

**OF SEMIOTICS AND POLITICS OF POSTCOLONIAL TEXT:
SIPHO SEPAMLA'S *THE SOWETO I LOVE* AND REMI RAJI'S
*LOVESONG FOR MY WASTELAND***

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Abstract

*The goal of this paper is to examine the intersections where literary semiotics and politics of postcolonialism intersperse in literary texts, using Siphos Sepamla's *The Soweto I Love* and Remi Raji's *Lovesong for My Wasteland* as instruments of illustration. A highlight of the modes of syntactic and symbolic linguistic used as cultural repository in the two works of poetry serves to underscore the dynamics of the worlds reflected in the two diverse postcolonial spheres of experience. Such signifying linguistic utilities encapsulate a cogent representation of characteristic violence, socio-political perversity, human degradation and general state of despair that typify the two milieus. The signs and linguistic symbols deployed in the respective poetic landscapes and creative foundries are in their critical contexts strategic as vital resources with which to highlight, invigorate and re-examine the politics of postcolonial African literature and criticism. This paper explores the ways literary semiotics could be utilised to illuminate the inglorious history of the colonial encounter with the attendant destructive legacies manifesting with neo-colonial tendencies as re-created in literary texts.*

Key words: Semiotics; postcolonial nationhood; love; apartheid; wasteland

In the blurbs of the two books of poems: *The Soweto I Love* (1977) by Siphos Sepamla and *Lovesong for My Wasteland* (2005) by Remi Raji, the producers of the respective titles provided what could be a glimpse into the informants to their creative muse and ideological persuasions that could guide us into the aesthetic and social

premises of their vision. In a thematic comparison of the two poetic scenarios there is an intricate existential thread of continuum in which the chaos, the depression and the brutality of the colonial era backlash on the violence, paradoxes and the contradictions of the post-independent and contemporary African experience. In the two collections, the symbolising word ‘*Love*’ bestrides the sphere as a signifying icon that embodies the relationship between the persona and the social world as well as the ontological episteme and the psychological imperatives of colonisation both in the past and in the present. The aesthetic of the two scenarios is vivified by the signifying linguistic constructions that embody the poetic *miens* and make their contexts livelier, enactive, striking and momentous.

In the two intertwined historical landscapes namely apartheid South Africa and post independent Nigeria, the sensation of ‘*Love*’ with the attendant interpretative ambivalence encapsulates an icon of signifying metaphor, and therefore constructs the historical dialectics by which the two spheres of discourse could be aesthetically crystallised. In all, the characteristic ‘subaltern’ flavour of the two poetic situations creates an array of the dominant themes and primarily addresses the concerns of the oppressed, especially those that have been silenced in the prevalent hegemony of politics and power dynamics. The two texts, by semiotic contextualisation, represent the voice of ‘Other’ or counter-narrative because they signify the feeling of the marginalised and deconstruct the angst of postcolonial despair while centralising the issues of alienation, social exclusion and are construed as victims of certain forms of imperialism of which Rukmini Bhaya Nair (cited in Shands 2008:6) describes as “a condition requiring a cure”.

In the postcolonial theorisation, Homi Bhabha’s makes copious reference to the characteristic subversive ethos of the postcolonial writers and texts as representing the voice of those portrayed (as victims of the historical injustices of the past); as the oppressed and do often play subversive roles in their bids for self-definition and to appropriate social power in the midst of hegemonic structure (Garcia-Morena & Pfeiffer, 1996:191). Boehmer (1995) writing about the traditions of imperial textuality asserted that “literary texts helped sustain the colonial vision, giving reinforcement to an already insular colonial world” (44) and for which the postcolonial authors consistently seek to subvert. Bressler (2003) asserted that irrespective of the controversy surrounding the ‘post’ or ‘post’- with or without prefixes in postcolonial discourse- it refers to “an approach to literary analysis that particularly concerns itself with literature written in English in formerly colonised countries” (199). This postulation has a foundational critical offering in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Bressler (2003) thus stated that postcolonial literature is born out of the colonized people’s frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture, and the vibes of their fears, hopes, and dreams about the future and their own

identities in which “the act of writing itself becomes the context and the theories of postcolonialism” (202).

The practice of utilising linguistic codes, sign language and cultural symbols in literary analysis is often traced to Structuralism as methodology of cultural study analysed in the famous lesson notes published as *Course in General Linguistics* composed by the Swiss philologist, theorist and teacher, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). A follow-up to de Saussure's structural linguistics was Charles Sanders Peirce's *Semiotics* which borrowed from the linguistic methods used by de Saussure. This cross-fertilisation of scholarship crystallised into semiology, translated simply as the study of 'science of signs' in language, communication and in literary studies. Literary semiotics in our context simply implies the study of codes, signs, and rules governing all human social and cultural practices, including communication, fashion, sports and the diversity of coded representations in imaginative texts, among others (Bressler 82). In de Saussure's assumption, language is a phenomenon of continuous subdivisions marked on the indefinite planes of ideas and sounds. In this context a word (sign) was a fusion of concept (signified) and sound image (signifier) linked together as 'meaning' in the mind in which the 'signified' and the 'signifier' both independently play on the chessboard of endless possibilities.

Literary semiotic therefore could be distilled down to some imagery in the semblance of metaphor although it is something much more than mere metaphorical representation that is commonplace in literary texts. Kolawole (2005) affirms that literature is an extended metaphor and a symbol whose intertextual interactions transcend literary transactions. She states further that metaphor in literary texts “derives from the impact of a wider range of pretexts- linguistic, cultural, philosophical, ideological, historical or political” milieu where a work of literature is situated and contextualised (10). The point of view of signs and symbols in literary work corroborates Saussure's notion of semiology that “language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signal, etc... I shall call it semiology”(16). From the foregone it appears obvious that the carefully or consciously selected words that the creative writer undertakes the craftsmanship in the process of literary manufacture could go beyond mere face value of what we generally know the word(s) to mean in our every day conventional use(s). It is against this theoretical backdrop that a semiotic de-construction of Siphon Sepamla's *The Soweto Love* and Remi Raji's *Lovesong for my Wasteland* throw up some meanings that deepen insight towards a solidification of the realities of postcolonial African condition.

The producer of Sepamla's *The Soweto I Love* points out in the blurb that the collection “reflects the anger that was the natural reaction to the tragic events that took place when Soweto ... violently exploded in June 1976”, and adds that “these poems

capture the mood of a people and enable the foreign reader to understand perhaps a little of what then happened to the people living in Soweto". In a similar vein, the introducer of Remi Raji's *Lovesong for My Wasteland* states that, the collection "chronicles the dynamics exhibited in the game of political power in Nigeria" and also adds that "the volume speaks to the violence of dying dreams, the terrific, yet terrifying actualities of contemporary life and silent roars of disillusionment in the land". The syntagmatic deviations in the word/sentence constructions are configured in various ways that symbolise the specifics in the worlds of experience portrayed by the two poetic atmospheres. These literary/linguistic utilities also come in the areas of allusions and architectonics that reify forms of reality and awaken images in which the colonial past could be projected and gleamed alongside the post-independent and contemporary African world order that could be comparatively re-constituted on their historical trajectories.

The two poems in their respective national settings typify as well as intertwine colonial and postcolonial continuum. One is set in the apartheid South Africa in the late 20th century while the other is set in the contemporary self-governing Nigeria deep in the 21st century. In the literature of African experience, the writer does not indulge in the Platonic paranoia as Ibitokun (2003) would point out, but every word and every image painted in the literary text signifies the art of reality and tries to demystify the world around him/her by projecting the reality of daily human encounters. African literature in the words of Ernest Emenyonu, is "meant to correct the distortions of African reality imposed on the world by the forces of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism"; adding that the African writers seek to "raise the levels of consciousness of their fellow Africans about the harm done by the European colonisers to African cultural values and sense of self" (vii). The African literary artist, as Wilson-Tagoe (2006) stated it, "continues to link nation, culture and narrative, yet, and centres on traumas of national collapse ... and an increasingly global focus in social and economic relations" (94).

The African writer, Nwagbara (2012) affirmed is saddled with the responsibility of guiding the society towards "a right direction it should go rather than passivity and complicity" (238-239), and finds him/herself obliged to re-create and romanticise with the past with the aim of demonstrating how the inflictions and treachery of the past occasioned by the contact with the Western world and other strand of immigrants resulted in the wounds on African body politics whose scars have refused to abate. A critical screening of the two texts which replicate an intercultural semiotics could be utilised as didactic instrument to teach and dialogue between the colonial encounter and the post independent repercussions. In which case, the signposts that defined the apartheid national value/ethical systems are culled to 'life' and in the course of this creative activity, silences are given voice, a dark past is invoked back to life through linguistic symbols while on the other hand, a typical post-independent African state, represented in the Nigerian setting is equally x-rayed in the critical limelight. By

these aesthetic/linguistic strategies, we could re-enter the 'archives of silences' (Durlington & Green (2007:231) and the dominant representation of experience in official colonial narratives could be revitalised, re-interrogated, re-interpreted and re-versioned.

The African writer that is conscious of the prevalent disequilibrium in the living conditions of the subaltern and the ruling elite against the prevalent chaotic social order, endemic poverty and lingering sufferings, is saddled with the patriotic task of building bridges across the divides created in the colonial and neo-colonial crucible, and is bound for reintegration and restoration (Adebayo, 1975) of a world that has been morally battered, culturally distorted and socio-political disorganised. In order to accentuate the momentum of this inglorious history, African writers resort to diverse means of translating this traumatising experience across the literary genres by deploying culturally symbolic language and creatively coded linguistic signs that serve to signify the dynamics and the complex web of postcolonial socio-political reality.

Semiotics, Aesthetics and the Polity

Let us now inquire into the imperatives of significations in human communication system and also explore how semiotics as signification embedded in sign language in communication sciences, could either at the physical or mental/cognitive levels be deployed to animate inanimate phenomenon and by so doing vivify meanings in certain specific ways in literary texts. When a creative writer wants to direct his addressee's attention to an item present to his mind, he/she uses words or constructs sentences in a way to give form or deepen mental illumination on the issues or phenomenon welling up in the creative artist's mind. The semiotician Umberto Eco (cited in Nazorova 1996:1) stated of semiotics that it "is the theory of sign systems" (1). In the bid to deepen the insight to the notion of semiotics, Nazorova (1996) affirmed Umberto Eco's assertion by stating that semiotics as "a science (be it a hard science or a soft one) should be able to change the state of things of which it speaks." (1). For example, in this theoretical context, "Soweto", "love" and the "my wasteland" in the two respective texts embody associative meanings, ambivalences and 'significations' that carry the signifying burdens of the two poetic imaginativeness. The three *nodal* words project what encapsulates ambivalence, a contradiction or a myth that need must be demystified, unbundled or illuminated to expose their contradictive dimensions of meanings that they embody. To demystify a myth a more familiar image of the phenomenon may be required. "Soweto" and "Nigeria" are in their semiotic register, two historical epochs running into each other and dialoguing or interrogating each other; they exude images of mutual affinity as well as mutual contradictions and peculiarities. The three highlighted key words constitute the myths that need to be demystified with a semiotic tool. In the words of Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1978), "any anonymously composed story telling of origins and destinies: the

explanations a society offers to its young on why the world is and why we do as we do” (191) constitutes a myth. The story of “Soweto” and “love” or the ‘truth’ about post independent nationhood that is *stigmatised* by the poet Remi-Raji as “my wasteland” is possibly decoded with semiotic utility as a way of highlighting the inherent contradictions in the two situations.

The implication of this rough analysis is that to unravel the very difficult postcolonial experience, the story might need to be told with livelier symbols, using words that could better decode the encoded or embedded meanings in narratives. It is in semiotics signs that a creative writer could create pictures out of a picture and magnify a cryptic phenomenon as a way of making sense of a complex linguistic situation with creative deployment of anecdotes and higher wisdom. In such respect, Brandt (2004) stated that “semiotics is the study of *signs*, their forms of expression and contents”, and explains furthermore that “the human world is massively semiotic; there are signs almost everywhere any time”. Brandt then added a caveat to this postulation in the following statement:

Between the world of signs and the world of things (also called Nature) surrounding the former, there is a world of meaning that signs have sedimented and sign users can presuppose, refer to, retrieve arguments from, find authority in, but equally be topped or inhibited by when trying to think out or work out new concepts, and that people therefore have felt to be a ‘second Nature’, namely the Cultural realm of reality (1).

For Ferdinand de Saussure (cited in Milner & Browitt 2002), the French-speaking linguist, “language is a system of signs; and a sign is the union of signifier-or symbol-and signified- the idea of concept”. Saussure thus referring to linguistic signs noted that such linguistic elements as semiotics are “entirely a matter of social convention, in which the signifier and the signified, and the relations between them, are radically arbitrary”. The sum total of this is that, “each element in the language is definable only in terms of its relation to other elements in the system of signs” (Milner and Browitt, 2003:95).

For more clarification on this, Danesi (2004) stated that such sign-scripting strategy creates pictures that memorably stick to the imagination and give stronger effects to the meaning envisaged in the poetic context. Danesi asserted that in order to extract meaning from a form X, one must be able to recognize it as a sign in the first place” and this to him means that “signs have *structure*. Specifically, a form X is a sign if: (1) it is distinctive; and (2) it is constructed in a predictable way”. He summed it up further as following:

The former is called, more specifically, paradigmatic and the latter syntagmatic structure ... Something is a sign if it has both a discernible (repeatable and predictable) form and if it is constructed in a definable (patterned) way... These have visual features on their "faces" that keep them distinct from each other, as well as differently shaped "edges" that make it possible to join them together in specific ways to complete the overall picture (14-15).

The signifying linguistic images that recur in the two respective poetic spectacles bring home the foregone arguments. One of the signifying signs is "Soweto" symbolising apartheid system with its brutality, and the other "Wasteland" which symbolises independent Nigerian situation where in the midst of stupendous wealth, leadership-induced wastefulness, denial and poverty define the national milieu. The poems also centralise their themes on the realities that are both disparate and interrelated. The images that the two key words in context conjure magnify the semiotic implications of what they represent in their different worlds of meanings. For instance, Soweto is not just a representative urban geographical space in apartheid South Africa, it is the semiotics of domination, social exclusion, racial persecution, historical injustice and it signifies an anarchical socio-political sphere where might is right and right is wrong and trampled. By their aesthetic colouration and by the way their respective polity are being metaphorised, Soweto has its alternative in the deconstructed "wasteland" which is a semiotic replication of a place of despair, a land of plenty and poverty, a place of human degradation and deprivation. The two national settings share similar history of alienation, political oppressions, and diverse forms of social disequilibrium.

The significations encoded in word constructions, symbols and scene images underscore the political character of the postcolonial African states as creatively configured in the poems. Hama Tuma (2003) described this common bond of history of African societies whether free or in bonds by stating that "many countries of this disparaged continent ... may have shared a similar past (subjugation under colonialism with just two exceptions, Ethiopia and Liberia)", and adds that this shared "feeling of being African notwithstanding ... "we are witnessing at present the failure of the so-called modern African Nation State as inherited from colonialism and the emergence of ethnicity as opposed to any notion of nationality" (1). The two texts in their interlocking thematic contexts could be used to track the movement of a shared history; how the past flows into the present in a continuum of violence, misrule, deprivation, social demarcation and upheaval; wasted resources and widespread despair. The two collections signify what Osofisan (cited in Asein 2005: 534) described as the "politics and ideology" of African reality as "they affect the communal and private experience, how they impede complete fulfilment of the vast masses".

In *The Soweto I love*, 'Soweto' signify both 'love' and 'hate' semiotically constituted as a symbol of ravished history, a land of abominated culture, a tradition of

contradictions as well as an estranged homeland of black race of South Africa now under apartheid bondage. Soweto is used in the poem to counter the myth of White supremacy, White ownership and Black inferiority with Black servitude. 'Soweto' is a signification of love and estrangement and an embodiment of aberrations. 'Love' in the two contexts signifies self-contradictive contexts. 'Lovesong' is metaphorically paired with 'wasteland'. 'My Wasteland' also represents a semiotic signifying an embodiment of contradictions and opposites and casts an array of significations that could be translated as ridiculous, repulsive yet attractive due to a kind of umbilical historical relationship with a place now lying ravished. In the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, love is described as "a means by which our being – our self and its world – are irrevocably affected once we are 'touched by love'". The philosophical treatment of love transcends disciplines encompassing epistemology and metaphysics, religion and politics, human nature and social ethos.

When the two categorical aberrations of *Love* that pervades the two poetic ambiances are critically contextualized, they in the semiotic signification, translate the societies they represent into milieus of moral crisis, premeditated practice of human inequality and social inequity. In which case "Soweto" replicates a personification addressed in the following dialogue in the first stanza of *The Soweto I Love*:

SOWETO

I have watched you grow
like fermented dough
and now that you overflow the bowl
I'm witness to the panic you have wrought (p.22)

It is both in the poetic mood, the coloration of the diction and the linguistic allusions in this stanza that the symbolic signs serve to display the nature of the landscape in apartheid South Africa which 'Soweto' is the definitive icon. Every other poem in the collection derives its thematic impetus from 'Soweto' with all it symbolizes. The poem "This Land" lends further credence to the characteristic nature of 'Soweto', and in the second stanza, the personal pronoun 'I' that is alliterated with recurrent frequency serves as an iconic phenomenon that accentuates the 'love' with its physical, emotional and spiritual affiliations. This can as well be explained as the persona's cultural, historical and perhaps embryonic relationships to the entity 'Soweto'. This is how the poet puts it in stanza two of 'This Land':

THIS LAND

...
I was born by the stroke of war
I was born by the ravage of disease
by the events of plagues
I know the stench of this land (p.17).

The stench', 'disease and 'plagues' create an unpleasant sensation that contradict the notion of love. But at the same time Soweto represents the raw natural state of the Soweto landscape before it depreciated to its present postmodern urban depravity. The humane identity of the past is juxtaposed with the nauseating condition of the present oppressive colonial social order. In the fifth and last stanza the persona in a symbolic outburst merges into Soweto to illustrate the point that he and Soweto are one:

I am this land of mine
I've never asked for a portion
there's never been a need to
I am the land (p.17).

In the above two selected poems in the *The Soweto I love*, there are several linguistic icons and signifying words that portray the semiotic means of translating experience. These symbols serve to create momentum, suspense, hilarity and thus illuminate the settings in the bids to make the scenes captivating.

Apart from the choice of language there is also the use of architectonic formations in Siphso Sepamla's *The Soweto I love*. Most of Sepamla's poems in this collection are presented with both syntagmatic and paradigmatic deviations. The syntaxes are consciously arranged in such a way to make it suggestive, picturesque and unusually captivating in such ways to arouse and accentuate the effects and the significations the poems bring to bear on the reader's sensibility. In the poem, "The Dawn of Another Day"(pp.6-9), one could imagine how the persona tries in words to picture the tension, violent irruptions, the confusion, anxiety, fear and horror that apartheid South African system unleashes on modern Soweto. The significations point at the infamy of police brutality, the restive atmosphere, the condition of perversity and upheaval with raging anger that exploded into the 'Soweto massacre' which resulted in global outrage, that occurred in June 1976.

The importance of these signs, icons and symbols is that they bridge the insufficiency of mere words in portraying the situation in its immediate, striking and realistic state. Soweto in Johannesburg signifies a turbulent social formation that is better embodied in the semiotics of recurrent tension. The strategy of the scattered texts translates into the condition of the society in disarray as manifest in the poetic imagination, and in such paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures, the iconic texts become the guide to deeper structures of meaning. In the poem 'Bullets'(p.12), in the context of this analysis, 'bullets' is the semiotic of culture of violence and unrest, as opposed to civil order, justice and democratic norms. This reality is accentuated not only in the scattered texts like bullets spray, but also in the deployment of such words as 'scare', 'inhuman', 'murderer'; or in such expressions as 'rip the flesh open', 'leave the heart inert', 'pierced the backs of kids', as well as 'killed and killed and killed'.

In the same vein, the persona in the poem 'Home' (p.15), stanzas 4-7 where 'Home' still refers back to "Soweto", ironically casts an image of estrangement, alienation, brutality and social exclusion. 'Home' to the Blacks in South Africa translates into "dungeon re-wombing its children without qualms", where "every heart is stunted", where "graves grow fast" and "bullets fly freely overhead". In this poem the operative semiotic element of 'home' is "Doornkop, Thornhill or Limehill or Vergenoeg" (pp.15-16). These alien names are used semiotically as rather the signposts of alienation, deprivation, exploitation, dispossession and brutality. In the same vein, the poem "When I Lost Slum Life" (pp.18-19), the poet tries to re-picture apartheid South Africa of his experience as a theatre of orgy and as a suffocating socio-political atmosphere. To graphically conjure this social experience in solid reality, not only are the syntagmatic formations of the texts arranged in disjointed formation, but the choice of words in the last stanza of the poem compares and contrasts between 'civilization' brought about by the immigrant Europeans to Africa and the indigenous social order. The pre-colonial South Africa is portrayed as a 'utopian ideal', as an egalitarian social order and as a world where man is fair to fellow man. Thus, 'slum life' and Western 'civilisation' are juxtaposed to create a sense of nostalgia in effect:

WHEN I LOST SLUM LIFE

I know I don't just want fresh air
I need the smell of sweaty life
oh yes I want to live colourfully once more (p.19).

'CIVILIZATION AHA' lampoons, satirises and mocks the idea of 'civilisation' with the structurally same unusual paradigmatic linguistic features. In this scenario, the contrastive semiotics comes up glaringly. Thus 'Whiteman' is associated with 'god', the 'Blackman' is associated with 'Satan'. In the same vein, 'Bantu education' is devised for Blacks while 'Western Education' is meant to glorify Western civilisation (p.27). In the poem 'IN SEARCH OF ROOTS', the word 'ROOTS' in context, constructs a symbol of the struggles between the indigenous people or culture and the immigrant alien European culture of segregation and racial violence in South Africa. The poet thus implies in the last two lines of this poem that "we will need to do all things/just to show the world Africa was never discovered" (p.52). In the last two lines of the last poem 'A WISH' (p.53) the persona declares what he seeks to achieve by the copious deployment of these signs and symbols thus: "but a wish of mine remains/peace at all times with all men", in contrast to the racist ethos of South African immigrant Europeans.

Remi Raji's *Lovesong for My Wasteland* erects a semiotic signpost that projects the proverbial landscape referred to as the 'Wasteland' that is creatively assumed to be Nigeria. A cursory reflection on the recurrent themes in the literature of African experience in the various genres, from colonialism to the post-independent era,

underscore the point that although Africa has passed through many crossroads in her historical encounters, the continent has only succeeded in crossing from one phase of historical huddle to another but at great cost in terms of avoidable human fatalities. In the back cover blurb of his book of essays, *Politics of the Postcolonial Text: Africa and its Diaporas* (2010), James T. Tsaior has asserted that the postcolonial text is bound for cultural recuperation, self-retrieval and for the redemption of the Black cultural condition that was "prejudiced" in the "absolutist modes of epistemologies". The signification in *Lovesong for My Wasteland* de-constructs the fact that the African humanity is still being haunted by the ghost of colonial monstrosity manifesting as neo-colonial or *new-colonial* dilemma.

In this 'Wasteland' projected as a society undergoing a traumatising journey, the persona in his choice of words expresses deep-seated gendered relationship. A similar aura pervades *The Soweto I Love*, especially in the poem 'SOWETO' with the inscription: "I love Soweto" (p.23), and in the poem 'THIS LAND' with the inscription: "I am this land of mine" (p.17). The poet persona in *Lovesong* also showers so much affective word to this 'Wasteland'. The 'love' in its semiotic translates into ironies and paradoxes. The sensation of love when juxtaposed with the social context of the poems in this collection, rather than suggest affection and affinity, exudes an atmosphere of betrayal, sense of loss and disillusionment. The loved 'wasteland' as we find in the poem: 'THERE WAS A LAND' in the context constitutes a conglomeration of negations and anti-thesis. This scenario is represented in such antithetical expressions as in "river runs with thirst", "lakes of intrigues", "rocks of watered hatred", "ponds of anger" and "creeks of imperfection" (p.15). 'Love' in its given semiotics becomes a mixture of ambivalence, contradiction and antagonism. The land is described as a citadel of violence and as a cesspool of social malfeasance where hunger, social exclusion, misrule and widespread disillusionment thrive. This is succinctly reflected in the poem 'NO ONE IS CLEAN'. This inscription of "clean" is a signpost that semiotically embodies the essential character of this 'loved' 'Wasteland'. The 'clean' is here expressed in terms of its opposites. It signifies the widespread decadence, depravity and waywardness of the milieu in the picture. The cleanliness when corroborated with the signification of 'love' only conjures filth, odour, decay, decadence and such like that negate the sense of affection that is ordinarily encoded in word 'love'. Down the lines the stains and moral blemishes in this love show that: "no one is free now/The deep smear/in a season of syphilis/On whose forehead have I not seen it?/ But everyone is talking about cleansing" (p.16). Syphilis is the semiotic that metaphorically constructs a deeply diseased social relationship. Love is naturally associated with purity and cleanliness but in this context, it also embodies a state of sickness, frustration and the depth of despair this exudes is nauseating. No doubt this 'wasteland' is not just a place for discarded items but a signification of putrefying odour; a milieu of wastefulness, deep-seated corruption, moral decadence and

characterised by an unnecessarily diminished quality of life. The linguistic signs prevalent in this collection are representative of a postcolonial Africa as a vast 'Wasteland' that the patrimony of national liberation and self-determination has been squandered by successive regimes of crude leadership of which Nigeria is a microscopic formation for the rest of Africa. The implication of this condition is that the literature of colonial oppression connects its social tentacles to the post-independent contexts and one therefore interlocks the other. In a nutshell, the literary experience in the past continues to condition the reality imagined in the aesthetics colouration of the present.

The poem 'FORTY FULL SEASONS GONE LIKE YESTERDAY' exhumes a menacing image that signifies the post-independent epochs and the 'wasted generation' that emerged from it. This image beams a frightening picture of plaintive narrative of national stagnation. This index of vicious circle is encompassed and embedded in the title of the poem. It exudes an experience of pains and despair arising from the prolonged decades of poor leadership. In the 'wasteland' of the persona's "tender song", the poet talks of it as "a land accustomed to stings and grief", where there is "much of...aches" (p.22). But in the next poem after this, this circle of vicious history is captured in the line of the poem: "This history's filled with the deeds of tetrarchs and swines" (p.24). The uncomplimentary pairing of 'Tetrarchs with swines' again conjures the appalling contrast that the successive rulers referred to as 'tetrarchs' are associated with 'swines'. This elegiac verse goes with a tone that reverberates in the lines: "Like snails among deers and bulls/We strut and boast in a contest of horns" (p.24). These animal characters illuminate the circle of idiocy, brutality, inhumanity and frustration that characterise 'TEN MONARCHS, TEN SEASONS'. The 'monarchs' in this context signifies the replacement of colonial masters with indigenous colonisers and thus portrays Africa as a people still struggling in the dark, trying to find direction.

In the solid reality, the dreams of the liberation and nationhood had been frittered, and the persona labels this condition as "...DREAMS MELTED" like "shea-butter nut of nothingness in the sun" (p.30). The allusion of dream to 'shea-butter' signifies the emptiness of the hope that came with national liberation from alien domination that was achieved at great cost. Also, the persona further gives the use of index, icons and symbols that portray the existing state of the society of his imagination and states that: "in the age of machines", men in the 'wasteland' have refused to "grow new hearts of steel" (p.33). Here the 'machine' and 'steel' are iconic elements that define the 'quantum leap' in the global technological sphere. The 'Wasteland' has failed to make progress by crawling along like 'snails' or 'cripples' mentioned as semiotic signs in the poem. This condition the persona presents in their contrastive binary, such as a feeling of disillusionment and affectation, love and despair, pleasantness and bitterness, monarch and swines. This is expressed in the poem: AND 'SUDDENLY MY LAND BECOMES A BRIDE AGAIN', and under this title the poet persona, in what flows like the old days Greco-Latino 'epithalamium' (Abrams,1971:

53) - a love poem composed to consummate love at a bridal chamber, pours encomium of 'love' and affection mostly in the lines: "Make the mountains sing your name/Make the valleys vow in your name... /I too proclaim you, woman, wife, mother, lover...my land". These materials of semiotic construction typically make the experience more engaging, dramatic and striking. He concludes this verse with the statement: "Suddenly my land becomes a bride again" (p.66). The bride signifies hope and a foreseen new dawn. In the last poem in *Lovesong for My Wasteland*, the poet persona, apparently for the 'love' of this 'Wasteland' takes the position of a wise counsellor with the following lines that are full of allusions, icons, indexes and symbols. Every word counts and loaded with powerful images that are semiotically signifying. He articulates his word of good counsel energetically thus:

"Forget the slow faces of sloth sorrow
Prime tomorrow with the colour of work
Abandon the bazaar of bastards
Invoke the humour of the wise..." (p.71).

Conclusion

The semiotic strategies with their icons, symbols and indexes utilised to analyse the two collections of poetry have been found useful for making the issues of their poetic concerns more enactive, captivating, memorable and illuminating. The direction of this paper has been to highlight how in their varied attempts to creatively portray the historical dynamics of the two intertwining historical spheres of experience, that is, the colonial past as represented by the apartheid South Africa, and the prevalent post-independent/postcolonial socio-political order, represented by the post-independent 'wasteland' that is set microscopically in Nigeria, the two iconic locations reciprocally interrogate or dialogue each other. By this engagement, the past interrogates the present where the two scenarios are juxtaposed in a critical context. By the strategies that the poets represent their experience by the use of signs- symbolic, iconic or enactive semiotics, with the associated linguistic elements with which they succeed in rousing the desired effects in the readers and in making the events centralised in their poetics lively, dramatic, momentous and realistic. The striking tool of semiotics does not only suspend disbelief, but at the same time it makes the reader to easily come to terms with the historical conditions of the two epochs. Above all, these creative linguistic 'Signs' that come in the form of symbolic, iconic or enactive forms make the meaning more exciting, challenging and authentic whether imagined as fiction meant to entertain or as experienced reality. They make the parameter for apprehending and comparing the two African historical epochs memorable against the dynamics of historical movement from colonial epoch through the post-independent/post-colonisation reality. By means of these semiotic signs, the historical trajectory from colonial bondage to the contemporary politics of nationhood in Africa are comparatively interlinked for a better

understanding of how the experience of the colonial past informs the socio-historical strictures of the present.

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Of Semiotics And Politics Of Postcolonial Text: Siphon Sepamla's *The Soweto I Love* And Remi Raji's *Lovesong For My Wasteland* - *David Ekanem Udoinwang, PhD And Gladstone Vero-Ekpri, PhD*

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