# DIGITAL TRANSMEDIALITY AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF AFRICAN IDENTITY IN THE PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF *LISABI*

**Taiwo Samuel OYEKOLA**
*University of Nigeria, Nsukka.*
*samuel.oyekola.pg98479@unn.edu.ng, 09066586142*

&

**Ojonugbede Samuel ALIDU, Ph.D**
*Prince Abubakar Audu University*
*alidu.so@ksu.edu.ng, 08134671310*

**Abstract**
This study examines the globalisation of African identity in the digital age through a performance analysis of *Lisabi*, directed by Niyi Akinmolayan. It interrogates how contemporary African narratives are mediated through digital technology to reach transnational audiences while retaining indigenous cultural integrity. Situating the film within performance studies and postcolonial theory, the research argues that *Lisabi* operates as a performative reconstruction of Yoruba history, transforming cultural memory into a globally circulating aesthetic experience. The study analyses performance elements such as costume, ritual embodiment, and visual composition to demonstrate how traditional Yoruba theatrical conventions are adapted within modern cinematic frameworks. Drawing on globalisation theory and media convergence, the study contends that technological mediation does not erode authenticity but instead expands the performative space through which African identity is negotiated and affirmed. *Lisabi* exemplifies a hybrid aesthetic that fuses oral tradition and epic dramaturgy with contemporary film technology, enabling local histories to assume global relevance. Ultimately, the study concludes that digital performance serves as a strategic site for cultural preservation, transformation, and global visibility in twenty-first-century African storytelling.

**Keywords:** *African Identity; Digital Age; Globalisation; Performance Analysis; Indigenous Aesthetics; Yoruba History and Cultural Representation.*

## Concept of African Identity

African identity refers to the shared culture, history, philosophy, and socio-political consciousness that defines African peoples and their prowess across time and space. It is not static but dynamic, emanating through historical trajectories such as colonialism, globalisation, migration, and technological transformation. One of the fundamental approaches to African identity situates it within shared historical experiences, particularly colonialism and resistance. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "African identity is deeply rooted in language, memory, and cultural heritage. He argues that colonial domination disrupted indigenous cultural systems by imposing foreign languages and epistemologies, which alienated Africans from their own identity (16–17). For Ngũgĩ, the reclamation of indigenous languages and cultural practices is central to restoring African identity and consciousness. Similarly, African identity is known as a product of historical continuity and cultural plurality. According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, "African identity cannot be reduced to a singular essence because Africa itself is culturally diverse. He continues that African identity is negotiated through interaction, dialogue, and shared histories

rather than through fixed or essentialist definitions" (62). African identity is relational and continually shaped by encounters with other cultures in contemporary globalisation; this project views African identity as hybrid, adaptive, and fluid. Homi K. Bhabha argues that, "identity emerges in the third space of cultural interaction, where traditional and modern, local and global elements intersect" (56). African identity, therefore, is not merely a movement for a return to precolonial traditions; however, it is an ongoing process of reinterpretation and innovation. In digital and performance contexts, this hybridity manifests through the fusion of indigenous aesthetics with modern media technologies.

Stuart Hall conceptualises identity as both being and becoming, emphasising that it is shaped by history while also constantly transformed by contemporary realities (225). For Hall, African identity is rooted in collective cultural codes and historical experience but it is also constructed through representation in media, film, and performance. African societies traditionally emphasise collective belonging rather than individualism. According to John S. Mbiti, the African worldview is grounded in the principle that "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am," which reflects the communal orientation of African identity (108). This philosophical orientation shapes African performance, ritual, and theatre, where collective participation reinforces social cohesion and shared identity. Consequently, African identity becomes both rooted and fluid, maintaining cultural authenticity while engaging with global aesthetics, technologies, and markets. Through digital media, diaspora networks, and international cultural platforms, African narratives circulate globally, fostering intercultural dialogue and repositioning Africa as an active contributor to global cultural production rather than a passive recipient of external influences. This dynamic interaction demonstrates that globalisation does not necessarily erode African identity; rather, it provides new opportunities for its expansion, visibility, and re-articulation within contemporary global discourse.

Globalisation refers to the intensification of worldwide social relations, economic exchanges, cultural interactions, and technological interconnections that link distant localities in such a way that events occurring in one part of the world shape realities elsewhere. It is not merely an economic process but a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing culture, media, identity, politics, and performance. Anthony Giddens defines globalisation as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (64). This implies that interdependence and interconnectedness are core features of globalisation. In cultural terms, it implies that artistic productions, including theatre and film, are no longer confined to local audiences but circulate within transnational networks. Similarly, Roland Robertson conceptualises globalisation as both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson, 8). This dual emphasis on structural integration and psychological awareness suggests that globalisation reshapes how communities perceive themselves within a global framework. Cultural identities, therefore, are increasingly formed in relation to global audiences and discourses rather than in isolation.

From a cultural perspective, Arjun Appadurai expands the understanding of globalisation by introducing the notion of global cultural scapes ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes, which describe the fluid and irregular flows of people, media, technology, capital, and ideas across borders (33). Furthermore, globalisation has been theorised as a process that generates cultural hybridity. Homi K. Bhabha argues that cultural interaction under conditions of globalisation produces hybrid identities that emerge within what he terms the third space (56). This hybridity challenges notions of pure or essential cultural identities and instead foregrounds negotiation and transformation.

Manuel Castells describes contemporary globalisation as the emergence of a network society, in which digital communication technologies structure social, economic, and cultural life (Castells, 469). In this networked system, information flows become central to power and identity formation. Cultural productions, including theatre and film, are embedded within digital infrastructures that determine access, distribution, and reception. Thus, globalisation in the digital age is inseparable from technological mediation.

Importantly, globalisation also enables counter-hegemonic cultural expressions. While it may spread dominant ideologies, it simultaneously provides platforms for marginalised voices to assert alternative narratives. Postcolonial scholars argue that globalisation can be appropriated strategically by formerly colonised societies to reclaim representation and cultural agency. Rather than being passive recipients of global influence, African artists and performers actively negotiate global systems to project indigenous identities onto international stages.

**Technological Advancement and the Transformation of African Theatre and Film**

Technological advancement has significantly transformed African theatre and film by redefining modes of production, performance, distribution, audience engagement, and cultural representation. From analogue performance traditions to digital and hybrid aesthetics, technology has expanded the scope and global visibility of African narratives, enabling theatre and film to function within transnational cultural networks. One of the most profound transformations lies in the shift from purely live performance to technologically mediated forms of theatrical expression. Traditionally, African theatre was rooted in communal participation, oral tradition, and ritual performance. However, the emergence of digital tools such as multimedia projection, sound engineering, and virtual scenography has altered the aesthetics and structure of theatrical production. According to Philip Auslander, the boundary between live and mediated performance has increasingly blurred, as digital technologies reshape the nature of theatrical presence and audience experience (Auslander 24). In the African context, this transformation allows theatre practitioners to incorporate filmic elements, digital scenography, and audiovisual effects that enhance narrative depth while preserving indigenous aesthetics.

Furthermore, technological innovation has revolutionised film production in Africa by lowering barriers to entry. The transition from celluloid to digital filmmaking has enabled independent filmmakers to produce content with minimal resources. This shift contributed to the

rapid growth of African film industries such as Nollywood. As Jonathan Haynes observes, the digital revolution democratized filmmaking in Nigeria, allowing diverse voices to emerge and redefining African cinema as a global cultural force (Haynes 3). The accessibility of affordable cameras, editing software, and digital distribution platforms has expanded creative possibilities and diversified narratives.

In addition, technology has transformed distribution and accessibility. Previously, African theatre and film were largely confined to local audiences due to limited infrastructure and funding. Today, digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, YouTube, and online theatre festivals have created global circuits for African cultural production. Arjun Appadurai argues that mediascapes enable the global flow of images and narratives, allowing local cultures to achieve transnational visibility (Appadurai 35). Through these platforms, African stories now reach diasporic and international audiences, fostering cross-cultural exchange and global recognition.

Moreover, technological advancement has redefined audience engagement and reception. Digital media allows interactive participation through social media, online streaming, and virtual performances. African theatre companies increasingly utilise digital platforms for audience feedback, live streaming, and promotional strategies. This participatory culture enhances accessibility and bridges geographical divides, creating new performance communities. Scholars note that digital engagement reshapes spectatorship by transforming audiences from passive observers into active participants in cultural discourse.

Another significant transformation concerns the aesthetics of African performance. Contemporary African theatre and film increasingly employ hybrid forms that integrate traditional storytelling with modern technology. This hybridity reflects the negotiation between indigenous cultural values and global media conventions. Homi K. Bhabha conceptualises this process as cultural hybridity, where new identities emerge from the interaction of local and global influences (Bhabha 56). African filmmakers and theatre practitioners draw on ritual, dance, and oral traditions while incorporating digital cinematography, special effects, and sound design, thereby creating innovative performance forms.

In addition, technological advancement has strengthened cultural preservation and documentation. Digital archives, recordings, and virtual exhibitions have enabled the preservation of African performance traditions that might otherwise be lost. Theatre productions, festivals, and rituals can now be documented and shared globally, contributing to historical continuity and cultural memory. This development supports the sustainability of indigenous knowledge systems and promotes scholarly research.

However, technological transformation also raises critical concerns. Issues such as cultural commodification, Westernisation, and unequal access to digital infrastructure remain significant challenges. David Harvey warns that global technological systems may reinforce economic and cultural inequalities (Harvey 270). African artists must therefore navigate the tension between global visibility and cultural authenticity, ensuring that technological innovation does not distort indigenous narratives.

In conclusion, technological advancement has reshaped African theatre and film by transforming production processes, aesthetics, audience engagement, distribution, and cultural representation. It has facilitated global visibility, innovation, and preservation while also introducing new challenges. As African practitioners continue to engage with digital tools, theatre and film serve as dynamic platforms for projecting African identity within global cultural spaces. This transformation underscores the importance of technology as both a creative resource and a site of negotiation in contemporary African performance.

**Theoretical Framework**

Globalisation theory emerged in the late twentieth century as an interdisciplinary framework for analysing the increasing interconnectedness of the world through economic, cultural, technological, and political exchanges. Although the processes associated with globalisation have historical antecedents in colonialism, trade, and migration, the theoretical articulation of globalisation gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, when scholars sought to explain the impact of technological advancement, media expansion, and transnational flows on identity, culture, and social relations.

One of the major propounders of globalisation theory is Anthony Giddens, whose work, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), provided a foundational sociological understanding of the concept. Giddens conceptualises globalisation as the intensification of worldwide social relations that link distant localities in such a way that local experiences are shaped by global events. His theory highlights the transformation of time and space, where technological innovations in communication and transportation collapse geographical barriers and create interconnected global networks. Similarly, Roland Robertson significantly contributed to globalisation theory in his book *Globalisation: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992). Robertson introduced the idea that globalisation involves both the structural compression of the world and the intensification of global consciousness. He emphasises that individuals and communities increasingly perceive themselves as part of a global system. This awareness influences cultural production, representation, and identity formation. For African cultural practitioners, this theoretical framework explains how contemporary performances and films are produced with global audiences in mind, reflecting transnational concerns and shared human experiences.

Another influential scholar is Arjun Appadurai, whose work, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (1996), expanded globalisation theory through the concept of global cultural flows. Appadurai identifies five dimensions of globalisation: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. These flows describe the movement of people, media, technology, capital, and ideas across borders.

The relevance of globalisation theory to this study lies in its capacity to explain how African identity is constructed, negotiated, and projected within global media spaces. Globalisation theory provides a framework for analysing how local histories and indigenous

performance traditions are adapted for transnational audiences. For instance, the distribution of African films through digital platforms such as Netflix illustrates the practical manifestation of global cultural flows. Through these platforms, culturally specific stories achieve global visibility, fostering intercultural dialogue and challenging stereotypical representations.

Moreover, globalisation theory supports the argument that African identity is not static but dynamic and hybrid. The performance aesthetics in *Lisabi* demonstrate how indigenous Yoruba traditions, rituals, language, and communal storytelling are mediated through digital cinematography, sound design, and visual effects. In addition, globalisation theory highlights the agency of African filmmakers and theatre practitioners in shaping global cultural discourse. Rather than being passive recipients of global influence, African artists strategically use digital media to assert cultural sovereignty, reclaim historical narratives, and project alternative representations.

**Research Methodology**

Research methodology refers to the systematic and theoretical framework that guides the process of investigating a research problem. It encompasses the philosophical assumptions, research design, methods of data collection, and analytical strategies adopted in a study. Methodology provides the foundation for ensuring validity, reliability, and coherence in scholarly inquiry. According to John W. Creswell, "research methodology involves the procedures and strategies used to collect, analyse, and interpret data in order to address research questions and achieve the objectives of a study (3). It is therefore not limited to the techniques used but includes the justification for selecting particular approaches based on the nature of the research problem.

Qualitative research focuses on understanding human experiences, social practices, and symbolic structures within their natural contexts. Qualitative methodology is grounded in constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, which assume that reality is socially constructed and multiple rather than singular. In this context, the study explores how African identity is represented and negotiated in performance through digital mediation. The qualitative method enables the researcher to examine visual, textual, and performative elements such as characterisation, costume, ritual, language, sound, and cinematic aesthetics in *Lisabi*, directed by Niyi Akinmolayan. This method facilitates a deep understanding of how cultural meanings are embedded in performance and how they contribute to the globalisation of African identity.

Within qualitative methodology, this study employs content analysis as the primary analytical approach. Content analysis refers to a systematic and objective method of analysing textual, visual, and audiovisual materials in order to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. According to Klaus Krippendorff, "content analysis is a research technique used for making replicable and valid inferences from texts and media to the contexts of their use"(24). This approach is widely used in media, film, and performance studies because it enables researchers to interpret symbolic representations and cultural narratives.

The use of content analysis in this study involves examining the visual and performative elements of *Lisabi* to understand how African identity is constructed and communicated. The analysis focuses on key components such as narrative structure, characterisation, mise-en-scène, language, music, costume, choreography, and ritual symbolism. These elements are interpreted in relation to globalisation and digital technology. Moreover, content analysis is particularly relevant to performance and film studies because it bridges textual and visual analysis. It allows the researcher to interpret the interaction between performance, technology, and audience reception. This method also facilitates comparative analysis with other African films and digital performances, thereby strengthening the study's analytical depth.

**Synopsis of the Film *Lisabi***

*Lisabi* is a Nigerian historical epic directed by Niyi Akinmolayan, inspired by the legendary 18th-century Lisabi Rebellion against the dominance of the Oyo Empire over the Egba people. The film follows the journey of Lisabi Agbongbo-Akala, portrayed by Lateef Adedimeji, a humble farmer whose life is transformed by the persistent oppression his community endures. Under the rule of the Alaafin of Oyo, played by Odunlade Adekola, and enforced by the ruthless tribute collector Sangodeyi, portrayed by Ibrahim Chatta, the Egba people are subjected to excessive taxation, violence, exploitation, and abuse, making everyday life unbearable.

The conflict intensifies when King Olodan, played by Femi Adebayo, refuses to comply with the excessive tributes demanded by the Oyo Empire and is publicly executed as a warning to others. The brutality of Sangodeyi and his Ilari agents extends beyond tax collection to acts of rape, intimidation, and the killing of innocent villagers. A particularly tragic moment occurs when Oshokenu, Lisabi's close friend, witnesses the oppression of his people and later loses his wife, Abebi, after she is assaulted by Sangodeyi on their wedding day. Unable to bear the trauma, Abebi takes her own life, while Oshokenu dies after confronting the oppressors, urging Lisabi to continue the struggle for justice.

Motivated by these events, Lisabi secretly organizes the Egba farmers through the traditional *Aaro* communal farming system. While appearing to promote agricultural cooperation, the group gradually becomes a covert resistance movement where members are recruited, trained, and prepared for armed rebellion. As their strength grows, the Egba launch coordinated attacks against the Oyo forces, dismantling imperial control and ultimately securing their freedom. The film concludes by celebrating Lisabi as a legendary hero whose courage, strategic leadership, and commitment to communal unity inspire the successful liberation of his people from oppression. Through its portrayal of resistance, sacrifice, and cultural solidarity, *Lisabi: The Uprising* honours an important chapter in Yoruba history while reaffirming the enduring values of justice, unity, and self-determination.

**African Identity in the *Lisabi* Film**



**Plate 1: Warrior Costume as a Representation of Yoruba Identity in *Lisabi***

*Source: Niyi Akinmolayan and Lateef Adedimeji*

The warrior costume and traditional weapons in *Lisabi* serve as significant performance elements that communicate African identity while enhancing the film's global appeal. The coordinated earth-toned sleeveless garments, colourful head wraps, and symbolic body adornments reflect authentic Yoruba cultural traditions, emphasizing unity, discipline, courage, and communal responsibility. The traditional bladed weapons symbolize resistance, self-defence, honour, and the determination to protect ancestral land, portraying African warriors as organized, skilled, and purposeful rather than reinforcing colonial stereotypes. The actors' synchronized posture and confident handling of the weapons further reinforce themes of solidarity, strength, and collective leadership. By combining these indigenous costume and weapon designs with modern cinematic techniques, the film preserves Yoruba cultural heritage and presents it authentically to international audiences. Consequently, *Lisabi* demonstrates how performance aesthetics can promote African history and identity on the global stage, using digital film as a medium for cultural preservation, education, and the globalization of African heritage.



**Plate 2: Traditional Chiefs as a Representation of Yoruba Identity in *Lisabi***

*Source: Niyi Akinmolayan and Lateef Adedimeji*

The chiefs depicted in this scene from *Lisabi* serve as important symbols of African identity, cultural continuity, and indigenous systems of governance. Their traditional Yoruba attire,

consisting of flowing *agbada* garments, matching caps and head wraps, and coral bead necklaces, reflects the dignity, prestige, and authority associated with traditional leadership in Yoruba society. These costumes are not merely decorative but function as cultural signifiers that communicate social status, wisdom, and responsibility within the community. Their composed posture and engagement in deliberation further portray the African institution of chieftaincy as one founded on consultation, collective decision-making, and the preservation of communal values, thereby challenging colonial narratives that often misrepresented precolonial African political structures as disorganized or primitive. Through careful costume design, performance, and visual representation, the film authentically projects Yoruba cultural heritage and leadership traditions to international audiences. By presenting these indigenous institutions through the global medium of digital cinema, *Lisabi* contributes to the globalization of African identity, fostering cross-cultural appreciation while preserving and promoting the historical and cultural significance of traditional African governance in contemporary global film culture.



**Plate 3: White Man and Palace Leader as Representations of the Intersection of Globalisation and Indigenous Culture in *Lisabi***

*Source: Niyi Akinmolayan and Lateef Adedimeji*

The scene from *Lisabi* effectively portrays the intersection of Yoruba cultural identity and global engagement through the visual contrast between a traditional Yoruba leader and a European character. The Yoruba elder, distinguished by his tribal marks, richly patterned *agbada*, elaborate coral bead necklaces, and traditional headgear, embodies the authenticity, dignity, and continuity of Yoruba cultural heritage. His tribal marks serve as a significant cultural symbol, representing ancestry, identity, social belonging, and the preservation of indigenous customs that have long defined Yoruba society. In contrast, the presence of the white character, dressed in European attire, symbolizes cross-cultural interaction and the encounter between African and Western civilizations. Rather than diminishing Yoruba identity, this juxtaposition emphasizes the confidence and resilience of indigenous culture in engaging with the outside world. Through this performance, the film intentionally positions Yoruba culture within a global context by allowing international audiences to appreciate its unique traditions, leadership, and values while

acknowledging historical intercultural encounters. The integration of both characters therefore reinforces the film's objective of globalizing African identity by presenting Yoruba culture as sophisticated, historically significant, and worthy of international recognition, demonstrating that African stories can achieve global relevance without compromising their cultural authenticity.



**Plate 4: Food Produce as a Representation of Indigenous Agricultural Heritage in *Lisabi***

*Source: Niyi Akinmolayan and Lateef Adedimeji*

The display of African food produce in this scene from *Lisabi* functions as a significant cultural and performance element that projects African identity, indigenous agricultural heritage, and the richness of local farming resources. The prominent display of staple crops such as yam and maize, carefully arranged in woven baskets within a traditional marketplace, symbolizes the central role of agriculture in sustaining the economic, social, and cultural life of Yoruba society. These food items represent more than sources of livelihood; they are cultural symbols that reflect self-sufficiency, hard work, communal prosperity, and the deep relationship between the people and their land. The marketplace setting further reinforces indigenous patterns of trade, communal interaction, and local economic organization that have characterized African societies for centuries. Through the authentic representation of indigenous food produce, the film challenges stereotypical portrayals of Africa as a continent defined by scarcity and dependence, instead presenting it as a land endowed with abundant natural resources, agricultural productivity, and rich cultural traditions. By capturing these everyday aspects of African life through high-quality cinematography and distributing the film through digital platforms, *Lisabi* successfully globalizes African identity, introducing international audiences to the continent's agricultural wealth, cultural values, and economic heritage while promoting a more authentic and positive image of Africa in the global film industry.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, *Lisabi* demonstrates that African films can serve as powerful instruments for preserving, promoting, and globalizing African cultural identity in the digital age. Through the effective use of indigenous costumes, traditional leadership structures, language, food produce,

music, and other performance elements, the film presents an authentic representation of Yoruba culture while making it accessible to audiences across the world. The study reveals that digital technologies, including streaming platforms, social media, and other online performance platforms, have significantly expanded the reach of African cultural productions beyond geographical boundaries. Consequently, African films and other performance forms such as theatre, dance, festivals, and digital performances should continue to embrace these platforms as strategic means of projecting African history, values, traditions, and identity to larger global audiences. By leveraging digital media, African cultural expressions can gain greater international recognition, challenge negative stereotypes, preserve indigenous heritage, and strengthen Africa's presence within the global creative and cultural industries.

**Works Cited**

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. 2nd ed., Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Creswell, John W., and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th ed., SAGE Publications, 2018.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford University Press, 1990.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222□237.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell Publishers, 1989.

Haynes, Jonathan. *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. 2nd ed., Heinemann, 1990.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. James Currey, 1986.

Robertson, Roland. *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. SAGE Publications, 1992.

*Lisabi: The Uprising*. Directed by Niyi Akinmolayan, performances by Lateef Adedimeji, Ibrahim Chatta, Odunlade Adekola, Femi Adebayo, and Adebowale Adedayo, Anthill Studios, 2024.