

An Investigation into the Representation of Nigerian Headloading Narratives using Semiotic Analysis and Creative Transmediation

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Abstract

On Facebook, images of Nigerian people carrying loads on their heads became the subject of a narrative, in protest against a politician's statement that youth were lazy. This study is an exploration of the visual representation of headloading to investigate its socio-political meaning, and the communication of this through creative practice. The key focus is on the making of meaning and the interpretation of various images of the phenomenon and, therefrom, interrogating several social, political and humanistic issues in Nigeria. It derives from Facebook conversations. Considering the socio-political nature of the conversations, my interest was drawn to the potential of an expansive exploration of headloading. The idea of linking a social media narrative to a creative practice of visual art occasioned the idea of transmediation. The study examines how the motif and theme of headloading has been used in Facebook narratives and in the works of contemporary artists, especially in Nigeria. Secondly, it explores my own visual practice of representation through a transmediatory process towards advancing the possibilities of interpreting the headloading concept. Lastly, the focus was to engage a semiotic analysis of my creative visual explorations to provide a deeper understanding of headloading in relation to socio-humanistic and political conditions in Nigeria. Facebook was the reference point, and the images were the data. Transmediation was the practice process and semiotics became the analytical tool. In exploring the potential of this transmediation to produce semiotic extensions, the analysis focused on the denotation and connotations of the images from Facebook. This deciphered the semiotic gaps that would be extended or made distinct through creative practice. In the creative works, both traditional and digital means were used in moving my understanding of the visual data from Facebook narratives into visual art practice. Resulting works were analysed and interpreted to interrogate the social, political and humanistic issues reflected in headloading. Although Nigeria is at the centre of the discourse, the implications, issues and themes which I explore around headloading representations such as poverty, migration, foreign aid and so on, touch on many other developing countries. The creative works were virtually distributed, to complete the hermeneutic cycle of the narrative.

Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Graduate Programme in Visual Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Trevor Vermont Morgan declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced
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5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.

Trevor Vermont Morgan

Name of Student

26 August 2022

Date

Supervisor: Katherine Elizabeth Arbuckle

K Arbuckle

Signature

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my fathers: my eternal Father and my mortal father.

My Father who art in heaven hallowed be Thy name. Thou didst make thy kingdom come into my heart. Thy will has been done in this: at last to make the study come through. Thou didst give me my daily bread and benefits. I thank Thee Father that Thou didst not lead me into temptation but from all evil deliveredst me. I do thank Thee, for Thine is the glory forever.

To the memory of my mortal father I further offer my dedication. Thou wouldst have been delighted at this feat. Thy legacy lives on, and I do it distil, with great mind and steel. I would every evil disdain 'till I reach the golden portal. Amen

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We are living in a social space and are rhizomatically connected with several threads of relationships. Without such connecting links we would lack the social wellness and passion needed to survive. The realisation of this project is dependent on the relations with such important people in my sphere of intellect, spirituality and familiarity. I here declare my appreciation and acknowledgement of their various helpfulness.

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Glossary/Definition of Terms

Adaptation: Adaptation is the practice of assimilating and appropriating of a creative work which may include artistic, aesthetic, cultural, linguistic, or others. It is a form of intertextual copy-paste thing.

Brain drain/Brain Gain: This is expressed by the departure of educated people or professionals from one country to another usually for better pay or better living conditions. This is otherwise called human capital flight. For the sending country it is a 'brain drain' whereas for the receiving country it is a 'brain gain'.

Connotation: This is the secondary level of signification or meaning of signs. It includes cultural, symbolic and ideological underpinnings and understandings of signs.

Denotation: This is the literal sense made of a sign. It is usually an overt and superficial understanding of a sign.

Discourse/Discursive: This deals with the analysis of texts of a language beyond the superficial. It is an elaboration of text based on its social or cultural context with relevant inferences and references.

Facebook: Facebook is a virtual and participatory social networking site (SNS) that allows users to create their own pages, create and distribute their own contents as posts, which usually include photographs and texts.

Foreign aid: This is the assistance offered to developing or poor countries of the world by the developed ones, especially those of the global north or 'first world'. This can take the forms of funds, charity, manpower supply, and among others.

Headloading: This is the practice and art of carrying loads on the head and moving one's self and the load to a desired location.

Interdiscursivity: A kind of intertextuality, interdiscursivity is the use of elements or inferences from previous experiences in a discourse. I use the term in the study to link to implicit references to other discourses or art works.

Interpretivism: The term 'interpretivism' is an epistemological paradigm about how we can gain knowledge of the world. It relies on interpreting or understanding of the meanings that humans attach to their practices (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014).

Intertextuality: Basically, intertextuality is a montage of quotations. It refers to appropriation, taking texts from extant sources as a building block for a new body of work. The definition of intertextuality and interdiscursivity

remains an object of contemporary discussion (Bartesaghi and Noy, 2015).
See interdiscursivity.

Metaphors (Visual): Metaphor as applied in this study refers to the notion of the visual. A visual metaphor is an artistic work through which an idea is expressed. A representation as an image is created with connoted association, that is, between the idea and the representation.

Metonymies (Visual): Here is a visual trope. The idea of metonymy is that in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept. Simply, it is a part representing a whole. This takes place in a visual instance of representation. It is more an indexical mode of signification.

Motivated Signs: This a social semiotic concept. It shows signs that have been enhanced to suit a producer's interest different from how the sign has been represented and functioned previously.

Nigeria: A country in West Africa, the most populous in Africa with diverse cultural practices such as headloading.

Practice-led, -based Research: Practice-led research defines that which "leads primarily to new understanding about the nature of practice" different from a practice-based research which centralises on the production of works as the basis for contributing to knowledge (Candy, 2006; Candy and Edmonds, 2018).

Reflexivity: Reflexivity talks about self in practice. It means taking from ones previous personal experience and espousing that in a working process. It is rather a subjective direction to oneself. This is an approach required in a practice based research (D'Cruz et al., 2007).

Representation: It is a process of meaning-making - producing and exchanging meaning across people of a culture. Basically, representation is using language to say something meaningful about the world to other people. It includes the use of language, gestures signs, images, and among others (Hall, 1997c).

Romanticisation: This term is used here as an art invested with a romantic characterisation. It means to idealise and glamourise. It draws its definition from the Romanticism of the late 18th century in such areas of life as art, literature, film, and architecture. It showed renderings of intense emotional content as the authentic source of aesthetic experience. The feeling of the producer was a major point of call, as there was a recourse to the sensual and human sensibilities.

Semiotics: Study of signs and the production of meaning through the analysis of sign.

Sign: A sign is a meaningful unit of representation which is interpreted as 'standing for' something other than itself. Signs can manifest words, images, sounds, acts or objects.

Signified: This is the mental concept represented by the signifier. It could be tangible or not.

Signifier: A signifier is the form which a sign takes. This is the representation referring to the sign.

Social Media: The term 'social media' and 'social networking sites' (SNSs) are used interchangeably in this study. They are online interactive sites that allow interaction between users. The social media technologies allow the users to create, share/exchange various information such as images, texts, videos and other expressions using emoticons within the platform or virtual community. Examples include Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram. (McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2017).

Social Semiotics: Social semiotics deals with meanings that touch on social spaces. It is a branch of semiotics that investigates practices in specific social and cultural circumstances. It tries to explain meaning-making as a social practice. In other words, it engages with signs and modes as social constructs (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Van Leeuwen, 2005).

Stereotype: A simplified, sole, minimised or prejudiced presentation and perception of a people place or thing.

Structuralism: As a theory, structuralism has a concept of social system which tried to reduce the complexity of human experiences to certain underlying structures which are universal. It covers fields including psychology sociology, anthropology, culture, and linguistics. It has its roots in language, linguistics and literature. Key figures in this theory include Wilhelm Wundt, Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, others (Chandler, 2007).

Text: In this piece 'text' is used in two ways. One, it is used to show words and write-ups. It is also used to show different modes of signs, written, visual, or audio.

Transmedia (practice, narrative...): a creative practice that entails moving contents from one form of medium to another as a way of realising and maximising the affordance and distinctiveness of the new medium (Semali and Fueyo, 2002; Semali, 2002b).

Transmediation: Taking understandings from one platform or sign system to another in order to advance of possibilities of meaning-making and interpretation (Semali, 2002b).

Visual tropes: these are figurative expressions in visual terms. They can manifest in simple, abstract, or conceptual forms with underlying meanings.

Visuality: The way in which vision is constructed in various ways: 'how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein;' what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed. All that is visual (Mirzoeff, 2006).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter opens with the rationale and motivation of the study which emanate from the Facebook social media site. It also presents the statement of the research problem, questions, aims and objectives. Here I lay the foundation for understanding the cultural and representational practices of visibility in which headloading occurs, as well as for the review of relevant literature for the study. The theoretical and conceptual framing together with the methodological processes of the study are introduced. These drive not only the study as studio-based process but also the interpretive structure of the study based on semiotic analysis.

1. 1. Background and Rationale

Social media has become an important part of modern day communication. As a social media user, in 2018, I encountered a Facebook conversation termed “Lazy Nigerian Youths”. This post and subsequent comments developed out of Nigeria’s Presidential speech at the Commonwealth Business Forum in London the same year. At the event, the president responded to a question thus: “We have a very young population. More than 60% of the population is below the age of 30. A lot of them haven’t been to school and they are claiming that Nigeria has been an oil-producing country, therefore they should sit and do nothing and get housing, healthcare, education free” (Amah and Adebayo, April 21 2018: 111).

Nigerian ‘youths’ felt criticised and, responding to the issue, they took to social media, especially Facebook, to express their disapproval of the labelling.

Obviously, this kind of Facebook narrative is different from weaponised kinds of social media conversation such as the #PutSouthAfricaFirst reported by

Bezuidenhout (2020). Bezuidenhout described the Twitter conversation @uLerato_pillay as fixated, paranoid, co-ordinated, and “sophisticated” and as a “well-oiled propaganda machine” framed and repurposed as a “personality cult” towards venting anger against African immigrants (n.p).

The Nigerian’s Facebook conversation Lazy Nigerian Youth (LNY) is different from that described above but carries a certain similarity with the kind of ‘détournement’ described by Kiziltunali (2018) in which government’s attack was redirected and detoured through imaging. I am not particularly concerned with the Nigerian presidential speech that gave rise to this LNY conversation, nor do I want to expressly trace the protest narrative; rather, my interest begins with reference to a headloading image used as one of the visual responses in the narrative.

The key response here is that in which Facebook users showed a youth carrying impossibly enormous bags of cement as headload. Literally, headloads are loads carried on the head as a way to move such loads. The visual forms of the headload responses included in the Lazy Nigerian Youths narrative were images of hawking, loading and unloading activities. Having personally had some experience of headloading in the past, I perceived that this kind of response was symbolic and could be laden with significations.

Growing up in Nigeria I not only saw both young and old persons carrying loads on their heads, I was also a participant in the headload culture. I was more fortunate than my parents whose stories of headloading showed coverage of longer walking distances. I carried farm produce, firewood and containers of water for a few kilometres and did some hawking in rural markets. Generally, headloading for hawking is still well-known in Nigeria and throughout Africa, especially among rural and semi-rural residents who trade in the suburbs, towns or cities, as well as among several other low income urban-dwellers.

My motivation for this study, therefore, derives from my social media encounter in which headloading was a visual response to a socio-political conversation. This, in concert with my own experience in headloading culture, raised my

curiosity to interrogate this phenomenon from the representational standpoint. It is my desire to examine the representation of the headload culture for possible deeper socio-political insights, bearing in mind the undertones in the ‘Lazy Nigerian Youths’ Facebook narrative. For me, the representation of headloading practice could afford a compelling communication for understanding the several socio-political and socio-economic issues in Nigeria.

Moreover, beyond superficial representations, the study presents itself as exploratory, investigative and interpretive of the concept of headloading. Layder (2018: 11) maintains that investigative research such as this “might focus on the responses of individuals to authority and control in the workplace.” A preliminary survey affirms the Facebook conversation as a potential phenomenon for inquiry. This begins with the representation of headloading by Facebook users in Nigeria as a way to express themselves about unequal power relations in society and abuse of power.

Previous studies have been done on the practice of headloading. For instance Ogunremi (1975: 1) underscores headloading as a practice of human portage – “the oldest and most widespread traditional form of transport, not only in Nigeria but also in many other parts” by which people can move themselves and move goods. Similarly, Porter et al. (2007) place the practice of headloading under intermediate mobility and transport and livelihood patterns among youths and women.

Another dimension to the headloading practice is a study by Porter et al. (2013) in which they investigate the health impacts of pedestrian headloading in sub-Saharan Africa with reference to women and children. They show the various headloading types and their complexities, and identify five major components of the potential harm of the practice: energy costs; long-term bio-mechanical impact; risk of acute injury; maternal and foetal health; and psychosocial impacts.

On his part, while connecting headloading with mobility, Osborn (2018) underpins headloading practice with the history of containerisation in West

Africa. The idea of carrying loads on the head is associated with indigenous societies globally, especially among women. As such headloading has been stereotypically a picturesque and wall-decorating representation (Ubogu, 2016) which usually offers mostly the Western 'other' a romanticized perception of Africans (Hall, 1997b).

It is important, therefore, to see how the idea of headloading opens into the context of my study and investigation. In brief, beyond the health approach to the study of headloading, Porter et al. suggest a more comprehensive study to examine the socially-connected impact of the load carrying practice. They write: "it is clearly essential to understand the socioeconomic, cultural and institutional contexts within which headloading takes place" (2013: 95,96). It is obvious to me that existing studies do not provide a connection between headloading practice, representation and socio-political spaces.

Exploring headloading from a humanistic perspective helps me to create an inclusive conceptual and socio-political communication with particular reference to Nigeria. Therefore, there is the potential of the headload concept to afford extended semiotic content for visual analysis and discussion. By drawing inspiration from the headloading narrative on Facebook (a social media platform), my own creative practice provides a meaning-making and communication process.

1. 2. The Problem

As shown above, images of headloading were used on Facebook to express certain aspects of audience's experiences of different socio-political issues in Nigeria. Headloading has also been studied from medical and mobility perspectives, as well as its being a process necessitated by containerisation (that is, packaging). The representation of headloading as a response to social issues on Facebook may be perceived as the individuated expression of ordinary people. For me, LNY is simply the starting point that introduced the prevalent use of headloading as a symbolically rich motif in exploring socio-political concerns. As a visual artist and communicator, I see a need to explore the

headload concept for deeper and connotative significances beyond the superficial presence on Facebook, and to examine other representational manifestations of headloading culture in order to provide a socio-humanistic perspective of the practice through creative exploration. By 'creative exploration' here, I mean that I will essentially be conduct a studio practice that would lead to my interpretation and extension of the headloading narrative.

My concern, therefore, is to provide an extended investigation and interpretation of headloading as a signifier in order to understand its implications on socio-political issues. This dimension of headloading deals with the many possible ways the representation of the practice can be perceived and creatively expounded. Positioning headloading as a signifier of socio-political issues derives from the assertion that "all signs are metaphors" (Kress, 2010: 55). Another dimension of the problem is the potential of the concept to provide an avenue for discourse on the relations of 'power' in social and humanistic terms. So, the problem depends on several social issues and conceptual associations that headloading as a representational and communicative code can afford.

1. 3. My Research Stance: from Facebook to creative practice

The connection between headloading representation and Facebook points to the interdisciplinary nature of this study. It includes studies on visuality, social (digital) media, and participatory culture (Hinton and Hjorth, 2013; Burger, 2015). It also encounters interdisciplinary elements which deal with how this study seeks to gain traction in artistic research as a sensitive social subject requiring proper articulation (Lapum, 2018). What follows is a brief overview of relevant elements, clarifying the connection between them.

Facebook stands as the source of the original narrative of headloading as a socio-political phenomenon from which this study emerges. The manifestation of images of headloading in the "Lazy Nigerian Youth" conversation is a form of online media 'protest.' Several researchers have investigated social media (Facebook) as a tool of public resistance and protest (Downing, 2008; Ibrahim, 2013; Woodstock, 2014; Agbo, 2016).

Others, such as Miguel (2016) have studied social media as a self-imaging platform for individuals. It has also been investigated as a ground for promoting indigenous practices and skills (Owiny et al., 2014) or even as an interfacing platform between the government and the public (or audience) (Ogundimu, 2013). So there is a sense in which social media spaces serve as a “square” for conversations and negotiations.

For me, there is a connection between Facebook as a digital/public space and the African traditional village square where social conversations are conducted (Sonesson, 2003). The traditional village square functions as both secular and spiritual space. In its secular function it is used for “meetings and ceremonies” (Ugwuanyi and Schofield, 2018: 1). In the same vein Facebook as a social media platform is a meeting space. In this way it serves as a digital/online public sphere because it is open to everyone agreeing to the terms and conditions of its use (Batorsk and Grzywińska, 2018). The digital space offers users the possibility of converging virtually and contributing individual statements in conversations in order to negotiate social and political issues. Moreover, the characteristic of the ‘public sphere’ as a connecting space for individuals of common opinion applies here.

Facebook is basically a participatory online medium whose users, as ‘audience’, operate from the privacy of their individual spaces. The description of the public sphere given by Dahlgren (cited in Batorsk and Grzywińska, 2018: 357) provides further clarity: Dahlgren describes it as a “communicative space in society ... in which citizens must be provided with the information, ideas and debates around public affairs so as to secure informed opinion and participation in democratic politics.” The author identifies three factors that define public spheres: the structural (that is, the organization providing access, freedom of speech and the dynamics of inclusivity or exclusivity); the representational, which includes the agenda, views and media coverage; and the interactional and participatory. The agenda here refers to opinion, goals and what the citizens are representing.

Beyond just making posts and comments, conversations on Facebook are individuated and lack the kind of openness and procedure of mainstream media. This characteristic of the social networking site points to levels of freedom and anonymity in presenting counter viewpoints to socio-political authorities. Such privacy afforded by social media provides the space to share 'small stories' (Tettey, 2009; Georgakopoulou, 2017). Privacy here can occur in different ways: by the use of pseudonyms for a profile; by setting options to limit the viewing of user's posts. It is also by the fact that Facebook as a virtual space is removed from the user's physical everyday social milieu.

There is evidence that a large number of Nigerians using social media choose to engage Facebook as an important mode of contemporary communication (Internet World Stats, 2020). In Nigeria people express their views on issues of society regardless of their cultural, religious and political groupings. Many narratives on Facebook reference topical social issues: the audiences provide "meaning-making" lines of thought that require interrogation Dayan (2005). Such topical conversations can form a point of departure for significant academic engagement. I agree with Burger's assertion: "the realisation that many aspects that were thought to be private or personal have to do with power relations has led to a widening interpretation of politics, to include personal matters and identity in what is called 'the political'" (Burger, 2015: 271; Comaroff, 1991)

It is important, then, to see how Facebook users have used headloading images from personal standpoints. I acknowledge that Facebook narratives develop and change fast. Headloading representation, the focus of this study, presents itself with social, political, and creative tendencies that require interrogation. While the concept of headloading may have been used or perceived rather simply, I see its potential to be explored and redirected towards eliciting a visual discourse on social and related issues more thematically and inclusively.

Images can become the beginning of conversations and storytelling and open up an assortment of communication lines. Below, in Figure 1, is an example of such

an image from Facebook conversation that refers to headloading. The texts and comments that trail such a narrative usually furnish the context of such images and they are of significant in the making of meaning.



Fig. 1: Facebook, [April 18](#), 2018, posted by [Oloche Okwori](#) with the text “'Lazy' Nigerian youth waiting for oil money.” Retrieved on April 20, 2018 from: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1869683626383971&set=a.101637556521929&type=3&theatre>

The idea of bringing headloading into artistic exploration while connecting it with the social standpoint of Facebook conversation brings up the concept of ‘moving’ conversation, content, or narratives across art (or media) ecologies. By the term ‘ecology,’ my creative practice for this study is here defined by its production (tools, techniques and technology), format and its consumers (audience) (Altheide, 1995; Hearn and Foth, 2007). This idea of linking a narrative from social media, as distinct media, to art practice, as a creative media platform connects strongly with the concept of transmediation. My idea and use of the concept of transmediation in this study connects with the possibility of producing expanded semiotic resources which can afford an innovative, diverse and rich system of signs for meaning-making (Dena, 2009).

Semali (2002b: 1) provides a very clear description of the idea of transmediation as I apply it in this study: a process of “taking understandings from one sign system and moving it into another in order to make meaning.” This is ‘representing’ meaning across sign systems. This process is described as transmediation by Suhor (1984). Different definitions have emerged around this

concept based on the field and techniques used. My choice of the process of transmediation is in order to provide a visual process for interpreting headloading representation, beyond the primary conversation from social media, as well as to afford and validate contents.

Jenkins developed the theory of 'transmedia' as an offshoot of 'convergence culture' (Jenkins, 2003; 2006) in the media industry. In his work, 'Convergence Culture' Jenkins sees "transmedia storytelling" as one of the new aesthetics that emerged in response to media convergence. This understanding relates to the way Dena (2009: 1) defines transmedia practice as involving the "employment of multiple distinct media and environments for expression."

Transmedia practice allows content to flow across platforms for possible richer media affordances and as a technique of telling a single story across multiple platforms and formats. It is a creative enterprise that is occasioned by digital technology with potentials of participatory engagement (Martín Barbero and Schwartz, 2009). For me, therefore, there is a sense in which transmediation provides itself as an interpretive tool. In this study the idea of transmediation affords a potent standpoint to interpret headloading by allowing me to provide a suitable background of the phenomenon. As a continuum from the Facebook narrative, it further leads towards socio-political and ideological communication through analysis.

Convergence culture therefore, involves the coming together of traditional and new media and allows storytelling in a variety of mediums (Jenkins, 2006; Dewdney and Ride, 2014). The practical exploration in my studio process comes through traditional ideation, sketching, and making of thumbnail pieces which connect with the use of digital tools as I create works that interpret the headloading culture in-depth. Hence, digital technology opens new ways to advance the interaction between representations of cultures, audience and the public for new public spaces.

Moreover, the 'transmedia' concept has been broadened for more creative hybridity and innovation (Barber, 2016; Darwin, 2019). Ibrus and Scolari (2012)

describe the concept as being “quintessentially innovative.” Moreover, Bardalet et al. (2016) maintain that the idea of ‘transmedia art’ can open up new meanings and possibilities for understanding artwork as it materializes in manifold ways. Exploring headloading as a concept and semiotic event of cultural representation, this study, therefore, is expected to furnish a new perspective of interpretation for extended meaning and communication into various social conditions in Nigeria and in related social settings.

The investigation of such cultural representation as headloading can be characterised by and classified into what Chouliaraki et al. (2019) refer to as ‘visual politics of power’ for mediatory functions. They write: “mediated visualities of suffering are always bound up in relations of power that have a direct impact on our conceptions of ‘humanity’” (308). However, my study is not only an advocacy project to promote a cause (Layder, 2018), but also an in-depth exploration of a rigorous methodological approach.

My study uses the methodological approach of a practice-led exploration in visual arts accompanied with a strong theoretical structure. This creative exploration includes both traditional and digital formats and follows details of studio practice as posited by Gray and Malins (2004) and Sullivan (2010). Moreover, by innovating a transmediatory process I have positioned my study to assume a practice of interpretivist dimension. The ‘dimension of practice between theory’ is what Sullivan refers to as a “meaning-making process that seeks to communicate individual and community understandings” (Sullivan, 2010: 106).

My study falls within the discursive dimension of meaning-making which I engage with using semiotics as theoretical framing. Advancing the meaning of a sign is the essence of transmediation and such understanding becomes a semiotic inquiry (Semali, 2002b). For this study, therefore, the focus is on producing and analysing visual forms as signs – to investigate the semiotic contents of the representation of headloading. I also bring in relevant elements of the dialectical dimension which allows me to explore visual forms of language

such as metaphors and metonymies as substantiated by Sullivan's (Sullivan, 2010) structure of 'domains of practice around inquiry'. It is important to note how the meaning-making process is grounded in intertextual and interdisciplinary discourse. In emphasising the interdisciplinary nature of this study, Sullivan maintains that "within the interpretivist paradigm, it is through an interdisciplinary investigation that theories and practices are teased apart and meanings disclosed" (2010: 111). Details on methodology are discussed in Chapter Five.

My investigation explores creative energies of the politics of visual representation as I relate with social, political and humanistic concerns. Similarly, taking my interpretation through creative exploration demonstrates potentials that are located in transmediation as a technique for approaching contemporary art inquiry for any chosen narrative. The study, therefore, adds to the existing readings on visual interpretation of the headloading practice, social discourse and transmediation process.

1. 4. Research Questions

There is a need to explore headloading culture as a ground for visual discourse and communication by creating extended visualisations and representation. Although the term visualisation basically stands for making things mentally or physically visible (Manovich, 2011), here it involves bringing into visual forms various dimensions of headloading to facilitate interpretation. This is done by means of constructing and articulating meanings through semiotic reading. In this study, by progressing through the collection of images from Facebook and interpretively visualising such texts, semiotic characterisation will be extended, re-interpreted and analysed multi-modally to answer the question: What is the potential for transmediation as an interpretive process to explore the semiotics of images of headloading in relation to social conditions and relations in which Nigeria is involved?

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- How has the motif of the headload emerged in Facebook social media narratives from Nigeria?
- How can semiotic analysis of Facebook posts provide primary understanding and communication of headload narratives?
- How has the subject of headloading featured in the works of contemporary Nigerian artists?
- What visual processes of representation support a semiotic expansion of the visuality of the headload concept?
- What is the potential of semiotic analysis of my creative works to provide a deeper and broadened meaning of headloading for social, humanistic and political conditions in Nigeria?

1.5. Objectives

The study seeks to inductively extend and deductively interpret the concept of headloading from the shared narratives of Facebook users in Nigeria. The transmediation process is explored in order to provide interpretation and communication in visual terms. As a creative approach, I engage with the concept as an interpretive 'tool' following its innovative potentials (Bardalet et al., 2016; Long, 2007) in order to interrogate meanings of the cultural practice and representation of headloading from a visual art standpoint. While I seek a heightened interpretative encounter with the concept of headloading for social communication, my creative practice as a means of interpretation results in creative works that are further analysed semiotically. Works are read using semiotic framing to explain their implied contents. I have also thematised the works in order to place them in their proper social perspectives.

Therefore, the objectives of this study include, to:

- Examine how the motif of the headload has emerged in Facebook social media narratives in Nigeria.
- Engage semiotic analysis of the Facebook posts to provide a discursive understanding and communication of the headload narratives.

- Examine how the headload theme has featured in the works of contemporary African artists.
- Explore my own visual processes of representation that would advance the possibilities of a transmedia continuity of the headload narrative and concept.
- Engage a semiotic analysis of my creative visual explorations to provide a deeper and discursive meaning to headloading about socio-humanistic and political conditions instantiated in Nigeria.

1. 6. Location of the Study

The study was conducted at the Centre for Visual Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. It refers to and emerges from images of headloading and comments used on Facebook. It concerns socio-humanistic narratives in which Nigeria is involved. My study is further foregrounded by artists' works in different media such as painting, drawings, or photography among others, which reflect headloading representations in Nigeria. However, the study has the potential of relating to other societies beyond Nigeria and Africa where headloading is known. Also a wider coverage of the study may come from the circulation of art works online and through the possibility of participatory sharing on social and digital media.

1. 7. Overview of Chapters

The study is arranged into eight chapters which include the following:

Chapter One opens with the background to the study, rationale/motivation, statement of the problem, aims and objectives. This foregrounds headloading representation and practice in Nigeria as a social phenomenon. It further provides a foundation for related interdisciplinary stances used in the study, such as the place of social media and Facebook in the study and transmediation as an interpretive process. The theoretical and conceptual framing as well the methodological processes of the study are introduced. Here I also lay the foundation for the review of literature and relevant creative works examined.

In **Chapter Two** I offer a critical review of extant literature. It places headloading as part of the representation of socio-cultural practices. It shows the interdisciplinary nature of the subject touching such aspects as the human involvement and historical positions on headloading and health issues in headloading. I consider transmediation as an innovative process for the interpretation of visual representation. My review cuts across literature in social and cultural representation, as well as visualities in digital and virtual spaces. I also consider the connection between headloading representation and social media, in this case Facebook, and the background of visuality.

In **Chapter Three** I undertake a review of art works of artists in Nigeria who have worked on the subject of headloading across different media such as painting, printmaking, textile, photography and others whose works manifest headloading experiences. This ample review also defines relevant themes that I interrogate further in the study. This helps to clarify the gaps that this study explores.

Chapter Four deals with the theoretical framework with which the visual data/images are analysed throughout the study. Drawing from Roland Barthes' brand of semiotics, I provide analysis across two modes of meaning, denotation and connotation, while injecting ideas from general (social) semiotics. At the descriptive level I show the basic features that define the selected Facebook images of headloading that I use in this study, as well as their implied meanings. The conceptual framework explores meanings in headloading representation and art works. These works are analysed for basic and connotative meanings while building up discourse on the semiotics of metaphors and metonymies. These emerging works gain traction through thematised stances.

Chapter Five describes the whole processes of study as methodology for both practice and theory. It follows a qualitative and interpretivist paradigm through a practice-led visual art approach. The method begins by the gathering of images from Facebook through purposive sampling to the organizing of visual materials, ideating and concept mapping and creating techniques. The ideating and concept-mapping processes include creating sketches, visual diaries and colour roughs.

The final production process includes those of digital composition and traditional studio working. Digital works are created from selected roughs and they are digitally composed from the building blocks of vector primitives: shapes and lines, using relevant software applications.

In **Chapter Six** I present the transmediatory process I have innovated for this study. This involves and provides a semiotic reading of selected Facebook images tabulated to show the basic and connoted meanings of the images. I list relevant comments accompanying posts on Facebook. In the second half of the chapter I show transmediated artworks. I present the artworks as signs in a descriptive mode as well as offering simple connotations of the works. Works are presented literally and narratively described using visual art expressions.

Chapter Seven provides a discursive interpretation and elaborations on the works in their ideological and social contexts. This draws on my visualisations using semiotic analysis. This is the meaning-making process at connotative and 'mythical' level. Meanings are not ready-made but are constructed semiotically linking literature and expanding on theory and discourse. The analysis here is done under the relevant themes which the practice and representation of headloading foreground. Some such subjects include brain drain, migration, making of headlines, subalternity, and liminality while identifying the social and power relations that the notion of headloading holds.

Chapter Eight is the conclusion of the study. It provides a summary of the outcome of this study, including reflections on the research questions and processes. Conclusions are reached on the motifs of headloading on Facebook and the involvement of artists in Nigeria with subject of headloading. The transmediatory technique is evaluated as to whether it has achieved its role as interpretive tool or not.

1. 8. Conclusion

Headloading practice as a phenomenon holds the potential for investigation (Layder, 2018). Few available studies on headloading show the need to examine the cultural practice from a socio-political standpoint. It is notable how the subject

of headloading, like other socio-cultural practices, is mediated online through social media. This derives from the possibility of sharing individual and group stories on the digital square, Facebook. This study, therefore, affords the space to interrogate headloading representation while exploring the possibilities of transmediation as a creative process and semiotics as analysis to provide interpretation and communication.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1. Introduction

This chapter offers critical insight into the interdisciplinary nature of my study as substantiated by extant works. Usually, headloading is a social and cultural practice. As a study in visual arts and depending on available literature, I locate headloading as a subject of representation as well as practice. It is important to note that available sources dwell majorly on the practice of headloading. I examine the phenomenon from the literature about practice to the representational and other connecting perspectives. The earliest date of the practice in Nigeria is generally placed in the pre-colonial nineteenth century and it subsists to date.

My review connects with literature dealing with representation, visuality and socio-digital mediation as participatory culture. This is important considering the source of my narrative, which is Facebook, as well as the trajectory of the study as images and representations of semiotic contents. The interface of Facebook as a visual culture platform is considered. The socio-humanistic and socio-political implications of such representations as headloading are underpinned in its history and in themes like stereotype, rurality and poverty.

I also examine transmediation. This process manifests through the reconnaissance of images of headloading on Facebook towards my visual production. The transmediatory narrative is foregrounded in intertextual references to both theoretical and praxical sources. It is important to note how interdisciplinary this study stands, as it connects with various kinds of literature

dealing with art practice, socio-political subjects, digital humanities, media and culture.

2. 2. Headloading as a Practice

Different views and studies straddle the practice of headloading. Among such views are those that connect headloading with mobility (Ogunremi, 1975; Porter et al., 2007; Porter, 2008), headloading and gender or womanhood (Mrunalini, 2016), headloading and health concerns (Porter et al., 2013), and headloading and socio-cultural traditions.

Headloading involves placing a heavy load on the head and walking at the same time. A number of reasons account for this. In defining the practice of headloading Osborn (2018: 22) wrote, “people skilled in headloading can balance on their heads, hands free, baskets, pots, and cloth bundles and any variety of goods, and move across different terrains.” Headloading has been classified as one of several intermediate means of transport known in sub-Saharan Africa. Porter maintains that such means of transport as headloading, “can facilitate transport of small to medium loads and/or personal travel along poor/narrow tracks” (2008: 253).

■ *Historical Perspectives*

Writing from a historical point of view Ogunremi (1975) observes that headloading is one of the oldest forms of transport in Nigeria. Moreover, he positions headloading within the structure of economic history. As identified by different authors, headloading broadly aims at moving personal items, commercial goods, or domestic materials, especially agricultural produce. In its earliest use, the reasons for this included supplementing other means of transport and distributing wares and farm produce from places of concentration to areas of need by hawking. An important dimension of headloading is ‘porterage,’ which is carriage of goods or luggage for a fee.

It is important to see how Osborn (2018) links the ideas of headloading and containerisation in West Africa as largely resulting from the ecological and climatic conditions of people, as well as their socio-economic efforts. She

underscores the making of containers and packaging as the processes and events that necessitated headloading practice, as well as West Africa's economic and trading networks that defined this.

Using archival documentation for historical clarity, the author validates her argument around the 'archaeology of headloading.' Beyond just showing headloading as a practice, Osborn particularised the essences of its origin as the invention of "pragmatic and productive adaptations" owing to lack of mobilized transportation and environmental challenges (2018: 22). The concern for 'adaptation' corroborates the position of Ogunremi (1975), which for me is the major factor that defines most indigenous practices. One such adaptation is the handling and transportation of agricultural produce.

Closely related to Ogunremi's idea of headloading as a means of agricultural mobility is the idea of 'packaging' shown in Osborn (2018). Osborn maintains that agricultural produce and commercial goods would be packaged, collected and moved by head for export. She uses the idea of 'packaging' and containerisation to underpin the history of the practice of headloading in West Africa as a socio-cultural phenomenon. The idea of containerisation, links the practice of headloading to the need to pack, package and export products across land spaces that were difficult to access by wheeled vehicles at the time due to the soil types and topography of the region. It is clear that such practice is rooted in certain cultural, economic or social systems of a people (Ogunremi, 1975).

However, Osborn's view that "Africa's pathogens" affecting animals that carry burdens was part of the reason for adaptation to headloading seems strange to me. The author identifies important considerations that can affect loads such as weight, distance, fragility, contents, container types, crafts of container-making, products to be carried, and practitioners.

■ *Human Involvement*

Available studies point to headloading as a practice that is largely upheld by women and the youth (Porter et al., 2013; Porter, 2008; Porter et al., 2007). Porter et al. (2007) draw a strong connection between youths seeking livelihood and

headloading, which is common in the rural setting. The question of livelihood as a reason for headloading, differs from the 'adaptive need' created to move agricultural produce around. There is sense in linking lack of education or professional skills as a key point in headloading. The youth involved in headloading might not yet be formally trained and less attention is accorded to women's education, which disposes them to menial pursuits for their livelihood.

Beyond seeking basic sustenance, the desire for financial liberty is another reason young people, especially boys, engage in portering. In general, headloading is classified as paid portering or as part of family obligations. Possible items carried by young people include containers of water, bundles of firewood and hawking wares carried to and from markets.

▫ *The Predominance of women*

Women were central in headloading culture. The account by Porter et al. (2013) shows that women were at the centre of headloading culture, especially in Africa. While the youth may have been involved in headloading as porters who sought livelihood, Calvo (1994) suggests that domestic subsistence accounted for most of the reasons for headloading among women. Apart from portering, for which youths were known, women's loads usually consisted of water supplies, firewood fetching, and carriage of farm produce primarily for family sustenance.

However, the reason for women's predominance in headloading is perceived differently by Ogunremi. He writes that "the main reason for women predominating in headloading, locally, was probably that 'when men armed for defence against animals and enemies went on unfettered and free for combat, women followed, loaded with their belongings and offspring'" (1975: 41). His account further shows that women's dominance in headloading resulted from the fact that they were more involved in local exchange of the farm produce.

In connection with the precariousness associated with headloading, as Osborn (2018) underscores, I survey the health challenges of headloading.

Closely connected to the human involvement in headloading practice is the fact that the practice manifested in a few cultural traditions.

■ *Headload in Cultural Performance*

Available studies underscore two important forms of cultural events in which headloading is manifest: performances during funerals (Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna, 2017) and matrimonial events (Adepegba, 1986). I have chosen to discuss the practice of matrimonial headloading in section 3.3. Here I refer to the funerary.

Discussing the theatrical creativity of most Igbo funeral ‘celebrations,’ Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna (2017: 189) write that “the art as a domain of creativity has found expression in a manifold of media, including music, dance, drama, poetry, performance, images and imagery.” Headloading in its various manifestations is seen in the cultural dance of the Abiriba troupe, a dance group of South-eastern Nigeria, which Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna refer to as a revered Igbo traditional ‘war dance group’. The dance of the Abiriba group is one of the many dance formations that grace funeral occasions among the Igbo.

It is clear that headloading in such cultural events as funerals enacts rites of passage. According to Gennep (1960) such funeral rites bring about an interface between the living and the dead as certain magical powers, deities and evil spirits come into play. As mourners mourn, they are circumspect to follow prescriptions allowed for the status of the dead and in the case of Abiriba group, a headload is required.

During performance, a central figure amidst the troupe is seen carrying a load on his head which is composed of different traditional paraphernalia. The most notable items in the carriage are ‘human heads’. Although this tradition celebrates or eulogises the exploits of a high-ranking chief at death, the practice of using real human heads has been replaced with sculptured human heads. Connecting headloading practice with cultural traditions, one is tempted to question how death and marriage as two opposites could become forms of celebration and entertainment. Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna explain that the

case here is not for self-gratification nor for place-seeking at the death of others but to democratise the space to mourn the dead. I will now consider health issues connected with headloading.

■ *Health problems associated with Headloading*

Health issues relating to the practice of headloading have been the concern of many studies (Beaucage-Gauvreau et al., 2011; Lloyd et al., 2011; Porter et al., 2013; Mrunalini, 2016). In a ten-author anthropological study, Porter et al. (2013) investigate the 'Health impacts of pedestrian head-loading' in sub-Saharan Africa. Their study predicates women and children in the practice. They suggest that although work itself may be good for health, "head-loading may be associated with negative energy balance, chronic musculoskeletal symptoms, risk of acute injury, compromised reproductive outcomes and pain and associated distress" (Porter et al., 2013: 95).

In a different study another health issue associated with headloading is identified by Makin and Ghanem (1995: 1). They found that "women who carried weights on the head had straighter spines than women who did not." Still connecting headloading with women and now particularising their study to pregnant women, Beaucage-Gauvreau et al. (2011: 1) show that headloading "can lead to muscle fatigue and ultimately to musculoskeletal injuries," due to increased upper trunk movements in the frontal and sagittal planes. Porter et al. (2007: 427) on issues of health, women and headloading have this to say: "in Aworabo, where children carry heavy loads of cocoa and firewood, every child we interviewed said they regularly suffered neck, waist or head pains from carrying goods. Load-carrying reportedly affects girls more, according to teachers, because they are expected to carry more on the way to school."

Writers such as Hudson et al. (2018); Lloyd et al. (2011) underscore the health issues of headloading from the broad dimensions of carriage economy, biomechanics and kinetics. Yet, the study around headloading and health is yet to be rigorous and controlled. It is clear that health challenges resulting from headloading are perennial.

While a number of parameters or variables are yet required for a broad study from a scientific standpoint, a humanistic study like this requires contextualisation (Porter et al., 2013). Available clinical studies do not engage comprehensively with headloading, thus suggesting that a study relating to psycho-social, socio-cultural or interdisciplinary contexts is highly pertinent, as suggested by Porter et al. (2013). They note that “there is an absence of studies which satisfactorily combine rigorous scientific methodology with an adequate understanding of the social and cultural context” (2013: 95). It is, therefore, from this socio-cultural and -political standpoint that this study reserves its pertinence.

■ *Rurality*

Available literature shows that the practice of headloading is linked to rurality and it signals poverty (Ogunremi, 1975; Ubogu, 2016; Osborn, 2018). As a means of transportation, Ogunremi underscores that headloading works in a way to move agricultural produce in bits from local and rural settings. The author connects the practice with the indigenous economy as he traces the practice back to pre-colonial times. Young people would combine walking and carrying loads on their heads and receive fees. Obviously then, the picture painted here is that of insufficiency, lack and need (Porter et al., 2007). And the inability to afford motorised mobilities in rural settings, as well as the quantities of goods moved, all show levels of poverty. Another important instance of poverty as a result of rurality is the existence of unskilled labour in which headloading is prominent, such as lifting head-pans of sand, bags of cement and concrete mixture during building construction.

Porter et al. (2007) define headloading against rurality and youths seeking a means of sustenance, as well as how it affects educational productivity in young people. In their work, “Youth, Mobility and Rural Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa” they write:

At an off-road village, both boys and girls from the age of about 10 regularly carry large loads of firewood to the district headquarters for sale before they go to school, a journey of around 10 km in total.

... interviews with teachers and children indicated the likelihood that educational opportunities for some girls, in particular, are substantially affected by their head-loading duties through late arrival at school, tiredness and headaches (2007: 426,427).

The connection between headloading, rurality, poverty and the struggle for survival is pinned down in Osborn (2018: 29) when she writes about the containerisation practices of West Africa:

This reflection does not mean that we should ignore or overlook the poverty and hardship that continue to drive some of West Africa's containerization practices: there is nothing glorious in the labour of West African women who are compelled, in the twenty-first century, to headload water to their households on a daily basis to use for washing and cooking.

The author draws attention to the connection between headloading, hardship, women and the West African population especially in the need for several basic amenities such as water and cooking fuel (firewood). Osborn's position reminds me of one of the notions raised by Chouliaraki et al. (2019: 203) when they speak of "images that pose new challenges to the visual communication of human misfortune." At this point it is difficult to conclude that headloading is an utter misfortune. Yet, Osborn's position portrays the stereotype of Africa's suffering as is usually 'presented' to the rest of the world. Such stereotypical presentation requires clarification. In the next section I examine the place of stereotype in connection with headloading representation in order to clarify certain misrepresentations associated with it.

2. 3. Stereotyping of African Headload culture

Headloading seems to be a common practice in Africa that has been used in stereotypical representations. The sight of a woman with a load on her head triggers in viewers a notion that she must be of African origin. Citing Eaton in relation to headloading in Nigeria, Ogunremi (1975: 40) writes "some European travellers regarded women as 'the original beasts of burden.'" Such a derogatory remark about women in Africa seems stereotypical of colonial discourse, and emphasizes a sense of alterity or otherness.

A stereotype presents a preconceived and oversimplified idea of a thing, people or the "Other." Otherness or alterity can be seen as a kind of stereotyping. For the most part stereotypes lack whole facts and are common devices of propaganda art (Moore, 2010). Stereotype reduces the perception of a people to a single mode of seeing or narrative. The problem lies in the continued portrayal of a people in a basic state even after decades of development.

The reality as defined by Hall (1997a) is that things cannot always have a single and unchanging meaning. He suggests that it is representation which works by use, feeling and thinking about a thing that defines its meaning. I argue that participants in a culture are most qualified to give meaning to practices, people and material pieces of such culture. When another does, the possibility of stereotype is greater. The understanding of stereotype is key in this study in dealing with the interpretation and understanding of the social and power narrative of headloading in Africa.

Hall's (1997b) *The Spectacle of the Other* provides a good perspective on an instance of stereotyping. He unpacks a dehumanising and enervating account of stereotyping from the West's racialized regime of representation of the 'other.' His account involves the White 'self' and the African 'other' while highlighting the key elements of stereotyping such as reductionism, simplification, naturalization and binary oppositions. Hall engages with the racial and ethnic representations of 'otherness' displayed in popular culture and mass media.

While he underscores stereotyping as a key manifestation of alterity, Leuthold (2011: 28, 29) adds 'primitivism' as another. For Leuthold 'primitivism' can involve appreciation and representation of the virtues of cultures at an earlier stage of their development. He writes: "primitive implies that which is basic in origin," "tied to that which is spontaneous, intuitive, simple, untrained, and natural" as against its binary opposites.

I am aware that headloading culture persists in Africa, yet, with the advancement of transportation systems, the remote and ancient scope has shrunk. Leuthold is quick to argue that primitivism functions as a self-critiquing

technique against the social problems of 'civilisation' – laws, competition and property – which produce envy, corruption and dissatisfaction. According to Leuthold, the representation of the primitive should occasion the discovery of difference and self as “each civilization invents the primitive it needs as a compensation for itself” (2011:32).

Hall uses examples of black people to argue for levels of meaning from the literal to the mythical on how 'otherness' works and how binary oppositions make differences possible. His work accounts for various stereotypes of the black race in which it is reduced and represented in many ways, while capturing the extent to which slavery promoted representations of difference and otherness (Hall, 1997b).

For his part, Leuthold presents what he calls “two competing theories of Otherness”: the 'critical,' and the 'idealistic'. In the first, “Otherness is experienced through very real historical events, often conflictual in nature.” It is here that stereotyping comes in, 'enemies' trying to 'fix' the representation and meaning of the Other, which is reductionist, simplistic, dehumanising and damaging, as shown by Hall (1997b). He identifies 'fixing' the image and appropriation as two ways of managing the 'other.'

Leuthold suggests that “fitting the [Other] into a controlling narrative, especially in persuasive forms such as ads and editorial cartoons, but also in the fine and popular arts” (Leuthold, 2011:37), may be a way of fixing the problem of stereotyping. Yet, for me such an approach might amplify the problem if not properly explored. The approach of promoting the Other and its causes by making identity a marketable product or by “aestheticizing” stereotyped practices, as suggested by Leuthold might be difficult, as it requires an ideological change on the side of the promoter.

Leuthold's stance that a narrative-controlling 'self-Othering' process can result in local artists still resorting to stereotypical representation and art for the purpose of profit-making is a more valid argument. This pursuit of financial gain gives the reason why popular artists of headloading continue to thrive in

African tourist markets. The attempt to provide ‘narrative-controlling self-othering’ or ‘aestheticizing’ objects of stereotypes has resulted in furthering stereotypes. This is why popular art forms of headloading are common in several of Africa’s tourist markets for “European travellers” (Ogunremi, 1975). Fig. 2.1 below instantiates how headloading has been reduced to stereotyped forms.



Fig. 2.1: *Ram Achal. African Art 06,*
Acrylic on canvas, 12x18in

The piece above was done by an Indian popular artist and marketed online under the title ‘African art’. The goal here is to draw tourists and buyers whose perception of Africa is reduced to skimpily adorned and delicately postured misses of the footpath who gossip with a load on the head. There is no other way to describe an Asian referring to a head-loader as an African if not for a stereotyped perception.

Hall (1997b) and Mirzoeff (1999) emphasise the idea of the ‘gaze’ of the Other as constituting a key factor in stereotyping. Such immersive gaze at the representations of the ‘other’ Hall remarks are couched in effects of fantasy,

fetishism and disavowal, a delusional fascination. Leuthold uses the word “Othercide” from Deleuze to show what happens when people ‘murder’ the essence of the Other or choose to disavow the reality of difference.

Such disavowal becomes delusional and perverse. Oguibe (2004: 18) puts it succinctly: “if the Other has no form, the One ceases to exist.” It is obvious then that in cultural production or representation, the artist’s place of origin (whether an insider or outsider) is an important point to consider, as well as the duration of his or her contact in the cultural space. Each of these factors can determine, to a great extent, varying ways of seeing, ways of representing or the capacity to comment on the particular cultural practice. Of the available studies on headloading I have accessed, most have been studies that are not from cultural insiders.

Oguibe observes that the longing of the West for touristic and exotic representations of non-western representation is rather romanticist and, as such, the idealistic viewpoints can produce limiting and rigid preconceptions of cultural distinctiveness and possible futures. The desire and pleasure derived from the Other’s art, with focus on African art in the West, is another manifestation of alterity which bestrides stereotyping. In his work “Culture Game” Oguibe uses the word ‘pornography’ to capture the essence of such pleasure. He writes:

“the perverted, pornographic desire manifests itself most significantly, however, in the continued preference in the West for the art from Africa that is easily imaged, not as art as we know it but as a sign of the occult, and inscription of the fantastic” (2004: 16).

In his narrative Hall refers to a certain sensuality of the racialized regime of representation against the black. Oguibe draws a connotative analogy between the romantic power of the Outsider over a romanticised or “colonised body” of work of the Other as ‘pornography’ of otherness. Ultimately, looking, seeing or gazing portends a relationship of power between the gazer and the gazed at. It defines classification and regimentation between social strata. Yet, I argue that

such a kind of gaze and sensuality expressed by the Outsider has gained presence in the Insiders by the romanticisation of the African body for which I give further explanation in section 3.3

In sum, the idealistic perspective of Otherness is a positive one allowing “for the possibility of different ways of coming to know the world” (Leuthold 2011:39), of self-discovery, of exploring and creating new knowledge. This could bring about the acknowledgment of differences rather than suppression of them while creating connection for positive possibilities. Besides, “Otherness implies reflexivity” (2011:42) and affords alternative ways of knowing.” Hence, I underscore the need for a people to first create their own representation. Though this may be considered ‘self-Othering’ with its demerits, for me it would produce an unprejudiced interpretation.

2. 4. Cultural Representation and Power

Power manifests through culture, knowledge, and representation, among other ways. Of power and culture, Comaroff and Comaroff (1997: 31) hold that power emerges from culture by “means of the residual, naturalized quality of habit” and thus “insinuating itself, apparently without agency”. This position above shows the basic and intrinsic manifestation of power in which people represent themselves. Another dimension of power emergence or relations is external which frames and (re)presents (vulnerable) people while questioning their agency and voice, and questioning whether they are objects of pity.

For instance, in the ‘racialized regime of representations’ expressed in “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” (Hall, 1997b) there is an encounter of manifest politics of representation and power relations, in which power operates through hegemony and discursive forms. Here Hall elucidates the circularity of power as having the ability to implicate the ‘subject’ and the ‘subjected’.

This inevitably concerns such representations as headloading. Guy Debord’s ‘The Society of the Spectacle’ further aptly highlights the image and representation of people with regard to society and economies. He underscores that the spectacle, (how people are represented and perceived) is not just an

image but that which connects with the socio-cultural existence and status. It is power released through representation and perception. He writes: “the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1967: 12; Bowen, 2006; Debord, 2006).

Debord posits spectacle as a reification of “*weltanschauung*,” or worldviews. In other words, there are ways persons of different social statuses are represented or perceived in a given society. In itself, the idea of carrying loads on the head signals a certain kind of social situation and status. Their social power becomes unconsciously defined in the audience’s mind. However, whether the spectacle manifests as “news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment [it] epitomizes the prevailing model of social life” as described by Debord (1967: 13), a tangible form of abstract social relationship which is interwoven with the economic as the goal and “consummate result” to the process of production. It is the unifying point of all human consciousness, at least in time.

The articulation here, perceptively links spectacle to “power” as a controlling influence over other activities of society. Power, variously connotes influence, persuasion and the compelling force which the representer or the representational has on society and on decision-making for both public and private choices. It clearly shows the place of power in representation in understanding that “the tolerable, consumable Other [is] stripped of authority and enunciatory autonomy” through the imposition of anonymity and thus opened to ‘pornographic’ and hegemonic advances (Oguibe, 2004: 15; Hall, 1997b).

In dimensions of representation power it is, therefore, imperative to understand why self-authoring as suggested by Oguibe would produce self-definition, right to “author-ity” (2004:13) and claim to subjectivity and, of course, a representational authority in matters of peoples’ cultures and arts. Moreover, Oguibe maintains there is sometimes a forbidding, vetoing or disenfranchising

of this right in certain places which pushes the Other to the corners of obscurity as well as anonymity. The idea of anonymity reminds me of the ways several headloading popular works cannot be traced to their producing artists – it is rather an anonymous production of ‘African art.’ And this brings us back to the propriety of social and cultural ownership in the defining or representing of people and their art.

Enwezor, like Oguibe, underscores the need for caution in dealing with black identity in art, especially of people in Africa. To avoid fantasizing in and fetishizing black identity, Enwezor (1997: 39) suggests that it “must never be turned into a copyright; an antinomy in which ethnicity through group reckoning stages its authenticities and retains exclusive user rights of its images.” This is to avoid losing the essential humanity in such a discourse.

Moreover, as we look at representation and art, especially from the African perspective, Leuthold (2011: 186,188) underscores art as a product of “complex relationship to social systems,” and so it can be understood from what he calls “a system approach.” This postulates the many systems that produce art of a people such as the “linguistic, economic, political, kinship, cosmological, and aesthetic.” Directly or otherwise, these systems position hierarchy, which in turn expresses social power structures of the members of society. He maintains that “ideas about art are social in their origin and in their effects.”

I am aware of how art stands astride religious and political functions, and other social structures about which Leuthold writes: “ideas about space and other visual relationships are incorporated in these systems” (2011:192). The notion of space, points to the actual location of the people in place and time or to social ideas in cultural, and social spaces. Such positioning of art or cultural representations equally defines members of society in their power statuses. It is, therefore, important to understand that headloading in its practice confers a certain social status on the practitioner, while its representation signals a power status by interpretation.

Moreover, in articulating spaces for such relations, it is appropriate to underscore the present reality. The digital space of the current century has moved representation and its power relations from the actual to the socio-virtual, which is not limited by geographical locations. It has moved from a defined class of people to another – the users. This is brought about by the convergence culture of forms, functions in fields of visibility and representation. Users of virtual-social spaces are now equipped and afforded with several digital apparatuses that can be used to navigate and to create visual forms that can turn perceptions of power structures. In other words, the social media space allows users to structure representation in such ways that can challenge the positions of power in society.

2. 5. On Meaning-making and theories of the Visual

Studies of visual materials have often straddled the understanding and interpretation of visual forms while others have concerned themselves more with theories of interpretation of the visual (Barthes, 1977; Rose, 2001; Felstead et al., 2004; Kress, 2010; Pauwels, 2011).

Dewdney and Ride (2006); (2014) demonstrate the scope to which ‘new media’ take theoretical underpinnings. They examine Marxism and psychoanalysis. They maintain that the marxist “body of work, later known as ‘critical theory’, directly addressed the role of media and media technologies and continues to be a reference point in the discussion of new media” while “psychoanalytical concepts have been influential in the analysis of representation because they address the subject and the self” (348). With reference to Hall (1997c), Dewdney and Ride insist that “the representational paradigm applied to new media objects and practices would, therefore, account for particular meanings, effects and outcomes within the established rules of representation, as they are practiced and articulated at various levels in the cycle of culture” (2014:290).

Images are semiotic resources; they are signs or codes laden with meanings (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Chandler, 2007; Baetens and Surdiacourt, 2011). It takes deliberate effort to unpack meanings inherent in the images. In other

words, in seeking interpretation, meanings are constructed rather than found (Felstead et al., 2004). Harrison (2004) asks an important question: 'who tells the story around photographs or any other images?' This highlights the need for the production of meaning as well as the subjectivity of interpretation in visual research.

As a theoretical and meaning-making process Harrison expounds dimensions of visuality that have made ubiquitous the practice of image-making through photography and camera technology. He raises concerns about the production, subjects, stories and meanings of photographic images, while examining the forms and functions of everyday photographic representations. Harrison articulates this as a "socially regulated practice," covering family memories, funeral practices, marriages and festivities, among others. He places these events of representation in functional contexts. He writes: "cameras and images function within particular social contexts and moments, which also define their significance" (Harrison, 2004: 37).

Rose identifies three sites of meaning in an image or group of images: "the sites of production, the image itself, and its audiencing" (2001: 17). These sites reveal the events around the making of images, their presented forms and contents, as well as the consumption of the images, that is, viewing the images. As I shall identify and define in Chapter 4, my practical works in this study emerging as signs will afford relevant semiotic understanding which connects headloading to issues of Nigerian society. For instance, Barthes' (1977) semiotic concepts of denotation and connotation whose tools of visual interpretation are relevant in decoding images and digital representations across platforms to enable access to new understandings apply here. Other writers such as Jewitt and Oyama (2001) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) provide relevant semiotic concepts for visual interpretation and analysis.

Interpreting images and signs beyond literal usages unveils their social and cultural essences. This is as much as the multimodal features of such visual representations and signs are unpacked. It is important to say here that my

study on headloading as a social phenomenon is part of several representational systems that require investigation and critical contextualisation. Bearing in mind that no individual has the monopoly on representation and interpretation, what is also relevant is the characteristic permissiveness of digital media technology and virtual infrastructures for representations beyond conventional representations and meanings.

2. 6. Representations, Visualities and virtual spaces

The virtual as a relevant space and aspect of representation is worth acknowledging. It is important to give an overview of the virtual, in this case social media, as a place of power and visual experience in order to clearly focus this study on its connection with social mediation. It is also relevant for me to show the place of representing several social and cultural practices such as headloading online with the use of digital tools and technology (Owiny et al., 2014).

Firstly, Mirzoeff (1999: 91) identifies virtuality as “an image or space that is not real but appears to be” and as well maintains that it “is not an innocent place” owing to the erosions of authenticity between the reality and the fake. Although there are kinds of virtual spaces, Mirzoeff maintains that the “computer-generated environment” was the first to provide interactive virtual space; and that space as a multifaceted phenomenon is “shaped dynamically and socially” (1999:92). This understanding will help us to link together the concept of representation in the social virtual space of the internet as a participatory sphere where visual experiences and expressive social ‘movements,’ have continued since the emergence of social media.

With virtual space as a ‘site of struggle,’ for the creation of new identities and freedoms, Dewdney and Ride argue for its place and structure in power relations “in which individuals, groups and institutions engage unequally, not only in competition for specific voices, to get their message out there, but compete for the very definition and regulation of what cyberspace or, more practically, online communication, is and should be” (2014: 351). This defines the

characteristics of social media platforms, as users are willing to pump in images and comments.

For instance, Facebook is a virtual and participatory social space that has allowed the negotiation of large numbers of images. Beyond representations of news and adverts, 21st century citizens or netizens have been afforded the power to present different modes of contents, engage images in ways that reveal or alter the narratives of their social realities. Representation today has moved away from just the 'correct' and professional forms to other ways of imaging encountered in the concept of visual culture.

Digital technology in the current time has very significantly changed visuality, representation and how images are shared (Langdon, 2014). This has followed a developmental trajectory that has moved visual communication across the static, the interactive, the immersive and participatory spaces (Burger, 2015; Saldre and Torop, 2012). Langdon writes:

The internet offers unprecedented levels of creative exchange. As globalisation's most powerful 'technoscape', the internet enables new opportunities for collaboration. It also enables artists and audiences to overcome the previous constraints of physical distance, which effected the transportation, construction and display of art. The internet offers new kinds of viewing spaces. It can enable artists to reach a far wider range of audiences, and increase the awareness of their works. It also gives exposure not just to exhibitions taking place at well-known galleries, but at small and otherwise overlooked spaces (2014:28).

Although, the above quote shows the increasing prospects of the virtual space, it does not in any way preclude the possibility of traditional studio practice of art from thriving. Rather it could be retooled in promoting a range of creative works - both from digital and 'traditional' studio spaces. On the nature and affordances of what, at the time of his writing, was known as 'new media' technology, which digital and social media connect with, Manovich (2001: 40) writes:

any new media object – a website, a computer game, a digital image, and so on – represents, as well as helps to construct, some outside referent: a physically existing object, historical information presented in other documents, a system of categories currently employed by culture as a whole or by some social groups or interests.

Moreover, Dewdney and Ride (2006; 2014) give a more expansive insight into ‘entanglements’ of the ‘new media’ as conditioned by post-modernity. While connecting technology, social and cultural developments, they underscore how the technology of new media of representation engages with cultural forms and contexts and highlights the expanding nature and formation of globalisation (Langdon, 2014). I am aware of such common terms as interface, interactivity, hypertextuality, navigation, networks, immersive, participatory, convergence, and so on, that characterise the environment of the internet. The concern is to see how writers have thought of and engaged with the humanistic and the relational ambience of social mediation and visual representation of virtual spaces.

It is important to see how Dewdney and Ride examine the contexts in which cyberspace provides a ground for several media, and for cultural and artistic production, especially taking into account case studies of different artists whose works include three-dimensional representation, interactive works, among other internet art projects at the time. They show that image-making is one of the established practices that have traction through digital means and online. Following the schematisation by Williams (1961) in which he shows art in Platonist, Romantic and Modernist stances as merely appearances and realities, Dewdney and Ride (2014) connect new media and art (creativity) showing how the post-modern characteristic of seeing (that is, the visual) is a constructed one in which representation is simulated and laden with information.

Simulation which involves imitation, altering and/or faking visual forms with digital tools even beyond what is possible in reality can advance the volume of information contained in represented forms. This technological advance is

hugely evident in the participatory nature of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and other online platforms such as blogs and news sites and their graphic interface potentials built upon Web 2.0. Of this, Dewdney and Ride (2014: 109) write “it is the World Wide Web, which has developed HTML pages with graphics, images and texts, that can be said to be the content of the Internet.”

First, as we discuss representation and visibility, we think in the direction of the instrumentality of the technology and media of representation. We have a growing world of representations in the form of photographs and videos or static versus moving. Although it is not current, the work by Mirzoeff (1999: 1) on ‘visual culture’ instantiates our contemporary life as being highly visualised under a “constant video surveillance from cameras” across different spaces of the society – CCTV cameras in public buildings, buses, stations and ATM machines, among others. This is occasioned by the ubiquitous presence of the camera and diverse tools of the digital ‘new media’ (Manovich, 2001; Langdon, 2014).

Even though such surveillance is largely economically based, it thrives on social (un)consciousness and ambivalence. In other words, we are being represented, and we are representing too. The camera functions in ways to maintain levels of concern and self-organisation when conscious of surveillance and it can also be a source of social embarrassment should one neglect such consciousness and personal decorum. Mirzoeff captures other examples that define us as existing in visual terms and requiring visual judgements for most of our existence today. Examples of such visual conditions include road traffic signage, advertising boards and so on.

Barthes’ (1970) early on suggested that we are living in a world saturated with representation, and the visual. Obviously then, it becomes interesting to see how today we are flooded with diverse outlets of images, pictures and seeing, which together produce visual culture (Mirzoeff, 1999; Rose, 2001; Mirzoeff, 2006). This is where the representation of headloading falls in its presence on Facebook.

Image-making or visualisation has become a language of social mediation in connection with the internet. It is certain that visual representation cannot be divorced from contemporary social issues (Adami and Jewitt, 2016).

Although I do not in this review discuss the technicalities of representation per se, I see the need to link the social elements that make for the various ways of seeing and visual representations. Rose (2001) underscores the immersive reality of our contemporary visuality, citing examples of the different kinds of visual technologies we are dealing with – photography, film, video, digital graphics, television. While the tools have placed us in the realm of the visual or ‘the spectacle’, Rose argues that the technologies do not produce innocent representations (2001:6). Rather, they are used to produce constructed seeing, following what the creator as interpreter wants and how he or she wants things to be seen.

For instance, photography would have been thought to offer the ‘true representation,’ of the world around us but we are faced with the questions of image production, manipulation, storage and consumption. Such questions include those that deal with the results of creating crop-montage effects, and using software applications such as Photoshop to deftly redefine the real image into a hybrid photograph. Rose refers to such simulated or constructed imaging as visuality, which is how we are allowed or made to see things rather than how they are in reality (Foster, 1988; Sand, 2012).

It is such construction of image, Mirzeoff (1999), announces as the ‘death of photography,’ which he says took place with the rise of digital imaging in the 1980s. This reiterates the argument raised by Rose (2001) about the innocence (or truth) of contemporary representation in the face of complex digital applications and tools of visual manipulation and augmented realities. For me, what, therefore, is relevant is how to make sense of these ubiquitous representations of our technologically condensed world in relation to their contexts. Social media are an important part of our technological condensed world which need to be properly contextualised.

Visual and narrative practices on Facebook and other social media platforms have attracted an increasing number of researchers across social science and humanities disciplines (Adami and Jewitt, 2016) to examine qualitatively and/or quantitatively such participatory 'new mediation.' The participatory culture of visuality as an important part of social mediation on Facebook is also part of what my study of headloading straddles, especially as the source of data for my creative exploration.

2. 7. Social Media and Socio-political Action

In our 'networked society,' social media have become sites for various civil, social and political actions for individuals, groups, governments and nations. The nature of these sites positions them to function the way they do. Users express themselves in several multimodal instances of images, words and colours. While "the dynamics of Facebook's platform architecture" or those of other social media platforms account for the visibility of posts circulated in them (Helmond et al., 2019), the content and quality of visuality to a great extent inform the viability of communication such as protest, and the potential of participants to join the conversation.

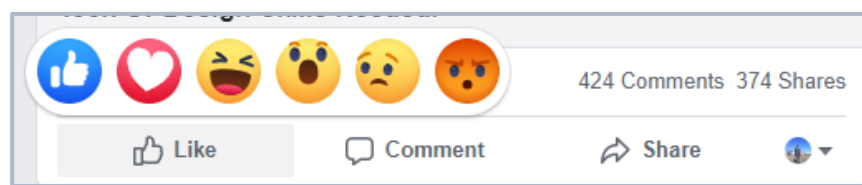


Fig. 2.2. Some multimodal elements in Facebook user interface

The dialogue box in Fig 2.2 shows a brief aggregation of the multimodal affordance that Facebook provides its users. Facebook holds such dynamics defined by 'posting,' 'reposting' and 'sharing' (Agbo, 2016). Basically the elements of the social networking sites that advance visibility and spread of post include 'comment,' 'reply,' 'like,' ('Love,' 'Wow,' 'Haha,' 'Sad,' 'Angry'), 'insert emoji,' 'post a sticker.' It is important to highlight the manner in which colour is used in the emojis. For instance, 'Like' comes with blue; 'Love' is associated with red. Tears, sweat and saliva as liquids are represented with blue, while the emoji

of an angry face is represented in hot yellow and orange. A participant can define who sees his or her 'posts': the public, friends or selected individuals.

In Fig 2.3, the stylised human face at the top right corner, drops down the several emoji available to the user. Included here are texts (words), colours, audios or videos, live video presentation, and feeling emojis. They are grouped under Simelys & People, Animals & Nature, Food & Drink, Activities, Travel & Places, Objects, Symbols, and Flags. These emojis as ideogrammatic digital icons are provided in assortment for different uses. For instance, the emoji of Smiley & People shows diverse kinds facial appearances from which users simulate their preferred emotions during conversation.

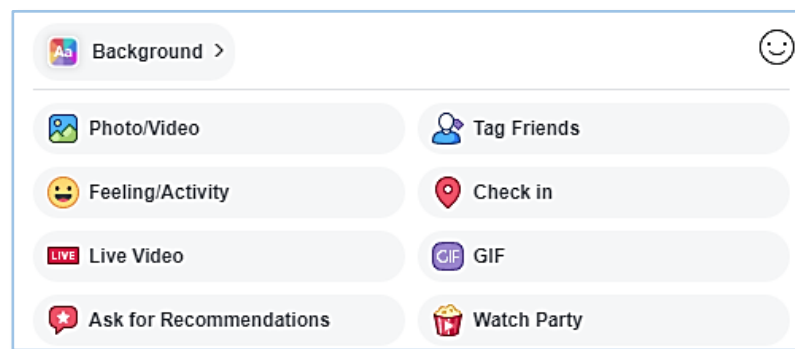


Fig. 2.3. Facebook Post dialog box with options for multimodal affordances

Yet the section of Feeling/ Activity in the dialog box provides diverse options such as "Feeling," "Eating," "Reading," and "Travelling," with matching icons, from which users can choose actions, responses or emotions. This is important to note, as many users or their 'friends' may prefer to use only emojis to contribute to a conversation or action. Hence, these icons carry connotations when they are used in a conversation. From this section one can also see how image-text relationship functions to clarify the emojis as they are defined with adjoining text.

While writers such as Bohler-Muller and van der Merwe (2011) underscore social media as having the potential to produce political and social change, others have opined that campaigns on social media platforms are merely

perfunctory – as a way of venting personal biases – rather than performing the real needed change of the physical world (Downing, 2008; Tweneboah, 2015).

Downing and Tweneboah hold that the participatory role of social media lacks the force to produce serious social change in practical essence owing to the limited provision for patrons to contribute substantially. I do not agree with Tweneboah's classification of social media as mere advertising platforms. Even at its most basic level, 'advertising' is an attempt to woo people to decide to 'buy' brands or causes, and with its possibility to produce positive results in the selling of brands, it can as well work for propagating, promoting and communicating shared 'causes.'

Several studies have investigated social media sites such as Facebook as a platform rich in visual potential for many social and political discourses. Langdon (2014), briefly explores this dimension of the potency of digital art in online participation. Although he queries the efficacy of online participation with visual forms to produce physical results in social and political terms, he is of the opinion that:

While there may not be clear avenues for viewers to take action on the issues raised, online works such as this can raise awareness, educate viewers, and rally individuals to pursue social and political causes, through sparking conversations that have been excluded or dropped from public discussion (133).

Langdon moreover accounts the social and political as two major issues or themes of online visuality citing the examples of Ibrahim Hamdan's *Images of Revolution* and its connection with the Arab uprising of 2011. In support, different writers invest the online visual experiences and social mediation with protest making and their socio-political tendencies (García-Jiménez et al., 2014; Ibrahim et al., 2016; Mercea et al., 2016; Rovisco and Veneti, 2017; Lee, 2018). Lee writes: "a growing amount of research speaks to the role of social media in mobilizing citizen protests" (2018: 1523).

It is here that Facebook finds its place in this study as a virtual medium that has participatory potential and representative and sharing dynamics mostly used by young people to propagate socio-political criticism. In 'Picturing protest: visibility, visibility and the public sphere,' for instance, Rovisco and Veneti (2017: 272) highlight "how and why certain visual images picturing protest events and social movements are rendered visible or invisible in the public sphere." Their study follows others whose concern for online social mediation deals largely in image production and circulation in public spaces.

Although anchored on protest in social media spaces, Rovisco and Veneti focus on how the visual, such as "image memes, photographs, posters, videos", is mediated and its potential to generate public debates in a participatory culture (that is, social mediation). Understanding the creative practice required in making and distributing images, they suggest that the production and circulation of images online portends the protesters' 'struggle to be visible.' Two levels of visibility are insinuated here: the visibility of visuals online and the visibility of interest in the protesters. It is such visibility that social media users, especially those in Nigeria, seek to advance in several ways despite insufficient social and digital infrastructures (Agbo, 2016).

2. 8. Social Media: Art for participatory action

Social sites are generally known for their interactivity and communication potential as users are offered the potential to create personal profiles and share texts and images (Rutten, 2018). In other words, they are participatory spaces. Facebook as a social media platform with wide coverage has an architecture and dynamic that promotes its environment for individuals, communities and business groups (Helmond et al., 2019). The architectural dynamics of Facebook allow for certain movement, embedding, transformation and temporary (in)visibility of posts as observable in group and personal profiles and pages. This potential also underscores how Facebook can function as a digital archival space, holding millions of images and textual posts (Helmond et al., 2019). It is from Facebook, therefore, that I develop my headload narrative.

Art works (visual images) and social media are two separate entities but, according to Van Koten (2009), by operating a tool for action, a user is able to switch between non-participatory and participatory modes of the work of art. In other words the key difference between the physical and social media viewing of art works is the nature of participation in relation to the materiality of the experience. A broader definition of this given in "The Work of Art in a Digital Age: Art, Technology and Globalisation" in which Langdon (2014) provides a good account of the basics that translate digital artmaking into a participatory body in virtual and social media spaces.

Langdon maintains a focus on digital art production and its connection with globalisation. His standpoint on the technology, the potential and practices that advance interaction, sharing and social mediation online is pertinent. He writes:

If digital technology was altering art production, then it was also transforming the ways in which it could be shared, produced and understood.... The use of open source content, connective media and banal devices to make and share digital art, might however, render it a more collaborative and participatory form of expression (2014: 29).

Furthermore, he argues that the immersive and interactive nature of digital art "can enable users to transcend the limits of space, time and speed" (2014: 30) thus substantiating van Koten's position. Here one makes sense of the use of several internet enabled devices, which includes visual representation in socio-virtual spaces. Such representations as in 'digital art' or at least the 'artistic' in today's audience' participatory culture differ from art in traditional expressions like painting, sculpture and printmaking. Langdon opines that engaging with digital art provides a means of dealing with certain phenomena that can be rather difficult to express in traditional art media, while tying together the ideas of globalisation and representation with digital art. This for me is a humanistic concern which capitalises on functionality.

Similarly, Martín Barbero and Schwartz bequeath value on results and functions rather than the apparatus of cultural communication when they write that

“technology today refers not only and not so much to the novelty of the apparatus but also to new modes of perception and of language, to new sensibilities and writings” (2009: 149). Handke et al. (2018) support this when they assert that the medium is not the message. Yet, this does not preclude the fact that tools, technology and techniques are vital in cultural communication.

Vast creative possibilities emerge from the convergence of culture and society through the mediating tools of art. By taking a digital or digitised form, art begins its journey into a participatory form or assumes a conservatory space, and mobility (Martín Barbero and Schwartz, 2009), although there have been debates about the permanence and reliability of both static and virtual digital apparatuses and spaces holding such artefacts.

Rutten extends the participatory culture of social media platforms for the artist. He writes: “participatory art has become an umbrella term for a broad range of artistic practices that focus on the importance of participation, interaction, social networks and processes as a crucial part of art projects and that move away from an exclusive focus on clearly defined and delineated art products” (2018: 1). With social media being at the centre of participatory engagement, Moore (2010: 192) maintains that “social media offer possibilities to quickly and easily form communities around shared ideas and attitudes in an environment which encourages self-expression.” This idea is supported by Hinton and Hjorth (2013).

Friend-to-friend communication or social media (hyper)linking allows users to come into contact with third-party posts, all of which are part of the ‘association’ known as the Facebook platform. In other words, users are allowed to choose how they want their post to be viewed – either personally (‘only me’ option), or publicly (with options of sharing with friends, or to extend viewing to friends of friends). All these are part of the association afforded and are derived from what Haider (2016) refers to as “networked architecture of interconnected profiles and followers” of the social media platform.

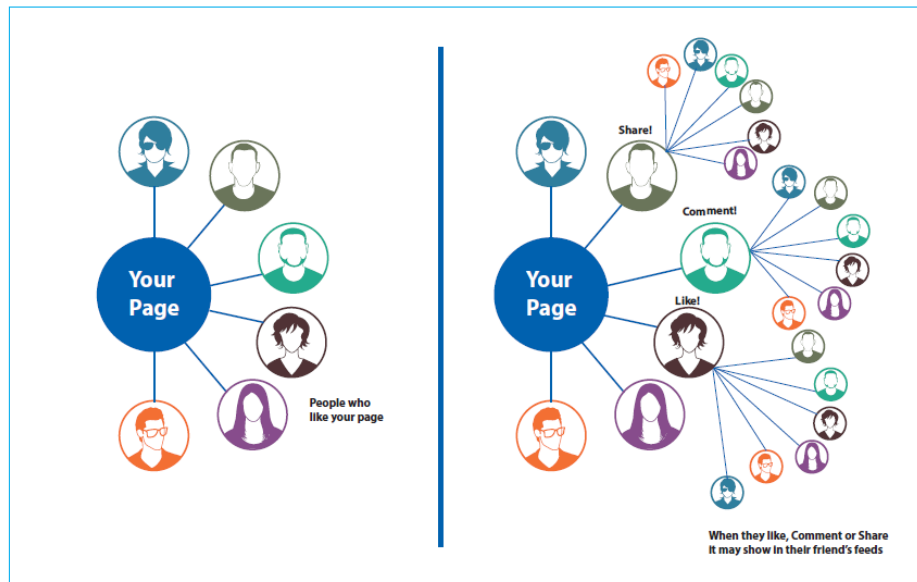


Fig. 2.4. Multiplier effect on Facebook News Feeds, Social Media Handbook (2017)

Social Media Handbook (SMH) (2017) identifies engagement as an important characteristic of the Facebook networking site (Fig. 2.4). This refers to the ‘multiplier effect’ which an individual’s page can have depending on the appeal of its content to ‘friends.’ The multiplier effect is made possible through the use of the ‘like’ button, ‘share’ options or the comment section by friends of the user and by the friends of friends. Other ways through which a user can advance engagement according to SMH include, improving posts, engaging influential individuals, paying to promote pages and posts.

Rutten (2018) posits that the elements and processes that define social interaction and cultural encounters are perceived as art practices with the understanding that artworks play indispensable roles in such participatory events. With emphasis on participation across the different areas of art practice the writer suggests there would be an “increasing convergence between participation, art and digital culture and an exploration of changing notions of interaction, space, place and community within the arts and also within art institutions” (2018:2). He, therefore, emphasizes the “intersection between participation, art and art mediation in relation to technology and digital media” which deals with art production, mediation and consumption in the participatory or networking

contexts provided by digital technologies. From this standpoint, it becomes clear then that the artist deliberately engages as an active participant in mediatory networking by offering his or her work as a basis of such 'dialogue.' Another side of participatory involvement is the possibility to have user-generated contents.

Rutten's study provides insight into the potential of artistic practices which can be socially and humanistically contextualised for a participatory encounter in digital and virtual spaces. For me, this study dealing with headloading, captures this sense of humanism in terms of the socio-political needs in Nigeria. Burger (2015) identifies political and development communication as study fields in which participatory culture can hold sway.

Owiny, et al. (2014) examines how social media could serve functions in the creation, preservation and dissemination of indigenous skill and knowledge across local communities in Africa. Their concern rests on how to stem the loss of indigenous cultural memory and knowledge, as well as preserve them from going into extinction by disseminating them using digital technology. This is a humanistic concern.

Notwithstanding how globalisation is mediated online, my emphasis depends on the related humanism in the face of several socio-political problems. Recent studies (Miguel (2016); Zappavigna (2016); Rutten (2018) link social networks to the construction of personal and mediated imaging, or simply put, the publicity and promotion of self through image-making or the politics of self-representation. Risam (2018) shows how migrants from the Middle East and refugees from Syria are caught in the act of selfie production. She accounts that in the making of selfies as self-representation, anyone that has access to the means of production – a hand, a camera, an internet connection – can participate.

Giving social and online space to selfies as a mode of representation helps in completing their digital life cycle. Writing from the postcolonial focus of digital humanities Risam (2018) discusses the politics of self-representation, distinguishing between images of 'migrants taking selfies' and just 'selfies' of

refuge-seekers. These two kinds of representation signal certain subtle politics of image-making and influence of the media. It is important to note here that in transmediation as explored in this study, the primary goal is its use as an interpretive tool. Emerging works from the process can still be given a continued existence and engagement in social spaces online.

A more direct encounter of visibility with humanistic fervour is shown in the work of Chouliaraki et al. (2019). The authors open a large vista that connects visual aesthetics and humanitarianism. They write:

we seek to emphasize the ubiquity of visualizations of human suffering across a variety of contexts whose structures and operations demand careful analysis. Such visualities are embedded in technological, social, and institutional practices of meaning-making that both enable and regulate the production, mediation, and engagement with visual aesthetics across the fields of humanitarianism and human rights (Chouliaraki et al., 2019: 303).

Social mediation begins for digital art when it assumes a place online thereby providing the experience of an immersive representation and participatory communication. It continues to gather to itself a global construct of meanings through “commenting,” “following,” “liking,” and “sharing.” Flowing through the social space over time such images become deconstructed and re-imagined from individual standpoints for globalised ideation and contextualisation. Langdon (2014) underscores the possibility that “individual experience, interpretation and affect are central to our understandings of art and globalisation.”

This study, therefore, finds an opening in socio-political discourse following the close affinity of art and communication. It is foregrounded in contextualising headloading as an implicative social practice whose artistic presentation or representation can result in semiotic understanding, socio-political communication and participatory engagement. It is part of the many on-going inquiries around people as social entities in participatory culture via digital (media) technology.

2. 9. Facebook, Social Media and Nigeria

Social media sites have become an integral part of Nigeria's contemporary society. According to Internet World Stats (2020), Nigeria with an estimated population of more than 206 million, has a total of 126,078,999 internet users with 27,120,000 subscribers to the Facebook social media site. Like many other developing societies, individuals, groups, institutions and (non)governmental agencies are using social media platforms to position their activities. However, it is important to see how individuals as audiences are engaging in issues of governance and social critique from their private locations.

Ibrahim (2013) and Egbunike (2015) interrogate a social media (Facebook) protest titled 'Occupy Nigeria Protests' which took place in Nigeria in 2012. Like a continuum, this protest followed such social movements as those of 'Occupy Wall Street' and the Arab Uprising. It was the response of Nigerians to the government's removal of fuel subsidy that year. Ogundimu's work on Facebook and digital activism further highlights the socio-political interaction that occurs between a government and the public, when she investigates how Nigeria's ex-president, Goodluck Jonathan, created a platform for public communication (Ogundimu, 2013).

A broader study is that of Agbo (2016) in which he examines Facebook, photography and resistance in Nigeria with the aim of highlighting the process of image production, the modes of dissemination and audience reactions, as well as investigating the socio-political concerns of virtual activism in Nigeria. Agbo's work examines photography from a historical viewpoint and explores its visual practice in Facebook in terms of content, construction of meaning and circulation while relating with the many dilemmas of Nigeria, such as insurgency, corruption, kidnappings and infrastructure deficiency. He explores political undertones manifest in photographs on Facebook as a virtual space of social activism. The Lazy Nigerian Youths narrative is one such action routed through social media by Nigerians, especially the youth.

Related studies on image practices that connect social mediation include the likes of Veneti (2017) Rovisco (2017). Most research on protest inextricably connects itself with the use of image: production and circulation. This refers to the communicative potential of visual representation in social and political relations. While such potential is yet to be explored in terms of visual and creative practice, my study gains relevance in this regard in seeking to link virtual imaging, practical exploration, meaning-making processes and humanistic concerns.

Moreover, I need to show the movement of the headloading narrative across virtual and actual spaces, that is, from the Facebook platform to my creative practice. This movement is transmediatory.

2. 10. Transmedia Narratives and Interpretations

The possibility of producing a visual discourse around the idea of headloading which flows from Facebook conversations connects with the idea of 'transmediation' Semali's (2002b: 1) description of transmediation as a process of "taking understandings from one sign system and moving them into another in order to make meaning" is very succinct of the concept as an interpretive and representational process.

Henry Jenkins (2003) develops the concept of transmedia as product of convergence culture. The concept of transmediation had been explored early on by Suhor (1984) from a pedagogical point of view. Concerning himself with the media and the entertainment industry, Jenkins thinks of transmedia as a way of moving stories across media platforms, in which case contents such as films could be expanded through comics, games, novels or television shows for the enhancement of the creative process and for better consumer satisfaction (Jenkins, 2003; 2006).

He further elucidates that each platform or medium needs to be self-contained for "autonomous consumption." Jenkins (2006: 2) argues that "convergence", which is the "flow of contents across media platforms" is not necessarily mediated by technology itself but by an individual's desire, participation and

construction occasioned by social interaction. He maintains that in transmediation, each medium has its best role and the ultimate goal is to have a motivated consumer experience rather than a boring monotony of content from one source/medium.

Transmedia practices have been used on many participatory levels depending on the varied views of practitioners: mainstream media (Jenkins, 2003; Jenkins, 2006; Phillips, 2012; Jenkins and Couldry, 2014), journalism (Zha, 2017; Gambarato and Alzamora, 2018), linguistic, theatrical to video production (Darvin, 2019; TEDxTransmedia, 2010), computational cum creative art (Horn et al., 2015) and others. The concept has been examined in many ways, with such key elements as 'crossing platforms' (or sign systems), 'meaning-generation' (or interpretation) and audience participation (Saldre and Torop, 2012).

It is expressed in a variety of practices. Dena (2009) and Long (2007) identify the scope of manifestation of the practice such as a 'transmedia narrative,' 'transmedia branding,' 'transmedia game,' 'transmedia storytelling,' 'transmedia fictional storytelling' and 'transmediation.' While Dena argues that transmediation is different from transmedia, on 'transmedia storytelling', Long (2007: 32) bridges the difference: "continuing a news story from television onto mobile devices and into print is a form of transmedia storytelling." It is the dimension of transmediation as a process that functions in an interpretive capacity. Yet, for me, there is a link between them. This underpins my position on the possibility of transmedia manifesting beyond screens.

Transmediation has been a pedagogical direction (Suhor, 1984; Siegel, 1995; Semali, 2002a; Semali and Fueyo, 2002; Kirk and Pitches, 2013). Suhor (1984) in the earliest presentation of the concept in educational practice describes it as moving the content of one sign system into another. For their part, Semali and Fueyo (2002: 1) characterise transmediation to mean "responding to cultural texts in a range of sign systems – art, movement, sculpture, dance, music, and so on – as well as in words." This is supported by authors such as Altenderfer et al. (2012) and Carey (2012).

Hadjioannou and Hutchinson (2014) observe that transmediation as a 'critical literacy approach' helps (pre-service) teachers in understanding and interpreting texts and subjects better, for effective knowledge transmission. This position underscores the possibility that transmedia practice as a medium of storytelling can promote better understanding and analytical power. Pietschmann et al. (2014) are concerned about how children would benefit from the development of transmediated works such as interactive picture stories, computer games and toys. They maintain that despite the potential of transmedia content in teaching, there are certain limitations: some of the young children lack the maturity to use, understand and participate in transmedia franchises" (2014: 2260). I, therefore, choose to engage with the concept transmediation as an interpretive process.

There is a sense in which exploring transmediation in this study connects with the idea of changing communication ecology. The process, for instance, takes the narrative of headloading from the social media platform to contemporary art practice in an exploratory way. It takes understanding from the headloading representation instantiated on Facebook to visual art practice. It provides me with an avenue towards creating an interpretation and visual discourse, while possibly working practice into digital and social engagements online. Altheide (1995) identifies three important areas that define communication ecology: the medium, the format and the interaction. Respectively, these involve the process, the product and the presentation (or participation), following closely the three sites of meaning construction identified by Rose (2001).

For the purpose of my study, and as in other forms of creative communication, ecology is defined by the totality of elements and persons that play roles in the production, circulation and consumption of (media/art) content. They include the artist with all his or her tools and ways of working, the art format and its materiality (sensorial perceptions and tactile qualities), art institutions and organizations such as museums, agencies, galleries (virtual or physical), the economy and society (Fuller, 2005; Hearn and Foth, 2007; Kaizen, 2008; Robinson, 2010; Holden, 2015).

The characterisation of transmedia practice given by Dena (2009: 1) as involving the “employment of multiple distinct media and environments for expression” underscores its potential for a number of creative ecologies within the same visual language (representational system of art). For instance, although images involving headloading have been used on Facebook as one of the popular responses to hard work or poverty, there is still a strong potential to explore headloading as a concept in another visual mode in order to understand and communicate its other socio-political and ideological viewpoints. It is certain that the implication of the original usage of such images of headloading could only be inferred as virtual protest against the socio-political conditions in Nigeria.

Yet, it is important to understand transmediation as a process of communication, basically in the sense of transmitting information. Saldre and Torop (2012: 25) assert that “transmedia in the broadest sense constitutes the communication of information across more than one medium or sign system.” However, the fact that transmediation cuts across mediums does not necessarily express that a single producer must be responsible for the entire range of production (Dena, 2009).

With an interpretivist approach, a broad visualisation of the concept of headloading becomes relevant as a continuum to the narrative which emerged on Facebook under the title, *Lazy Nigerian Youths*. The creative transmediatory process is in order to afford creative points of entry to the meaning-making process; that is, making artistic images as a way of articulating, constructing and expanding meaning in a different “sign system.” The scope of this study includes the creation of digital art that can function interpretively and communicatively on the headload phenomenon. The emerging works also offers possibility for further study following distribution online with the end goal of creative participation through different platforms, comments and sharing in ongoing transmedia narratives.

Although somewhat dated following current studies, one can make sense from Mercea et al. (2016: 280) of the different characterisations given for interactive and participatory ecologies. They write: “whilst the interactive ecology pertained to an active engagement of audiences with media content, in the participatory ecology, audiences were elevated to the position of co-creators of social goods.” This underscores the possibility available to participants or virtual audiences to upload, share and comment on posts (creative content) as their response.

While the concept and practice of transmedia developed in the entertainment industry on a huge scale, its application has metamorphosed into mass communication and journalism (Scolari and Ibrus, 2014; Zha, 2017; Gambarato and Alzamora, 2018). Zha’s study of transmediation deals with the organisation, digitization and virtualization of news content in terms of adding pictures and infographics to the digital versions of news. It is clear that transmedia practice complements and extends narratives rather than duplicates them. This brings us to the question of *intertextuality*, which I consider in the next section.

Beyond the available studies in typical areas of transmedia practice – in education and entertainment – there have been other modes of application and approaches. Saldre and Torop (2012: 25) capture the sense in which transmedia practice is variegated, maintaining that “the conceptualizations of transmediality itself vary significantly.” They write: “the disciplines that have taken part in the explosion of research into transmedia range from linguistics and pedagogy, to cultural, social and economic sciences, and to media and narrative studies.”

With such examples of works featured in “*Dare to Make*” by TEDxTransmedia (2010), “*Kegemu-Paris-2011*” by Hanabusa and Sakakura (2011), “*Intelligence and Luck*” by Cearanissa (2008), some performing artists have expressed their own perceptions of transmedia. The presentation, TEDxTransmedia (2010), justifies my understanding that transmedia “is not just about screens.” The presenter, Christopher Sandberg, shows images and videos of what he has done with his counterparts in a transmedia drama and performance, building live gamespace

and landscape. His transmedia approach advances live action performances with a fusion of digital media and augmented reality.

Barber (2016) differentiates forms of digital storytelling in creative art. These forms include multimedia, cross-media or intermedia practices. He writes that transmedia is “different from multimedia where one uses multiple media to tell a story. And it is different from cross media where one just tells the same story across different media” (2016:8).

Multimedia, for instance, involves different semiotic modes such as visuals, sound, writing and others in one creative project while transmedia accounts for the manifestation of a narrative on different ‘platforms’ or ‘languages’ of representation and it is rather as a continuum, with each having the capacity to stand alone. Barber underscores it thus: transmedia entails that “multiple platforms contribute to an ecology of creative and complex storytelling experiences” (2016: 8). While each platform exists separately, it is allowed to afford its potential to the creative experience, and “everything remains connected by a central narrative and theme.”

From the foregoing, therefore, the concept of transmediation is appropriate as an interpretive process as I position it for a visual art inquiry that links social media (Facebook), socio-political and visual discourses. As a process, the technique affords me exploratory possibilities for meaning making (Burns, 2016). This is captured in the words of Dena (2009) that “design realizes discourse,” as the creative ‘tinkering’ is part of the process of meaning-making. This allows me as an artist to decide on the semiotic content that advances the construction of meaning in headloading representation in this study. Before I conclude the chapter, it is necessary to show the place of and the connection between transmediation, intertextual and adaptive processes.

2. 11. Intertextuality, Adaptation and Transmediation

Originally as a linguistic concept, intertextuality refers to drawing connections to and inspiration from texts from different sources by authors and creators, consciously and/or unconsciously. It also manifests in readers and audiences being able to interpret what they see in relation to previously seen texts, images and ideas (Butt, 2010; Chandler, 2007; D'Angelo, 2009). Some writers have tried to question the seeming conflictual position of intertextuality with such notions as postmodernism, interdiscursivity, intersubjectivity, interdisciplinarity, intersemioticity, influence, inspiration, among others (Landwehr, 2002; Martin, 2011).

Freedman (1994) refers to intertextuality as the “conceptual space between texts,” and “the relationship between texts.” Although formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin in his work on ‘dialogism’ the idea of intertextuality coined by Julia Kristeva denotes “the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another” (Kristeva, 1984). It underscores the fact that texts and literature are constructed mosaics of words and connections are made by means of citations, quotations, allusions, borrowings, adaptations, appropriations, parody, pastiche, imitation, and the like (D'Angelo, 2009).

While the concept of intertextuality was originally a linguistic one, Freedman particularised the term *intergraphicality* as another conceptual space and relationship in which visual forms cue references with other images. In this regard, I am aware of the fact that, sometimes, the concept of transmedia seems to entangle within the dimensions of intertextuality or intergraphicality. It is important to define how transmediation differs from these ideas of intertextuality and adaptation. This follows arguments that try to position transmedia practice in the realm of intertextual adaptation (Adami and Jewitt, 2016).

Such notions seem to disparage creative practices that involve elements of intertextuality such as adaptation, imitation and others. Intertextuality can be a useful tool to advance the production of meaning. While a position against any

intertextual presence in transmediatory practice may highlight function rather than form, it minimises the meaning-making potential of intertextuality.

Moreover, the idea of interdiscursivity becomes clear in showing remote and subtle intertextual presence in the sense that a content creator is influenced by previous experience and skill. This kind of invisible or partial engagement of intertextual elements, as shown by Saldre and Torop (2012), is obvious in my creative practice. Further accounts on how this has manifested in my work are provided in Section 7.8.

Jenkin's argument about transmedia storytelling may also provide a good ground for differentiating transmedia from intertextuality:

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics... (Jenkins, 2006: 95,96).

While adaptation as a key element of intertextuality necessarily has recourse to something already existing in order to generate a new work in a different format (D'Angelo, 2009), transmedia franchise is connected as a continuum of a story. This instance from Long (2007: 24) provides further clarification: "if Genesis only existed as stained glass, Exodus as spoken words, Leviticus as music and Deuteronomy as brushstrokes on canvas, then the Bible would objectively be a transmedial franchise."

In a transmediation, then, it is the same narrative developing uniquely in interpretation, in presentation and in a different medium within the affordances of a new medium (Dena, 2009). Long's argument pinpoints the differentiating element between adaptation and transmediation when he writes that "retelling a story in a different media type is adaptation, while using multiple media types to craft a single story is transmediation" (Long, 2007 cited in Dena, 2009: 148).

It is important to note that a key element marking out transmediation is its potential to continue a narrative by creating distinctive content within a specific

medium. This study engages with transmediation as a means of interpretation by developing the headloading narrative in creative practice. This is a continuum of headloading narratives on the Facebook social media platform that straddles several socio-political issues in Nigeria. However, the approach of transmediation is innovated to suit my research design as shown in Chapter 5. While I choose to engage the concept in creative exploration, it is also important to understand that one cannot practically divorce intertextual functions in a visual study such as this. In the next chapter I am going to examine art works from Nigeria that manifest the subject of headloading in them.

CHAPTER 3

HEADLOADING IN NIGERIAN ART

3.1. Introduction

As already noted, my interest in and insight into headloading for this study derives primarily from the use of a representation of the subject in a Facebook conversation termed 'Lazy Nigeria Youths'. Headloading has once and again become a subject in the works of some artists in Nigeria without the provision of ample explanation around the subject. I am aware that headloading is not only a practice in Nigeria, but in many African countries.

In reviewing the representation and theme of headloading in various art works from Nigeria, it has become obvious that little or no study has been carried out to position the phenomenon in a humanistic and communicative perspective. As a precursor to my review, I cite a work by Kentridge (2018) titled 'The Head and Load'. This art event was a creative visit to colonial history of the First World War in which Africans played significant roles. With a combination of art, music, dance, film, sculpture and shadows, the artist explored the tension and circumstances that surrounded the war.

Recognising that the majority of Africans involved in the war did not serve as soldiers but as porters and headloaders, with huge death tolls, Kentridge writes that 'The Head and the Load':

is about historical incomprehension (and inaudibility and invisibility). The colonial logic towards the black participants could be summed up: 'Lest their actions merit recognition, their deeds must not be recorded.' The Head & the Load aims to recognise and record (2018: 3).

Beyond Nigeria, Kentridge opens the understanding that various representations of headloading hold vast and potent socio-political connotations and communication for the current time. It further signals the trauma experienced in relation to the colonial past (see further details on this in Section 7.7).

Kentridge's piece is interdisciplinary and is relevant to the headload discourse. By separating the words, 'head' and 'load' there seems to be a heightened sense of the multiple burdens in the motif. The idea of colonial ideology eclipsing the African 'headloaders' raises questions around the authenticity of contemporary solidarity between African countries and their past colonisers. This question of layers of meaning is part of my creative exploration. In addition, I have tried to explore part of these ideological questions and relationships in my pieces titled, *Foreign Aids and Global North on South* (Figs. 7.9 and 7.10) as a way to expand my interpretation of the headload concept.

It is important at this point to begin to survey some of artists' concepts and works on headloading in order to see how they have engaged with the representation of the African cultural practice of headloading. Works of artists are usually presented in exhibitions. Sources available to me include those of catalogues and images of works online. However, there is a scarcity of sources of visual material on headloading. Moreover, I have identified artworks reflecting the subject or concept of headloading, some of which are backed up by sparse literature while most are not. I have purposely selected works representative of the different sections of visual arts – painting, drawing, photography, textile design and installation, among others.

These sections also define the media in which to group and present the works. Works accompanied with statements are accordingly presented and cited, while those without written backup are defined by the titles explored by the various artists. Ifedioramma Dike's work represents headloading on textile.

Photography is another area of interest where I show works from Victor Politis and James-Iroha Uchechukwu. In printmaking I show works by Solomon Irein

Wangboje. In painting I show selected works of Dele Jegede, Obiora Udechukwu, Sukanthy Visapprumal Egharevba. Although their works do not study headloading, some of their social, political and cultural concerns manifest through it. Their pieces provide a path that potentiates my headloading survey.

3. 2. Drawings, Illustrations and Painting

On drawings and illustrations, I have identified works by Obiora Udechukwu and Chike Aniakor. They are artists of the Nsukka Art School whose works have over the years interrogated a number of issues in Nigeria's socio-political space. Udechukwu's drawings are well known for their presentation of sensitive lines. Linearity, characteristic of the *Uli* design system is a common denominator of drawings from the Nsukka Art School. *Uli* art tradition, developed out of the wall styling practice of the Igbo women, is synonymous with the Nsukka school (Ottenberg, 2002; Morgan et al., 2017).

■ *The Poor: In Search of Water*

Udechukwu's (1981) exhibition titled, "No Water" holds illustrations and drawings in which he explores water scarcity as a biting social malady of the time. In the exhibition, Udechukwu articulates the social problem of dealing with the endemic shortage of water in Nigeria. In the drawings are represented headloaders in search of water. "Water Fetchers: portraits and silhouettes" (Fig. 3.1); "The Burden" (Fig. 3.2); "The Search Continues" (Fig. 3.3) are titles in the "No Water" show in which headloading appears. These drawings present the condition, the containers and the common approaches used in search of survival: the search for the basic need of water.

In "Water Fetchers: portraits and silhouettes" and "The Burden", for instance, one perceives the principle of repetition – and, more absurdly, people carrying people in the containers instead of water. Rendered in wash of ink, Udechukwu presents silhouetted figures of mostly young people who in groups 'pursue' the water search with diverse kinds of containers, levels of curiosity and kinds of mobility. It is here that headloading shows up as a mobility option, buttressing

the idea of headloading as intermediate means of transport in sub-Saharan Africa (Ogunremi, 1975; Porter, 2008; Porter et al., 2007).

A common feature across Udechukwu's pieces is the metal bucket that defined rurality at the time. The idea of 'containers' here reminds me of the history of headloading which Osborn (2018) contextualises in containerisation practices, traditions of storage and mobility of pre-colonial West Africa. There is a connection between headloading and rurality (or underdevelopment)

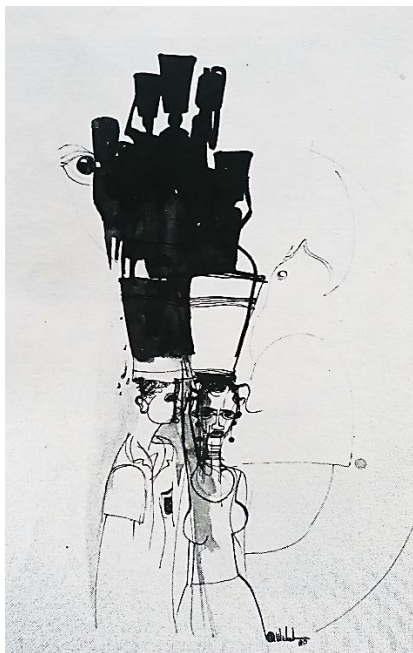


Fig. 3.1: Water Fetchers: portraits and silhouettes, Obiora Udechukwu. 1980. Ink & wash, 42x29.7cm

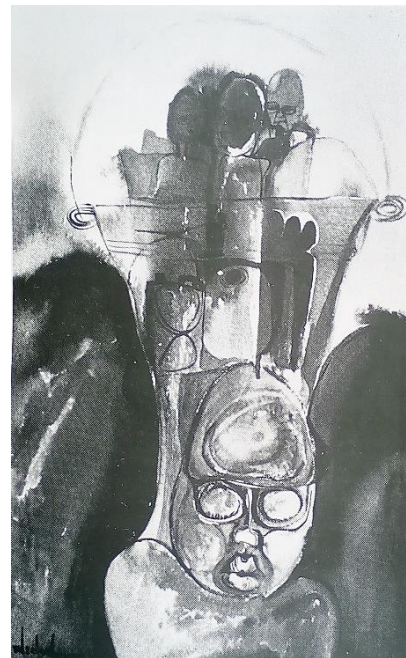


Fig. 3.2: The Burden, Obiora Udechukwu. 1980. Ink & wash, 42x29.7cm



Fig. 3.3: Obiora Udechukwu. The Search continues, 1980. Ink & wash, 51x40.5cm

■ *Menial Survival tactics and poverty*

The artworks here show people seeking ways to survive in tight economic conditions such as in the search for water. Udechukwu's "People of the Night" (Fig 3.4) connects with his paintings on 'Nightsoilmen' (Fig 3.5 and 3.6). Although the works bear different titles they refer to the same practice of conveying excrement. "Nightsoilman" 1 and 2 catalogued in "So Far" (Udechukwu, 1993), Sukanthy's "The Burden we bear" shown in "The Art of Nigerian Women" (Bosah and Okediji, 2017), and "Fura de Nunu I" by Ifedioramma Dike (AKA, 1993) all represent certain important social, economic or domestic scenes in which headloading is manifest.



Fig. 3.4: People of the Night, 1985.
Obiora Udechukwu. Pen & Ink, 13x25cm?

For instance, "The People of the Night" was local parlance referring to men whose job was to handle nightsoil during the colonial and early postcolonial era in Nigeria. They were so referred to because they waited for the cover of darkness to do their business which entailed moving certain distances to dispose of human excrement. In his illustration the artist includes the tools and elements used in the nightsoil business: buckets, brushes, lamps, head cover, among other

things. He acknowledges issues of containerisation, loading and transporting systems, the secrecy and the facelessness, the timing, the stigma and the psychology, the health or aesthetic sensibilities, as well as the menial stance associated with this 'economic practice' (Udechukwu, 2002).

Udechukwu further relates these characterisations of the 'nightsoilmen' concept to the several social divides and (dis)connections of the society. Although the practice of manual and nocturnal disposal of human ordure is now dated, Udechukwu thought of it as "one of the fallouts of urbanisation" and colonisation in Nigeria (Udechukwu, 2002: 102). In essence, these works express living at the lowest ebb or rung of social status.



Fig. 3.5: Nightsoilman I, 1964.
Obiora Udechuckwu.



Fig. 3.6: Nightsoilman II, 1971.
Obiora Udechuckwu.

There is sense in which the practice signals power and social relations between the rich and the poor. If one agrees with Udechukwu that this headloading practice here is a fallout of urbanisation, then it becomes clear how power plays out: some people rise on the fall of others. The works by the artist Sukanthy Visappurmal Egharevba support the standpoint of the practice as a struggle for living. Headloading stands as a code for power relations in this study.

■ *Motherhood and domesticity*

The representations below with titles “The Burden we bear” by Sukanthy and “Fura de Nunu I” by Ifedioramma (Figs. 3.7 and 3.8), depict women who find means of subsistence under the weight of domestic care. While Sukanthy, unlike Udechukwu (Fig 3.2), seems to obscure the understanding of the burden in Fig. 3.7 in favour of aesthetics, with the graphic and chromatic shine of the piece, the social struggle of headloading is clear.

In “The Burden we bear” and in “Fura de Nunu I” the linking of womanhood and fertility is evident. In both works we see visual symbols of childbearing and child-rearing. While Sukanthy shows (faceless) mothers and child, Ifedioramma’s batik rendering suggests Fulani milkmaids selling local dairy products. The phrase, ‘Fura de Nunu’ defines a Fulani food composed of ‘locally fermented milk and millet gruel’ (Idoko, 2018).

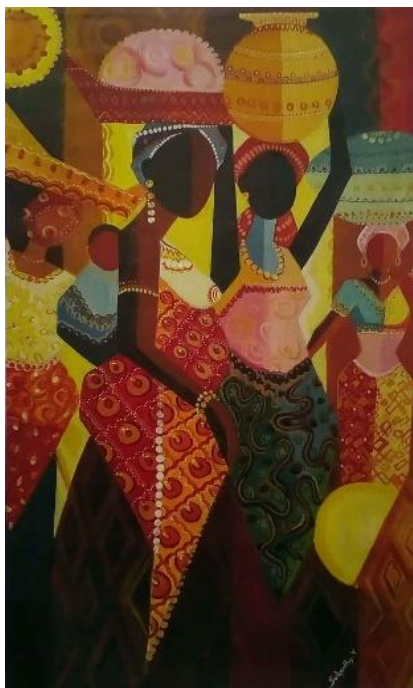


Fig. 3.7: The Burden we bear, 2002.
Sukanthy Egharevba
Acrylic on Canvas, 115x80cm



Fig. 3.8: Fura de Nunu I, 1993. Dike Ifedioramma.
Fabric ink, batik on cotton, 75x50cm

Thus, one sees the capacity to produce sustain life, straddled with loads and weights of care. Maternal sustenance may be suggested by the depiction of uncovered breasts in the two works, and the local produce carried on the head,

could suggest fertility for which 'milk' stands as code, domestic sustenance even under adverse conditions. Such a basic interpretation relies on stereotypes of women as mothers whose main role is to nurture their children and families. Alternatively, the focus could be placed on strength, resilience and dignity of these images. Section 3.3 provides details on the theme of the romanticising of headloading under which these images are also categorised.

Although, I have explored some other gender issues in Chapter Seven, here (Figs 3.7-9) it is clear how women have been represented in headloading practices.

■ *Terror and Conflicts in Nigeria*

The representation of headloading continues in painting. Jegede (2015) shows a rather flat painting titled "IDP: Internally Displaced Persons" in which headloading activity is manifested as the major subject of his work (see Fig. 3.9). Jegede, a Nigerian artist based in the United State of America writes of his works: "they address fundamental and cogent matters in the life of the Nigerian nation."



Fig. 3.9: IDP: Internally displaced Persons, 2015. Dele Jegede.
Acrylic on Canvas, 75x50cm

He writes: "I draw inspiration from the political, economic, and socio-cultural incongruities that constantly assail our collective probity" (jegede, no date: n.p.). "IDP: Internally Displaced Persons" when connected to Nigeria refers to the

terrorist attacks from Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen and bandits. Terrorism from these groups have left tens of thousands dead and many displaced in Nigeria's north-east zone.

In this piece, Dele Jegede surveys the effects of terrorism and other crises, such as inter-tribal conflicts, which can cause internal displacement of people. Primarily, the individual, family or community is displaced, then belongings are displaced as represented here with headloading, before an eventual mental displacement. From a broad perspective artists including Udechukwu, Aniakor and Jegede through their works, challenge the political and social maladies of the times in which they work. There is a link between illustrations of wartime and Jegede's piece on terrorism in Nigeria.

■ *War and fleeing*

In his exhibition titled "Selected Sketches 1965-83 and recent Drawings and Watercolours," Udechukwu (1984) shows a rather intense exploration of different concepts, some of which capture scenes of headloading practice as a sign of war. Instances of headloading activities in which the themes of war and flight manifest in his drawing include: *Flight* (Fig. 3.10), *Refugees Fleeing* (Fig. 3.11) and *Exile Train 1 and 2* (Fig. 3.12 and 3.13). Some of these works shown in the exhibition are "from [his] first-hand experience or observation of the genocide, suffering, hunger, kwashiorkor, and air raids" that defined Nigeria's civil war (Udechukwu, 2002: 105).

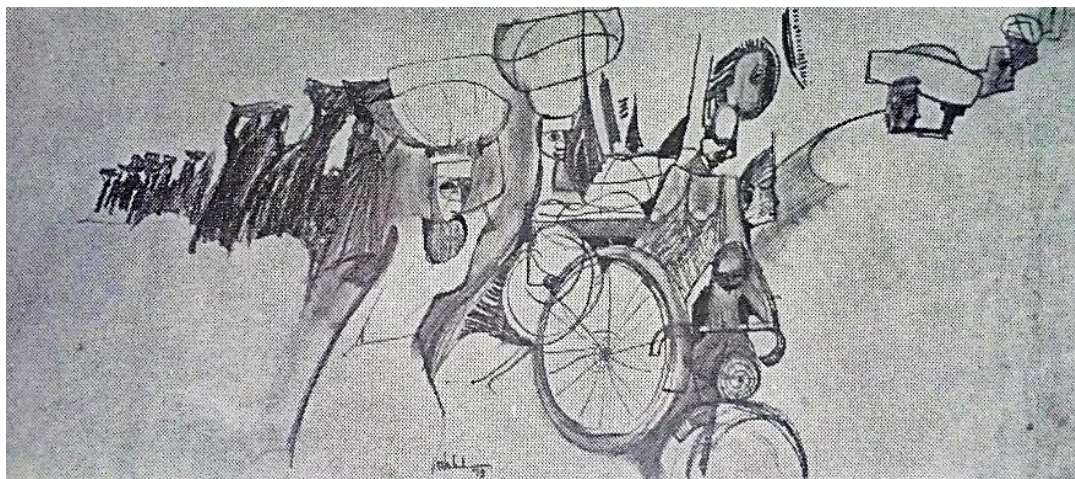


Fig. 3.10: Flight, 1978? Obiora Udechukwu. Pen & Ink

It is possible to classify Udechukwu's statement as a personal account of the occurrences that took place during the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970, which was particularly tragic for the Biafran side. One can undoubtedly connect headloading, war and flight, as earlier shown in the work of Kentridge (2018). Of course, such wartime flight by foot over long distances have consequences. Udechukwu's piece in Fig 3.12 suggests strongly the underlying social issues connected with load carrying on the head. The figures look tired and bent under loads, not just physically but mentally. The crowd of figures evoke the larger social context of wars, such as poverty, famine, and migration.



Fig. 3.11: Obiora Udechukwu. Refugees Fleeing, 1972.



Fig. 3.12: Exile Train, 1981?,
Obiora Udechukwu. Brush and Ink



Fig. 3.13: The Exile Train, 1984?,
Obiora Udechukwu.

Udechukwu's exploration of the Nigerian civil upheaval which resulted in the 'flight' of many households is also seen in "Exodus 1 [The Refugees]" (Fig. 3.14), another vital drawing representative of headloading, by Chike Aniakor.

"Exodus 1 (The Refugees)" is shown in "The Poetics of Line: Seven Artists of the Nsukka Group (October 22, 1997 - April 26, 1998). Aniakor's title has a similarity with those of Udechukwu, potentially revealing a connection between the practice of headloading and the condition of 'migration and 'refugeism'.

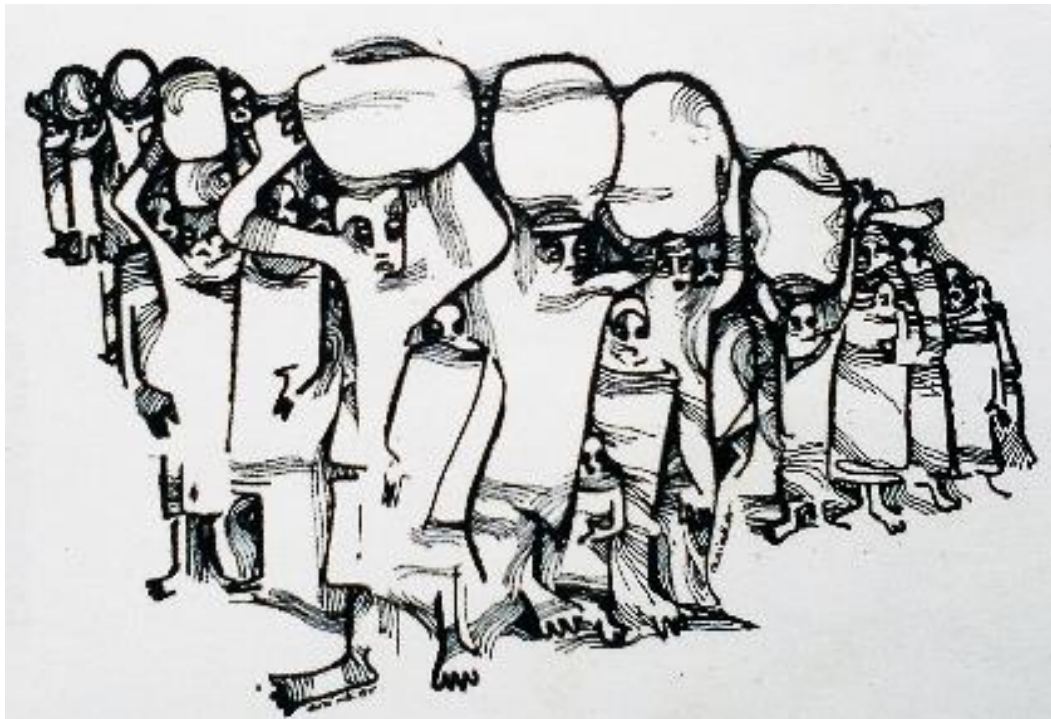


Fig. 3.14: Exodus I [The Refugees], Chike Aniakor.
1977. Ink on paper, 32.7x27.9cm

In the works of both artists one can see the multitudes, the train and possibly the traffic created. In "Exodus 1" we can see the struggle, the tension, and the compactness of the multitude. These men, women and children, looking forward, seem to have their eyes sunken in their sockets: they seem to be sliced into the queue, standing with a sense of curiosity and incongruity as they peep into the future of their situation. It is uncertain what the journey will bring, and how many will remain or return alive. There is desire to survive.

3.3. Photographing Hawking

Victor Politis and James-Iroha Uchechukwu are the two Nigerian photographers whose works showing headloading are relevant here. Some of their photographs concern young people in the streets peddling wares which they carry on the head.

Beyond historical headloading as a means of transportation, in Nigeria today hawking seems to be taking the largest part of the practice. For Nigeria, this may not be unconnected to a number of factors such as increasing urbanisation, increasing demand for financial independence and means of livelihood, as well as increasing population. In his work, 'Nigeria Through the Eyes of a Passerby', Politis (2008) reveals a number of street and city activities, of which hawking by carrying loads on the head is one. His "Lagos 2007" series (Fig. 3.15 – 3.17) and James-Iroha's (2006) "Not for export – soft drink hawkers" (Fig. 3.18) are among the photographic images of headloading I discuss in this study.



Fig. 3.15: Victor Politis. "Lagos 2007" series, 2008. Photograph

Figs 3.15-3.17 are photographs from Victor Politics in which he captures the energy of headloading not as a sport but as a means through which survival is sought in Nigeria. Participants of headloading in the market place include

mostly young boys and girls who carry different degrees of weight, seeking potential buyers. For instance, Fig 3.15 shows a young woman carrying a tray full of fried plantain chips, a local snack patronised by passers-by. Her gaze in this piece perhaps epitomizes a hunter seeking prey rather than a seller seeking a buyer.

Politis as a foreigner in Nigeria was caught by the energy, the tension and the resilient spirit he observed in Nigeria's headloading culture and rigorously engaged his lens, across sections of the society. In acknowledging this, he writes: "In taking these photographs I have come to appreciate and celebrate the dignity and survival skills of the people of Nigeria" (Politis, 2008: n.p.)



Fig. 3.16: "Lagos 2007" series, Victor Politis. Photograph



Fig. 3.17, "Lagos 2007" series. Victor Politis. Photograph



Fig. 3.18: Not for export—soft drink hawkers, 2006. James-Iroha Uchechukwu. Photograph, 83.84cmx177.8cm

James-Iroha, a graduate artist and a professional photographer, also shows images of young peddlers. In Fig. 3.18 we see a line-up of young boys within the same age range. They look like curious hawkers of different brands, especially of soft drinks and of other edible stuff often sold by hawkers across Nigerian cities. These boys are shown standing at the edge of a drainage channel, postured against environmental squalor, perhaps in anticipation of this uncommon engagement with the photographer. Among questions for these photographs are: who are these youths hawking for? What level of profit will these enterprises produce? Are these young people not supposed to be busy with their studies? What effects do long hours of carrying loads on the head have on their different aspects of life?

There is a sense in which the young people (as shown in Fig 3.18) use the headload practice to get a slice of the economic pie (this is further explored in the Chapter Six). Yet considering the ages of the young people, one could view their headloading practice as disrupting their formal education. While hawking is an unskilled and freelance approach to personal or family subsistence in Nigeria, it could also be viewed in the light of individual empowerment.

3. 4. Headloading in Prints and Banknotes

Here I review the works of Solomon Irein Wangboje, a Nigerian printmaker and art educator. Printmaking is another process of art making through which artists produce representations of headloading practice.

■ *The Romance of load-carrying*

The idea of romance here derives from Wangboje's title, "Romance of the headload series" which is well known among artists and art writers in Nigeria (Ubogu, 2016). It is a series of silkscreen prints depicting the carrying of loads on the head, as the artist reminisces his involvement in the practice of headloading.



Fig. 3.19: Romance of the Headload II, 1978. Solomon Irein Wangboje. Print, 43x33cm



Fig. 3.20: Romance of the Headload III, 1978. Solomon Irein Wangboje. Print, 48x32cm

The series was borne out of the artist's domestic experience in childhood when he was involved in conveying domestic loads and wares across long distances. These works show women as their main subjects and show women carrying their children on their backs, as seen in Fig. 3.19 and 3.20. These works manifest the engagement of the principle of 'repetition.' This is to achieve the aesthetic effects of visual unity in the composition, and perhaps place emphasis on continuity of the headloading culture.

Postured in silhouettes against bright ochres of yellow and brown, the prints are rather flat, while at the same time pursuing a perspectival arrangement of the repeating figures. His techniques here involve a superimposition of vibrant colours and repetitive forms on a flat background. In one of the pieces, there is some connection with the Fulani milkmaid as represented in Ifedioramma's "Fura de Nunu" (Fig. 3.8), which perpetuates the gender stereotype of maternal care and sustenance.

■ *Romanticising Headloading*

The majority of the artworks represent women in the practice of headloading. They often represent a romanticised image of women as mothers and providers, but could also be seen as sexualised representations of the female body.

Representations of women whose female bodies are idealised or even sexualised, alludes to Hall's (1997b) account of racialized regimes of representation in which the female body becomes a fetishized object, making the viewer complicit with the male gaze.

Images of women headloading appear on two of Nigeria's banknotes: the Ten Naira and Hundred Naira notes. I am aware that the subjects of currency designs are important national emblems for any country. For Nigeria to represent headloading on banknotes, suggests it is proud of the practice. There may be a celebration of an entrepreneurial spirit in these representations or it may be a way to accord honour to the industry of women (Morgan, 2014). However, the romanticised image of the practice depicting women in the Naira designs is a complex one to understand.

On Nigeria's Ten Naira note is the depiction of two Fulani Milkmaids carrying their loads of calabash, containing their goods 'fura du nunu'. This representation has lasted on the Naira design since its first design in 1979 (Morgan, 2016). On the other hand, the headloading representation in Fig. 3.22 was introduced on the newer commemorative N100 banknote and unveiled in 2014 to celebrate the centennial of Nigeria's existence.

One might ask why the government would think of headloading as a subject that requires representation in the nation's object of identity. This for me signals an affirmation of a practice that in several ways does not gratify the practitioner psychologically and socially, except by way of making a living. By presenting headloading women in the banknotes, the government could further be adducing to and emphasising the strength and resilience of women specifically. Fig 3.22 presents a case of headloading in which the practitioner is celebrated.

The reason behind the multiple representations of Fulani women as milkmaids by artists is not clear. Perhaps, the artists are inclined to the sexualised gaze afforded by the common half-nude dressing of Fulani milkmaids in these pieces. This perhaps shows the connection between headloading and clothing,

particularly considering the sensuous and the sensual that might be occasioned when arms are raised to support loads.

Adepegba (1986: 15) provides a clue to the relationship between romanticisation and load-carrying through the coiffure and fashion style of the Fulani women. He thinks of the dress style as a matter of convenience for the female dairy hawkers when he wrote that:

The nomadic Fulani women in Nigeria have preference for designs which are convenient for their dairy hawking and other household activities which involve carrying load on the head. The characteristic aspect of their hair styles are therefore the braids that hang down the back and the sides of the face.

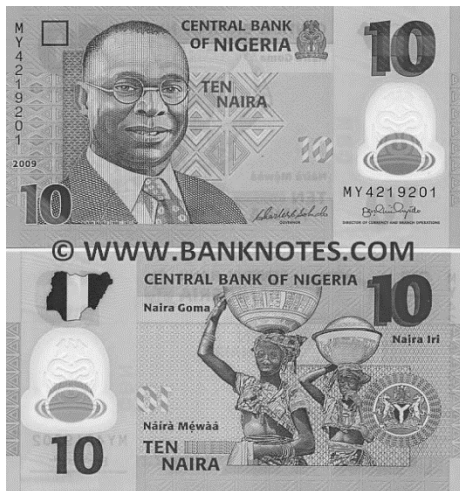


Fig. 3.21: Ten Naira note. Fulani Milkmaids, 2007. Banknote.



Fig. 3.22: One Hundred Naira note. Celebrant, 2014. Banknote.

In Fig. 3.22 the headloader is seen with a load on her head and another in her hand. This image suggests a marriage tradition of a Hausa-Fulani bride in northern Nigeria. Generally, the Fulani group is known for calabash decoration and on such occasions as marriage they carry decorated calabashes as gifts (Adepegba, 1986), and are adorned with colourful beadwork. The carrying of a load here is not a point of delight in itself but a necessity towards the completion of the marriage ritual.

I am aware that owing to acculturation, other ethnic groups in Nigeria may share similar cultural experience as shown in Fig. 3.22. Thus, it is relevant to

underscore the carriage of the celebrant and the graceful gait accorded the occasion. This depiction of headloading differs from that composed by El Anatsui in wood whose organisation is rather rustic and unrefined.

3.5. Installing Headloads

“On their fateful journey nowhere,” Fig. 3.23 is an installation in wood by El Anatsui, (Anatsui, 2002). Anatsui, a Ghanaian artist living in Nigeria, spent more than four decades working and teaching at the University of Nigeria, and has from there developed his global fame, linkages and accolades. Although “On their fateful journey nowhere” is not altogether an abstraction, it is anthropomorphic in its characteristics. The composition of the installation suggests those carrying headloads – both standing and falling. The fallen wood suggests death along ‘the journey.’ A clear pointer to the work as conceptualising headloading comes from the title.



Fig. 3.23: El Anatsui. On their fateful journey nowhere, 1995. Wood Installation, 95cm high

The word “journey” in the title shows relationship with headloading as a means of transportation, as emphasised by writers like Ogunremi (1975) and Porter (2008). The notion further aligns itself with ideas of “fleeing,” “exile train,” “flight,” and “refugees” as underscored in Uchechukwu’s drawings. In other words, one perceives the notion of movement, even though the artist here has

expressed the idea of “journeying nowhere.” He connotes the possible impediments and inhibitions that the ‘load’ can have on its carriers, as shown by the static nature of the installation. Nothing changes. There is lack of development. They are trapped in a poverty of desire and capacity.

Anatsui’s work here has something in common with his other work titled “Akua’s Surviving Children.” The similarity in both works manifests in the way in which he positions horizontal wood pieces atop vertical ones, conveying the idea of carrying something on the head. I underscore the interaction or intersection of ‘verticals and horizontals’ as a fundamental principle of headloading.

From the foregoing it is evident how headloading has been the subject of many artworks in Nigeria, yet, it is also clear that most artists lack literature that discusses concepts and insights about their works. This is a problem for art discourse. The subject of headloading is not exempt, notwithstanding the fact that headloading has appeared in the art of many Nigerian artists. My creative practice, as a form of transmediation, allows me to offer interpretations of the headloading concept, without necessarily drawing on the works of others but on the wider and contemporary social and political narratives from a platform such as Facebook. This in many cases is reclaiming and challenging the romanticised stereotype and other basic knowledge of representing the practice as a ‘canon’ in Africa.

3. 6. Conclusion

From the above, I underscore that headloading representation is a cultural expression that requires sense to be made out of it through interpretivist investigation. It connects with diverse ideological, cultural and socio-political realities that can be articulated through its different ways of presentation and interpretation. Considering the development and the linkage between visual culture and creative practice, I see in headloading the potential for visual communication on several socio-political issues in Nigeria.

My concern is to provide a deeper reading of the headloading visual language (Eubanks, 1997). My desire is to provide social commentary on several socio-political and ideological issues in Nigeria, as well as afford audience engagement within the ambit of artistic ecology and participation online.

This study, therefore, continues the narratives of headload culture from the Facebook social space to a different creative platform while interpreting through a transmediatory process. It is, thus, strongly positioned to link digital, social media and visual representation through a personal interpretation of a transmedia process. I believe that by re-imagining headloading practice the study affords a different creative expression imbued with semiotic content and enriched visual discourse, as well as further research potential.

CHAPTER 4

THEORETICAL FRAMING AND CONCEPTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical framing of this study. It is a practice-led study in which I explore the interpretation of headloading through the creative concept of transmediation. I examine the creative direction of transmediation which, as a pedagogical technique, was expounded by Semali (2002). Its media equivalent, 'transmedia' practice was made popular by Jenkins (2003; 2006) and applied by practitioners and authors in various creative fields. I also define how this concept works as a discursive technique for interpretive process. My transmediatory practice in this study shows how I understand Facebook narrative through semiotic analysis and move that understanding into creative practice as a process of interpreting headloading representation.

The theory of semiotics by Barthes (1977) is relevant for me. Roland Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation of signs as key elements of semiotics are explored. I combine this with related concepts within mainstream (social) semiotics. This combination of theory and concepts and how I use them is what I explore in this chapter.

Through my creative practice I explore the semiotic content of headloading imageries while semiotic analysis provides an interpretation and communication of the visual. Semiosis is the process of making meaning through signs. It is interesting how Jewitt and Oyama (2001: 138) define the possibility of expanding semiotic resources: they write: "semiotic resources may be expanded so as to allow more options, more tools for the production and interpretation of images and other forms of visual communication. In other words, semiotics can be a tool

for design.” In essence, my study entails working creatively across platforms to produce content that will afford interpretation, communication and participation.

Using an interpretivist paradigm in this study, my concern is to understand and to give a meaningful representation of the social practice of headloading expressed through visual language. Semiotics as a theory provides an ideal perspective for an interpretivist investigation that deals with meaning-making (Semali, 2002b). I will use the following to understand the topic in practical terms.

4. 2. Approaches to Communication and meaning-making

Before I define semiotics and its underlying elements for this study, I would like to explore communication as an important dimension to the working out of meaning. This is to help position elements necessary for understanding semiotics.

Fiske (2011) identifies communication in two major approaches (or models): communication as the transmission of messages and communication as production and collaborative exchange of meaning. In a sense, the former depends on the process while the latter concentrates on the product (output). Fiske calls the dependants of the latter group, semiotic. Although my study here is interpretivist in nature, seeking semiotic analysis of headloading representation, the transmedia process I engage emerges in social ‘communication’.

The communication process begins with image sourcing from Facebook narratives and culminates in an exhibition either for audiences or for distribution on a social platform online. The nature of this study predisposes it to semiotic approaches, that is, the production of meaning towards the production of social interaction. This production of meaning is what the theoretical analysis of my creative process seeks to do through interpretation of the headloading concept.

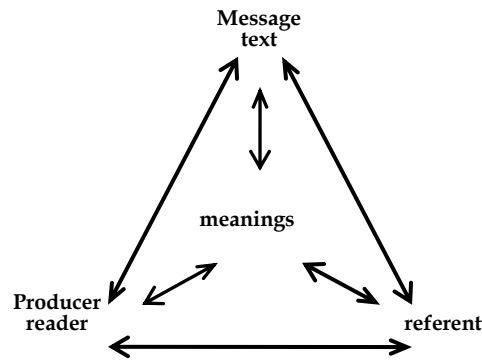


Fig. 4.1: Messages and Meanings (Fiske, 2011)

In the figure above Fiske shows the process of meaning making and effective messaging. The meaning that transpires has elements that are beyond the producer's control, as the receiver also produces meaning. Here are three components that lead to the making of meaning: the producer (and the reader or audience), the message (text or any visual representation) and the referent (object or idea referred to, such as headloading). The producer sends the message as text or representation, the referent shown in the message is decoded by the reader, thus, meaning is inferred or constructed. While a message is defined as "the smallest unit of meaning that can have an independent material existence," "a text is string of messages which is ascribed semiotic unity" according to Hodge and Kress (1988: 262, 263).

It is important to note that cultural experience of the reader or audience is pertinent in coding and decoding semiotic texts. For example, to a Western viewer, headloading images must mean something different than to an African who has carried headloads all his or her life. It is in this regard that, for this study, my auto-ethnographic bias and understanding become effective towards the making of meaning.

The process of making meaning, as shown above, shares certain similarities with the key elements of visual methodologies outlined by Rose (2001). She writes: "interpretations of visual images broadly concur that there are three sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by various

audiences (Rose, 2001: 16). At the level of production of visual form is the producer. The message text is the image itself and the referent is the object or idea captured in the image. It is important to define the audience as readers of visual forms or messages. In order to underscore images as signs and towards interpretation and communication, I want to explore the concept of semiotics in detail.

4.3. On Semiotics

For my study I have adopted semiotics as the central theoretical frame. Here I examine the basic assumptions and tenets of semiotics in order to locate it paradigmatically. Semiotics is a tool for studying and constructing meaning of different representational modes: verbal, visual and other. Engaging with semiotic frameworks supports my interpretive concern, which is the main focus of this qualitative study.

Particularly, I have engaged the theory drawing from the interpretive possibilities afforded by its denotative and connotative models, underscored by Barthes (1977). The rationale for selecting this approach is in order to properly expound all that headloading stands for in social and ideological implications in line with my transmediation of headloading.

Semiotics is a system of signs. A sign is something that represents something else. It deals with signs and representations for meaning-making. Semiotics is concerned with the social effects of meaning. Margaret Iversen (1986: 84) describes semiology as “laying bare the prejudices beneath the smooth surface of the beautiful,” so that the prevalent social relations of the image is understood. In his words, Kress (2010: 54) holds that at the core of semiotics is “a fusion of forms and meaning.” At its most basic level of definition, therefore, semiotics is the study or theory of signs. It provides ways that messages are made of signs across a wide range of modes and processes such as symbolic, allegorical, metaphorical, metonymical and other communicative structures. As modes they take different forms such as words, images, sounds, gestures, objects. (Chandler,

2007). It is important to note that a sign can afford multiples of meanings based on personal and social experiences.

We are surrounded by signs and we are daily making our own signs as individuals and as entities in social, cultural and other humanistic spaces. Chandler underscores that the idea of semiotics brings to our awareness common signs which can be overlooked or taken for granted. He maintains that “we derive a sense of ‘self’ from drawing upon conventional, pre-existing repertoires of signs and codes which we did not ourselves create” (Chandler, 2007: 216). That is, it affords us the systems to construct meaning out of the ideological realities of our everyday life, as well as providing grounds for challenging reality.

Language is a code, a sign that participants in a culture must know and share (Hall, 1997a). If signs occur in such ubiquitous and diverse verbal, visual and other non-verbal modes, then, it is plausible to say that the making and ‘knowing’ of signs is as old as humankind’s ability to make sense of them. The study of signs dates back to several centuries of recorded history occurring in scholastic philosophies of the medieval periods (Meier-Oeser, 2011). Semiotics gained strong academic traction from such 19th century proponents as the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914).

■ *Production of meaning in semiotics*

Saussure was a major proponent of semiotics. He used his own term ‘semiology,’ largely from a linguistic perspective. ‘Semiology’ referred to the study of signs as a linguistic subject. It has been used as an interdisciplinary theory to analyse texts of different kinds (Semali, 2002b; Hodge and Kress, 1988). Signs are text which manifests in modes and forms such as verbal, visual and gestural (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010).

Saussure’s definition shows signs as being dyadic or two-part: ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’. The signifier refers to the form taken by the sign. This is a visual representation. Saussure’s ‘signified’ is the mental concept created by the

signifier. It is a psychological process of signification that does not show a material form. Umberto Eco (cited in Chandler, 2007: 16) notes that the signified is somewhere between 'a mental image, a concept and a psychological reality.' Saussure's position holds that signs make meaning not in isolation but in relation to other signs in society. This offers the idea of a complex social network of signs (D'Alleva, 2012).

According to Charles Sanders Peirce, three elements are involved in semiotics as a meaning-making tool: the sign, that to which it refers and the users of the sign. This model of semiotics expressed by Peirce (1955-58) is tripartite (triadic). Peirce's triadic formula of the sign involves the representamen, the interpretant and the object (or referent) as shown below:

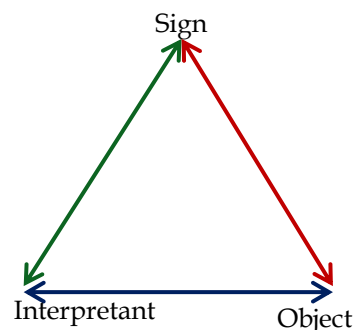


Fig. 4.2: Peirce's triadic elements of meaning (Fiske, 2011)

In his model of semiotics, the sign is the representamen. A sign as a representation refers to something different from itself. That to which a sign refers, Peirce called the Object or Referent. The interpretant of the sign is what Nöth (1990) refers to as "the sense made of the sign." It is a mental sense, a meaning derived by perceiving the sign (Nöth, 2011).

The representamen corresponds to the signifier in Saussure's model, while the interpretant is rather similar to the signified. Although an interpretant is not the same as an interpreter, an interpreter or reader is required to make sense of the sign. In linguistic meaning-making, 'a mental picture' is first formed, while in artistic sense a mental picture is formed with the potential of multiple visual cases or representations.

Peirce (cited in Chandler, 2007) maintains that an equivalent or more developed sign is created as an interpretant of the first sign (the representamen). By making sense of the first sign, another sign results. In other words an interpretant leads to generating other signs and a chain of infinite semiosis (Atkin, 2013). This is the connotative and cultural level of signification.

Considering Peirce's model, each artwork in my study, is a sign, a representation or a component of an artwork might contain a sign. Referring to headloading as the object, I make sense of an artwork as interpretant with such references as migration or rurality. Each work, therefore, will be read connotatively without overlooking what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call "cultural coherence," in interpreting metaphors. Expressing such cultural experiences, as meanings vary from place to place, does not preclude the reality that meaning is usually negotiated and it results from the dynamic interaction between a sign, interpretant, and object (Fiske, 2011).

In his account, Fiske groups 'the users of such a sign' (that is, the social space that the sign occupies) with the sign and the signified as part of the key elements in the production of meaning. A sign is usually visible or perceivable to the senses, taking a form different from the real thing it represents and it may refer to something abstract. It is in this sense that signs stand as rhetorical tropes such as metaphor. Kress (2010: 30) maintains that "all signs are metaphors... Signs are means of making knowledge material." For details on the position of visual tropes in semiotics see Section 4.11. Below I show the categorisation of signs.

■ *Sign types/modes*

As already shown above, Ferdinand de Saussure categorised signs as possessing dual components: a 'signifier' and 'signified'. He posited that the signifier is the form which the sign takes, the representation or verbal manifestation, while the signified is the concept it refers to, which is usually mental (Chandler, 2007).

However, the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce grouped signs into three modes or types: icons, indexes or symbols. This is Peirce's triadic classification of the sign (Fiske, 2011). Icons or iconic signs are representations

that resemble or imitate what they signify (the signified), for instance, a portrait or natural sounds. Visual signs are basically iconic signs. Index is a sign that gives direct connections or references to what it signifies without having obvious relationship with what it refers to. Indexical signs are not arbitrary: they are represented effects of their causes, for instance, smoke is a sign of fire, footprints show that a being passed by. In symbols or symbolic signs there is no connection or resemblance between the sign and the object (the signified). Symbols are modes of signs that do not look like the signified but are arbitrary and assume conventional representation. They function by people's agreement on the sign, for instance, the cross is a symbol of Christianity. (See Fig. 4.3 below)

Modes are different ways signs materialise and more often than not they carry social and cultural tendencies and they define how meaning is realised. Examples of semiotic modes include spoken words, images, sounds, and so on (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010).

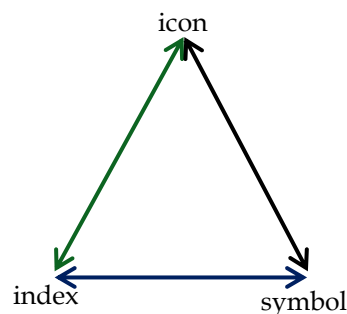


Fig. 4.3: Peirce's sign-types (Fiske, 2011)

Signs can also be categorised as paradigmatic and syntagmatic. "A paradigm is a set of signs from which the one to be used is chosen" (Fiske, 2011). The paradigmatic dimension of a (visual) language refers to the selection of possible alternatives of and oppositions to a sign, while the syntagmatic deals with the rules for the combination or composition of the sign units towards meaning making. Paradigmatic signs gain their meaning from a contrast with other possible signs. Syntagmatic signs gain their meaning from the signs that surround or complement them, that is, its meanings emerge by combination of

different parts or elements. For instance, an artwork is a syntagm (composition) of colours, lines, and images.

Paradigmatic process works by differences. Sense is made by the choice to include or exclude an element in a compositional system. This connects with the idea of binary opposites or substitution. It can also work by what Nöth (1990) refers to as 'relations of equivalence': where two elements have the same function, a choice is made, say of a colour, type of line or gender. For instance, in Fig 6.9 I chose to use black and red for the piece. It was possible to use blue instead of red to connote despair (for blue) and not danger (for red).

4. 4. Structuralism and Social Semiotics

On the development of traditional semiotics, there are divergent schools of thought. Semiotics as a form of structuralism emerged through several analytical methods of the 19th and 20th centuries. In Europe, semiotics was strongly led by Saussure's work in linguistics and tied to structuralism, a term coined by Jakobson as an analytical method. For structuralists, the key to understanding signs was to define their structural relationship with other signs. For example, it used an interpretation framework of right versus wrong – a fixed meaning within a context. The concept is often criticised for its seemingly static approach to thinking.

Structuralism "argues that we cannot know the world on its own terms, but only through the conceptual and linguistic structures of our culture" (Fiske, 2011: 115). It shows that all parts and views of human life are constituted and built on a system of underlying structure and those structures need to be explained. In other words, it shows cultures as structures. One such defining structure is the concept of binary opposition as surface account for underlying meanings. It is built upon the paradigmatic relationship in which choices are made from contrasting signs (Nöth, 1990; Chandler, 2007).

For structuralists, binary opposition stands as the basis of meaning-making, emphasising the way reality is structured in duality. For instance, binary opposition differentiates between nature and culture, civilisation and

primitivism. So, structuralists hold that meanings occur in contrasts and differences between signs such as negative and positive, nature and culture (D'Alleva, 2012; Chandler, 2007). Realities which do not fit into the binary structures are categorised as anomalous. Important structuralist-semioticians include Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan.

Under structuralism semiotic systems are conceived as codes, sets of rules through which meanings are generated from signs. Yet further development of the theory of semiotics led to a theoretical shift during the post-structuralist decades. Critical views describing structuralism as lacking strong theoretical grounds led to this shift. Structuralism was also adjudged ahistorical by proponents of post-structuralism. By this, they meant that it establishes fictitious structures in dealing with social and cultural change.

Semioticians such as Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard began as structuralists but eventually had their works characterised as post-structuralist. Across the divide between structuralism and text, semiotics proponents adapted their theoretical models in areas of linguistics, sociology, anthropology and a wide range of cultural and social practices such as religion, literature and visual arts. It is through this interdisciplinary nature of semiotics that the branch of social semiotics later emerged.

Halliday's (1978) "Language as Social Semiotic" is the seminal work on social semiotics. It is upon this that Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) further developed social semiotics for visual interpretation. For their part, Hodge and Kress (1988) had anchored their development of social semiotics on the definition of semiotics as given by Saussure (1974) in "General Course in Linguistics" as 'the science of the life of signs in society'.

Broadly then, social semiotics deals with meanings that touch on social spaces. It is a subset of semiotics and it retains the basic elements of traditional semiotics such as the text, signifier and the signified. Social semiotics engages with signs and modes as social constructs, whose meanings negotiate and reflect social issues and cultural power relations. Social semiotics seeks to explore signs in

specific social situations beyond the (linguistic) signification of structuralism (Chandler, 2007).

Hodge and Kress (1988: 1), in their seminal work on social semiotics, critique and identify certain 'defects' of traditional semiotics when they write that:

'Mainstream semiotics' emphasises structures and codes, at the expense of functions and social uses of semiotic systems, the complex interrelations of semiotic systems in social practice, all of the factors which provide their motivation, their origins and destinations, their forms and substance.

One such important factor that distinguishes social semiotics from the textual/tradition semiotics is its logomonic system of meaning-making which defines signs in terms of the rules, constraints and conditions of their production and reception. Another defining element of social semiotics expressed by Hodge and Kress (1988) is that of the ideological complex, which seeks to represent the contradictions of ideological positions of social groups and their relations. This includes representing the social order and the interests of the dominant and subordinate in society. In other words, the 'ideological complex' accounts for the social semiotic dimension of social power relations.

Social semiotics has been modified to accommodate analysis of visual texts in a particularised way, gaining from the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). Halliday's socio-semiotic system of functional grammar is an important work in social semiotics. For use in the reading of visual texts, Kress and van Leeuwen apply Halliday's "ideational," "interpersonal" and "textual" meta-functions of language to possess corresponding 'representational,' 'communicational' and 'compositional' abilities in visual texts. This understanding defines what they called 'visual grammar' meant for visual description, interpretation and explanation of social issues.

In its multimodal stance, social semiotics accounts for semiotic modes such as image, text, colour and so on, used in the production of semiotic texts and offers readings in social contexts. In the words of Bezemer and Jewitt (2010: 00) "social

semiotics assumes that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which contribute to meaning.”

Social semiotics exchanges the concept of ‘sign’ with ‘resource.’ ‘Resource’ in this regard is defined as a means of meaning-making – “the actions, materials and artifacts we use for communicative purposes” (Mavers and Gibson, 2012: n.p.) which can include vocal apparatus for language, the muscles for making facial expressions and gestures, images from drawing, computer and others, music from instruments, and also the most neglected ones such as food, dress and objects of everyday use (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Social resources stand as signifiers, actions and objects. They are the semiotic texts that require interpretation in their diverse modes. The term ‘semiotic resource’ is preferred, to “avoid the impression that ‘what a sign stands for’ is somehow pre-given, and not affected by its use” (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 3).

Social semiotics rests on several assumptions and principles. One such assumption is that signs are always newly-made, according Kress (2010). When I develop a mental picture of a given sign or make sense of a sign in visual terms, a new sign results. The possibility of the continuous emergence of new signs through interpretation seems to also apply to the Peircean semiotic model. Generating signs in this way draws a parallel with the characteristic of social semiotics that signs are constantly made anew (Mavers and Gibson, 2012).

Additionally, signs are motivated based on a form and a meaning arising from the interest of the sign-maker. This means that it is the sign-maker that determines or motivates the contents of the sign. Also, signs make use of available cultural resources. Kress posits that “in the process of representation sign-makers remake concepts and ‘knowledge’ in a constant new shaping of the cultural resources for dealing with the social world” (2010: 62,71).

This position of mainstream semiotics contrasts with the static view of signs as being completely culture-centred. Kress insists that in creating a sign, the sign-maker’s ‘interest produces attention’ and this leads him or her to create an analogy of the signified. In other words, what a producer of a sign prefers or is

interested in directs his or her representation. His or her attention is drawn to what he or she is used to in trying to create a sign. He or she derives from his or her worldview. Thus the sign resulting from the analogy becomes itself a metaphor.

Social semiotic analysis for visual forms tends to favour illustrative, photographic and design images with formalised layout following Halliday's (1978) three meta-functions and the 'visual grammar' relayed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). It is more of a descriptive approach to communication which provides 'mandatory prescriptions' and rules (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001). This for me benefits the analysis of compositional structures rather than conceptual and philosophical structures. Analysing conceptual images one needs to route interpretation through other theoretical tools such as iconography and discourse analysis.

The dimensions of social semiotic analysis – discourse, genre, style, and modality – provided by Van Leeuwen (2005), for me, borrows from a different analytical system. The dimension of 'discourse,' which affords a reflective reading in social semiotics indirectly refers to the concept of 'discourse analysis.' In "Introducing Social Semiotics", van Leeuwen writes: "the term 'discourse' is often used to denote an extended stretch of connected speech or writing, a 'text'. I have chosen a more defined method to semiotic denotation and connotation which is discursive.

The concern in this study is to provide reflective and discursive direction through which the representation of headloading can be understood for social or political communication. In his words, Chandler (2007: 59) agrees that "one cannot engage in the semiotic study of how meanings are made in texts and cultural practices without adopting a philosophical stance in relation to the nature of signs, representation and reality." This reflective and discursive process I explore through Barthes' semiotic model of denotation and connotation, while making use of any relevant element of social semiotics. This is in order to give a clear and simplified presentation and analysis of my work. I

am aware of the bitter intellectual feud that existed between structuralism and social semiotics and how they are not compatible in some ways. Nevertheless, I choose to combine concepts from both theories.

4. 5. Analytical concepts: Denotation and Connotation

The notion of denotation and connotation talks about the layering of meaning in semiotics or orders of signification. The concept of denotation and connotation is Roland Barthes' visual semiotics (Barthes, 1977). This provides a good tool for unveiling implied and applied meanings in visual representation. At the level of connotation, a wider possibility of meanings is afforded beyond denotation (Fiske, 2011). First, on the creative work of this study, I explore the concept of transmediation (Jenkins, 2003; 2006), which functions for this study as a practical interpretive process while aiding my theoretical analysis. Having explored the idea of transmediation in Chapter Two, details on how it combines with semiotic theory in this study are shown at the end of this chapter.

The concepts of denotation and connotation Roland Barthes (1977) developed under Saussure, whose model of semiotics only interpreted signs at the 'denotative' level. Going beyond this model, Barthes developed an extended order of meaning-making not only for reading linguistic texts but particularly for interpreting visual signs. His work deals essentially with interpretation at different levels of meaning.

In his essays 'The Photographic Message' and 'Rhetoric of the Image' Barthes (1977) provides ways of reading images, photographs and works of art. He discusses the production of meaning from signs: at the basic level, signs give denoted meanings, while deeper and cultural meanings are constructed at connotative level. This latter level provides ways to understand visual metaphors, and to unveil implied expressions of works of art, thus, moving beyond denotative interpretation to cultural meanings.

For my study I have chosen to engage with Barthes' semiotic model. It affords the tools to interpret and analyse works for denotations and connotations, in

order to examine the varied underlying meanings of my source data, as well as my own creative works on headloading. Barthes writes:

when photography turns painting, composition or visual substance treated with deliberation in its very material 'texture', it is either so as to signify itself as 'art' ...or to impose a generally more subtle and complex signified than would be possible with other connotation procedures (1977: 24).

■ **Denotation**

According to Barthes all 'imitative' art comprises three kinds of message: linguistic, literal (denoted), and connoted. A denoted message is the 'analogon' itself, and a connoted message is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it (1977: 17). His term 'analogon' conveys the sense in which a photograph or an image appears to depict reality in a neutral manner. Denotation shows the obvious, the commonplace, as manifested in the sign. Barthes discusses photographs as "a message without a code", deceptively simple, however, a photograph still contains layers of denotation and connotation. While an image may look 'real,' the meaning is not always obvious.

Denotation provides a descriptive presentation of the sign. As the first order message, it is 'plainly objective,' in the sense of cursory reading. Today, with the many possibilities of digital apparatus and software applications, questions of objectivity and photographic authenticity have been raised (Rose, 2001).

However, what is clear here is that the interpreter describes what he sees on the sign as a representation of something else. This level of semiotic interpretation is generally known by members of the same socio-cultural group, because they are likely to share the same worldview.

■ **Connotation**

Connotation in Barthes' (1977) semiotic model offers a dimension in which images as signs can be read beyond the first order of signification. It is context-dependent and refers to "the socio-cultural and personal associations (ideological, emotional, conceptual) of the sign" (Chandler, 2007: 138). In this

study, deep insight is necessary in order to make meaning of the images, especially of the photographic source images. This is relevant in exploring meaning around my own works which emerge as conceptual and symbolic representations: visual metaphors, metonymies, and so on. The idea of dealing with signs as figurative expression is corroborated by Kress (2010: 55) when he writes that “all signs are metaphors.” The assertion that all signs are metaphors recognises signs to be only a representation of reality. No sign is the actual object as metaphors are symbolic and are a means of expression. Hence, they require interpretations. Details of how metaphors are used in this study are given in Section 4.11.

For Barthes, connotation begins a series of what he refers to as second-order messages. The second order of signification includes the mythical and the symbolic. In the process of articulating connotation certain elements are to be noticed as shown by Barthes. They include the pose of individual(s), the trick effects (which include cropping and montage, image transposition, and so on) and the objects and their composition in the artwork or photograph. In the case of photography, connotation can also be delineated through what Barthes called “photogenia” (1977: 23). By this he means the technical effects such as light and shade, exposure and so on, expressed in the creative work, which aid signification and interpretation. It is clear that in examining visual works at a connotative level one can draw from an inventory of historical and cultural structures that elicit meaning.

We see a diversification of connotation into different forms: the perceptive, cognitive, ideological or ethical connotation. The perceptive here includes the initial understanding of the visual (beyond denotation) that comes from “inner metalanguage.” In cognitive connotation, the signifiers are identified and localized in the interpreter’s ‘culture’ and knowledge. Ideological reading introduces reasons or values into the interpretation of the visual language connecting interpretation with what is particular to such a people.

Barthes maintains that this is a strong connotation that demands elaborated signifiers. This level of meaning-making is subjective. It can be personal, social or emotional, thus showing the arbitrary characteristic of symbolic signs in semiotic analysis. This begins with the producer's interests in motivating a sign (especially in social semiotics), as well as how the interpreter decides to construct his or her meaning. Connected to connotation is myth. Although in common use myth refers to fables and ancient entities, Barthes' linking of myth with semiotics speaks about the ideological – "the dominant ideologies of our time" (Chandler, 2007: 144). In other words, each given period of time or cultural setting has its own ideologies or ways of seeing to which construction of meaning can be linked (Fiske, 2011).

I prefer not to separate connotation from myth in my analysis, as some writers have done by referring to myth as third order signification. Rather, I engage with myth as an extended connotation in connection with the symbolic and cultural interpretations of signs and representations in this study, as supported in Van Leeuwen (2001). Chandler refers to myth as extended metaphor rather than belief. This follows the understanding provided in "Myths Today", the second section of "Mythologies" in which Barthes (1973) holds that modern cultural phenomena can be selected and invested with meaning and function as discourse. He writes:

everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message... everything then can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestion (Barthes, 1973: 109)

■ *Anchorage and relay: Image-text relationships*

The terms 'anchorage' and 'relay' are used by Barthes (1977) to show certain relationships between linguistic texts and images for semiotic contextualisation. Writing about photography particularly, Barthes shows there can be the 'linguistic message,' which manifests when texts are used on images or by drawing from titles of images. Other kinds of linguistic text are common in road

signs, comics, commercial adverts, propaganda posters, web banners and maps, among others.

It is important to underscore the place of written texts (words) in my study, especially in including words and the body of texts in my artworks. I am aware that some artists use words to anchor their creative pieces. This includes such artists as Barbara Kruger and Douglas Huebler. I use texts/words in two ways in my practice: first, to serve as a compositional element, adding to aesthetics and engaging the space in which they are used (For example, see Fig. 6.7); secondly, to function as metaphors and metonymies for literacy and education in related pieces of art (For example, see Fig. 6.9).

Barthes argues: “the text produces (invents) an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image...” (1977: 27). He defines ‘anchorage’ as the use and function of written texts such as captions or titles of images and photographs. This is the linguistic message that clarifies the denotation of a visual representation since, according to Barthes, “all images are polysemous” (1977: 38,39). By this he means that images possess multiple ‘signifieds’ or meanings from all of which a reader makes his or her choice.

‘Anchorage’ is relevant in this study as I deal with texts in art works. One manifestation is in the titles and body of my art works. It also involves texts such as comments, headings, and labels of Facebook posts, on specific images. Some artists do not assign statements to their art works, which makes it difficult to know the artists’ intentions. It is the titles of such works that provide “anchorage” towards understanding what the artists’ concepts are in relation to the social issues they deal with.

Texts create associations with the image and, hence, supplement the sense made of the posts. Fixing a moment of time and space by representation may not altogether show the source or direction of the image. In many ways, words and images work together in modern visual culture. Kotz (2006) writes that the instrumental use of text in combination with photography or other images alters

their conventional functions and sets them into new types of relations with each other.

So 'texts' as anchorage allow the reader to pin down the sense made in specific situations amidst several possible interpretations. This position is credible considering the subjectivity and varieties of possible meanings which can be realised by different readers or audiences. However, the sense in which the Saussurean concept of arbitrariness in linguistic signs denies necessary connection between signified and signifier cannot be retained in this regard (Hodge and Kress, 1988).

Van Leeuwen (2008) defines image-text relationship from the context of visual communication. He emphasises that while "words provide the facts, the explanations... images provide interpretations, ideologically colored angles, and they do so not explicitly, but by suggestion, by connotation, by appealing to barely conscious, half-forgotten knowledge" (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 136). Ware (2004) maintains that text and images can form a 'symbiotic' interaction when combined. The idea that image and text can maintain a shared relevance when presented as a syntagm does not preclude the possibility of redundancy of either of the two in certain situations. This could be a deliberate strategy to ensure the greatest chance of successfully communicating the intended meaning.

In image-text relations, texts provide images with anchorage while for texts, images provide illustration. A 'relay' occurs in a situation where either text or image complements the other in a syntagmatic design to add more information (See Fig. 6.9 for instance). Anchorage informs elaboration of interpretation; 'relay' deals with extension of content either through similarity or contrast in the symbiotic relation (Van Leeuwen, 2005). The visual and the verbal can work together in the negotiation of meaning. In the next section I draw the connection between representations and the making of meaning.

4. 6. Critical approaches to the semiotics of representation

Primarily, here I refer to visual '*representation*' as against other systems of representation, such as verbal, gestural and aural. In dealing with the concept of

visual representation (or visual language), I recognise that there are several forms in which this can manifest. The visual is to the artistic what the verbal is to the linguistic. Both are languages – means of representation. Such visual forms include photographs, films, art works (such as paintings, prints), symbols, videos, digitally manipulated images and anything that has a visual impact through creative production.

From a broad perspective, two major categories of things are represented: nature around us and thoughts (ideas). The term representation suggests presenting again – that is, *'re-presenting'* in visual forms the ideas that present themselves to our mind or the *'re-presenting'* as images the realities that present themselves in our environment. Basically, therefore, representation is the capturing of a moment of time and space of reality from a specific viewpoint. Bolt (2011: 57), in reference to Heidegger, maintains that “rather than re-presenting reality, representationalism is a way of thinking, or a mode of thought that prescribes all that is thought.” However, the thought leading to representation either originates from inside of the individual or from the outside – the social space.

For Bolt, there will always be a gap between reality and representation. Beyond the truth that representation may not take the perfect instance of its reality, certain abstract realities can only be reified in conceptual modes such as metaphors. Whether in realistic or figurative dimension, Bolt accounts representation as a “mode of thinking.” And this is very important in the making and interpretation of images such as headloading.

I navigate the idea of representation as a means of meaning-making of the socio-cultural context, as well as the relevant interconnections of people’s visual experiences. Stuart Hall in “The Work of Representation” supports the place of a culture in the making of meaning when he writes that “it is participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects and events... Meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction” (Hall, 1997c: 3). It is important to note that language is an indispensable tool in the

construction of meaning (Hall, 1997a). This, for me, informs the place of visual exploration that interrogates the discourse about headloading practice.

Representation is one of the critical elements that defines society and its cultural practices, as Hall explores. While he sees representation as “the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” he asserts that “meaning depends on the relationship between things in the world – people, objects and events, real or fictional – and their conceptual system” (1997c: 17,18). By this Hall highlights the social foregrounding of meaning-making in representations. Headloading practice, for instance, is foregrounded in cultural, social and power systems.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) agree with Hall (1997c) that visual languages as semiotic containers offer easier access to meaning-making than representation in the verbal mode. I am aware that this standpoint is debatable. However, the process is perhaps similar. Hall underscores that at the mental stage one finds ways for organizing, examining and establishing concepts and ideas and their complex relations and this, in turn, leads to representation, which in this case is visual. Concepts and ideas in represented forms are *signs* and they are culturally and contextually grounded. In other words, they can be mentally, socio-politically and humanistically defined or controlled with a subtext to advance power structures and inequality.

This understanding defines the need for the identification and interpretation of signs and signifiers for a discursive meaning-making cycle. Interpretations are always followed by other interpretations, in an endless semiotic chain as emphasised by Hall (1997c). Further in his work, we encounter the notion of materiality of different modes of signs such as sounds, images (photography), artworks (painting) and digital impulses. Among contemporary modes or forms of representation the digital seems to be strategically positioned as it provides a vast possibility of expression in online social mediation. This leads us to the complex interactions that are possible on virtual platforms of communication.

4. 7. The Rhizomatic structure of social media

My concern here to understand the kind of communication available through social media. It is to see how social media platforms like Facebook provide variously interconnecting interactions and narratives based on their fundamental structures, especially as my study connects with the virtual, making sense of the data emerging therefrom.

Social networking sites (SNS) or social media platforms are dynamic sites that allow individuals from their various individual locations to post, share or recycle images and text within their own circle of virtual friends and groups (Hinton and Hjorth, 2013; Helmond et al., 2019). The interconnection, networking and hyperlinking of conversation and communication on social media shows analytical relevance in the concept of the rhizome propagated Deleuze and Guattari (1987). The concept of a rhizome is a metaphor to show the possible multi-directional focus of representation, communication or meaning-meaning. The rhizome metaphor finds expression in this kind of generative possibility that allows social media sites to link, tag and connect with others over a period of time and space.

Understandably then, rhizome consists of the web of interconnecting elements without a centre, beginning or endpoint in which different discourses can emerge, as observed in botanical rhizomes (McAven, 2011). Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 8) highlight the concept in terms of the “multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections.” It shows new and non-conventional ideas can gain traction in a mosaic form, detailing a non-narrative flow of context. Each of the disparate thoughts are transformed in the analytical process (McAven, 2011). This concept captures such notions as the variation, expansion, a-centricity and non-hierarchical organization of a social media conversation and the flow of information.

The rhizome describes the structure of communication and narrative on the internet and social media. Although they were not originally characterised as a rhizomatic structure, the World Wide Web later found explanatory structure in

the rhizome, according to Gattler (2012). This concept thrives on its complexity. It works on the principle of heterogeneity, mutation and hybridisation, which allows different thoughts to emerge without necessarily following a chronological organisation. Although the rhizome as a concept can be used as a framework, I only show it here to illustrate how social media communication materialises.

On Facebook, as in the case of this study, the idea concerns the ways representation and narratives change and expand while breeding varying thoughts unimaginable by a single individual. It also deals with the many possibilities of how users of social media capture images and hybridise them for further engagements online. Images are then recycled in different ways to negotiate points of view in an ongoing conversation (Agbo, 2016; Rose, 2001) across one or several social networking sites.

While social media users make choices of images to use and take turns from multiple directions to expand the narratives, various social media platforms have continued to update their ways and modes of censoring such images and posts (Hu et al., 2017) Users of SNS like Facebook use the options of 'post,' 'share,' 'comment,' among others, to 'rhizomatise' interaction (See Section 2.8 for details on advertising algorithms - the 'multiplier effects of user conversation on Facebook). This understanding provides a ground for further insight into the notion of affordances and multimodality of Facebook, the social networking site I refer to in this study.

4. 8. The Digital affordances, materiality and multimodality of Facebook

This section continues to define the Facebook space from which I derive my initial visual data for this study. In connection with its communicative tendencies, this is in order to understand the affordances that enabled the conversations and comments which developed the narratives to which I refer in my semiotic analysis, as well as to acknowledge the potential of the platform for participatory engagement.

Although I do not intend to define the entire multimodal stance of the social networking site, it is important to provide an overview of this platform which primes the transmediation process in this study. Facebook, as a multimodal platform of social communication, relies on image and text combinations for meanings and narratives. It is important to underscore how intertextual tendencies may become evident through comments on the social media space.

The idea of affordances began with Gibson (1979). Gibson describes his notion of the concept in relation to the animal-human environment. Here I deal with a digital environment – Facebook – as a social media environment. Gibson writes: “the affordances of the environment are what it offers... what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill” (Gibson, 1986: 143; Chemero, 2003). The above expression provides a basic definition of the concept of affordance. In this study the term refers to the possibility that exists between users and technology (Blewett and Hugo, 2016).

It is important to note how Kress (2010) delineates affordances, according to relevance to the integral semiotic modes that make up the ‘environment’. From a semiotic point of view the concept of affordances is tied to the multimodal elements that define the (technological) environment. So affordances can be socially, historically, materially and culturally defined and are not merely perceptive (Mavers and Oliver, 2012).

This connects with materiality which is an important concern of affordance. Materiality touches on the various modes in the entire space. It can be perceived in two ways. First, as used in defining affordances for this study, it refers to the potential and applications that modes offer as semiotic elements entangled in social perception (Price et al., 2012). This understanding is subtly related to the second quality of tangibility and tactility shown by materials, especially in visual representation or in physical objects.

Hong (2003) underscores the materiality of non-physical or intangible forms as something which can be “worked up or elaborated, or of which anything is composed.” He maintains that this context of materiality can be charged with

philosophical and aesthetic implications. It is articulated by its relationship to the form and content of a medium.

Facebook as a social networking environment provides content as modes that define its affordances. Affordance, according to Mavers and Oliver (2012) depends on the potentialities and constraints of different modes. It shows what the user can express, represent or communicate easily with the mode. The affordance of Facebook as SNS does not only depend on the visible contents of its interface but also on the technology and the programmable procedures of it.

Of the technology of the platform, Helmond et al. (2019: 1) write that “social media platforms such as Facebook change constantly on the level of their platform architectures, interfaces, governance frameworks, and control mechanisms, all while responding to their larger environments.” This shows how digital technology can affect modes or modality and materiality which, in turn, affects the affordances. In this regard, the affordance of this platform provides programmability, as shown by Helmond et al., or what Haider (2016: 483) describes as ‘fluidity of affordances.’ This allows external developers to customise pages for organisations or, in another direction, users can determine information flow in their newsfeed. This, as a result defines the materiality of the platform.

Further aspects of materiality depend on the possibilities for individual users to engage with posts in different ways. Individual users can make online ‘friends’, as well as form different kinds of interest groups, where they can share conversations in words and memes. Beyond conversations of group interest, Georgakopoulou (2017) suggests that the prevalence of small stories on social media platforms is part of its affordances. Hence, part of the materiality of its affordance stands on the entire presentation of a user’s newsfeed, with the aggregate of several images posted at any given time.

On Facebook, the affordance also derives from its multimodal interface and layout. The dynamics of the social media platform provide the possibility of a heterogeneous use of media which, in this case, includes all of its codes of

operation. Codes of operation here entail what is allowable or restricted by the site. I am aware as a user that Facebook social media site admits the uploading of images, text, sound, motion graphics, videos, as 'post' and real-time calls (audio and video). Contents can be posted in a number of file formats such as .jpeg, gif, .mpeg, mp3. The site presents a level of affordability by its graphic user interface in combination with the use of texts. One can also appreciate the layout which divides the interface into columns and rows for sections that allow users easy access. For instance, there is an option which allows users access to various chromatic options as background for posted texts. (See Chapter Two for details).

Treem and Leonardi (2013) sum up the affordances of social media using the workplace as their focus. They identify four significant dimensions of the affordance: visibility, persistence, editability and association. Although their finding refers to the workplace, for me these elements are key in identifying the affordance of the Facebook networking site for individual users as well. The idea of visibility underscores the seeing of a user's activities and currency online by his or her friends. It also shows the material affordance of Facebook presence signalling media content production (by posting), availability for friend-to-friend communication, publicity, personal profiling and imaging.

On the affordance of 'persistence,' as a common user, I know that posts are preserved on the platform and can be regurgitated over time by the dynamics of the Facebook site. The debate about the perennality of users' content on social media platforms is a matter to note in discussing the persistence of content on social media even in the face of cloud computing. Persistence, as noted by Treem and Leonardi (2013), is based on the availability of content verbatim after initial posting and logging, which allows for reviewing, editing or referencing. However, one could think of possible failure of the firm's data storage system and how this can affect users. On the affordance of 'editability' users are allowed the possibility to review their posts, modify or delete them even after they have been communicated. Posts can be deleted and so lose their permanence on the site.

Before I conclude this section I will briefly underscore some of the multimodal characterisation of the Facebook social networking site that adds to its affordances. For this, I use the term 'multimodality' to show the multiplicity and collection of modes (Jewitt, 2012). Depending on the representational system, the repertoire of modes can be broadly classified as visual, spoken, written, gestural, three-dimensional. Elements of design such as line, colour, shape, form and texture, are markers that can in themselves stand as meaning-making modes or semiotic resources.

Like any other visual design or art work, the Facebook interface carries the basic modal elements identified by Kress (2010), which include text (writing), image and colour. According to Kress, each of these semiotic modes does a specific thing. Of this "division of semiotic labour" he wrote, "image shows what takes too long to read, writing (text) names what would be difficult to show. Colour is used to highlight specific aspects of the overall message" (Kress, 2010: 1).

4. 9. Facebook and Intertextuality: Understanding images and comments

I have already discussed the place of intertextuality in this study, especially side by side with the idea of transmediation. Here, I provide details of how the meaning of the images and comments is affected by news stories, past images, political and social factors. One of the key affordances of almost all social networking sites is the possibility to 'comment' on other users' posts, especially by friends. Facebook allows users to upload and share various media such as personal photographs, video, texts and other images. The questions are: How original is this content? Is it recycled or does it reference earlier events? This brings me to the key elements of intertextuality.

The concept of intertextuality (See Section 2.11) was described by Julia Kristeva, a French semiotician, to show how texts or signs refer to each other. She informs that every text is a product of previous discourses which can connect between an author and his or her reader or between a text and another text (D'Alleva, 2012). Facebook posts may not be products of original creators (Kiziltunali, 2018). On Facebook, the place of intertextuality is primarily evident in two instances: one,

within the comment section, and two, in the recycling of images outside their original contexts. In the latter, when images are taken from a completely different context, they are accorded text to alter the meaning. In this way adaptation as a form of intertextuality is played out. Below I discuss these instances separately.

Facebook provides an opportunity for users to respond to other people's posts using the comment section. In Section 2.3 I show the 'multiplier effect' that can occur when users respond to friends' posts (Social Media Handbook, 2017). Owing to the anonymity and privacy which social media affords, users may copy texts from older sources or reference people's ideas or contemporary socio-political developments. All such adaptations are products of intertextuality. Comments are affected by current news, political, social, historical and religious events and user's views about society. In other words, previous discourses determine the current news, interpretations and the ways comments are made on posts. They inform and affect our interpretations. What things mean is based on what we have seen before – cultural artefacts, news stories and so on. Contextual elements affect meaning both on an individual, public or cultural level.

What Batorsk and Grzywińska (2018: 361) call "egalitarian distribution of comments" suggests that users see themselves as equal netizens over whom no other user has higher control. Intertextuality is observed when users make posts or comments out of previously used images. They copy memes from ongoing conversations to buttress their points. Sometimes, Facebook users decide to engage a totally different image, sourced from another event and alter the meaning by superimposing words over the image. The image derives its meaning from the comments and text that surround it. An image in this regard is constructed to defer to the ongoing conversation. Images can also be adapted or reworked using photo-editing software applications such as Photoshop (Rose, 2001).

Photographs of past memories and other socio-political and historical documents as they are uploaded generate conversations in concert with current news and developments. For instance, one of the pictures of headloading that I examine in this study belongs to the historic Nigerian-Biafran Civil War of 1967-1970 (See Fig. 6.5). The piece attracted comments and current insights from the virtual audience, emerging from the bias of historical information. This reference to history is intertextual or rather interdiscursive. Minimal levels of intertextual connection may occur on social media as users link existing news and stories; comments generally can be classified as feedback and analysed as elaborations.

It is, therefore, important to sum up that images and text on social networking sites like Facebook usually derive their meanings from the context of current affairs. Yet such images or posts are not altogether free from previous discourses. There is usually a recourse to known events, stories told and heard, as well as experiences undergone. In this study, therefore, my transmedia process progresses multimodally as a creative approach to 'motivating' the headloading narrative.

4. 10. Transmedia process as a means of motivating signs

In the previous chapter I describe transmediation as a process of interpretation which depends on the potential of moving a narrative from one medium of representation to another as a continuum (Semali and Fueyo, 2002; Long, 2007). The generic goal is to make stories "stronger and more compelling," as well as to be able to achieve consumers' satisfaction in a participatory and immersive culture (Jenkins, 2003; 2006; Trento, 2008).

Jenkins primarily thought of transmedia for the entertainment industry and participatory culture as I discuss earlier. However, I apply the concept creatively while integrating various forms to suit the creative process of this study, which flows understanding of narratives from Facebook to a creative art practice as defined by Semali (2002b).

Drawing from Jenkins and further adopting the creative characterisation of transmedia practice by Barber (2016) and Bardalet et al. (2016), for this study, my

narrative emerges visually to expand the content, interpretation and distributive potential of headloading representation. This is as opposed to previous uses of headloading images on Facebook and beyond stereotypes of Africa. In this way, my study will make an original contribution to visual research and communication.

My creative work gains traction from the position held by Kress (2010) in his work "Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication." His work offers insight into the element of 'modalities' for 'semiotic production' as a meaning-making process. This is supported by Bezemer and Jewitt (2010: 184) who emphasise multimodality as a meaning-making process "in which people make choices from a network of alternatives: selecting one modal resource over another." Obviously, the production of visual representations is part of the interpretive process. Kress supports this in asserting that:

In production, meaning is made material and becomes subject to review, comment, engagement and transformation... Production has semiotic (form-as-content), conceptual (content-as-concepts) and affective (semiosis-as-expressive, always reflecting interest and personal 'investment') features; all three at the same time (Kress, 2010: 27).

The idea of transmediation is significant in my study in order for me to visually and creatively lay bare 'the sense made of the first sign.' The sense here is the visual interpretation of the headloading phenomenon, while the first sign refers to the headloading images drawn from Facebook narrative, which I clarify in the next chapter. This 'sense' becomes a new sign (a new representation) through my creative practice and it also provides a continuum in the cycle of meaning-making.

It is important to see how Kress identifies the shift of dominance from the written mode to the visual mode in 'semiotic production' of representation. By taking a transmediatory, practical process, I give "inner, unmaterialized meaning" a visible or material form, which is what Kress refers to as 'meaning-

as-resource' (Kress, 2010: 145). Although I identify aspects of headloading culture in which 'sense' should be made through the interpretive process, there is the possibility of advancing the semiotic chain of the concept of headloading (Mavers and Gibson, 2012).

This creative process usually allows the expansion of semiotic content for headloading 'signs' in this study, thereby adding what Kress calls 'frame.' Frame functions as punctuation marks which inform meaning and are inseparably interwoven with visual texts and communication. By adding such 'visual punctuation' as frame, my works produce discourse with diverse associations of headloading practice. Such creative framings for me include elements or resources of visual composition such as line, colour, space and form. They are modal resources which can be explored in meaning-making using analytical approaches such as multimodality, semiotics and visual discourse.

This motivation of signs arises from the interest in forms and meaning which the interpreter has and intends in creating the sign (Van Leeuwen, 2005). In other words, the producer creates and activates from his or her interpretation of the original sign based on the social and cultural insight he or she possesses. Kress underscores that in motivating the signs, the sign-maker uses forms and shapes (and of course other elements of design) to 'mirror' or 'reflect' the meaning he or she seeks in the signified. It is here that the practice gains relevance as spatial syntagmatic or paradigmatic relations evolve. They evolve with the inclusion or exclusion of design elements such as colour, space and form with the possibility of gaining dimensions of modes and modalities. The artist as a sign-maker or interpreter of the first sign creates other signs which can equally manifest conceptually visual metaphors and metonymies. Van Leeuwen (2005: 29) writes: "metaphor is a key principle of semiotic innovation." In furthering the dynamics of meaning formation through images I need to define certain visual tropes that manifest in my works.

4. 11. Visual tropes in motivated signs: Metaphors and Metonymies

It is important for me to consider the place of motivated headloading signs as figurative expressions, especially because of how they inform my semiotic analysis. I identify new signs as visual metaphors and metonymies. This relates to the process of interpretation through which semiotic connotation gains relevance in this study.

There is the need to explicate such instances of figurative expression. They are a means of reifying varieties of concepts on headloading which may not have other substantial expression. Using these visual tropes helps to prop up the discourse in which social and power relations are explored through headloading representation. Here, these tropes appear as visual concepts rather than verbal.

Metaphors and metonymies are part of the major tropes that appear in semiotic discourse (Hills, 2017; Nöth, 1990). They are examples of the four general categories of deviations, which otherwise are referred to as rhetorical expressions. These categories of deviations are broadly grouped into paradigmatic (for substitution and transposition) and syntagmatic (for addition and deletion) (Chandler, 2007; Nöth, 1990).

Metaphors and metonymies belong to the 'substitution' part of the paradigmatic transformational processes. They are figurative expressions that convey implied meanings. Both of them are techniques of creative expression. Jakobson (cited in Nöth, 1990: 341) underscores that while metaphors operate as "substitutions by similarity," metonymies occur as "substitutions by contiguity". In dealing with figurative expressions which emerge from visual language, I recognise the assertion made by Chandler that sign-systems help to "naturalise and reinforce" our understanding of reality. Although ideologies are potentially masked in the process of representation, "semiotic analysis always involves ideological analysis" (Chandler, 2007: 214; Van Leeuwen, 2005) in order to negotiate meaning.

A metaphor stands for something whose characteristic is represented directly in the sign – a signified acting as a signifier of something else. Manifesting in my

visual language, metaphor belongs to the structural classification defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Metaphors allow the structuring of one idea in terms of another and they vary from culture to culture. Lakoff and Johnson underscore that all metaphors are both structural and ontological. It is clear from their standpoint that metaphors and metonymies perform the function of providing understanding. One must underscore the creative spirit and imaginative effort that is required to create or interpret metaphor in artistic process (Fiske, 2011).

Metonymy on the other hand is a representation of an object or concept by engaging a part or something close to the whole. It involves using one signified to stand for another signified which is usually directly or closely related with it in some way (Chandler, 2007). It is usually indexically connoted. Van Leeuwen (2005: 34) writes “like metaphors, metonyms highlight some aspects and repress others, thus indicating what is important for the purposes of the given context.” For instance, a wedding ring visually stands as a metonymy for marriage.

Many figurative expression in art are largely mistaken for visual metaphors. According to (Chandler, 2007: 126,127), “metaphor is so widespread that it is often used as an 'umbrella' term (another metaphor!) to include other figures of speech (such as metonyms) which can be technically distinguished from it in its narrower usage.”

Lara-Garcia and Lara-Rosana (1999) grapple with the narrow difference between metaphors and metonymies. They write that “any procedure for encoding knowledge about a complex system through visual art should be able to synthesise a metaphorical image representing the portion of reality to be analysed” (183). In the above quote, the authors refer to metonymy as ‘representing a portion of reality.’ It is clear that artists and sign-makers often engage metonymies, illustrating a part of reality to represent the whole.

I agree with the authors that visual tropes such as metaphors are knowledge encoding processes. They assert that the use of metaphors arises when there is a lack of ‘well-structured models.’ They are writing from a scientific viewpoint. However, metaphors and other tropes are means artists have commonly used to

assert strong visual expressions and, as such, they have engaged it as a choice technique, even in the presence of simple options.

Lara-Garcia and Lara-Rosana link metaphors with thoughts, which are structured depending on our experiences. In such cases, abstract realities are visualised and thought processes concretised. They maintain that visual metaphors are potent to produce structural representations in two or three dimensions over the limitations of verbal metaphors, which are rather temporal. Such a “system of meanings is an ambiguous and very rich one, entailing polyvalent and multiple possible interpretations” (Lara-Garcia and Lara-Rosana, 1999: 183).

The ensuing interpretations are variously and subjectively constructed. It is, therefore, important for me to underscore that creating visual tropes is a way of articulating meanings. When such thoughts are vented through visualisation they should be decoded and explained. Such decoding manifests through discourse.

4. 12. Engaging Transmediation as a discursive process

In this study my transmediatory practice, as a building block, is meant to position my interpretation as a means of visual discourse or a discursive vista. This is what I explore in this section. It is important to note how semiotics encapsulates the construction of discourse as one of its meaning-making elements. According to Hodge and Kress (1988: 6) the concept of discourse derives from “the social process in which texts are embedded”. It “refers to the process of semiosis rather its product (i.e., text). It is always realised through texts and it is inseparable from them. Since a discourse is a major signified of any text, the semiotic analysis of text must defer to an analysis of discourse.” In the widest sense of the word, text includes visuals.

My practice is a process towards the production of meaning. The system of sign is visual. Hence, in my analysis there is a “dialectic between text and system.” Hodge and Kress maintain that there must always be a social and referential dimension to a semiotic analysis. They also insist that analysis must show

aspects of reality (that is, of the phenomenon dealt with), and represent the mimetic plane as well as dimensions of the semiotic event, which represents the semiotic plane (Hodge and Kress, 1988). The discourse rests on the semiotic plane but derives from the text. In this analysis, therefore, the transmediation process and product is the semiotic event and its connection with aspects of reality (headloading practice) provides the discourse towards the production of meaning.

In drawing the connection between the text and the system, the idea of 'system' stands for the visual language, the art practice. Of the idea of 'dialectic,' Hodge and Kress write: "discourse in this sense is the site where social forms of organisation engage with systems of signs in the production of text, thus reproducing or changing the sets of meanings and values which make up a culture" (1988: 6). In this study, the dialectic starts with the production of text which is the studio practice. Each work in the transmedia process is a product of exploration in which I first examine the social positioning of the theme in line with the practice of headloading.

I am aware of the discursive nature of semiotic analysis. Hodge and Kress underscore that "every system of signs is the product of processes of semiosis, and documents the history of its own constitution" (1988: 6). This informs the articulation of different working processes. Although I have created works with multimodal forms, the aim is to produce the content discursively from these art works in an integrated manner rather than reading the multiple modes separately.

In positioning my creative works as discursive practice, they assume a syntagmatic semiotic structure. They emerge from the elements of art as semiotic modes following a set of principles to elicit discourse. Hence, the emerging works are visual ensembles, a composition (a syntagm) of multifocal thought (Fiske, 2011). Discursive thoughts and insights are embedded in the headloading visual ensembles in order to delineate their several implicatures thematically. The emerging concept for me is what I have chosen to refer to as transmedia

discourse. This by implication shows semiotic expansion, emerging from an existing narrative. The practice-oriented study, therefore, is further analysed theoretically in order to make meanings from a broad context.

There is a manifestation of power relations in the practice of headloading. Although this may not be overt in a portion of the works, it is a thematic structure that resonates across the representation of the cultural phenomenon. Such tendencies need to be explicated through a discursive reading while examining contents and contexts (Schneider, 2013; Luo, 2019).

I underscore these essentials in my analysis and I acknowledge semiotics as affording a related nature of discourse as highlighted by Van Leeuwen (2005: 92) who writes that “the concept of ‘discourse’ is the key to studying how semiotic resources are used to construct representations of what is going on in the world.” My study further draws its need for discursive ordering from the transmedia expansion of semiotic content of my practice. Linking connotation with visual discourse, helps me to unveil the extended meanings inherent in my headloading visual texts. Having examined the theoretical directions from semiotics and transmedia, I situate and sum up the theoretical frames that I apply in this study.

4. 13. Conclusion: Conjugating my theoretical framing

Semiotics and transmedia art, from their epistemological stance, provide interpretation, discourse and communication of headloading art as signs. I have already explicated that the goal of transmedia practice goes beyond improved consumer satisfaction. Transmediated work is a continuum of a story beginning from a different platform or sign system. Understandably, then, the process differs from adaptation and appropriation by its key ideas of semiotic expansion and creative distinction (Dena, 2009). It makes a distinctive and significant contribution to the narrative (Klaebe and Hancox, 2017). Distinction here describes the innovation of artistry and the unique properties afforded by a new creative platform.

I show through semiotic reading how the idea of headloading presented in visual language provides vast and robust discursive interpretations, ranging from the sites of the social, to political and humanistic while connecting with experiences in Nigeria. Sullivan (2010: 106) underscores that “visual arts practice and interpretivist dimensions are explored using a meaning-making process that seeks to communicate individual and community understandings.”

My choice of theoretical framing derives from the nature of semiotics as a meaning-making tool and from my study’s interpretivist methodology. Headloading representations of different semiotic motivations and elaborations are the source of knowing in my research and my art works on headloading. Following the transmediatory procedures innovated for this study, the resulting works become the sources through which meanings are negotiated and communication provided.

My rationale for combining these theoretical frameworks is dependent on the fact that Barthes’ semiotic model provides a good structure for images, reading into their connotative projections. I establish a system of sign from my transmediation process. The emerging meaning is derived from the conceptual characterisations shown in the artworks as signs.

It is important for me to define the parameters that build up into the theoretical analysis. First, having looked at the theoretical ground of transmedia as practice-related, in the next chapter I give the details of the methodology of my transmediatory processes. I also provide the step-by-step process through which my creative work has progressed. Secondly, semiotic analysis is included into the visual working process from the beginning. Hence, a denotative to connotative theoretical analysis is effected. In bringing together transmedia and semiotics, I refer to my innovated framework as transmedia discourse.

In summary, my strategic semiotic reading (a) provides description of the images drawn from Facebook alongside comments on them. This is a denotative and connotative reading in tabulated form. I give descriptions and explanations of the visual characterisation of each of the images. (b) shows my sign-making

process. It is at this studio stage that the new images are created and motivated for deeper insights. In this practical process I show how materials and methods are engaged in the production of meaning around the headloading phenomenon. (c) offers analysis of and discursive insight into my transmediated works. Here I provide denotation of my work and give their connotations for social, political and humanistic stances.

I identify the rhetorical expressions and codes embedded in my creative works for discursive underpinnings. At this stage, I explore the ideological or competing contents of the image. (d) further guides me into the various themes highlighted in the transmedia process. These themes I take separately to show their connotative and ideological positions, as expressed in my work, and discursively explore these standpoints based on social experiences. My visual discourse at this juncture employs Barthes' second-order signification of connotation and myth. (e) is buttressed by exploring possibilities of participatory engagements online.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

5.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the general approach used in conducting this study. It includes the paradigm and research style informing the methodology. As a study in the visual arts, it involves both theory and practical process. My creative process here is transmediation, as I have already defined in earlier chapters. Later in this chapter I show how the transmediatory process has been particularised and applied to this study.

The process begins with data identification and collection from the Facebook social networking site (SNS), continues to idea and concept mapping through reflection, and to the entire visualisation procedures. The practical methods include those of creating traditional and digital sketches and colour roughs, through to digital exploration and/or the combination of other visual practices which ultimately results in the final pieces of art.

This is a qualitative study with an interpretivist paradigm. A qualitative study according to Davis (2014: 14) seeks to “understand, explore or to describe people’s behaviour; themes in behaviours, attitudes and trends; or relations between people’s actions.” My research explores representation and interpretations. This includes the analysis and creation of visual ‘texts’ in the broad sense of the word ‘text’. The trajectory of this study is to practically explore the representation of headloading, towards analysing the phenomenon in terms of deeper meanings (connotations) that might not be evident on the surface, and how these meanings are constructed and not fixed. Below I give a

more elaborate perspective of the study as investigative, practice-driven and interpretive.

■ *Understanding a phenomenological investigation*

Considering the nature of my study, I have adapted elements of ‘investigative research’ (IR), which have emerged through my practice. Elements of an investigative research approach, as shown in Layder (2018), include explanation of social behaviour with distinctive ways of collecting data. This allows an investigative study to add invaluable to the existing armoury of research methods and approaches (Layder, 2018). My study agrees with Layder’s insistence that “during such exploration, a researcher must display a readiness to discover new angles on a phenomenon or problem, or to see them in a different light, or from an alternative perspective” (2018: 3). This position underscores the possibilities of induction and deeper insight when dealing with a phenomenon.

Owing to the fact that this study connects with the cultural and social practice of headloading, it is grouped under what Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) classifies as phenomenology among hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism as approaches to interpretivism. Phenomenology is one of the means through which the epistemological issue of the distinctive character of art knowledge is addressed (Borgdorf, 2012). Headloading is a phenomenon in Nigeria which manifests in different activities such as trading, building construction and domestic events – across age and gender strata.

Given that I am a Nigerian and have been a participant in the practice of headloading as already shown in Chapter One, I possess fundamental understanding which can serve as (auto)ethnographic observations and deduction to explicate headloading as a shared experience among many Nigerians. Headloading is commonplace for most rural dwellers especially the young people and women. Part of my headloading experience as a young extended between domestic, market and farm activities. Some of the activities I participated in include fetching water in cans especially during dry seasons from

household that were privileged to own underground or stationed water tanks, bringing farm produces like bunches of palm fruit, moving fire woods for domestic uses, among others. Another important part of the headload culture, for me, was the involvement in helping to lift or down loads from others' heads. Here one requires strength and stamina to do so. Another experience I have explored in this study is the aesthesis and liminality of headloading (see discussion under Fig. 6.15).

Beyond socio-political narratives, headloading as a phenomenon affords a reflective platform to contemplate the connection between two existential realities of society (Groenewald, 2004) – the negative and the positive, the government and the people, the private and the public and issues of power relations. What is then the interconnection between the two aspects of the social realities? Who determines what happens in society? Is it the private that controls the public? Studies in this respect seek to interpret the social and humanistic world.

Phenomenology examines a practice that is just commonly accepted as normal in Nigeria, by drawing attention to its alternative interpretations and deeper meanings it may have in ideological terms. Layder maintains that in this kind of study sources of data are not fixed and the “research problems are not rigidly ‘determined’ in advance” (2018: 3). I show that the best approach to interpreting this phenomenon is by doing a semiotic analysis through a practice led study.

My motivation sprang from a virtual conversation in which users engaged headloading as a way to respond to authority, perhaps to show people's lived experience and their desire for social inclusion. While the social media narrative posits a lay account of the audience's social experience, considering the SNS as providing a public sphere, this study explores through art practice and an interpretivist paradigm the various connotations of headloading for social relations in Nigeria.

■ *Interpretivist Paradigm*

This study falls within the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm seeks to draw information together into a synthesis that helps answer the question, 'how?' as my study requires (Sullivan, 2010). It also seeks to understand the meaning informing human agencies, behaviours, beliefs and perceptions (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). This is so because of changes in the nature, environments and influences of human beings. The interpretivist paradigm holds the assumption that there is not just a single "truth about the social world" and, as such, several interpretations are possible. This reality, therefore, makes clear the subjective nature of the interpretivist paradigm in a research process.

This ontological assumption posits interpretations as fluid and non-objective within a system of meaning (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014) and it further validates people's experience and sense of reality. I agree with Borgdorf (2012) that "no art practices exist that are not saturated with experiences, histories, and beliefs." In dealing with the ontological question of artistic practice (the process and outcome), further, he elucidates that:

artistic practices are hermeneutic practices, because they always lend themselves to multiple or ambiguous interpretations and even invite them... Artistic practices are performative practices, in the sense that artworks and creative processes do something to us, set us in motion, and alter our understanding and view of the world, also in a moral sense. Artistic practices are mimetic and expressive when they represent, reflect, articulate, or communicate situations or events in their own way, in their own medium. (Borgdorf, 2012: 45)

It is essential to always situate or contextualise art practice. My investigation of headloading is rooted in socio-cultural, political and humanistic contexts. Beyond the positivists' quantitative form of knowledge, interpretivism provides knowledge about the society guided by 'common sense' (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The notion of 'common sense' is significant here through the reflective processes of my studio exploration and creative practice, and my own perspectives. While this does not mean I am all-seeing, I do have tangible

knowledge in headloading and this research approach is important for studies based on humanistic and socio-cultural knowledge. So, my choice to engage an interpretivist paradigm for this work follows the stimulating context of headloading representation emerging from a Facebook conversation termed the 'Lazy Nigerian Youths' (See Fig 4.1) which expresses socio-political, cultural and humanistic concerns.

The outcome of my work is broadly premised on socio-humanistic functions and communicative potentials rather than seeking validity of the occurrence with which quantitative studies are defined. The socio-humanistic characteristic of headloading practice and representation has a strong connection in the research definitions of interpretivism. On socio-cultural issues such as headloading, an interpretivist concern deals with how "individuals make sense of the world around them," and "ascribe meaning both to their own and other people's actions" (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014: 28). Hence, the epistemological question of the study is articulated through the art practice, which includes the processes and resulting artworks. Through the interpretive process, the idea of headloading is explored and described; knowledge is embodied and meaning is constructed.

My investigation of the subject of headloading representation deals with the ontological instances of social, political, and economic issues they reflect, while at the same time articulating the technique of transmediation in contemporary art practice (Bardalet et al., 2016). The nature of the object of the study is representational and visual, and I explore a number of themes which are deducible from headloading, such as subsistence and migration among others.

My art practice involves a reflective and reflexive process and discursive deductions (Gray and Malins, 2004; Sullivan, 2010). In dealing with the assumptions of interpretivism in this study, I investigate the discursive potentials that are connected with the social practice of headloading. The investigation is in order to interpret forms of meanings that are potentially locked in or signified by the representation and practice of headloading – from the Facebook narrative to my transmediated workings. Following the narrative

from Facebook, as I have shown in Chapter one, I go on to produce representations in a different sign system, that is, the visual art media. This is in order to construct meanings for a number of social and humanistic experiences in Nigeria portended in the headloading practice.

While I have tried to give a fluid narrative, I reference accounts from Nigeria as one of the many African countries where headloading is known. As a citizen I am aware of the several socio-political and humanistic relations that the practice of headloading might reflect. My creative practice is, therefore, to provide a discursive direction to the representation of headloading and to negotiate meaning for the various themes emerging from its analysis.

The interpretivist paradigm connects aspects of social experiences and practice. In other words, interpretation can be discursive and interdisciplinary in nature. Sullivan (2010: 111) highlights that “it is through an interdisciplinary investigation that theories and practices are teased apart and meanings disclosed.” This assertion notes the influence which the perspectives of other disciplines could have on studio-based research. This kind of cross-disciplinary interaction can also benefit hugely from the artist’s previous experiences, such as my “human processes, communal practices, and cultural agencies” (2010: 111) to ground ideas and interpretive potency.

For domains of inquiry and paradigms of practice located around visual arts research Sullivan identifies three categories: discursive, dialectical and deconstructionist. The discursive method is a meaning-making dimension that “incorporates the empiricist focus on structure and the interpretivist emphasis on agency” which is, for me, a style for this study. Here “visual forms are used as data to investigate meanings, and as sources of data” Sullivan, 2010:108, 107).

Some elements of the ‘dialectical’ come into play at certain points of my account. That is, it becomes conversational and dialogical using language-based strategies such as metaphors and metonymies to challenge meaning. On language-based strategies, I have already described in the previous chapter the possibility of exploring visual tropes as motivated signs in order to reify ideas to drive home

my points. It is important to note here that a certain mix is possible as there may not be a clear-cut demarcation between styles.

In engaging with the discursive domain of practice, there is a connection to the position held by Pauwels that studio-based study provides 'researcher-generated' data, the production of which "allows more control over the data-gathering procedures...so that more highly contextualized material can be produced" (Pauwels, 2011: 7). This process of data production forestalls the limitation that can come from 'found data' and opens possibilities of a variety of sub-ideas and themes. This necessitates recourse to a researcher-generated visual. In such a practical approach my creative practice functions for both data sourcing and as a visual discourse. I have already elaborated the essence of practice as discourse in the previous chapter.

■ *A practice-oriented Research*

The practice here is chosen to enhance my interpretation of the headloading phenomenon. It is endorsed by authors on visual arts research who engage diverse ideas of practice-led process (Gray and Malins, 2004; Sullivan, 2010; Vincs, 2007; Stewart, 2007). It is important to clarify the definition of practice-led study as I use it in this study deriving from the perspective of such writers as Candy and Edmonds (2018) and Smith and Dean (2009) bearing in mind the slight contestation between ideas of 'led,' 'based,' and 'related'.

Candy and Edmonds write of practice-led research as that which "leads primarily to new understanding about the nature of practice", different from practice-based research which centralises on the production of works as the basis for contributing to knowledge (2018:63). This provides a standpoint for the research as leading to understanding of the interpretive potentials of transmedia art process on the practice of headloading and not necessarily on how to develop knowledge and dexterity through practice. I also focus on advancing knowledge about and within practice as a possibility underscored by Candy and Edmonds.

In a practice-led study there is need to show the connection between the proficiencies required from a researcher as a theorist and as a practitioner. Thus,

“if the researcher is a poor practitioner then any findings of the outcomes may be of questionable cultural value” argue Brown and Sorensen (2010: 156). The reverse is equally true. This highlights the need to cohere capability within research and practice in order to deliver new knowledge. As in this study, the “process of practice” is an integral part of the methodology in practice-led research, unlike the practice-based stance for which production of artefacts is the research and essential (Candy, 2006). So, while I hope to generate a new understanding about transmediation as an interpretive process, I show that in practice-led study:

the role of making an artefact is not central to the process. This research usually involves an exploration of existing working practices and, through studies and reflections, aims to produce new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice... the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative work, although documentation of that work may form an important part of the presentation of the ideas (Candy and Edmonds, 2018: 65)

A number of components define practice-led research, as shown by Smith and Dean (2009). One, is the creative process of making and shaping the artworks, while the research part deals with the documentation, theorisation and the contextualisation of the artwork and the surrounding practices.

For me, therefore, the creative process in this study is to prepare the potentials for interpretation and understanding of headloading representation. It is clear that a studio exploration is a means of generating certain levels of knowledge (Bauer, 2013; Garbolino, 2013). Bauer maintains that “artistic inquiry can serve as a kind of “interrogation,” a critical reflection of what knowledge production is and how knowledge is distributed (2013:45). Subsequent to other writers, Biggs (2010) makes sense of practice-led research when he writes that culturally, novel understanding and focus should define the objective of practical research in the arts, (not merely novel to the artist or his observers). This then highlights the two sides of practice-led research which comprise understanding the art-making

process as a form of research and the resulting artworks as a form of knowledge. None of the aspects should be discounted.

It is important to acknowledge that a personal sense in creative practice helps to extend exploration and to contribute to knowledge. 'Personal sense' in visual art exploration is what Sullivan (2010: 104) refers to when she writes that "in the case of visual arts practice, the operational and methodological features are primarily reflexive, as forms that are created in a research project are critiqued within a responsive environment." Owing to the subjective and reflexive involvement of practice, there is the possibility of methodology to be eclectic, diverse and innovative and as such develop hybrid methodology (Gray and Malins, 2004).

This potential in a practice process is one of the rationales for my approach in this study – drawing from a concept of practice straddling art and the (social) media. This technique of transmediation underpins my research as I adopt the key features of making a creative contribution that is unique from the original narrative. The position of Borgdorf (2012) is pertinent at this point as he argues that in art research the creative processes or the art objects can be focussed on the aesthetic, interpretive, performative, expressive and emotive points of view. In other words, the researcher-practitioner can make any of these his or her investigative concern

■ *Validity, Reliability and Rigour of the study*

As interpretivist research, this study does not involve the same criteria of empirical validity and reliability required in quantitative studies. However, there is a need for a substantial level of rigorous working with methodology appropriate to the topic to ensure that it meets the scholarly demands of a visual research community. In its rigour this work entails interpretative processes of art-making that draw from reflective decisions in practice-led research (Sullivan, 2010; Macleod and Holdridge, 2006; Gray and Malins, 2004; Hannula et al., 2014). Although Gray and Malins note that the "dynamic nature of reflection-in-action probably gives [one] less opportunity to interact with [one's] journal,"

drawing from the dynamics of experimentation and improvisation built around reflexivity will help me to achieve an innovative visual outcome. Ultimately, creative rigour depends on translating ideas into semiotic modes and visual forms through my own interpretation. It also entails creating works that are capable of eliciting discursive underpinnings.

■ *Reflexivity and critical reflection*

Reflexivity is a key element in studio art production (Hannula et al., 2014).

Reflexivity deals with the action turned towards oneself. D’Cruz et al. (2007) capture the idea of reflexivity in three variations that are pertinent in this study.

Reflexivity is perceived as an individual’s response to a context, making choices for further direction. It is also described as “an individual’s self-critical approach that questions how knowledge is generated” and there is also an emotional dimension (2007:75).

For the artist these three factors can be engaged in tandem through the mental, the emotional and the visual. The mental would deal with the dimension of past experiences and knowledge of the artist, while connecting with the emotional, which touches on the deep-seated self and the essence of humanity. The result of reflexive action can be allowed to manifest visually through the artist’s creative practice. Reflexivity through an auto-ethnographic approach will help me to “connect the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context” as underscored by (Holt, 2003: 18).

I use the concept of reflexivity in this study to consider my place as an individual in the exploration process. This is essential as artists, usually, cannot divorce themselves nor their experiences from their practice. As a practitioner and researcher my thoughts and experiences are retrospectively considered and allowed to play on the work. In the context of my work reflexivity and reflectivity, which entails deep and critical thoughtfulness, work back and forth with each other in my production of art.

The concepts, materials and mediums and the interpretations work with recourse to my personal experiences and self. In this study this is important, as

my insight and experience on the nature of headloading plays out in my practice. It is important to underscore the level of subjectivity, personal involvement and interaction that go along with reflexivity in action (Gray and Malins, 2004), especially when engaging with an interpretivist paradigm. For me, it is a process through which meaning is negotiated and constructed, with the artist in the centre.

In the reflexive process practice, research, thought and action are all cohered into a meaningful whole. It is important to underscore the sense in which it instantiates an auto-ethnographic process of the narrative, as shown in my analytical stance (see Section 4.4). It connects thinking about the narrative from practice to theory. It underscores personal improvisation, frame of mind and frame of thought. The creative process is hugely innovated upon the personality of self and humanistic concern.

In Section 5.3 of this chapter, I show how I engage reflective action through the preliminary stages of my art production. I maintain a visual diary and a reflective journal which are geared towards generating ideas and sketches for concept mappings. For me, art is a liberal and humanist exercise originating from within the mind as the artist broods over ideas in order to develop and crystallise them visually (Hannula et al., 2014; Aniakor, 1987). Reflective action allows me the possibility of reifying abstract concepts into certain figurative forms. This is a process of turning myself inside out. It is both a critical and a creative process through which I, as the artist, am able to question myself, my mediums and materials. I position myself as part of the audience who will critique the art and participate in the meaning-making process.

To show the rigour involved in the reflective process, each stage of my studio process and making of my art demands self-reflection around my understanding of the social, the political space I deal with, and other factors that determine how I represent the phenomenon and representation of headloading.

■ *Ethical Considerations*

Research like this poses ethical concerns in various ways. One is on the reliability of data. I am aware that my sources of data collection require ethical clarification, since images include those I collect from the Facebook networking site, as well as artists' works. The source data should be reliable when examined. Details of my data collection I have given in Section 5.2 to show the verifiability of each image used. Issues of informed consent, privacy of information, as well as their legal implications, are defined below.

▫ *On Data generation*

Data collection for my study does not involve interviews and/or focus groups. There are no participants involved as I do not need interviews for my study. As an online participant observer and user of Facebook (see details in Section 5.2) I consider the development of the conversations on headloading which I reference in this study. The observation here is digital, which works by means of what Georgakopoulou (2017: 272) calls a "digitally native" approach for data collection. As a qualitative study in visual arts, no third party sites are required for mining data. It follows a systematic observing of activities, postings and developing conversation on a social site, I being a user and a participant.

It is important for me to clarify my process of generating data. My study is qualitative and practice-led. The central focus of my research is not the social media site conversations per se, but visual narratives and my creative practice emerging through transmediation. The transmediatory process is the real direction of the study in which I produce my own works to be examined semiotically. Observing and referencing the visual narratives on Facebook is a departure for my creative practice. My use of any visual data is to show the diverse events in which headloading has been used.

My transmediation process, which is the key part of my work, involves a semiotic understanding of the visuals that form part of the Facebook narrative. In a tabulated form, the semiotic analysis take the following steps

using Barthes' semiotic concepts: (1) Show each visual narrative (2) Show their denotation (an auto-ethnographic direction is especially relevant) (3) Underscore the connotation of these narratives. Finally, from my reading, I am able to decipher the gap that requires visualization in my creative practice. My practice follows a practice-led structuring (journaling, ideation, sketching, thumbnail build-ups). This is an exploratory process whose main crux is the art production process.

▫ *Visual data: Consent, Privacy and Legality:*

I am aware of the ethical questions around privacy and legality in such a study as this, especially with use of images, depending on the countries concerned. Generally, data can be used within the academic context on fair use (Hoffman, 1997; Wilson, 2005; Butt, 2010; Markellou, 2013). I have tried to avoid visual material whose copyright poses a problem to this study. On the copyright of images, used outside academic context, permission is sought, especially in the event of external publications.

In many ways it is impracticable to treat informed consent as the precondition for collection of contents circulated on Facebook pages as images are in public conversation. Such images are fleeting. At times it is difficult to determine their primary source as they might have encountered a series of edits: users can download images, re-edit or add texts and re-upload. As a 'best practice' Samuel and Buchanan (2020: 6) write: "consider data in use, at rest, in transit, and in deletion." In this regard, the images I deal with are not in any way incriminatory, illegal nor are they personated or personally inclined: rather they are culturally and publicly deliverable.

I am aware that part of the power of SNS lies in their ability to be fluid. It is important to note how several users of the Facebook avoid formalisation of consent as this would undermine their anonymity (Agbo, 2016). Salmons (2017: 185) suggests that "some kinds of research with extant data that contains no personally identifiable information can be conducted without informed consent." On the other hand, "any study using elicitation or

enacted methods will require that participants are informed and voluntarily consent to participate.”

For me, in an attempt to reach some of the sources of the images I use, the users have failed to respond to messages seeking permission to use images, perhaps owing to the fact that they might not be the original users of such images and as I do not have personal connection with them in real life. For scholars, contents of social media platforms can be cited as “sources” of information. This is supported by Kozinets et al. (2014: 268) when they write that a researcher may approach web content as published content, as social media content in public view/newsfeed is “technically published, and subject to criticism and quotation with citation.” Some of the images I show are products of published exhibition catalogues, which I reference as published sources.

Townsend and Wallace (undated) underscore flexibility as key in matters of ethics in social media study and one area of such flexibility depends on the sensitivity of the subject matter. In my study, for appropriate presentation and citation of the Facebook content used, I note the username of the one who posted it, date posted, date accessed and the web address of the post. And I have made each source URL active so that on a mouse click, one is taken to the page from which the material was retrieved (Agbo, 2016).

For anonymization towards protecting individuals’ names – both legal and assumed, I have chosen to use only abbreviations for individual names while retaining Pages’ names and/or their URL. All images and Facebook pages that are referred to or reproduced in this study are on public profiles or open groups. No private/restricted groups are used as sources. The images and the Facebook narratives to which I refer in this study are open and the image sources and links from are duly provided and credited, depending on the nature of the material, and are guided by protocols of social media.

▫ *Appropriation*

Ethics of intertextual applications, such as in the case of appropriation and plagiarism, is not applicable in this study. Appropriation primarily refers to the practice in which artists use pre-existing images in their art with little transformation of the original (Butt, 2010; Markellou, 2013). See details on this in Section 4.9

In deriving images from Facebook, I do not adapt them for my practice: rather, I define them as the primary narrative of headloading on social media, which my transmedia practice extends. Any image I have engaged beyond its original form is moved through creative and exploratory techniques and is so reported and referenced.

■ *Research Design*

Figure 5.1 shows the methodological approach for this study as I have articulated and developed it. On the “methodological innovation” as suggested by Hand (2017: 217), I integrate various elements and concepts that are particular for this study. It derives from related theoretical and reflexive studio practices to provide a certain level of subjective articulation to interpretation. This methodology is also informed by the fact that transmediation technique has not been substantially framed in visual art practice (Barber, 2016).

The distinctive interpretive potential of the headloading phenomenon sought in this study is afforded through transmediation. Although the present manifestations of transmedia fiction and transmedia practice are rooted in the creative, the dimension of visual art exploration is still lacking and cannot be discounted. Dena (2009: 82), thus, suggests having what she calls ‘transartistic interrogation’ of the transmedia phenomenon. While Dena examines transmedia fiction and its ramifications of modal and artistic complexities, this study underscores the transmediatory practice in a non-fictional world, exploring semiotic methodology with artistic potentialities.

▫ *On Post-media*

In exploring the technique in visual art practice, I am aware of post-media arguments that try to challenge notions of medium specificity (Chierico, 2016; Krauss, 2000). Practice in art, media and the interactive have existed for some time in distinct media. There have been combinations existing in such sets as old and new media (for photography and films), networked media and real world environments (for interactive and gaming spaces).

Yet in the spirit of post-modern avant-gardism, artists are at liberty to explore, invent and produce their own visual language. Art has traditionally been defined in terms of the medium in which it is produced, however, we see artist moving beyond such borders in their working process by adding other mediums into a piece of art (Bardalet et al., 2016). Bardalet et al. maintain that such a creative approach to “the notion of ‘transmedia art’ opens up the possibility to free the artwork from the media. From then on the artwork is understood as an immaterial process that can assume manifold ways of materializing and mediating itself in the world.” As such they refer to transmedia art as “the crossing of or agonistic dialogue amongst and between different media” Bardalet et al. (2016: para.2,3).

The foregoing provides the structure that is appropriate to my research question, process and paradigm. In support, Gray and Malins (2004: 21) underscore: “methodology is responsive, driven by the requirements of practice and its creative dynamic.” I, therefore, map out four elements that define my transmediation methodology as applied in this study. I show a summary of the elements below which include source visual data, semiotic analysis, studio procedures and discursive analysis and discussion.

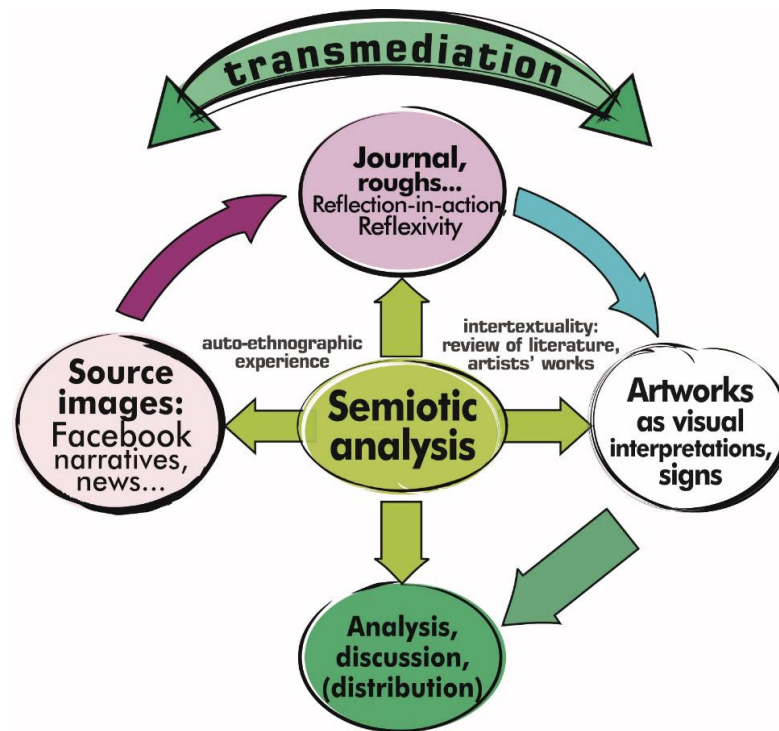


Fig. 5.1: Methodology map (Qualitative: Interpretivist)

5.2. Collecting and Selecting Data

In general, the data for this study are variously collected from Facebook, art exhibition catalogues and brochures, books and articles as well as images of my creative practice. It includes those existing on websites and platforms online. Below I briefly define and summarise each of these data sources, as well as providing relevant information around them.

■ *Data from the Facebook platform*

This study began from Facebook in relation to headloading imagery. In seeking meaning and to broaden interpretation, my choice for transmediation of the narrative emerged. In this study, the headloading conversation is moved from a social media space to an art media platform, with the idea to extend the semiotic resources of the headloading narrative. Facebook plays a pivotal role as a data source. Facebook is among the various social media platforms that has advanced the trajectory of globalisation in this era of information technology. Other such social networking platforms include YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, WeChat and several others.

The original source data for this study is user-generated content accompanied with other headloading images (see in Fig 5.2). I am an active user and participant in Facebook, which is why I am able to follow developing conversations as they appear on my 'Newsfeed' through the site's dynamics and interactions. I also derive related images of headloading (see Figs 5.3-5.5) which are not necessarily part of the conversation mentioned above but they provide substantive evidences of the headloading culture and are part of the varied social issues that thematise headloading in Nigeria.

Considering my presence on Facebook and the nature of its affordances, my first approach to data collection for this qualitative study becomes a parallel of participant observation. By participant observation – which in this case is online, with regular visits to my 'page' – I am able to view and draw on the conversations in which images of headloading appear. The observation, being digital, belongs to what Georgakopoulou (2017: 272) calls a “digitally native” approach for data collection. She describes it as “observing systematically, as a ‘lurking’ participant on a specific site, activities and postings, so as to identify key-posters of small stories and respondents.”

This approach also finds expression in providing the kind of data Pauwels (2017) refers to as “found” materials. As I observed conversations on Facebook, as a user I was able to select which data was necessary for my study. As I have already defined in Section 2.8, the dynamics of the Facebook infrastructure make it possible for posts made by a user as 'friend' or 'friends' of a friend' to (re)surface rather spasmodically on a user's newsfeed, perhaps induced by such options as 'comment,' 'like,' and 'share'. As part of searching for data, I also followed links to group pages to locate headloading images relevant to the study.

■ *Sampling strategy for Facebook images*

Following the nature of this interpretivist study, unlike studies on social media laden with statistics (Valenzuela et al., 2014; Halpern et al., 2017), I chose to limit the images to a number that was relevant to the study. Having encountered

various images of headloading on Facebook, I selected appropriately while discarding those that might be repeated or closely related. I, as well, limited the number to relevant socio-human subjects.

In dealing with investigative research, Layder (2018: 94) identifies that the challenge of data sampling dwells in the sort of people, incidents, observation and documents to use. He suggests *problem sampling* as the default, which “relies on the data that is representative of the problem-focus of the study” and he maintains that problem sampling is much closer to purposive sampling.

On the selection of the images of headloading, I narrowed them down and selected them using a purposive sampling technique, considering the available range of options (Gentles et al., 2015; Etikan et al., 2016). The purposive sampling and selection technique informed the nature and subject of this study. I have purposively chosen particular images and texts (and comments) because of their relevance to my research questions and their thematic potential, while leveraging on my experience as a visual communicator.

Before narrowing down to the subject of headloading, I considered other options of national relevance on social media, such as the clash between farmers and Fulani herdsman, issues of corruption and so on. Headloading emerged because it is already part of visual expression in Nigeria and, thus, the new ways of using this phenomenon provided a focus and rich potential for creative exploration. Although it may not be common, it signalled for me an expression of different aspects of society, such as the way politicians disrespect the people (the youth), the more positive aspect of entrepreneurship for young people, who clearly have ambitions to ‘go places’, the suffering of women and the poor. It further related the displacement of people carrying their belongings on the heads, which touches on conflict.

These images and their texts are inductively relevant in engaging them towards semiotic extension and deductive conclusion. The image-text working style derives from the pattern in which texts are posted on or around images and, as such, connect a multimodal stance for my practice. Basically, images are copied

and saved as bitmaps, while comments are copied as editable texts. Images are sorted and stored according to their potential themes and categorisation.

Below are the sampled headloading images I present in this study. The background information to these images is provided in a description to reveal their contexts. I have deliberately minimised their textual content here but they are referenced as part of the interpretive data in the study. In Section 6.2 I present details of the sampled images which form part of my visual data.

■ *Literature and textual resources*

Resources and data for the written part of this study include books, e-books, book sections, journal articles, relevant online magazines and newspapers. The review of literature in Chapter Two provides a context for understanding the choice of headloading as a theme for this study. Furthermore, relevant textual posts and comments from Facebook are also referenced. This is relevant as comments link to important literature and provide points of engagement for discursive interpretation of my creative works. Related and relevant images and texts from digital, physical archives and other online news outlets are also used. My literature review in Chapter Two covers issues of representation and visuality, social media and visual imaging and transmediation in order to problematize and contextualize headloading representation as artistic and discursive.

A collection of relevant literature in both physical and digital spaces, which is used in this study, came from the Cecil Renaud library of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Combined with personal collections of books, the other libraries earlier mentioned in this section added to my sources of relevant literature.

To manage the bulk of my literature for the study, I created folders both on my personal computer (PC) and online, coded for different categories of the literature. This was organised into parts dealing with representation and studio-based practice, social media, transmedia practice, theoretical frameworks and methodology.

■ *Exhibition catalogues and brochures*

The data in this case was to support my theoretical insight in validating the gap I have chosen to fill by this study. This was to reveal extant practices of the headloading phenomenon. Exhibition catalogues and art-related materials were further relevant sources of visual data for this work. Although catalogues do not usually provide elaborate texts and statements about art works beyond just vignettes, they do, however, afford points of understanding extant artists' concepts, practice and their social involvement. They provide pertinent clues on the state of art practice in a given time, place or concern.

The catalogues I have used for this work are drawn from the library of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and the library of the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Lagos, which has one of the largest collections of art texts in Africa. My personal collection of catalogues/brochures was also vital in referencing works on headloading. A good example is Simon Ottenberg's (2002) edited volume, *The Nsukka Artists and Nigeria Contemporary Art*.

Artists with representations of headloading in Nigeria or Africa were chosen. I have already discussed the artists and their works in Chapter Three. I purposively sampled the works and artists included here. I considered the relevance of their works while seeking to minimise repetition of ideas and concepts explored. Included in my survey of secondary data, I reviewed and showed the artworks in Chapter Three while also trying to group selected works according to obvious themes and mediums used. It is by examining what these artists have done around the concept of headloading, alongside those shared by users on Facebook that I begin to define the scope of my creative practice.

My creative practice ultimately forms an important data source but I will discuss this under a separate heading rather than as a subheading under data collection. The reason for this choice is for the sake of clarity and presentation. Although the study is an interpretive one, the written dimension to the process of practice

affords explanation, provides communication, as well as giving justification for the process.

5.3. Towards my Creative practice

In this section I show the detail of working, which validates the rigorous engagement with the exploratory process required in a study of this kind. On the process of creative practice, Lapum's (2018) position is pertinent in articulating that the act of creating artwork can provide researchers with access to sensitive topics and to experiences that are difficult to express with words alone, as well as elicit an emotional understanding of the topic.

Gray and Malins (2004) provide an exhaustive framework from which practitioners can choose to produce a rigorous body of work. Although I have options such as 'observation,' 'visualisation,' 'brainstorming/lateral thinking,' 'concept mapping,' 'experimentation with materials and processes,' 'reflection-in-action,' 'visual diary/reflective journal,' 'use of metaphor and analogy,' 'exposition and peer feedback,' I articulate them under two major stages of my exploratory processes with other sub-sections : (a) ideation and concept mapping, and (b) finishing and organization of visual materials.

Generically, the creative exploration of visual art is a "context-aware and narrative enterprise," which should not be locked up or tied down but left "genuinely open" as suggested by Hannula et al. (2014: 15). In my study the exploration involves creating works that expand the semiotic details of headloading, while connecting with the original headloading narrative emerging from Facebook in my reflective mapping. By visualising my interpretation of the concept of headloading, I generated images as 'researcher-generated' data (Pauwels, 2011). The visualising process deepens the visual discourse.

While such an exploration as this should be reflective (Gray and Malins, 2004; Sullivan, 2010), it also benefits from my being a Nigerian and an African who has been part of the practice of headloading. Here, reflexivity has enabled my creation of visual interpretations with expressive contents. In the next chapter I

show the resulting works of my studio practice, while the analysis and discussion appear in Chapter Seven.

My final works emerge as mainly digital reproductions on canvas or other surfaces. My work tools include graphite and charcoal sketching and drawing, water colours and acrylic for doing roughs and the computer for digital vector works. I have used CorelDraw vector application software for my digital explorations. Working on the digital vector application allowed me to attempt different options in terms of creating shapes, chromatic schemes, and sizing among others. Below I examine and elaborate the two broad frameworks as I used them in my practice.

■ *Ideation and concept mapping*

The ideation technique includes sketching and draughting through reflection around the practice of headloading. It is a process that begins with looking, thinking, preliminary finding and emerges rather playfully until it matures into concrete forms (Stewart, 2007). The second stage of the ideating concept is that of doing colour roughs. Below I discuss the processes in detail

▣ *Reflective Journal, visual diary and sketches*

This is the first level of the visualising process. For this study I used a multi-page visual diary and sketchbook for draughting concepts and writing down different ideas as they emerged from my reflective thinking. As required in a studio-based study, emerging forms, styles and the possible techniques to be used in each of the concepts is articulated in the visual journal through reflective activities.

In describing the role of the visual diary in studio-practice, “the journal comes into its own as a tool for describing, evaluating, summarizing and planning. The quick and brief ‘notes’ captured while reflecting-in-action can be considered in more depth, expanded, elaborated and completed” Gray and Malins (2004: 62).

In connection with reflective thinking, access to other artworks can lead to potential ideation and conceptualisation. Of course, this is not about copying others' ideas but a kind of 'mental budding' that tends to sharpen or redirect one's focus. This understanding defines the term 'interdiscursivity', which is an indirect manifestation of intertextuality.

Gray and Malins (2004: 152) point out that "a reflective journal can become an unwieldy research document." For me, at times an idea can become rather unstable or fluctuating in the mind and the only available option is to reduce it to visual form by making marks, drawing lines and scribbling. Writing down concepts also helped to reference my thought in order to have an idea refined and reassessed later.

Some of the sketches did not materialise to the final stage as they only formed part of the thinking process. Udechukwu (1984: 6) highlights the key points defining the reality of pre-production studies and sketches: "sometimes the so-called sketch or study is more exciting, more spontaneous and human than the final things for we are privileged, as it were, to look over the shoulder of the [artists]... and watch them struggle with their medium and surmount several failures." My journal and visual diary serve as key tools in rethinking and articulating the exegesis of the concepts raised in the study. Some such thoughts are located within the thematic groupings that are identified, which mostly are concerned with social, economic and political focus.

For my study, the visual diary is a form of data collection as the sketches are further translated to generate knowledge as they visually manifest in the final pieces of the practice. In the words of Garbolino (2013: 75) "knowledge is the product of a thinking process, that thinking is in the head, and that art is a practice that produces artifacts and that has to do with the hand and the eye." This emphasizes the cognitive nature of art from its most rudimentary level of draughting and sketching to its intermediate and advanced stages of visual interpretation (Legrenzi and Jacomuzzi, 2013).

Jacob (2013: 100) identifies the creative production of knowledge of this kind as a dialectic process, which involves moving “between doing and reflecting, making and thinking.” She further underscores knowledge creation as a ‘relational process,’ a ‘progressive process,’ deriving from the work of the American philosopher John Dewey (See Dewey, 1934, 1980; Savage, 2002).

Now I show samples of my sketches developed for this study, as well as the text that accompanies them, from my visual diary. I have used both graphite and ink to study my concepts. In a few instances, as shown in Fig 5.7, I have inserted photographs which informed the sketches and illustrations. The bulk of my visual diary covers economic headloading activities. My studies range from realism to semi-abstract and show hawking activities in which young people are carrying their wares on their heads.

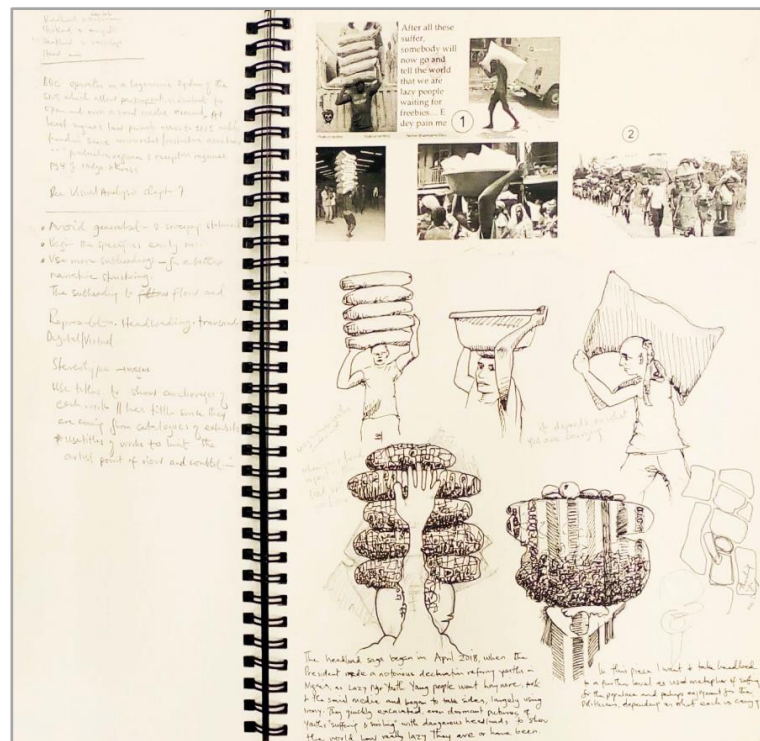


Fig. 5.2: Trevor Morgan, Page from my Reflective Journal I, 2018

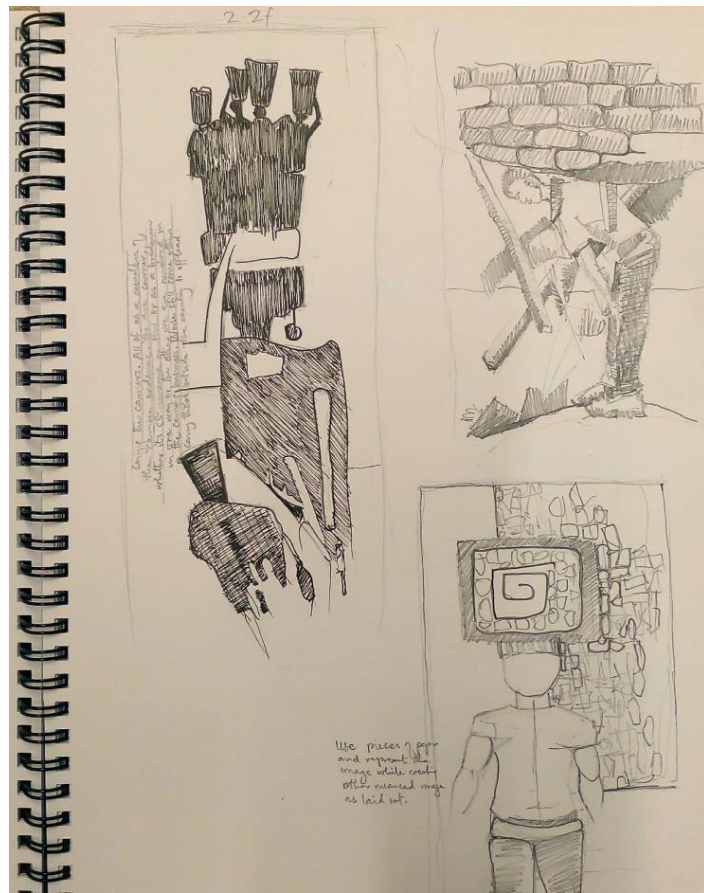


Fig. 5.3: Page from my Reflective Journal II, 2019



Fig. 5.4: Page from my Reflective Journal III, 2019



Fig. 5.5: Page from my Reflective Journal IV, 2019

In Fig. 5.11 I began to explore strong abstractions of headloading forms. This is in order to visually express and reify certain elements through which we can understand headloading more profoundly. Those realities which cannot be physically perceived but have prevalence in the practice of headloading, I tried to give a visual form. For instance, while the head is the paramount part of the human body in use, the hands are equally essential and the face bears part of the load. The abstraction persists as visual metaphors and metonymies in order to emphasise part of the headloading culture that requires focus. Lara-Garcia and Lara-Rosana (1999: 181) maintain that visual metaphors are used to represent or code “uncertain qualitative knowledge about complex systems.”

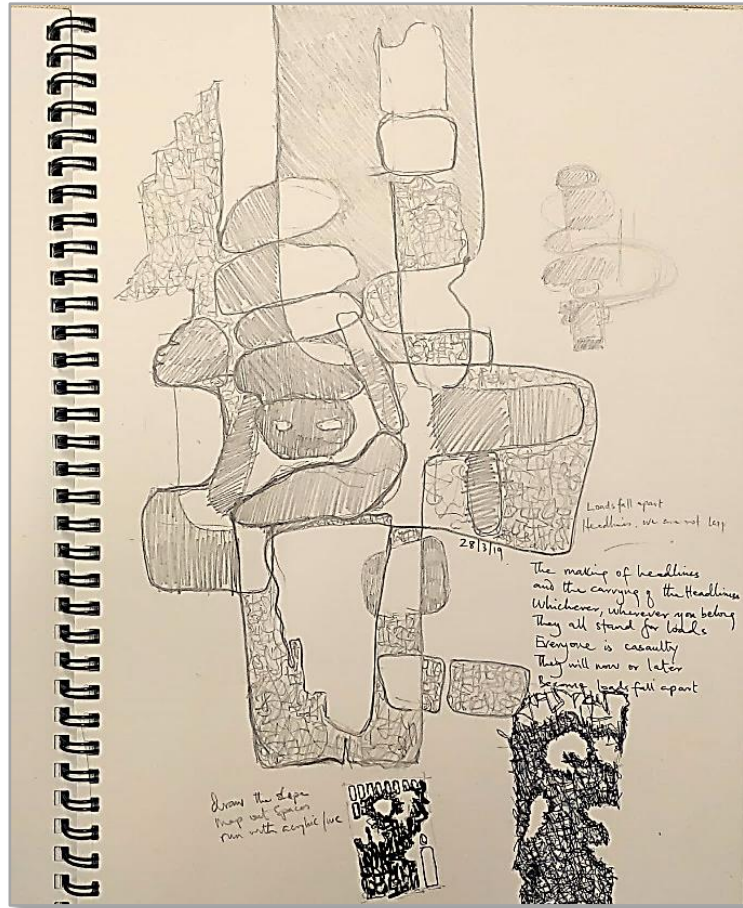


Fig. 5.6: Page from my Reflective Journal V, 2019

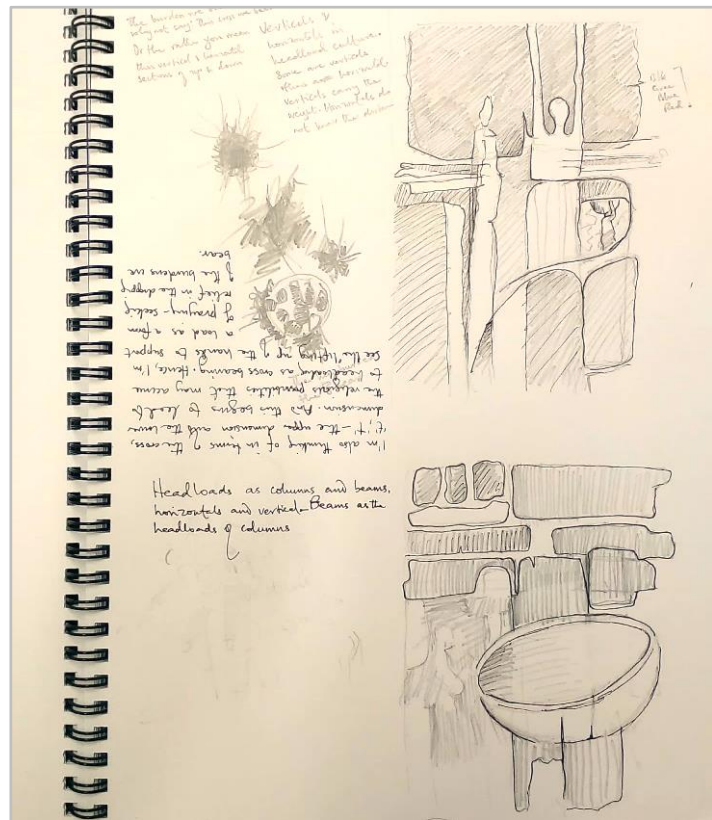


Fig. 5.7: Page from my Reflective Journal VI, 2019



Fig. 5.8: Page from my Reflective Journal VII, 2019

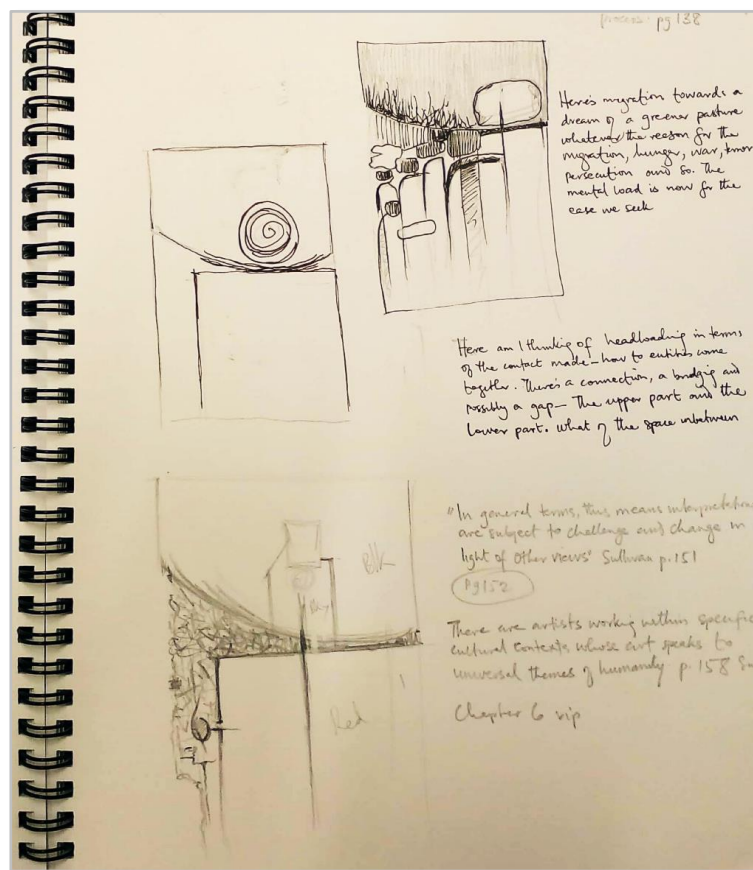


Fig. 5.9: Page from my Reflective journal VIII, 2019

▫ *Colour Roughs*

As the name implies, this is a preliminary colour rendering made of the concepts as they are manually mapped in colours. Basically, roughs are used to develop briefs in design making. Its use here derives from my training as a visual communicator. They are smaller versions of the main works that would later emerge to be the final products of the studio exploration. We can refer to them as colour thumbnails. On average, two different colour schemes were experimented with. Other choices were made about format, colour, form and other elements of art, which would be realised in the final works.

Roughs are done quickly, yet the aim is to capture the key elements of the concept. The need for developing roughs is to have a degree of certitude of the final outcome of the work and this helps to maximise time spent on realising the work. Creating roughs can help to maximise resources and materials. So by 'trying the work out' the artist becomes at least minimally aware of what to expect at the end of his or her practice.

I have used two methods to process roughs in this study. One is by drawing a concept on hard paper and applying colours. Another is by digitally capturing the images of my sketches, replicating and reproducing them on paper and then applying colours. This latter option is to maximise time and the need to have multiples of the same illustration. Below I show some examples of roughs I created for this study. It is important to note that while I show different colour roughs, I do show the finished works in the next chapter.



Fig. 5.10 (a,b): Roughs for Aesthetics and Liminalities I



Fig. 5.11 (a,b): Roughs for Aesthetics and Liminalities II

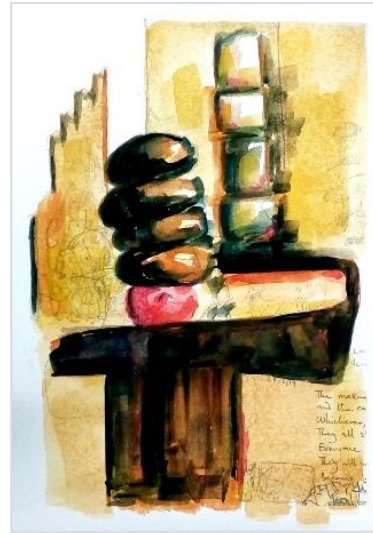


Fig. 5.12 (a,b): Roughs for *The making of Headlines*



Fig. 5.13 (a,b): Roughs for *Foreign Aid*



Fig. 5.14 (a,b): Roughs for *Brain Drain*



Fig. 5.15 (a,b): Roughs for *Health-load and the Woman*



Fig. 5.16 (a,b): Roughs for *Migration and other Journeys*



Fig. 5.17 (a,b): Roughs for *Palliative and Alleviative Cycles*

- *Studio Explorations and Creating Visual data*

My studio processes are both manually and digitally carried out. While the preliminary processes are largely manual, most part of my creative work is done in the digital workspace. Somehow, I have combined these two dimensions.

- *Defining my media of production*

Broadly, I emphasise exploration with digital tools over the traditional. While I began with the manual approach, using acrylic on canvas, drawing on Fabriano papers and so on, I put emphasis on digital processes at the final production stage of the works. First, the reason for engaging the digital tool depends on the fluidity of representational elements within the application software. Design elements such as lines, shapes, colours, and so on, can be re-edited and 'recycled' in visual composition, resulting in different forms of hybridised artworks. Since digital distribution is an important end result of my practice, then moving towards that platform early on allows me to consider the work from a digital viewpoint as early on as possible.

Brown and Sorensen appreciate the expressiveness and characteristic significance of having greater leverage in digitising the representation of ideas (Brown and Sorensen, 2010). The digital works were created with the aim of reproducing them on digital canvas and mounted on a chassis, in considering the question of tangibility and materiality of the art. Yet it is important to make sense through this lens that "what is characteristic for artistic products, processes, and experiences is that, in and through the materiality of the medium, something is presented which transcends materiality" (Borgdorf, 2012: 46)

- *Digital production workflow*

I am aware of the notion that designates digital art-making space as laboratory instead of art studio in traditional terms, as well as referring to the creative exploration as experimentation in digital processes (Lehmann, 2009). However, I maintain the use of the term 'digital studio' exploration, for certain reasons, which include the fact that my methods have basically

followed those defined in studio or practice based research (Gray and Malins, 2004).

In my digital production I use the vector graphic software application, CorelDraw (supplemented with the raster application Adobe Photoshop). Basically, vector graphics deals with art created from lines. This differs from those of bitmaps or raster images composed of digital bits. For me, conceptualisation and mastery of tools and techniques of exploration are more a point of consideration in art-making than the mediums and tools used. Tools do not make art, artists do. So, based on my digital skill and experience, using the computer and creative software applications requires the same way of working and dexterous approach as another artist would need to work with his or her brush on canvas for painting or his or her gouges and matrix for printmaking.

In dealing with the notion of digital art, I identify with the assertion made by Scrivener as cited in Biggs (2010), in which he underscores the potential danger of understanding the artwork as a product independent of the process or vice versa. Concentrating on the process would present the artwork as a by-product and concentrating on the product would reduce the artwork to a mere utilitarian product. Hence, both should be understood together. This is substantiated by Borgdorf (2012: 47) in maintaining that “if the focus of investigation is on the creative process, one should not lose sight of the result of that process – the work of art itself” or the other way round.

I have already shown the workflow from ideation and concept-mapping to the making of roughs in colour. What I explain here now is the process of creation of each artwork in the studio. The compositions were made following my concept maps and sketches, while leaving room for possible creative inspiration following the understanding of Hannula et al. (2014) that such exploratory study should not be regimented.

For a better understanding, I am going to show a production workflow of my digital exploration using two examples. My digital workflow at the

minimum includes the following aspects: (a) mapping format and background. This involves setting the size and layout, as well as determining the proportion of the spaces allotted sections of the composition; (b) creating outlines, shapes and images. It is important to note that beyond figures and subjects in the composition, shapes can be chromatically ordered to produce a semiotic sense, especially in abstract representations; (c) separating and applying colours to shapes to create forms. This entails choosing different colours relevant to the work while usually referencing the colour rough earlier defined. However, it is important to note the possibility of the artist striking a fresh idea during the exploration process different from that earlier expressed in the roughs (Hannula et al., 2014); (d) adding textual forms. This is optional for different works. However, my practice has had a high probability of textual forms owing to the presence of comments in the Facebook conversation; (e) organizing images, touch-ups and rendering. This dimension of the practice involves the options of cleaning up extraneous elements from the entire composition.

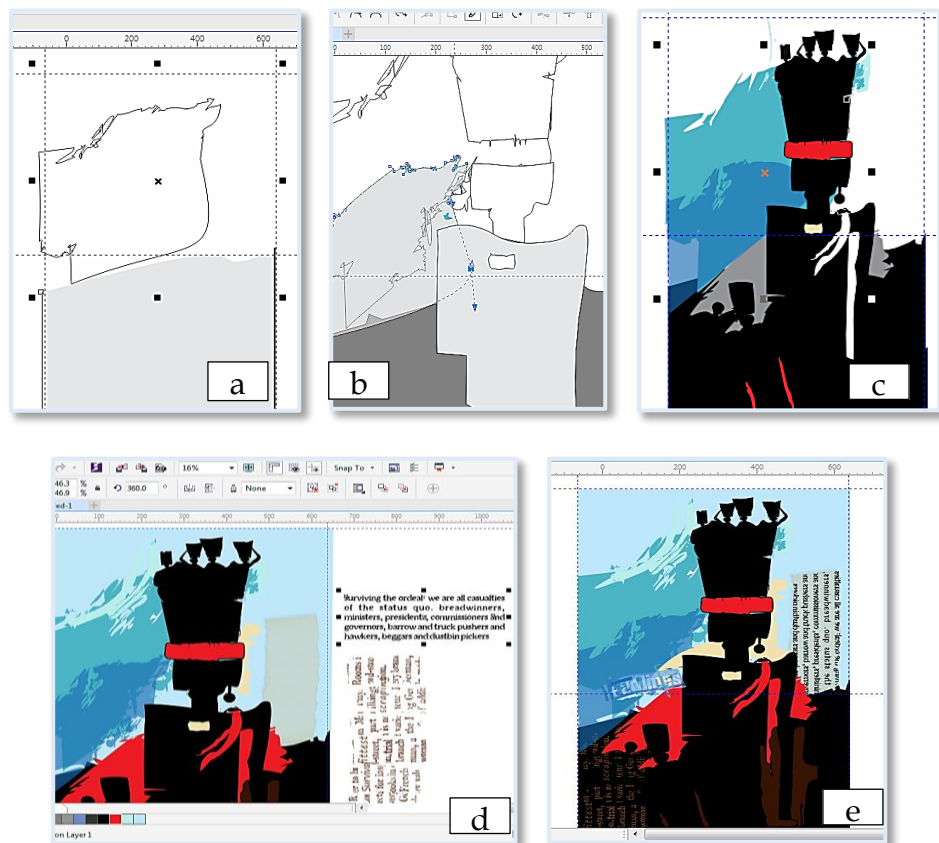


Fig. 5.18 (a-e): Example 1 of my digital workflow

In the digital workspace I began by creating outlines and shapes of the concept. In this piece, my major concern is to get the forms into that which convincingly conveys headloading as an undoing practice when taken to the extreme. I showed little concern for the background, colour and textual additions. In other words, understanding that my sketch is rather complex, I tried to simplify the composition (in terms of form and colour) during the production process. In place of textual elements in this piece, I introduced intricate linear forms for a visual texture. In the second example of my exploration workflow, I show the steps beginning with sketches from my reflective journal, to the colour rough I have chosen.

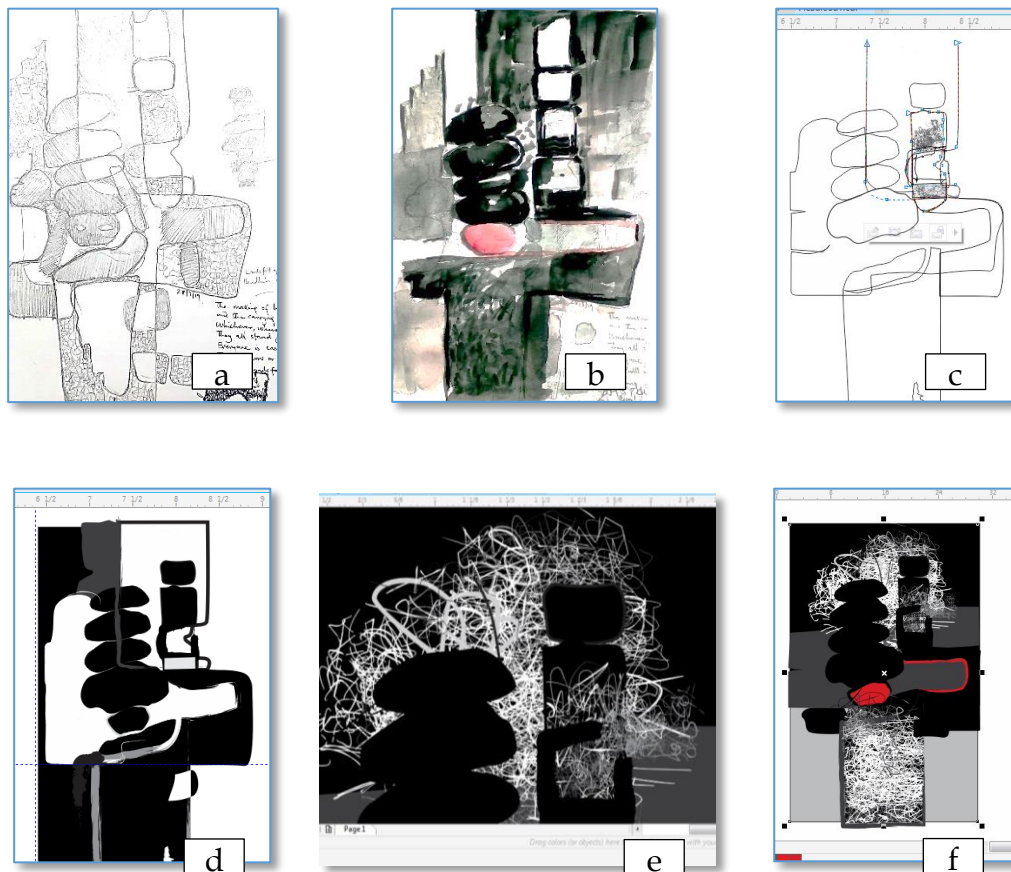


Fig. 5.19 (a-f): Example 2 of my digital workflow

5. 4. Stance on data analysis and discussion

In Chapter 4, I have expounded the analytical and theoretical framing that undergirds my study. Gillian Rose’s (2001) work on visual methodology provides pertinent clues towards understanding the interpretation of visual texts

or what she refers to as 'visual representation'. She identifies three sites of image-reading, which usually form the pathways of analysis. They include first the 'site of production,' which subsists as my processes of working and creative exploration. In a previous section of this chapter I have given a general account and explained my exploratory studio processes. Relevant aspects of individual working processes are shown in the next chapter.

Secondly, 'the image itself' is a site for the production of meaning. This corresponds with the analytical presentation, description and discussion around my transmediated works. Lastly in the analytical field is 'the audience,' which for me in this study acknowledges and references the comments and conversation of the Facebook 'audience' alongside pertinent literature. The audience commentary further includes those comments garnered from professional peers as suggested by Leavy (2018). Such an interpretivist approach is appropriate in order to be able "to communicate individual and community understandings, according to Sullivan (2010: 106)."

Data from Facebook and from my creative practice as indicated above are the objects of analysis of this study in its interpretivist paradigm. On the first level of analysis, data from Facebook are given visual description. The images are tabulated according to their denoted and connoted senses. I include selected comments accompanying the post. The essence of this first analysis is to anchor my practice in a proper purview.

Furthermore, my visual exploration processes are shown. These include the presentation and description of my process of thought shown as reflective sketches, roughs and final rendering (Hannula et al., 2014). My transmediated works are denotatively presented and connotatively tabulated. In my presentation I deal with the visual description of the ideas explored and the visual elements used, while providing understanding of the subjects in the works. This part of the analysis gives credence to the critical characteristic of the transmedia approach which I employ here in order to extend the semiotic content of the headloading narrative. The second level of analysis is discursive

and ideological engaging connotative semiotic analysis in order to show the deeper levels of constructed meanings. Details of my theoretical framing are already described in Chapter Three, while the analysis is done in Chapter Six.

The level of analysis underscores the idea of transmedia as a discursive and interpretive tool. A thematic organization of images and textual data has been done (Kress, 2010; Bezemer, 2012; Cimasko and Shin, 2017). At this level of analysis, reflexivity and personal experience of headloading culture play a good part to accentuate discourse. I draw from the “layered accounts” form of the auto-ethnographic approach which, according to Ellis et al. (2010: 6), is defined as using “the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature.” Auto-ethnography itself is a known and acceptable style in social research (Ellis, 2004; Anderson, 2006; Boyd, 2008; Sykes, 2014). In order to place meanings in proper cultural and insider’s perspective, the concept of ‘self-expression’ as underscored by Burger (2015) functions side by side with auto-ethnographic ‘layered account.’ This, therefore, combines self-experience alongside relevant literature (Ellis et al., 2010). This is relevant in order to enhance meaning by means of ‘small stories’ (Georgakopoulou, 2017).

Although I am not engaging auto-ethnographic fieldwork as a key method in this study, my personal experience serves as a possible and relevant ‘insider’ source of data, as defined by Adams and Jones (2018: 144). It is important to note, following their standpoint, that my participation in Facebook – regular accessing of its newsfeed and following developing conversation on the social networking site – provides a good auto-ethnographic standpoint for me. Such a reflexive approach is relevant as I have already engaged with it in my studio processes (Adams et al., 2015).

As a narrative and interpretative exercise, therefore, this study provides possible epistemological input in the field of transmediatory art practice. Another point of consideration which is a precursor to studies is the distribution of practical outcomes of my art works and virtual participatory engagement around them.

5. 5. Thinking towards a participatory distribution

I have digitally prepared my creative production towards virtual and participatory distribution. Although the scope of this study does not stretch to re-analysing transmediated works distributed on social media, virtual distribution of the artworks could serve as a precursor to further study on the subject of headloading. It also serves a function in exhibiting these works, in circulating them and in getting audiences to participate. In a way, the distribution completes a kind of cycle in which the narrative begins from Facebook, to the creative art media and can be mediated online on Facebook or any other social networking site (SNS).

In thinking a way forward for the project I created a new Facebook account, with the title, Headloading Art [www.facebook.com/headloading_art.3/] to host a good part of my works from this study. I also created a Page on my personal Facebook account with the title, The Art of Headloading [www.facebook.com/The-Art-of-Headloading-108889600510752/]. This is coupled with a public group called, "[The Art of Headloading Group.](#)" Further emphasis is given in my concluding Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER 6

MY VISUAL DATA AND CREATIVE OUTCOMES

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter I examine the question of how the motif of headloading emerged in Facebook narratives from Nigeria and formed the point of departure for my transmedia practice. Using semiotic analysis foregrounds the connection for the transmediatory process that I have chosen for this study. As a qualitative study in a creative art the procedure is not regimental (Hannula et al., 2014).

I began the process by taking a semiotic reading of the multimodal images and posts from Facebook. I am aware of the arguments about the use of semiotics having low validity (See Chapter 4). Whatever the level of validity I can attain based on my analysis, considering that my data emerged from different Facebook page sources, anchored with written texts, following socio-political events which contextualise the images, the fact that the nature of qualitative and interpretive study reserves certain level of subjectivity cannot be overemphasised. So, interpretive paradigm allows for reflective and reflexive perception in such a studio practice as this.

While tabulating the Facebook images aids my practice, it constitutes the initial part of the general interpretation of the headloading narrative. At this stage, it is in order to understand the popular conversation of the headloading practice following current developments in Nigeria. I deal with the first level of analysis of the images as sources of data. These images are important source data for this study which I transmediate into my art practice. The resulting works of creative exploration account for further visual data for my study.

I have selected and engaged with seven images of headloading from Facebook by purposive sampling based on my auto-ethnographic experience as a participant in headloading culture, as well as a user of the social networking site. Below, I give a semiotic analysis of the images, with a tabulation of each for both denotation and connotation. Selected comments from each post are also presented. This is to help me properly place the images within context.

With the images culled from different episodes online, it raises the question about the innocence of representation in the face of contemporary and complex digital tools that aid visual manipulation and augment realities (Rose, 2001). This study does not concern itself with proving the authenticity of the sources of the images. Yet it is obvious to me from an insider's perspective that these images present substantial bearing to the social realities or narrative they illustrate or respond to.

The study does not seek the validity of the events that surround each image. Rather, they provide a point of departure towards a socio-visual discourse and interpretation on the subject of headloading. The images particularly tend to provide public narratives around the political events and situation that give rise to them. For me, then, one of the rationales for transmediating from the social networking site into creative practice is to seek deeper interpretation of headloading representation. Understanding the Facebook images and accompanying texts and how they draw on the tradition of headloading (and its depiction by other artists which validates it as a thread of Nigerian life) can be taken further to show how my creative interpretations transmediate the narratives into a different format that takes the phenomenon of visual depiction of headloads full circle.

Below I show in a semiotic reading each of the seven images I have collected as source images accounting for such features as men's and women's participation in headloading, trading and migration, which are associated occurrences. The description that I provide here also cover the conversation in the comments

surrounding each image, as well as grouping the images according to their potential themes.

6.2. Description of Source Data

Below are the sampled headloading images I present in this study. The background information to these images are provided in a description to reveal their contexts. I have deliberately minimised their textual content here but they are referenced as part of the interpretive data in the study.

It is important to note that although headloading is a known practice in Africa and in Nigeria in particular, my sampling of the subject was done purposively as shown in Section 5.2 above.

■ *Headloading and working hard*

In my review of literature in Chapter Two headloading deals with human portorage. Another connects it with farming and agricultural practice. I examine headloading art practice in Chapter Three as having a link to diverse ways of labouring hard. In a general sense of hard work, the image in Fig. 6.1 provides a pointed illustration. It is drawn from the 'Lazy Nigerian Youths' conversation that emerged on Facebook in 2018 as I have given some details in Chapter One.

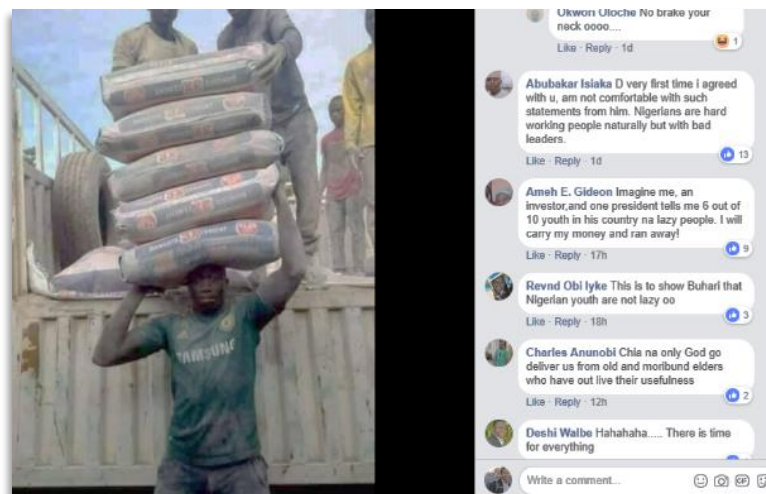


Fig. 6.1: Facebook, April 18, 2018, posted by Oloche Okwori with the text “'Lazy' Nigerian youth waiting for oil money.” Retrieved on April 20, 2018 from: [\[www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1869683626383971&set=a.101637556521929&type=3&theater\]](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1869683626383971&set=a.101637556521929&type=3&theater)

Table 6.1: Semiotic reading of headloading image from 'Lazy' Nigerian youth'

Denotation	Connotation	Selected Facebook Comments*
A young man standing behind a truck, with four men standing inside the truck	They are working, trying to offload the truck.	1. <i>If this is what it takes to be hardworking, then I humbly admit "I am lazy" Must I kill myself before I die?</i> 2. <i>This is to show B that Nigerian youth are not lazy oo</i>
Workers are positioning five 50kg bags of cement onto the head of the man in the foreground	They are really working very hard with such unbearable weight for a normal person. These are not 'lazy' youths.	3. <i>You are shortening ur life-span on eath.</i> 4. <i>Very very very lazy.</i> 5. <i>This is suicide not hardworking</i> 6. <i>Imagine me, an investor, and one president tells me 6 out of 10 youth in his country na lazy people. I will carry my money and ran away!</i>
The logo on the bags of cement is that from Dangote's cement factory	The mogul, Dangote is one of Africa's richest. His wealth is built on the backs of these workers.	7. <i>Chia na only God go deliver us from old and moribund elders who have out live their usefulness</i>

***Note:** Currently the total number of comments and shares of this post on Facebook are 30 and 10,000 respectively. That means, as the shares continue comments continue. The selection of comments in the table was based on representing a diversity of views. The majority view shows that the young people are not lazy. Others are discontented with the label of laziness, albeit some have used irony to state this in their comments.

This image was posted (or reposted) on Facebook by the user on April 18, 2018. It was part of several images used by Facebook users or "youths" in Nigeria in response to the comment in which the president referred to Nigerian youth as sitting down 'lazily' or doing nothing. The speech in question was made while addressing a Commonwealth Business Forum in Westminster, London, on Wednesday, 18 April 2018. While there were other images shared on the conversation, images of hawking and load-carrying youth were prominent and widely shared.

The image in Fig. 6.1 was a prominent image at the centre of the conversation in relation to this study, perhaps as a result of the incredible weight being arranged on the young man in the photograph. It was figurative to use such an image of headloading as a response to a conversation titled "Lazy Nigerian Youths." It is a way of seeking to ironically 'refute' the notion that the Nigerian youth are lazy. Or perhaps it is a way of showing the president, the government or the public,

the present social reality in which the contemporary Nigerian youth is commonly trapped. In the table below I give a summary of the analysis of this piece.

In this post we see an energetic and muscular young man behind a parked truck on whose head are being loaded and arranged five 50kg bags of cement (which equals 250kg of weight) by his co-labourers. The brand of the cement is known to me as that manufactured and distributed by Dangote industries. These five persons seen in this photograph are 'working hard' to offload the goods on the truck.

They are about their normal business of unloading the contents of the truck. Although they may be used to this kind of 'weight-carrying' business, this is an extraneously heavy load for a common person. So one can actually conclude that they are working really hard. This is 'hard labour.' In consideration of the prominent figure in the foreground, this seemingly 'overwhelming' load raises question about his humanity and humanistic tendencies. Others watch him position the load, allowing him to move or to collapse. This further questions the human nature and concern of these workers. It seems that the main goal of the 'hard workers' is to earn for personal effects through any means possible.

The image's connotation and social context emerge from its title. A good part of the comments present sarcasm on the word "lazy" in relating to the image of someone with a heavy load. This image reveals the attempt to eke out a living, yet, it is a kind of dying in order to live. It shows a struggle for survival. My question is: 'How much can be gained from this kind of labour? While this image was used ironically, it serves as a metaphor for a lived suffering and it underscores the different kinds of jobs or, rather, servitude people experience in order to survive. I associate this with a situation where people scavenge unhealthy heaps of rubbish across towns and cities in Nigeria to sort out recyclable discards for sale and for money. It becomes antithetical to premise survival on suffering. This piece (Fig. 5.1) could raise certain question in the

viewer on whether it is better to survive through doing such heavy labour, or be without employment or income.

This piece lends credence to the weights and burdens borne daily in an economy such as Nigeria's and an environment bereft of much of the basic amenities and infrastructure for livelihood (Foster and Pushak, 2011). For instance, recently economic recession swept across Nigeria leaving many financially 'wounded', trapped, distressed or struggling (Emefiele, 2017; Patience, 2016; Nasir, 2020). There comes the burden and struggle to raise such things as food for the family, to settle bills and to fund children's education.

Another dimension to this struggle for survival is that which derives from the kind of family linkages and dependants in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, the burden reverberates not only in families: the nation itself is also distraught in many ways (Agbo, 2018). Some of the comments trailing the above post emerge figuratively. For instance GBA comments: "If this is what it takes to be hardworking, then I humbly admit "I am lazy." Must I kill myself before I die?" Another writes, "this is suicide not hardworking" (see Table 6.1).

A pertinent point emerging from the use of this image is perhaps the enormous financial and status difference it conveys – that which exists between the labourers and the mogul of this business, the richest African, Alihu Dangote (Forbes, 2020), who maintains a vast economic repertoire in Nigeria and across Africa. It shows the stratification of society between the bourgeois top class and the low-income working class, whose job is to secure the wealth of those occupying the top. Such come into play by the former 'creating job opportunities' for the latter, as shown in this piece.

There is also a sense in which this image conveys the spectacle. There is a perception that this enormous weight-carrying could be theatre, a drama in search of applause or fame. Does it draw the sense of power and might and the desire to be revered? A semiotic extension of power or quest for power as a theme in headloading is further examined in the next chapter through my creative practice. Again, certain dimensions of visibilities and invisibilities are

here revealed about the labourers and their 'oga.' 'Oga,' is common word of Yoruba origin used across Nigeria to mean 'boss'. Both the workers and the moguls are in some ways in pursuit of the spectacular, which is a global social desire (Debord, 1967). However, the low working class is visible while the business owner is invisible.

The questions and conversations of identity and exploitation are raised here (Fanon, 1964; Enwezor, 1997). This piece underscores the politics behind various economic relationships between nations. While one is supplying the labour and raw materials, the other is taking credit for development and prosperity. I think about the effects of colonisation, slavery and other forms of exploitation. My studio practice, *Global North on South* (Fig. 7.10) explores the inherent ideas of subalternity and vassalage in this regard.

■ *Headloading and Hawking*

Figure 6.2 opens up thinking of headloading practice in terms of business management and entrepreneurship. This I explore in my practice. In Figure 6.2 one sees a young man carrying a bowl containing sealed plastic bottles of water captured at different times of doing his business. It is important to refer to his identity and his dress in suit and tie.

This image (Fig. 6.2) is accompanied by the text by the Facebook user:

Meet Michael Chukwuebuka Who Sells Bottled, Pure Water In Suit In Lagos. Michael Iloduba Chukwuebuka, 24 years old, aka Corporate Pure Water seller in Lagos. He is well known on the Lagos Island, from CMS to Ojo, According to him he hopes to Open His Very Own Table Water Bottling Company "Corporate Water" once he has enough money in the future. According to an eye witness, "after selling water till the market closes every day, he also does Bus Conductor from CMS back to OJO at night before going back home.



Fig 6.2: Facebook, September 9, 2019, posted by Gbenga Fasole GSc.

Retrieved on September 10, 2019 from:

[facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2276932325739475&set=pcb.2276932455739462&type=3&theater]
 <https://web.facebook.com/411395515922324/posts/michael-iloduba-chukwuebuka-24-years-old-aka-corporate-pure-watermicheal-dresses/806992466362625/?_rdc=1&_rdr>

This gives extra information about the itinerant young business man in Fig 6.2, who has taken to supplying bottled water in Lagos. This account is also corroborated in an online news articles with the title “EFCC fetes man who sells sachet water in corporate wear” (Oyeleke, 2019). The online media also clarify that the business is formally registered with Nigeria's Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC).

The setting of this photograph shows a business district in a Nigerian urban setting. My attention is drawn to the text written on the container he carries. I can identify the word, ‘corporate water.’ From the account given by Oyeleke, the ‘businessman’ maintains that he took to the ‘corporate’ approach in dressing and packaging in order to be different and to attract more customers. His appearance connotes professionalism and prosperity.

This helps to shed light on a certain sense of packaging evidenced in the corporate dressing of the seller. If one takes the word ‘corporate’ to stand for

‘that suitable for or associated with people who work for large corporations,’ then it means that the bottled water is meant to serve people in offices and companies in the places of distribution. Hence, the need for the distributor to equally assume a corporate dress code and manner. The dress code allows him to claim some of the power-position by implication, and subvert preconceptions and stereotypes of headloading.

Table 5.2: Semiotic reading of headloading from Gbenga Fasole GSc’s “Meet Michael Chukwuebuka Who Sells Bottled, ‘Pure Water’ In Suit In Lagos”

Denotation	Connotation	Selected Comments*
A young man carrying plastic bowls containing sealed water bottles.	He is selling the bottles of water, usually refrigerated.	1. See now, one xxx opened his mouth and said Nigerian youth are lazy. 2. This really prove how poor is this country 3. I once bought from him. Do not despise days of little beginning. God bless your hustle my brother.
He is in suit and tie	His outfit gives a sense of seriousness and corporate business modalities. He presents himself with pride and dignity and he is not ashamed of his work. This adds to his business packaging	4. This is an expression of dignity of labour. Keep it up my brother. Hard work actually pays. We must create work for ourselves if nobody does it. It is better than begging and stealing which is the order of the day because man must eat and pay bills. God will reward you if you are not discouraged.
The setting is business-based: shops	Here are the customers to whom he sells the product. He takes the product to where the people are	5. That's the African spirit... This is what we have been preaching, since there is a will, there will always be a way. Just think it through and be patient life is stratified... 6. What a courageous man.... 7. It's well 8. Chaii, God will do something for you soon, it shows how determined he is.
He has bank notes in his hand	This shows he is actually making sales	

*Note: The comments here are representative of the majority views of the post. The post has mutated. You can find similar narratives through the address on Fig. 6.2 above

The concern that arises is to identify the elements that characterise ‘corporateness.’ Does this vary from place to place? And who determines the contents of what is corporate? Perhaps, corporations and business organisations define what it means to them and vice versa. It is very likely that some corporations will not accept this as ‘corporate water,’ perhaps not recognising a headloader, an individual, as a corporate body to do business with. From another perspective, it is possible the marketer here branded his business as

'corporate' in order to differentiate it from those termed and sold as "sachet pure water" in Nigeria.

If we take corporate to stand for established business entities and professional identity, then, one has to deal with the idea of connecting the term 'corporate' with informal trade like this. The idea of 'corporateness' bridges legal and humanistic dimensions. As a legal entity, it connects with the means of formalisation of the entity, and thus positions that the headload venture is not an individual enterprise but represents potential, thus becoming a subversion of headloading stereotypes. On the other hand, 'corporateness' in dressing as a humanistic thing works as a signifier to construct and communicate identity, presentability and impression of business (Au et al., 2009).

The text 'corporate water' is important to me in constructing a connotation for this image, as it corroborates the idea of the formal business dress code of a suit and a tie as perceived in Nigeria. The text in the main post defines the intention and interpretation of the person sharing the image, while the text in the comments section shows the variety of interpretations that are possible, and that images are polysemous (Barthes, 1977).

I relate with the comments supporting the post. Some of the comments seem to differ on what to make of this piece. One of the comments links the image to the 'Lazy Nigerian Youth' episode. While some applaud the business effort as courageous, others critique the government and Nigeria. Some take the religious side. They offer 'online' prayers, while designating the business practice here as an entrepreneurship effort that has the potential of budding into a wider professional business. This suggests that the business in its current state is not corporate. Rather, the seller is taking himself seriously and presenting an image that may impress customers who could ultimately give him a chance to advance his business and his life. His suit and tie functions as an indexical sign of success, seriousness, professionalism.

Personally, having ventured into the headloading business, I appreciate that it takes courage to peddle goods. Figure 6.3 is an example of another headload carrier in a public place hawking. This image is of a young woman standing at the centre of the road between cars, which are seemingly waiting to ‘escape’ a traffic gridlock.



Figure 6.3: Facebook, March 13, 2019, posted by NIGERIANS. Retrieved on June 24, 2019 from: [facebook.com/1857605687787496/photos/a.1857609827787082/2229584773922917/?type=3&theatre]. [https://web.facebook.com/graceekpuphography/photos/2054837841430413] (**Source:** Grace Ekpu)

Table 6.3: Semiotic reading of headloading from “NIGERIANS”

Denotation	Connotation	Selected Comments
A young woman in focus standing at the centre of the road between cars whose colours are yellow and grey	Cars held up in traffic jam (go-slow)	<i>No comments on this post.</i>
On her head is a big bowl containing stuff	She is doing hawking on a busy road	
She supports her headload with one hand	The load is heavy and could fall in traffic if not supported.	

On the head of this young woman is a big black bowl containing 'Gala Sausage Roll' or 'Gala' for short. It is a product of the United African Company (UAC) whose origin predates Nigeria as a geographical entity. Gala is a favourite snack for travellers by road in Nigeria. In this piece the youngster supports her load with one hand while stretching her vision for any potential customer.

Connotatively, I can make sense from this photograph that the cars are in a "go-slow" ("go-slow" is local phrasing for traffic jam in Nigeria). She is involved in highway hawking on a busy road, ready to scurry around to reach her potential customers in their cars. Although one cannot determine the weight of the load by looking on the image, it is quite clear that the load is heavy. Even if the weight is within bearable limits, the time carrying this can result in overwhelming pressure and strain. The load could fall if left unsupported. If it falls, cars can run over the product and that means loss for the hawker.

This shows that skill is required to cope with the tension that goes along with headload hawking on Nigerian highways. One such skill is the use of a small folded cloth, a padding, to support the usually solid and heavy load. Placed between the head and the load, a folded piece of cloth helps to cushion the weight and the load's impact on the body. I think her face shows a lot. Her facial expression contributes to the meaning of the piece. It is a sign both indexical and symbolic of suffering. She looks weary and shell-shocked.

Although she might be used to this kind of business, it is not easy being in traffic with a load all the time. Even though her clothes look neat, she is in a vulnerable situation. This idea of cushioning introduces the notion of liminality and 'aid' in headloading as the loader usually desires a way to assuage his or her 'travail' and burden. It is this notion that I explore in one of the concepts in my creative practices shown in the next chapter.

Another point in connection with the earlier image described shows how large business conglomerates thrive on the backs of struggling youths who themselves are seeking opportunities beyond subsistence. I am aware that items hawked on Nigeria's highways and in her cities are numerous, ranging across different

kinds of edible and utilitarian products. I am concerned about the visual and environmental presentation and aesthetics of Nigeria's cities and parks which are usually clustered by these hawking system. This brings up a question about environment degradation, as most buyers of these snacks consume them and increase litter in the environment. This brings to mind such things as the government's perception and policy on environmental control, highway hawking, ease of doing business, livelihood and the youth.

This piece (Fig. 6.3) appears as a typical scene in Nigeria. Alongside the piece in Fig. 6.4, this piece reserves a kind of obvious 'Nigerianness' which leaves users speechless, without making comment. In a sense, this is a proof of the commonness of headloading and hawking to the audience, hence, their choice of merely 'Liking' or using emojis as response.

■ *Women and Headloading*

Fig. 6.4 is a scene in which three women are in focus. Two men are also seen in the foreground and several others in the background. But only two women are seen carrying loads of big black bowls on their heads. Their containers are stuffed with used carton and plastic materials. It is difficult to see the exact contents of the containers.

The street is busy and for me it suggests a 'street market' arena in Nigeria. It is clear in the piece that everyone is minding their business, activity and direction. In this piece several people are traversing the road space, with their shadows clearly trailing them. The shadows show it is a very sunny day, which usually indicates that the temperature is high. The temperature would indicate heat, stress, struggle and tension which the people would have to contend with.

The women headloaders are at the market place, it is clear they are not engaged at home or in other work. Furthermore, this piece exemplifies the typical connections made between womanhood, motherhood and headloading. It seems to validate the notion that women are at the centre of headloading, at the

market, and whose purposes are domestically inclined. The major concern focuses on the relationship between women carrying loads and the pursuit of domestic welfare in Africa’s rural places.



Fig. 6.4: Facebook, March 13, 2019, posted by NIGERIANS. Retrieved on June 24, 2019 from: [facebook.com/1857605687787496/photos/a.1857609827787082/2229584717256256/?type=3&theatre]

Table 6.4: Semiotic reading of headloading from “NIGERIANS”

Denotation	Connotation	Selected Comments
Men and women walking in the road with marked shadows	The street is busy. Everyone is minded on their business, activity and direction in a very sunny day	<i>No comments on these post.</i>
Two women are seen carrying big bowls containing stuff like cartons and packaging	They seem to be on their own kind of business, job and they are clearly not engaged in a domestic chore	
Although both have on headdresses, the one on the right is rather broad and conspicuous	This is islamic religious garb. Ti shows headloading goes beyond religious affiliation in Nigeria.	

Fig. 6.5 shows a woman riding a bicycle with one hand while with the other hand she supports an empty drum carried on her head. She is dressed in a wrapper, which seems to make cycling a rather difficult exercise. Her dresscode suggests she is a married woman. Wearing a wrapper is common dress culture of married women in many of Nigeria's ethnic groups. We see the woman cycling alone along an untarred road. In the background is a field with dry stands of corn or bush.



Fig. 6.5: Facebook, May 9, 2019, posted by GREAT MINDS with caption “God bless all mothers hustling to feed their kids.” Retrieved on September 10, 2019 from: [\[facebook.com/obanyis/photos/a.1559420167466585/2658862050855719/?type=3&theater \]](https://facebook.com/obanyis/photos/a.1559420167466585/2658862050855719/?type=3&theater)

There is a kind of doggedness and tenacity in the manner the woman is controlling the bicycle and the headload. Her action shows strength, energy and willpower. It could also connote a certain balance and spirit in women to manage different situations and events simultaneously. In considering maternal devotion and focus, this could be understood as a painstaking mother seeking to fend for her children and family even in a risky situation. There is a risk involved if the woman loses balance while trying to maintain carrying and

cycling together – her fall could endanger her life. This risk is one of the considerations in my creative practice. It is also important to note the prevailing rurality under which the woman is operating.

To a large extent comments on this piece, pass admiration for women and mothers in general. Many encourage motherhood in their comments. Others pray. Some underscore the fact that this is all about struggling for family subsistence. It is critical to note the ‘irresponsibility’ of the anonymous husband of this woman in one of the comments suggesting that the husband has allowed his wife such physically demanding work. The connection of this piece to the marital status of the woman is suggested by her dressing in wrapper with which many married Nigeria women are known.

Table 6.5: Semiotic reading of headloading titled “God bless all mothers hustling to feed their kids” by GREAT MINDS`

Denotation	Connotation	Selected Comments*
A woman in a wrapper cycling with one hand	She is a married woman. I see a kind of motherly doggedness and the tenacity of female folk.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ever Hardworking Mother! God Bless You. 2. Mother is my best one ever and my everything 3. My Ernest prayer for them to eat the fruit of their labour IJMN Amen 4. My mother will always tolerate my short comings as a child and even as an adult. pls next time u see motherd struggling for food or soft drink in parties dont stop them cause is for their children at home. This piece is for real mothers not those that give birth and throw inside toilet or fake ones. Happy Sunday
Holding the bicycle with one hand while the other hand is used to support load on her head	This action evidences strength, energy and willpower. It also reveals a certain balance that women have in order to manage and achieve domestic goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. What a worthy woman, who likes to put good food on the table for he`r children and husband. Your efforts will never be in vain. 6. This must be either Edo, Delta or Ebonyi States 7. Job's children are increasing in Nigeria. It wl not be a bad idea if cycling with a drum on d head is introduced as a new sport. 8. It's about the individual the woman is married to not the community. If the woman is married to a hard working man that knows his responsibility as a man he will not allow the wife to be subjected to such strainous and stressful work meant for men
Riding alone along untarred road	This shows the rural setting under which the woman is operating	

***Note:** Currently, this post has recorded 175 comments and 4400 shares. This either shows the connection between people and motherhood or with headloading. The higher percentile of the comments seems to pass encomiums to the motherhood as driven by the title of this post. However, several interpretations have emerged in the comment section such as equality of men and women, critique of the government and the men who allow their wives to do such a herculean work.

One can observe how the caption of this post “God bless all mothers hustling to feed their kids,” controls or fixes the majority of the comments that follow it. The element of feeding kids is actually not evident from the photograph. This interpretation is created by the caption, which might have redirected the piece from its original context. Some viewers might see the purpose of the drum as for water storage, grain storage, or for sale. However, in addition to any purpose or interpretation, there is the potential of a certain degree of domestic sustenance afforded by this effort.

■ *Headloading and Fleeing*

In examining these images, it is clear to me that the carrying of loads on the head is not usually a choice of leisure: but people are usually compelled to carry their own loads when that is the only available option. With a heavy write-up backing the image (Fig. 6.6), the post begins with the words “You must have heard, seen or known someone that is a victim of the ongoing daily sad news across Nigeria.” So the piece represents part of the social issues in Nigeria that have caused people to become internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees or migrants. Although the user has used this photograph to anchor his or her write-up on the current issues of Nigeria, it is a historical piece that brings up memories of the Nigerian civil war.

In this black and white piece we see a train of people moving on a tarred road. The train is made up of men, women and children who are serious and composed for the journey. They seem to be properly clothed, while some can be seen walking barefoot. With mild shadows cast, it seems to me that the temperature is not hot and so they chose to walk barefoot. Babies are incapable of walking the distance so they are carried by hand or on the shoulder. One can also see the loads that adorn the journey. Almost everyone carries their loads and luggage on their heads.

There is a high probability that these people are migrating or they are returning from a flight. It is important for me to give a background account of the title assigned this image ‘Now that we're all Biafrans.’ This title, as well as the image,

references the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970, which took place between Nigerian forces and the Biafran secessionist group.



Fig. 6.6: Facebook, February 28, 2018, posted by Peter Agba Kalu with the title: NOW THAT WE'RE ALL BIAFRANS. Retrieved on March 10, 2018, from: [facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10211881637898763&set=a.1029220493183.2006736.1305474227&type=3&theatre]

Table 6.6: Semiotic reading of headloading from 'Now that we're all Biafrans'

Denotation	Connotation	Selected Comments
A train of people moving on tarred road	They are migrating somewhere (possibly going or returning)	1. <i>One naija for now. Biafra lost 2m soul on civil war. Until Fulani can kill 2.1 million people naija is still in sleepy peace. Total life lost now from Boko boys and herdsmen is just under 15k.</i>
Men, women and children are part of the train	Part of the same family or community	2. <i>Just the beginning</i> 3. <i>Wonderful! You are really great. This will be too relevant come 2023 that's if there will one Nigeria. keep in archives please</i> 4. <i>Wow you're a great historian.</i> 5. <i>History can be dubious....</i>
Almost everyone is carrying stuff on their heads	This is their luggage and belongings – containing items for survival	6. <i>So let them see small pain the igbo's men saw pains and loses and they haven't lost anything yet.</i> 7. <i>You people should not abandon them , show them you are wiser by defending them before they kill all of them</i>
Babies are carried by hand or on the shoulder	Children are unable to go the distance on foot and so form part of the burden.	8. <i>Wonderful! But it is too late to save the Niger area.</i>

The Biafran group of southern Nigeria declared themselves independent from the rest of Nigeria, as a result of political skirmishes of the time. Although this may have taken a subjective position of the political instability that occurred in Nigeria at the time, Falola and Heaton write, “most damaging, however, was the culmination of these problems in a two-and-a-half-year civil war from 1967 to 1970 that rent the country along regional and ethnic lines, killed between 1 and 3 million people, and nearly destroyed the fragile federal bonds that held together the Nigerian state” (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 158; Lenshie, 2014)

Historical evidence and personal accounts show that during the war, families and communities moved in search of safety as mirrored in this piece.

Uncertainty filled the air and existence became precarious, especially for the Biafran side, which was the theatre of the war. In such a war, fleeing and flight become necessary; carrying luggage and belongings remains essential as a way of increasing chances for survival. Items and luggage of basic necessities, usually domestic and utilitarian for feeding and protection from harsh weather conditions are carried. Children are unable to cover the distance on foot. Carrying them forms part of the burden or else they are abandoned to die.

By digging up this historical episode, the Facebook user in Figure 6.6 makes a connection between the Biafran war and the Boko Haram ‘war’ alongside incidents of Fulani herdsmen. All these are connected with several killings, kidnappings and burnings. But the highpoint of the post, for me, is to pose every Nigerian as a casualty in their own land. This reminds me of J.P. Clark’s “Casualties” (Ighile and Nwodo, 2013) a poem through which he captures the essence of the Nigerian civil war. He refers to every participant in the war as a casualty, whether they are ‘offenders’ or ‘defenders.’

In other words the Facebook post insists that every part of the country is now experiencing the same carnage which defined ‘Biafra’ during the civil war. While I cannot affirm that the tone of this post is retaliatory, some of the comments seem to be so. Here are some of the comments “Just the beginning,” “History can

be dubious...,” “So let them see small pain the Igbo's men saw pains and loses and they haven't lost anything yet.”



Fig. 6.7: Facebook, June 20, 2019, posted by Stefanos Fdn. Retrieved on June 24, 2019 from: [facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1043091409228924&set=pcb.1043103505894381&type=3&theatre]

Table 6.7: Semiotic reading of headloading from Stefanos Fdn’s 3 IRIGWE VILLAGES ATTACKED IN PLATEAU/KADUNA STATES

Denotation	Connotation	Selected Comments
Four women moving towards the same direction	This seems to be a departure or migration as suggested by the text accompanying the post	1. <i>So sad, but are there Irigwes in Riyom and Kaura LGAs? I thought they are only found in Bassa LGA. (Reply: Yes Irigwe people are found in kaduna about 35% with 2 district and is the Rigwe son that just hand over their house of representative sit. And in riyom you can 1% of Rigwe people)</i>
All four are carrying various bags/ baggage on their heads	Carriages suggest contents as a means to survive the ‘journey’ for mothers and children	2. <i>SO SAD WHAT A COUNTRY WHERE HUMAN LIVES HAVE BECOME WORTHLESS, ITS UNFORTUNATE, MAY THERE RIP</i> 3. <i>My hearts bleeds for my people that are been killed everyday on the plateau.. oh God we need you now</i>
Two are backing their children while two are not with any children	Children are cared for as they are still young and cannot walk the way on their own	4. <i>They are in their numbers, they attack at will, they are dangerous, they show no mercy. There should be a consistent national protest against unbearable level of insecurity.</i> 5. <i>this is so serous. i doubt if d lives of d christains in d middle-belt are save. we ought to protect our own lives if not dey will wipe away all of us and govt will say nothing.</i>
Only a few houses are seen in the distance, the road is sandy and untarred, the environment is bushy	Undeveloped and sleepy rural area. Population of the rural setting is low	6. <i>Everything that has a beginning surely has an end, this is beyond human doing or the govt we must get together to our knees and pray wit sincere hrts!</i> 7. <i>Chai!! I'm short of words over this level of destruction.</i>

There is a sense in which headloading connects with migration, fleeing in times of conflict or war occasioned by political and religious extremism in a place like Nigeria. I further explore this notion in my practice. Fig. 6.6 is a continuum of such migratory headloading. In this piece one sees four women, each carrying luggage on her head. Two of the women are equally carrying their children on their backs while the other two are not with children. A few houses are seen in the distance. The road is sandy and untarred and the environment is bushy grassland.

While one may argue that this image may represent women returning from market, for me it is clear that the volume and packaging of carriage does not express this. Also, this piece is contextualised by the title “3 Irigwe villages attacked in Plateau/Kaduna states.” The places mentioned in the title belong to Nigeria's northern geography and they also include places long threatened by the activities of Fulani herdsmen and anonymous ‘bandits’. The activities of Boko Haram and, fairly recently those of Fulani herdsmen, have defined the security status in Nigeria’s north-eastern states and Middle Belt regions respectively (Ojo, 2020).

These two groups are widely regarded as terror groups (Buchanan, 2015; Akpor-Obaro and Lanre-Babalola, 2018). There have been incidences of spontaneous terrorist attacks against towns and villages in northern Nigeria. While attacks by Boko Haram terrorist groups are known by their suicidal, military and guerrilla structure, those involving the Fulani cattle herders (or Fulani militants) occur between them and the local farmers (Ojo, 2020; Amnesty International, 2018).

This piece reminds one of the horrific activities of Boko Haram militants who have in the recent past abducted hundreds of secondary school girls either in Chibok, Dapchi or in other communities. It also signals the possibility of wild activities of such terrorist groups against women. Hence, there is need to create a safe escape route from lonely communities to avoid further incidence of kidnapping and rape associated with the brutal groups. Such migrations as seen in this piece have resulted in a number of internally displaced persons’ (IDPs)

camps in Nigeria. I am aware that displacement and migration are not a Nigeria-only issue, but a global problem that spans from the Middle East to Europe and the United States of America. The major concern is that women mostly are at the centre of migratory headloading even with the burden of caring for their little children.

Having given an account of the source images that underlie my creative process for this study, in the next section I show the artworks resulting from my transmediatory process in their headloading contexts. I present the resulting pieces in a descriptive mode, while providing deeper analysis and discourse in the next chapter. Both the images from Facebook and those of my creative exploration provide data for the investigation of headloading in this study (Pauwels, 2011; Adams and Jones, 2018).

6.3. Describing my creative works

The presentation of my source data as shown above is an integral part of the transmediation process. It is precursory to the creative process. The transmediation process works in this study in such a way that by identifying meanings from the original image narratives, I am able to move them into other semiotic modes that enable further interpretations (Semali, 2002b).

Through the transmediatory process, I explore the key ideas opened up in the preliminary reading of the source data, while providing distinctive articulation of the narrative in visual terms, as well as affording semiotic extension. One must appreciate how intertextual connections occur between the Facebook source data I engage with and the headloading narrative that emerges through my creative practice. At this juncture, it is noteworthy how my works manifest with certain forms and levels of abstraction.

Below I present the emerging works in tabulated format, focusing predominantly on their denotative sense. Basic connotative reading of the pieces is shown in the table. I intentionally choose not to present the works according to their themes in this section. The thematic and discursive readings of the works

are provided in the next chapter. Also I show a reduced size of the art works here while giving larger images of the works as Appendices.

In Fig 6.7 I explore the future facing these head loaders and hawkers. This is a semi-abstract representation showing a chromatically graded landscape or mountainscape. The scenery does not show vegetation but chromatic blocks, flattening the different perspectival planes into abstract shapes.

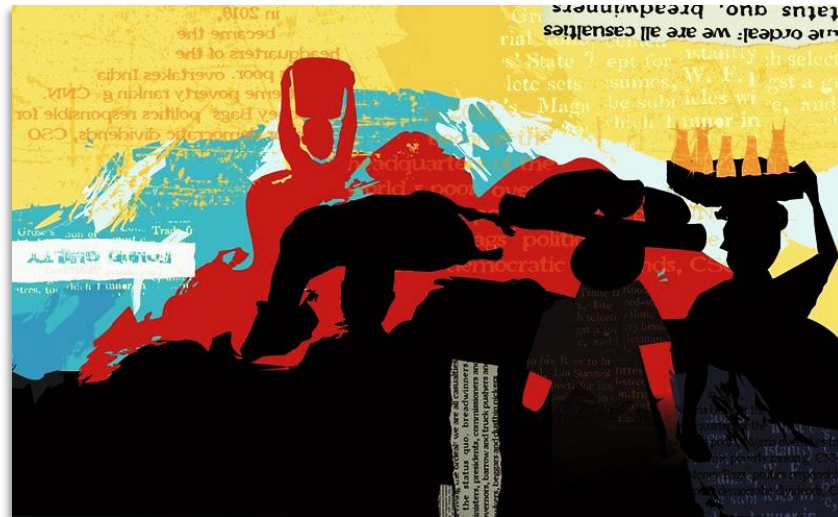


Fig. 6.8: Tinkering with the future (2019), 3x5ft, DP on canvas

Table 6.8: Semiotic reading of 'Tinkering with the future'

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
Four figures are shown. All are carrying loads on their heads. One of the figures inclines her body and head under her load and has a different head structure	These figures are hawkers and market porters with their wares. The inclining figure represents a female encountering pressure from her carriage. Their direction and position in the piece connotes the herculean task they face	Texts in this piece include: "found guilty," "...the ordeal: we are all casualties; in 2018 became the headquarters of the
Prominent hues of the perspectival planes include black, red, shades of sky blue and yellow ochre	While the colours may not be assigned rigid connotations, there is a sense in which black and red represents dangerous and deadly consequences. Blue represents hope amidst all the pursuits for survival.	world's poor; overtakes India in extreme poverty ranking, CNN." "Money bags" politics responsible for poor democratic
Patches or blocks of texts and textual images	These texts are both functional and aesthetic. The functional part is to anchor the concept explored. Major interpretation of the text are given in the next chapter	dividends, CSO

In this piece are silhouetted figures carrying wares of different kinds on their heads. These figures are subtly made to form part of the background or to emerge from it. The background is variously textured in grunge style to give a painterly visual effect. It is important to underscore the textual content which the piece carries. Below, I show a brief summary of the semiotic denotation of this piece, titled, 'Tinkering with the future'.

The idea explored in 'Tinkering with the future' (Fig. 6.8) connects with that of 'Hustlers and Entrepreneurs' (Fig. 6.9), both as a means of business enterprise that can bud into fruition. In Nigeria, hawkers have the potential to develop into 'hustlers', then to entrepreneurs. (Section 7.2 gives further insight on the use of the term 'hustling' in Nigeria). The latter is a visual representation that is fauvist in characterisation. It is rendered in a combination of graphic, painterly and strident colours. It is a semi-abstract piece, simple in its forms. At the centre of it is a 'huge' figure with a large head carrying a 'box' inside which are other headloaders and square-shaped forms.

The main subject is rigidly constructed with straight lines and rendered in a very light yellow. Although two-dimensionally done, at the back of the central figure are amorphous forms which are colourfully defined. Beside these is a figural image standing apposed to the main subject of the piece done in reds and ochres. Almost all the subjects of this work are defined with bold and textured lines. A cocktail of words is included and water-marked in chromatic, painterly brush strokes drawn at the right down side of this work.

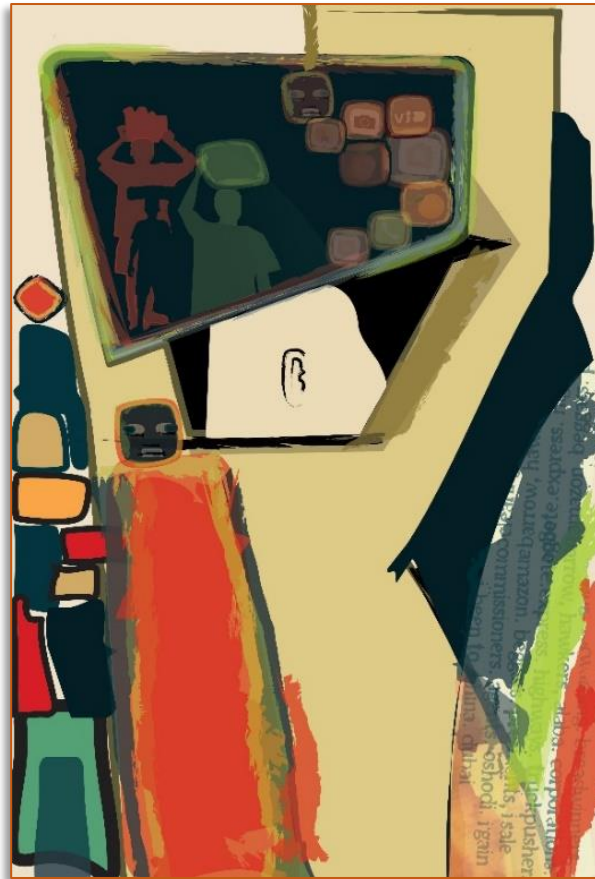


Fig. 6.9: 'Hustlers and Entrepreneurs (2019),
2.5x4ft, DP on canvas

Table 6.9: Hustlers and Entrepreneurs

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
Angular 'male' figure with white head raising hands over a boxlike carriage on the head. In this boxlike carriage are other headloaders in different colours. Box also contains roundedly amorphous shapes. This figure is facing a sequence of silhouette shapes	This is a hawker with a smart head carrying business. He is a manager of others, showcasing his personnel and products with a listening ear. The silhouetted sequence of colours facing shows the graduating tendencies of uncertainty facing a hustler.	As watermarks are texts including: oshodi, truck pusher, breadwinner, been to china, isale, igain, barrow, amazon, ogbete,
Figural image standing apposed to the main figure, mostly in red colour	Colours here indicate the predicament affecting the business either as business uncertainty or dependant	commissioners, express, beggars, others
Geometric shapes organised in pyramidic form are placed at the lower left portion of the piece	This is the foundational support, which yet holds certain business variables and variabilities	

'Brain Drain' (Fig. 6.10) is a semi-abstract piece, in which the subject of the human head is represented. Without a common centre, a spherical form, inside

of which there are about three other spheres or ovals, is placed atop the image's head. Overall, textural linear forms and shapes like brush strokes are prominent in this piece. These assorted rough and jagged linear elements are used in dual ways: to define the subjects and to activate the creative space. This piece, a black and white representation spiced up with a few red lines. A more definite summary is show in Table 6.10.

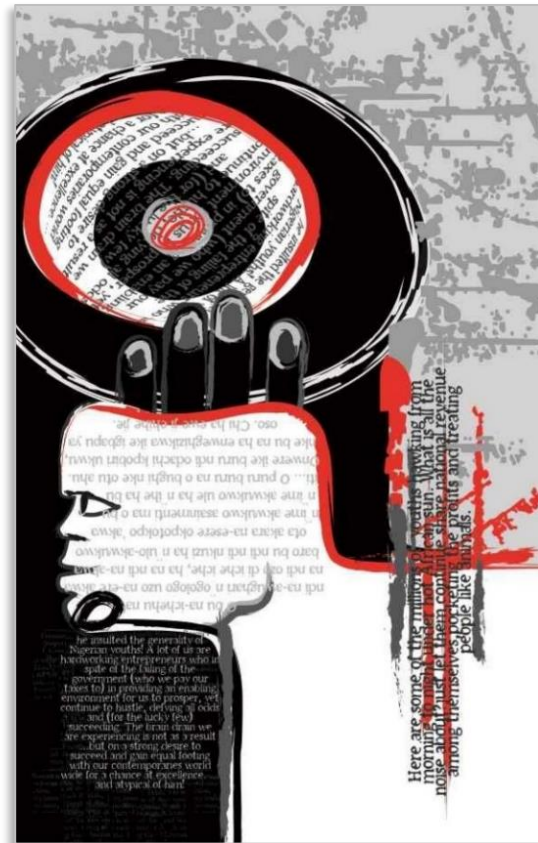


Fig. 6.10: Brain Drain, (2019), 2.5x4ft, DP on canvas

Table 6.10: Semiotic reading of 'Brain Drain'

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
A human head in profile gazing, staring directly to the left (the west) with the mouth gaping. The top of the head is crooked. A defining line support the neck and the jaw from under. The head	This individual has a vision focused on the West. I examine two kinds of brain drain here. Both result in a crooked head needing a structural support	Texts here combines English language and Igbo. He insulted the generality of nigerian youths! A lot of us are hardworking entrepreneurs who in spite of the failing of the government (who we pay our taxes to) in providing an enabling environment for us to prosper, yet continue to hustle,

is more or less a negative space in contrast with the oval shape.		defying all odds and (for the lucky few) succeeding. The brain drain we are experiencing is not as a result of... but on a strong desire to succeed and gain equal footing with our contemporaries world wide for a chance at excellence... Here are some of the millions of youths hawking from morning to night under hot
The shperical form is placed atop the head. A hand (fingers) interfaces between the head and the spherical forms from behind	A load is laid upon this head. It is now depressed. The load here is represented by weight of foreign demand on the head, and the mental illiteracy and inadequacy caused. The former is caused by academic failure shown by 'nought' and caused by health issues if carrying loads on the head	sun. what is all the noise about? Just let them continue share the national revenue among themselves, pocketing the profits and treating people like animals. O bu na-icheghi na ndi na-awughari n'ogologo uzo na-ere akwa na ahia ndi ozo di iche iche, ha na ndi na-akwa baro bu ndi ndi nkuzi ha n'ulo-akwukwo ota akara na-esere okpotokpo 'akwa' n'ime akwukwo asainmenti ma o bu n'ime akwukwo ule ha n'ihe ha bu iti... O puru buru na o bughi nke otu ahu. Onwere ike
Both the spheres and the heads are composed with black and red. The work is rather a monochrome interjected with red.	These colours speak of the dimensions of pitiable dismalness, danger, and disadvantage that the idea brain drain conveys	buru ndi odachi kpobiri ukwu, nke bu na ha enweghizikwa ike igbapu ya oso. Chi ha ewe ji ehihe jie.

In some ways, there is a connection between brain drain migration and headloading. I explore the concept of migration in Fig. 6.11, 'Migration and other Journeys.' This title emerges from the point of view that migrants lift and 'take their loads head-on' as a matter of necessity. The piece also informs the reality that headloading is usually connected with migration as a form of transportation. In other words, the main idea dwells on the carriage of headloads as a necessary transportation system for migrant belongings.

Here, I underscore the direction of the migrant population, as well as the leadership example provided by headloading. I use bold brush strokes as outlines to represent human subjects in abstract forms. The subjects here are clarified in different colours and sizes to show adults and children. I also place distorted oval forms close to the 'heads.' Above these human representations is a huge space demarcated in an arc form painted with strokes of red and yellow. It

is enclosed a block of texts in transparent hues. At the bottom right angle of this arc, I have a photograph of a lush landscape with colourful flowers.



Fig. 6.11: Migration and other Journeys (2020),
DP on Canvas, 3x4.5ft

Table 6.11: Semiotic reading of 'Migration'

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
About 10 abstract human figures represented in different colours. Yet not everyone of them is seen with headloads. These images are each defined with bold brush strokes. This piece is set on a background of blue and skyblue.	The figures represent the migrating population, closely joined to each other, for security reasons. To some their loads form their burden, to others their heads are the load. The brushstrokes show the ruggedness of the journey.	"Sahara Desert, fleeing, immigrants, asylum seekers, the Mediterranean sea, people, drought, terrorism, middle East, exile crossing, racism, thirst, Europe, protest, UN,
The biggest subject of the painting is at the extreme left in deep blue and that which should represent the head is opened up to a beautiful mountainscape of flowers.	This figure is the leader of the family, group or the journey. He leads the way and the mission and carries the vision of the 'green pasture'	trekking, Arab, walls, border control, war, influx, refugees, uprising, conflict." "refugeeism," "migration and asylum-seeking can be dangerous"
Text is used to anchor this piece.	Texts here connote scholarship	

Table 6.12: Semiotic reading of ‘Global North on South’

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
Two subjects are most prominent in this piece: a figure and a group of concentric spheres and square shapes. An important subject is the anthropomorphous form in red. The head of this anthropomorphous being is shaped to a rounded square, with eyes crossed – eyeballs looking in opposite directions	The anthropomorphous figure represents the lower and southern divide of the globe upon whose head the northern hemisphere lies. By the weight it carries, this subject has become deformed.	A block quote in this piece reads, “All men are born equal but some are more equal than others. Some were
The upper part of this piece holds concentric circular forms. These spheres are positioned on a black background. They are composed of shades of grey and red and outlined by subdued grey.	This is the weight. In many instances, the north is the weight borne by the south. It also refers to the northern and southern of Nigeria	made eunuchs by others. Others were dwarfed by some. It also
In-between the concentric objects and the figural image at the lower part of this piece is a map of Africa, Asia and South America, continents closely positioned together.	These are maps of the global south. in many ways upon them lies the weight emerging north. In a sense these maps represent the padding needed to assuage the tension of the weight	contains two words ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ latently positioned.

‘The Making of Headlines’ (Fig. 6.13) is an abstract representation. It underscores the practice of headloading in which hawkers contend with huge weight, carried atop both the head and the hand. Here, the idea of loads is represented through the spherical forms sequentially stacked on the carrier. What represents the head is rendered in red, as well as a line that runs through one of the hands.

At both the lower and upper divides of the piece are networks of crisscrossed lines. While the upper nest or network of lines is free-flowing on the background space, the one at the lower part is bounded within the central subject. It is important to note how the piece is deliberately divided into two background parts: the black top and the grey bottom. In Table 6.13, I give a summary of the piece in denotation.

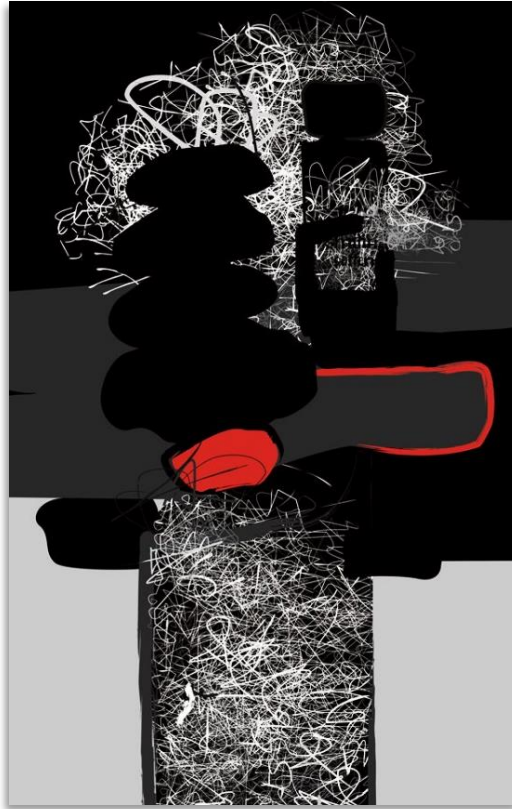


Fig. 6.13: The Making of Headlines, (2019),
2.5x4ft, DP on canvas

Table 6.13: Semiotic reading of 'The Making of the Headlines'

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
Abstract imagery with a collection of spherical forms as load carried on the head.	This abstract subject is the carrier on whose head are huge weights of load	No visible text
A representation of a hand is shown in a corrugated form. It still has other black forms on it.	It shows a lifting up of another quantity of load above the head	
There are lines of different shapes interwoven together. A network of crisscrossed and interwoven white and grey lines on a black background	These lines show a web, a manifestation of headloading, the confusion in carrying too much. It shows the unease that follows the one wanting to make headlines. It shows the network of connections through which the rich or those desiring to be rich link themselves to different individuals, businesses, places schedules, engagements, labours, transitions, trainings.	



Fig. 6.14: Health-load and the Woman, (2019),
2.5x4ft, DP on canvas

Fig 6.14 is a representation with a central subject in silhouette. The foreground is rendered in black while the background appears in shades of sky blue and light yellow. The coloured shapes in the background move with a degree of energy and the direction of shapes suggests waves in the sea or a kind of turbulent happening, signifying difficult situations of life. The central image of this piece is a representation of a female figure, on whose head is a load of headloaders.

The form here is more or less defined by its angularity and structure. What looks like a piece of cloth flies in red to adorn this bony-feminine figure. In between the rectangular head, from which a representation of an earring is hanging, and the load, is a padding (usually a cloth fold), whose function is to cushion the weight on the bearer. Here the padding is angular rather than spherical.

Table 6.14: Semiotic reading of 'Health-load and the Woman'

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
A central silhouette figure is standing tall with a representation of cloth and an earring. On its head is a container of other headloaders.	This subject suggests femininity, a woman in her attire. She is a carrier of others, a caregiver	...the ordeal: we are all casualties of the status quo. Breadwinners, ministers, presidents, commissioners and
In the distant left of the foreground is a representation of two individuals against a red background. One is seen with a headload while the other expresses hands towards the load carried by the other.	This represents many of the domestic activities in which help could be offered or annoyance and violence extended. It is part of the load carried upon health	governors, barrow and truck pushers and hawkers, beggars and dustbin-pickers.
The major hues include black in the foreground, and shades of sky blue in the background, red and brown	The colours used signify the hopes, the dangers or even death that can emerge from headloading	Trade, rooms, survival, fittest, scraping, trials, man, woman
At the bottom right of this work is a representation of what looks like a crutch in brown hue	This furthers the position that activities of headloading could lead to health-related issues such as biomechanical dysfunction.	



Fig. 6.15: Liminality and Aesthesis (2020), 2.2x3.6ft, water colour, DP on canvas

'Liminalities and Aesthesis' (Fig. 6.15) is a completely abstract piece of art through which I explore the idea of what goes on in the space between the load and the carrier. I worked around this piece manually from a watercolour medium and finished it in the digital. In the piece three forms are distinctly prominent.

This amorphous piece shows forms with cracked spaces and edges, as well as with different patches of yellow and blue for the upper and lower parts respectively. Red, interjecting between the upper and lower portions of the pieces, signifies the strange feeling (aesthesis) at the threshold of headloading. Key points of the description are shown in Table 6.15

Table 6.15: Semiotic reading of Liminality and Aesthesis

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
This piece is made up of two amorphous and broken shapes created from yellow and blue rectangles. The bottom side of each is cracked, rough and jagged. One slightly sits on top of the other. Each is rendered in watercolour gradation. It is painterly with blotches and tones of their different hues.	The two forms in yellow and blue are abstract forms of the load and the loader. Usually the carriage is represented to be on top. Its roughness depicts the checkered experience of the carrying times	No text is added
At the centre of the yellow and blue forms are linear forms that are composed like floriated spikes growing out from its centre. This bundle of bold linear forms connects the two parts of the piece.	This is the major feature of this piece. It is a reification of the idea of the tension, the pain, the pressure, the struggle within - to go or not to go. It is the immediate effect of the weight on the bearer	

The headloader's conflict of purpose and his or her struggle about the weight he or she carries is represented in the next figure. Weight on the head, more often than not, produces the desire for palliative and alleviative possibilities – ways of lightening the load. 'Palliative and Alleviative Cycles' (Fig. 6.16) is a semi-abstract painterly work through which I explore heavy loaders' desire to 'lighten up' their weight. In this piece there is a central image in the foreground that vertically traverses the entire design space. This figure has its hands raised up.

The upper part of the work shows a representation of the human head. The head shows a face in profile with rather sleepy eyes, mouth slightly open and tears dropping. In the large space of the head are silhouettes of headloaders in the distance. This space also encloses a representation of a flaming candle close to the viewer. Brush strokes of red, bright yellow and light blue green colours are used to break the visual action in this piece into upper and lower parts. The lower is composed of texts that corroborate the piece. Below I show a summary of the key elements of the work.



Fig. 6.16: Palliative and Alleviative Cycles (2020),
2.4x3.7ft, DP on canvas

Table 6.16: Semiotic reading of ‘Palliative and Alleviative Cycles’

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
The piece is seemingly in two parts. The upper bears a representation of a human head dropping tears. Beyond the face the other part of the head is rather empty with tiny silhouetted subjects of headloaders in a distant view.	The representation of the human head connotes the weight carried. In a sense it serves dual functions of a head and the weight. Its volume signifies the pressure. Pain and thoughts flood the mental space evidenced by the tears on the face.	Words in this piece include: USAID, WHO, EURO, AFDB, UKspend, CHINA, DOLLARS, POUNDS; desire to be assisted again; aids, assistance;
An important subject of the head space is a flaming candle in yellow. Smudges of red, yellow and light blue green seem to demarcate the piece into two parts. The upper part of the piece is largely in red and part in black	I have used the candle light creatively to show the desire to “lighten up” which is one of the most significant desires of all headloaders. If the head could produce a deadly pressure why not burn it off with the light? Light is represented by the yellow, black and red, showing the possible danger and death behind the pressure of headloading	“foreign assistance in nigeria seeks to reduce extreme poverty and improve the quality of life for nigeria’s most vulnerable communities through improved governance at the federal, state and local levels.”
A central image raises hands and stands tall across the entire space. This subject appears in bright yellow with its lower end in red.	The posture established by this subject is that which is ready to lend hands in lowering the pressuring load. This is actually the one to help lighten the load.	



Fig. 6.17: Foreign Aids (2020), 3x4.5ft, DP on Canvas

As an extension of ‘Palliative and Alleviative Cycles’ (Fig. 6.16), in ‘Foreign Aids’ (Fig 6.17), I explore the idea that headloaders usually require support in order to lay down the weight they carry. This multi-colour piece is an abstract one showing no human subject but hands and palms. It is composed of several amorphous forms and shapes and boldly defined by black brush strokes.

It is observable how the forms interlace and how the deep contours created with digital brushes of various sizes animate the piece. Although the subjects of this work are abstracted, its meaning is embedded in its connotative level of interpretation. Below, in Table 6.17, I give a descriptive summary of the piece.

Table 6.17: Semiotic reading of ‘Foreign Aids’

Denotation	Connotation	Texts
Four human hands are represented in this piece in the colours of black, brown, yellow and deep yellow. One of the hands is shown in yellow dropping down while the other in black is raised up	The yellow hand which is dropping down shows the source of the aid while the second in black is the recipient	This piece is also anchored with typography: “African countries have been recipients of foreign assistance since their independence.” “In moving away from a reliance on Western assistance, African governments should seek to improve regional integration initiatives.” “...so leaders must actively seek...”
The other two hands at the top centre of the piece are shown clasping together. Amorphous shapes and forms interlace upon one another in hues of red, shades of yellow, brown, deep green blue. Heavy jagged brush strokes define these forms in black.	The clasping hands like on one’s chest connotes a form of submission by a headloader, a posture of humbleness, plea and appeal that precede foreign assistance. It show an agreement to be offered help	
At the bottom right corner is a representation of the media device (perhaps a television set) on whose top is an oval shape of yellow	The media/television set here gives a sense of the publicity that follows such gestures of aid. The yellow yolk shape closely above this set represents the aid.	

Having given a descriptive overview of my creative works, in the next chapter I provide detailed discussion. The discussion is in order to offer deeper analysis or the ‘mythical’ and ideological strand of the Barthes’ visual semiotic process of analysis beyond the visual elements of the designs (Chandler, 2007; Barthes, 1977). In the next chapter I advance interpretations in deductive sense in relation to different issues of society and politics.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

7.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the discussion and analysis of my creative works. The interpretation of one sign usually endlessly creates other signs. This standpoint clarifies that my creative works as visual interpretations themselves need further interpretation as second-level signifiers. Using the analytic tool of semiotics, I engage with my different headloading imageries as points of departure for my second level semiotic reading. This second level analysis is connotative and discursive, showing a deeper level of constructed meanings.




In this analytical mode of the study, based on semiotics of representation, my works are signs standing for something in social, political, humanistic and ideological realms beyond the mere carrying of loads on the head. They provide deeper understanding of communicating with signs and images (Semali, 2002b). For better appreciation, I chose to do a thematic organization of these signs and images in order to construct relevant communicative viewpoints. The meanings of image are not on the surface waiting to be found: rather they are constructed and negotiated (Kress, 2010; Bezemer, 2012; Cimasko and Shin, 2017).

My analysis across this chapter also derive from my reflexivity, which offers “layered accounts” of interpretation combining the cultural, the symbolic and the auto-ethnographic. Ellis et al. (2010: 6) define “layered accounts” to mean using “the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature.” The approach is common in interpretation and studies that are

socially inclined (Ellis, 2004; Anderson, 2006; Boyd, 2008; Sykes, 2014), without necessarily downplaying objectivity. It is, therefore, strategic as my work deals with socio-political and humanistic concerns. Reflexivity is relevant for me in order to “connect the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context” (Holt, 2003: 18). Reflexivity has been of immense import throughout my creative practice alongside reflective journaling (Adams et al., 2015). In all, the interpretations I give are influenced by the auto-ethnographic information available as a participant in the headload culture.

I identify five themes through which headloading can be discussed connotatively with elaborations. These are sociological, political, humanistic and ideological in scope. These themes maintain a common front in the analysis instead of defining each image as a separate entity. The themes touch on issues around brain drain, migration, entrepreneurship and capitalism, foreign aid and alleviations, gender and health and liminalities.

It is important to note that while I position a work in a particular theme it may still be relevant in another theme or section and might be so referred. I am speaking to the theme through the work and not merely speaking on the work. It is important for me to clarify that my analysis in its general context references Nigeria, while the concept is further broadened and applied to a wider transnational discussion. Before I continue with the analysis I show in the table below a summary of my works and their themes.

Thumbnails of Work	Title	Themes	Remarks
	Facing the future	Tinkering and Facing the future	
	Hustlers' and Entrepreneurs		
	Brain Drain	Representing Brain Drain	








	Migration and other Journeys	Migration and other Journeys	
	The Making of Headlines	The making of headlines vis-à-vis Igbu-ozu	
	Health-load and the Woman	Gender and socio-Womanhood	
	Liminality and Aesthesis	Liminality of Symbolic Headloading	
	Palliative and Alleviative Cycles	Foreign Aid and Alleviations	
	Foreign Aid		
	Global North on South	Headloading and the Global South: Subalternity and Vassalage	

Table 7.1: Summary of works with their titles and themes

7. 2. Tinkering and Facing the future

With more than 60% of Nigeria's population young people, the conversation around entrepreneurship is a thriving one. Nigeria's huge market and population allows for the exploration of different kinds of opportunities for survival. Several brands of goods from China find their way into Nigeria (Morgan, 2018). Hawkers find themselves in the retail link, not usually as a formal setup but as individuals who are accountable to themselves or accountable to an immediate individual employer. And their main patrons are direct consumers who are on the go. But there is more to the issue of headloading versus entrepreneurship than just survival and making money.

In this section I discuss the two works 'Tinkering with the future' (Fig. 7.1), and 'Hustlers and Entrepreneurs' (Fig. 7.2). The idea of tinkering with the future suggests that headloading practice offers a means through which young people

explore survival opportunities and their future in the midst of hunger and poverty. In the headloading representation (Fig. 7.1) we encounter four hawkers with different wares. While they carry wares around for sale, they seem to stand still. The figures appear in silhouette backing the viewer, except the one in red and in the distance. The postures here signal looking forward to a prospective future with an uncertain reality.

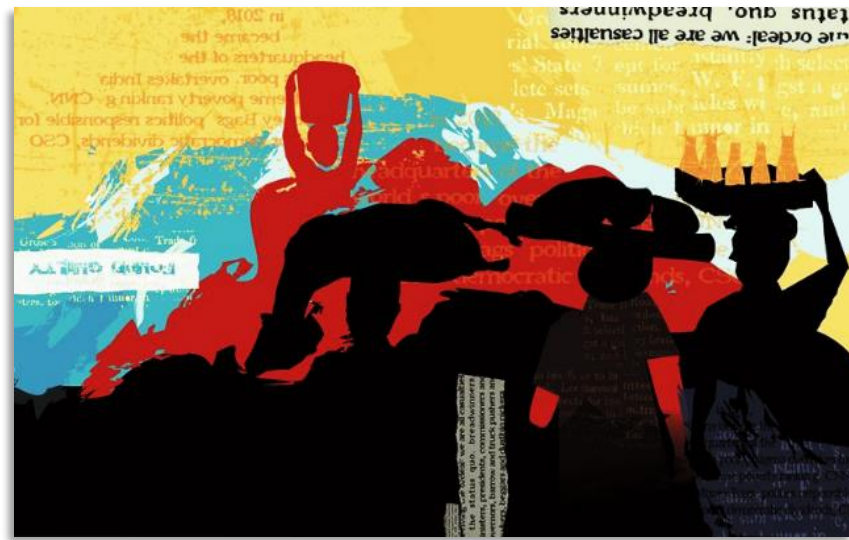


Fig. 7.1: Tinkering with the future (2019), 3x5ft, DP on canvas

Thoughts of uncertainty run through their minds as to whether the hawking exercise will produce the desired future. The black, the red and the blue are colours that define dilemma, danger or death but possibilities lie in the future signified by the bright yellow. There is a sense in which headload hawking is an attempt to scrape to survive for its participants. Yet, there is the possibility of upgrading from survival to success, in which case the hawker becomes an established business employer. These are two sides of the same coin, which I discuss further below.

One must understand the social realities which this headloading representation portends in Nigeria. For instance, when young people between the ages of 6 to 17 years are involved in headload-hawking it is unsettling thinking about what the future holds for them. In Nigeria, this age range is the interval between primary and post-primary education. While some youths are pursuing careers in schools, others occupy the streets and parks with heavy loads, hawking. In

Nigeria, owing to such things as scarcity of family resources “some of the children are withdrawn from school and made to learn some trades or to participate in the family business such as farming, hawking, street trading, begging etc.” (UNICEF, 2012: 39).

It becomes a critical thing when a female child is allowed to roam the streets trading. In Fig. 7.1 the posture of the only female figure is one of resignation to fate as she inclines her shoulder under the weight of hawking. Perhaps she is a ward whose guardians have mandated her to go hawking. Her posture represents angst and dread and it suggests a disavowal of this kind of life of headloading and hawking. UNICEF insists that hawking, which is largely by headloading, is child labour (CL):

Street and park hawking is by far the largest single form of CL in Nigeria. It accounts for over 50% of total urban CL. Both boys and girls are involved as street workers mainly in the southern zones of Nigeria. But in the northern zones, girls dominate street hawking while the boys engage mainly as beggars and in other categories of labour. (UNICEF, 2012: 41)

This brings to mind my experience of headload hawking as a high school teenager more than two decades back. In trying to help my brother to sell a brand of chocolate product at the time, I literally roamed the rural market and was wearied, yet I was only able to sell very few sachets of the product. From that time on I knew I would not be inclined to trading. In a way, owing to the social reality of poverty in Nigeria (Lenbang, 2019; Adebayo, 2018) one is compelled into different ways of seeking survival.

This links me to ‘Hustlers’ and Entrepreneurs (Fig 7.2). The concept of hustling in Nigeria means looking for work (usually informal kinds), getting a job and working hard in order to ‘make money and earn a living (Lawal, 2015). There is a connection between hustling and entrepreneurship as an important approach to growing countries’ gross domestic product (GDP) and financial capabilities (Morgan, 2014). This could start as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It is also a way individuals are able to move towards resource independence.

Some of the headloading activities of hawking actually run into heavy capital, such that the participants are not merely seeking to solve hunger problem but to maintain wealth.



Fig. 7.2: 'Hustlers' and Entrepreneurs (2019),
2.5x4ft, DP on canvas

In Fig 7.2 is represented a central subject of a robust male figure who is carrying a load on his head. He represents an entrepreneurial and capitalist entity whose economic activities (funding, production, distribution and exchange of goods and fortune) revolve around his person. I am aware of the nature and the diverse theoretical and historical framings that capitalism deals with. However, in this piece, I engage with the concept in its key characteristics of exchange and commerce in post-colonial Africa, in order to project the understanding which headloading holds in the discourse (Fikes, 2010).

This private control of resources, which characterises entrepreneurship (or capitalism), is shown by the huge and heavy neck and fat body of the headloader in this piece. The robustness also signifies the containment of diverse entrepreneurial possibilities and the prosperity of his enterprise. While heavy loading and street walking should make the loader lean, here it is ironically

different, perhaps owing to the massive output from his personnel, shown as smaller loaders inside his own carriage.

The potential of entrepreneurship as presented in the piece is the ability of the entrepreneur to employ others who carry loads with or for him or her. This signals a huge possibility of the business thriving on the head and effort of others, perhaps using different kinds of personnel for production, distribution of products across retailers, hawkers and consumers. There is a likelihood of networking and associations. This dimension of headloading presents an option usually considered by many young people who cannot afford formal education, professional training or those who are yet to gain tertiary scholarship. However, entrepreneurship by headload hawking presents a future of uncertainty, considering that government policies could at any time truncate such enterprising.

The carriage in this piece represents a “show glass” containing other headloaders and icons. The concept of ‘show glass’ as known in Nigeria is simply a wooden or aluminium framed box with a glass front that shows the contents inside. Traders use this box to display their products. As captured in this piece, there is a sense in which the show glass represents a television screen and a screen of a phone with icons of apps on it. The headloading practice here seems to function as advertising means.

Whether carried on the head as show glass or in the hand as an internet-enabled device (phone, tablet and laptop) or as a television screen, they all serve as capitalist tools used in business promotion. Whether it is a business done by headloading or by a conglomerate, it carries the same spirit of an entrepreneurial and capitalist concern – assertive sale techniques, competition, radical advertising and seeking fortunes with ears wide open. The texts in watermark – truck-pusher, barrow, Amazon, Ogbete, and so on – show these similarities of businesses from sole proprietorship to large organisations. For instance, while the internet provides a vast space for ads for capitalists in the 21st century, the headloader-entrepreneur makes use of traffic jams, parks and

street corners as sites for locating customers. Lagos, Onitsha and Enugu are Nigerian cities well-known for hours of gridlock under which headloading entrepreneurship thrives. All are spaces of promotion.

For me, there a connection between headloading and brain drain, particularly relating to young people and hawking. There is a socio-ideological stance by which headloading connotes brain drain. In the next section I explore these two implicative dimensions of headloading as represented in my practice.

7. 3. Representing Brain Drain

'Brain drain' is a serious issue in Nigeria and across Africa (Akuru, 2019; Abella, 2006; THE WORLD BANK, 2011). I am aware of the common definition of the term "brain drain" as the international transfer of human capital resources, through the migration of highly educated individuals from developing to developed countries (Docquier, 2014). The concept of brain drain is fundamentally a metaphorical one. So it is from the metaphorical viewpoint that I develop my analysis of the concept.

Following the piece (Fig. 7.3), two perspectives are deductible: a figurative kind of 'drain' resulting from physical exertion on the brain, as well as the implied, the metaphorical and the migratory. From a health dimension, headloading has a retarding or damaging effect on the body development of the loader and, in the case of a child, the effect could be dangerous (Porter et al., 2013). A consistent carrying of weight on the head can retard brain potential, as I explore in Fig 7.3.

I draw from personal and reflexive experience that prolonged or heavy headloads can cause pain and headaches for carriers (See section 6.4). When this happens to young and school-aged children, it affects their educational performance, owing to the possibilities of weakness or sickness. From that perspective, considering the head as representing the brain, the practitioner becomes mentally dislocated and inactive. Disuse of the brain due to continued headloading and hawking is a factor to consider, as such a carrier could become incapable of mental activities such as scholarship.

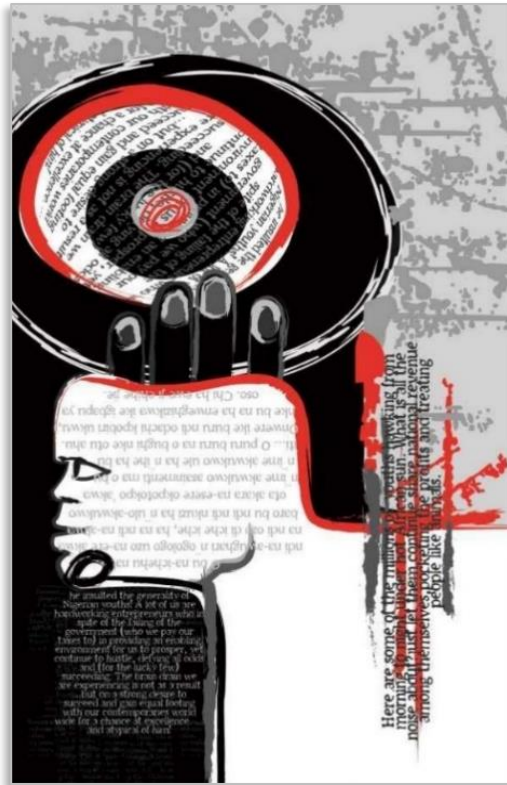


Fig. 7.3: Brain Drain, (2019), 2.5x4ft, DP on canvas

Antithetically, there is a sense in which a form of brain drain, such as in the explanation above, occasions headloading. This I anchor in this representation using the Igbo words,

“O bu na icheghi na ndi na-awughari n’ogologo uzo na-ere akwa na ahia ndi ozo di iche iche, ha na ndi na-akwa baro bu ndi ndi nkuzi ha n’ulo-akwukwo ota akara na-esere okpotokpo ‘akwa’ n’ime akwukwo asainmenti ma o bu n’ime akwukwo ule ha n’ihe ha bu iti... O puru buru na o bughi nke otu ahu? Onwere ike buru ndi odachi kpobiri ukwu, nke bu na ha enweghizikwa ike igbapu ya oso. Chi ha ewe ji ehihe jie.”

Translated into English, the above reads,

Do you not think that those hawking cloths (or eggs) around on roadsides or other markets, with those barrow pushers, were once pupils whose teachers in primary school drew big circles (or eggs) in their assignment books or examination scripts because they were dullards... Could it be that it is not exactly so? It then could be those that misfortune caused to stumble, so much that they could not escape. And their sun set in a broad day light.”

The above statement suggests that many of the headload hawking practices of many middle-aged individuals resulted from a number of factors. Beyond possible misfortunes that could reduce one to a street hawker, many are dropouts who began from early childhood in primary school such that they could not measure up. Dropping out from formal education and not taking up a professional skill, they are usually presented with the option of hustling or headload hawking as an 'easy' way to survive. This idea of academic failure leading one into headloading is explored in Fig 7.3. This 'failure' or 'zero' concept is represented by the spherical forms of black and red in the piece. The 'heaviness' of failure is instantiated as the deformation of the skull, notwithstanding the hand trying to assist. Tying hawking with headloading, some of the comments from the 'Lazy Nigerian Youth' episode can help to understand the growing tension and living experience of brain drain in the headload hawker.

... A lot of us are hardworking entrepreneurs who in spite of the failing of the government (who we pay our taxes to) in providing an enabling environment for us to prosper, yet continue to hustle, defying all odds and (for the lucky few) succeeding. The brain drain we are experiencing is not as a result of laziness on the part of the Nigerian youth but on a strong desire to succeed.... (Oputa, 2013)

The above was a response to a post whose title read, "Here are some of the millions of youths hawking from morning to night under hot sun..." While the above statement may have shut out the causes for the hawking and headloading, the effects are clear as indexical signs. For me, it could be 'brain-drain-caused' headloading and hawking rather than headloading-caused brain drain. There is a connection between the red on the spherical forms and that on the head in Fig. 7.3. In a sense, the 'red pen' that designed a zero in scholarship has continued to manifest in 'red pain' caused by headloading.

One can link this to a professional/financial brain drain caused by previous intellectually drained brains. This is indeed a metaphor of the word 'drain,' like water being wasted or removed from a container. Interpretively, it also refers to

emotional states or tiredness and depression from a hard life, pressure to earn, as well as the pressure on the head, the mindless physical nature of headloading as a way to earn money.

The metaphorical and ideological representation of the idea of drain in my headloading representation has an intellectual dimension. The intellectual, professional or migratory brain drain is a huge dilemma in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa (Boutsikos et al., 2020; Akuru, 2019). Nigeria is losing its brains. This kind of brain drain resulting from the pursuit of better working conditions directs people to the West, as seen in my representation.

This owes to the economic situation and quality of currencies of these nations to match the intellectual resources exported. Yet, this implied headloading cannot be done without being educated or a professional, as shown in Chapter Two (see Section 2.2). The human subject of the piece shows an intent observation towards the 'western' space with texts surrounding the head. The 'western' here represents the developed world where many people from the low income countries aspire to enter.

These textual elements signify the erudition resources required to afford decent survival in the distant land. However, it is important to note the vital disadvantage of brain drain occurring for the participant, his dependants and country of origin. There is pain to bear as signified by the figure's red outline in the piece. Docquier (2014: 1) asserts that "the impact of the brain drain on a source country's welfare and development can be beneficial or harmful. The evidence suggests that there are many more losers than winners among developing countries."

In considering the nature and dimension of brain drain taking place and the human resource capital being drained from developing country, it is important for me to consider other kinds of transnational mobility that do not seem to arise from high skill transfer. This leads me to thematically examine the idea of migration.

7. 4. Migration and other Journeys

Generally, migration itself occurs largely from developing countries to developed ones. Osborn's (2018) account of containerisation as connecting with headloading is a good example of the trajectory of migration between nations and this is substantiated by Isiugo-Abanihe and IOM Nigeria (2016) and Rizvi (2005). For me, the ideological sense of headloading in relation to migration is more a socio-economic and socio-political factor than just a neutral desire to cross borders (Robertson, 2006).

It shows how policies and conditions of livelihood in many countries (dis)orient their citizens in creating desires to leave for 'greener pastures' (Kirwin and Anderson, 2018). Nigeria, for instance, recorded a total of 4,235,758 departures of international travellers across all its borders between 2017 and 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).



Fig. 7.4: Migration and other Journeys (2020),
DP on Canvas, 3x4.5ft

It is important to underscore that although the notion of migration is a broad one that touches on several factors, its connection with headloading is metaphorical in essence. From an alternative perspective, the representation in Fig 7.4 presents

a metonymy for migration for which headloading is an important part. It also signifies that kind of migration in which people trek the distance and their heads become their loads as they try to escape from their home countries or communities.

In this piece, 'Migration and other Journeys' (Fig. 7.4), references are made to labour, education and conflict as important causes of migration. Nigeria is an important instance in these regards. In this study I identify three diverse grounds or modes of transnational migration: Labour (employment), conflict (war, protest), and education. A recent account by the United Nations underscores that such transnational migrations occur along multiple routes to reach different destinations with shared desires for either "better economic conditions, or fleeing persecution and war, or both" (UNODC, 2018: 33).

■ *Migrating from conflict (in Nigeria)*

This brings me to the kind of migration orchestrated by conflict, wars, and protests. In the piece above, human figures in rainbow hues are representative of the migrants who, mostly with children, go long distance with headloads to reach safety. Of course, migrants come from different countries. They are persons displaced by conflict, emigrants who have a wall or a border to cross and so are weak and worn. Beyond Nigeria, security concerns around war and civil or military conflicts are reasons for many transnational migrations witnessed recently in different parts of Europe and the Middle East (Memou, 2019; Onay-Coker, 2019).

Nigeria's terrorism situation, heightened by Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen and bandits, is the cause of many flights and migrations within Nigeria (Lenshie, 2014; Suleiman and Maiangwa, 2017; Buchanan, 2015). It has also produced various Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in a bid to shelter mostly women and children from the face of terror attack, abduction, rape and killings. Historically, the Nigerian civil war was a momentous case that necessitated a huge exodus as I have already shown (See, Fig 6.5).

■ *Crossing the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea*

The concept of headloading becomes an important element in the making of refugees as they move from conflict zones to asylum centres, usually by foot, legally or illegally (Hickerson and Dunsmore, 2016). Memou (2019: 1) maintains that “the record number of migrants and refugees who attempted to reach Europe throughout 2015 and 2016 via the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea is the largest migrant exodus since the Second World War.”

A dimension of this kind of migration which has involved Nigeria and several West Africa countries is that in which migrant populations seek to cross to Europe through the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean Sea using boats. For Nigerians, Niger seems to be the preferred exit point (Patience, 2017). While some choose to trek in groups, others rent vans or other kinds of vehicles. Such journeys are known to be disastrous (Frisina and Muresu, 2019), as many of the migrants die of thirst, hunger or drowning or as victims of circumstances and environmental issues (Flynn, 2015; Morgan, 2017).

In economic terms, migrants in this category seem to be largely unskilled or untrained in expert professions. Their basic aim is to find any possible way out of poverty. This kind of migration contrasts with that of skilled, educated professionals who have better economic opportunities (Isiugo-Abanihe and IOM Nigeria, 2016). It is important to note the dimension of this kind of migration as shown in the United Nation’s report. According to a recent report by the United Nations:

Migrants and refugees are smuggled from many different West African countries to Europe, as well as to North and Southern Africa. Niger is a key transit country for the smuggling route from West Africa towards North Africa and Europe...While Nigerians comprised the largest share, there were also many Nigeriens, Gambians, Senegalese and others (UNODC, 2018: 33).

This migratory process which involves crossing Africa’s desert and the Mediterranean Sea also at times includes human trafficking. The idea of ‘smuggling’ here also connects with transnational “human trafficking.” It is

remarkable that Nigeria is involved. Part of those trafficked are women who are “required to provide sexual services to their ‘protectors’ during transit” (UNODC, 2010: 29). The United Nations refers to human trafficking as “the process through which individuals are placed or maintained in an exploitative situation for economic gain” (UNHCR, 2014: 29).

■ *On Subsistence and Employment Migration*

Subsistence is a major reason for transnational migration and this is often instigated by economic issues in the country of origin. Ayanruoh and Di Benedetto (2018: 4) underscore this possibility, writing that “a large percentage of Nigerians in the United Kingdom could be tagged economic migrants as they have migrated into the United Kingdom for economic reasons.” Kirwin and Anderson (2018: 3) give another dimension as to why Nigerian’s migrate when they write that “economic standing has a limited effect on Nigerians’ desire to leave their home. Instead, individual perceptions of the strength of Nigeria’s democracy are most strongly associated with Nigerians’ desire to migrate abroad...”

While the above statement provides strong grounds why people may be migrating, for me, it is elitist and may not capture views from rural and suburban settings. The term “economic standing” seems to refer to persons with some recognisable economic reckoning in the urban places rather than referring to those who are bare of recognisable economic indices.

In ‘Migration and other Journeys’ I explore the idea of subsistence in migration within the concept of seeking ‘greener pastures’. Towards the right top corner of this piece is an ‘open window’ showing opportunities in the metaphor of beautiful green and floral hills. Migrants are usually seekers of better opportunities, welfare and futures and headloads are part and parcel of this mobility. This ‘window of opportunity’ in the piece opens up the desires of many labour, job, employment and commercial migrations.

Many migrants from Nigeria seek opportunities for subsistence, employment, labour and commercial activities in a foreign nation. This kind of migration is

largely informed by the poverty level in the land, as well as political and socio-environmental factors. It is important to note that several employment migrations from Nigeria involve skilled professionals. This economic ground for migration is evident in the way Nigerian doctors and nurses and other highly skilled professionals leave the country and work abroad for better remuneration (Okafor and Chimereze, 2020; Abang, 2019; Isiugo-Abanihe and IOM Nigeria, 2016).

Only recently (2019) was Nigeria's monthly minimum wage increased from eighteen thousand naira to thirty thousand naira, which is approximately eighty dollars (Abu, 2019). Nigeria may be acclaimed as having the highest GDP in Africa but Isiugo-Abanihe and IOM Nigeria (2016: 21) puts it right when they write that “growth does not automatically translate into benefits for the poor through job creation.”

■ *Educational Migration: Brain Gain or Drain*

Part of Figure 7.4 represents the educational dimension of migration.

Figuratively, this is represented by the textual component of the piece at the left top side. The textual portion here is a metonymy for literacy and scholarship (all writing and literature). It has become obvious how several Nigerian students migrate to study in the West, especially Europe, supported either by the students themselves, governments or host institutions (Babatunde, 2018). In understanding that mobility from developing countries to developed countries causes brain drain, then, one has to also clarify the place of knowledge gain/transfer afforded by the host countries through education.

So there is a sense in which migration can lead to brain drain and brain gain. There is an economic gain for knowledge gain or human capital development. While the educational migrants tap knowledge to advance their capacities, their host countries gain financial advantage (Onyekwelu, 2019; Robertson, 2006). For instance, in 2013 I received a scholarship award from my home country for a postgraduate programme in the UK and the tuition alone was about £12,000 for the year. Yet, one cannot conclude that there would be a balance of gain for the

two countries in this reciprocal function. If these brains are retained as human resource capital to work just for the benefit of the host country it becomes a point of inflection. The developing home country loses.

On the economic position, studies show that there is the possibility of diasporic investment in countries of origin. Although this is not entirely a concern of education, Nigeria's experience is notable in this regard. Nigeria's diaspora have been known to make returns to their home country “through official and non-formal channels” (Agbakwuru, 2020). For instance, a recent report titled ‘Strength from Abroad: The Economic Power of Nigeria’s diaspora’ showed that remittances by Nigerian diaspora in 2018 represented about 83 percent of the federal government budget for that year, and it further estimated that these remittances would be on the increase (Onyekwelu, 2019; Nevin and Omosomi, 2019). This estimation was fulfilled shortly afterwards (Agbakwuru, 2020).

Beyond the possibility of drain or gain of migration as shown above, there is also a certain kind of cultural draining when people migrate from their homes of origin. Migrants are naturally required to develop new cultures for survival in the process of seeking inclusion. In doing so they lose some of their indigenous culture, especially in such cases of asylum as refugees, following policies of integration (Hickerson and Dunsmore, 2016). This could come with certain edging out occasioned by racialized alterity and differences (Memou, 2019), which ‘inferiorize’ the migrants.

The linear and lean characteristics of the human subjects in Fig 7.3 represent the effects, health consequences of moving long distances with headloading. In other words, there is a sense in which migration and other kinds of headloading engender leanness and drainage of well-being, as represented by these subjects. In the next section I deal with the issue of socio-human health that is connected with headloading.

7.5. Headloading, Socio-Human Dysfunction and Gender

The meanings I construct here may be culturally subtle for outsiders to Nigeria. However, such interpretations possess equivalence in other cultures, perhaps in

different manifestations. Social struggle is one of the common socio-human dysfunctions across countries. Examples are seen around racism, corruption, inequality and banditry, among others. Here I deal with that which can be seen from the lens of headloading as I have explored in my practice.

■ *The making of headlines vis-à-vis Igbu-ozu*

'The Making of Headlines' (Fig 7.4) is a visual metaphor ideologically representing the idea of labour and extreme hustling, either in pretext or in clandestine plots. This can be a system of "igbu ozo." Igbu ozo is an Igbo phrase which loosely translates to, "have a kill", "make it" or "become or seem successful".



Fig. 7.5: The Making of Headlines, (*Igbu ozo*) (2019), 2.5x4ft, DP on canvas

It largely concerns economic hunting. This notion is a trend among many young Nigerians, with or without formal education. In advancing my interpretation of headloading through the idea of 'making headlines', it is important for me to reference how elaboration of discourse informs new language and ways of expressions, as shown by Meyer and Land (2005).

In effect, this piece epitomises the challenges and consequences that manifest in an attempt to move from headloads to headlines, in many cases, by hollow agenda and unethical processes. It also underscores the disturbance and the tension that arise from unthinking headship of various social, political, cultural and economic carriages (agenda) for the people. In a mere desire to show off, such agenda are dysfunctional and hurt, not only the head (government) but the society at large.

The concomitant power and social structure remains that the poor carry headloads, and the rich carry headlines. The poor carry social discontent, while the rich carry political propagandas in the making of headlines. This desire to 'make headlines' or to 'meet up' by all means is what instigates many young Nigerians and West Africans to attempt to cross the Sahara Desert by foot or to cross the Mediterranean Sea by boat, not minding the risks involved. The term 'meet up' is local parlance for measuring up to personal, family or society's expectations. The same desire to make headlines propels politicians to certain malfeasances. While the linear weaving in this piece (Fig.7.5) represents the intricate connections in making headlines and the rigmaroles of such a penchant for 'igbu ozu', it further implicates the convoluted dangers and snares of the materialistic. There is, therefore, a sense in which this fibrous interlacing of lines is obsessive and 'flammable' in reference to the pursuit of the materialistic.

The materiality of the colour scheme used here connotes a dismal and precarious characteristic of excessive and criminal indulgence. The desire to show off or arrogate prominence through extremist "headloading" can ultimately result in a "red head," or a "burning hand" as expressed in this piece. The concept of 'excessiveness' is further explored here by the visual weight which the colour black bestows on the lower part of this piece. For me, the use of 'red' for the head and the hand portends a social, political or economic "health" issue for a people - for Nigeria as an instance. Although the making of 'headlines' may be successful superficially, it could become a source of internal hurt and fretting connoted by the woven lines. It is also important to underscore the amputated

left hand in this piece which signals part of the problem of personally forced labour with underlying ambitions of making the headlines.

■ *Gender, Health and social survival*

Gender issues cannot be minimised in the discourse and representations of different kinds of headloading. As already noted, depictions of headload practices traditionally featured women as mothers, housewives, or less often as sexualised objects of the male gaze. The representation, 'Health-load and the Woman' (Fig. 7.6) connects women's headloading practice with domestic care and labour (Cho et al., 2014; Barwell, 1996; Calvo, 1994), gender and food (Talley, 2011; Drews, 2007), women and health issues (Porter et al., 2013).



Fig. 7.6: Health-load and the Woman, (2019), 2.5x4ft, DP on canvas

I acknowledge the status of women, from Nigeria and from the rest of Africa, in discussing issues of women's headloading and well-being. The practice of carrying loads on the head itself is known among women across rural markets and agricultural settlements. My representation in Fig 7.6 communicates the challenges and possibility of health problems arising from the practice.

It is important to underscore the tenacity with which African women operate in all of these laborious activities. Wura-Natasha Ogunji explores this idea, underscoring that African women are usually burdened with loads of domestic cares without securing a proper place in society and politics. Engaging in performance art she asserted self in the place of women needing proper recognition with the message that “women often work so hard, and yet their contributions are hardly appreciated and largely ignored” (Layiwola, 2017: 149).

In ‘Health-load and the Woman’ is an anthropomorphic subject structured as a female elegant neck, earring and scarf on the shoulder, and backing the viewer. Although the subject is postured to look out to bright and promising scenery, it (she) seems to be trapped by the challenges of motherhood and the problem of ill health connoted by ‘her’ physique and by the visual density of elements in the lower part of this piece. The outlook here suggests the opportunities, challenges and choices that lie ahead. It is clear that many women are limited by domestic vagaries which in some cases cause them to minimise possibilities in education, jobs and socio-political assignments.

Some are suppressed and harmed under loads of non-essentials (Mrunalini, 2016). Care of family and domestic work should not be left to either men or women alone, there is a possibility for reinventing oneself by developing a different mind-set to reach greater equality. The angular structure of the human subject in this piece further informs the precarious situation of poverty and lack with which headloading connects gender.

The silhouette of human figures at the lower left portion of the piece is a representation of possible domestic contention. Combined with those carried by the central figure, one gets the sense of domestic problems harnessed to motherhood. All of these produce different kinds of health issues, signalled by the representation of brown crutches at the right lower part of this artwork. Such domestic involvements determine the ‘woman’s’ presence or absence in other social, cultural and political activities (Mikailu, 2016).

This piece contains headloading and society as a visual metaphor. Within its interpretivist epistemology, the piece also expresses a social system brought to a rickety or ailing halt as a result of systemic negligence in the face of bright possibilities. It relates to the social condition which is merely struggling to make headlines without fully trapping its opportunities and problems. This further connotes how a social condition can result from or in a systemic ineptitude connoted by the 'crutches' in this piece.

7. 6. Liminality of Symbolic Headloading

Denotatively, liminality within my context of use in headloading narrative deals with the human experience between the time a load is carried on the head and the time it is lifted. This difference between carrying and not carrying is known as the interstice, the connection between the load and its carrier. Etymologically, the term liminality comes from the Latin root word, "limen" meaning threshold, boundary, a point of divide or space between two places (Ratiani, 2007).

Although the concept of liminality had been used in transcendental and cultural contexts of rites of passage as shown in the work of Arnold Van Gennep (Bigger, 2009), it has gained traction in several contemporary epistemological discourses and disciplines (Meyer and Land, 2005) such as architectural practice (Suhirman, 2014; Alakavuk, 2018), visual art practice (Bolt, 2011), sociology, political anthropology, pedagogy and education (Meyer and Land, 2005; Budziak, 2017).

Liminality, as I use it deals with the part of headloading experience which underscores a transition from one point of reality to another. It informs a change of status. In my analysis here, the idea moves from that which concerns the physical to that which is socially ideological, showing phases of the experience. The idea, therefore, traverses the physical to the symbolic.



Fig.7.7: Liminality and Aesthesis (2020),
2.2x3.6ft, water colour, DP on canvas

In a physical sense, drawing from my experience of headloading practice and depending on the nature and weight of the object carried, headloading produces an aesthesis, with multimodal perception by the human senses. The touch sensation advances the consciousness and fragile response accorded headloading as the process could impair the carriage or the carrier. This liminal sensibility begins from the moment the individual takes the load onto his head and it reaches the peak according to the distance or duration covered with the load. The liminal sensation transforms the carrier of the load into a new individual especially and ultimately when the load is dropped from the head.

For me, the liminal presence in headloading can be underscored as a transitional experience across three stages. These stages agree with Arnold Van Gennep's additions of the pre-liminal and post-liminal to the liminal (Bigger, 2009; Wright, 2012). The pre-liminal stage, which is the beginning phase, corresponds with the pre-headloading stage. This stage allows the preparations needed for headloading to take place, for instance, packaging and padding. Padding is a technique used to assuage the liminal friction and aesthesis that arise in headloading (see Fig. 7.7).

The next stage, the liminal, is the headloading itself, which is also the threshold and marginal stage. This is followed by the experience succeeding the lifting of the headload. The aesthesia of this last stage usually produces new experiences of pain, injury, stress or dislocation (Meyer and Land, 2005) that leave the headloader not the same as at the pre-headloading stage. It is a post-liminal experience. I have tried to explore this understanding and these stages through forms and colours in the piece, 'Liminality and Aesthesis'.

Three hues are used: blue, red and yellow in their shades. The blue underscores the cool moment. Red connotes the point of tension and aesthesis while yellow implies moments of lightening the load or the possibility of easing the tension by adjustment of the load and its eventual removal. It is important to underscore the point of liminality as the cracking point which can happen to both the carriage and carrier. This liminal response can take place from any part of the body, especially as shown in the lower parts of the yellow and blue forms in this piece. This suggests that the head and the feet can be the most affected. It is at the height of this aesthesia that the need for alleviative action is required in order to lighten the load.

In the ideological sense, I use the notion of liminality in headloading to construct and negotiate a range of social and power relations. Such relational analysis of liminality provides the purview for understanding the social positioning which a society like Nigeria's affords with headloading. Headloading experience is an instance in which liminality represents a social structure.

The social structure here is that which shows headloading and its participants as being at the base of the social pyramid. The representation further provides itself as a visual metaphor for understanding social conditioning and transformation. Such a social structure encloses issues of power, politics, wealth and other determinants of status (Bigger, 2009). Although the carrying of headloads is not a cultural rite, each dimension of the practice (as shown of women for domestic affairs, youths in hawking, migrants in seeking better living conditions or in pursuit of academic degrees) affords its symbolic liminality. The passage from

the liminal to the post-liminal which headloading symbolises informs a change in social and power status.

The liminal space is based on the shifting experiences of symbolic headloading towards lightening of the load, such as is perceivable between 'sowing' and 'reaping,' which ultimately leads to a change of position or status (Bigger, 2009; Turner, 1969). In this shifting of time and space, life cannot remain the same as symbolised by different dimensions of headloading in this study. The social stratification in Nigeria which manifests in the post-liminality of economic power and authority is the reason many desire to cross the threshold of headloading as "anti-structural activity" (Bigger, 2009).

According to (Bigger, 2009: 1; Turner, 1969) such anti-structures as responses to social structure are positive and creative and are pressures to change. It is at this point that the practice of headloading is validated symbolically. Although writing from a cultural standpoint, Skjoldager-Nielsen and Edelman (2014: 1) underscore liminality symbolically when they write that "liminality resides in this middle phase, where the absence of structure makes social creativity – the development of new social realities – possible." 'Liminality and Aesthesis' presents a reality in which liminal "anti-structure" produces responses from society's bottom in order to measure up to the social structure which the society esteems.

Another dimension in headloading discourse is that which shadows the ramifications of the post-liminal stage. It begins with the desire, the need, and the assistance to leave the liminal and to experience the aggregation of the new phase without the 'burden.' That new status of social, economic and political freedom and power elicits the desire to endure the liminal tension and experiences in society.

7.7. Foreign Aid and Alleviations

The pain and struggle in passing through the liminal experience of headloading, produce the desire to lighten the load. Drawing from personal experience as a participant in headloading culture, it is common to want to drop headloads after

a long distance or due to heaviness. The practice of headloading many times requires someone else's assistance to properly place a load on the head of the carrier or in bringing the load down to carefully avoid damage. Such stages of experience are very important as they can also break the individual.

These are pre-liminal and post-liminal stages in headloading. These two stages raise a desire to be assisted or relieved by another individual. This desire to be assisted by a different or external individual is symbolically analogous to certain socio-humanistic issues, not only in Nigeria, but also across societies. This notion of assistance or aid towards loading or unloading of burdens signals a condition of power and social relations such as those existing between the educated and the illiterate, the rich and poor, the developed and the developing countries. It is sense that I explore in the two visual contemplations, 'Palliative and Alleviative Cycles' (Fig. 7.8) and 'Foreign Aid' (Fig. 7.9).



Fig. 7.8: Palliative and Alleviative Cycles (2020) 2.4x3.7ft, DP on canvas

Fig. 7.9: Foreign Aids (2020), 3x4.5ft, DP on Canvas

The headloading exploration in 'Palliative and Alleviative Cycles' is metaphorically positioned showing one who is standing up to assist in the placement or displacement of (head)loads. The cycle plays out from the fact that

if assistance was required to carry a headload, it would also be required to lay it down and the assistant assumes the same posture.

For Nigeria, while the literates may be aware of the idea of “foreign aid,” the current global pandemic of COVID-19 has popularised the concept of “palliative”. The government, its representatives and non-governmental individuals adopted various kinds of palliative measures in order to alleviate the effects of the COVID-19 problem across towns and villages in Nigeria at the height of the pandemic.

Here, I use the idea of “light,” as a figurative representation of lightening or alleviating a headload. The idea of light is shown by the colour, yellow, which is also used for the prominent human subject in the piece. Symbolically, then, this light works in a way to lighten the threshold, to cushion the aesthesia of tension and pain for the carrier of the load. The load is represented in this piece by the black and red upper part of this piece. The ‘assistant’ is strategically positioned to offer help. The position of the assistant in headloading practice, therefore, negates the understanding that such a responsibility or office could be subordinate.

The strategic balance required of helpers of headloaders represents the dimensions of power and social relations between nations. In such burden management, the assistant wields more influence, power, or control in order to help. This is true in the affordance of international foreign aid between countries, as explored in Fig. 7.9. Hjertholm and White (1998: 3) define ‘aid’ as an “international operation channelling tens of billions of dollars to developing countries each year and employing hundreds of thousands of people in a multitude of organisations.”

Nigeria, like many African countries, has long been a recipient of foreign aid/assistance from developed countries of the West. Wolff (2000), underscores that the concept of foreign aid derives from the effects of colonialism in several African countries (I explore this further in the next section). Referring to ‘aid’ as a “reverse net flow of resources into former colonies” he writes:

It was widely believed that bilateral and multilateral reparations or 'aid' from former colonizers to former colonies might be increased if it could be shown that a net reverse flow of resources had occurred during the colonial period and often thereafter as well. Indeed, the continued net flow of resources from former colonies to former colonizers led many to refer to the postcolonial period as neo-colonialism. (Wolff, 2000: 178)

On the tone of the relations and schemes that foreground the provision and acceptance of foreign assistance, (Kwemo, 2017) notes that:

African countries have been recipients of foreign assistance since their independence. ...some U.S. development assistance programs ... have shown lasting results in programs that stimulate local economies and reduce aid dependency (such as sustainable agriculture, youth entrepreneurship, and improved access to power).

Yet, it is important to underscore that offers of aid show economic power relations. By being recipients of foreign aid, African countries affirm their various economic, educational and developmental 'headloading cultures' that require foreign aid. They submit to the terms and conditions of the aid. In this symbolism, therefore, Nigeria, like other African nations, is sustaining the culture of dependence and primordial techniques of operation manifest in several literal headloadings activities, such as in hawking.

There are key elements I explore in 'Foreign Aid' regarding seeking or receiving aid. Here are two palms and two hands, while the yellow arm from up-down connotes the 'assistant', the one from down-up shows the recipient, the headloader as asking for help or showing a need. The positioning reminds one that the aider usually occupies a higher (social, economic) pedestal in order to help the one in a lower, subaltern plane. In the middle of this piece are two hands represented as clasping together.

This posture shows an individual with hands on his chest making a sympathetic appeal, which symbolizes the protocol and politics of qualifying for aid. From this piece, the delicate understanding of headloading is that of subservience. The

social sense of the practice underlines the self-insufficiency of the headloader and the assertive control of the helper. While appeal for foreign assistance may have its own place as expressed through my work, Kwemo (2017) has redirected the viewer to another perspective and potent tool in the social and power discourse that exists between the benefactor and the beneficiary. That tool is 'negotiation.' Kwemo underscores that what Africa might receive in foreign aid depends on its negotiating powers. Conversely, some have thought of foreign assistance as a way developed countries impose themselves on less developed ones for certain benefits (Hjertholm and White, 1998; Mukaddas, 2020).

In their different colours, the shapes in this work represent the channel through which the offering of aid ultimately materialises and is publicized in the media. The media set at the bottom right corner of this piece is about to broadcast the news of the aid – a post-liminal activity in headloading. There is the potential to rise from being a mere recipient of foreign aid to being a donor. Mukaddas (2020: 203) highlights that while some countries have advanced from receiving foreign aid, Nigeria, which “has benefitted from various schemes of foreign aid ... is still struggling for self-sufficiency in all aspects of development.”

In a way this relationship between donor and recipient reflects the wide master-servant divide or that existing between the colonizer and the colonized. In a nutshell, it is clear that even though developed countries show a certain benevolence of aid in material or monetary terms, there are limits to western benefactors' know-how that would vigorously elicit development and independence of the assisted. The social relations that can activate such aid are premised on an expensive compromise between headloader and helper. The next section explores the place of headloading peoples as Global Southerners in the context of the Global North and South divide.

7. 8. Headloading and the Global South: Subalternity and Vassalage

Representing headloading as a metaphor for the concept of Global South (and North) defines an ideology and operational intersectionality between socio-political and humanistic divides signified by the upper and lower portions of a

headloading system. It signifies the social formation and inequalities of capitalist society, as well as the structure of domination – the exploiter over the exploited and the ruler over the ruled (Hodge and Kress, 1988).

Compositionally, the carrier or headloader represents the south on which sits a load representing the north. Although the south and north divides here are primarily adapted in global sense, Nigeria's geopolitical arrangement, as well as power structure, equally portends a symbology of the north sitting on the south as explored in Fig 7.10.

The Global South is partly a geographical location. Moreover, it is a social, political and economic placement and labelling of the developmentally disadvantaged nation-states of the world (Mahler, 2017). They include the dependent and 'developing' nations of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania, as differentiated by the rich and developed Global North which need no 'aid' (Dados and Connell, 2012). Dados and Connell argue that the "use of the phrase Global South marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power" (2012: 1).

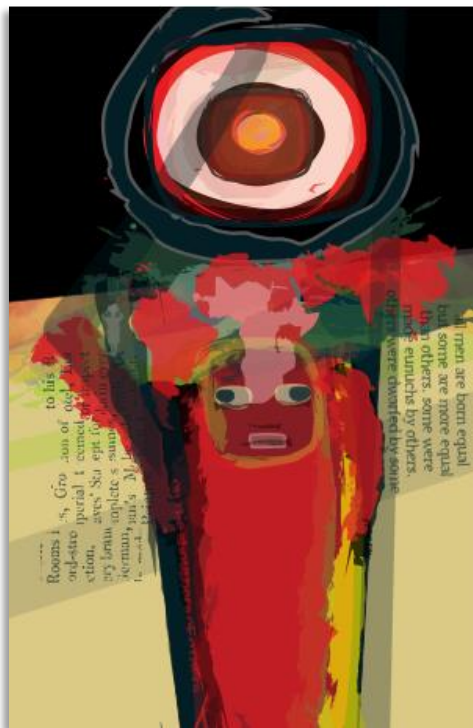


Fig. 7.10: Global North on South (2020),
2.4x3.7ft, DP canvas

For me, a closer consideration of the above standpoint reminds me of the subalternity arising from colonial and postcolonial conditioning. Therefore, in this section I have chosen to interrogate more intently the connection between the concept of Global South and the subject of subalternity with reference to my creative piece.

As opposed to the Global North, the term, Global South has been founded within several pessimistic identities: struggle, challenge, low democracies, colonised (by the Global North), dependency, malnutrition, poverty, low-income nations, marginalised, poor urbanity and informal settlements (Mitlin and Patel, 2014; Hollington et al., 2015). Headloading as metaphor provides an understanding of the Global South as strewn with elements of subalternity such as poverty, vassalage and unassertiveness. Beverley (1999) defines the term 'subalternity' to refer to conditions of subjugation arising as effects of formal colonialization. It results in various forms of economic, social, racial, linguistic, or cultural dominance and, as such, deals with relations of power. This is supported by Zaib (2015) when she synonymises the concept with such terms as subordinated, downtrodden, marginalized and oppressed.

As headloading representation, 'Global North on South' (Fig. 7.10) explores the implications of colonialism on the Global South which has reduced Africa, and Nigeria in particular, to various subaltern conditions. It is clear that the colonisers of Nigeria and Africa came from the Global North and indirectly became the burden we bear. Although, headloading predates colonialism in Nigeria and Africa as a means of portage (Ogunremi, 1975; Osborn, 2018), it provides symbolism for that which is exerted by colonialism, manifest in the subaltern.

I am aware that 'subalternity' as a theoretical frame is foregrounded in the study of post-colonial societies, yet its application has gained wider usage in postmodern discourse, "defined in descriptive terms according to a particular marginalized subject position in any given cultural or social context" (Louai, 2012: 4). I believe that the concept of headloading reveals socio-political,

humanistic, and/or ideological intersecting spaces of marginality and hegemonic discourses (Basu, 2019) as signified by my piece.

The piece is compositionally divided into two parts. The upper, made up of black and dense tones, represents the (global) north, while the lower, rendered in red and lighter hues, represents the (global) south. It underscores the effects of colonisation as having made African people deficient in economic, cultural and mental development. As a connotation of subalternity, the human subject in this piece represents the Global South shown as immersed in a bleeding red, malformed and stunted. Eyes are crossed, appearance is timid, vision is pale, the body is zombified and the head is dropping under a load.

All of these deficiencies which I have used to explicate the conditions of any of the Global South nation-states seem to exist in the face of various educational trainings, foreign aid and socio-political inputs they have received. Africa as an important part of the Global South seems to be stuck in its colonised mentality of subjugation, inferiority, ignorance and struggle while lacking some 'negotiatory' power (Kwemo, 2017). Much literature attests to the effects of colonisation on African states (Al Tinawi, 2015; Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2012; Wolff, 2000; Suret-Canale, 1962).

The performance art of Kentridge (2018) explores the headloading of colonial Africans during the First World War. Their meritorious efforts as porters of war materials, in which huge numbers died (Olusoga, 2018), were not considered as needing recognition, thus, showing the Global North's desire to hide and subjugate Africa in many ways. Like in the representation, Africa, the carrier is simply zombified, while being eclipsed developmentally by the 'northern' burden. This further grounds the power relation that exists between the Global North and the Global South

Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012: 53) argue vigorously that the desire to have a supply of raw materials and search for new markets were major reasons colonial dominance, exploitation and imperialism occurred. Even after independence, perhaps, in a neo-colonialist tendency, it has become difficult for African states

to disengage as dominant sources of raw materials for the West's manufactured products. And while lacking industrialization, due to the 'assignment' of production of raw materials, "colonialism encouraged and intensified class struggle, tribalism and ethnicity." This has continued to plague Africa. All of these inform the sources of corruption for which many African states are known, as colonialism introduced unhealthy capitalist competition among ethnics (Suret-Canale, 1962; Al Tinawi, 2015). This, thus led to the 'divide and rule' principle found in Nigeria (Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2012).

In many ways the ideological presentation of the headload piece reflects an individual, a people or nation discontented to be vassals and poor. Poverty is perhaps the most appropriate word to articulate the dimensions bequeathed on a people framed as subalterns of the Global South. Although from place to place the concept of Global South or subalternity may concern various dimensions of social, political, economic, educational and technological deficiencies and ineptitude, the notion of poverty is usually uniform. For instance, writing from a seemingly subaltern position of poverty from an Asian standpoint, Sianipar (2008: 92) underscores that:

Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to go to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job; it is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.

Nigeria instantiates such a condition of poverty drawing from the fairly recent account by World Poverty Clock. Adebayo (2018: para. 1-4) captures the report:

Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians, or around half of the country's population, thought to be living on less than \$1.90 a day. The findings, based on a projection by the World Poverty Clock and compiled by Brookings Institute, show that more than 643 million people across the world live in extreme poverty, with Africans accounting for about two-thirds of the total number... Despite being the largest oil producer

in Africa, Nigeria has struggled to translate its resource wealth into rising living standards.

In 2019 more than 40% of Nigeria's population was classified as poor (NBS, 2020), The current online report by World Poverty Clock puts Nigeria's population of extreme poverty to 50%, which reflects 14.5% of the global in extreme poverty (World Data Lab, 2020; World Bank, 2016). It is important to underscore that the Global South nations house the world's extreme poor (Kharas et al., 2018). These facts about Nigeria and Africa, therefore, clarify why several means are explored for survival including headloading in its various dimensions. Understanding the various socio-humanistic reasons for the above situation in Nigeria further implicates the nature of African colonialism and subalternity.

However, beyond the implicative relationship between Global North and Global South as explored above, this piece (Fig 7.10) further informs a general class structure that takes a cue from the forces and formats of African colonizers. It differentiates between the political and public, the wealthy and the struggling in Nigeria. The rich and their children do not carry headloads; the poor do. The politically and economically powerful subjugate and exploit the powerless as the latter function as production labourers and the powerful rule (Wolff, 2000) by making policies and providing minimum stipends. While I do not blame all the deficiencies of the Global South on the north, nor should Africa continue to bemoan its history, one cannot easily extricate Africa's development from the subtle impact of colonialism.

7. 9. Interdiscursive Relations between my practice and extant artworks

In this section I provide a summary connecting my analytical themes with the works of other artist previously reviewed. Interdiscursivity is a dimension of intertextuality with implied reference to extant sources (Bartesaghi and Noy, 2015). My articulation here provides a balance essential for a transmediated account. The presence of intertextual connection underscores the potency which transmediation affords in a narrative practice such as this.

In Chapter Three I have considered some of the works done by Nigerian artists. Although their practices were minimally or not at all theorised, I bring out the connecting ideas that they share. I do this bearing in mind the three analytical procedures for art based-study identified by Leavy (2018) which include having internal dialogue, the use of theoretical framing and/or literature. The internal dialogue includes reflective examination of the artist's emotional, psychological and intellectual responses through the process. For me, the internal dialogue process can function in two relevant ways: for the artist working through his or her production or for the researcher working through the analysis of artworks.

First, one of the ideas running through several of the artists' pieces point to headloading as a social burden. Social burden as I use it derives from the fact that although headloading is a private practice, it socially confers certain burdens on the practitioner. Instances can be seen in Figs 3.1 – 3.3. Udechukwu (1981) sketches on 'No Water' suggest that these headloaders are at the lowest rung of the social ladder in not being able to afford water or by being subjected to the distress of searching for water as a basic commodity. It therefore translates into a socio-economic problem. On the other hand, it berates the kind of government that rules the world's poorest. The poverty is evident in the skeletal structures of these subjects. In Nigeria such conditions of poverty include the lack of several basic amenities such as water and electricity. Although Udechukwu's exploration of 'No Water' has now been decades ago, the challenge still persists.

Another dimension to the burdensomeness of the headloading practice is visible in Figs 3.10 and 3.11, which deal with the plight of flight. People are seen fleeing areas of conflict as identified in the artist's statement (Udechukwu, 1984). In these pieces, headloading connects war and conflict, ill-health, hunger and malnutrition (Fig. 3.11; Fig. 3.12). In the essence of expanding the interpretation in my practice I express the concept on migration in its various shades and meanings. The commonest kind of migration in Nigeria today seems to be that of emigration, as the conditions of living are difficult, with inflation and leadership problems. Succinctly, then, it relates to many education, professionals, and refugee migrations.

Few of the works point to the theme and/or style of romanticism, which I did not explore in my practice. The potentially sexualised depictions shown by some artists in revealing the female body, were avoided, as well as the luscious 'colour orchestra' of some of the works. This theme connects with the stereotyping of headloading which I express in Chapter Two. The artists, Sukanthy Visappurmal and Dike Ifedioramma in Figs. 3.7 and 3.8 respectively, present headloading as a visually pleasing cultural practice as shown in the sensuous rendering of the female body as the subject of their works. There is a sense in which such a rendering shares ideology or connotation with the headloading representation on Nigeria's Naira notes (Figs. 3.21 and 3.22). Both representations fashion headloading as a point of attraction. In all these that include women in picturesque depictions of headloading, one should not fail to also recognise the strength, the versatility, and vision of women in Africa.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

■ *Introduction*

The study has interrogated headloading representation in order to connect it with socio-humanistic issues in Nigeria. The thesis has also explored the interpretive potential of transmediation in creative practice in order to provide semiotic extension of the headload culture. The creative practice is part of the process of transmediation used in this study. As an interpretive, qualitative study, which provides a mixture of perspectives, the transmediation technique and the representation of the headloading phenomenon were analysed with the semiotics framework, and in this case Barthes' denotation and connotation concepts.

Headloading has been an age-long practice in Nigeria, as a means of portage, which usually involved youths and women. This nature of portage was relevant owing to lack of developed transportation systems. It was premised on the fact that agricultural produce in Nigeria's rural settings would be moved to points of distribution or marketing. Thus, headloading also served a packaging function. It has also manifested in ceremonial function of marriage and funeral, which are both rites of passage, directions that could be further investigated in their terms. One could decide to further investigate and frame headloading as a subversive performance that could bring the offstage conversation of the oppressed onstage in coded form, among others. Headloading holds huge potential for further investigation.

The key idea of this study was to investigate and interpret representations of headloading. Deriving from the Facebook SNS, headloading conversation was

transmediated through semiotic analysis and creative practice. It is through this creative transmediation as an interpretive process that meanings are explored. My practice emerged as a visual language of communication while establishing various connotative and ideological instances to reflect the headloading phenomenon in different socio-humanistic conditions and relations in Nigeria. I have underscored that the occupations which the cultural carriage of headloading characterises define a complex system of social hierarchy and power relations.

■ *From Facebook to headloading narratives*

The preliminary part of the process was to find how the headloading motif has been used to develop Facebook narratives in Nigeria beyond the initial conversation connected to 'Lazy Nigerian Youth'. This entailed searching the platform and purposively sampling available narratives. A preliminary semiotic analysis was to lead to understanding the images and their context of use.

An initial semiotic reading and understanding of the images from Facebook helped to position them as my visual data through which the practice-led process would begin. Through this contextual investigation I underscored how users have used photographic postings in Facebook to engage the representation of this phenomenon. The headloading narratives on Facebook were, therefore, summed up into four key parts. These parts, as shown in Chapter Six, include the ironical presentation of headloading as hard work; headloading as a means of hawking goods; headloading as women's approach to domestic activities and sustenance; as well as headloading as a means of fleeing situations of conflict.

Headloading images categorised as hard work or otherwise as suffering included those with seeming overloads. This contextual organisation in line with a semiotic reading of the representative images from Facebook was the first level of my creative and transmediatory practice. In another instance, the loads carried signified ways young people showed interest in developing money-making skills or ways of facing the future.

The process here involved examining and tabulating each of the Facebook images and its narrative, using Barthes' denotative and connotative system of analysis. The semiotic analysis was relevant as it helped to articulate these images beyond what is visible and to underpin them in contexts of social events that gave rise to them. Some of the comments were selected considering their relevance to the images. The comments surrounding the posts gave textual clues to organise images thematically.

■ *Controlling the 'Africanness' of Headloading*

Many artists have enjoyed making headloading a subject of their art in various mediums. Only very few artists' drawings, such as Obiora Udechukwu's and Dele Jegede's include written pieces relevant to their headloading representation. My review of the related works showed that headloading as a subject has manifested in mediums such as illustration, paintings, photographs, prints, textiles and banknotes.

With the exception of a few artists (Ubogu, 2016; Udechukwu, 2002) whose works around headloading have some textual back up, many art works containing headloading representation did not provide explicit and substantial documentation of the social concern for which the artist conceived the practice. I believe the reason for this is because such pieces are merely single works rather than bodies of work and the artists are only concerned about exhibition rather than writing.

Through the review it became clear how the subject of headloading appeared in the works of many artists in Nigeria. As most of the artists' works appeared in catalogues, information available on them was just vignettes. They do not provide adequate explanation of the artists' concepts and creative details. This makes it difficult to understand or to position such pieces in their social, cultural or political contexts beyond what their titles suggest. However, certain themes were deducted from the available artworks, as shown in Chapter Three.

Examples of the themes include poverty, survival tactics, motherhood, hawking and conflict.

Similarly, Nigeria's naira banknotes perpetuate the imagery of headloading. The representation here shows Fulani milkmaids peddling their wares, as well as showing the cultural rite of marriage. All of these instances, with those expressed by other artists, were as yet to be given academic examination to access their social implicatures (and semiotics). Hence, the need to broadly explore meanings around the representation of such a phenomenon through creative process with principles of intertextuality or intersemioticity (Saldre and Torop, 2012).

In the review of the artworks (Section 3.3), I suggested that some of the works are stereotypical and romanticised in their presentation. The idea of the term 'control' for this section is informed by the need to balance the understanding of stereotypical in this context. Although some of the art works show romanticised renderings, ultimately, they are rough estimations of stereotyping since, as cultural producers, they are broadly aware of the ramifications of headloading practices and representation.

I would argue then for the possibility that, rather than contributing to romanticised stereotypes which are well-received by western audiences, the artists are acknowledging the headload motif for its powerful expressive potential. One may not deliberately place the understanding of stereotype here side by side with those of a racialized regime of representation with all of its fetishization, social relegation and conditioning and concepts of the gaze. The control of such understanding could be informed by the diversification of the themes attempted and expressed in the titles of the works (see Chapter Three). As the producers of their own cultures, a range of themes attempted in the different works by the artists reveals their understanding of headloading as not a one-sided representation.

■ *Transmediation directions*

The transmediation approach here is aggregated from its different understanding in media, education and creative practices. This is relevant as the different forms build on distinction and advancement of narrative as they

develop through different platforms (Jenkins, 2006). The presentation of the concept as taking understandings from one sign system and representing them in another, as stipulated by Semali (2002b), was central in my application.

My visual practice was predicated in understanding transmediation as a means of “communication of information across more than one medium or sign system” (Saldre and Torop, 2012: 1). This is bearing in mind that there is not just a single approach to creativity in such areas as spatiality, narratology and mediation for various fields (Ibrus and Scolari, 2012) as transmediatory processes are not limited to specific media and methodology (Aarseth, 2006). This posits the possibility of forging new frontiers in communication and meaning-making. This process enabled the possibility of semiotic extension which worked by means of ‘motivating the signs’ as discussed in Chapter Four. This is in order to provide a better discursive ambit of the headloading subject.

My transmediatory approach provided interpretive energy in visual art practice. In essence, the approach here synergised levels of production and interpretation (Carpentier, 2011) to provide visual resources on the social phenomenon of headloading. I did not restrict my study to the media notion of transmedia storytelling nor to the pedagogical. Rather, the approach is organised upon an interpretivist stance with methods that follow the principles of creative studio practice. The social media interest here covers two fronts – narrative sourcing from Facebook and distribution of my own creative interpretation.

Therefore, I engaged with headloading as a socio-cultural, socio-political and humanistic issue, through this creative process. By drawing visual data from Facebook and by following a digital studio process I developed the possibilities inherent in the principle of transmediation, as well as broadening social discourse latent in the practice and representation of headloading. In essence, this study began with my examination of headloading motifs and narratives from Facebook social networking site in Nigeria.

This initial contextual analysis resulted in a decipherment of specific social tendencies and issues, as well as other social gaps in Nigeria which the

headloading phenomenon epitomises. A step further was to explore each notion deciphered, in a visual term, using methods of studio-based research (Gray and Malins, 2004) which include reflection-in-action, reflexivity, ideation, different forms of intertextual understanding, and creative rendering. The creative processes without doubt derived from my auto-ethnographic experience as a participant in headloading culture. This positioned my artistic and interdisciplinary engagement with specific social, humanistic and political perceptions of Nigeria.

I underscore how headloading reflects several issues and conditions of society, not only for Nigeria but for most of the Global South nations, so defined as victims of colonisation or under inept government. In this study, therefore, I give the headloading narrative discursively from the standpoint of creative exploration occasioned particularly by a social media conversation. I further developed the work towards gallery or virtual exhibition and audience participation and engagement. It also provides the possibility of digital reproduction of the works on canvas.

Creating works in digital studio does not in any way discredit the creative authenticity or rigour of the practice. Rather digital art-making requires profound skills and experimental tact. In alluding to the kind of versatility involved in digital exploration of creative practice, Lehmann (2009: 33) underscores that an artist in the digital studio “has to be engineer, programmer, graphic designer, and hardware constructor all at once.” However, for me, in this study the focus is on how to organise and interpret semiotic content and the contexts of the images.

■ *Interpreting and semiotics*

In creating interpretation and constructing meaning, my works were further discursively expounded using a semiotic framework. I explored a holistic framework of practice in visual art which I refer to as a creative transmediation for visual semiotics. In semiotic language the images of my practice are signs. Headloading stood as the signified or the object, while the interpretation makes

sense of the sign. The sense here is the interpretant (Fiske, 2011). It is important to note that a major reason for my transmediatory procedure from social media to creative art platform was to aid the extension of the semiotic contents of headloading representation in order to properly position them for discursive insight. It was also to gain originality of the visual pieces as data on which this study is situated (Pauwels, 2011). I show the interpretive outcomes of the works.

Ultimately, my studio process showed the possibility of the headloading concept to provide connotative, ideological and creative dialogue for contemporary socio-humanistic issues in Nigeria. This connotative and ideological insight has opened up deep realities reflected in headloading representations. Layers of connotation, meanings and ideological stances were constructed from the transmediated works of the headloading concept. This derived from the conceptual nature of the works which emerged as visual metaphors. Of course, meanings in semiotics are not discovered: rather, they need to be constructed (Kress, 2010).

Such exploration and construction of meaning have occasioned the social and ideological instances of headloading representation in many ways. Firstly, it links headloading to the search for a better economic life through entrepreneurship. Such an approach to survival is common and some have thought it to be an expression of the dignity of labour, albeit a romanticised at times (Ubogu, 2016).

My analysis also links headloading to the challenges of 'brain drain' and or 'brain gain' which are especially rooted in migration, signified by headloading. This representation (Fig. 7.3) stands as a visual metaphor for various forms of migration and their socio-political connections, which is brain drain for the country. In 'brain drain' the country of origin loses, while in 'brain gain' the country of destination gains.

Furthermore, the notion of headloading as the making of headlines (igbu ozo) in one of my works in this study presents an ideological presentation about materialism in Nigeria. This piece (Fig. 6.4) details the extent to which Nigerians,

individuals and politicians, will go to in order to 'meet up.' This defines most reasons for headloading. The slang, 'meet up', defines the competitive spirit and ambition common in several Nigerian headloading and business events. Moreover, the piece here is a symbolic sum of the spirit with which Nigerians can go 'extra miles' to achieve goals of different categories, especially, the material, not minding the tension and toil.

The ideological deductions of the liminality of headloading detailed the tensions, the aesthesia, and the hazard required for status shift of the masses as shown in section 7.5. This idea of liminality connects rather strongly with the idea of making of headlines as I have earlier explicated, but it encloses a wider perspective of social and power relations. Foreign aid and alleviations, as another connotative dimension of headloading, expresses the idea of assistance required in the dislocation of headloading as social problems. Such assistance might minimise social problems signified in headloading in its pre-liminal and post-liminal stages. The headloader tends to forget that he/her burden, whether physical, financial, economic social or political, has not actually ended.

From another perspective when gender is involved in connotative headloading, the type of aid needed or expressed has to be properly considered. The place of gender, health and the social survival of women was one of the connotative underpinnings of this work. Beginning with the presence of the woman in the practice of headloading for domestic maintenance, I moved to her place in socio-political schemes at large. I thought about the possibility of extricating the African woman from the social and political challenges signified by headloading culture and its health implications, as well as its stereotypes. This interrogates the practice which deals with the presentation and perception of women as tourist sites and attraction.

My explanation on receiving aid and foreign assistance which headloading expresses moved further into the social, economic and political dimension with Africa facing the West or vice versa. This culminates in the characterisation of Africans or global southerners as subalterns. My analysis reimagines colonialism

as an ideological instance of headloading, which has left the Global South on a pathetic edge. The headloading narrative portends a significant power relation in which the headloader is subjugated in many ways, while the one without a load or the assistant is in control.

■ *Conclusion*

At this juncture, it is clear that one can make sense of headloading phenomenon following the Lazy Nigeria Youth conversation. Having come across the images of the conversation, the images of various artists on the subject, as well as the resulting works of this study, it is safe to say that a deeper interpretation and understanding have been attempted. Headloading in itself should not be concluded as an utter misfortune considering the connections between the cultural practice as creative adaption, its agency and power.

As a creative adaptation, headloading has served and continued to serve as a means of portage where other options of transportation are not available. The rural places are mostly at the behest of this approach. This understanding is foundational in interpreting headloading. The understanding gets a bit deeper in thinking of headloading as a means of breaking even, a leverage for those at the lower rung of economic ladder. This is espoused in my works in Figs 7.1 – 3, 5. Such leverage when properly explored could lead the headload participant out of his socio-economic challenges. That is *igbu ozu* (Fig 7.4), an attempt to be celebrated. But at the liminality of socio-economic headloading the headloader may take to protest and resistance when his load begins to bite as seen through the Facebook conversations that foregrounded this study. In his words Comaroff (1991) assert that “human agency is practice invested with subjectivity, meaning, and to a greater or lesser extent power.”

So the headload concept differentiates two classes: the low and the high. Ideologically, the practice stands as an agency of transiting across these two classes whether it is social, economic, political, educational, or otherwise. In a sense, headloading has become a metaphor for power, control between the poor and the rich, the working class headloaders who are supplying labour power

and the rich bosses and owners of business. This understanding furnishes the reason for the works in Fig. 7.8 and 7.9. The powerful rich nations in many ways try to alleviate conditions in poor or developing nations. Comaroff (1991: 17) insists that power is no longer left to “the formal bounds of ‘political’ institutions” but “has diffused and proliferated into hitherto uncharted terrains.” It exists and manifest in everyday life. I want to conclude that the transmediation approach in this study has helped to open up for me the hitherto hidden understanding around the headload culture.

■ *Engagement: Towards a future study*

Having articulated the key areas of this research, here I show the direction and area of interest that could provoke and extend the scope of this study in future. Images used in this study came from Facebook and, so, re-sharing and distributing the transmediated images and participants’ involvement could be a way of continuing the hermeneutic cycle of the ‘results’ of the study. I provide details below.

My works were virtually distributed, thinking of participatory engagement. In taking my works to a virtual space they begin a new life with new audiences. I am aware that it is not part of my objective for this study to include the participatory aspect of the work. Yet, this could hold potential for a future study.

In distributing and articulating a potential front for future engagement, I created an audience point of participation and interaction. I opened a new Facebook user account entitled [Headloading Art](#) for this study and a Facebook Page entitled [The Art of Headloading](#).

These virtual pages accommodate a good part of the images of my creative exploration. Participation, therefore, is enabled. Van Koten (2009: 92) emphasises that “the user shifts from non-participatory mode when contemplating an image, into a participatory mode when operating tools for action.” In a sense, by moving the image into a medium or platform with interactive capacity and options, participatory engagement and activities take place.

There is a sense in which the audience control and properly appropriate the interaction when operating the screen rather than when viewing on gallery walls. The screen affords a different perception and materiality of the visual in comparison with other mediums. There is a connection between affordance and materiality (See Section 4.8 for details).

In Fig 8.1 is a collage of both my source images and the outcomes of my creative transmediation as they are placed within the Facebook social media page on which my works are distributed. Some of the images in this collage are toned down from their original colours. This piece also contains selected comments from the participants, the virtual audience who interacted with some of the works on Facebook. These comments are important to consider, at least a few, in order to see the potential that this process reserves in creative production and visual communication of this kind. In general, the comments show that the audience followed intently on the developing narrative in thinking of headloading beyond its ordinariness.

While I do not stretch the analysis of the individual comments, I present some of them verbatim at this stage in order to affirm that feedback is part of the visual communication elicited. I began by creating a Facebook account with the introduction:

This is a project investigation headloading practice. It seeks to know what headloading means to you, especially from a Nigerian experience. We've created artworks on headloading. DO PARTICIPATE, COMMENT AND CONNECT your domestic, economic, social, political, religious experience with the posts as the come. #The Art of Headloading.

In making posts on the page, each piece was introduced with a text describing the concept in order to guide participants in their comments or to give a clue as to what concept was expressed in the piece. For instance, in posting the image of "Migration and Other Journeys," this description was given:

PLEASE COMMENT: This piece explores the connection between headloading and migration. It derives from the facts that a number of aspect of migration such as fleeing from conflicts and other transnational crossings involve load carriage. You can also think about 'refugeeism,' asylum-seeking, internally displaced persons, border-crossing, trekking through Sahara desert, etc.

The Facebook Headloading Art page contains some of the responses and comments from the participants. Although I have already discussed these art works, in presenting the comments here, I show the advance in the communication process of my creative practice. Below are excerpts drawn from <https://web.facebook.com/headloading.art.3>:

Comment 1: [B●● A●● Headloading Art](#) interesting yet. The issue of head loading must first be consumed from the medical point of view. Are the real medical intonations? Maybe you should bring some medics on board. If there is some linkage then we could get some contextualisation with regards to social, political and economic parlance. My 2 pences...

Comment 2: [Headloading Art](#) Thanks for your comments. Medical research has been done already. Here's a step further - the socio-political, socio-cultural and otherwise through artistic inquiry.

Comment 3: [E●● E●●](#) I agree that brain drain is a necessary consequence of "headloading", but it is the brainy that are drained outta the shores 😊 Any ties between poverty, illiteracy and headloading?

Comment 4: [O●● U●●](#) If I understand the concept well, I think that the south is under Serious pressure since the neck is already bent from the load, but the load itself doesn't really look big enough to bend the neck to that extent. Maybe you should look at the weight of the North and its attendant effect on the South.

Comment 5: [C●● N●●](#) He is dead while alive, hence his blood stained body and dress appear mingled.

The first two comments above ensued in response to the image post on 'Brain Drain,' while the others concerned the post on 'Global North on South.' It is important to note that these posts are still online and will be attracting more comments. By taking a participatory turn, this study underscores how a social phenomenon such as headloading can emerge as context and content of art production, mediation and consumption, thereby creating an interaction between the artist and the public. Rutten (2018: 2) writes: "the emphasis on participation in both contemporary art and (digital) media has led to an increasing convergence between participation, art and digital culture and an exploration of changing notions of interaction, space, place and community within the arts."

There is a huge possibility of innovation and reimagining in contemporary art ecology for production, timing and spacing, deployment, and audience. Beyond

active participation with the making of comments, the affordance of the Facebook platform also allows for a passive kind of audience presence which can be by mere viewing of art work and/or by clicking icons such as “like,” “love” or “wow.” All of these form the complex nature and interdisciplinary connection of contemporary art in digital culture. The question of preservation and archiving of digital forms comes to mind.

The archival of digital art forms has continued to be in practice for about two decades now, beginning with such notions as hypermedia and databases (Harrison, 2009). Further developments have come upon us in such details as archives in the cloud or on more developed databases, which various social networking sites have adopted. With the emergence of several social networking sites, there has been the development of cloud storage and databases house images as digital archives and advance virtual distribution of data.

Of the possibilities that are available for digital and virtual art, Laforet (2009: p.109) questions: “How should the conservation of a living artistic practice in flux be approached?” The question of artistic practice in flux identifies many contemporary art practices characterised by ephemerality, whose processes are more a point of concern to the artist than their products. This temporality is not an isolated case.

Connected to this question is another question about the permanence of digital archiving. In this regard, Laforet rightly suggests that documentation could be a prioritised approach to preservation and a relevant archival practice for the arts whose forms and mediums are challenged on permanence. Of course, there is no certainty of the permanence of the social networking sites themselves and their ability to accommodate huge numbers of images and files online without crashing. For me, wherever the works are archived, other ways of backing up can support the demand for permanence. While I have distributed my works on Facebook social media site, these works are still reproducible unto canvases for gallery exhibition.

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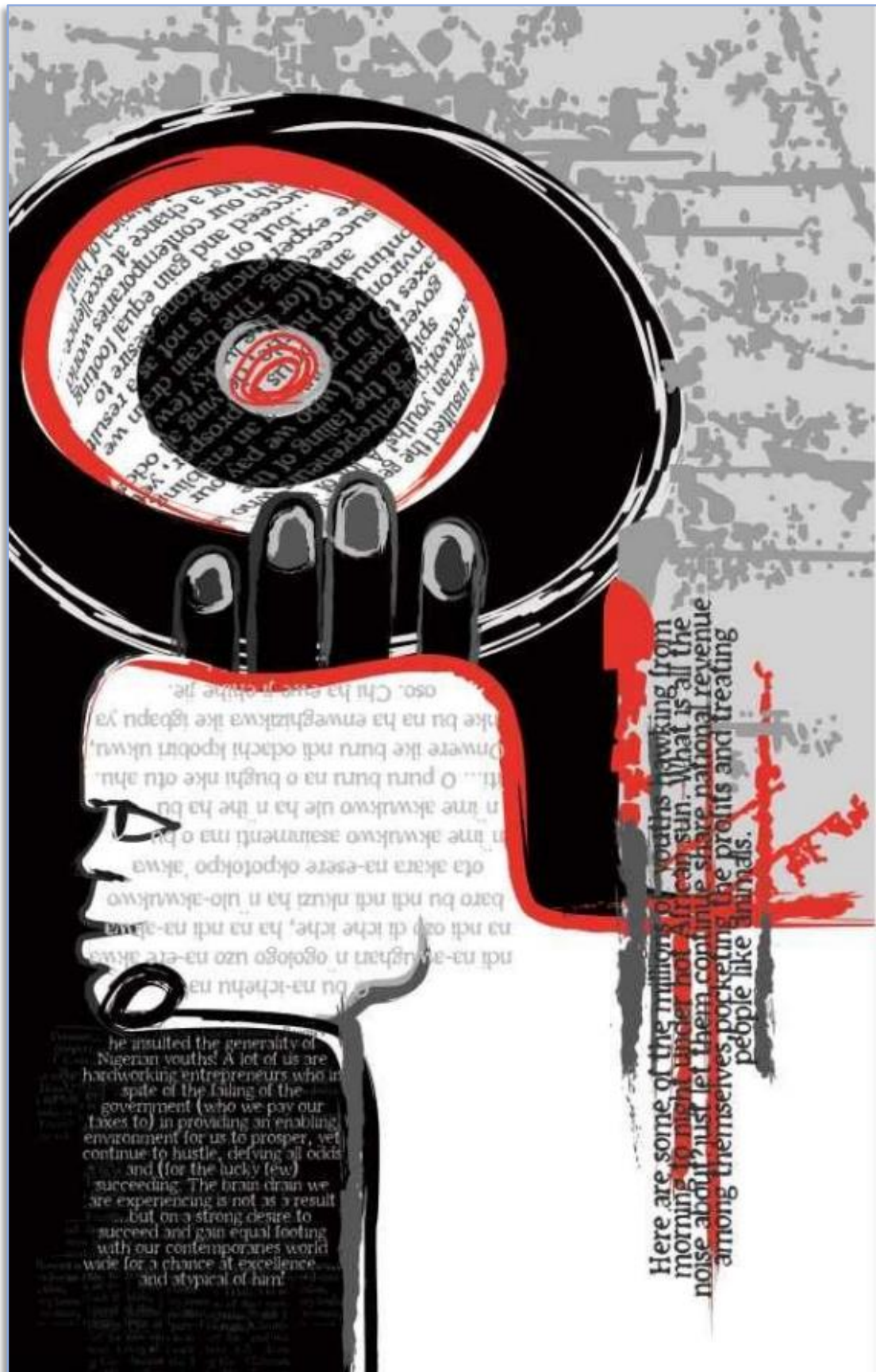
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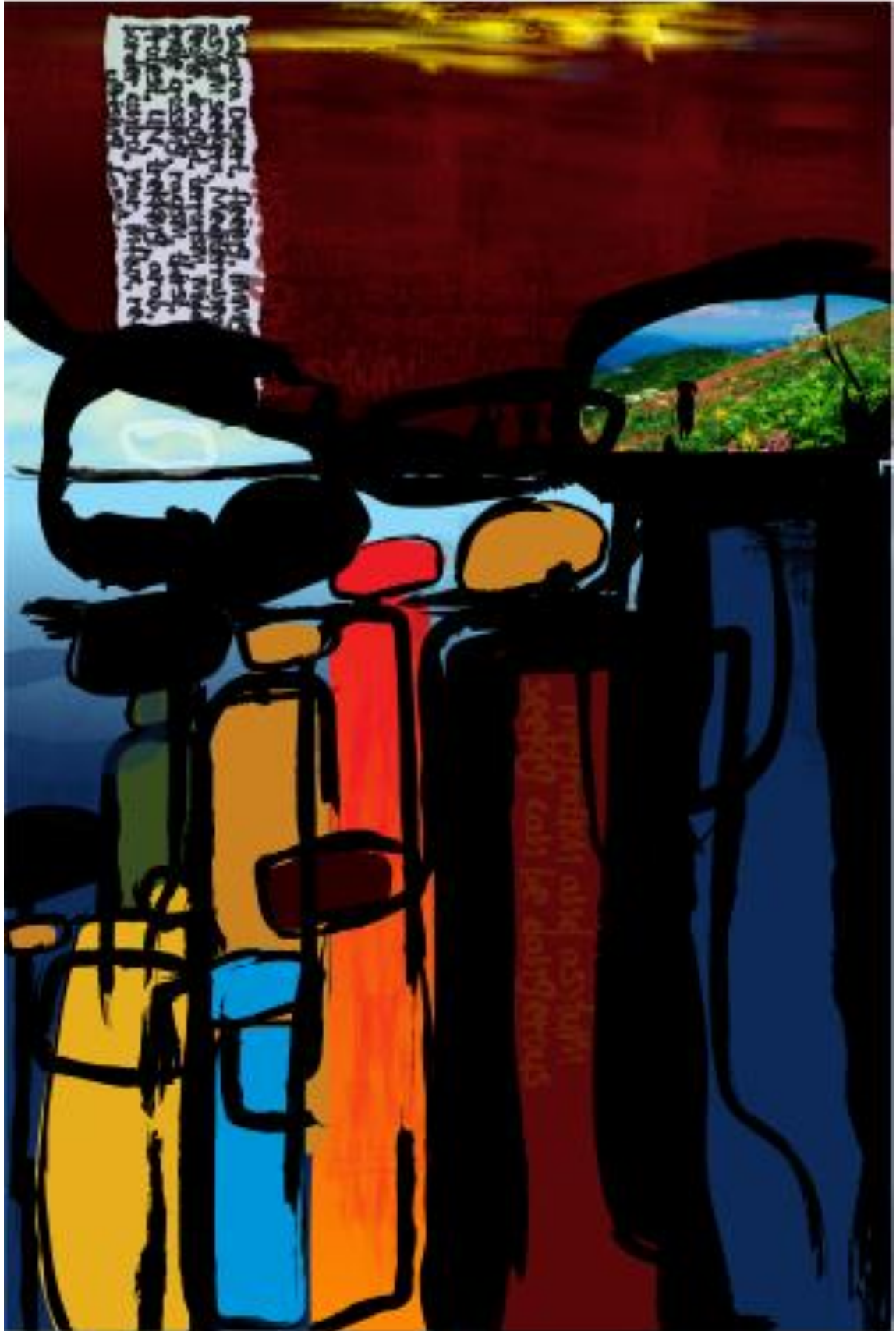
- *Entrepreneurs and hustlers, 2.5x4ft,*



■ *Brain drain, 2.5x4ft*



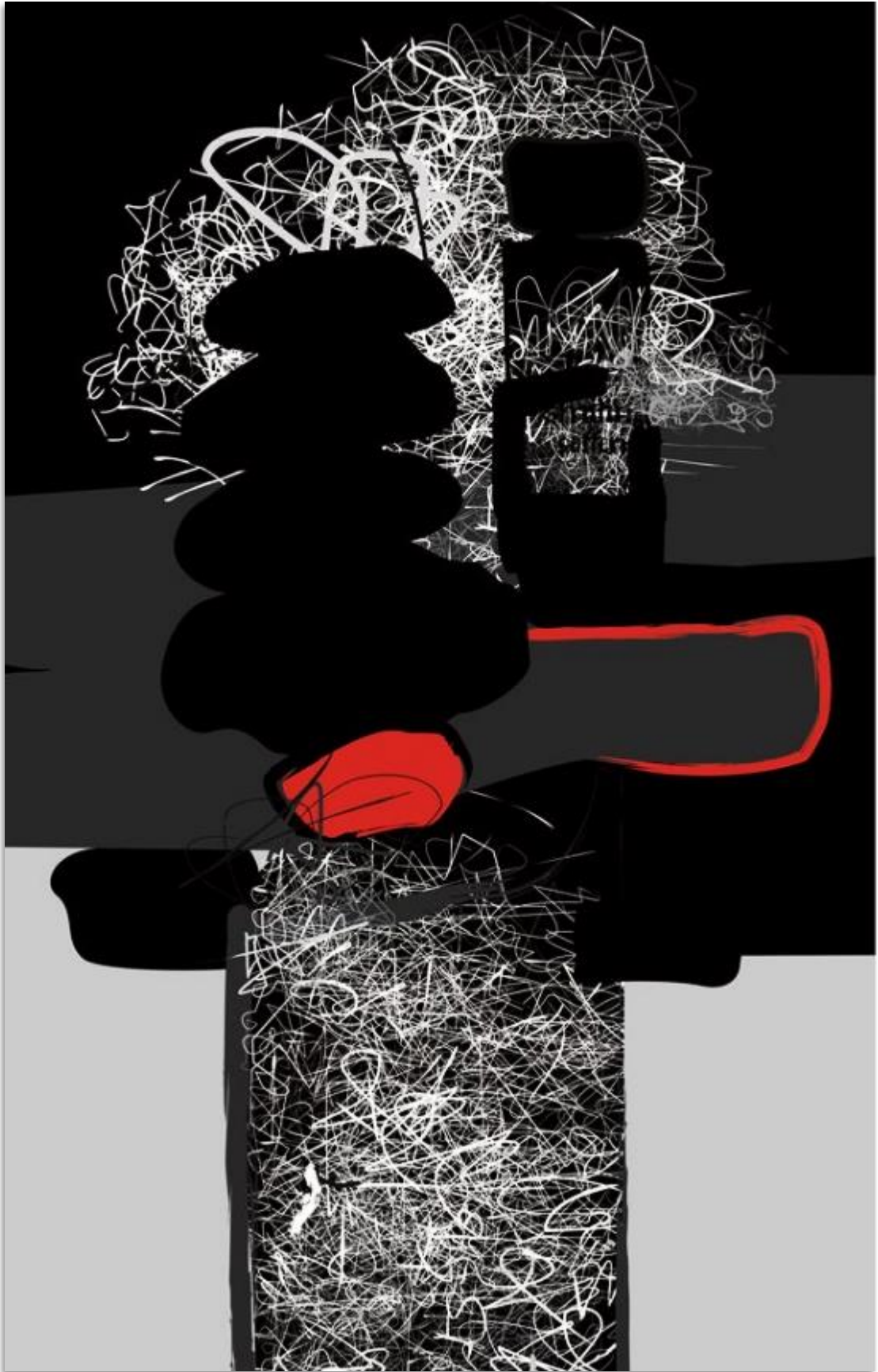
- *Migration and other journeys, 3x4.5ft*



- *Global North on South, 2.4x3.7ft*



■ *The Making of Headlines, 2.5x4ft*



- *Health-load and the Woman, 2.5x4ft*



- *Liminality and Aesthetics, 2.2x3.6ft*



- Palliative and Alleviative cycles, 2.4x3.7ft



■ *Foreign Aid, 3x4.5ft*



Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance



27 October 2020

Mr Trevor Vermont Morgan (217081778)
School Of Arts
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mr Morgan,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00000618/2019

Project title: An investigation into the representation of Nigerian Headloading narratives using semiotic analysis and creative transmediation

Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 14 October 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL** on the following condition:

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 27 October 2021.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

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