

Multimodal Analysis of Online Protest Visuals on Female Genital Mutilation

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Abstract

Multimodality in modern linguistic research has become popular with scholars exploring multiple semiotic resources in diverse social contexts. However, despite the abundance of studies in this field, the multimodality of online protest visuals on female genital mutilation (FGM) remains under-studied. To fill this research gap therefore, this paper elicits the multimodal resources in select online protest visuals on FGM and analyses their communicative functions as semiotic ensembles of protest against FGM. This is with a view to understanding how the visual elements form coherent visual statements of resistance against FGM. Twenty (20) purposively selected online visuals on FGM are subjected to qualitative analysis using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar. The data analysis reveals that the images are all ideationally narrative with some embedding processes; and this cumulative narrativity represents participants "doing protests" to end the practice of FGM. Other multimodal resources such as transactions, reactions, bidirectionality, demand, offer and close shots, horizontal and vertical compositions, among others, are realised in the visuals to interactively perform directive, declarative, empathic and collaborative functions. The paper thus concludes that the visuals' representative, interactive and compositional systems synergise to create an all-inclusive anti-FGM global movement than an agitative one.

Keywords: female genital mutilation (FGM), visuals, protest, multimodality and semiotics

Introduction

Multimodality engages in the coherent weaving of diverse modes of communication into an organic semiotic ensemble that represents the communicative setting and the interest of the discourse producer (Kress,

2011). The assumption multimodality is based on is that language, either spoken or written, represents just one mode of making meaning out of the various modes available. Hence, the art of meaning-making encompasses multiple semiotic modes such as language, images, gestures, postures, colours, gazes, movements, dress, architecture, proximity, lighting, camera angle, among others; this signals the shift from monomodality to multimodality in discourse studies (Bonsignori & Camiciottoli, 2016; Oyeboode, 2021). Multimodality in language-oriented research emerged in the late 1990s with the ground-breaking work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) on visual grammar that draws upon Halliday's (1978) social semiotics. With the surge in multimodal studies in modern linguistics, the field has gained wider recognition under the label multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) as linguists keep coming up with diverse theoretic tools for understanding multiple semiotic resources in meaning construction.

Thus far in the literature, many multimodal studies have explored the roles of multimodal semiotic modes in meaning-making in diverse communicative contexts such as politics (Machin & van Leeuwen, 2016), public health campaigns (Oyeboode & Unuabonah, 2013; Brookes & Harvey, 2015; Aragbuwa & Adejumo, 2021), digital technology (Kvale, 2016), filming (Bateman & Schmidt, 2011), among others. However, no study so far in multimodal studies has examined how online protest visuals on female genital mutilation (henceforth, FGM) semiotically encode meaning. In view of this paucity, this paper seeks to fill this research gap by: exploring salient multimodal resources in select online protest visuals on FGM; interrogating how the visuals are weaved together to make coherent semiotic ensembles; and, analysing how they have been used to construct meaning by the protesters in their awareness campaign against FGM. The study will significantly serve as a valuable addition to the body of literatures on multimodality in modern linguistics. It will also lend voice to the increasing global call for an end to FGM.

Female Genital Mutilation: A Literature Review

Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female genital cutting (FGC) and female circumcision (FC), is an ancient harmful practice that involves the partial or complete excision of the external female genitals whether through traditional or medical procedures (UNFPA, 2007; Samuel, Muteshi & Njue, 2016; Obiora, Maree & Nkosi-Mafutha, 2020).

Over 130 million females have been circumcised globally with about 3 million girls at risk of being subjected to the injurious procedure annually (WHO, 2008; Epundu *et al.*, 2018). The practice is reportedly prevalent in most African countries, although cases have been reported in the Middle East, Western Asia, North America, among others (UNICEF, 2005; WHO, 2006; UNFPA, 2007; Obiora, Maree & Nkosi-Mafutha, 2020).

Unlike male circumcision, FGM is considered unsafe, dangerous and potentially fatal to the reproductive and sexual health of girls and women; hence, it violates their fundamental rights to bodily integrity, sexual and reproductive health. It is regarded as one of the key contributors to the high mortality and morbidity rates of African girls and women and therefore a global threat to females' overall well-being (Obiora, Maree & Nkosi-Mafutha, 2020). In view of its high prevalence and immediate/lifelong impacts on girls and women, many national, regional and international organisations like UNFPA, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a host of other NGOs have mobilised efforts to denounce and ban the practice globally. Such efforts have promoted series of awareness campaigns on the physical, health, sexual, psychological, moral and ethical consequences of FGM.

These interventional campaigns have increased public knowledge on the risks associated with FGM which has consequently birthed a growing number of discourses on the phenomenon in academia across the globe. Scholars have investigated its prevalence and distribution across regions (Kandala, *et al.*, 2020), its different types (Kaplan *et al.*, 2013), the reasons/motivations behind it (Andarge, 2014), attitudes towards it (Van Rossem, Meekers & Gage, 2015), the efficacy of anti-FGM laws/policies (Aberese & Akweongo, 2018), its trendy medicalisation (Serour, 2013), its immediate/long-term and (in)direct consequences on females (Samuel, Muteshi & Njue, 2016), its risk for DV (Salihu *et al.*, 2012), and, local and international commitments to its abandonment (UNFPA, 2007). Most of these studies are carried out in the fields of health sciences, culture studies, gender/women studies, human rights studies and legal studies.

In linguistic studies however, the study of FGM has been under-researched. Few language-based studies that have explored FGM have only examined it from a critical analytical perspective (e.g., Frissa, 2011). In multimodal studies, Moran and Lee (2013) have worked on female

genital cosmetic surgery by examining select Australian websites that promote the practice. Although cosmetic genital surgery entails genital mutilation or modification, the practice is still different from FGM because it is a voluntary beauty procedure. In view of this paucity, the current study presents a multimodal analysis of online protest visuals on FGM with a view to analysing how each protest visual represents a multimodal semiotic unit that represents resistance to FGM.

It is assumed that there is a decline in the prevalence of FGM worldwide due to massive campaign against it by researchers and (non) governmental organisations. However, Obiora, Maree & Nkosi-Mafutha's (2020) study provides evidence that the research aggregate on FGM in Africa between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2016, a period of 10 years, is low. This shows that there is still the urgent need for research on FGM in order to further promote awareness campaigns towards its eradication, most especially in African countries where there is a higher prevalence rate owing to uncontrolled births and other harmful practices like child and forced marriages. Health, the basic right of every female, is crucial to women's empowerment (Samuel, Muteshi & Njue, 2016); therefore, studying FGM protest visuals as multimodal campaign ensembles of dissent against FGM in discourse studies becomes highly significant.

The Theoretical Base

Theoretically, this study is hinged on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal theory of visual grammar which is apt for the data analysis owing to its exploration of multimodality using Halliday's social semiotic approach to language. Kress and van Leeuwen present the first social semiotic framework for analysing visual images to demonstrate that visual text has its own grammar. This framework recognises that visual images simultaneously perform three metafunctions in social semiotics, namely: the ideational function (representational), the interpersonal function (interactive) and the textual function (compositional) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 16). Each of these metafunctions represents different levels of meaning construction in multimodality.

The ideational function offers diverse patterns of representing participants within and around us and thus presents ways of encoding visually how humans experience the world. Although the ideational

function offers an array of representational choices, only the narrative pattern is relevant to this study; the pattern connects represented participants through a vector that visually structures participants “as doing something to or for each other” within a semiotic act (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 59). Narration could be an action or a reactional process. If an action flows from an actor to a goal, the structure is transactional but if the action does not flow from an actor to a goal, the structure is non-transactional. In addition, a bidirectional transaction exists in which the participants are both doing something for each other in an actor-goal role exchange where both participants are represented as interactors. Thus, transactional action processes could be unidirectional or bidirectional (Harrison, 2003; Oyeboade, 2021; Aragbuwa & Adejumo, 2021). A reactional process, on the other hand, is visually structured via a vector formed through the eyeline (gaze) of one or more participants tagged as the reactor while the object of the gaze is the phenomenon. In a similar vein, a reactional pattern could be transactional (where a reactor relates to a phenomenon) or non-transactional (no phenomenon) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 50-68).

Participants are of three types in visuals: interactive participants (image-producers and -viewers), represented participants (people, objects and places being depicted) and secondary participants known as circumstances (optional participants in narrative representation) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 72). The interpersonal function thus represents the different patterns of interactions among these participants via image acts, size of frame, horizontal and vertical angles. Image acts construe demand and offer relations. Demand shows represented participant(s) gazing directly at the viewer's eyes in such a way that the participant's gaze (or eyelines) forms a vector that connects participants with viewers. Offer, on the other hand, depicts represented participants looking away from the viewer; participants are merely presented as objects of information or scrutiny to viewers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 116-123). On the other hand, size of frame represents social distance relational choices between represented participants and viewers.

The choices include: close shot or close-up (shows only the head and the shoulders); the very close shot also known as big close-up (shows anything less than the head and the shoulders); the medium close shot (shows the waist up); the medium shot (shows the knees upwards); the

medium long shot (shows the full body); the long shot (shows the full body occupying about half the height of the frame); and the very long shot (shows anything wider than the long shot) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 124). Horizontal angle portrays frontal and oblique angles which encode the image producer's involvement and detachment, respectively. Vertical angle inversely depicts power relations between interactive and represented participants which include, high angle (enacts a point of view of interactive participant's power over the represented participant), low angle (the represented participant has power over the interactive participant) and eye-level angle (enacts equality among all participants) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 140).

The textual function integrates the representational and interactional patterns using diverse compositional resources that operate through three interrelated principles of information value, salience and framing (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p. 176). Information value sees to the placement of elements on the left-right (Given-New), top-bottom (Ideal-Real), and centre-margin sections. The Given-New information value is a horizontal composition where elements placed on the left are presented as Given (information already known to viewers) while those on the right are New (unknown information). The Ideal-Real value is a vertical composition that places some constituent elements at the top section (idealised or generalised information essence) and others at the bottom section (specific and more practical information). The Centre-Margin value is a central composition where one (or more) elements is placed at the center (the information nucleus) while other elements (the dependent elements) are placed around the central element. Salience depicts factors such as colour contrast, size, gaze intensity, foregrounding or backgrounding, sharpness or dullness of focus, etc. that are visually encoded to attract viewers' attention. Framing entails the presence or absence of framing devices that either connect or disconnect compositional elements to achieve inclusion or exclusion (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 177-197).

Having explained Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar as it relates to the three metafunctions in social semiotics, the current paper thus seeks to a) explore the realisation of the ideational, interpersonal and textual resources in the select online visuals on FGM;

and, b) analyse their communication functions as composite images of protest against FGM.

Methodology

The data for the study comprise twenty (20) purposively selected visuals on FGM retrieved from the following online sources: BBC News, Plan International Canada Inc., africanews and United Nations (OHCHR). The select images cover a range of FGM-themes such as: the girl-child victimhood of FGN; its consequences on victims; its violation of girls' human rights; the need to save the girl-child; men's efforts in the fight against FGM; and, local and international protests against the practice. However, the data selection has been narrowed down to five (5) online protest images against FGM owing to the fact that the select images are all-encompassing as they contain all other aforementioned themes. Also, space constraints and the need for thorough analyses have also necessitated the exigency of streamlining the data to protest images. The study adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar as the theoretical framework inasmuch as the theory explores multimodality using Halliday's social semiotics.

Data Analysis

This study focuses on the multimodal composition of some FGM images and their deployment as campaign tools in the local and international protests against FGM. In achieving this aim, the ideational, interpersonal and textual resources in the select images are first elicited and their communication functions as composite images of protest against FGM are subsequently analysed. In doing these, the work is engaged in multimodality, which will hopefully add to the body of literatures on multimodal studies and lend a voice to the local and global call for the eradication of FGM. Each visual will first be presented followed by its metafunctional analysis.

Figure 1



The United Nations (2021) Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/07/female-genital-mutilation-can-be-stopped-says-hc>

Figure 1 is a narrative representation with a transactional reactional process. The image consists of a black woman and a black man looking at each other as they both hold a banner each. The woman's and the man's banners, respectively, display the verbal texts, *LET'S STAND TOGETHER TO END FGM* and *MEN SPEAK UP TO END FGM*. The light-blue sky and the banner sticks held by the participants represent vectorial processes that connect the two represented participants (henceforth, RPs). Each RP plays the role of reactor and phenomenon simultaneously in an exchange that represents their relation as a bidirectional transactive reaction. The simultaneity of their reactions is realised by their eyelines (gazes) which form vectors that signal both participants doing something for each other and relating to each other reciprocally; hence, both participants represent interactors in this bidirectional encounter. Inasmuch as narrative patterns present unfolding actions or processes, the RPs are both depicted as collaborators in the protest against FGM. The gaze of the woman directly addresses the man, and vice versa, thereby establishing personal relation with each other. Both also share a distance of few inches apart which suggests alignment of purpose. By implication, the woman seeks collaboration with the man in the protest against FGM while the man voluntarily coacts in the campaign which engenders gender bond in the fight against FGM. The circumstances (other participants that are unrelated to the RPs) in the visual are locative as

they relate the RPs to their setting which is Germany as indicated in the verbal text *#gegenGewalt*, a German word that denotes “counter-violence” ([https://en.pons.com/translate/german-english/ Gegengewalt](https://en.pons.com/translate/german-english/Gegengewalt)), inscribed on the left lower section of the banner.

Figure 1 however has a cojoined representation with its vertical structure in which the upper section visualises the two banners (held by the RPs) that construes a non-transactive reaction as against the bidirectional transactive reaction of the elements at the bottom. The banners' non-transactive reaction engages viewers with the verbal texts *LET'S STAND TOGETHER TO END FGM* and *MEN SPEAK UP TO END FGM*. Ideationally therefore, the image's cojoined narrative structure visually represents the role of gender collaboration in the campaign against FGM.

Interactionally, the image act is both demand and offer. The demand act enacts a relation of social affinity between the RPs depicted in a close shot portrait marking personal distance. The vectors formed through their eyelines act as vectors that connect both of them to be addressing each other. The black woman's gaze demands a relational engagement with the black man and the kind of relation is signified by means of the verbal text on her banner, *LET'S STAND TOGETHER TO END FGM*, a visual direct address to the black man that marks a demand for gender team-up in the campaign. The reciprocal gaze of the black man signals acceptance as indexed in the text on his banner. Inasmuch as the woman and the man represent the two genders, the demand act thus reinforces gender inclusion in the campaign. The verbal texts on the banners also elicit a demand as they seek gender collaboration with viewers through emotive appeal with the aim of fostering a balanced gender engagement in the elimination of FGM.

On the other hand, offer act is enacted in the visual by presenting impersonally the RPs as objects of contemplation and information to viewers. Viewers are to contemplate the relationship between the woman and the man; and, reflect on the information that the campaign against FGM is all-gender inclusive. The frontal eye-level viewpoint additionally fosters an equal, all-inclusive attitude towards the eradication of FGM as it demonstrates that it makes the campaign effective.

Textually, Figure 1 combines both vertical and horizontal compositions. Vertically, its top section displays the two banners while the bottom shows the two RPs connected by their reciprocal gazes. The verbal

texts on the banners represent the ideal, a direct call for gender-inclusiveness in the campaign against FGM while the man and woman stand for the real that depicts the actual doing of gender collaboration in the campaign. The ideal, the banners with the texts, is however more salient because they face the viewers frontally; reveal the motives of the RPs; engage viewers to a joint action; and consequently, represent the idealised essence of the visual. The banner sticks serve as vectors that connect ideal to real and present them as complementing each other. There is thus a visual symmetry between the ideal and the real.

Horizontally too, the elements on the left (the woman with her banner) represents the given, the known fact that women are at the forefront of the campaign against FGM, being the direct victims. However, the elements on the right (the man with his banner) is the new, the novel information that men are now collaborating with women to end FGM. The slanting of their banner sticks towards each other depicts the coming together of the two genders harmoniously in the campaign mission. Hence, the vertical and horizontal compositions connected through an image-text relation are directive, practical, collective and basically gender-inclusive in function.

Figure 2



Buitenbos, 2022. Retrieved from <https://plancanada.ca/stories/ending-fgm-why-these-3-traditional-cutters-are-putting-down-their-knives>

Figure 2 encodes a narrative representation. The image foregrounds a black female teenager holding a placard with the bold inscription, *END FGM*. The lady represents the reactor; however, her reaction formed by her vectorial gaze is non-transactive owing to the

absence of a phenomenon, which has been left to viewers' imagination. From her sombre gaze that relates her to a protestive ambience and the verbal text on her placard, it could be presumed that she reacts to the practice of FGM with a stern look of disapproval, which therefore becomes the implicit phenomenon of her reactional posture. Ideationally therefore, this image's non-transactive reaction creates a strong sense of identification and empathy with the direct victims of FGM, most especially African girls which the black girl represents. The verbal text, *END FGM*, also constitutes an embedded narrative structure as it represents a secondary non-transactive reaction subordinated to the larger non-transactive reaction of the girl-participant. As the text engages some unseen audience, it functionally makes explicit the girl's non-transactive reaction in a complex narrative process that could be transcoded as "I am a victim of FGM who wants an end to it".

Interactionally, the RP looks directly at viewers thereby connecting the vector formed by her eyelines with those of viewers. Her sombre expression and skin colour invite viewers to relate to young black/African girls as the direct victims of FGM. The image demands something from viewers, which is empathy; that is for them to help end FGM. Viewers are therefore being coopted to join in the fight against FGM. With a frontal close-up point of view, the image says: black African girls are part of our world; hence, everyone must all be involved in ending FGM. The frontal and eye-level angle of this visual also foster an equal all-inclusive attitude towards ending FGM, which thus reinforces the involvement of all participants.

From the point of view of compositional meaning, this image is structured along the vertical axis (ideal-real) where the upper section visualises the melancholic gaze of the girl and the lower section displays the banner with the text, *END FGM*. While the upper section makes an emotional appeal from victims of FGM represented by the girl, the lower part tends to be more explicit by textualising what the appeal is, a call to end FGM. The girls' two hands holding firmly the banner form vectors that integrate the image-text relation between the upper and lower sections thereby creating complementarity between both parts and presents them as a single unit of information.

Figure 3



BBC News (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-49677983>

Ideationally, Figure 3 too is narrative with a non-transactive reactional structure. Two women of colour jointly holding a banner with the inscription, *SAVE A GIRL AND BREAK THE RAZOR BLADE*, are displayed in the visual. Both RPs form reactors via their eyelines which serve as vectors. From the women's bright facial expressions, it could be deduced that they do not play the victimhood role here, but that of empathisers, protesting on behalf of the actual victims of FGM, the girl-child. Inasmuch as their gazes connect with some unseen audience, it is a non-transactive reaction that positions the RPs in a collective move of dissent against FGM as suggested by the protest ambience signaled in the verbal text on the banner which constitutes another non-transaction as the text gazes out in a reactive process. However, this second process is embedded in the first major process in a visual structure that could be transcoded as "The ladies advocate ending FGM to save the girl-child". The young women are thus reactors of solidarity, representing the girl-child as the victim that must be liberated from FGM.

On the interactive meanings, Figure 3 is a demand, a beckoning that wants two things from viewers: save the girl-child and break the razor blade. The razor blade, the instrument used for crude act of FGM serves as a metaphor reference of the act; hence breaking it connotes ending the act.

The reactors' demand act thus acknowledges viewers and demands from them a move to liberate the girl-child from FGM. Their bright facial expressions, full hairstyles and makeup faces portray them as tertiary or former victims of FGM; hence, their gesture of solidarity with the girl-child, the direct victim. Just like Figure 2, the RPs' close-up signifies personal distance that foregrounds a direct visual address with viewers while the frontal shot says that the girl-child is one of us who must be saved from the razor blade (FGM). The eye-level angle likewise indicates an all-inclusive attitude towards the eradication of FGM.

Compositionally, the image is positioned on a vertical axis (top-bottom). The top (ideal) displays the moderately lit faces of the two women of colour while the bottom (real) shows the banner held by the women with a broken razor blade on the right side of the banner, and on the left the inscription, *SAVE A GIRL AND BREAK THE RAZOR BLADE*. The top visualises an optimistic emotive appeal from the RPs to viewers while the bottom serves as an explicit text elaboration of the women's facial gesture of appeal – save our own, the girl-child, from FGM. Worthy of note is the fact that the bottom, that contains the banner, is also vertically and horizontally polarised in an embedding structure. The vertical polarisation has the text *SAVE A GIRL* at the top of the banner to make salient the girl-child as the actual victim of FGM that needs to be saved. The lower section in this verticalness is also distinctly polarised horizontally into left and right sections. The left side has the text extension ... *AND BREAK THE RAZOR BLADE*, which metaphorically promotes further the protest to end FGM, while the right side is dominated by a bold image of a broken blade, the new metaphor that signals the end of FGM and the optimistic emancipation of the girl-child. The embedding structure of the banner with its text-elaboration makes it the salient element with the most important information in the semiotic unit. However, the hands of the RPs holding the banner form vectorial patterns of synergy which unite the visual elements as a whole.

Figure 3



A Protest against FGM in Somalia
Ritchie (2016). Retrieved from
<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36101342>

Figure 4 is a narrative process with a non-transactive reaction. The pictorial page consists of some African women from Somalia. A large banner with the inscription *STOP FGM* could be seen at the background; this banner with its verbal inscription forms another non-transactive reaction. The women and the verbal text are thus reactors in non-transactive reactions as their gazes connect with some unseen elements. However, the women's lively faces, clapping gestures and the verbal text on the banner suggest the RPs are all engaged in protest chants against the practice of FGM. The image's non-transactive reactions depict an energetic anti-FGM movement meant to create a powerful sense of viewers' identification with the women.

Interactionally, the image enacts an offer by presenting the RPs to viewers as objects to be observed. The women in close personal distance are offered as anti-FGM activists and therefore as a group viewers should identify with. The frontal angle of the image encodes a point of view of involvement that can be transcoded as “this is something we all should be involved in”. Hence, the depiction fosters attitudinal involvement with

anti-FGM activism. The visual's high angle does not only give a wider view of the women-participants, it most importantly diminishes the women in order to portray them as a vulnerable group seeking empathy. However, the banner with its verbal text is a demand that engages viewers to evoke the visual imperative, (Let's) stop FGM! The text is frontally placed in the foreground and at a low-angle to give it more salience as the most important element that demands urgency.

Compositionally, the visual is vertically polarised to reveal top (ideal) and bottom (real) sections. The ideal contains the banner with the verbal text *STOP FGM* while the real displays some African women clapping cheerfully. The ideal visualises “the directive to end FGM” while the real shows “activism to end FGM”. In this composition, the verbal text plays the lead role owing to its placement in the foreground and sharp focus. The hand of the unseen woman (a secondary participant) holding the banner at the left side and the heads of the women form integrating devices that connect the ideal with the real making both functionally complementary. Communicatively, the information value of the integration shows that the elimination of FGM goes beyond mere rhetoric, it entails activism.

Figure 5



Davies (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.africanews.com/2021/03/17/kenya-upholds-anti-female-genital-mutilation-fgm-law/>

Figure 5 is vertically structured. The top visualises seven RPs, six mixed-race females and one male, all displaying the hand stop gesture. The bottom contains the verbal text *FGM/C IS GLOBAL but so is the movement to end it*. The two parts, top and bottom, constitute narrative representations presenting unfolding non-transactive reactions. The RPs occupying the upper section are reactors who engage with some unseen audience with their vectorial gazes. Their hand-stop gestures however elaborate their gazes to show that they want FGM to stop. Their non-transactive reaction is therefore functionally directive. The verbal text at the bottom of the image serves as a second non-transactive reactional process in which the verbal text gazes at some unseen elements in a declarative reaction. While the top ideationally gives a global and an all-inclusive approach directive to ending FGM, the bottom substantiates the directive by stating that inasmuch as the practice is global, the campaign against it too should be. The top and bottom are complementarily directive and declarative, respectively. The RPs play the role of anti-FGM activists here. The two thick vertical lines that enclose the verbal text represent the processes that relate the top and the bottom to each other.

Interactionally, the top with the seven RPs is a demand as the gazes of the participants engage directly viewers. The RP's hand-stop gestures and gazes form collective vectors that evoke the visual imperative – Stop! The top section of the image thus commands viewers to stop something. What viewers should stop is however indirectly stated in the verbal text at the bottom of the image, *FGM/C IS GLOBAL but so is the movement to end it*. With the text's direct and bold gaze at viewers, it evokes a visual declarative affirming that the anti-FGM movement should be global inasmuch as the practice is. In other words, the verbal text elaborates the visual command which could be transcoded as – *Stop FGM globally since its practice is global*. The gender and racial inclusiveness of the RPs portrayed in a medium shot further engenders global inclusivity. Therefore, the top and bottom sections jointly demand an anti-FGM global movement. In addition, the visual's frontal eye-level angle fosters an egalitarian, all-inclusive attitude to the elimination of FGM.

From the compositional point of view, the image is vertically structured with some embedded compositions. A thick vertical line divides the image into two sections, top-bottom. However, this dividing line fuses the two sections into a co-joined complementary image-text composition.

The information value of the top idealises the anti-FGM global movement while that of the bottom substantiates the ideal. The theme of global inclusivity thus cojoins the two sections. The seven RPs at the top are the foregrounded elements in the composition owing to their sharper focus and medium shot that foreground gender and racial inclusion.

Embedding also structures both top and bottom. The top has an embedded verticalness of top and bottom too. Four RPs consisting of three females (one black, one white and one Middle Eastern) with one male occupy the top space to visualise the ideal of gender and race inclusion in the anti-FGM movement while the bottom displays three women (also one black, one white and one) to only reinforce racial inclusion. Apparently, the top RPs are more salient owing to the male gender inclusion. The bottom of the whole visual also has an embedded vertical pattern in which the text *FGM/C IS GLOBAL* boldly occupies the top space of the entire verbal caption while *but so is the movement to end it* unmarkedly occupies the bottom space. By implication, the top presents the global ideal of FGM while the bottom presents the real of fighting it globally; however, the ideal takes the lead role in this composition as it substantiates the real.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

Using Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal theory, the current study has examined the representational, interactive and compositional resources in select online protest visuals on female genital mutilation and analysed how they encode diverse semiotic meanings in the campaign against FGM. The data analysis reveals that the images are all ideationally narrative as they present unfolding reactions using non-transactional structures. The visuals' narrativity details the series of protest actions undertaken by women (and a few men) agitating for the elimination of FGM which represents them as "doing protest" to end the practice; hence, the narrativity represents acts of protest against FGM. The dominance of the reactional pattern in the semiotic ensembles visualises all the participants reacting to the practice of FGM with disapproval, while the non-transaction of their reactions, as they are not aimed at any seen phenomenon, serve to establish an emphatic all-inclusive engagement (that is, "we all are involved in this") in the fight against FGM. The bidirectional transactional reaction only characterises Figure 1 basically to represent gender co-acting in the protest narrative. However, all the

images are represented as embedded narrative processes that form overlapping visual structures to foreground the centrality of participants' protest actions against FGM.

Interactively, the narrative structures combine both demand and offer acts which semiotically perform the directive, declarative, empathic and collaborative functions. The directive function imperatively calls for a protest action to end FGM; the declarative function affirms the imperatives of gender and racial inclusion in the protest; the empathic function makes an emotive appeal of identification with direct and secondary victims of FGM; and, the collaborative function seeks global collaboration in the protest actions against FGM. The dominance of the close frontal eye-level portrait creates a maximum sense of participants' engagement with viewers; and also promotes an all-inclusive anti-FGM global movement. In an instance where the medium frontal high angle is used, it evokes an empathetic attitude towards victims of FGM.

Compositionally, although the visuals combine vertical (ideal-real) and horizontal (given-new) structures, vertical structures dominate in which the ideal cumulatively makes an emotive appeal for gender and racial inclusion in the protest against FGM while the real practically demonstrates it. In sum, the examined visuals' representative, interactive and compositional systems synergise to create an all-inclusive anti-FGM global movement than an agitative one. The paper has therefore revealed the diverse multimodal structures deployed by the anti-FGM movement to represent their activism narratively.

In support of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) assertion that visuals are also grammatically structured, the study has demonstrated that all the anti-FGM visual elements are choicely structured as visual statements of protest against the practice of FGM. This study has thus broadened the knowledge on multimodality, especially as regards FGM in multimodal studies. It must be acknowledged at this juncture that the multimodality of these anti-FGM visuals is extensive and diverse which thus necessitates the need for other possible multimodal readings from interested scholars.

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