



Signs That Move: Mobile Semiosis, Intercultural Visual Communication, and the Cultural Semiotics of Commercial Vehicles in Urban Northern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Commercial vehicles in urban Northern Nigeria, particularly Kano's densely networked motor parks and thoroughfares, constitute a dynamic, mobile field of visual meaning-making that has remained theoretically underexplored in African communication scholarship. This paper develops and operationalises the Mobile Semiosis Framework (MSF), an integrative theoretical model that synthesises Peircean triadic semiotics, Barthesian mythologies, and the New Mobilities Paradigm to analyse the semiotic dimensions of visual inscriptions on commercial vehicles. Departing from Eurocentric interpretive defaults, the MSF foregrounds the indigenous epistemological logics of Hausa cultural symbolism, Islamic visual ethics, and Northern Nigerian urban aesthetics as constitutive, rather than peripheral, semiotic codes. The paper argues that commercial vehicle inscriptions function simultaneously as communicative acts, cultural memory repositories, and intercultural negotiation sites across the mobile contact zones of Kano's metropolitan space. Drawing on Nwosu's (2009) intercultural communication framework, Yankah's (1995) oral tradition scholarship, and Okafor's (2020) African visual semiotics, alongside canonical semiotic theory, the MSF advances a decolonial corrective to sign theory, de-centring Western interpretive defaults in favour of the lived communicative practices of West African urban publics. Implications are discussed for African communication theory, visual culture studies, and intercultural communication pedagogy.

Keywords: Commercial Vehicles; Decolonial Communication Theory; Hausa Visual Culture; Mobile Semiosis; New Mobilities Paradigm

1. Introduction

The streets of Kano, Nigeria's second-largest city and the commercial heartland of the Hausa-Muslim north, are animated by a semiotic density that formal communication scholarship has seldom engaged with adequate theoretical rigour. On the bodies of minibuses, buses, trucks, and tricycles (Keke Napep) one encounters a polyphonic visual field: Qur'anic inscriptions in Arabic calligraphy, Hausa proverbs rendered in improvised typefaces, imagery invoking political authority, Kannywood celebrity culture, Sufi brotherhood symbolism, and globalised commercial branding, all co-present on a single mobile surface moving through the heterogeneous urban landscape. These inscriptions are not decorative noise. They are, as Barthes (1957/2009) would insist, myths: second-order semiological systems that naturalise ideological meanings; and, as Peirce (1931–1958) would recognise, triadic sign events that produce interpretants in the minds of percipients embedded in specific cultural communities.

Yet the scholarly literature on African urban visual culture has remained thin and, where it does exist, often tethered to frameworks derived from Western European urban semiology (see Gottdiener & Lagopoulos, 1986; Culler, 1981). There is an urgent need for theoretically grounded, empirically attentive, and epistemologically de-centred frameworks capable of making sense of the rich semiotic worlds produced and consumed by everyday urban Africans. This paper responds to that need by presenting the Mobile Semiosis Framework (MSF), an integrative theoretical architecture developed specifically to analyse the visual communication practices embedded in commercial vehicle culture in urban Northern Nigeria.

The MSF draws on three theoretical traditions: (1) Peircean semiotics, specifically the triadic sign model of representamen-object-interpretant and Peirce's typologies of icon, index, and symbol; (2) Barthesian cultural semiology, particularly his concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth; and (3) the New Mobilities Paradigm (Urry, 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2006), which reframes movement not merely as physical displacement but as a socially and semiotically productive force. Crucially, the MSF embeds these three canonical frameworks within an African epistemological matrix that draws on Hausa oral and visual tradition (Yankah, 1995; Daba, 2018), Islamic aesthetics and hermeneutics (Muhammad, 2016), and the intercultural communication scholarship rooted in African social contexts (Nwosu, 2009; Ugboajah, 1985; Okafor, 2020). Together, these four resources, the three canonical traditions and the indigenous epistemological matrix, constitute the full architecture of the MSF. The paper proceeds as follows: it first situates the framework within debates on African urban communication and the decolonial turn; it then elaborates each theoretical resource in turn; it next sets out the five operational analytical dimensions through which the resources are combined and illustrates them in two brief analyses; and it closes by discussing the framework's contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. African Urban Communication and the Decolonial Turn in Semiotics

2.1 The Poverty of Eurocentric Frameworks in African Visual Communication Studies

African communication scholarship has long grappled with the structural problem of theoretical dependency, the uncritical importation of analytical frameworks developed in, and for, Western social and cultural contexts (Ugboajah, 1985; Nyamnjoh, 2011; Mano, 2014). This dependency is nowhere more apparent than in the analysis of urban visual culture. Studies of street art, commercial signage, and vehicular inscription in African cities have often defaulted to frameworks, structuralist semiology, cultural studies, or urban sociology, that bear the epistemological imprints of European modernity (Fabian, 1998; Mbembe, 2001). The result is a chronic underrepresentation of the indigenous communicative logics that organise meaning for the very communities under study.

Nyamnjoh (2011) argues that African scholars must resist the 'bandwagon tendency' of uncritically adopting foreign intellectual fashions and instead develop frameworks adequate to African social realities. Zeleza (2006) similarly calls for the de-provincialisation of knowledge production in African studies, a project that requires not the rejection of Western theory but its de-centring, subjecting it to dialogue with indigenous epistemologies. The MSF does not abandon Peirce or Barthes; rather, it recontextualises them within the cultural logics of Hausa Northern Nigeria, insisting that interpretant-production, the very heart of Peircean semiosis, is a culturally situated act that

cannot be understood apart from the communicative traditions and cosmological frameworks of sign-interpreting communities (Okafor, 2020; Nwosu, 2009).

2.2 Commercial Vehicle Visual Culture as a Communicative Form

Commercial vehicle inscriptions constitute what Yankah (1995) might recognise as a form of public oral-visual rhetoric, utterances directed to mobile, heterogeneous audiences whose interpretive competencies are activated by shared cultural codes. In Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria, scholars have noted the communicative richness of commercial vehicle art without systematically theorising the semiotic mechanisms through which meaning is produced and received (Quarcoopome, 1993; Daba, 2018; Agberia, 2006). In Kano specifically, the commercial vehicle, whether a Keke Napep (the tricycle type operating under Kano State's Adaidaita Sahu transport regulation scheme), a long-haul truck, bus, or a city minibus, is a communicative surface that reflects, negotiates, and reproduces the cultural values, social tensions, and intercultural encounters that define urban life in a rapidly changing metropolis (Iro, 2019; Adamu, 2021).

The significance of this communicative form is amplified by two contextual factors unique to Kano. First, Kano is a city of extraordinary ethno-cultural complexity, a historic emirate that is simultaneously a post-colonial commercial hub, a site of recurring inter-religious tension, a Hausa-Fulani cultural heartland, and a city integrated into global trade and media networks (Paden, 2005; Casey, 2008). Second, the Islamic tradition that structures much of Kano's public culture has a rich relationship to visual representation, one that does not simply prohibit imagery, as popular misconception holds, but organises visual expression through the aesthetics of Arabic calligraphy, geometric patterning, and Qur'anic citation (Muhammad, 2016; Gruber, 2019). These two factors mean that commercial vehicle inscriptions in Kano are particularly layered sites of intercultural and inter-semiotic negotiation.

3. Theoretical Foundations of the Mobile Semiosis Framework

3.1 Peircean Triadic Semiotics

Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics offers the MSF its fundamental architectonic (Peirce, 1931–1958). Against the dyadic sign model of Saussure, signifier and signified, Peirce proposes a triadic structure: the representamen (the sign-vehicle), the object (what the sign stands for), and the interpretant (the meaning produced in the mind of the sign-user). This triadic model is theoretically superior for the analysis of mobile visual culture for two reasons. First, it foregrounds the dynamic and processual nature of semiosis: meaning is not a fixed relationship but an ongoing event. Second, and crucially for the MSF, the interpretant is inherently contextual and culturally embedded: it is produced by a specific community of interpreters, what Peirce calls a 'community of inquiry', whose interpretive habits are shaped by prior semiotic experience (Hoopes, 1991).

Peirce's typology of sign relations, icon (resemblance), index (causal or existential connection), and symbol (conventional or arbitrary relation), provides the MSF with a fine-grained analytical vocabulary. A painted image of a Sufi saint on a truck door may operate iconically (as a visual likeness), indexically (as an indicator of the driver's brotherhood affiliation), and symbolically (as a conventional marker of spiritual protection) simultaneously (Nöth, 1990). The MSF employs this typology not as a rigid categorisation but as an analytical heuristic that sensitises the analyst to the plurality of sign functions at work in any given vehicular inscription (Okafor, 2020).

3.2 Barthesian Cultural Semiology and Myth

Roland Barthes's (1957/2009) *Mythologies* and his subsequent elaboration in 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1977) provide the MSF with its tools for ideological analysis. Barthes distinguishes between denotation, the first-order, literal meaning of a sign, and connotation, the second-order meanings that mobilise cultural, ideological, and affective associations. At the second order, connotative systems can become naturalised into 'myth': what appears as mere description of reality is in fact the historical and political work of a dominant culture presenting its contingent values as universal and inevitable (Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1997).

For the MSF, Barthesian myth-analysis is essential to understanding how commercial vehicle inscriptions in Kano do not merely reflect social reality but actively participate in its production. An inscription invoking divine protection (e.g., 'Allah Ya Kiyaye', 'May Allah Protect') operates denotatively as a religious statement;

connotatively, it encodes a complex network of meanings around piety, fate, risk, masculinity, and the cosmological order of a Muslim public; mythologically, it naturalises the subordination of secular risk management to divine providence in a way that is ideologically productive for particular social interests (Adamu, 2021; Iro, 2019).

3.3 The New Mobilities Paradigm

The New Mobilities Paradigm (Urry, 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2006) constitutes the third theoretical pillar of the MSF. Urry's foundational argument is that social science must take movement seriously as a constitutive social force rather than treating it as mere background noise to the 'real' business of social structure and cultural meaning. Mobilities, of people, objects, images, and information, are not merely transport phenomena; they reshape social identities, reconfigure cultural boundaries, and generate new communicative spaces (Cresswell, 2006; Elliott & Urry, 2010).

For the MSF, the mobility of commercial vehicles is semiologically productive: the inscribed surface moves through multiple social and cultural zones within a single journey, encountering diverse interpretive communities whose semiotic codes may overlap, conflict, or be mutually opaque. Kano's commercial vehicles travel not only between urban and peri-urban spaces but between ethnic communities, social classes, the formal city and the informal economy, and, increasingly, local and globally-connected lifeworlds. The sign on the vehicle is thus not addressed to a stable, homogeneous audience but to a mobile, heterogeneous, and intercultural public (Nwosu, 2009; Adamu, 2021), an insight foundational to the MSF's reconceptualisation of vehicular inscription as intercultural communication.

3.4 Indigenous African Epistemological Resources

The MSF's fourth intellectual resource, and the one that most decisively marks its decolonial orientation, is the corpus of indigenous African communication and epistemological scholarship. Yankah's (1995) work on Akan proverb and public speech provides a model for understanding how condensed, figurative utterances function as high-density communicative acts that encode cultural memory, moral authority, and social instruction. Hausa verbal art, including *kirari* (praise epithets), *karin magana* (proverbs), and *kacici-kacici* (riddles), operates by analogous logics, deploying figurative compression to communicate complex social meanings (Skinner, 1980; Furniss, 1996). The MSF treats vehicular inscriptions in the Hausa tradition as a visual extension of this oral-figurative repertoire.

Alongside these oral-verbal forms, the Hausa-Islamic tradition supplies specifically epistemic and hermeneutic concepts that the MSF treats as constitutive theoretical resources rather than incidental cultural colour: *Zuciya* (the heart as the seat of wisdom, moral discernment, and communicative intent), *Tafakkur* (the Islamic hermeneutic practice of deep, reflective contemplation of signs), and *Ta'awwidh* (protective utterance, the invocation of divine protection through spoken or inscribed formulae). Introducing these terms here, alongside *karin magana* and *kirari*, establishes the full indigenous conceptual vocabulary before Dimension Five, below, puts it to analytical work.

Nwosu's (2009) intercultural communication framework, developed from an African philosophical base, argues that African communicative practices are organised around relational ontologies, a sense of personhood and community that is constitutively intersubjective, generating communicative values markedly different from the individualistic, information-transfer models dominant in Western communication theory. The MSF draws on this insight to argue that vehicular inscriptions in Kano are relational acts that position the vehicle owner within networks of community, spiritual obligation, political identity, and social aspiration (Okafor, 2020; Ugboajah, 1985).

A note on theoretical compatibility is warranted. Peircean semiotics and Barthesian semiology emerge from distinct intellectual genealogies: Peirce's triadic model is rooted in pragmatist philosophy, treating signification as an open-ended, inferential process, whereas Barthes's account of denotation, connotation, and myth develops within the structuralist tradition inaugurated by Saussure, treating signification as the product of stable, code-governed systems. The MSF does not treat these traditions as seamlessly continuous but as complementary: Peircean analysis specifies how meaning is generated and how it varies across interpreting communities, while Barthesian analysis specifies the ideological work that stabilised, shared meanings perform once they circulate as naturalised common sense. This is a deliberate theoretical eclecticism rather than an unexamined fusion.

4. The Mobile Semiosis Framework: Architecture and Components

Building on the three canonical traditions and the indigenous epistemological matrix outlined above, the MSF operationalises this architecture as five interlocking analytical dimensions, each corresponding to a distinct level of semiotic analysis. These dimensions are not sequential stages but simultaneous analytical registers that together constitute a comprehensive interpretive account of vehicular semiosis.

In practice, an analyst typically moves through the dimensions in the order presented below, establishing the material sign-vehicle before disaggregating its triadic and mythological meanings, then situating those meanings within the mobilities and indigenous-epistemic registers that condition their reception. No single dimension carries automatic priority; the dimension that proves most generative depends on the empirical question being asked. A study of driver identity construction will foreground the sign-vehicle and cultural-myth dimensions, whereas a study of audience reception across ethnic groups will foreground the triadic-semiosis and mobilities dimensions. Where dimensions suggest divergent readings, for example, where the sign-vehicle dimension identifies a decorative motive while the indigenous-epistemic dimension identifies a devotional one, the MSF treats this divergence not as a contradiction to be resolved but as itself analytically significant: evidence of the polysemy that mobile inscriptions sustain because they address heterogeneous, moving publics. Figure 1 represents the five dimensions in a radial, non-hierarchical arrangement around the vehicular inscription, visualising their status as simultaneous rather than sequential registers.

Figure 1. The five dimensions of the Mobile Semiosis Framework in radial, non-hierarchical relation to the vehicular inscription.



4.1 Dimension One: The Sign-Vehicle

The sign-vehicle dimension attends to the material properties of the inscription: its medium (paint, sticker, relief carving, textile), its location on the vehicle body (cab door, rear panel, bumper, windscreen), its typographic or visual style, its language(s) (Hausa, Arabic, English, or code-switched combinations), and its condition (new, weathered, partially effaced). These material properties are not pre-semiotic givens; they are themselves signs. The choice of Arabic calligraphy over Roman script encodes cultural and religious allegiances; an inscription on the rear panel, addressed to the vehicles behind, constitutes a different communicative act from one on the cab door, which addresses onlookers at stops and roadside (Daba, 2018; Muhammad, 2016).

This dimension requires what O'Toole (1994) calls a 'semiotic of visual grammar', an attentiveness to how formal and material properties participate in the production of meaning. For the MSF, it is inflected by the specific material culture of Northern Nigerian commercial vehicle practice: enamel paint in vivid primary colours associated with regional craft tradition; Islamic geometric patterning as border designs; and locally manufactured stickers bearing pre-formed Qur'anic texts or celebrity images (Iro, 2019).

4.2 Dimension Two: Triadic Semiosis

The triadic semiosis dimension applies Peirce's sign typology to disaggregate the representational relationships at work in a given inscription. The analyst asks: in what respect does this representamen stand for its object, iconically, indexically, or symbolically? And what interpretant does it produce, and how does this vary across interpretive communities?

Interpretant-variation is particularly important for the MSF's intercultural dimension. Peirce recognised that the final interpretant is the product of a community of inquiry sharing interpretive habits (Hoopes, 1991). In Kano's intercultural urban space, the community of interpreters is not unified: a Hausa-Muslim long-distance truck driver, a Southern Nigerian Igbo trader newly arrived in Kano, a young Kano resident immersed in global social media culture, and a foreign NGO worker will all produce different interpretants from the same vehicular inscription, activating different codes, memories, and affective responses (Nwosu, 2009; Adamu, 2021). The MSF treats this interpretant-plurality not as a complication to be resolved but as a primary datum revealing the intercultural dynamics of urban semiotic life.

4.3 Dimension Three: Cultural Myth and Ideology

The cultural myth dimension deploys Barthes's second-order semiology to identify the ideological work performed by vehicular inscriptions: what naturalised assumptions about social order, gender relations, religious authority, political power, or ethnic identity are encoded, and how does the inscription reproduce or contest dominant cultural myths?

Particular attention is given to three mythological complexes that structure much of Kano's commercial vehicle semiosis. First, the myth of divine providence, the pervasive encoding of vulnerability and protection in Islamic terms, which subordinates human agency to divine will (Adamu, 2021; Muhammad, 2016). Second, the myth of masculine journeying, the inscription of the driver as a heroic, risk-taking subject whose mobility is a masculine achievement (Iro, 2019; Daba, 2018). Third, the myth of ethnic heritage, the inscription of Hausa cultural identity through proverbs, visual motifs, and linguistic choices that assert local rootedness while negotiating global cultural flows (Furniss, 1996; Yankah, 1995).

4.4 Dimension Four: Mobilities and Contact Zones

The mobilities dimension asks how the movement of the vehicle-as-sign through urban space modifies the semiotic event. Drawing on Sheller and Urry (2006) and Pratt's (1992) concept of the 'contact zone', social spaces where disparate cultures meet and negotiate, the MSF reconceptualises Kano's urban thoroughfares as semiotic contact zones: mobile, unstable fields of intercultural encounter in which vehicular inscriptions are addressed to shifting, heterogeneous publics constituted by the vehicle's movement.

This dimension also attends to what Urry (2007) calls 'moorings', the fixed infrastructural points (motor parks, checkpoints, markets, mosques) at which mobile objects temporarily rest and are encountered by denser, more homogeneous audiences. Meaning may vary substantially between an inscription's mobile reception (brief, fleeting, distanced) and its moored reception (extended, proximate, communal), a distinction the MSF uses to theorise the temporal and spatial dynamics of vehicular meaning-making (Cresswell, 2006; Elliott & Urry, 2010).

4.5 Dimension Five: The Indigenous Epistemic Register

The indigenous epistemic dimension is the MSF's most distinctive contribution to semiotic theory. It insists that the analytical framework itself, not merely the data it analyses, must be accountable to the communicative epistemologies of the community under study, taking seriously Zuciya, Tafakkur, and the broader African relational ontology in which communication is constitutively communal rather than individual (Nwosu, 2009; Okafor, 2020; Muhammad, 2016).

Concretely, the MSF reads vehicular inscriptions not only as objects of scholarly analysis but as instances of indigenous communicative practice, asking not only 'what does this sign mean?' (the semiologist's question) but 'what is this sign doing in this community's communicative life?' (the ethnographic question) and 'what does this sign know?' (the epistemological question that takes indigenous knowledge seriously on its own terms) (Yankah, 1995; Zeleza, 2006; Nyamnjoh, 2011).

A fifth concept, Alama (sign, mark, or token, from the Arabic 'Alama), names the indigenous lexical category of 'sign' itself. Unlike Peirce's formally defined representamen, Alama carries a connotation of a divinely ordained, providentially meaningful mark rather than a neutral vehicle of representation. This bears on the framework's theoretical status: the MSF treats Zuciya, Tafakkur, Ta'awwidh, and Alama not as a free-standing theory competing with Peircean interpretant-production, but as culturally specific instantiations of it, specifying, for Hausa-Islamic interpretive communities, what mental and moral state an interpretant takes (reflective, devotionally oriented Tafakkur rather than mere cognitive recognition) and what kind of object a sign is taken to indicate (a providentially meaningful Alama rather than a neutral referent).

This dimension also carries a risk worth naming: essentialising 'Hausa-Islamic' epistemology as a single, monolithic standpoint. Hausa communities are internally diverse along lines of Sufi brotherhood affiliation, generation, class, and exposure to global media culture, and Islamic practice in Kano encompasses considerable doctrinal variation. The indigenous-epistemic dimension should therefore be read as identifying culturally available interpretive resources that Hausa-Muslim audiences draw upon with varying intensity and conviction, not a uniform interpretive subject. Naming this risk strengthens, rather than weakens, the framework's decolonial claim, since decolonial theorising can itself reproduce the homogenising gestures, it critiques if inattentive to internal difference.

5. Analytical Illustrations: The MSF in Action

The two analyses that follow are illustrative rather than the output of a systematic corpus study. They are grounded in sustained observation of, and general familiarity with, commercial vehicle inscription practices in Kano's motor parks and urban corridors, rather than in a dated programme of photographic fieldwork, and are presented here to demonstrate the MSF's analytical productivity and render its five dimensions concrete. Systematic, dated photographic documentation across a larger corpus is identified below as a priority for future research. Statements about how commonly particular inscriptions occur reflect this observational basis and are hedged accordingly.

5.1 Qur'anic Inscription as Polysemic Sign

Consider the commonly observed inscription 'Bismillahi' ('In the Name of Allah'), which appears to open many commercial vehicle journeys and is often painted in elaborate Arabic calligraphy across the windscreen or hood. At the sign-vehicle level, the choice of Arabic calligraphy over transliteration encodes Islamic orthographic authority and the vehicle owner's cultural capital (Muhammad, 2016). At the triadic-semiosis level, the inscription operates symbolically, but also indexically: its presence is an existential index of the driver's Muslim identity and submission to divine authority before a potentially dangerous journey (Peirce, 1931–1958; Nöth, 1990).

At the cultural-myth level, 'Bismillahi' naturalises the idea that the journey is undertaken not in the driver's own capacity but under divine auspices, an encoding that simultaneously expresses genuine piety and offloads moral responsibility for outcomes onto the divine order (Adamu, 2021; Barthes, 1957/2009). At the mobilities level, its meaning is most densely received by Hausa-Muslim audiences sharing its theological codes, and this reception intensifies at moorings such as motor parks, where the inscription is read closely and communally rather than merely glimpsed in transit (Urry, 2007). At the indigenous epistemic level, the inscription draws on the tradition of

Ta'awwidh, protective utterances, which has a long history in Northern Nigerian material culture, from leather talismans to architectural decoration (Paden, 2005; Furniss, 1996).

5.2 Hausa Proverb as Intercultural Communicative Act

A second example: the Hausa proverb 'Gobe ta Allah ce' ('Tomorrow is unknown/uncertain'), of the kind commonly observed on the rear panels of Kano minibuses and tricycles. At the sign-vehicle level, the Hausa-language inscription addresses primarily Hausa-speaking audiences, an act of ethno-linguistic positioning (Furniss, 1996; Skinner, 1980). At the triadic-semiosis level, the proverb operates predominantly as a symbol, its meaning requiring knowledge of the Hausa proverbial tradition and the cultural weight attached to uncertainty and divine timing (Yankah, 1995).

At the cultural-myth level, the proverb naturalises the idea that the future is radically open and human planning limited; this encoding is not politically neutral, as it may discourage structural critique of the conditions that make drivers' lives precarious, naturalising precarity as metaphysical fate rather than social inequality (Barthes, 1977; Hall, 1997; Nyamnjoh, 2011). At the mobilities level, its rear-panel placement addresses following vehicles, constituting a community of shared vulnerability (Iro, 2019), an ideological work more fully activated at moorings such as motor parks, where the proverb can be read at leisure, than in fleeting roadside encounters (Urry, 2007). At the indigenous epistemic level, the proverb draws on *karin magana* as a form of wisdom-bearing compressed speech, whose authority rests on its embeddedness in community memory (Furniss, 1996; Yankah, 1995).

6. Theoretical Implications and Contributions

6.1 Contribution to African Communication Theory

The MSF makes three principal contributions to African communication scholarship. First, it advances theoretically grounded, empirically attentive African communication research by providing a rigorous analytical framework derived from, and accountable to, the communicative realities of a specific African urban context, addressing the recurring call, from Ugboajah (1985) to Nyamnjoh (2011) to Okafor (2020), for frameworks that take African communicative practices seriously on their own terms.

Second, the MSF contributes to the growing literature on African visual communication by theorising the semiotic dimensions of commercial vehicle inscription, a communicative form widely observed across sub-Saharan Africa that has nonetheless received minimal systematic scholarly attention, opening a field of inquiry that could extend to cities across West, East, and Southern Africa (Daba, 2018; Agberia, 2006; Mano, 2014).

Third, the MSF's indigenous epistemic dimension contributes to the decolonial turn by arguing that decolonisation is not merely a matter of choosing different research topics but of transforming the epistemological foundations of analytical frameworks. By insisting that Hausa-Islamic communicative logics, *Zuciya*, *Tafakkur*, *karin magana*, *Ta'awwidh*, are structural components of the analytical framework itself, the MSF contributes to the de-centring of Western sign theory that Zeleza (2006) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) call for, at the level of methodology. It does not claim to complete that project, but to advance it by placing indigenous epistemic resources in dialogue with, rather than beneath, canonical frameworks.

6.2 Contribution to Semiotic Theory

The MSF makes a further, more foundational contribution to semiotic theory by demonstrating the analytical necessity of cultural contextualisation in sign analysis. The dominant tendency in canonical semiotics, from Saussure to Eco to Derrida, has been to theorise the sign at a level of abstraction that aspires to universality but achieves it only by silencing cultural particularity (Okafor, 2020; Nöth, 1990). The MSF's demonstration that interpretant-production is irreducibly culturally situated constitutes an empirical argument for a culturally-situated semiotics that treats interpretive community as a variable of the first order.

This resonates with, and extends, developments in social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988; van Leeuwen, 2005), which ground sign analysis in social practice. The MSF pushes this move into an explicitly decolonial register, insisting that the 'social' in social semiotics must encompass African urban publics whose semiotic practices have

been systematically excluded from canonical sign theory.

6.3 Contribution to Intercultural Communication Studies

For intercultural communication studies, the MSF offers a framework for analysing 'ambient intercultural communication', encounters generated not by deliberate cross-cultural exchange but by the routine circulation of culturally inscribed objects through heterogeneous urban space. Kano's commercial vehicles do not seek intercultural communication; they produce it, involuntarily and continuously, drawing on Nwosu's (2009) relational framework to argue that meanings generated in these mobile encounters are actively negotiated by audiences whose interpretive competencies vary along axes of ethnicity, religion, class, age, and global connectivity.

This speaks to a growing recognition that intercultural communication scholarship must move beyond face-to-face cross-cultural interaction toward the mediated, material, and ambient dimensions of intercultural life (Poutiainen, 2014; Moon, 2010). The MSF's mobilities dimension is particularly relevant here, providing theoretical resources for understanding how culturally inscribed objects moving through intercultural urban space generate new forms of communicative encounter that existing frameworks are ill-equipped to theorise.

7. Conclusion

This paper has presented the Mobile Semiosis Framework as an integrative theoretical architecture for the analysis of commercial vehicle visual culture in urban Northern Nigeria. By synthesising Peircean triadic semiotics, Barthesian cultural mythology, the New Mobilities Paradigm, and indigenous African communicative epistemologies, the MSF provides a multi-dimensional analytical framework capable of revealing the semiotic complexity of a communicative form that scholarship has neglected at its own theoretical cost.

The argument at the heart of the MSF is both empirical and epistemological. Empirically, commercial vehicle inscriptions in Kano are dense, polysemic communicative acts through which urban communities negotiate identity, cosmology, ethnicity, gender, and social aspiration in motion. Epistemologically, any framework adequate to this semiotic world must be accountable not only to Western semiological tradition but to the indigenous communicative logics of Hausa-Islamic culture, a demand that constitutes the MSF's most significant departure from conventional sign theory and its most significant contribution to the de-centring of Western sign theory within African communication scholarship.

Three limitations should be acknowledged. First, the MSF has not yet been applied systematically to a large corpus of vehicular inscriptions; the illustrative analyses offered here demonstrate the framework's productivity but do not establish its patterns of application across the full range of inscription types and neighbourhoods that make up Kano's commercial transport sector. Second, the framework is synchronic rather than diachronic: it does not yet theorise how vehicular sign systems change over time. Third, the MSF's current dimensions were developed with reference to painted, printed, and calligraphic inscriptions and do not yet address digital elements, such as QR codes and social media handles, increasingly appearing on Kano's commercial vehicles.

Future research applying the MSF should pursue two directions that respond directly to these limitations. First, empirical fieldwork in Kano's motor parks and urban corridors is needed to test and refine the framework's dimensions against the full diversity of vehicular inscription practices, including their digital elements. Second, comparative application of the MSF across other West African urban contexts, Lagos, Accra, Dakar, would allow assessment of the framework's transferability and the development of a genuinely Pan-African visual communication theory. The signs are moving; it is time for scholarship to follow.

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