
Narrativising Injustice, Political Emancipation and the Authentic Life in Sam Ukala's *the Placenta of Death*

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v23i2.4>

Abstract

The human desire to live together as a community or a nation is predicated on the conditions of equity, justice and fairness to all. However, the urge to dominate others has entrenched social injustice in society. This nature of human living breeds different kinds of human reactions which philosophers have identified. In his phenomenological ontology, Jean-Paul Sartre developed some concepts he believed to define our relationships with the world around us and how that world responds to our desires: *Being-in-itself*, *Being-for-Itself*, *Facticity*, *Bad Faith* and *Authenticity* are some concepts explored in this study. Sartre argues that because humans are ongoing projects with future possibilities, attaining our full potential as human beings only become valued through the ways we respond to these ideals. In the application of the above concepts using Sam Ukala's *The Placenta of Death*, this study, through a content analysis of the qualitative research method, interrogated human attitudes in an oppressive and unjust world seeking justification or otherwise for human actions that would provide us with what human society should be like for our experience of it to be what it ought to be. Our findings, among others, revealed that oppression and injustice in society breed political and material denials which lead to resentment and the consequent desire for political struggles. It also discovered that

those who resign to *bad faith* (self-deceptive and compromised persons) are afraid to take responsibility for their past and present actions and thereby closing future possibilities for themselves and others. The study concluded that in a society of entrenched oppression and injustice, it is obligated and justified that one takes a political stand: one against oppression and injustice, but in favour of political emancipation and freedom.

Key Words: Injustice, Bad Faith, Facticity, Being-for-itself and Authenticity

Introduction

Unarguably, injustice in Nigeria is as old as the country itself. The British colonialists, by design amalgamated in 1914, people of diverse cultures, ethnic nationalities, orientations, multiple languages, religions and world views to form the entity called Nigeria. A good many Nigerian people have decried and described the act as a contraption. As unnatural as the act was, it marked the beginning of injustice in the country. No doubt, in the time of early man, people lived individually and in isolation. Or perhaps, they lived in units. It was obvious that the need for collective survival must have necessitated early resolve to organize society into communities. This must not have come without recourse to potential comparative advantage. It is also not removed from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's "Theory of historical forms of people's community by concrete material reasons." (Institute of Social Sciences 231). The source noted that: "various forms of community, clan, tribe, nationality, nation - take shape in the full

analysis under the impact of the production and reproduction of the material condition of social development”. (231)

Historically, therefore, people have been known to agree to live together as a community, tribe or nation because of concrete material provision hinged on the principles of fairness and justice. However, that seemed not to be the case with the British amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates of Nigeria as done in 1914. The reason, it may be argued, the country has continued to witness internal tensions to date.

Injustice in Nigeria, which resulted in the 1967-'70 Nigeria/Biafra civil war, still has not abated as the majority of people in both the Biafran and Nigerian sides are today still calling for a restructuring of the country, while others seek its dismemberment. Since stories in Dramatic Arts connect humans - to their history, to their psychology and, as well, to their socio-economic-political dynamics - the narrative analysis of Sam Ukala's *The Placenta of Death*, as explored in this study, offers us a revealing insight and an understanding of the intricate ways in which injustice, perpetuated through political dominance and hegemony, has continued to navigate Nigerians towards *bad faith* and the inauthentic lifestyle. The study argued that, as a seed of discord, injustice is central in the production of the human pervasive tendencies to political struggles and the consequent rejection of authority as are continually reflective and manifest in the Nigerian State.

Conceptual Reflections

A few concepts developed by the 20th Century French writer and philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, guide the analysis of this study. In his phenomenological ontology, Sartre developed several concepts he believed will answer the “How” and “What” of life. He believed

that our understanding and proper application of these concepts in our relationship with our world would provide us with what the world should be like for our experience of it to be what it ought to be. Sartre's emphasis was on human willingness and action. First of all, Sartre dealt with appearance - the way the world or reality appears to us by our analysis of it. The two concepts he talked about in appearance were "being in itself" and "being for itself." By "being-in-itself," Sartre describes causally determined objects. Nothing in them surpasses their original composition. Tables, chairs, spoons, et cetera, belong to this category. They exist as they are, and as such, are self-contained. For a "being-for-itself," Sartre says, is a being with consciousness. A "for-itself" is a self-aware and conscious being. It is conscious of things around it and is not determined or influenced by external forces or determined by external causes. Unlike tables, spoons and computers, humans do not have permanent identity according to Sartre, and this is because, man is an ongoing project with future possibilities, always seeking renewal by the dint of the choices he makes. Sartre claims that "...man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself." (EH 291). He further declares that "Man is freedom," and that "we are condemned to freedom." (295)

Another of Sartre's concept germane to the study is his idea of human *facticity*. We might argue that there are conditions we find ourselves that are not of our own making and for which we must live: conditions that we have no choice other than to accept that are inalienable and innate to us. For instance, if I am an Igbo man of Biafraland - a seemingly conquered people by war, to say, and now taking the identity of a Nigerian citizen, it is this kind of seemingly inescapable feature of my existence that Sartre refers to

as my *facticity*. It represents, albeit, the ‘facts’ of my existence. Maybe, as a child from poor parentage, or one whose parents died while an infant and has no hope of survival; no hope to be rich! I conclude that I am therefore permanently limited as those were the facts of my existence. Sartre thinks that such assigning of permanent labelling on myself is not true. For him, by our ontological freedom, we are not limited by our facticity. Thus, though a conquered people, it is in our choice to accept or reject that appellation. Explicating this further, William Lawhead writes that “however, if facts do not have intrinsic meaning, but are things for which we assign meaning, then to state the features of our facticity is, as such, to say very little.” (549). Concurring with Sartre, Lawhead further informs that “Our true freedom becomes clear in the way in which we respond to our facticity.” (549). Thus, as free agents, we can alter the features of our facticity to desired ends because, accordingly, “As we face the bare givens of our facticity, we face an overwhelming amount of freedom in deciding what meaning these have for us.” (590).

Another concept captured here is *bad faith*. In *bad faith* we deceive ourselves, notes Sartre. A notable ally of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, noted that “Every time that transcendence falls back into immanence, there is a degradation of existence into the in-itself, of freedom into facticity.” (The Second Sex 131), and that happens as a failure of humans to make the right choice. This is what is referred to by Sartre as *bad faith*, and accordingly, Bad Faith occurs when a conscious being denies her freedom to choose from among a range of possibilities, or when she denies aspects of her facticity, for instance, that there are certain choices she has made in the past, or that these choices make up certain patterns. (Guignom and Perebom 261)

Sartre categorizes *bad faith* into two kinds. In the first kind, the person of bad faith denies some aspects of his freedom, while in the second kind, the person denies some aspects of his existence as a material being. Sartre however believes that one can escape these extremes by tending towards sincerity - a quality he characterizes as trying to be “what one is,” trying to be “authentic.” In bad faith therefore, we try to label ourselves - “I am a slave”, “I am an outcast”, “I am vanquished”, “I am a poor man,” or “I am a failure!” We say all these because we had concluded in ourselves that nature made it so. Therefore, labels became our identity through our own choice. Being in bad faith is therefore our attempt to identify ourselves with our past choices while closing all our future possibilities.

The last concept considered in the study is Sartre’s idea of the authentic person. Sartre believes that as consciousness, it is our responsibility to create the type of value we want for ourselves because we are fundamentally free. Sartre noted that many a time, humans desire to rescind to an *it-self*, that is, a determined being - a being with identity - because to Sartre, we, in most cases, are afraid to face our responsibility. The choice we make fundamentally is accompanied by responsibility. It was Martin Heidegger who pointed out that “facing our freedom brings with it the burden of responsibility and experiences of anxiety, anguish and despair. “(Lawhead 551). It is therefore up to us to take responsibility “for there is no meaning to the world or our lives but the meaning we create.” (551). Thus, “you are free, therefore choose - that is to say, invent,” (EH 298), charges Sartre. *Authenticity*, therefore, involves “a lucid awareness of the

structural ambiguity in a person between *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*.” (EA 158). Thus, the;

An authentic person is lucidly aware of her past activities and what they add up to, but at the same time does not view these past actions as determining what she will be for she sees herself as being able to freely choose from among the possibilities that open up for her. (263). Hence, “only when we take responsibility for the meaning of our past and present, and self-consciously choose our future will we achieve authenticity.” (Lawhead 551).

The Placenta of Death: A Summary

Sam Ukala is a renowned playwright of Nigerian extraction. Ukala developed a distinct dramatic genre called *folks*. Folkloric drama is Ukala’s attempt to employ Africa’s narrative and story-telling forms in creating and presenting dramatic performances. In African societies, narratives and story-telling forms present cultural dynamics as important in revealing past and present events, exploring mysteries, and engendering ethics, mores, morals and traditions of a given society. They are also used as pedagogic tools for education and knowledge transmission and dissemination. The aforementioned functions do not preclude drama’s primary function as a tool for entertainment. Thus, at the very core of African folkloric narrative and story-telling forms is a social relationship where both actors and audience members are active participants during a given dramatic presentation. Because in a traditional setting, stories told, whether real or fictive, reflect both individual and communal concerns, it generally implies that such stories must repose in them appreciable degrees of politics in their constructions. Hence, since in writing, a writer is usually influenced by the realities of his immediate environment,

Ukala's *The Placenta of Death* reflects the realities of the Nigerian State.

The drama is set in the fictitious land of Owodoland. The play centres on King Owodo 111 and his Owodoland. It also revolves around Emeni, a wealthy and illustrious son of the Dein tribe. Dein is annexed to Owodoland by history, and its citizens had henceforth been considered captives and slaves to Owodoland. Emeni's daughter, Ibo, is married to Owodo 111. Ibo is just delivered a baby boy and Emeni has come to break the good news to King Owodo 111. Being the first male child of the royal family, an overjoyed Owodo proclaims the baby heir to the throne of Owodoland. This does not go down well with Iyasere, a palace minister and native of Owodoland, who reminded the Oba cautiously that "Owodoland cannot be ruled by a slave." Infuriated by Iyasere's audacity, Owodo reminds an audacious Iyasere that "by my marriage to Ibo, I have cleansed her of slavery." (31). Owodo's comment does not go down well with Emeni who retorts: "And Emeni that you did not marry remains a slave, eh?" "Yes, if you want a categorical statement," replies Owodo. For Emeni therefore, the die is cast. He resorts to threats: "But I swear, we will shake you out of the sweet indolence of owning captives without a war." (31). From thence, a conscious Emeni begins to mobilize the Dein tribe against King Owodo. In a statement he makes: ...It's time you all had a taste of captivity and slavery. For you, the sun has stayed overhead too much...it is only fair that you have the opportunity in your lifetime to enjoy the status of a captive and a slave. (54)

Narrativising Injustice and Political Struggle in Studied Play Text

As stated in the introductory paragraph to the study, the African folkloric form is Africa's traditional phenomenological ontology through which the African world/world-view is revealed through the structures of an individual or communal consciousness in a participatory narrative and story-telling dramatic form. The form provides us with an account of what society was, is and what it should be. African folkloric forms thus describe the nature of being. It answers the question of the "How" and "What" of the human world from within the domain of human consciousness. The art forms describe the nature of human relationships in societies.

One major problem facing human society today is the problem of injustice and human oppression. Interestingly, Sam Ukala captures the hydra-headed consequences of injustice and political oppression in *The Placenta of Death*. Owodoland represents an unjust and oppressive state. It is not unlikely that Ukala metaphorically makes an analogy between the setting of the play with the Nigerian State. The descriptive commentary on Owodoland at the opening of the play by the Narrator is analogous to the Nigerian situation. It serves as an expose' revealing the general state of things in Owodoland, the setting of the play. Thus, like Nigeria, where human misery, occasioned by oppression and injustice abound, the Narrator urges citizens to "...sing a dirge despite the time" as Owodoland is now a place where "many now rot before their death." (13). Owodoland is described as a shadow of its former self where citizens now sing its dirge because of hard times occasioned by political injustices and oppressions. Injustice now turns Owodoland into a place of despair and hopelessness - a meaningless enterprise where "...work hardly pays for the transport to it, and the worker is cudgelled almost to death," hence, "man no

die, no rotten.” (13). The paradox of life in Owodoland, despite its rich human and material deposits, raises concern about its continued existence as a nation. This is so because the majority of its citizens now resign to bad faith. The festering degree of injustice and oppression in the land has risen to an excruciating level and the poem citizens now render to their fatherland is: “Like a dirge for a nation shrouded by riches and strife...that nation was rich, and riches beget power and injustice, enjoyment and anguish...” (13)

Citizens thus speak of their nation in the past. In Owodoland therefore, there exist social, economic and political disparities as the powerful beget power and enjoyment, while the less privileged beget injustice, anguish and despair - a leviathan society where only the fittest survive.

Owodoland, as said, comprises two tribes - Owodo and the Dein tribes. King Owodo 111 and the citizens of Owodoland consider the citizens of the Dein tribe as captives of history and treat them as such. Thus, what rivates in the play are categorizations and regional supremacy and structural deprivations. Fundamentally, therefore, people are segregated against and as well alienated thereby making social relationships selective. As entrenched as this level of misdemeanour is, citizens have grown to perspectivise their psyche thus. Admonishing King Owodo on his resolve to marry Ibo, a slave, and who is just delivered a baby boy, an elder of Owodo, Ihama, reprimands the Oba saying:

I told your father without chewing words. The girl is the daughter of the son of a captive - a nice word at that - a slave! The daughter of a slave is a slave! ...The throne of our father will not bear the messy bottom of a slave king. (14)

Thus, despite Ibo being married to Owodo, her son is not permitted to ascend the throne as king since he, too, by his mother's descent, is considered a captive. By tradition, it is the first son of the king that succeeds him as king when he is looked after and is no more. However, of their negative psychology, the people of the Owodo tribe want to upturn tradition by considering a son of their tribe from Omon who is but a second son to the king against the first son from the Dein tribe. This kind of conscious perpetuation of injustice has even permeated the psyche of the oppressed who have come to see such interpolative tendencies as normal. Engrained injustice and oppression perpetuated by a group of persons against another in the society that has quartered so long a time among the people such that they have begun to see their situation as eternal equates to what Sartre calls bad faith - a kind of self-deception. This is the reason the two palace messengers - Ebuzun and Izagodo - citizens of the Dein tribe - consider as abnormal, a son of their own Dein tribe ascending the throne of Owodoland. Hear Ebuzun forlorn:

...Perhaps, the ancestors of Owodoland have gone to sleep and the messy bottom of a slave is angling up for their throne...must we, of the Dein tribe, forever be their slaves, never their masters? (17)

Note that even the women of the Dein tribe share this scepticism as advanced by Ebuzun despite the succour the emergence of a king of their own Dein blood would bring them. On hearing that Ibo has given birth to a male child, the character 1ST WOMAN expresses such mixed joy as seen below:

In our lifetime? I wish the messiah were to come from a humbler home. With Ibo as the mother of our messiah, neither the moon nor the sun can shine without her approval. (27)

Injustice and oppression breed denial, especially political and material denials. In the play, the people of the Dein tribe, despite being the source of livelihood of Owodoland, are denied the necessities of life. They are as well considered unfit to attain certain levels of social and political heights. Despite being the region harbouring the natural resources of the land and its labour force, the people of the Dein tribe must jostle, hustle and beg for food before eating. They are paid fewer wages than the labour they provide and they have no access to good potable water as the one in their region had been circumvented by Owodo and his people. The disparaging living conditions of citizens of the Owodo and Dein tribes can be captured in the excerpt below:

2ND WOMAN: What choice has Nduka or anyone else from the Dein tribe, anyway? Dein is the South and the South is the bottom. The head swallows the morsels, but the bottom makes the labour pains of bearing shit. We toil to exist. Look what I carry on my head, sometimes, thrice a day. Put half of it on the head of any woman of the Owodo tribe and a bucket of shit will jet out of her anus at once.

1ST WOMAN: Because she was not created to toil like you. She drinks of the royal stream - originally the royal stream of Deinland - piped already into her kitchen. You cannot, having been forbidden to foul up the stream with your leprous slave body. You must go far away to find yourself another stream or die of thirst. And our men must sell their sweat and blood for a kobo or die of hunger...our men are content to toil away their manhood. (26-7)

The picture painted above is akin to the Nigerian situation where people from the South, despite being the source of Nigeria's economy, are grossly shortchanged in the scheme of things. It is interesting to note here that the South-South and South East are the regions in Nigeria where oil is explored and yet the headquarters of all the oil companies in Nigeria are either located in Lagos or Abuja. The effect of such a parochial arrangement is that if you are a citizen of these source zones, to get a contract or employment from any of these companies, implies that you must travel to Abuja or Lagos for that. Thus, rather than use the revenues generated from these source communities for their development, such revenues are used to develop the communities hosting these headquarters. This accounts for why both in the South East and South South of Nigeria one cannot find a city as developed as Abuja and Lagos. This also accounts for the reason why in these companies only the Hausas, Fulanis and Yorubas call the shots.

We also find a thread of injustice and oppression play out in the relationship between Iyasere, the Prime Minister of Owodoland and the Owodo tribe, with those ordinary citizens of the Dein tribe. When asked by Omon, wife of King Owodo and Owodo tribe, about the possibility of mobilizing in so short a time notice farmers from the Dein tribe to come and work on the king's farm, Iyasere replies with a prided ego as captured in the below conversation excerpt between him and Omon:

IYASERE: What do you take me for? The Iyasere himself visits a slave of Owodoland tells him that the Oba needs his service the following morning and the slave would hesitate.

OMON: These slaves don't have minds of their own?

IYASERE: Well, perhaps, they-

OMON: Only perhaps?

IYASERE: Well, only a slave should know for certain how the slave mind works. Nonetheless, the wish of a free-born cancels the will of a slave, especially if the free-born is the Iyasere himself! (50-1)

Omon thinks that treating people as *a being-in-itself*, that is, as objects determined ‘sounds unfair.’ (51). However, Iyasere thinks otherwise. For him, “what else is the world?” (51), he questions. Again, even though he oppresses citizens of the Dein tribe and removing not the clog in his own eyes first, Iyasere considers Owodo an oppressor. Thus, why he empathizes with Omon of his Owodo tribe whom he recommended for marriage to Owodo, Iyasere does not see it as important to extend the same gesture to Ibo whom he considers of slave extraction and therefore unfit to bear a child who would angle up the throne of Owodoland. Because Iyasere considers Omon his tribal extract, he is “ready to lay down my life for her sake”. For Omon’s sake, Iyasere dares the king:

IYASERE: I swore to protect Omon against oppressive tendencies from the palace merely on account of her lowly birth...and I must keep to my oath to the end. If I die protecting Omon, I die a happy death. (**Draws his sword**). I dare you, Owodo, or any of your stooge, to enforce your insane pronouncement. (73)

Iyasere’s outburst and deadly challenge come against the recent death sentence passed on Omon by Owodo for using the meat of a vulture to prepare the king’s meal in retaliation for the same done to her by Ibo when she gave birth to her son. Omon accuses the king of being complicit in Ibo’s conspiracy against the king and takes retaliation on the king.

Perhaps, the degree of oppression and human high-handedness against fellow humans can be appreciated in the degree of power allocation existing between King Owodo, his cabinet members and the citizens of Owodoland. Addressing the king, one of the surviving victims of Omon vulture meal eulogizes: “King from the sky, he who asks for a hundred human heads in a day and gets them.” (65). Thus, Owodo is considered a very powerful omnipotent king who treats his subjects as the in-itself, that is, as objects. He sees himself as a supreme and maximum ruler. The people of his kingdom see him as such.

It is a travesty of justice, equity and fair play when people are dehumanized and meant to live as described above. As being-for-itself, a human person is usually conscious of the happenings around him. Citizens of the Dein tribe are aware they are being oppressed and subjugated by Owodo and his people. As humans, the people of the Dein tribe have well as all humans cannot be deceived all the time. Thus, as conscious beings, they cannot permanently be coerced by their oppressors. This is so because they are self-aware, and as Satre rightly tells us: “we are free.” Hence, that humans are free to define their existence by the way of their own choice informed the political struggle in the play.

Often-time, people who are oppressed consider themselves powerless to challenge the order that oppresses them. Such characters abound in Ukala’s *The Placenta of Death*. Among such characters, the two palace servants, Ebuzun and Izagodo, stand out. Rather than join forces against their oppressor, they fight among themselves. It is not much help as Ibo breaks their ranks by doling an extra portion of food to Izagodo who avails himself as a willing tool of sabotage. Even Ebuzun is aware of the inauthentic lifestyle of Izagodo as he becomes self-cautious: “...I may chirp,” he mockingly advances, “...but I do not gossip as some people do. I

should be careful what I say here. Some people are a mere extension of the queen's ear." (18) However, rather than adjust his distrust character to level up for a collective good, Izagodo chooses to square down with his fellow slave challenging: "I say, let's wrestle seven times. If you do not kiss the ground each time, don't call me Izagodo anymore." (19). Thus, rather than face the demand for their freedom, the two slaves prefer to chase shadows. They do not seem to be aware that their situation can be altered pending the choice they make. Theirs is a case of bad faith. They deceive themselves.

One other character in the play that takes the perspective towards bad faith is Osaze, Omon's father. Osaze's philosophy of life is a deception of himself. He adumbrates:

Some people came right into the middle of the world. Others came perching on its edge,
due to no fault of theirs. We belong to the group that is perching on the edge...If we but
over swayed with as much as the breath of the tongue of a snake we would fall right
back into the abyss of the forgotten. That is how it is for my daughter. (44)

However, Omon castigates this perspective to life. For Omon, that is not how life should be. She sarcastically describes her father's philosophy of life as "beautiful fatalism." Osaze forgets that one standing on the edge of the world has choices either to fall off the cliff, remain on the edge or fall back from whence he came and that in all these choices, he must take responsibility. Osaze's inclination

to bad faith is deceptive. It made him believe that he is left with one determined choice, which is: that “he will end up in a bottomless pit,” because, for him, “...the little finger willing to push its way into the middle must be cut.” (45). However, it is worthy of note that such negative philosophy of life pulls one back to immanence. Emeni is a wealthy son of Owodoland and the Dein tribe. Emeni has contributed immensely to the development and growth of Owodoland. His facticity as a historically conquered person places a stricture on his resolve to aspire to his desired greatness. The reason, as advanced by Iyasere, the Prime Minister to Owodoland and of the Owodo tribe, is that “It is a tradition that challenges.” Thus, Emeni becomes labelled and facilitated. However, as a being-for-itself, a being who is self-aware, Emeni would not accept such labelling. Emeni challenges the culture that places a label on him and thereby forces him to a permanent facticity. He challenges and rejects authority, putting it to Owodo, thus:

What do I care about your tradition that bows to your fart? Do you think you and your fathers can use and dump at will, Umuluo and his offspring? It is good what you are doing. Haven’t we been foolish for too long? Isn’t it the fool who needs telling to come out of the smoke? (**Moves to the shrine, picks a broken machete from it**) But I swear, we will shake you out of the sweet insolence of owning captives without a war. (31).

From that point of realization and decision, everything in the story changes and thus begins the political struggle for self-emancipation and political freedom. This is so because you cannot hold a people to perpetual slavery and oppression without their reactions. Emeni recognizes his facticity and that of his Dein tribe as historical captives. He must therefore begin to mobilize against their enemies

if they must delabel themselves of the appendages of slavery and captivity. Heroic history places a label on the Dein tribe. Citizens of the tribe resign themselves to that tactical condition. However, Emeni thinks that he should be saddled with the choice of defining that situation and the meaning it portends to him rather than others defining him. Therefore, as we face our bare givens, nature also bestows on us to face an overwhelming amount of freedom to decide the direction of our lives. Emeni is aware of this because he knows that he “is free to choose” to transcend his facticity and that of his Dein tribe. He knows it is in their hand to navigate their fate to the desired end. Emeni is not alone in this way of thinking. His daughter, Ibo, thinks in the same way. Ibo recognizes that there are levels of freedom, and as such, despite being a wife to king Owodo, she is yet to attain the highest potential of her freedom. She must help free others that are held captive so that she becomes truly free. What is implied here is that other people’s bad conditions should place a moral burden on us, and acting upon this to free them from their situation automatically frees us from the weight of that burden. This aspect of moral freedom which has become the pursuit of Ibo and her father of late beats the imagination of Owodo. He quizzes Ibo:

You’re beginning to dream a dangerous dream, Ibo. The dream of freeing your people from bondage during my reign or my son is dangerous. Your father has been dreaming about it of late. Don’t learn it...my son and I didn’t annex Dein tribe. History did. Heroic history of Owodoland, through the instrumentality of the Whiteman... (38)

From Owodo's statement above, one would conclude that those who oppress others would always wish to continue their oppression of those they subjugate. However, such a move always leads to self-destruction as such oppressive powers are usually challenged, and in most cases, subdued and overthrown. For Ibo therefore, her son represents the future of Owodoland, their captor, and she must therefore start her destruction of Owodoland with that future hope of their captor unless Owodo frees her people of the Dein tribe.

"Just take a look, my hope," she tells the innocent baby, "for today ends your bid to rule from captivity to kingship. Today, we smash your ambitious, unkingly head at the foot of the throne you were meant to sit on." (39).

At this point of consciousness, those oppressed will begin to recount their years of oppression and what it portends for their future. Emeni, on his part, begins to conscientize others reminding them of their degree of oppression in the hands of their oppressors, and the need to seek their liberation. Emeni conscientizes Olotu:

Yours, Olotu, is the only ministerial appointment ever conceded to the Dein tribe...if you care to join us, the Dein tribe is mobilizing towards forcing history to our side. Towards making our captors our captives. Our enslavers our slaves. (54)

Emeni does not only wish to liberate his people of the Dein tribe but also wishes a retaliation for their oppressions. What is implied above is that since oppression, in most cases, is usually a structured oppression, its effect is usually the rise of a structured agitation that culminates into structural violence. Emeni's decision comes against the fact that oppression is bad, and the oppressor must be made to suffer for his oppression of others. Thus, when Iyasere notices that the emancipation of the Dein tribe is inevitable at this

point, he tries to absolve himself of wrongdoings by tending towards blame shifting. He pretends to forget that he was part of the oppression against the Dein tribe. Iyasere admonishes an unyielding Emeni saying: "...The plan is not for you to enslave the Owodo tribe...I should never be able to support that. It's Owodo that we need to humiliate." (54).

Emeni thinks otherwise. He thinks that injustice by the Owodo tribe is a collective hubris, and for this, therefore:

It's the Owodo tribe. It's time you all had a taste of captivity and slavery. For you, the sun has stayed overhead for too long. You, Iyasere, have been the loudest single trumpeter of the slave status of my daughter, her son and me. It is only fair you have the opportunity, in your lifetime, to enjoy the status of a captive and a slave. (54)

This is a very potent time for Emeni and he must explore it to the full. Even his oppressor knows that the dead are cast and that the rubicon must be crossed. Even though the oppressor may not admit it, a time comes when even an oppressive hegemony realizes that those they oppress have reached a point of retractable resistance. Iyasere realizes this especially given the fact of Emeni admonishes Olotu against Iyasere, saying:

Don't listen to the hallow braggart, Olotu. My father made him a soldier and taught him the dirty tricks which gave him the little money that now turns his head...I can never share the same plan with Iyasere, our prospective slave. (54)

When one refuses to put oneself in the shoes of others, one refuses to feel their pain. We need to continually put ourselves in the shoes of others to understand the human situation. It's laughable that Iyasere is afraid to experience the same ordeal his Owodo tribe and he had subjected the Dein tribe to centuries past. Emeni sees as "Arrant nonsense" Iyasere's negative philosophy of life: "If you want to rule," he says, "rule yourselves. But if we rule, we rule over you." (55).

Bad Faith and the Authentic Life in *The Placenta of Death*

One who seeks emancipation from captivity and slavery must live an authentic and sincere lifestyle. A slave lives by the mercy of his master who provides him with little material needs to keep life going. The slave is never paid commensurate to his services. He, therefore, lives in denial. Most often, what those who hold others in captivity do is lure them with material gifts to close their eyes to their liberty. Ukala explores aspects of this in *The Placenta of Death*. The oppressed who understand this gimmick of material inducement by the oppressor will usually escape resignation to *the bad faith* that is always a lot of the oppressed. Bad Faith, as we say, is a kind of self-deception. It works against the authentic life.

In the play, as explored, Emeni does not allow his facticity to determine him. He refuses to accept the label of slavery and captivity Owodo and his tribe place on the Dein tribe. In walking towards the authentic life, therefore, the man who struggles for political emancipation must reject the attraction of material gifts from his oppressor. The oppressed must see themselves to surpass material attractions. Thus, Emeni rejects the gift sent to him by Owodo as he declares his resolve for the freedom of his people. He tells Owodo: "Keep your gifts to yourself, Great One. This slave does not need them to take care of his daughter and ground son."

(Begins to leave. (13). This is unlike Olotu who deceives himself by holding on to bad faith and inauthentic life. Though of the Dein tribe and enslaved, Olotu thinks himself determined and therefore compromised. He is not lucidly aware of his circumstances the reason he tells Emeni, as the latter lures him into the struggle, saying:

...Didn't I accept the gift the other day? But, you know my position. I can't publicly stand against my employer, unless, of course, I have enough money to fall back on if... (55)

Olotu wants to be free, but he does not want to make sacrifices and as well take responsibility. This is bad faith in action, a situation the Narrator considers unfortunate the reason he questions Olotu saying: "Does he need to bribe you before you can fight for the political emancipation of your people?" (34). Thus, Olotu deceives himself by denying some aspects of his freedom as a free human agent. Therefore, by resigning to the mercy and determination of our oppressors, we consciously incapacitate ourselves. We thus close all future possibilities for ourselves and our generation. This is so because by demanding to be compensated to fight for his freedom, Olotu falls back to immanence. Hence, in the rebuttal of Ibo to Izagodo, the palace messenger says: "You are a born slave! You are fetters around the freedom feet of the Dein tribe. I am ashamed of you," (35), applies to the likes of Olotu as well. Hence, those who want to be bribed before they can fight for their freedom are those said to live an inauthentic life. They prefer the crumbs from the table of their oppressor than join forces with others for their liberation. They are those who smile amid their excruciating

suffering. They pretend all is well, and as such, deceive themselves.

Ibo, like Emeni her father, leads an authentic life. It is her life's goal to set the people of her Dein tribe free and it does not matter what it will cost her to achieve this feat. Thus, despite Ibo knowing of her son that:

The whole of this courtyard is yours. From here, you'll sneeze and the whole of Owodoland will quiver. Here you'll set to make the captor captive; the enslaver the slave. King from the sky, come. Come sit on your throne. (**sits the baby on the throne**). (34).

She would not mind sacrificing him for the liberation of her entire tribe! "...Today, we smash your ambitious, unkingly head at the throne you were meant to sit on." (39). Therefore, even though wife to the king and considered free, Ibo is aware that she is not free if her Dein tribe is in bondage. This is the reason she takes the perspective of sincerity. Owodo caps the authentic life of Ibo and her father, Emeni, perfectly in the below excerpt:

You are beginning to dream a dangerous dream, Ibo. The dream of freeing your people from bondage during my reign or my sons is dangerous. Your father has been dreaming about it of late. Don't learn it... (38).

As humans, such rebuttal by Owodo to Ibo is considered unnecessary because man must learn the vision of freeing humanity from bondage, and that exactly is what Ibo and Emeni are doing! Ibo must learn the dream of liberty even to perfection as that is the only meaningful choice to make if she must give meaning to her existence and that of her Dein tribe. Hence, to be free, we must

have others freed. To be free, we must help others attain their freedom.

Conclusion

Humans choose to live together to help each other and thereby making life easy and worth living for all. The decision to live together is usually anchored on the reasons of justice, equity and fairness to all. However, the urge to dominate others, has in many cases, ushered in injustice and oppression in human society and thereby leading to resentment. Injustice, oppression and structural impoverishment breed denial, especially political and material denials some of which consequences result in political struggle for self-emancipation, rejection of authority, strife and structural violence by those oppressed. Fundamentally, therefore, one who is oppressed can only fulfil his existence in revolt.

Naturally, man is a free agent. He decides the direction of his life - the way he wants it. However, since some people wield power in greater proportion in society than others, it limits human will and in many of these instances, the oppressed, who think they cannot change the course of their life, resign to bad faith. A resignation to bad faith means a conscious denial of oneself as a self-creating being with choices and capabilities. One who resigns to bad faith is afraid to take responsibility for his past and present actions and thereby closing future possibilities for himself. Such a person only lives in the present. The now. Resigning to bad faith is self-deception. Self-deception is one major setback for the oppressed as they see their situation as determined. A self-deceived person tends towards an inauthentic lifestyle. A man deceives himself when he refuses to recognize the structural ambiguity he possesses as a

transcendental being - a project. He thus denies an aspect of his freedom.

To live an authentic life requires that a human individual recognizes himself as freedom. A free human agent is lucidly self-aware - recognizing the structural differences between his being as consciousness and the being of objects around him. He must therefore take responsibility for the choices he makes to give meaning to his life. Running away from our responsibilities draws us back to immanence, that is, to the actual state we originally found ourselves thrust into that is not of our own making. Living the authentic life, therefore, entails our ability to reject the labels society places on us; for society may label us by its own choice, but it is our own choice to accept or reject such labels.

Owodoland, the setting of Sam Ukala's *The Placenta of Death*, is analogous to the Nigerian State. Thus, despite the abundance of rich human and material resources, citizens still suffer untold hardship as a result of injustice and oppression. We see in Nigeria, just like in Owodoland, where the South produces virtually everything, and yet gets nothing. These consciously entrenched injustices and oppressions have put the country along regional and tribal divides with the consequence that the situation continues to elicit reactions. We found in our study that injustice and oppression thrive in society when they are left unchallenged and unchecked by those oppressed.

The challenge of oppression and injustice results when people refuse to make choices and take responsibility for their past and present actions., and for this, they resign to bad faith. Living in bad faith amounts to one deceiving oneself and this we have found in the character of a good number of persons in the South of Nigeria who are contented with the crumbs from the "master's table". The study advances that if we must be free from injustice and

consciously structured oppression, we must make a choice - a choice that must entail responsibility.

When people are oppressed and unjustly treated, they must see themselves as capable of freeing themselves from the shackles of oppression. To achieve this, they must reject every external imposition of identity and labelling that tend to reduce their humanity to a factual state. To have our freedom, we must live an authentic lifestyle. Living a life of authenticity requires that we shun compromise. Shunning compromise requires that we, first of all, grasp our oppression and then take a political stand against it. The political stand we must take is the one that demands we join forces with others in revolt without asking to be compensated with material gifts or positions for our emancipation. When we live the way of compensation for our liberation, we are only avoiding making choices and taking up responsibility for our future. When we avoid making choices for our good and are ready to bear the consequences thereof, we are consciously and inadvertently closing future possibilities for ourselves. Thus, to live an authentic life, we must tend towards sincerity, that is, telling ourselves the truth, and such truth to ourselves is that we are yet to attain our potential as truly free beings. To be truly free therefore requires that we do not feel satisfied in our actual state no matter the label society places on us. It requires that we do not keep quiet in the face of injustice and oppression. To be authentic humans entails that we choose a political struggle for self-emancipation as this alone will open up future possibilities for our transcendence as self-creating beings. This is the perspective Emeni and his daughter, Ibo, take to free their tribe from the shackles of captivity and slavery from Owodo and his Owodo tribe.

Following the above, it is therefore in the view of this study that those who feel unjustly treated in the Nigerian enterprise should rise to the occasion of political struggle for their emancipation. Such people deceive themselves by accepting the label of second-class citizens or people conquered as such attitude to life only closes up to them all future possibilities to transcend their factual origins. In all, it causes a degradation of their existence as transcendentals. Hence, we do not only align with some political theorists like John Locke that political revolution can be morally justified. We assert that it is morally obligated and justified that one takes a political stand of revolt that is against injustice, oppression and the freezing and intermittent shutting down of one's freedom. Freedom is the spice of life, and those who value life must rise to grasp freedom.

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