

Existentialist Ideology as an Apparatus for Afro-Semio-Aesthetic Study of Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice* and Sam Ukala's *Akpakaland*

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Abstract

Playwrights as members of a society derive their raw materials and inspirations from the society where they are members. As they draw these sources of their inspirations from their communities, consciously or unconsciously they may be aware of some cultural elements as they embed these components in their creative outputs. The problem of the study is therefore, the inability of the readers (Africans and non-Africans) of African plays to leverage on these cultural components for meaning making, and thus creates misinterpretation. Therefore, the objectives of the study is to investigate how these cultural rudiments have gone a long way in the deduction of meanings through the existentialist thought in modern Nigerian drama. The study adopts contents analysis of the qualitative research methodology by exploring the plays of Sunnie Ododo and Sam Ukala through the roles of some characters in the playtexts. The findings thus, reveals that for African or non-African to understand the aboriginal playtexts, they should endeavour to understand the cultural components of the people. Hence, the research among others recommends that modernist movements can help in the deductions of meanings from Nigerian playtexts in a multicultural society.

Key words: Africa; Existentialism; Playwright; Apparatus; Ideology

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INTRODUCTION

People within the same cultural milieu and domain have generated certain set of symbols and signs; language for communicative enterprise. These signs and symbols are received by the people within the same cultural setting and responded to accordingly. The playwright is one of those people living in the same cultural setting. Therefore, the dramatist's aim is for him to communicate with his play text to the people. Relating with the peoples' art with certain signs in the community; these signs and symbols ranges from language, totem, gestures, metaphor and other non-verbal communication tools in the said community, and communicate with these signs and symbols proficiently within the members of that community. Hence, the need for semiotic and aesthetic study. Watson and Hill posit that, "semiotics is the general science of sign system and their role in the construction and reconstruction of meaning... there is practically nothing that is not a sign capable of meaning and signification" (p.261).

Therefore, it is imperative to set the foreground for semiotic discourse and how the elements fit into contemporary Nigerian drama. What exactly is semiotics? How does it apply to the practice of drama? What role does semiotics play when it applies to play writing? The answers to this can be found in the avalanche of plays by the contemporary Nigerian dramatists. Apparently, semiotics is often employed in the writing of play texts and as such it must be explored in the analysis of contemporary Nigerian drama.

Here it should perhaps be noted that a 'text' can exist in any medium and may be verbal, non-verbal, or both. The term text usually refers to a message which has been recorded/encoded in some ways, these could be written, audio- and video-recording so that it is physically independent of its encoder or decoder. Examples of the physically independent of it encoder (playwright) can be found in contemporary Nigerian drama. A text

therefore, is an assemblage of signs such as, symbols, language, words, images, sounds and/or gestures shaped and interpreted with reference to the harmonies associated with a genre and in a particular 'medium' of communication. "Semiotics permeates all aspects of human communication and serves as a platform for the understanding and decoding of meanings" (Ekweariri and Nwosu, p.60). These aspects of human communication are enshrined in contemporary Nigerian drama.

In this regard, the playwright or contemporary dramatist fuses his play text with signs, symbols, language, images and other non-verbal cues to communicate his idea to the people. For instance, the characters in Idegwu's *Tough Man* are symbolically divided into two, the living characters and the dead characters. Efi-ile and efu-ojaegwu symbolize two worlds, the world of the living and the world of the dead. A replica can also be drawn from Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, where Elesin Oba represents the black man and Simon Pilkings represents the White man. Hence for the interpreter to understand and interpret the play justifiably, he may understand these worlds of the black and the white. The dramatist communicates with the two worlds as they are not just there for visual pleasing, they are there for semiotic and aesthetic purposes.

Semiotics according to different language scholars, critics and semioticians, is however the resting place for language- signs and signification. Chandler citing Saussure posits that: "The idea is to think of language as a system of signs" (p.51). Whether from the structuralists' point of view or from the linguistics' perception, in literary theory, language is the bedrock of sign system and signification. It is the quest for the different semiotic structures and languages that led the Russian cultural semiotician Yuri Lotman to coin the term 'semiosphere' to refer to, "the whole semiotic space of the culture in question" (Lotman, pp.124-125). The contemporary Nigerian playwrights did not just explore language for nothing, but, for communicative purposes. When an interpreter/ reader talks of the language of a play, he is equally talking of the signs and symbols in the play that will aid communication. Thus, the contemporary Nigerian drama strives on language to be able to communicate to its reader/interpreter.

Etymologically, the term semiotics is also known as semiology. Semiotics or semiology has: "over the years, generated a number of discourses, which have made its comprehension a difficult subject" (Epochi-Olise, p.181). She goes on to assert that: "...semiotics, has posed some difficulty, especially in terms of definition." (p.181). But it is debatable however, that there have been different attempts to define semiotics in other fields like linguistics, sociology, psychology, theatre arts, but it has not been ascertained if the term semiotics or semiology has been properly placed in the study of theatre and drama. That is why from Greek's perception; it is seen as "an

interpreter of signs" (Epochi-Olise, p.181). The Nigerian contemporary drama is flooded with signs, symbol and language that should be understood by the interpreter/ reader to enable him create outside that of the dramatists.

This takes us to connect with aesthetic itself. What then is aesthetics? Let us start with a working definition of aesthetics. Aesthetics can be said to be the study of whether a work of arts or a non-work of arts from the perspective of either its beauty or uncomely. That is, beautiful or ugly. This definition emphasizes that the beautiful is according to the person studying that work and the ugly too. Accordingly, Holman and Harmon define aesthetics as: "The study or philosophy of the beautiful in nature, art, and literature. It has both a philosophical dimension. What is art? What is beauty? What is the relationship of the beautiful to other values?" (p.5). Beyond art, aesthetics goes to other areas like nature and literature. Thus follow by some rhetorical questions which are obviously things that will bring the meaning of aesthetics to the front burner. They equally go further to state the psychological dimension which is: "what is the source of aesthetic enjoyment? How is beauty perceived and recognized? From what impulse do art and beauty arise?" (p.5). These are some of the questions this study seeks to address through the plays selected for this dissertation. Holman and Harmon did not stop at that; they equally went on to look at the main purpose of aesthetics in the study of literature. Perhaps, this may serve as leeway to this dissertation. According to them, "The aesthetic study of literature concentrates its attention on the sense of the beautiful rather than on moral, social, or practical considerations" (p.5). Whether the contemporary drama is beautiful or ugly, it can be considered.

There is problem with aesthetic study of literature-drama simply because the concentration is always on the beauty and less attention is always accrued to moral, social and practical considerations. This is perhaps, the lacuna found in the extensive study of aesthetics. An attempt to open up on the contextual meaning of aesthetics, Effiong Johnson submits that:

If human beings had the privilege of suggesting how they wanted to look like to the Master human designer, I guess no one would have dared to suggest ugliness. Every man would have looked for what best appealed to him to the Designer in his fabrication for him to come out stunning... what is being said here is that everyone likes beauty or the beautiful or the handsome, the good, the attractive, the bright, the colourful... the aesthetically pleasing. (p.19)

Furthermore, Effiong Johnson citing Ruth Saw adds that: "Aesthetics is unique among the evaluative disciplines, in that it has to do importantly with feelings, feelings expressed in art and in the appreciation of art, and with the judgment that are usually taken to base on these feelings" (p.19). Therefore, aesthetic judgment is based on individual feelings about work of art and other works beyond the art: "We very easily and naturally tie

our aesthetic experiences to works of art which are man-made objects” (Akpan and Etuk, p.22). Again, Zima explains from his deduction of what aesthetics means from the point of view of Kant as: “the beautiful in nature and art as a phenomenon which ‘pleases without a concept’ and which ought to be perceived by the observer with ‘disinterested pleasure’” (p.3). These are what the Nigerian dramatist explores in his attempt to pass his message across, and any interpreter should endeavour to understand the aesthetic embellishment of the drama to make meaning from it.

SYNOPSIS OF *HARD CHOICE* AND *AKPAKALAND*

Ukala’s Akpakaland

Akpakaland is based on an Ika folk story centred on a jealous wife who transfers a cow’s tail to her co-wife in order to gain higher sexual and financial attention from their husband. In the play, Ukala twists the original tale beyond a mere polygamous frivolity into a very important state matter. This transcends the domestic context of the play, to a very serious political setting where the ruler and ‘have-all’ perpetually dominate and oppress the ruled and less privileged of the society. Akpaka, the President of Akpakaland, is married to five wives, in order: Fulama, Yeiye, Seotu, Unata, and Iyebi. He selected each of these wives from different geo-political zones. The first three wives are picked from the province of the rich, while he picked the last two from the province of the poor. Whenever he thinks of the dwindling state of the financial resources of his kingdom he finds solace in trying to knock out the solution of the problem from his bottle of gin.

It is on one of these occasions when he is thinking of the state of insecurity, hunger, squalor, disease, corruption, empty treasury and armoury that have bedevilled Akpakaland that Fulama his first wife, who is the daughter of a very influential past president, Dan Mali the great, brings to his attention a flimsy gossip that one of his wives has a tail. Instead of dismissing Fulama and her domestic frivolity for the more serious state matters he is trying to solve, Akpaka handles the tail matter even more seriously than Fulama expected. He decrees that his wives must strip naked before the entire Akpakaland. Unata is the unfortunate wife with the tail. She and her father Idemudia seek spiritual solution from Enwe, the traditional Doctor who had earlier prepared a charmed rope for Fulama’s cow to regain its tail, which it lost to some thieves. On Unata’s request that the tail be returned to the sender, the oracles asked Unata to bring, amongst other sacrificial items, an unripe plantain, which would be used as bait for the one who sent the tail. To further ridicule Unata, Fulama, in the company of Yeiye and

Seotu, continuously mocks her to take her bath in their presence in order for them to see her tail. On one of these occasions, an unsuspecting Fulama smells a roasting plantain and begs for it. Unata who, with this symbolic act, transfers the tail back to the sender gladly gives her the food. On the day of the public tease, Fulama is the one with the tail and her shame escalates to high heavens.

Her mother tries to lobby for the dismissal of the case, while some of the corrupt ministers persuade Akpaka to administer a light sentence because of Fulama’s parentage, and also because of the unavailability of armoury to execute her. Akpaka eventually pronounces a sentence of three months imprisonment, as against the public execution earlier decreed. Idemudia is not happy with this since, according to him, “...if my daughter were found guilty, the executioner would have had the wherewithal to execute her. If he has no guns and bullets to execute Fulama, we have our hoes and matchets” (p.50). This instigates a pandemonium in the crowd who becomes mad and seizes Fulama for jungle justice and execution. But fortunately, the law of nemesis catches up on Fulama as Afianmo (Akpaka’s Minister for war, and the executioner) suddenly produces a gun that could not be found earlier to execute Fulama. In an attempt to shoot blindly at the irate crowd, a stray bullet however hits Fulama. The crowd, constituting mainly the poor impoverished masses, sees this as an opportunity and seizes power from Akpaka and his ministers.

Ododo’s Hard Choice

The play, *Hard Choice*, opens in a joyous atmosphere where the prince of Igedu Kingdom and the Princess of Emepiri Kingdom want to get married. But there is pandemonium as some unidentified and masked youths invade the venue and snatched away the crown of the king of Igedu kingdom. This ugly scenario marks the beginning of the tragic events in the play. The quest to find the missing crown begins. The High Chief Ubanga is behind this ugly incident because of his selfish interest in marrying the princess of Emepiri kingdom. After the snatching the crown, it was handed over to the queen who is unknown to King of Emepiri, the chief plotter of the incident. As the play progresses, King Iginla who is in the hideout and his Bashorun begin to plan for war if the missing crown is not found. The missing crown is authority. The snatching of the crown is a disgrace to their kingdom, that act is on its own a taboo, because one the symbol of authority of Igedu kingdom is missing. They promise war which makes Eze Okiakoh to seek for peace, as a result, goes to meet King Iginla in his hideout.

The drama comes to limelight as Chief Ubanga is apprehended by Prince Oki and his body guards, they take him before both King Iginla and Eze Okiakoh, where Chief Ubanga confesses and the name of the queen comes out as the chief plotter. But, when they further investigate the matter, it becomes apparent that, it is a plan to give

Chief Ubanga the Princess to marry. Unknowingly to Chief Ubanga that queen is only playing him to the foolery. She wants to only make use of him and achieve her own selfish aim. The play proceeds and it is revealed that the crown in question is in Oguguru shrine and the only thing that can bring it out of that shrine is red wine which is human blood, and that is the princess' blood. But it comes to the fore that it is the queen who vows to sacrifice the princess for her husband to become the king about twenty-one years ago, the event that leads to the death of Eze Okiakoh's brother.

On hearing this the Princess makes hard choice by willingly presenting herself for the sacrifice as that is the only thing that will avert the impending war on the kingdom. As the play climaxes, the royal beads (which through deconstruction may be interpreted as symbol of love, unity or peace) on the Princess' neck is given to the Prince of Igedu Kingdom who will rule over the two kingdoms which restore peace to the lands, and the Princess dies in the shrine of Oguguru. Everybody returns back home in jubilation of the restored peace in the land and the war is averted with just the act of the Princess of Emepiri.

EXISTENTIALIST APPARATUS FOR AFRO-SEMIO-AESTHETIC COMMUNICATION IN *HARD CHOICE* AND *AKPAKALAND*

There is no gainsaying that theatre or drama is a work of art as rightly opines by Johnson: "theatre is an art form" (p.20). Beyond art works or by extension, to other works of nature. But the crux of this study is aesthetic study in relation to drama, whether from the beautiful perspective or from the ugly perspective. One thing however, that must be noted in discourse of aesthetics is that the pleasure or the displeasure derived from aesthetic experiences makes the work beautiful or ugly in the eyes of the doer. That is sensual perception. For example, in *Akpakaland*. Human being growing a tail and the transfer of the tail to another person, through aesthetic judgement creates pleasure and displeasure because it is absurd for a man or woman to have tail, but equally communicate evil aesthetically and etymologically. Or the aesthetics of the dead communicating with the living physically in Idegus' *Tough Man* and the aesthetics of a person eating raw yam in Iwuh's *The Village Lamb*. Linking it with Johnson citing Etuk asserts that: "what makes an action or a piece of conduct good is that it brings pleasure to the doer and nothing more" (p.61). This is done through sensual perception or perspective.

The pleasure theory of aesthetics or aesthetical hedonism says that the immediate pleasure we derive from perceiving any object determines the aesthetic value of that object; the amount

of pleasure derived indicating positive value, while the amount of pain or unpleasantness indicates negative value. (Johnson cited in Etuk, p.61)

This implies that aesthetic experiences would be incomplete if the experiences of the doer of an action relay the pleasure (beauty) he derives from such an action, and not even a reflex on the unpleasantness (ugly) he derives from an action. Therefore, aesthetic value deals with both pleasant and unpleasantness of a particular work, whether art or non-art. Especially, the contemporary Nigerian drama. The case studies of this work are embellished with both semiotic and aesthetic elements, which intensively, will be discussed in the analysis subsequently.

In Ododo's *Hard Choice*, a clash of interest exist between Chief Ubanga and the Queen. Owing to the philosophical binary oppositions that can be found in a person which is not open to the two of them. There is an indication that the Queen was only using Chief Ubanga to deter the princess from marrying a prince from another community (tribe) and Chief Ubanga carries out the action for his interest in marrying the princess. This action alone cries for deconstruction of both characters and language of the play. Beyond this, it was also discovered that in order for the Queen to achieve her defiant aim, she indulges in the use of hooligans or touts through Chief Ubanga. Who invaded the venue of the marriage and snatched away the crown of King Iginla. The crown here caught the attention of the researcher; the symbol of authority to King Iginla and Igedu Kingdom. After the crown was snatched away, what becomes of the character of King Iginla? Empty, because the sensual perception of Africans about the crown which culminate semiotics and aesthetics is apparent. Hence, the need for deconstruction of this action. This is evident from Bashorun's line in Ododo's *Hard Choice* thus:

BASHORUN: Good to know, but Your Highness, your search is rather too slow for us. In case you don't know, the life of our king hangs on that crown. If in three days, it not recovered and surrendered, we shall be left with no other choice but to match on your kingdom and recover the crown ourselves. I believe you know what that means. In one word... WAR! (*Turns and leaves with his men. The others remain speechless as the message sinks.*) (Ododo, p.23)

The crown that propelled Bashorun to threaten Eze Okiakoh and the entire Emepiri kingdom with war demands interpretation through deconstruction and semio-aesthetic analyses of the play. The crown holds sensual perceptions of Afro-semio-aesthetics. The three elements of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation become necessary to the study of these play texts. A reader/an interpreter needs to know what these plays are all about. He needs to know what the plays talk about and he appropriates the plays to into life world. The priest in Africa means a lot. They all resort to consulting him and Eze Okiakoh *Hard Choice* asks:

EZE OKIAKOH: Debia, what is the message?

DEBIA: The sun and the moon are on a course of collision and the stars are trembling. Why? A vow is abrogated but appeased. The object of appeasement is sacrosanct and restless. Your Highness, only the original vow will avert the calamity, but it is too dear to let go. My king, when a medicinal pot of soup sits on fire boiling, only the brave and courageous attempt a leak from it. My lord, fire is burning inside water and water is helpless. Otapaipoh says that only red wine will quench this fire if...

CHIEF UBANGA: (Cuts in.) Enough of these incomprehensible statements.

DEBIA: It's not me, it is Otapaipoh. Otapaipoh says that what belongs to the gods is being forcefully substituted; deceit and connivance are conveyor belts in this act. Your Highness, your clue to solving this impending calamity is to offer royal red wine to the gods. I speak no more ... (Packing his things to depart, other chiefs intercepted him.)

CHIEF BEMBE: Debia, the gods have spoken through you in their own language. To leave without speaking to us in the idioms we understand is to leave us more confused and far withdrawn from the answers we seek. (pp.27-8)

Bringing the Debia in and consulting the gods is African. The language of the gods is equally African and it only the Debia that can interpret it. That is why through the priest, it was discovered that the crown is in the shrine of Oguguru. Of all the places, why the queen decides to drop the crown at Oguguru shrine? Afro-semio-aesthetic ideology played out here. This demands hermeneutic interpretation, according to Paul Ricoeur. It was discovered as the play progresses that Oguguru shrine requested for Royal red wine. This royal red wine which was latter translated to be royal blood (African Semio-aesthetics) must be well deconstructed to allow meaning to flow. Hence, Langer conceives symbols as: "vehicles for the conception of objects" (Langer, p.70). Again, symbol is: "an instrument of thought" (p.70). The princess of Emepiri's neck less that she handed over to the Prince of Igedu kingdom is symbolic and the jubilation by the two communities in unity is a signifier; these are all elements of semio-aesthetics, which must be well deconstructed for communication enterprises. This is explicit from the following dialogue thus:

PRINCESS: (*She removes the coral beads on her neck.*) Oki my love, with this coral beads I decorate you to reaffirm the vision we both share...

DEBIA: Yes, she's right. It is one aspect of our customs that has remained a guided secret because of fear of abuse. Apart from marital ties, any male that an only-child-princess gives her royal coral beads, automatically becomes the crown prince of Emepiri Kingdom... (*Hard Choice*, pp.50-51)

African cultural semio-aesthetics constitutes the factors both tangible and intangible in form and ideas to represent African world-view. In recent times, African cultural semio-aesthetics is at the core of Nigerian plays

directly or indirectly. For more than two decades now, Nigerian playwrights have explored African semio-aesthetic approaches to present and explore African sensual perceptions of semiotics and aesthetics in the writing of their plays.

In Ukala's *Akpakaland*, it is reflected in the following dialogue:

FULAMA: Enwe, healer-and-killer-at-the-same-time! What business have you with Unata's tail? What have you done with her tail?

ENWE: Tail? Unata? Does she have a tail? (FULAMA is silent.) Your jokes are always peculiar... Please, sit down. How is the cow now? You dropped the rope across it way?

FULAMA: Yes.

ENWE: How did it behave after that? Didn't it go rubbing its itchy spine against the wall?

FULAMA: Yes... em... Well, I didn't take note.

ENWE: It has grown the tail, hasn't it?

FULAMA: It has. (*Akpakaland*, p.27)

The above is fused with language, character and action, which may require semio-aesthetic analyses. It could make the reader/interpreter lost the story, because Enwe who just finishes with Unata few minutes ago, is the Enwe that is talking with Fulama and never made her to know that he is aware of Unata's tail. Enwe's character needs to be analysed semio-aesthetic wise. But Enwe reveals to Fulama that, he is aware of the whole thing. This is espoused through the following exchange:

ENWE: Go well, my sister. (FULAMA moves to the door.) You said you were quarrelling with Unata?

FULAMA: Well, just a minor misunderstanding.

ENWE: And you transferred the cow's tail to her? (*Akpakaland*, p.27)

In furtherance, Enwe continues to speak in parable (the language which needs semio-aesthetic analyses) to Fulama, but Fulama like the reader/interpreter need to deconstruct the language through semio-aesthetic analyses, so that she can understand Enwe to allow communication flow. Again, this is explicit from Enwe and Fulama's dialogue thus:

ENWE: So the cow's tail is on the cow?

FULAMA: The cow's tail is on the cow.

ENWE: Those flies that used to trouble the cow so much so that you shed tears, the cow now drives them easily?

FULAMA: Yes.

ENWE: Good! You need not quarrel with Unata then.

(*Akpakaland*, p.28)

Based on Ricoeur's appropriation: "the gained understanding is used for expanding the text into a life world, here the interpreter seeks to achieve the writers thoughts and feelings but does this through (the interpreter's) understanding and meaning gained from the text" (Ricoeur, 1627). Through semio-aesthetic analyses, it is revealed apparently that they are not talking about cow here, but referring to Bulama's co-wives, especially, Unata as cow. Hence, 'differences' and binary oppositions of deconstruction and semio-aesthetic analyses are

required for more comprehension of the language, character and action of the play.

Hermeneutically, the process of extracting meaning from texts is called interpretation, but to succeed in this, the hidden part of the text must be discovered. Ododo's *Hard Choice* is explicit on this:

PRINCESS: Tonight I shall carry the burden of Emepiri kingdom to the gods so that war is averted and lives saved. Chinelo, what could be more honourable. Please, I'm in high spirit today don't dampen it...

PRINCE: I know you're upset with me.

PRINCESS: I'm not, the prince of Igedu Kingdom.

PRINCE: I tried to reach you but the Queen's security network around you was impenetrable.

PRINCESS: I know, Chinelo told me everything.

PRINCE: My Princess, look we don't have much time. My people are getting set for the ritual slated for Oguguru shrine to recover the crown with your life. I've come to elope with you to far distance, far away from this entire weird atmosphere. Hurry...

PRINCESS: It's too late, Prince Oki. Can we really escape from our shadows? No. The life of your father, the King of Igedu Kingdom, and that of the entire people of Emepiri Kingdom are enmeshed in this weird atmosphere. It would only take a life, my life, to save them and you want me to walk away?

PRINCE: What then happens to me? (*Hard Choice*, pp.48-9)

The character of princess was revealed as courageous fellow which must be deconstructed for meaning generation through the existentialist thought; any decision you take like the princess, is a choice and any consequence from that choice is your result.

Yerima opines that: "In drama, the language and characters must be progressive" (p.40). He further states that: "in the use of language in drama, the new playwright discovers that three aspects emerge: aesthetics, dramatic criticism and stylistics" (p.39). In the same vein with Langer's discursive symbolism. Hence, the need to deconstruct the outlined aspects by Yerima to enable one as a reader/interpreter make meaning or communicate meaningfully.

There is also semio-aesthetic motif in the effort to transfer the tail back to the sender. The move by Unata and his father who went to the same priest to help them send the tail back to the sender is a strong premise to interpret the tail as not really meant for any cow. This can be deduced through Langer's symbol, object and person with signs of semiotics. This is part of deconstruction; the reader's deductions must go beyond the meaning instilled in the play by the playwright. Another intriguing aspect of the play is the transfer of the tail from Unata back to Fulama. What they seek from the Priest was to send the tail back to the sender. It was obvious later that both Unata's father, Enwe and Unata herself know the sender and the sender, Fulama knows herself which makes the story more interesting. These are choices made by the characters above and the consequences are theirs.

The researcher's concern here is the African semio-aesthetic motif of the action and the existentialist

essence on all the characters involved. That is both discursive and non-discursive symbolisms of Sussane Langer are put to the fore. Simply put that in order to understand Fulama, the researcher opines that we must deconstruct her character and the way she uses language. Why she uses language that way and what prompts her use of language in that manner and her character construction.

Etymologically, royal blood implies the blood from the ruling house. But aesthetic wise, royal blood to the beholder could be appreciated through beauty or ugly. Beautiful because it deals with royal entity and ugly from aesthetic perspective because a human life is going for it. The elders could not understand the Debia because his language is embedded with philosophical binary oppositions. The character of Chief Ubanga and that of the Queen are revealed as both are equally different to each other. They both have different plans against each other. This was revealed in *Hard Choice* through their exchange thus:

QUEEN: Chief Ubanga, What's urgent that can't wait till tomorrow?

CHIEF UBANGA: The crown, the crown ...

QUEEN: What about it?

CHIEF UBANGA: My Queen, you didn't tell us you're taking the crown to Oguguru shrine.

QUEEN: How does that bother you, you fretting chief?

CHIEF UBANGA: A lot and if you know what I know, I'm sure it would bother you, too.

QUEEN: What?

CHIEF UBANGA: According to Otapaipoh, our kingdom oracle, Oguguru demands the princess' blood in exchange for the crown. And with the war threat from Igedu people, looks like Eze may not be left with any other choice but to offer the princess. (p.36)

Even though existentialism plays out as the princess of Emepiri kingdom willingly gave herself in for the sacrifice as against the queen's will. This sets the binary oppositions between the princess and the queen. Another unique thing that runs across the plays selected for this study, is the human being as sacrifice. But as the princess of Emepiri kingdom sacrifices herself she handed her necklace to the prince which could be viewed sociologically, as icon, symbol of authority, peace, unity and progress. It is glaring from Ododo's *Hard Choice* thus:

PRINCESS: (*She removes the coral beads on her neck.*) Oki my love, with this coral beads I decorate you to reaffirm the vision we both share... (Ododo 50)

DEBIA: Yes, she's right. It is one aspect of our customs that has remained a guided secret because of fear of abuse. Apart from marital ties, any male that an only-child-princess gives her royal coral beads, automatically becomes the crown prince of Emepiri Kingdom... (Ododo, p.51)

These, coupled with the jubilation between both kingdoms permits the peaceful co-existence that both kingdoms were yearning for. Now, with or without the

princess now, the prince through the Debia's language, we got to know that he will still inherit Emepiri kingdom, as the custom demand.

CONCLUSION

Hence, it is glaring that aesthetics and semiotics are strong instruments that can help in generating meanings from dramas or playtexts as can be seen conspicuously from the above discourse and interpretation of the playtexts. Though loaded with avalanche of existentialist elements which culminated into aesthetic and semiotic instruments that can aim communication in modern Nigerian drama. There is no neglecting these elements from the African cosmology if the meaning and communication must be made from Nigerian drama.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Owing from the above, the following recommendations are presented to serve as way forward:

Young readers and non-African readers of Nigerian playtexts should endeavour to read monographs from Africa to enable them be acquainted with the aboriginal cultures that are represented in most African playtexts.

Playwrights of African/Nigerian origin should continue in that light of building our dramas with cultural elements that will help the younger ones in coming to term with their cultures.

Efforts should be geared by stakeholders; dramatists, directors and theatre practitioners towards new playtexts that will help in propagating the African culture further.

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