

## ***Wood-Off-Cuts as a Creative Resource: a Metaphorical Reflection on “The Ruler and the Ruled” Sculpture Project***

**Chikelue Chris Akabuike**

*University of Nigeria, Nsukka*

### **Abstract**

“The Ruler and the Ruled” sculpture project engages the use of joinery in a process-oriented studio exploration. It explores wood-off-cuts using dovetail, flatlock, and dado joints among others as a method in an upcycling process to create visual imageries that metaphorically address the misinterpretations and consequences of Nigeria’s socio-political settings. Works selected for discussion include *Genesis of Disintegration*, *Entanglement*, and *Marriage of East and West*. Conceptually, these works address the plights of the downtrodden. Other African artists such as Sumegne, Dilomprizulike, Hazoume and Titos have created works that border around the same theme. However, the use of wood-offcuts effectively exploits upcycle in a creative interpretation distinct from tying, welding, and assemblage processes of joining, as practised respectively by the aforementioned artists. Nonetheless, this study attempts to validate how wood offcuts form part of the ongoing dialogue of the downtrodden. Focusing on joinery and its aesthetic effects, it metaphorically interprets the emerging forms while their formal features are conceptually analyzed using theories and models of visual social semiotics. Findings show that significant socio-political issues were raised through the range of works that address the plight of the downtrodden and the implications were also highlighted.

**Keywords:** Wood-offcuts, The Ruler and the Ruled, Sculpture project, Downtrodden, Creative Resources, multimodality, Semiotic resources.

### **1. Introduction**

The use of seemingly waste materials to create an art form that adds aesthetic values to the environment and as well generates a means of livelihood for the artist that produces from such materials has become a focus in the twenty-first-century art practice (Akabuike, 2021a; Akabuike, 2021b; Ngwu, 2020; Ngwu, 2019; Obodo & Morgan, 2014). This has given rise to a lot of innovation in the field of creative art. These works sometimes metaphorically advocate the need to salvage the environment from degradation which would result in the improvement of health and quality of living among humans and the natural environment. Other times, they metaphorically advocate changes in harmful human activities that harbour unkind treatments of the downtrodden, emanating from political, economic, and social organizations.

Something that all artists have in common is their ability to draw from the materials around them, each in their unique way; to call for a reassessment of humanity's relationship as regards the political, economic, and social policies sometimes meted out to the downtrodden (Njami, 2005). The relationships between the rulers and the ruled in Africa are always strained by different forms of marginalization, agitations, and suppression which usually leave the ruled class complaining and rebelling against the ruling class. These forms of unhealthy relationships constitute the crux of this paper.

The use of wood offcuts to formulate sculpture through a fabrication procedure known as the joinery process falls within the category of art forms under this discussion. This paper is a sequel to previous articles in the series of the Ruler and the Ruled studio explorations Akabuike, (2021a, b), which explore in detail the practices of other African upcycling artists who transform their waste materials back into aesthetic objects that sometimes address human socio-political activities, especially as it relates to the downtrodden in society. It is against this background that "The Ruler and the Ruled" project, as a process-oriented studio exploration, (about which this paper reports) engages the use of joints, such as dovetail, flatlock, dado, rabbet, cross-lap, mortise and tenon, dowel, dowel in edge, mitre, halve, finger, and booth among other conventional and unconventional joinery processes in its interaction with wood. The project is also geared towards creating visual imageries that corroborate the efforts of other African artists and writers who metaphorically reflect on the ongoing socio-political issues and discuss events of the downtrodden within Nigeria, Africa and the world at large (Akabuike, 2020). This paper metaphorically analyses the formal features of the exploration results and discusses their conceptual references and meanings using the concept of multimodality, a qualitative and fine-grained analytical tool of meaning-making drawn from social semiotics theory.

## 2. Visual social semiotics

In visual communication, Micheal Halliday's *Language as Social Semiotic* in 1978 gave rise to other versions (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2015). It has been studied from such perspectives as content analysis (Bell 2001); cultural dimension (Stoian 2015); anthropological studies (Collier & Collier 1986); psychoanalysis (Diem-Ville 2001); film and television (Price 2015) and Social semiotics (Jewitt & Oyama 2001), (Stoian, 2016). This study, however, focused on the version proposed by Gunther Kress, Robert Hodge, Theo van Leeuwen, and others.

I discuss its connections with Pragmatics and other approaches, key concepts, analytical tools, and field applications to negotiate the nexus between a studio project and its socio-political implications. While *Visual Communication* conveys information and ideas visually. (Stoian, 2016), *Social semiotics* examines the production and dissemination of discourse across a variety of social and cultural contexts in which meaning is made by using a qualitative and fine-grained analytical tool of meaning-

making, such as "artefacts," "text," and "transcripts" (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2015). In this case, meaning is created through the "joinery as a sculpture process," and by drawing on social semiotics structures (that focus on meaning makers and meaning-making) while investigating wood media as the modes of communication to represent its understanding and shape power relations with the rulers and the ruled.

While Michael Halliday's theories, presented in *Language as Social Semiotic* (1994; 2004), metafunctions, Halliday & Matthiessen (2004), contend that each sign performs three simultaneous functions—expressing ideas about the world (the "ideational metafunction"), putting people in relation to one another (the "interpersonal metafunction"), and connecting with other signs to create coherent text (the "textual metafunction"), Robert Hodge, van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress's critique of Halliday's theory was not only based on Marx's book *Language as Ideology* (Kress & Hodge, 1979; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2015) but extended metafunction to visual social semiotic resources (1996; 2006) and renamed it as representational, interactive and compositional (Stoian, 2016). They took a similar attitude in *Social Semiotics* (1988), exploring any set of semiotic resources that people utilize in daily life, including language resources as well as resources for images and other forms (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2015; Stoian, 2016). They also consider that "the visual, like all semiotic modes, has to serve several communicational (and representational) requirements to function as a full system of communication" (2006, p. 41).

The perspective of the Social semiotics adopted for this paper involves the description of semiotic resources, image analysis, other visual means of communication and interpretation of images in a socio-political perspective partially in line with Jewitt & Oyama (2001). Thus, visual resources are viewed from a functionalist perspective; and like any other semiotic resource, they carry out multiple metafunctions at once to communicate meaning. It is the "ideational metafunction" and the 'other forms' that capture the interest of this study which is situated in the notion that "...Social semiotics cannot assume that texts produce exactly the meanings and effects that their authors hope for: it is precisely the struggles and their uncertain outcomes that must be studied at the level of social action, and their effects in the production of meaning" as suggested by Hodge & Kress, (1988) in this study of wood-off-cuts for meaning production.

Social Semiotics argued against some of the working hypotheses of classical linguistics and semiotics and in favour of a placed perspective on communication, similar to Pragmatics, the study of language in relation to the users of the language. Social semiotics aims to account for 'context', not based on "a naïve text-context dichotomy", but rather based on the assumption that "context has to be theorized and understood as

another set of text" (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 8). Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) present a framework for the examination of images. The framework uses the system network as a heuristic framework for theorizing meaning as choice which is based on the broad semiotic characteristics of Halliday's social semiotic theory. In his book *The Language of Displayed Art* (1994), Michael O'Toole used Halliday's systemic functional grammar and the tools it provided to investigate the visual. Both approaches treat an image as a collection of resources for creating meaning.

In the 1990s, the topic of mode and multiple modes came to the forefront. The term "multimodality" became a keyword when the emphasis shifted from studying modes in isolation to focusing on how they interact (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2015). Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) describe the 'multimodal' perspective as follows.

"We aim to explore the common principle behind multimodal communication. We move away from the idea that the different modes in multimodal texts have strictly bounded and framed specialist tasks [...]. Instead, we move towards a view of multimodality in which common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes."  
(Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 2).

Due to the multimodal nature of social semiotics, they are able to address modes of decision-making that are usually ignored by pragmatics, particularly in situations where people are not physically present and words are not used, as in this project (the ruler and the ruled). However, the two present unique interpretations, drawing on ideas from their various perspectives on meaning creation and multimodality, where the empirical domains of pragmatics and social semiotics overlap. These terms are the sign, semiotic resource, mode, affordance, orchestration and so on, in the context of social semiotics.

To conceptualize and justify how wood-off-cuts (the signifier), contribute to the discourse of addressing the plights of the downtrodden (signs), I (the sign maker) employed those words appearing in the field of social semiotics in the analysis of the project's exploratory outcomes (the ruler and the ruled which is the signified). The developing forms (modes) are metaphorically interpreted while their formal aspects are theoretically investigated using theoretical models of visual social semiotics, with a focus on joinery (affordance) and its aesthetic implications. Additionally, this effort to employ wood-off-cuts as a tool for a creative interpretation (material, social, cultural and modal affordance) is not unique to other methods highlighted in the Routledge quarterly *Social Semiotics* (established in 1990), which presents itself as "a journal for discourse and critique looking for high quality, politically engaged papers that use textual analysis, discourse analysis, political economy, ethnography or combinations

of these and or other methods, to say something concrete about the nature of life in our societies” (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2015, p. 2).

### **3. Insight into the origin of the Ruler and the Ruled**

The ‘Ruler and the Ruled’ series originated from the ‘joinery as a sculpture process’ project at Nsukka Art School, Nigeria, in the late-1990s. The Joinery as a Sculpture Process (Akabuike, 2003) gave birth to several ideas, and forms which, though originating from a common artistic position delved into diverse directions like installations, wall panels, constructions and configurations of miscellaneous sculptural works that emerged with diverse techniques derived from both conventional and unconventional joints process (Akabuike, 2021 a). This paper, therefore, focuses on part of the body of works created from the project in wood using joints techniques as a studio process of glueing, fastening and bonding pieces of wood together to arrive at something wholesome referred to as the Ruler and the Ruled project (Akabuike, 2020).

### **4. Why “The Ruler and the Ruled”?**

The 1967–1970 Nigerian civil war left its victims with many traumatic memories. It altered how both individuals and collective ethnic groupings inside the nation perceived leadership and followership. This phenomenon is not unique to Nigeria; the aftermath of war can be found in almost every African nation where there has previously been war. We witness, read about, and watch how corruption, the aftermath of war and its consequences steadily ruin Africa and Africans all around us. Starting with Kosovo, Bosnia, Burundi, Angola, the Congo Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Angola, it then divided into various regions of the world such as Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Palestine, India, Pakistan, China, Russia and Ukraine (Onuzulike, 2018; Greenlee, 2006). When the origin of these wars is investigated, they are not far from the effect of what this paper conceptualized as the ‘Rulers’ (the elected government officials in power, the governing bodies of a society, state or nations, and the colonizers) on the ‘Ruled’(the electorate, subjects, or those under the rulership of any constituted authority and the colonized). Also, the artist (sign maker) in this study metaphorically acts as the ruler, who transforms the wood-off-cuts (the ruled) into whatever shape or form he deems fit to make symbolical socio-political statements.

Hence, the effect of the rulers on the ruled and the quest to be liberated from the tyranny of the ruled have given rise to other societal abnormalities like terrorism, kidnapping, oil pipeline bombing and vandalization, assassination and thuggery. Other examples include African leaders using the youths as a prop to rig elections in order to sustain leadership positions and powers. Consequently, the masses fall victim to hunger, starvation, disease and death. Corruption, poor economic policies, looting of communal

treasure, nepotism and other forms of corruption emanating from leadership incompetence or selfishness.

As a result of the poor road network, many deaths of the ruled who ply these roads are reported throughout Africa, particularly in Nigeria. The ruled are not affected since they do not only travel by air but on their private jets. These developments gave rise to this project, the *Ruler and the Ruled*. I have read and observed how the natural riches of Africa have been connected to these tragic events, where these conflicts have drawn the interest of academics who have studied the "economics of civil war," also known as "greed and grievance in a civil war," and theorized as the "resource curse." I have sought to focus on these issues and their implications in my studio project under the theme of "The Ruler and the Ruled" the works engendered by the project include *Unity in Diversity*, *Forced Unity*, *Genesis of Disintegration*, and *Entanglement*, other includes *Re-Union*, *Though Hand may Join Hand*, *Marriage of East and West*, *The Developed and the Underdeveloped World*, and *Colony*. These and other works in the series draw upon a long list of metaphors, identified below, for their signification.

#### 4.1 The "Ruler and the Ruled Idiom"

A detailed examination reveals that each technical decision made throughout the studio production has a clear connection to the factors that led to and affected the Ruler and the Ruled. In such works as *Unity in Diversity*, *Forced Unity*, *Though Hand May Join in Hand*, *Developed and the Underdeveloped world*, and *The Ruler and the Ruled* in which I have used disfigured and stylized human forms realized in woods, I make direct and indirect references to metaphors relating to the use of machinery in working processes of woodworks such as hammering, sawing, mortising, cutting, locking, drilling, punching, chiselling, roughing and smoothening.

In such works as *Derange*, *When two Eggs Meet*, and *Marriage of East and West*, one finds the composition of buried forms on a flat surface of smooth two-dimensional blocks of wood, and then one is drawn to ruminate over acts, and situations surrounding, mass burial, elimination, relocation, demarcation, division, separation, sorting, distancing, isolation, extermination, exclusion, marginalization, screening, besieging, amputation, hammering, crushing, maiming, slashing, hacking, disfiguring, perforating, shooting, terrorizing, sawing, handicapping, harassing, horrifying, emasculating, demobilizing, paralyzing, damaging, violating, afflicting, annihilating, assaulting, destroying, bombarding, bastardizing, battering, beating, flogging, slapping, kicking, bursting, wounding, beheading, blowing exploding, blistering, buffeting, breaking, bulldozing, butchering, splitting, squeezing...

In the works titled *The World is a Maze*, *Involvement*, *Unanimity of Trinity*, *Entanglement*, and *Re-Union* where I used "Halved Joint" to knit the pieces of wood together, I strive to raise questions relating to nailing, screwing, killing, shooting,

collision, raping, indicting, violating, dumping, arranging, detaching, scattering. When in *Genesis of Disintegration* and *Colony* where I used multiple joint technics, then I think about separation, partitioning, caging, capturing, monitoring, spying, demarcating, restricting, blockading, restraining, excluding, hindering, handcuffing, hijacking, clamping, arraigning, barring, cutting, building, and fitting.

Nonetheless, attention is also drawn to biding, gathering, bandaging, healing, rehabilitating and bonding. I have used a variety of everyday objects that provide strong analogies that are pertinent to the human conditions in Nigeria, Africa and elsewhere around the world. I have looked through the pores of woods and grains, the planned edge of the wood-off-cuts, the sharp and cutting edge of the chisels, the jagged teeth of the power tool cutting jig-saw blades, the rough and smooth surface of the rough and smooth sandpapers, the power spy drilled holes of the drilling machine, the burning furnace of the acetylene touch embellishment of pyrography, the scattered pieces of the jigsaw puzzle from wood-off-cuts and I have seen the Ruler and the Ruled everywhere. I elaborate on these thoughts further by closely examining some works on the Ruler and the Ruled phenomenon.

#### **4.2 Conceptualization (Representational metafunction) of the Genesis of Disintegration**

*The Genesis of Disintegration* (mode, signifier), (Figure.1) explores a depiction of a three-dimensional sculpture (mode) produced from the use of 'Multiple housing and Halved' joints (modal affordance) fastened with screw nails and reinforced with metals (semiotic resources) for strength and malleability in case of shock. I (sign maker, artist) attempt to depict the tower of Babel (vector, signified) which according to the Christian Holy Book Bible (Loftie, 1872), (Genesis 11:1-8; ) was the origin of human dispersal (chains of semiosis), (signified). The work was structured in three participants (transformation, ensemble), the base (subordinate), the shaft (superordinate) and clusters (relay) of halved jointed wood-off-cuts configured in a semi-human form (transactional actor).

The base was fashioned from *multiple halved joints* placed horizontally on the floor plane and reinforced by drilling (vector, means) strips of  $\frac{1}{4}$  rods (circumstances) into it to boost its strength and its malleability. Without this, the delicate halved joints usually split as a result of the wood grain formation. Halved joints appear smooth and well-fitted when viewed after fixing. However, this fitting is deceptive since it cannot carry a heavy load if a fastener is not used to anchor the two sides firmly together. Mounted on the base vertically are clusters of multiple housing/halved joints. These formed the sprouts which housed numerous multiple housing/halved joints to form

what looks like a giant *Ijele* masquerade (superordinate, the tower). This form was gradually built up with clusters of multiple housing/halved joints but always connecting using only one point of anchor. This enabled strength but also constitutes a big weakness at the anchoring point since this point carries a huge load without any reinforcement but the wooden fingers that formed the joints.

Apart from the cluster of halved joints fixed with screw nails, the piece is mounted free of any other fastener except the joints on which they hang. The third participant (relay) in the work is the individual-halved jointed wood-off-cuts (subordinate) assembled in clusters around the base. This set of individuals (mode) signifies people who seem confused or indecisive on what to do with the giant *Ijele* (tower) before them which of course visually looks like them in structure but far bigger.

#### **4.3 Symbolic structure and analytical process**

When viewed from afar, the work (mode) appears like a giant anthill, *Ijele* masquerade or a dilapidated castle. It has multiple units of flat wood-off-cuts of different shapes, textures and colours joined (orchestration) in such a way that they appear to unite giving the viewer (demand) a multi-choice of forms to choose from. While the base was structured with wood and metals that made it strong enough to house the giant form on top, the form itself, however, looks fragile.

This fragility, nonetheless, is make-believe, since the multiple housing/halved joints were also strung with strips of metal for strength and malleability. However, a strong weakness exists at the point where each cluster meets. The clustered jointed wood-off-cuts on the base, represent people of various human races and colours, coming together for a common developmental purpose with the phobia of possible breakdown, lack of trust and dispersal (symbolic process).

#### **4.4 Narrative and conceptual discussion (structure, signs) and symbolic process**

Despite every attempt to strengthen the forms by using strips of metals, screw nails, and advanced joinery technics, to bind, bond, unit and fit the work together, there are still major flaws in the formation of its body which are the weaknesses at the anchoring points, where each cluster meets and connects. This is evidence of how difficult it has been to bring the people of various ethnic groups in Nigeria to bond irrespective of expounded efforts. The process of drilling holes, screwing nails and fastening joints brings to mind these efforts and how they are frustrated by foist men (some uniformed) who treat innocent people like an animal with impunity in Nigeria. The police instead, screw you of your money; the military drill you as if you are undergoing some military training, separate you from your family for no just cause and finally put handcuffs on you just because you refused to *roger* (bribe) them on the multiple Nigeria checkpoints.



Going deeper, one can also see how it is not surprising to the artist that human races can never acquire a socio-political, religious or economic unity as a result of that dispersal forced (foist) on them at Babel by God. The phenomena such as separation, partitioning, caging, capturing, monitoring, spying, demarcating, restricting, restructuring, blockading, restraining, excluding, hindering, handcuffing, hijacking, clamping, arranging, barring, cutting, and disintegration have come to stay with humanity.

#### **4.5 Entanglement**

The (ensemble) work Entanglement is made up of forty discrete rectangular pieces of wood off-cuts (minor elements) units (interactive metafunction), organised to provide a dynamic visual illusion yet fairly static (embedding, transformation) (mode). An attempt to visually study any (minor element) of each rectangular formation, leads the eyes to the next form (minor element) till it gets to the end. This is made possible by the use of *simple halve* and *finger* joints (vector) and the arrangement (orchestration) of each rectangular unit positioned uniquely at an angle different from any other unit (transformation, orchestration). These rectangles (minor elements) vary in size and form, though visually not easily identifiable. This was achieved through the juxtaposition of the forms entangled to pose an optical illusion (meaning maker and modes, transformation). However, the beginning arrangement and end transformation of the work (mode) look closely the same and are not as confusing or complicatedly arranged as the rest of the body. This is because the observer (demand) who started with either of the ends will end up with the same conclusion (sign) as he or she gets to the other end (chains of semiosis).

#### **4.6 Narrative and conceptual structures of the interactive metafunction**

The work evokes the same idioms to an observer (demand) as it did to the artist (sign maker) during the studio formation process (vector) and experience. It (the mode) engages with idioms (modal affordance) like relocation, demarcation, sorting, distancing, extermination, inclusion, exclusion, marginalization, screening, besieging, hammering, crushing, slashing, hacking, disfiguring, perforating, sawing, harassing, emasculating, demobilizing, paralyzing, damaging, violating, afflicting, annihilating, assaulting, destroying, bombarding, bastardizing, battering, bruising, wounding, beheading, blowing, exploding, blistering, breaking, bulldozing, butchering, splitting, and squeezing. These idioms (modal affordance) are also reflected in the formation process and the use of machines and manual assembling of the work (transduction).

#### 4.7 Objective interactive conceptual interpretations of the metafunctions

The use of *Halved Joints* to knit *Entanglement* together is not accidental. I strive to raise the socio-political questions relating to nailing, screwing, cutting, shooting, collision, raping, dumping, arranging, pilling, and scattering. These are reflected in the visual illusion buried in the arrangement (transformation) of the forms and through the instrumentalist essence of formulating the halve joints using machines like the drilling machine, circular saw, jigsaw, jack plane and power nailing tools (semiotic resources). Each piece (minor element) is clamped with another through the arraignment, barring, cutting, shooting, building, and fitting made possible by various power tools (vector, semiotic resources).

Going deeper (modality), the complex interplay (transformation) arrangement of *Entanglement* could be attributed to the relationship that exists within one layer of cabbage or onion when peeled off from the ball. Each pulled layer (minor element) of cabbage or onion, reveals another layer (minor element) similar to but not quite the same as the previous layer as observed in the arrangement of *Entanglement*. This variable but a similar concept (transformation) found in the layers of vegetables and the arrangement of *Entanglement* metaphorically negotiates the artist's experience with humanity and governance. Each government (minor element) during campaigns promises to be different from the incumbent one. However, they end up being as corrupt as their predecessors.

Furthermore, people were created differently yet they all have basic features and attributes of humans (transformation). Then they are placed on one planet (transduction), earth, where they must meet, interact, mix, inter-marry and entangle (sign) with each other. Nonetheless, amidst these fundamental features and disposition as humans who are meant to socialize as one (orchestration), there are the tendencies toward idioms (vector) like swindling, cut-throat, maim, overthrow, outsmart, kill, shoot, relocate, demarcate, sort, distancing, exterminate, exclusion, screen, besiege, hammer, crush, slash, hack, disfigure, perforate, saw, harass, emasculate, demobilize, paralyze, damage, violate, afflict, annihilate, assault, destroy, bombard, bastardize, batter, bruising, wound, behead, blow, explode, blister, break, bulldoze, butcher, split, squeeze and kidnap (chains of semiosis).

#### 4.8 Inter-semiotic relations and multimodal orchestration

These idioms reflect in man's everyday treatment of fellow man. In man's *entanglement* setting with each other arose socio-political questions relating to nailing, screwing, cutting, shooting, collision, raping, dumping, arranging, pilling, scattering, and marginalization. The interpretations of these idioms, however, differ in different climes, claims and social categories depending on who is interpreting it and the category in which he/she stands. However, at every point where men are placed under another for governance, there arise these idioms, most often than not, the ruled

(subordinate) constantly are being threatened by the inhumane attitude of the ruler (superordinate). This is further buttressed by the way I (sign maker) used various tools, materials and resources (semiotic resources) available to me as an artist (the ruler) to manipulate, subdue, reconfigure, recreate, and transform wood-off-cuts to any form I deem fit. Thus, the inspiration for this work was derived from a careful study of human encounters and adverse relationships that exist within the rulers (government, authorities) placed above the ruled (electorates, subordinates). This adverse relationship is most common in Africa and dreadful in Nigeria (Ojo, 2014; Fukuyama, 2014; Uraizee, 2011; DeLong, et. al, 2011; Akabuike, 2020).

Whereas the human character (transduction) is so dynamic that each human may physically appear to be the same (transformation) as every other human, there is always something unique that makes them different from one another on closer study and interaction. This uniqueness could either be positive or negative depending on the core values acquired while formulating life principles (Cavarnos, 1978). The Igbo concept of "*Mmadu ka eji aka*" literally meaning that "humans are greater because they have each other", could as well be put the other way; "*Mmadu ka a na aya*", which means that "men have become the bane of fellow men".

When one gets entangled with another human, more so politicians, one is bound to learn that each of them like the *Entanglement* has an unlimited layer of intriguing character and is like a cabbage/onion full of complexity. Studying them is like opening a new layer each time you encounter a new one and so is rulership in Nigeria. The symbolic essence of the work *Entanglement* (mode) draws from these intriguing characteristics (transduction/transformation) of humans in its ensemble, relaying the orchestration of transformation and transduction at the same time. They could never be the same, yet they look the same and are not the same. They are all the same "politicians" and have a lot in common, and at the same time, less in common no matter their size, height, complexion and age. This is the experience Nigerian politicians have given about themselves to the governed and *Entanglement* has metaphorically drawn on these to make meaning.

*Entanglement* (mode) also goes further to interpret (signified) the relationship that exists between most governments and their people in Nigeria's spheres. Usually, during the campaign the aspirant's leaders (ruler, superordinate), appear safe, inclusive, accommodating, compassionate, down-to-earth and friendly. However, they get out of control as soon as they get into power. They become beasts in sheep's clothing (Akabuike, 2020; Greenlee, 2006). This phenomenon has become glaring in Nigeria's system of government. It appears the leaders are engaged in cultic oaths (vector) as

pointed out by Ellis, (2017), an activity that probably leaves them incapacitated to solve the socio-economic problems they promised the masses before an election (Ellis, 2017; Ojo, 2014; Fukuyama, 2014; Uraizee, 2011; DeLong, et. el., 2011). Hence getting elected to tackle these challenges becomes a herculean task. It is speculated that they use diabolism to keep the masses under the illusion that they are running good government, whereas the reverse is the case. At this stage, the masses have become entangled such that getting out of the system might not be easy, so they conform by also devising possible means of survival which in turn worsen the system.

*Entanglement* as well contains 'narrative structures' of 'secondary participants', (circumstances) which are interpreted (signified) and conceptualized to reflect other spheres of life; like a situation where people easily get themselves involved in something but usually find it difficult to disentangle themselves from. The arrangement of *Entanglement* depicts a situation which seemingly appears smooth and safe but gradually got complicated and complex. This ensemble (mode) mirrors a murder scenario, destruction of lives and lies which most often are easy to commit, and most times difficult to cover up (Dudley, 1965). Hence, violence has been excessively inculcated into Nigeria's leadership (Ellis, 2017; Adebani, 2008). The intricacies in the formation and transformation structure of *Entanglement* point to the concept of deceit applied in an attempt to cover one lie with another just as it also applies to covering up more killings giving rise to more decadence in society (Econ Intelligence, 2021; Ojo, 2014; Fukuyama, 2014; Uraizee, 2011; Ellis, 2011). Politics in Nigeria is riddled with a lot of lies, destruction, corruption and mass murder as symbolically signified in the ensemble of *Entanglement*.

However, *Entanglement* advocates for a more critical reflection on the part of the masses before electing any leader. It is always safer for one to look before one leaps since the wrong move or a bad start could be detrimental to the overall system. In the Ruler and the Ruled series, therefore, I have worked with a selection of commonplace materials with potent metaphors relevant to the human condition in Nigeria, Africa and elsewhere around the world. I have looked through the cutting edge of the axe eyes and chisels, the bulging eyes of the mallet, the hammered back of the carved woods, the magnifying lenses of the hole saw, the pointed nipple of the nails and drill bits. I have also examined the shattered sieves of broken wood-shaven dust, the jagged teeth of the circular saw, the flaming anger of the acetytherlane lamp, and the savage rupture of the router machine as it rough handles a block of wood-off-cuts. Finally, I have piped through the spy holes of the rivet machine and the artistic manipulation of these machines on media and all I see everywhere is the ruler and the ruled, the ruler manhandling the ruled.

#### **4.9 Marriage of East and West**

##### ***The Marriage of the East and West, Representational metafunction***

Figure 3 is a landscaped formatted two-dimensional work (mode) consisting of twelve panels (transformation) of a flat block of wood-off-cuts (semiotic resources). The centre panel (major element) is wider in size than the rest of the eleven panels (minor elements) and it (the centre panel) forms a bridge between the east and the west wings of the panels (ensemble of minor elements). The first six panels from the left to the right, constituting the west wing panels (superordinate) were joined with pieces of ebony wood-off-cuts (embedding, semiotic resources, vector); which tend to flow from one panel into another (orchestration), thus, creating a visual encoding of organic patterns on the surface of the panels as it flows (transitory spatial arrangements, embedding). On the bottom left side of the panels (the west wing), were other smaller pieces of assorted wood-off-cuts (semiotic resources). These assorted wood-off-cuts are more geometrically shaped than organically formed. Their visual encoding was carried on by narrative and conceptual structures methodically placed to depict the symbol of a sunset.

On the right side of the panel plane, appears a similar sun (depicted element) symbol meticulously placed to symbolize (signified) the rising sun. The five-piece panels constituting the right side that formed the east wing were linked or joined with the same organic forms as in the west wing to form the same visual encoding of narrative and conceptual structures. The middle panel (major element) which is wider than the rest of the panels (minor elements) has a marriage *nsibidi* structured (sign) symbol depicted in assorted wood-off-cuts (semiotic resources) reburied into it. This symbol was achieved using mortise and tenon joints made possible by cutting assorted pieces of wood-off-cuts (modal affordance) and burying (conceptual encoding) them within the middle panel to metaphorically represent the symbol of a broken marriage (signified) as interpreted (representation) by the “*nsibidi*” signs, and symbols.

Other materials (semiotic resources) such as copper wire, canes, and coins were meticulously fastened on the surface of the panels. These materials are tied, buried or attached to the panels to visually narrate a conceptual structure of unfolding action. A closer observation drives the observer (demand) to identify a tonal gradation and a juxtaposition of colours carefully rendered in natural wood colours (orchestration).

##### **4.10 Objective interactive conceptual interpretations of the metafunctions**

The inspiration for the work *Marriage of the East and West* was drawn from Nigeria’s socio-political and economic arena. The east wing as observed signifies the rising of

the sun, while the west denotes the setting. By implication, brighter colours ought to be emanating from the rising sun since light is at its brightest beam as it rises than when it sets. Metaphorically, however, the reverse seems to be the case as observed in the work. While the sun rises from the East panels as seen in the east wing of the panels, the east remains in darkness as the west absorbs all the light coming from it.

It is also observed that the symbol and colours used on the east wing (supposedly the rising of the sun) are dark colours while the ones used on the setting (west wing) are brighter colours this juxtaposition is an anomaly. It ought not to be so since the intensity of the sun is higher when it is rising than when it sets. However, this is what we have represented in the work. The colour misplacements metaphorically symbolize the saying "*Monkey dey work and Baboon dey chop*" literally meaning that '*while the Monkey works, the Baboon enjoys the dividend of the work*' implying that while the sun rises from the East, it shines in the West.

This is also likened (signified) to gagging the mouth of the cow that trashes the corn. It leads us to the other materials buried or fastened within the work that formed part of the remaining symbols. Copper, tin, lead and coal symbolically represent the mineral resources which are derived from the eastern part of the country. But from the work's rendition, we see that the dividends of these minerals are being spent on the western side of the country and by so doing, lunches the material's derivation sources into the darkness while placing the west where the resources are spent in glory.

The model also presented a parallel insight into the relationship that exists between Europe as the colonial masters and Africa as the colonized. In a neo-colonization setting as observed by Akabuike, (2020), *the King that devours his people* and as also depicted in fig. 4 captured by an unknown artist, showing a graphic that illustrates how the dividends of a palm tree are enjoyed across the fence by the West (Europe), while the people at the base of the tree (East, Africa) remain in deprivation of what they work for. This is a typical syphoning mechanism by the West (Europe) to keep Africa in perpetual poverty. Furthermore, while the mineral resources like tin, copper, gold, coal and oils are gotten from the east (Africa), they are refined and brought back to Africa and Europeans who acquired them from us enjoy the proceeds.

Going further, the slogan '*one Nigeria*' becomes questionable because gold and other mineral resources derived from the Western part of the country remain exclusively in all ramifications for the west to enjoy while the ones derived from the Eastern part are perceived as the national cake meant to be enjoyed by all. The alleged oneness comes only in the colours of the skin (transformation) which is the same colour arrangement that runs through the wood structure and the element of the joint that stocked the wood-off-cuts together. The percentage of intermarriage among different ethnic groups in

Nigeria is very minimal which implies the oneness that the name Nigeria represent is fake. It is not yet attainable.

That is why now and then riot breaks out to claim the lives of many people who are not native inhabitants of the part of the country where the unrest happened. This disunity is fueled more by the marginalization of the Niger Delta, a region from which the greater percentage of the country's oil is derived. As a result, any attempt to fight for their right earns them the gallows. A typical example is the case of the late King Saro Wiwa who was brutally murdered for speaking about the marginalization of his people (Uraizee, 2011). The implication of these outcomes points to the fact that some people believe it is their birthright to be the ruling class (The Ruler) in the country while others were born to be ruled.

This disunity is worsened by the growing multiplicity of religions in Nigeria. In Christendom, the Catholics find it difficult to wed the Protestants yet we claim that we are one Nigeria. If a Catholic cannot wed a fellow Christian in another denomination, is it a Muslim that he can marry? The Boko Haram terrorists in the North whose activities are worse off, than the act of pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta with their occasional kidnapping for ransom are not termed terrorists. But the IPOB members who peacefully agitate for good governance are called terrorists.

The artist, therefore, through the instrumentalist essence of the studio project 'the ruler and the ruled'(model) draws attention to these issues so that permanent solutions might be proffered. It advocates unity in Nigeria because if all Nigerians learn to accept one another as brothers and sisters and the right of every Nigerian is protected through the enforcement of unity and equity Nigeria will be a good place for all to live in peace and bliss.

## **5. Conclusion**

The paper has described the concepts and metaphors implicated in the production of some of the works done in "The Ruler and the Ruled" series. The study utilized 'wood-offcuts' timbers as the basic material which metaphorically reflected the concept of "The Ruler and the Ruled". It opened up channels of creative dialogues and possibilities over the effect of the ruling class on the downtrodden (the ruled). The implications of wood offcut timbers as material for art have shown a strong functional significance in linking its physical quality to the effect of bad governance. The materiality of "wood-offcuts" allows for an oscillation between process and material whereby manipulating artistic tools to form metaphors of new visual imageries that speak to the plight of Nigerian citizens. These possibilities were utilized in works that seemed to combine

experience with objects and forms. These imageries are ways to connect material and technique to provide intersections where meanings have been drawn from the works. While this study may have generated controversies, it is every artiste's goal when they create to stir up controversy by creating work that both asks and responds to real-world issues. Additional research from the current study can still be carried out in several ways to improve the work that has already been done.



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