

Meaning and Worship: A Semiotic Analysis of Selected Gospel Afrobeats: "We will be many" by Sound of Salem and "No Turning Back 11" (Gaise Baba ft. Lawrence Oyor)

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores a semiotic analysis of two recent Nigerian gospel Afrobeats (Afro-gospel) songs; "We Will Be Many" (by Sound of Salem) and "No turning Back II" (by Gaise Baba ft Lawrence Oyor). Using Peircean and Barthesian semiotic theoretical frameworks. The study examines how sonic, linguistic, visual, and performative signs produce theological meanings grounded in sacred/secular boundaries and participate in the cultural circulation of contemporary Nigerian Christianity. This study indicates that gospel Afrobeats functions as a symbolic space through which youth-oriented spiritual perceptions are played out and contested. Recent discourse on originality and the viral circulation of these tracks reveals ongoing scholarship over what counts as "sacred sound" in Nigeria's digital age.

KEYWORDS: Gospel Afrobeats, Semiotic Analysis, Peircean Semiotics, Nigerian Pentecostalism, Multimodal Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Afro-gospel (gospel Afrobeats) is a growing subset of contemporary Nigerian music infusing Pentecostal/evangelical themes with Afrobeats' rhythmic/production aesthetics. In recent years, it has moved from church contexts to mainstream streaming platforms, sparking significant public discussion about authenticity, commercialization, and worship practice. "No Turning Back II" (Lawrence Oyor & Gaise Baba) has generated millions of streams, while "We Will Be Many" (Sound of Salem) has circulated widely. In November 2025, Chartmetric, "No Turning Back II" has 9.3 million streams; Songstats shows 10.2 million streams across platforms. The official YouTube video has 25,302,837 views. It reached number 4 on Nigeria's TurnTable Top 100 chart, making it the highest-charting gospel song in that chart's history (The Guardian Nigeria). Between 2022 and 2024, gospel music streams among Nigerian Gen Z on Spotify increased by 1,228% (PM News Nigeria).

This study will show how musical, lyrical, and visual signs in gospel Afrobeats produce semiotic meanings and explore the boundary between worship and entertainment. A close, multimodal semiotic reading of the two songs, the official

videos and live performances will be critically studied. This research is qualitative, multimodal, and interpretive. The corpus comprises: (1) studio recordings and official audio releases of the two songs; (2) official music videos and high-profile live performance clips. The analytic procedure is close listening and partial transcription: for each song, a transcription and interpretation of the choruses and salient melodic/rhythmic motifs. The multimodal coding focuses on Peircean and Barthesian key motifs mapping to icon/index/symbol relations and to denotative/connotative layers. In addition, Kress's multimodal interpretation of the video performances is considered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AFROBEATS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA AND AFRICA

Afrobeats trace back to the late 1990s and early 2000s, following the decline of traditional highlife and the popularization of Afrobeat by Fela Anikulapo Kuti. While Fela's Afrobeat carried strong political and Pan-Africanist undertones, modern Afrobeats showcases a profitable and digitally mediated form; more melodic, hybrid, with high youthful acceptance (Collins, 2019; Omobowale, 2021).

Afrobeats gained visibility through Nigeria's expanding urban youth population and the globalization of digital platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok (Adedeji, 2023). Artists such as Wizkid, Burna Boy, and Davido became cultural ambassadors, blending indigenous languages with Western pop aesthetics. As Olaniyan (2022) argues, Afrobeats reinforces Africa's symbolic image, projecting youth creativity and optimism rather than deficiency.

AFRO-GOSPEL (AFROBEATS GOSPEL)

Christian music has existed across Africa since the 16th Century, but a uniquely Nigerian style emerged in the 19th century, influenced by the Church Missionary Society and the pioneering work of Reverend Josiah J. Ransome-Kuti, who fused European choral traditions with local rhythms and languages. The 20th century saw growth through Pentecostal revivals, evolving into a diverse genre. In the Mid-1960s, the growth of Pentecostal churches spurred the development of gospel music, emphasizing spiritual gifting and music's power to connect with the divine. Contemporary artists like Moses Bliss, Mercy Chinwo, Dunsin Oyekan, Nathaniel Bassey, Gaise Baba, Frank Edwards, and Lawrence Oyor have gained widespread recognition in the gospel space, with millions of views on platforms like YouTube. Nigerian gospel music has a strong social media presence, with songs going viral and influencing worship globally.

Historically, Nigerian gospel music evolved through stages: from hymn-based worship in mission churches (1900s–1950s) to indigenous highlife gospel (1960s–1980s), Pentecostal praise (1990s–2000s), and, finally, the contemporary fusion styles of the 2010s (Oikelome, 2013; Ezenwanebe, 2020). Afro-Gospel emerged at the intersection of two forces: the digital democratization of music production and the Pentecostalization of Nigerian Christianity.

MUSIC AND SEMIOTICS

Since semiotics is the study of signs and how meanings are conveyed from them, music in whatever shade has a meaning that it upholds, whether culturally, spiritually, religiously, economically, or socio-politically. According to Agawu (2016), African rhythm is not only a structure but also signification- a semiotic sphere that codifies social relations, emotion, and spirituality. In gospel situations, these rhythmic symbols are rewritten with a godly purpose. In *No Turning Back II*, the syncopated beat and melodic chants serve as markers of divine richness, in which the music's intensity corresponds to the ecstasy of the spirit. This is what Oikelome (2013) refers to as the sacralization of the secular beat where the sensual beat of Afrobeats is re-blended as a container of worship.

Music semiotics supplies the analytical tools: Peirce's triadic model (icon/index/symbol) and Barthes's connotation/myth are central for linking sound and image to social meanings (Peirce, 1931/1958; Barthes, 1967, 1972). Tagg's and Dunbar-Hall's work on popular music semiotics recommends close listening for culturally coded "topic" gestures and showing how these gestures are read differently across contexts (Tagg, 2013; Dunbar-Hall, 2012). Multimodal discourse theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) foregrounds the co-construction of meaning across modes (lyric, sound, image, gesture), which is essential when analyzing music videos and live worship performances.

As Bello (2025) notes, the genre represents a "sacral recontextualization of sound"- the re-signification of beats, gestures, and linguistic codes for spiritual purposes. In *No Turning Back II*, the pulsating Afrobeat rhythm signifies persistence and covenant, transforming what could be read as a dance track into a spiritual declaration of faithfulness. Similarly, *We Will Be Many* transforms communal chanting into a prophetic utterance of divine multiplication, encoding biblical prophecy through Afrobeats' communal semiotics.

Streaming platforms and social media create what Adejumo (2024) calls a "digital Pentecostal economy," where worship is mediated through clicks, algorithms, and virality. Afro-Gospel thus becomes both devotion and content- a form of "algorithmic evangelism" where faith messages circulate through the same networks as secular hits. Onwuegbuna (2025) argues that Afro-Gospel creates a "new ritual space" where faith is not confined to the church but performed across smartphones, social feeds, and streaming charts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs an integrated theoretical viewpoint; semiotic analysis draws primarily from Charles Sanders Peirce and Roland Barthes, complemented by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse theory.

CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE'S TRIADIC MODEL OF THE SIGN

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) founded semiotics, a systematic theory of signs that explains meaning production, communication, and interpretation. Peirce developed a three-part model: the Representamen (the visible sign), the Object (what

the sign represents), and the Interpretant (the meaning created in the interpreter's mind). These three interact in continuous semiosis (Peirce, 1931-1958, CP 2.228).

CLASSIFICATION OF SIGNS: ICON, INDEX, AND SYMBOL

Peirce divides signs based on the relationship between representamen and object (CP 2.276-2.294):

1. Icon - A sign that denotes its object by similarity. The melodic expression that imitates a hymn is iconic.
2. Index - A sign directly related to its object cause-wise or by association. Clapping and call-and-response are indicators of communal worship.
3. Symbol - A sign showing a relation by convention or learned association. Words, formulas, and phrases like "we will be many" have symbolic meaning through shared theological knowledge.

BARTHESIAN SEMIOTICS: DENOTATION, CONNOTATION, AND MYTH

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) developed semiotics to include cultural signification. All signs work in two orders: Denotation (literal meaning) and Connotation (secondary, culturally constructed meaning). Barthes' theory of myth is a second-order semiotic system in which naturalized denotative signs become myths. Myth rebrands history as nature and cultural values as eternal and self-evident, an ideological reproduction process upholding dominant ideologies through common sense (Barthes, 1972).

Roland Barthes' semiotic model allows for a richer reading of Afrobeats and Afro-gospel as culturally layered texts (Barthes, 1977). In "We Will Be Many," the denotative meaning of the lyric's points to numerical growth, but connotatively, it becomes a declaration of African Christian solidarity, self-determination, and resilience. In "No Turning Back II," the denotative level expresses a simple promise of faithfulness to God. However, the connotative level highlights the struggle of modern believers to remain true in a changing society.

MULTIMODAL SEMIOTICS (KRESS & VAN LEEUWEN)

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001, 2006) assert that modern communication integrates linguistic, visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural modes. Each mode provides different semiotic resources, and meaning is created through their interaction. They develop three metafunctions: representation (what is depicted), interactive (the relationship between producer and viewer), and composition (the arrangement of elements). This interrelation is known as intersemiosis: the interaction of various modes to create a complete message.

DATA PRESENTATION & SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

No Turning Back II- sonic, lyrical, visual semiotics

Chorus: I have decided to follow Jesus / I have decided to follow Jesus / I have decided to follow Jesus / No turning back / No turning back

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

The text is declarative and repetitive, as the chorus is a liturgical refrain. The line "I have decided to follow Jesus" alludes verbatim to the famous missionary hymn of the same title. The anaphoric and repetitive patterning makes it mnemonic and ritualistic, appropriate for communal singing and strengthening faith commitment.

From a Peircean perspective, "to follow Jesus" is a symbol that represents the Christian ideal of discipleship, using a familiar and culturally accepted sign. Its repetitiveness serves as an index of ritual attendance and communal consent to the frequent covenant declarations in worship.

According to Barthes, the denotative meaning is a personal, straightforward choice to follow Jesus. At the connotative level, the term conveys certainty, moral determination, and spiritual refiguration. The mythical level internalizes the ideology of being true in faith, focused on making an irreversible turning to God, creating religion as a binary life-choice between devotion and apostasy.

Bridge / Hook: No No, No No, No No / No, No turning back

The reduplicative vocalization and rhythmic repetition convey emphatic conviction. The linguistic meaning is embodied in non-lexical vocables and rhythmic chanting. By repeating the monosyllabic "No", the utterance becomes a sonic act of denial and protest. Vocally, this pattern acts indexically. In Peircean terms, it signals an absolute rejection of regression or spiritual compromise. The recurrence of "No" echoes the sound and physical power of stomping or chanting during live worship.

Using Barthes, the denotative meaning of "No" is denial. The connotative level puts this rejection with moral and theological solidity- emphatic rejection of backsliding. At the mythical level, repetition naturalizes the irreversible character of conversion and faith as the only way forward. The refrain is a speech act.

Verse 1: Mi o ni choice/I go narrow dey think say I no know road o

The linguistic texture is enriched with code-switching between Yoruba, Nigerian Pidgin, and English, creating a hybridized sociolect that embodies local identity and global faith discourse. The phrase "Mi o ni choice / I go narrow / De think say I no know road oh" blends idiomatic Yoruba, Nigerian Pidgin, and Standard English. This multilingualism serves as a symbolic marker of authenticity, situating the universal Christian message within a specific African linguistic and cultural context.

The term "narrow" is a symbol in Christian theological discourse, referring to the biblical image of the narrow way in Matthew 7:13-14. The indexical value of code-mixing signifies local legitimacy. According to Barthesian semiotics, the denotation has a strict statement of commitment despite the opinion of people. Its connotation is defiant, strong, and spiritually self-reliant. On the mythological level, this verse makes the believer an anticultural hero, bold enough to take the hard, unloved way.

Emi Mimo, Na him Dey move me, dey lead me Dey go oh / On God, My mind is made up o

"Emi Mimo" is a Yoruba term, meaning Holy Spirit. It confirms the movement of God and spiritual direction: "Emi Mimo, Na him dey move me, dey lead me dey go oh / On God, my mind is made up oh." The bilingual code localizes universal Christian pneumatological teaching. The statement "my mind is made up" conveys human determination, and, coming after "Emi Mimo," shifts the agency of choice to divine agency, creating an interaction between volition and inspiration.

In the triadic model, "Emi Mimo" is mostly symbolic, denoting the theological notion of the Holy Spirit as a source of divine guidance. But it also has indexical meaning: in Pentecostal theology, the work of the Holy Spirit is perceived as manifesting both internally and externally. The rhythm, dance, and vocal intensity serve as indicators of divine activity.

Using Barthes, the denotative meaning states that Spirit matters in human lives. At the connotative level, the phrase creates a theology of dependency- steadfastness and obedience are reactions to divine agency. This mythic layer naturalizes the assumption that spiritual agency legitimizes human action, a Pentecostal worldview according to which the Holy Spirit justifies human decisions.

Of course, no going back oh / Nonstop, on 240 / Esu gan, o da mi duro ti / I'm steady revving, mo'n te throttle / Got my eye on the prize o

This brings pneumatological force to the semiotics of speed and resistance. The symbolic image of acceleration (on 240, revving, pressing the throttle) works as a sign of movement and spiritual perseverance. The reference to "Esu" (Yoruba word for devil) offers an antithetical index, but its failure to stop ("o da mi duro ti") is a mark of success by divine ability. The linguistic transformation into dynamic metaphor creates a symbol of persistence: the believer cannot be stopped, driven into movement towards the prize (Philippians 3:14).

The terms "revving and throttle" are icons of energy and progress, sonically and semantically synonymous with acceleration, and indices of determination, spiritual urgency, and steady movement. Barthes shows that in denotation, there is uninterrupted forward movement; connotation glorifies perseverance and heavenly propulsion; myth psychologizes Christian perseverance as heroic movement.

Baba nla, enikan ko le snatch me His hand oh / Ife Jesu lo wa mi ri, to gba'ku mi ku o

In this part, Yoruba and English are mixed, whereby scriptural words are code-mixed with colloquial rhythm to create a localized pronunciation of divine assurance. The words "no one can snatch me out of His hand" directly echo Romans 8:38-39 and John 10:28, declaring the impossibility of the believer being snatched from God. This intertextual source anchors speech on biblical discussion and renders it through Nigerian language identity.

In Peirce's triad, "His hand" acts as a sign, symbolizing protection and divine providence. The scriptural echo is an index of doctrinal continuity. Using Barthes, the

denotative meaning is evidence of Jesus' love, ensuring salvation. At the connotative level, there are semantic associations with security, devotion, and sacrificial intimacy. At the mythic level, this text makes the doctrine of divine providence natural; nothing can change divine destiny. The myth perpetuates personal confidence and faith identity.

Hook / Chorus variations / Proclamations: "I can never turn back oh / It's already too late oh / I've already come too far"

The repetitions create an intensifying build-up, and negation turns into an emotional outcry of conviction. The "too late" phrase serves as a marker of time, defining the present as beyond reversal. This linguistic structure creates a theology of temporal end, the notion that past commitment has made future denial impossible. The recurrence of "No" ceases to be negative; it becomes a statement of the irreparable character of faith.

These utterances have a dual semiotic purpose. Time adverbs (already, too late, come too far) serve as markers of irreversible transition, indexing the causal relationship between spiritual choice and current identity. The phrase "too late" is used symbolically, as a symbol of crossing the threshold, an initiation in religion.

The denotation is the impossibility of going back. This irreversibility is overlaid with connotations of steadfastness, endurance, and complete devotion. The mythical repetition naturalizes conversion as a decisive break with the past that permanently reasserts identity. This section serves as a theologically reaffirming verbal ritual.

Declaration: "We will burn the world / We will spend the billions / We will spend for Jesus / Till we shift the culture / We will heal the sick / We will raise the dead / Transform the nation / Till we hear well done."

This declaration is a rhetorical climax of both language and theology. The language texture is hyperbolic and millennial, extrapolating an image of vast world-shattering faith. The frequency of future auxiliary "will" places discussion in a programmatic and prophetic context, suggesting divine authority. The reiteration of "We will" produces a chanting effect, combining linguistic predestination and performative obligation.

Using Peirce, such proclamations work both symbolically and indexically. Expressions like "burn the world" or "spend the billions" are metaphors that symbolically convey radical cultural reformation and complete commitment. Fire brings back the scripture of the Pentecostal tradition of Holy Ghost fire-purification and passion. The declarative type is a performative index, a linguistic act which actualizes purpose. Each "We will" indexes intentions that change into collective commitment.

The denotative level is a simple promise of mass action. The connotative layer adds ideological and theological content, empowerment of believers to change the world materially and spiritually. On the mythological plane, the lyrics express a prosperity-transformationalist myth, suggesting that, with proper Christian practice, the result will be spiritual and societal renewal.

Chants & Outro lines: "No More foolishness / No more laziness / I can't go back now / Never Never I will never never... Never turn back"

The final part shifts tone to moralizing. The language is authoritative and commanding. The words "No more foolishness, No more laziness" are moral imperatives. Repetition strengthens urgency and renunciation. Such a directing command shifts the discussion to ethical reformation, indicating that real conversion must show in altered behavior.

In Peirce's view, this segment exists at both the indexical and the symbolic levels. The exhortation to drop foolishness and laziness represents a measure of moral change. The repetition of "never" and "no more" is a representation of total renunciation, symbolizing a fresh start after wrongdoing.

The denotative meaning is simple: abandonment of vice and proclamation of moral integrity. The connotative layer introduces shades of moral regeneration, spiritual confidence, and ethical certitude. At the mythic plane, the lyrics make the assumption that conversion inevitably leads to moral and social renewal—a theme of African Pentecostal theology.

MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF THE VISUALS AND VIDEO PERFORMANCES

ANALYSIS OF THE VISUAL PERFORMANCE

The scene presents a live musical performance, creating a concert-like worship atmosphere. The lighting is gentle and cozy, appealing to reverence rather than spectacle. The wall's circular holes and muted colors suggest serenity and symbolic openness, creating a holy yet modern worship space where current trends and religion meet.

The microphones and informal setup suggest a worship register that blends liturgical intent with urbanity. The comfort and ease of the singer's body language signal accessibility and experience. Their posture and smiles indicate sincerity, humility, and emotional connection to the audience. The tightly packed audience is an important indicator: facing the stage marks communal involvement and physical agreement with the theological theme.

In Peircean semiotics, meaning operates in multiple layers. The iconic layer is the similarity between this setting and a normal church or worship setting. The indexical layer comes from body gestures: bent heads, raised hands, and turned fronts as signs of reverence and spiritual concentration. The symbolic layer functions on holding microphones and facing the congregation: identifying power, leadership, and ritual aspects of facilitating divine expression through song.

The denotation, in Barthesian terms, is simple: a live music performance that conducts a crowd into worship. The connotation introduces emotional and ideological meanings: genuineness, community, and young spirituality, connecting faith expression to modern cultural creativity. The mythic level naturalizes the notion that worship needs no traditional sanctuaries or clerical hierarchies but can be created through artistic performance and mutual musical experience.

THE VIDEO PERFORMANCES

The video clip serves as a densely coded semiotic text in which movement, costume, camera, gesture, and sound unite to communicate theological identity and social meanings. The intimate framing of the main singers and their call-and-response with dancers and background singers constitute the main structures. The camera's closeness creates salience and visual dominance; audio mixing foregrounds the lead voice, marking authorship and authenticity.

The costume decisions—a mix of modern street clothes with church dress—are visual elements of cultural negotiation. The semiotic network assists in deconstructing this mash-up: denotatively, the clothes are ordinary items; connotatively, they represent the myth of postmodern and pluralistic spirituality, a blend of African urban style and Christian devotion. The costume signals youth culture and religious identity. The casual, modest dress codes indicate approachability and cultural grounding, inviting the younger generation to perceive their daily world as a valid source of spiritual expression.

The choreography and repertoire of gestures—lifted hands, forward steps, synchronized stamping, coordinated arm patterns—transfer spiritual meaning to physical. These movements are largely indexical: raised hands worship and surrender; unison movements index unity and common conviction; stepping forward indexes spiritual progress and commitment. Bodily synchrony transforms personal devotion into communal spectacle—movement as ritualized signification.

The mob shots and singing in great numbers are indexical and symbolic demonstrations of mass size and active worship. The crowd is an index of social response—the apparent outcome of the song's emotional and spiritual appeal. It also represents the Church universal: several voices in one voice. Barthes carries this into the myth of cultural revival and movement; faith has entered a populist level as group identification. The mass presence confirms the message; it brings spiritual development into reality.

The editing rhythm is tightly synchronized with Afrobeats percussion, offering a multimodal combination of religious message and popular rhythm. Every visual discontinuity follows percussion, creating a harmonic effect between sight and sound and making the gospel message both danceable and shareable. In Kress and van Leeuwen's framework, such alignment indicates an equal role of image and sound in meaning-making. Beat-visual editing enables secondary circulation on social media, inviting dance challenges, reaction videos, and remix culture, and extending interpretive life beyond the liturgical context.

The light and color scheme—warm, saturated colors with backlighting—works as a code of emotional and spiritual closeness. Barthes' denotative level captures warmth and brightness, while the connotative level triggers a sense of revival, sincerity, and God's presence.

CLOSING COMMENTS ON THE ANALYSIS OF NO TURNING BACK II

Lawrence Oyor and Gaise Baba create a highly stacked semiotic text by blending linguistic hybridity, performative rhythm, and theological conviction to dramatize the Christian process of conversion, perseverance, and transformation in *No Turning Back*.

II. Every lyrical passage is part of one story-faith, as movement, an irreversible flow of the Spirit to divine purpose. Semiotically, the song functions on iconic, indexical, and symbolic levels, at the interface of sound, gesture, and language, encoding faith as embodied experience. Its denotative affirmations of commitment bring forth connotative affirmations of empowerment, solidarity, and divine fate, as well as the myth of Christianity as a transformative force, spiritually, morally, and materially.

II. We Will Be Many- sonic, lyrical, visual semiotics

A. Recurrent phrase: "Ah la la la la la la la/ la la la la la la/ We will make Jesus proud/ We'll be many o (we'll be many o) / The nations are waiting (waiting) / The people are hungry o / The Master needs vessels."

The chorus, "We will be many / The nations are waiting / The people are hungry o/ The Master is in need of vessels", so I pledge my allegiance to the one who has called me oh..." gives prophetic and missional underpinning to the song. The passage is written as a prophetic statement, a mission speech, using the plural future tense "we will", outlining collective fate, not personal desire. The repetition of "we will be many" serves as both prediction and invocation, a linguistic act that both predicts and creates a future community of believers. The vocative "master" evokes biblical servant imagery, appealing to divine power and obedience, whereas "vessels" refers to the Pauline metaphor (2 Timothy 2:21) of consecrated human vehicles of Godly mission. The vocational syntax turns worship into a discourse of mobilization.

In Peircean semiotics, "vessels" is used as a symbol, a traditional theological coincidence depicting consecrated human tools that enact divine will. "Nations" serves as a symbol and index, pointing to the international scope of the Christian mandate and marking the exterior course of faith. The phrase "people are hungry" is an indicator of social and spiritual deficiency, directed to an urgent evangelistic and humanitarian response. The representamen (linguistic form) connects the thing (missionary call) with the interpretant (believer's understanding of divine mandate).

The denotative meaning is evident: many "labourers" responding to God's call. The connotative meaning symbolizes fate, divine enlargement and obedience in community. The mythic level reminds us of the Great Commission narrative (Matthew 28:19-20), in which the worldwide spread of the gospel becomes a mythic image of the Christian community. This myth makes evangelism a natural obligation and destiny, combining faith and social action, placing the Church as an instrument of divine change. The song creates a myth of plenitude-the ideology that divine pledge assures numerical and spiritual growth.

B. I will make Jesus proud

The statement "I will make Jesus proud" shifts from a communal vow to an individual consecration. Linguistically, it is a personal vow of filial devotion, showing allegiance in the terminology of relational pride and moral responsibility. The phrase is symbolically used as a familiar culturally identifiable slogan, transforming honor into a

moral mission. Indicatively, it refers to ethical performance and individual responsibility; commitment should be expressed in action and service.

In Barthes' model, denotation is a mere promise to gratify or honor Christ, but connotation layers add theology of performative piety: faith as witness lived. The mythic interpretation builds a notion of salvation involving moral action, social demonstration, and embodying inner change. The myth makes ideal of sanctified life, with obedience and moral character as manifestations of grace.

C. Lord, the price that you paid (very costly o) / And the love that you showed (no denying o) / And the prayer that you made (I will answer o) / I will make Jesus proud

This segment establishes a theological and emotional climax. Linguistically, the passage is a pledge-like utterance that combines expressions of gratitude, acknowledgment of atonement, and personal commitment. The lexical field "price," "love," "prayer," "answer," and "make Jesus proud" encapsulates the core narrative of Christian redemption. The phrase "the price that You paid" explicitly references atonement, foregrounding crucifixion as the moral and theological basis of salvation. The simplicity and repetition create a tone of humility and worship, while the vow "I will make Jesus proud" introduces a performative response of gratitude and responsibility. The declarative syntax conveys assurance and intimacy, transforming remembrance into covenantal reaffirmation.

From a Peircean perspective, the lyrics operate through symbolic and indexical functions. The word "price" serves as a symbol, representing Christ's sacrificial death as understood in orthodox Christian theology. The phrase "I will answer" symbolizes the believer's active participation in divine dialogue-player, mission, and obedience are human reciprocations of divine initiative. At the indexical level, expressions of gratitude signify a transformed relationship: they index conversion and covenant, pointing to relational cause (divine love) producing human effect (thanksgiving and moral allegiance).

Through Barthes's lens, denotation directly recognizes Christ's redemptive sacrifice and the believer's corresponding pledge. On a connotative level, lines communicate the theology of reciprocity and covenantal gratitude; the believer responds to divine grace with obedience, witness, and moral fruitfulness. At the myth level, the passage naturalizes the belief that the believer's life must bear visible fruit as evidence of gratitude. This myth of responsive discipleship frames Christian faith as a continuous exchange between divine gift and human duty.

D. We'll be many that pray / We'll be many that preach / We'll be many that fast and heal

The list "We'll be many that pray / We'll be many that preach / We'll be many that fast and heal" catalogs Pentecostal practices, defining spiritual practices as markers of believer identity. The list is written in declarative, rhythmic syntax, creating a repetitive pattern that signals liturgical recitation. The list of practices-prayer, preaching, fasting, healing-has linguistic and theological roles: constitutive acts comprising membership of a charismatic community. Repetition is not a figure of

speech: it is performance, re-establishment of common ecclesiology based on spiritual productivity. The song turns spiritual disciplines into audible members through rhythm and anaphora.

These lines have indexical and symbolic functions in Peirce's triad. The repeated naming of spiritual acts indicates charismatic practice, referring to behavioral expressions of faith at the center of Pentecostal worship. Mentions of such activity's index lived experience-external display of internal change. At the same time, these practices serve as signifiers, meaning canonical processes of holiness and divine experience in Christian tradition. Together, they constitute an imaginary grammar of faith where ritual actions convey real authority-the sign system is that doing is believing.

Using Barthes, denotation is a literal enumeration of spiritual activities, but connotation extends to mean embodiment needs embodiment in physical, social, and verbal action. At the mythic level, spiritual and social change unfolds, making it natural that the Church is a living entity vital to the world through prayer, proclamation, and healing. The myth reflects a larger Pentecostal myth in which the Holy Spirit enables ordinary people to be agents of change, connecting the sacred and the societal.

This call to vocational preparedness becomes noticeable in the following lines: "When You call, when You call, I will run running o / Oh Jesus, I have made up my mind to follow, I will follow You". The linguistic structure shifts from collective enumeration to personal immediacy. The conditional clause "when You call" brings divine initiative, whereas the main clause "I'll come running" introduces human responsiveness. This syntactic coupling forms relational dynamism theology: God calls, the believer responds. Reiteration of "when You call" contributes to attentiveness and preparedness state, and the verb "come running" indices eagerness and obedience, making the text energetic in a kinetic manner.

The "call" symbolizes divine vocation, a theologically loaded sign alluding to the biblical theme of calling. The believer's response signals discipleship, a causal link between Godly prompting and human obedience. The index indicates a theology of experience: the believer's responsiveness becomes an outward display of internal faith.

In Barthes' terms, denotation conveys readiness, a willingness to act; connotation conveys a sense of urgency, devotion, and relationship intimacy; myth creates an image of an effective and obedient believer who exists as God's tool, never willfully deaf to God's voice or mission call. This myth supports the Pentecostal model of vocational Christianity, where faith is dialogic and performative, a constant call-and-response.

MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF THE VISUAL AND VIDEO PERFORMANCES

ANALYSIS OF THE VISUAL

The visual composition presents five men in flowing white and colored robes dancing in unison before an open sky. The frame creates an impressive convergence of ritual, embodiment, and prophecy through the grammar of movement, costume, and environment. In the Saussurean sense, each object is a signifier, a visible gesture, a

garment, and a space, which together denote spiritual ideas important to Christian and prophetic symbolism.

The initial semiotic sign is clothing. All dancers wear long outfits, white tallit-like prayer caps on their shoulders, and blue-and-black stripes suggesting Jewish priestly dress. Denotatively, these are robes and shawls; connotatively, these produce an image of sanctity, purity, and continuity to Judeo-Christian liturgical tradition. In Barthes' mythic dimension, their wear normalizes the connection between holiness/purity, creating a myth of sanctified embodiment, and clothes are a service to God. In Peircean terms, the robes are both symbols of consecration and of ritual involvement. Wearing both white and colored robes can convey a sense of diversity unified, underscoring the plurality the song title suggests: "We Will Be Many".

The body movement, barefoot dancing, stepping to rhythm, and lifting legs together, is an embodied semiotic system. The movements iconize worship (they resemble traditional liturgical or celebratory dance) and point to overall joy, spiritual passion, and liberty. The rhythm of movement, combined with five men, forms a visual metaphor of unity, multiplication, and divine order. The ensemble creates a shared identity in which individuality is absorbed into the collective rhythm, a microcosm of the many songs foretold. The mythic resonance in Barthes' connotative reading is profound: choreography becomes a myth of active prophecy, and the body a medium through which God's extension and procreation are enacted.

The spatial environment, a rooftop with an expansive sky background, around the seaside, on a boat, is a strong indexical indicator of transcendence and an expansive world. The high stage, together with visible urban buildings in the background, places performance in visual space between heaven and earth, a threshold zone of divine-human interrelation. In Barthesian terms, the sky connotes infinitude and possibility, while the cityscape grounds vision in earthly mission. This brings an allegorical conflict between Godly calling and earthly execution, reminiscent of an evangelistic song: a call to spread faith to nations. Worship in an open-air environment, with no church walls or formal altar, democratizes sacred space, suggesting that worship and calling don't respect institutional boundaries.

In a multimodal approach (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001), composition combines bodily, spatial, and chromatic modes to create a unified spiritual message. Visual salience is enhanced by the contrast between bright robes and a dull urban background, with performers as bright objects in the material world. The reflective floor material visually doubles the dancers, with an iconic connotation of the many that will appear ahead. The group's rhythmic movement and dress in an open, natural space create a multimodal story of growth, holiness, and divine multiplication.

The missing shoes have another semiotic value. In biblical semiotics, bare feet mark reverence, remembering Moses before the burning bush (Exodus 3:5) and humility before God. This is an indexical sign of a sacred encounter and a mythic reading aspect of a naturalized sign of authenticity and closeness to the divine. It implies unmediated contact with holy ground, underscoring that dancers are charged messengers who prophesy truth.

The camera framing, with emphasis on full-body shots of the group, focuses on symmetry and builds composition around the horizon, serving as a semiotic tool of

equilibrium and breadth. It literally draws the prophecy of "we will be many" graphically onto the picture frame: a row of dancers is a horizontal reflection, connoting steadiness and limitless possibility. The panoramic shot lets the audience see dancers as individuals and as a symbolic representation, visually performing the theology of community development in the lyrics.

A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEO

Sound of Salem's song is a multimodal text; sound, movement, image, and collective performance combine to express the theology of expansion and purpose. All modes-verbal, visual, bodily, and auditory-are signifying systems supporting the prophetic message of lyrics. With this incorporation, the song not only says but also does what it says: multiplying believers, expanding the Church, and converting society through faith.

The main signifier is the title phrase and the chorus motif, "We will be many", the semiotic nucleus. The denotative meaning is predictive, anticipating numerical growth. On a connotative level, the phrase signals hope, group growth, and final promise. Repetition naturalizes the expectation, turning hope into certainty. The line serves as a symbol in Peircean meaning, drawing on a pre-existing scriptural trope of multiplication (Genesis 22:17) and revivalist rhetoric, where growth signals God's favor. Therefore, saying "we will be many" makes it come true.

The mass choreography-organized masses, big formations, and mobility of space-serves as an indexical label of social order and unity. The physical posing of bodies visually represents hierarchical and harmonious relationships: lead vocalists at the center are associated with spiritual power, and collective discipline is represented through the synchronic movements of dancers. These structures signal integrity, social power, and unity, suggesting that the spiritual development process culminates in societal unity. This visual representation models a utopian future, whose lyrics are a prophecy of multiplication made real.

The lexicon of dance, vigorous arm gestures, jubilant movements, and the group's lifts are iconic symbols of triumph and joy. The dances are iconic because they resemble celebratory gestures in religious and cultural celebrations and simultaneously serve as indices of celebration and victory. These moves are culturally grounded in African popular dance idioms, grounding performance in local cultural authenticity and allowing audience recognition through bodily grammar. The dancers' expressive vitality confirms the verbal prophecy: embodied joy serves as sensory evidence of the song's assertion that divine multiplication is present and impending.

The staging, outdoor, and, in certain cuts, in the ship, in the middle of open water, are measures of scale and open areas. At the denotative level, it merely marks a performance setting; at the connotative level, it denotes openness, universalism, and legitimacy to the public. The wide and open spaces used instead of a church interior transform the symbolic image of sea into the symbolic image of nations, referring to biblical symbolism of harvests and multitude (Revelation 7:9). The public staging broadens message reach, claiming movement doesn't exist within the ecclesial domain but is part of the world stage-Christian witness as cultural and public influence.

Shots of the audience and callbacks, where people echo the chorus or follow orders, index reception and participation. This reciprocity illustrates social uptake, clearly showing that the audience receives and internalizes the prophetic utterance. The call-and-response pattern indicates an interactive form of worship characteristic of African Pentecostal aesthetics, in which meaning is jointly created between performer and congregation. Semiotically, this dynamic offers social evidence: open-market community behavior justifies the performative force of prophecy, considering that the song's message reaches a stage and beyond.

A COMPARATIVE VIEW

Across the two songs, it is observed that common semiotic strategies include repetition as performative theology (speech acts/testimony), rhythmic hybridity as indexical bridging (traditional worship and Afrobeats), and visual strategies that align youth identity with spiritual commitment. Yet contrasts matter: "We Will Be Many" foregrounds corporate liturgy and choral unity; "No Turning Back II" foregrounds youth mobilization and, arguably, a riskier aesthetic that explicitly courts mainstream visibility and, hence, contestation.

Theoretically, these patterns show how semiotic resources available in Afrobeats are retooled to carry sacred meanings. This supports Tagg's claim that popular music communicates via culturally coded gestures but extends it by showing how these gestures are negotiated in frictional space between church elders, artists, influencers, and platform economies.

CONCLUSION

The semiotic analysis reveals that, practically, gospel Afrobeats does theology through form: groove, repetition, and communal performance are theological instruments. That theology privileges embodied resilience, testimony, and experiential assurance-a "faith of the body" enacted through rhythm and social media. These findings contribute to scholarship on religious modernity by showing how contemporary worship is remade through sound and circulation infrastructures. Afrobeats creates Christo-youthful mobilization, movements, sensitization, and faith affirmations through musical-semiotic narratives.

Gospel Afrobeats is a vibrant semiotic field where sacred meanings are produced, contested, and circulated. "We Will Be Many" and "No Turning Back II" each demonstrate distinctive semiotic strategies-communal prophecy, intimate testimony, and urban discipleship- while together they show the genre's capacity to reconfigure worship for digitally mediated, youth-centric environments. Debates about authenticity and policing of sacred sound signal that these semiotic negotiations are contested and ongoing.

Future research should combine textual semiotics with ethnographic fieldwork (participant observation in worship settings, interviews with artists and pastors) and quantitative platform analysis (streaming metrics, playlist inclusion, TikTok challenges) to map how meanings shift over time and across communities. Musical

notation/transcription of motifs, along with audience ethnography, would deepen claims about embodied worship and interpretive communities.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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