AN APPRAISAL OF THE *Dibi*a INSTITUTION ANDTRADITIONAL MEDICINE AS A STYLE IN GODDY ONYEAKAỌNWỤ'S PLAYS

BY

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Abstract

This paper examines the traditional medicine institution as a style in Goddy Onyekaonwu's plays focusing on their roles within Igbo culture. Qualitative research design focusing on textual analysis of the selected Igbo literary texts was adopted. Through an analysis of Nwata Rie Awọ, Ọkụ Ghara Ite, Ọkụ Ụzụ Daa Ibube and Eriri Mara Ngwugwu, this study aims at uncovering the wisdom and knowledge embedded in these plays. Onyekaonwu manipulated this aspect of culture and unveils the secret behind the interpretation and use of these wisdom and knowledge. The theoretical frameworks guiding this analysis are ecocriticism developed in the late 20th century influenced by the environmental movement led by Cheryll Glotfelty and and his team. The second is the theory of indigenous knowledge. This theory is as old as human being. It originates from the daily experiences of indigenous communities. This study therefore seeks to examine how Onyekaonwu incorporates elements of traditional healing within his plays and the symbolic role of traditional medicine in the plays and its impact on the style and choice of themes in the works. The findings suggest that while these dibia types are closely connected in their practices, they differ in their underlying philosophies. The paper concludes that traditional medicine institution provides services that are as effective as those of their orthodox counterparts, emphasizing their ongoing importance in Igbo culture.

***Keywords**: Traditional medicine, institutions, Igbo culture, ecocriticism, Onyekaonwu, orthodox.*

1.0 Introduction

Many literary scholars have written on the area of literature – both written and oral – in society and its value to life. Akporobaro (2012:33) refers to literature as the heritage of imaginative verbal creations, stories, folk beliefs and songs belonging to a group of people. Obi (2016:185) views it as the way, manner or method in which something is said or written to express issues of life. To Ọnụnkwọ (2009:173), literature is a reflection of people's ways of life. It is the way of life; a reflection of a people's manner and methods of carrying out their day to day activities, their ceremonies, festivities, belief system, and social institutions. There are three genres of literature which are prose, drama and poetry. However, the focus of this paper is drama. This paper makes an appraisal of the traditional medicine institution in four of Goddy Onyekaọnwụ's plays: *Nwata Rie Awọ*, *Ọkụ GharaIte, Ọkụ Ụzụ Daa Ibube* and *Eriri Mara Ngwugwu*. The playwright is chosen because he emphasises one aspect of *dibia* institution or the other in his plays.

2.1 Literature Review

Aristotle as cited by Butcher (2008) states that human beings are mimetic in nature and the instinct for imitation is implanted in man right from birth. Olajumoke (2018:8) views literary works as portraying human experiences through oral and written expressions while Iwu-Ikwubuzo (2004:160) describes these 'human experiences' as the culture of the people which literary writers can draw inspirations from the cultural and traditional backgrounds of the society in which they belong. More so, Africa is a multi-cultural entity (Nnanna, 2004:193). Based on these multi-cultural characteristics, most literary works try to express one aspect of the culture or the other as the theme of their works.

Ogunbiyi (1981:25) has it that some sets of Igbo drama emanated from 1940s, among which is the drama of the Onitsha market literature. These literatures are in the form of pamphlets, novelettes, playlets and stories compiled by literate traders and some American trained Igbo graduates like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Cyprian Ekwensi who set up popular mass media of information. Interestingly, Cyprian Ekwensi's *Ikolo*, the wrestler (1947) captures the first pamphlet of the Onitsha market literature. Then, Obiechina singles out didactic love, marriage and family, religion and moral as his themes –all structured in the drama form. This continued until 1960 when John Ekwere and his Ogui players emerged and later changed its name to "Eastern Nigerian Theatre Group". Within all these movements, many Igbo writers emerged, expressing one form of Igbo cultures or the other as the theme of their texts, through the medium of English language. Consequently, they were not counted as Igbo plays. Therefore, it is claimed that the first Igbo written drama text started with the Chukwuezi's *Udo ka Mma* published in 1974,(Nwadike 1998:1). From 1974 to date, there have been several written Igbo drama texts in circulation all over Nigeria and beyond.

Dibia institution isa prominent themes Igbo.Playwrights use to influence Igbo literature and arts which Ofomata(2013:425) describes*dibia* institution as group of traditional medicine practice endowment with the ability to identify and take care of human health conditions with the use of herbs. Ofomata states that this provides alternative healing options and supports community cohesion,which started when the world (life) started.

The *dibịa*appears in four aspects according to their duties - the *dibịa afa* - the diviner, the *dibia aja* – the sacrifice priest, the *dibia mgbogwu na mkpaakwụkwọ*the herbalist and the *dibia ọgwụ* the occult. The most important thing in all these aspects of traditional medicine institution is the indigenous knowledge and wisdom acquired traditionally from their forefathers orally and practically passed down from generation to generation. Ubesie (2004:187) explains extensively,*dibịa afa* and *dibịaaja* as the beginning and the most important healing process in the sense that *dibịa afa* will first of all diagnose the situation then sacrifice will be made by *dibịaaja* to appease the gods and deities so that the administration of any drug gives the expected results. On the other hand, Ogbalu (1981:225) recognizes *dibịa afa* the diviner and the *dibịa ọgwụ* the occult, claiming it is peculiar to some communities and towns within Igbo land which Uchendu(1966:105) indirectly supports by saying that people select those cultural traits which can be easily reconciled with their own existing cultural pattern. One thing is paramount in traditional medicine institution, their duties and goal are channeled towards health care management either for diagnosis, healing or prevention which they say is better than cure.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Literary criticism in its broadest perspective is devoted to comparison and analysis that enhance understanding and appreciation of literary works (Dobie, 2009). This also paves way for a critical thinking, interpretation and evaluation of all the works of literature. On the other hand, literary theories are frameworks used to analyse and interpret literary works for better understanding. Based on this, two literary theories are considered for this study, ecocriticism and the theory of indigenous knowledge. The first ecocriticism takes care of nature, the later takes care of the tradition that is involved in this research.

Ecocriticism started in the later part of 20th century all through the early part of the 21st century. It goes by many names – literary ecology, a term which Joseph Meeker in 1972 used to analyse the relationship of living creatures to one another and their environment. In 1978, William Rueckert called it literature ecology which looks into the application of ecological concepts to the study of literature and Lawrence Buell said that it is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment while Cheryll Glotfelty defined ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. To bring all these ideas together, Lawrence Buelle and Cheryll Glotfelty concludesthat ecocrticism is the study of the relationship and interaction between nature and the physical environment as represented in all literary works. The main concerns of the ecocriticism is to examine the impact of human activities on the natural world with the aim of creating awareness about environmental issues and usage. It goes further to explore how human being interact with, represent and understand the environment for equitable co-existence especially as represented in literary works.

The second theory deemed fit for this study is the theory of indigenous knowledge which refers to the unique, traditional knowledge and perspectives of indigenous cultures and traditions. The theory incorporates traditional myths, legends and stories; exploring themes relevant to indigenous cultures and experiences by using indigenous language likes idioms, proverbs and other cultural expressions. The theory of indigenous knowledge opens a window into indigenous cultures, challenges dominant narratives, promote greater understanding and appreciation of indigenous lifestyle. Key proponents of this theory are Vandana Shiva, Gregory Cajet, Linda Tuhiwai, George Dei and Enrique Dussel all known and addressed as 'indigenous scholars' according to the report of the international conference on indigenous knowledge and development in 2017 and 2023 respectively.

2.3 *Dibia* Institution and Traditional Medicines

The *Dibia*institution is a group of traditional medicine practitioners that have indigenous knowledge to manipulate nature and the spiritual world. They are said to have acquired knowledge of medicinal plants and their effects on the human body from their forefathers, as it is passed through unconscious imitation. However, some people learned the trade through personal experience while being treated as patients, others through spiritual calling.

In the Igbo culture, the *Dibia*institution plays so much roles in the existence and activities of the divinities which come according to seasons, situations and circumstances. Some of these divinities include 'Agwu' which is the spirit of purity and love; *Chi* – personal consciousness that directs one on what to do at any given time. 'Ikenga' – the spirit of prosperity; *Arụsị* – the spirit of glory and protection; *Ọfọ* – the staff of equity and justice. All these divinities have their various responsibilities, each of them performs in the traditional medicine institution. So,

whenever any situation arises, the Igbo man knows which of the divinities to consult through the services of a *dibịa*. On the other hand, when a traditional Igbo man is faced with fear and doubts about what future will be, he goes to seek the aids of the gods, patrons, ancestors and divinities. as pointed out by Nwaozuzu (1980). The existence and activities of these divinities are made known through the services of the traditional medicineinstitution which rely on spiritual acts, often based on the belief of psycho-spiritualism. Ajetunmobi (2010:94) mentions witches and wizards who use their crafts more to plead for good health, security and prosperity in every area of life.

The four sub-sections of the *dibịa* institution are interwoven in such a way that a process may not be completed without the services of the others. The four sections are *dibịa afa* – the diviners, *dibịa aja* – the sacrifice priest, *dibịa mgbọrọgwu na mkpaakwụkwọ* - the herbalist and *dibịa ọgwụ* – who is regarded as comprising ocults and wizards which are often diabolical.

2.3.1 *Dibịa Afa* – The Diviners

The process of *Afa,* according to Ubesie (2004:186) is the act of identifying the mystic events or occurrences among the living and the dead. From this, *Dibia Afa* is described according to the function and responsibility he performs. In the Igbo context,*Dibịa Afa* relates and interacts with the supernatural world through incantations, chants and evocations to clarify certain unpleasant situations or circumstances. Ajetunmobi (2010:95) describes it as 'magic' through which access to an external mystic forces beyond the ordinary human spheres are manipulated. This means that *Dibịa Afa* looks into the past happenings and events; examines the present to determine what the future will look like. To support Ubesie (2004), Ezikeojiaku (2000:69) says that *Afa* divination is a method of looking into the future in order to correct life's anomalies and better a person's life. From the above, it is obvious that the reason for consulting *Dibịa Afa*is to find solutions to causes of a client's problem. The *dibia* casts cowry seeds (okwe) on the ground within a circle he marks with kaolin (nzu) and makes some chants and invocations. He repeats that as many times as possible then, he carefully and intelligently reads and interprets whatever appears there in a plain language the client will understand. That is why the concerns of the indigenous knowledge theory is to revitalize the Igbo cultural practices and knowledge, as they appear in literary works.

In addition, Okeogu (2017:144) views the language of the *Dibịa Afa* as bilingual in the sense that, a *Dibịa Afa* has one language with which he communes with the spirit world and another for ordinary human beings (the physical). The acquisition and use of this language is purely indigenous, transmitted from generation to generation according to experiences and practices, a language that may not be familiar to the client, as the theory of the indigenous knowledge points out the use of African languages, idioms, proverbs and cultural expressions.

There are some apparatus and materials *Dibia Afa* uses for his day to day business of divination. These are carved wood known as *Ọfọ* which is claimed to be the staff of equity and justice among the Igbo people. The *Dibia Afa* holds this staff and makes some chants,*ịgọ ọfọ* to prove justice to his client of justice in their transaction. During the process of *ịgọ* the ancestors and deities are invited into their midst so as to get favor and answers to the problem(s). He also uses a metal gong (Ogene*)*to create awareness/attention of the spirit world. Ashes – (Ntụ) used to drive away any unwanted response to his evocation by blowing it into the air.Cowry seeds– (okwe) which are believed by *Dibia Afa* to have a head, a tail and a back; it is from the positions of all these parts that he interprets the situations for which he is being consulted. The number of

cowry seeds – (okwe) is always four representing the four market days of the Igbo which they regard as deities and must be beckoned upon during such services. *Nzu* – Kaolin is used to mark a circle on the ground where he casts the *Okwe* and if any of the *Okwe* seeds falls outside the circle, that's another case altogether. Close to *Nzu* is *edo* – yellow chalk used to make a circle round about his two eyes, meaning that his eyes are changed to that of the spirits and therefore can see what an ordinary person cannot see.

2.3.2 Dibịa Aja – The Sacrifice Priest

Dibịa Aja is the traditional medicine man whose duty is to perform sacrifice and worship to appease the gods, deities and dead ancestors. The services of the *dibịa* institution may intersect – the *Dibịa Aja* finds out what to do (diagnoses); *Dibịa* Aja makes the sacrifice which is one of the remedies to the problems. Obviously, when a traditional Igbo man is in doubt of the future concerning a journey to embark upon, an adventure to go into or is faced with an ugly situation, he goes to *Dibịa Aja* to find out what to do. It could be that the client needs to appease his god (chi), *agwụ, ikenga* or arusị harvests, blessing of children, or how to prevent one calamity or the other that wants to befall the individual or community. The *Dibịa Aja* may refer the client to *Dibịa Aja* who does the actual sacrifice. Okunade (2010:66) explains that the diviner *Dibịa Aja* diagnoses the cause of an affliction and forces that are responsible for its occurrence then refers the client to the appropriate doctor (the sacrifice priest or herbalist) to effect the healing.

While performing his duty as the sacrificing priest, the *Dibịa Aja* goes into his shrine (ihu arụsị) and decorates himself with all the necessary customs that will make him commune adequately with the spirits. The major materials for sacrifice are mainly animals of various kinds and levels. At times, it may be food items of any kind, depending on the nature of the sacrifice and the divinity before which the sacrifice could be made. Just like the *Dibịa Afa*, *Dibịa Aja* makes incantations and evocations, calling on the spirits and ancestors to accept the sacrifice so that things will augur well with the people.

The divinity may reject the sacrifice to show displeasure over the material or method or accept it. After the preliminary act of worship, the *dibịa* kills the animal and pour the blood on the shrine, an act described by Ubesie (2004) as *ịgọ mmụọ* – pleading with spirits.

2.3.3 *Dịbịa Mgbọrọgwu na Mkpaakwụkwọ*

This is the Igbo traditional medical doctor who has acquired the knowledge and wisdom of the ancestors to cure one disease or the other with animal parts and plants. He is able to identify the particular leave(s), roots, stems and animal parts or whole to treat one form of ailment or the other. *Dibịa Mgbọrọgwu* produces the drugs by boiling, squeezing to extract the juice or pounding to produce a relative solid swallowing drug. In some cases, *Dibịa Mgbọrọgwu* may combine organic and inorganic materials such as *nzu* – kaolin, lower animals like snail, lizard, rat another animal parts to produce his drugs. Just like the orthodox medicine men, *Dibịa Mgbọrọgwu* can cure or take care of sicknesses/health conditions, ranging from mere fever, cholera, physical injuries and burns to higher ones like fibroid, epilepsy, infections, etc. To administer these medicines to the patient, it can come in form of external application of rubbing or incision, inhaling or bathing with the liquid drug.

2.3.4 *Dibịa Ọgwụ*

DibịaỌgwụ is a little bit similar to *dibịa mgbọrọgwu na mkpaakwụkwọ*, but with some additional motifs. This is the traditional medicine man who performs mysterious acts such as afflicting target subjects with diabolical ailments. Through his diabolic way and material eliminate life in form of poison or abstract waves. Some other traditional medicines from *DibịaỌgwụ* could be used as protective measures from enemy attacks, both humans and spiritual, preserve one's destiny, secure long life, maintain progress and prosperity. That is why Ofomata (2007:429) identifies *DibịaỌgwụ* as traditional medicine man who does medicine in a negative manner that harm or jeopardise the welfare of the people. They can kill, hinder one's progress or afflict one with obnoxious diseases that may render one useless throughout the person's life time. Ofomata describes them as evil traditional medicine men. In the Igbo traditional life, it is assumed that *DibịaỌgwụ* eats with both left and right hand, simply because he prepares medicines both to kill, destroy, maim and to save at the same time. He makes medicines to afflict diseases and neutralize it another way. The materials for this kind of medicines are usually very strange and out of reach of the prospective clients. Therefore, the medicine man is expected to source the materials while the client pays.

Finally, the duties of these forms of traditional medicine institutions are closely related, except in their philosophy. They are related in the sense that, one may refer a client to the other depending on the nature of the ailment or needs. The materials and manner of administering medications may be or almost the same to achieve the common goal of cure and maintenance of health and posterity. Though they are similar, they equally disagree in their philosophy; some believe that they are master of all trades, they can diagnose, sacrifice, administer drugs and even do the work of the *DibịaỌgwụ*, no need for referral to the other specialist. Again, many traditional medical practitioners are people without western education, who rather acquired the knowledge and use of plant medicine and their effects on human body from their forefathers, and guard against any kind of intrusion. They equally protect the therapeutic knowledge by keeping it secret thereby hindering the spread and posterity of this important indigenous knowledge in the traditional medicine institution. In some cases, they transfer information only to direct offspring and relations with a family circle just to make sure the knowledge remains an aspect of family identity.

Again, it is noticed that the four aspects of the traditional medicine institution is closely related in their practices – to take care of people's health condition, either for diagnosis, healing and prevention. But, at times, one aspect tries to carry out what the other is supposed to. For example, *dibịaafa* who diagnoses a health condition, supposed to refer the client to the *dibia mgbọrọgwụ* na *mkpaakwụkwọ* or *dibịa Ọgwụ* as the case may be. Some of them believe that they can do what the other *dibịa* can do thereby making some mistakes through trials and errors that may not give the adequate and expected result.

3.0 Analysis of Data

3.1 Traditional medicine Institution In Onyekaọnwụ's Plays

The traditional medicine institution as traditional medicine practitioner appears in the form of *dibịa afa, dibịa aja, dibịa mgbọrọgwu na mkpaakwụkwọ* and *dibịa ọgwụ. Dibịa afa* is known as the 'diviner'; *dibịa aja* is the sacrificial healers/ritual practitioner; *dibịa mgbọrọgwu na mkpaakwụkwọ* is the 'herbalist'; while *dibịaọgwụ* is the occult. This study reveals various places

and forms these aspects of the dibịa institution appear in Onyekaọnwụ's plays namely: *Nwata Rie Awo* (1979), *Ọkụ Ghara Ite* (1994), *Ọkụ Uzu Daa Ibube* (1991) and *Eriri Mara Ngwugwu* (1985).

3.1.1 Dibịa Afa - The Diviner

In the plays of Onyekaọnwu, there are many instances the work of *dibịa afa* are shown. In *Nwata*

Rie Awọ, page 82, Onyekaọnwụ shows how Otikpọ advices Awọrọ to go to *dibịa afa* the diviner, to find out the cause of his predicaments.

Otikpo: Awọrọ *enyi m! gaa be dibịa afa*: Awọrọ my friend! Go to a diviner

Dibịa afa ka m na-ekwu, ọ bụghị dibịa ọgwu. I mean a diviner not an occult

Ebe ị ga-achọpụta ihe mere ebe – Where you will find out whathappened here

Ọ bụ a mataodu mbamba – When you get the cause

E wee chọwa, mpụmpụ - You will look for a solution.

(page 82, Acts 5, Scene 1)

Here, Awọrọ is faced with an unpalatable situation that he knows neither the cause nor the solution. So his friend, Otikpo advices him to consult a diviner who will look into the matter and correct those anomalies in his life. Ezikeojiaku (2000:69) basing his argument on the theory of indigenous knowledge claims that *dibịa afa* uses various methods to communicate with the spirit world, ancestors and deities in order to solve a client's problem(s). The theory also has it that *dibịa afa* connects to the spirits and receives guidance which is what Awọrọ needs at this point in time.

Further in the play, Onyekaọnwụ shows the real act of divination by the *dibịa afa* precisely:

Dibịa afa: Afọ, nkwọ, eke, orie, ahịa nanọ - *Afo, nkwọ, eke, orie* four market days

Ubọchi nanọ - four days.

Ọkara turu, o turu ọfa – idiomatic expression

Ọfa turu ọkara ọ mụta oturu – idiomatic expression

Hei, Hei, Hei, anya ahụọ m mmụọ - Hei, Hei, Hei, my eyes has seen spirits

Chineke ekwela ihe ọjọọ - God forbid person's evil.

Sịnụ Chineke ekwelaihe ọjọọ - Ask God to forbid evil. (page 90, Acts 5, Scene 2)

Dibịa afa uses the ancestral language – idioms and proverbs to express/interpret his message to the people, which the theory of indigenous knowledge also identifies.

In his play,*Ọkụ Ghara Ite, Onyekaọnwụ* calls *dibịa afa* a visioner in Act 2, Scene 1, where Ukpabi consults Okagbuo the visioner who does the same work with the diviner.

Okagbuo: *Nwa m, ihe m hụrụ n'abalị gara aga* – My child, what I saw last night.

N'isi gị abụghị ihe a ga-eji ọnụ kọ- Concerning you, cannot be explained.

Ọ dị ndị na-akpa nkata igbu gị - there are some people who are planning to kill you.

Ọ bụghị taa, ọ bụrụ echi – If it is not today, it will be tomorrow

Ejiri m anya m abụọ, ọ bụghị na nrọ - I saw it with my two eyes, not dream

(page 49, Act 2, Scene 1)

Immediately, the same visioner that identifies the problem, proffers a solution which is supposed to be the duty of the other dibịa medicine man.

Okagbuo: *Taa, n'abalị taa, kpọkọrọ nwunye gị* - Today, this night, take your wife

Na ụmụ gị, si obodo a gbapụ - And your children, escape from the town

Gbagaa ala ebe ndị ọ bụla sitere – To anywhere, people from

Obodo a agaghị ahụ gị anya wee ruo – This town will not see you

Ihe dịka afọ iri – For about ten years

(page 50, Act 2, Scene 1)

This goes in line with the opinon of the theory of indigenous knowledge that *dibịa afa* plays the role of maintaining balance and harmony in the Igbo society, reflecting Igbo cosmology and philosophy. Since there is no other solution to his problem, Okagbuo asks Ukpabi to go on self-exile to another town called Kakanda. In the text *Ọkụ Ụzụ Daa Ibube*, Onyekaonwu does not portray traditional medicine institution as much as in the other plays of his. However, in Act 2, Scene 1 page 16 the elders of the land consult *dibịa afa* to find out the cause of the omen that befall the land. The *dibịa afa* tells them that their deity *Amadịọha* and the 'land' are angry with them that brought about the random and untimely death among the people.

Eze Omaliko: …*Onye ọbụla jiri anya ya abụọ* - Everybody used their twoeyes:

Hụrụ mkpampa Amadịọha na ala Isuebu – saw what Amadịọha and the land of Isuebu

Kpasara ụmụ Isuebu abalị ole na ole gara aga – did few days ago.

Were ya mara na iwe ha dị ọkụ - By that learn that they are angry

N'ebe anyị nọ - With us,

(Page 15, Act 1, Scene 1)

Because of this, they (the people of Isuebu) seek the services of *dibịa afa* who reveals the cause of the bad omen. When it seems that the people of Isuebu are delaying in averting the situation, one of the elders of the land reminds them what the *dibịa afa* tells them to do.

Chikezie: *site n'ihe ndị anyị nụrụ ugbu a* – From all that we have just heard

Dibịa afa kwuru – The diviner said

Anyị amatala na ihe na-ebe – We observed that what is happening

Na-eberịrị …… is still happening.

(page 16, Act 1, Scene 1)

This shows that *dibịa afa* actually identifies the mystic occurrences among the living. In line with Ubesie's (2004:186) submissions, this supports the theory of indigenous knowledge which promotes greater understanding and appreciation of African culture.

In addition, in the text *Eriri Mara Ngwugwu*, Onyekaọnwu shows the services of *dibịa afa* in pages 61, 63 and 65 respectively. In this play, *dibịa afa* is referred to as 'a prophet' and according to his performance in the text, a prophet is a religious man who is with the Supreme Being and can speak on behalf of that Supreme Being.

Nọọsụ: *Olee ihe mmere* – See what I did

Ụwa jiri bụrụ m ogwu na uke? – The world is like a thorn to me

Ka m gakene be prọfeetị anyị - Let me go to our prophet's house.

Mata ma ọ ga-enye aka – Find out whether he will help

Ime ka ibu arọ a – To make this heavy burden

M bu n'obi dajụlata – I bear in my mind lighten

(Page 61, Act 3, Scene 2)

Here, this character is confused about her experiences in the life she is living – things are not going on well with her and so she wants some clarifications; this made her to go to the prophet. Ezikeojiaku (2000:69) explains that diviner considers the past, looks into the future in order to correct some anomalies in a person's life and the indigenous knowledge theory has it that the *dibịa afa* connects with the spirit world to receive guidance on how to better the life of the people.

In page 63, Onyekaonwu shows how the prophet carries out the real act of divination which he calls prayer *ekpere*.

Ekpere: *Ana m akpọ gị* - I call upon you

Ka ị rịdata ugbua – That you come now

Bịa nụrụ arịrịọ nwa gị - Hear the plea of your child

Gbadata bịa nụrụ ekpere nwa gị - Descend and listen to prayer

Ka ha ra bụ ihe ndị - All those things

Na-emekpa ya ahụ - troubling her

Amusu, ajo mmụọ, ekwensu elu – Witches, evil spirit, satan of the sky.

Na nke ala – And the one of the land.

(Page 63, Act 3, Scene 2)

When the diviner is in the act of divination, his language (use of words) automatically changes to the one unknown to the client, which he (the diviner) later interprets with a language an ordinary man can understand in line with Okeogu (2017:144) that in medical domain, diviner – (*dibịa afa)*uses specialised language in communicating with the unseen forces (spirit world). And the theory of indigenous knowledge explores the language of the diviner – (*dibịa afa)* as being idioms and a form of traditional expressions that are beyond the assimilation of the client.

Lastly, on page 65s, the diviner expresses what he observes in a way the client will be able to comprehend because the client does not have the spiritual eyes and ears to see and hear the spirits which the diviner discussed with in his divination.

Bụrọda Ọsai: *Ka a na-ekpere gị ekpere* – As the prayer was going on

Ahụrụ m ndị mmụọ ọzọ – I saw other angels

Ka ha bịara gbaa gị okirikiri – As they surrounded you

…setan *bịa*, *were mma agha* – Satan came with his sword

Chụsasịa ha – And scatters them

…Ahụrụ m ebe etinyere gị n'igbe ozu – I saw as they put you in coffin

Na-akwado itinye gị n'ime ala – About to put you in the grave

Ma ọ dị ndị na-adọ - But there are those hindering them

Ka a ghara itinye igbe ahụ n'ime ala – That the coffin will not be lowered to the grave

(Page 65, Act 3, Scene 2)

The diviner here, is able to identify why things are not going on well with the nurse. The *dibịa afa* casts his cowry seeds which Onyekaọnwụ modernises as candle and incense on the ground within a circle and makes some chants and evocations (prayers). After this, he will interpret the act from the position of the cowry seeds. He also holds *ọfọ* – the staff of justice and equity, which Onyekaọnwụ calls the bible and holds in his hand to prove to his client, justice and equity in their transaction.

To look deeply into the practices of *dibịa afa* (the diviner), one may wonder how the diviner is able to study the positions of the ordinary cowry seeds cast on the ground tell him the message he wants for the client; using various methods to communicate with the spirits (dead ancestors) and other deities. He then interprets the messages received from them to the clients. This is purely indigenous and transmitted from generation to generation according to their experiences and practices. Dei (2004:38) says that the indigenous knowledge and wisdom emerge as people's experiences and the interactions with the social and natural world in which they live increase. All of these also support the theoretical concerns of ecocriticism which looks into the

interaction and relationship between this natural/physical word and the people within a particular environment and time.

3.1.2 *Dibịa Aja*: The Sacrifice Priest

This is the traditional medicine man whose duty is to perform sacrifices or worship to appease the gods and deities of the land. *Dibịa aja* specializes in performing sacrifices, rituals and communicates with the ancestors, gods and deities of the community. When a traditional Igbo man is in doubt of the future (what tomorrow will bring), concerning a journey to be embarked upon, an adventure to go into or faced with an ugly situation, he goes to *dibịa afa* to make inquiries. It could be that the client needs to appease his *chi*, *agwụ*, *ikenga* or other deities. It could also be for a bumper harvest, blessing of child bearing or to avert one calamity or the other that want to/befall the land or an individual. It is there and then that the *dibịa aja* comes in to perform his duty of sacrificing priest to the deity responsible for that occurrence/event at that particular time.

However, Onyekaọnwụ does not show much of this aspect of traditional medicine institution in his plays.Thus,they can only be seen , in two out of the four plays under study. In the play entitled e, *Ọkụ Ghara Ite* pages 23 and 50, the activities of *dibịa aja* are exhibited. The chairman (onye isi oche) of Iduma cult asks Ụkpabi to sacrifice his wife to Oduma in order to be rich.

Onye isi oche: *Mazị Ukpabi, ị ga-egbu nwunye gị* - Mr. Ukpabi, you will kill your wife.

Beta ire ya ma ghụtakwa mkpụrụ anya – Cut the tongue and pluck the eye balls

Ya abụọ chitara Oduma - The two and bring to Oduma.

(Page 23, Act 1, Scene 2)

Ordinarily, items for sacrifices are supposed to be animals like goats, chickens, dogs, and so on. At times, food items such as kolanut, bitter kola, alligator pepper, yams, cocoyam, fruits and vegetables according to the theory of indigenous knowledge. But in this case, Ụkpabi is asked to kill his wife for sacrifice to Oduma which the theory of indigenous knowledge calls ritual performance, and the practitioners are called ritualist (a branch of sacrifice priest). During the time of such performance, *dibịa aja* calls upon the deities by their brave names and efforts, narrates the good stories of the past in order to arouse their willingness to hearken and/or accept the sacrifice or plea.

In *Eriri Mara Ngwugwu*, Onyekaọnwụ shows how sacrifice is done by the prophet for the nurse when things are not going on well with her. The prophet who is also the sacrifice priest asks her (the nurse) to bring some items like five white pigeon, six red candles and one bottle of olive oil.

Profeeti: *Mgbe ị ga-abịa, ị ga-eweta* – When you are coming, bring

Pijin ọcha ise – Five white pigeon

Pakeeti kandụlụ meei mmei isii – Six red packets of candles

Na otu ekpem oliivu oyili – And one bottle of olive oil

(Page 67, Acts 3, Scene 2)

When all these are made available, the prophet makes the sacrifice by killing the pigeon and sprinkles the blood on the altar or shrine, light the candle and incense too in such a way that it is obviously seen that a sacrifice of blood is being carried out there. Onyekaọnwụ fails to show that specifically in his narration. Normally, when performing his duty of sacrifice, priest to the gods, *dibịa aja* goes to the shrine and decorates himself with all the necessary costumes that will make him commune adequately with the spirits. The *dibịa aja* uses chants, incantations and evocations to call on the deity/spirit to accept the sacrifice so that things will augur well with the people as in the case of the nurse.

Prọfeetị: *Ma i mechasịa ihe ndịa* – When all these are done

A gwara gị - As you are told

Ndị Igwe ga-atọpụ gị - Heaven will loose you from the chain

Agbụ ha kere gị - They chained you with

(Page 67, Acts 3, Scene 2)

Here, the prophet assures his client (the nurse) of being liberated from the bondage of enemy that makes her not to prosper in life. This means that the divinity has accepted the sacrifice and ready to lose their holds on the client.

3.1.3 *Dibịa Mgbọrọgwu na Mkpaakwụkwọ* - The Herbalist

This is regarded as traditional medicine man whose duty is to take care of health challenges with natural plants growing within the environment. This medical doctor handles any kind of ailment with leaves, roots and stems of medicinal plants and animals of high and low species. All these are drugs for one health challenge or the other; it is left for the herbalist to identify and administer the right drug(s) to the right case of the client. To emphasise the duties of *dibịa mgbọrọgwụ na mkpaakwụkwọ*, Onyekaọnwụ, prominent Igbo playwright shows this in three out of the four plays under study. In the play Nwata Rie Awọ, the playwright in page 84 shows where Awọrọ (character) advices the wife on the act of taking herbal drugs.

Awọrọ: *Ana m eche na ị ga-akwụsịgodu* – I am think you will stop

Ịnụ ọgwụ ahịhịa ndị ahụ ị na-anụ - Taking those herbal drugs you have been takeing.

Ka a gaa be dibịa afa wee – For us to go to the diviner

Chọpụtacha ojije akụ na ọlịla akụ - To find out in and out

Emechaa, nye ndị mmụọ ihe ha – After that, give the spirits their thing.

(Page 84, Act 5 Scene 1)

Here, Odinchefu, the wife of Awọrọ has been taking herbal medicines without getting any positive result which may be as a result of not taking the right step that is going to a diviner *dibịa afa* for diagnosis before the *dibịa mgbọrọgwu* administers his drugs for more positive result.

Moreso, Okunade (2010:67) emphasises that the role of the diviner *dibịa afa* is very important in healing process.

In *Ọkụ Ghara Ite,* Page 76 Onyekaọnwụ indicates the healing process with herbal medicines at the commentary section of the play, by a passerby (onye na-agafe) who sees Akachukwu lying helplessly on the ground.

(Ka ọ nọzi na-eti mkpu a, otu onye na-agafe

Ụzọ wee nụ ya wee gbagara. Mgbe ọ na-ajụ ya

Ihe mere ya ma na-ekelekwa ya, ọ na-ehileke

naanị n'isi, ọ dịghị ihe o kwuru, karịa ka e duru

ya ozigbo gawa be dibịa ahịhịa

As he is bewailing, a passerby heard. As he asked him what happened, he only shaked his head

without speaking any word, only that he should take him to the herbalist immediately).

(Page 76, Act 2, Scene 5)

Onyekaonwu represents the importance of herbal medicine as the only and quickest remedy to a dying or unconscious client. The moment the drug is administered, the dying life comes back to life just as Adodo (2000:15) says. What he refers to life here is all the fresh natural plant growing around our environment and the theory of indigenous knowledge investigates the knowledge and wisdom of the *dibịa mgbọrọgwu* which enables him to identify the particular plants (leaves, roots and stems) that should be applied to a particular health challenge and healing will occur. The theory goes further to say that the knowledge and wisdom is instinctive in man and passed down from generation to generation. The ecocriticism theory says that it is how human actions affect the environment and *dibịa mgbọrọgwu*'s efforts to mitigate or restore balance within a given situation and circumstance.

Still on healing through the use of herbal drugs, Onyekaọnwụ, in his play *Eriri Mara Ngwugwu* pages 10 and 82 illustrates how effective herbal drugs are when administered. In page 10, Onyekaọnwụ shows that herbalist can move from place to place with his herbal drugs to reach out to those that don't have easy access to the dibịa's residential place.

Acha: *Ọ dapụrụ dimkpa, too, na-enwu* – A fair huge man

O nwere akara dị ya na nti aka nri – He has a mark on his right cheek

O nwere ike ịdị ihe dị ka – He may be about

Afọ iri anọ na ise ma ọ bụ karịa – Forty five years or more

Ọ sịrị na aha ya bụ Okwuike Ogbunanjọ - He said that his name is Okwuike Ogbunanjo

Na ya bụ nwadibia ahịhịa – And he is a herbalist

(Page 10, Act 4, Scene 2)

Here, Acha who Onyekaonwu does not tell us whether he is *dibịa afa* that is referring a client Oriaku Okwundụ or just an ordinary referrer is directing his client to go to his *dibịa mgbọrọgwụ dibịa ahịhịa*. According to Onyekaọnwụ term is get some herbal medicines which he assumes to be a remedy to her problem. In page 82, dibịa *mgbọrọgwụ na mkpaakwụkwọ* which Onyekaọnwụ simply calls *dibịa ahịhịa* is represented.

Ochonganooko: *Onye Iduma a mara ama* – A well known Iduma citizen

N'ihe gbasara ahịhịa ọgwu – In herbal medicines

Ziri ka m dute gị - Asked me to bring you

Na o nwere ọgwụ ya ga-enye mụ na gị – For there is a medicine he will give you and I

Ka nwa nwoke anyị na-achọ achọ - That the male chile we are looking for

Wee rute anyị aka na-atufughị oge – Will be ours

The play shows here that *dibịa mgbọrọgwu na mkpaakwụkwọ* takes care of all sorts of ailment including infertility and even the particular gender one wants as *Ọchọnganooke* the character says. According to the Igbo culture, not having male child is an ugly human experience which may cause emotional trauma in the family. Both husband and wife don't relent in search of how and where to go to get some medications to remedy the situation That is why the principle and practice of ecocriticism says that *dibịa mgbọrọgwụ* addresses the physical, spiritual and emotional ailment of the people and community. Supported by the theory of indigenous knowledge that the Igbo cultural values and practices are preserved by *dibịa mgbọrọgwu* who fits into the larger ecological context of the environment, using natural plants and other elements for healing and ensure community wellness.

However, according to World Health Organization (1996), Nigeria is the 11th largest known developing country for medicinal plants and that is why *dibịa mgbọrọgwụ* has extensive knowledge of plant medicines and it is deeply rooted in Igbo culture and traditional practices. The theory of indigenous knowledge says that the ability to cure one ailment or the other with ordinary leave, root, stem and animal parts procured from the environment requires traditional man of highly intelligent level in tradition and traditional practices. Then, ecocriticism examines this environmental interactions and relationship that help to promote the well-being of the people and community.

3.1.4 *Dibịa Ọgwu:*

This is the traditional medicine man who makes the kind of medicines that kills which Ofomata (2007:429) describes as 'dibịa nsi' – negative doctor. They are well known for negative medicines that kills (poison), afflict obnoxious diseases, madness, leprosy, elephantiasis and so on just to harm and jeopardise the life of the people. Nevertheless, *dibịa ọgwụ* does medicines that strengthens and gives/mpowers one to accomplish some special assignment or achievement life as Onyekaọnwụ represents in his *Nwata Rie Awọ* page 30.

Awọrọ: *Nnaa ekelee m gị* - I greet you, father

Ejikwa m ohere nke a na-echetara gị - I use this opportunity to remind you

Na nwadibịa ahụ ga-egbuchi m ahụ - That the medicine man for transdermal drug

Maka mgba a m na-akwadebe – Against the wrestling I'm preparing

ịgba ga-abịa n'ụtụtụ a – Will come this morning

(Page 30, Act 2, Scene 1)

This medicine given to Awọrọ really strengthens Awọrọ into success by defeating his opponent (Akatoosi) in the wrestling competition.

Oha Mmadụ: …*N'ikpaeazu, Awọrọ ebulie Akatosi* – At last, Awọrọ carried Akatosi

Amangwu wee were ọnụ gaa – Amagwu left with joy

Bulie Awọrọ dọwasa n'ubu na – Carried Awọrọ on the shoulder

agụ egwu mmeri – And sing the song of victory

Awọrọ uses this medicine to revitalize himself for the fight, not physical strength, tactics, agility or skill but just with ordinary transdermal drugs made with some obnoxious materials like abuba ugo (eagle feather), *ọji ugo asaa* (white eagle kolanut) eze agụ (lion's teeth), *otu egbenu ọkụkọ* (one cock and out udu mmanya (one drum of palm wine) page 30. The materials for this kind of medicine are usually very strange and out of the reach of prospective clients, therefore it behooves the medicine man to source the materials while the client pays.

Finally, the traditional medicine in Igbo culture comes through the services of traditional medicineinstitution which comes in four forms - *dibịa afa* – the diviner/visioner, *dibịa aja* – the sacrifice priest, *dibịa mgbọrọgwu namkpaakwụkwọ* - the herbalist and dibịa *ọgwụ* - the fettish doctor. Their duties are inter-related that a process may not be completed without referral while some assume to be master of all, handling almost all the duties of others. The medicines of the *dibịa* could come in form of mere sacrifice, syrup, solid, power or body wash. At times, it comes as a substance blown in the air/spread on the ground or by abstract wave according to the case and need of the client. (Ofomata, 2013:438).

Conclusion

The study examined *dibia*institution as a unique style in the written plays of Goddy Onyekaonwu. It showcased the four aspects of the traditional medicine institution namely, *dibia afa, dibia aja, dibia mgbọrọgwụ* and *dibia ọgwụ. Dibia afa* the diviner is the native doctor that diagonises the clients' through divination to explain the causes and solution to the problem, *dibia aja* the sacrifice priest performs all the necessary sacrifices for atonements and request to gods/deities, *dibia mgbọrọgwụ na mkpaakwụkwọ* the herbalist uses herbs and animal parts to take care of the health conditions of patients while *dibia ọgwụ* the medicine man is the one that does evil medicine that may mar or make people's life. Two literary theories were used to examine the study. The eco criticism theory which looks at the interaction between nature and the physical environment and the theory of indigenous knowledge which pays more attention to the unique traditional knowledge and perspectives of indigenous cultures. Finally, four plays of Goddy Onyekaọnwụ were analysed to show the activities of various aspects of *dibia* which according to the study has a sole objective of health care management.

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