

THE CULTURAL FACTOR IN THE SEMIOTICS
OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN DRAMA

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this research report
is my work and that it has not previously been
submitted for any other degree at this or other universities

SIGNED:..... DATE:.....

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APPROVAL

This thesis by Cheela F K Chilala is approved
as fulfilling part of the requirements for the award of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Literature
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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the influence of culture on the semiotics of modern African drama. Semiotics is the science of signs, or the study of how meaning is produced. Semiotics deals with the meaning of everything that can be considered a sign, including words and actions. In other words, signs can be verbal and non-verbal; meaning can be produced both by speech and silence. This study however recognises the fact that some signs are culture-specific and that the semiotic process is largely determined by the cultural orientation of both the writer and the reader. This study will attempt to show that the reader needs to have an idea of the writer's cultural orientation in order to conduct a meaningful semiotic reading of a text. In this study however the focus is on the relationship between culture and the semiotics of the contemporary African dramatic text. It is concerned with how cultural factors influence the semiotic aspects of the writings of African dramatists, as well as how they influence the semiotic reading of the African dramatic text. This study postulates that the dramatic text is different from the performance or theatrical text. While the former is the text of the play before it is performed, the latter is the play when it is performed. This study is concerned only with the semiotic reading of the dramatic text and not the theatrical text. Since African dramatists are influenced by African culture in their writings, it is important to take this factor into account when conducting a semiotic reading of an African dramatic text. It is possible to misunderstand or misinterpret a play text because of failure to understand the relationship between its sign-vehicles and the text's cultural context. On the other hand, an understanding of the cultural context of the text's sign-vehicles, either by experience or research, can help in the process of semiotic interpretation of the text. In addition, it is possible to write a play about a culture one has never experienced by studying it thoroughly and correctly employing its culture-driven sign-vehicles. The findings and conclusions of this study are based on the analysis of four contemporary African dramatic texts: *The Black Mamba Two* by Kabwe Kasoma of Zambia, *Nothing but the Truth* by South African John Kani; *The Dilemma of a Ghost* by Ghana's Ama Ata Aidoo and *The Black Hermit* by Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

DEDICATION

Once again,

To my wife, Phyllis,

For being so supportive and understanding during the times
my research and writing took away from quality family time;

and to my son, Mainza Kaubi Miyanda,

and my daughter, Chilombo Nachizo ('Chizo')

for inspiring me to do it:

It was all for you

And to my high school Literature teacher,

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For giving me the confidence to dream big:

You saw it coming

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