



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COURSE CODE: ENG 281

COURSE TITLE: AFRICAN NOVEL



**COURSE
GUIDE**

**ENG 281
THE AFRICAN NOVEL**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to ENG 281: The African Novel

The African Novel is a 3 credit, one semester undergraduate course. It comprises 25 study units subdivided into modules. The materials have been developed with Nigerian context in view. This course guide gives you an overview of the course. It also provides you with information on the organization and requirements of the course.

COURSE AIM

- a) To give an overview of the origin and development of the African novel
- b) To give the evolution of the African novel from 'oracy' to contemporary novel
- c) To explore with the learner the socio-cultural cum political experiences that gave rise to different themes of the African novel
- d) To see the indexical ties of the different blocs of African novels- Francophone, Anglophone, Lusophonic, west/south and north African novels
- e) To study the thematic concerns of African novels as distinct from western values and literature
- f) To understand and distinguish the thematic concerns of the modern writers as distinct in themes but related in style, language and structure

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To achieve the aims above, we have some overall objectives. Each unit also has objectives. These will guide you in your study. They are usually stated at the beginning of the each unit and when you are through with studying the units go back and read the objectives. This would help you assimilate the task you have set out to achieve. On completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Understand the polemics of the African Novel
- Relate the novels with their ideological/socio-political types
- Trace the evolution of the African novel from the oracy to the present pattern
- Make a critique of any African novel giving it a succinct interpretation
- Appreciate the major impulses on the African novel
- Distinguish African fiction according to their themes
- Recognize African fiction as pure African literary genre

WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

To complete the course, you are required to read the study units and other related materials. You will also need to undertake practical exercises for which you need a pen, a notebook, and other materials that will be listed in this guide. The exercises are to aid you in understanding the concepts being presented. At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit written assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course, you will write a final examination.

COURSE MATERIALS

The major materials you will need for this course are:

1. Course guide
2. Study units
3. Relevant textbooks including the ones listed under each unit
4. Assignment file
5. Presentation schedule

STUDY UNITS

There are 25 study units in this course as follows:

Module 1 The Rise of the African Novel

- Unit 1 The African Novel: Polemics of a Definition
- Unit 2 Beginning of the Novel in Africa 1: Orality
- Unit 3 Beginning of the Novel in Africa 2: Pamphleteering
- Unit 4 The Rise of Formal Novels
- Unit 5 The African Milieu and the African Novel

Module 2 Major Themes & Threads in African Novel

- Unit 1 Politics of Land
- Unit 2 Politics of Apartheid
- Unit 3 Independent Africa
- Unit 4 Politics of Corruption
- Unit 5 Politics of Militarism

Module 3 Varieties of the African Novels

- Unit 1 Anti-Colonial African Novel
- Unit 2 African Novel and Marxism
- Unit 3 Novel of Social Realities
- Unit 4 Gender & Class in African Novel
- Unit 5 War Fiction

Module 4 Major Blocs of African Novels

| | |
|--------|--------------------------------|
| Unit 1 | The Francophone Africa Fiction |
| Unit 2 | North African Novels |
| Unit 3 | The Lusophonic African Fiction |
| Unit 4 | Central African Blocs |
| Unit 5 | Ethnic Novels in West Africa |

Module 5 Contemporary African Novels/Themes

| | |
|--------|---------------------------------------|
| Unit 1 | The New Writers in Africa |
| Unit 2 | The Diaspora Novelists |
| Unit 3 | Alternative History Novels: Biography |
| Unit 4 | The Short Fiction |
| Unit 5 | Other New Novels |

TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES

Certain books are recommended in the course. You may wish to purchase them for further reading.

ASSIGNMENT FILE

An assignment file and a marking scheme will be made available to you. In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the assignment file itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

Tutor-Marked Assignment

You will need to submit a specified number of the Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs). Every unit in this course has a tutor marked assignment. You will be assessed on four of them but the best four (that is, the highest four of the fifteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the best four (4) assignments will be 30% of your total work. Assignment questions for the unit in this course are counted in the Assignment File. When you have completed each assignment, send it, together with the TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline for submission. If, for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extension will not be granted after due date unless under exceptional circumstances.

FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination of ENG 208 will be of three hours' duration. All areas of the course will be examined. Find time to read the unit all over before your examination. The final examination will attract 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have previously come across. All areas of the course will be assessed. You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will also find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

COURSE MARKING SCHEME

The following table lays out how the actual course mark allocation is broken down.

| Assessment | Marks |
|---|--------------------|
| Assignments (Best three Assignments out of Four marked) | = t 30% |
| Final Examination | = 70% _s |
| Total | = 100% |

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

The dates for submission of all assignments will be communicated to you. You will also be told the date for completing the study units and dates for examinations.

Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

| Unit | Title of Work | Week's Activities | Assessment (end of unit) |
|--|--|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Course Guide | | | |
| Module 1 The Rise of the African Novel | | | |
| 1 | The African Novel: Polemics of a Definition | Week 1 | Assignment 1 |
| 2 | Beginning of the Novel in Africa 1: Orality | Week 1 | Assignment 2 |
| 3 | Beginning of the Novel in Africa 2: Pamphleteering | Week 2 | Assignment 3 |
| 4 | The Rise of Formal Novels | Week 2 | Assignment 4 |
| 5 | The African Milieu and the African Novel | Week 2 | Assignment 5 |

| Module 2 Major Themes & Threads in African Novel | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 | Politics of Land | Week 3 | Assignment 1 |
| 2 | Politics of Apartheid | Week 3 | Assignment 2 |
| 3 | Independent Africa | Week 3 | Assignment 3 |
| 4 | Politics of Corruption | Week 4 | Assignment 4 |
| 5 | Politics of Militarism | Week 4 | Assignment 5 |
| Module 3 Varieties of the African Novels | | | |
| 1 | Anti-Colonial African Novels | Week 5 | Assignment 1 |
| 2 | African Novel and Marxism | Week 5 | Assignment 2 |
| 3 | Novel of Social Realities | Week 6 | Assignment 3 |
| 4 | Gender & Class in African Novel | Week 7 | Assignment 4 |
| 5 | War Fiction | Week 7 | Assignment 5 |
| Module 4 Major Blocs of African Novels | | | |
| 1 | The Francophone Africa Fiction | Week 8 | Assignment 1 |
| 2 | North African Novels | Week 8 | Assignment 2 |
| 3 | The Lusophonic African Fiction | Week 9 | Assignment 3 |
| 4 | Central African Blocs | Week 9 | Assignment 4 |
| 5 | Ethnic Novels in West Africa | Week 10 | Assignment 5 |
| Module 5 Contemporary African Novels & Themes | | | |
| 1 | The New Writers in Africa | Week 11 | Assignment 1 |
| 2 | The Diaspora Novelists | Week 12 | Assignment 2 |
| 3 | Alternative History Novels: Memoirs | Week 13 | Assignment 3 |
| 4 | The Short Fiction | Week 14 | Assignment 4 |
| 5 | Other New Fictions | Week 15 | Assignment 5 |
| | REVISION | One Week | |
| | EXAMINATION | One Week | |
| | TOTAL | 17 Weeks | |

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit

guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from your course guides. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it. Follow the following advice carefully:

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment
2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course Overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on and write own dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to Unit 1 and read the Introduction and the Objectives for the Unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each unit to inform that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.

10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the Course Objectives (listed in the Course Guide).
11. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up-to-date course information will be continuously available there.

FACILITATORS/TUTORS AND TUTORIALS

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- You have difficulty with the self-tests exercises,
- You have a question or problem with assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face-to-face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

SUMMARY

This course guide gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study. ENG 208 introduces you to the basics of the African novel, how the African novel developed, the major themes and threads in African novels, the thematic concern of the different blocs of African novels the emergence of contemporary African novels.



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MODULE 1 THE RISE OF THE AFRICAN NOVEL

| | |
|--------|--|
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UNIT 1 THE AFRICAN NOVEL: POLEMICS OF A DEFINITION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall find out the major problems that have prevailed in the development of the African novel. The African novel is the most important example of the genre of fiction. Fiction is distinct from drama and poetry. Apart from the problem of identification of the African novel, there have also been the problems of definition. We shall explore all these problems and find out how African fiction has come to be recognized as a major genre in the vast field of literature in English. This unit examines African fiction in terms of meaning, content and aesthetic coverage by critically studying the various ideological dispositions that trailed the identity of African novel as distinct from the other genres. Literature in Africa had to undergo several polemics of definition considering the need to make it separate from the vast world literature in several continents. African literature has an oral beginning in its form and aesthetic contours. Many writers, especially the early practitioners have had to define it to suit their ideologies. There shall be tutor-marked assignments to guide the students' understanding of the unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, the students should be able to:

- appreciate the fact that African fiction is one of the genres of African literature in English
- understand that African fiction is not ethnic literature since it is written in English language
- realize that African fiction started as an oral form
- identify African fiction as one of the genres of African literature
- see pamphleteering as a part of the beginning for African fiction
- discuss African fiction as a product of the African people and environment
- argue that African fiction are those written by Africans about Africa
- accept that English language is used in African fiction to reach wider audience.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

African literature refers to the literature of the African peoples. The African concept includes oral literature, while European views of literature often stressed a separation of art and content, African awareness is all inclusive. Literature can also imply an artistic use of words for the sake of art alone. Without denying the important role of aesthetics in Africa, we should keep in mind that, traditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. Rather than write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to the society. Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build.

One major problem of African fiction is categorization. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the African novel gained momentum at a time of social upheaval in Africa. There were intense nationalist activities challenging the whole idea and practice of colonialism in Africa. Yet the African intelligentsia, to borrow Emmanuel Ngara's expression, that is, the new bourgeoisie or elite was a product of missionary education. The colonial powers had acquiesced to granting political, but not economic and cultural independence to its colonies. That led the new African social elite to engage in artistic form inherited from the West but inspired by local tradition. For example, in 1952 Amos Tutuola wrote *The Palm-wine Drinkard* based on Yoruba mythology, using African folktale

tradition as form. He was followed in 1953 by Camara Laye with *L'Enfant noir* (translated into English as *The African Child* and later in the American edition as *The Dark Child*), an episodic novel, which relied heavily on African oral tradition to vaunt the merits of the African past, tradition and civilization to a deaf world. In 1958 and from a historical perspective, Chinua Achebe published the novel *Things Fall Apart*, which set out to correct the ugly perception of Africans. Ngugi wa Thiong'o followed in 1964 with *Weep Not Child*. It was the year of Kenyan independence and the novelist was making an urgent call to Africans to embrace education and enterprise as a way of ending Western imperialism and Indian entrepreneurship in East Africa.

If the genre of the novel came to dominate the literary scene, it was due in part to its ability to borrow from tradition, but more importantly, it was a means that the new intelligentsia, educated in a colonial context, could understand and use to herald African values outside and inside Africa. The impact of other genres was progressively overshadowed by that of novelists such as wa Thiong'o, Ousmane, Oyono, Armah, Beti, Laye, Achebe, to mention only a few. Often, novelists made oral tradition and legends their springboard. They began telling stories about self, the immediate community or village, the nation-state or the newly formed proletariat, but by and large they remained inaccessible and foreign to the great majority of the African people.

In contrast, African novel seems to belong to the people rather than to the elite because its formal complexity and intimidating status, borrowed from Western hierarchies, have never been naturalized in Africa. With the voice of ordinary people, the novel claims to be the legitimate heir of the traditional legends through which griots chronicled community history. The African novel writer tells stories to entertain and educate people in a way they understand. Like the storyteller, the writer holds the audience spellbound by the very beauty of the narrative, giving pleasure and also teaching morals and beliefs of the community, race or nation. African Novel has much in common with African oral tradition, which has been described as 'the African classical tradition'.

African classical tradition then finds its renewal in the novel because in a familiar way this genre puts in the context of today a number of subjects relevant to traditional and modern African values. It shows how economic, political, religious and social situations relate to pre-colonial Africa, colonialism, neo-colonial independence, apartheid, indigenous and imported religions, etc. Thus, the themes dealt with by African novelists include art, religion, urban-life, tradition and culture, apartheid, ironies of life, and pre-colonial, colonial, and neo-colonial reality, etc. Just as the common storyteller of old, the contemporary African fiction writer aims at helping his/her society to change while retaining the best

features of authentic African cultures. A large number of literary authors of great talent have not lost sight of the novel's potential to enrich human lives and African societies.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the major problems that arose in the categorization of African fiction.

3.2 African Fiction by Non Africans

There has also been the problem of classification. Some literary writers who wrote about Africa were not really Africans. Joyce Cary wrote *Mister Johnson*, a story about Africans and Africa. It was this novel which prompted the writing of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. According to Achebe, *Mister Johnson* contained distorted pictures of the African society which he tried to correct in *Things Fall Apart*. More so, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is also about Africa and the African People. The questions now are: should we call these fictions African fiction because they presented Africans? What about the authorship? Is African fiction to be written by Africans only? It is true that the present form of written fiction in Africa is an offshoot of Western literary culture infused in the western education of Africans but is it possible to have African fiction in African form that is without any hinge on the western form of writing? These are impossibilities since the writers of African fictions make use of western style and values in the craft. African literature, in its basic form, is oral. So, written literature echoes western values.

To classify Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad as African writers and to call their fictions African fictions becomes a major problem in the polemics of definition of African fiction. Fiction is an imaginative recreation of real life experiences. This means that the subject matters in every fiction must reflect the experiences of the society from which it emanated. One very important fact here, being that every fictional work must show realism not mere fabrication of unrealities purposely designed to distort the history of a people. Chinua Achebe made a proposition that fictional works about Africa written by non Africans tend to rewrite the history and culture of African people in very bad manner and intentions.

Herodotus of Halycahusus, one of the early historians gave a distorted history of Africa. He described Africa as "a continent of barbarians, and animal-like humans with four legs without any form of culture or religion" and this historical distortion has often influenced the western judgment of Africa and Africans. Hence, we do not expect a better fiction from non-Africans about Africa since they already have a

distorted history about Africa. In defining African fiction, we get stuck about the placement of these literatures written by non-Africans about Africa.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the proper categorization of Fiction by non Africans about Africa.

3.3 African Fiction by African Slaves

Another controversial aspect of identification of African fiction is the inclusion of literary works by African slaves in America, India and Europe. The African works best known in the West from the period of colonization and the slave trade are primarily slave narratives, such as [Olaudah Equiano](#)'s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789). There is also Alex Harley's *Roots* which also gave accurate account of the slave trade experiences of the Africans in fictional mode. In the colonial period, Africans exposed to Western languages began to write in those tongues. In 1911, [Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford](#) (also known as Ekra-Agiman) of the [Gold Coast](#) (now [Ghana](#)) published what is probably the first African novel written in English, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation*. Although the work moves between fiction and political advocacy, its publication and positive reviews in the Western press mark a watershed moment in African literature. Interestingly, the emergence of African American literature now subsumes the literatures of slave Africans.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the contribution of slave narratives to the development of African fiction.

3.4 African Fiction by Africans in the Diaspora

Many African writers write abroad. For sure, the society and environment they write from influence them a lot. Many of these writers left the continent out of protest while some left for economic reasons. Most of them write novels about the experiences of the western world. There is nothing African in their works. The African style, culture, environment and society are not reflected in the stories. Instead, the stories are bent towards celebrating western values and civilization. The question now is: do we classify these works as African literature merely because they are written by Africans even though the subject matter in their stories does not reflect Africa? Many African writers have become

westernized to the extent of preferring to write about New York, White House, Hurricane Katrina etc instead of the immediate African socio-political experiences. To get western readership, these African writers in the Diaspora tend to consider the immediate interest of the western populace.

Although some African writers have also made impact even though they wrote from outside Africa, many of them were already known in Africa before they left the African shores. We have such names as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ben Okri, Niyi Osundare and recently Chimamanda Adichie, Helen Oyeyemi and Diana Evans.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Appreciate African Fiction by African writers in other continents as truly African literature.

3.5 African Fiction in African Languages

Many critics of African literature consider literatures written in African languages as ethnic literatures since they serve the interest of the ethnic group that uses the language of the literature. Most novels written in African languages have not been accessible to non-users of such languages unless the work is translated. Since Africans have thousands of languages, it becomes more appropriate using Western languages such as English, French and Portuguese as the language of fiction in order to reach out to millions of people with diverse language forms. Some critics of African literature believe that English Language is an imperial language representing colonialism in all its facets. They advocated that African writers should use their native languages in writing literatures. When it looked as if there was no compromise in this direction, most of the critics began to suggest the evolvement of an African lingua franca. Some suggested Kiswahili while others suggested some other language forms like Hausa, Yoruba and Acoli languages. Most of these critics undermined western audience for African literatures. They believed that African novels are for the consumption of African people alone. Many writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Okot P'Bitek, Wole Soyinka amongst others practised writing in their native dialects but these never yielded wider acclaim. The advocates of this theory believe that African fiction will truly be identified as African if written in African languages expressing African ideas and philosophies.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

How does the writing of African Fiction in English help in the development of the genre?

4.0 CONCLUSION

African literature as an institution of several associated units has defied definition but some see it as "the sum total of all national and ethnic literatures of Africa." Abiola Irele finds it futile to de-emphasize the social function of literature, because without its social functions, African literature does not merit its existence. The problem of defining Africa's limits is relegated to the background, and the need to establish the affinity of Africans and Diasporans becomes paramount through reference to social experience and history.

In my view, little has changed today with regard to bringing together the distant cousins of Africa and the African Diaspora, and Irele's suggestion that the focus of literary studies should be on the social functions of African literature holds true. Furthermore, for literature to reflect its society, it must be presented in the form that comes naturally to the people's appreciation of art. Moreover, in time to come, due to extreme pressures of life in modern cities, the society will resort to less time-consuming ways of reading and communicating what can be seen as happening. In each transition, as a historical development of social language itself: finding new means, and new forms and then new definitions of changing practical consciousness become inevitable. This prediction by Raymond Williams is relevant to the whole world, including that of the African literary genre.

5.0 SUMMARY

The debate over the scope of what is called African fiction has continued to generate significant interest ever since the emergence of African literary writing in European languages. Discussions of this debate have in the past often highlighted the inherently normative character of the idea of an African literature in African languages, by African people and for African people. By tracing the history of the debate, this unit seeks to distinguish between the actual role played by African languages in the emergence of a literature identified as African by its practitioners, and the ideological function of the debate for Africans who write in European languages. From this perspective, appeals for a literature in indigenous languages appear to serve the purpose of ethnic signification on behalf of a tradition of writing that continues to rely on European languages at the levels of both creative practice and theoretical formulation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions

1. Explain in details why African literature defies definition
2. Appreciate African fiction as a true semblance of African oral art
3. What factors led to the emergence of ethnic or national literatures?
4. Assess the categories of African fiction that have not been certified as truly African fiction.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 BEGINNING OF THE NOVEL IN AFRICA 1: ORALITY

CONTENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we examine whether or not there is an authentic African orature, the types and the various influences it has had on the emerging African novel. African oral tradition carries the African storytelling tradition with it. It embodies African beliefs and general attitudes to life. The myth and legends carry the historical realities in the life of the primordial Africans. They transmit and store the values of their experiences by telling the tales to the younger generations as guide. We shall also examine other oral forms like the folktales, fables, proverbs, clichés and idioms in order to establish the true development of African novels after the emergence of writing through colonial education.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit the students should be able to:

- recognize orature as the beginning of African literature
- establish a link between the orature and written African literature
- accept that oral narratives embody the qualities of the written African novel
- appreciate the inclusion of African oral narrative forms in the African novel
- explain that early African novels derived from the form of oral narratives
- see the pre-colonial African society as a creative one.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Africans have a rich oral tradition. Oral renditions existed and still exist as one of the ways by which African value systems are transmitted into the upcoming members of a community. African belief systems, attitudes, modes of worship, traditional mores, communal expectations and cultural affinity are transmitted through oral traditional methods like storytelling and other forms of ritual recourse. There are incidences of orature in most written fictions in Africa and the early novels imbibed the oral traditional art in creating the authentic African fiction from the African sociological framework. Oral literature (or orature) may be in prose or verse. The prose is often mythological or historical and can include tales of the trickster character. Storytellers in Africa sometimes use call-and-response techniques to tell their stories. Poetry, often sung, includes: narrative epic, occupational verse, ritual verse, praise poems for rulers and other prominent people. Praise singers, bards sometimes known as "griots", tell their stories with music. Also recited, often sung, are: love songs, work songs, children's songs, along with epigrams, proverbs and riddles. Examples of pre-colonial African literature include the Epic of Sundiata composed in medieval Mali, The older Epic of Dinga from the old Ghana Empire, and the Kebrä Negast or book of kings from Ethiopia.

One popular form of traditional African folktale is the "trickster" story, where a small animal uses its wits to survive encounters with larger creatures. Examples of animal tricksters include Anansi, a spider in the folklore of the Ashanti people of Ghana; Ijàpá or Mbe, a tortoise in Yoruba or Igbo folklore of Nigeria; and Sungura, a hare found in Central and East African folklore. These stories are mostly fictions even though they tend to embody the belief systems and attitudes of the people. This is called 'education through entertainment'. They are fictional but they carry the people's culture. In talking about African literature, there is a tendency to forget that the whole of African art is linked with oral literature which has been the mainstay of both traditional and modern Africa. Often times, African written literature is a transcription, adaptation, translation or exploitation of oral material, irrespective of the language chosen by the author to write her/his piece.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the various forms of oral narratives and how they carry the people's belief system, attitudes and culture.

3.2 African Oral Narrative Forms

The oral traditional art of Africans come in various forms. Just like the European literary forms, it has tripartite genres: ‘what is sung’ (poetry), ‘what is spoken’ (prose) and ‘what is acted’ (drama). Under ‘what is sung’ we have oral poetic forms like love songs, marriage songs, work songs, war songs, lullabies and incantations, while under ‘what is spoken’ we have the storytelling forms like myths, legends, folktales, fables, anecdotes, proverbs, idioms amongst others. Under ‘what is acted’ we have the masquerade forms, rituals, dance, invocation etc. Sometimes, these three genres tend to overlap in the rendition patterns of oral narratives. In a typical folktale session, the narrator keeps the audience’s attention with songs, responses, chants and demonstrations typical to acting out the actions in the stories. The stories are usually told to be seen.

Each aspect of these genres tends to manifest in the daily experiences of the growing ones in the community. When a child cries, lullabies are often rendered. When labourers are working, they sing work songs; when there is war, they sing war songs. In the worship of gods, the priests act out encounters with the gods. A typical example is in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, where Ezeulu is shown knocking staff with Ulu, the god of Umuaro people. At night, especially during moonlight plays, children gather round a village sage who tells them folktales and heroic tales like myths and legends. The elderly one tries to arrest the attention of his audience through all forms of dramatization and songs. The end result is entertainment and education through orature.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the various forms of African orature studied in this course and how they overlap in practice.

3.3 African Myths/Legends

African oral literature, like other forms of popular culture, is not merely a form of entertainment but a medium for commenting on contemporary social and political events. It can also be a significant agent of change capable of storing the people’s historical experiences. This is where myths and legend emerge. Myths are stories of origin or creation. They are stories about the beginning of a people, a race or a community. Many communities attribute their greatness to their beginning.

Legends are records of a community’s heroes. They are stories about those who founded a community and how brave they were. Ruth Finnegan (1980) expresses that myths and legend capture the most

valued history of a people by tracing how they began and how their beginning affected their situation. It also traces the beginning of traditions, cultural rites, worship and the discovery of food, craft, and other lore. Myths have often occurred in African novels such as the origin of Ulu in *Arrow of God*, the exploits of the great Umuofia men in *Things Fall Apart*.

We also have different forms of myths and legends recounted in most African novels set in the rural backgrounds. Myths and legends are fictional but have traces of reality as each of them has a physical referent in the real world. This referent guides the members of the community in certain observances. Myths and legends help to store or preserve a people's cultural beliefs about nature and their natural habitats. This is one of the sources of truly African novels as one of the earliest novels to have come out of Africa called *Palmwine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola which is truly an embodiment of African orature in the written form.

Epic narratives also occurred as one of the earliest forms of legendary fictions in Africa. We have the legendary *Sundiata: Epic of Great Mali*, which records the exploits of the great men in medieval Mali. This oral art is now written as a literary text. Others are the older Epic of Dinga from the old Ghana Empire, and the Kebra Negast or book of kings from Ethiopia.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Assess myths and legends as one of the recurring oral narrative form in African novels.

3.4 Folktales as Fiction

Folktales are animal stories. They are stories about select animals personified to carry certain human attributes in order to play out a needed role for moral lessons. In folktales, there are heroes and villains. The heroes are human or animals that play the major roles. A common type of African folktale is also called the "trickster" story, where a small animal uses its wits to survive encounters with larger creatures. Some animal tricksters include Ananse, a spider in the folklore of the Ashanti people of Ghana; Ijàpá or Mbe, a tortoise in Yoruba or Igbo folklore of Nigeria; and Sungura, a hare found in Central and East African folklore. One interesting thing about the folktale is the manipulation of animals as humans playing out their political, sociological and cultural roles in a fictional community.

We have seen the folktale forms occurring in African novels. In folktales the essence of poetic justice is expressed and this is a recurring

feature in some African novels. D.O. Fagunwa's *My Life in a Forest of a Thousand Demons* is a pure written folktale, similar to the form in Amos Tutuola's *Palmwine Drinkard*. The form of the folktale has a great influence on the present form of the African novels. The folktale form is arranged in a manner that there is a beginning in a distant land with different wrongs being committed by a given animal at the end of which poetic justice occurs. This thematic form is often the structure of most African novels. The effects of oral narratives on the written literatures in Africa are mostly structural and thematic.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

How does the folktale tradition influence the writing of African novels?

3.5 Metamorphosis of Orature into Literature

In the colonial period, Africans exposed to Western languages began to write in those tongues. In 1911, Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford (also known as Ekra-Agiman) of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) published what is probably the first African novel written in English titled *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation*. Although the work moves between fiction and political advocacy, its publication and positive reviews in the Western press mark a watershed moment in African literature. During this period, African plays began to emerge. Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo of South Africa published the first English-language African play, *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongquase the Liberator* in 1935. In 1962, Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Kenya wrote the first East African drama, *The Black Hermit*, a cautionary tale about "tribalism" (racism between African tribes). African writers in this period wrote both in Western languages (notably English, French, and Portuguese) and in traditional African languages.

One interesting thing about these early works is absorption of the oral arts in them. D.O. Fagunwa pioneered the Yoruba language novel. In 1938, Fagunwa wrote his *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale*, the first novel written in the Yoruba language and one of the first to be written in any African language; Wole Soyinka translated the book into English in 1968 as *The Forest of A Thousand Demons*. Fagunwa's later works include *Igbo Olodumare (The Forest of God, 1949)*, *Ireke Onibudo (1949)*, *Irinkerindo ninu Igbo Elegbeje (Expedition to the Mount of Thought, 1954)*, and *Adiitu Olodumare (1961)*. Again, Fagunwa's novels draw heavily on folktale traditions and idioms, including many supernatural elements. His heroes are usually Yoruba hunters, who interact with kings, sages, and even gods in their quests. Thematically, his novels also explore the divide between the Christian beliefs of Africa's colonizers and the continent's traditional religions. Fagunwa

remains the most widely-read Yorùbá-language author, and a major influence on such contemporary writers as Amos Tutuola. In Igbo area, Pita Nwana wrote *Omenuko* which is regarded as the first Igbo epic. The same occurred in the Hausa literature. Western education enabled the African people the opportunity to put down their oral narratives into written words.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Explain how orature metamorphosed into literature in early African literature.

3.6 Orature in/as Early African Fiction

Orature occurs in various ways in African fiction. We have various manifestations of the oral art in most African novels. Unlike the western novels, African novels contain the oral heritage of the African people. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we have various oral heritage of the Igbos in the novel. There is the form of drama which manifested in the form of wrestling and the Egwugwu Masquerade group. There are sessions where folktales are narrated and various songs are rendered according to the required circumstance. These are oral narratives manifesting in the written literature. The same occurred in other novels especially in novels set in rural background in Africa. Other novels like Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep not Child* and *The River Between* amongst other African novels contain elements of African orature in them.

Considering the root of the African novelists first as Africans brought up in the African milieu and secondly as the fortunate recipients of western education, they write as Africans in European languages. The resultant effect is that they represent the African personality and culture and try to reveal that in their novels. Some of them who could write in their native languages using English alphabetic forms attempted original works in their first languages. Although, English served as the only language that could make their message reach wider audience, the writers try as much as possible to incorporate the oral literary form in their works. It is not surprising though that the early novels in Africa are mostly works generated from the oral tradition of the people. The early novels, especially Fagunwa, Tutuola, Amadi, Achebe, Soyinka amongst others relived orature in African fiction.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Explain how African orature manifested in and as early African novels.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear that Africa has a rich oral tradition. Besides, there are patterned literary forms akin to the western types in Africa. The difference is that African literature then was oral.

Western education marked the rise of African literature. There was a smooth transition from orature to literature. Africans did not hear of literature for the first time from the Europeans. The three genres of literature also manifests in African orature in various forms. The epic and legends of Africa have often occurred in the written literature. The other forms like songs, masquerades, rituals, incantations, folktale narration, the application of proverbs and anecdotes amongst other African oral heritage have become a regular form in African novels. All these reflect the influence of the oral tradition in the African novels.

In the beginning, after the encounter with western education, the early African novelists began with the writing of African orature as literature. The novels of Fagunwa, Tutuola, and Achebe amongst others reveal a leaning towards the oral art as an expression of a true African novel. The application of these forms has been tagged 'local colour tradition' by critics of African literature. They are local colour because they capture the original African orature in its entirety in the written form. We notice today that African literature is identified mainly by the oral forms and African inherent lore. There are elements of orature in most genres of African literature and the African novel embodies all the genres as the storyteller uses every means to reach out to his immediate audience.

5.0 SUMMARY

Orature is African heritage in storytelling, songs and masquerades. It is the most significant ways of transmitting cultural values and belief systems of the people. Orature like literature has genres. These genres manifest in various forms. African writers imbibe the oral tradition in the writing of literature. Early novels began as a revisit on the African tradition. This is evident in the works of the early novelists like Fagunwa, Tutuola, Achebe, Amadi amongst others. They reflect the African oral tradition in their novels. Some of them even wrote the oral arts as novels. It is thoroughly evident that African novels began from the oral literary tradition of the Africans. We have the application of African myths and legends, folktale forms, fable forms, proverbs, idioms, dance, songs, incantations and masquerade forms in African novels. This is because a writer is a product of his environment and reflects that in his works. Western education only prepared the African writer for the task of transmitting his cultural values to a wider audience beyond his immediate environment. Quite often, not surprising though,

the African novel still reflects the African orature in various forms as these brings in what has been termed the Africanness of the African novel.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions

- 1) Categorize African orature into genres.
- 2) How does African orature manifest in African novels?
- 3) Explain why orature has been termed 'local colour tradition'.
- 4) Must African fiction be written in African languages to reflect Africanness?

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UNIT 3 BEGINNING OF THE NOVEL IN AFRICA 2: PAMPHLETEERING

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Market Literature
 - 3.3 Onitsha Market Literature
 - 3.4 Kano Market Literature
 - 3.5 Transition from Pamphlets into Novels
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine critically the way the early educated Africans were able to write creatively. Most of them had no university education and it is only those who had the opportunity of attending the then University College Ibadan that really turned their creative sketches into full blown novels. At that time, pamphlets of all types in all literary genres flourished and were sold to interested members of the public for entertainment. The first set of Africans that came in contact with European education were excited about the discovery and attempted several experiment through writing. These group of Africans were actually not well educated as most of them had little education, especially the type that allows them write and work as civil servants. They had middle level of education equivalent to the present secondary education.

We shall examine the historical development of pamphlets and how they contributed immensely to the development of African novels. Most of them were civil servants and traders. They were concerned with expressing themselves in pamphlets as means to counseling, guiding or entertaining the people. Although, some intellectuals like Cyprian Ekwensi among others wrote pamphlets. They were not really published but printed without ISBN numbers.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit the students should be able to:

- understand pamphlets as one of the beginnings of African fiction
- trace the beginning of pamphlets to western education
- appreciate pamphlets as motivation for full literature
- see market literature as end product of pamphleteering
- explain how pamphlets transited into novels
- recognize Onitsha Market Literature and Kano Market Literatures as the most popular in Africa
- relate the pamphlet themes to early novels' themes.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

A pamphlet is an unbound booklet (that is, without a hard cover or binding). It may consist of a single sheet of paper that is printed on both sides and folded in half, in thirds, or in fourths (called a leaflet), or it may consist of a few pages that are folded in half and stapled at the crease to make a simple book. In order to count as a pamphlet, UNESCO requires a publication (other than a periodical) to have 'at least 5 but not more than 48 pages exclusive of the cover pages'; a longer item is a book. Pamphlets can contain anything from information on kitchen appliances to medical information and religious treatises. Pamphlets are very important in marketing as they are cheap to produce and can be distributed easily to customers.

Pamphlets have also long been an important tool of political protest and political campaigning for similar reasons. The storage of individual pamphlets requires special consideration because they can be easily crushed or torn when shelved alongside hardcover books. For this reason, they should either be kept in file folders in a file cabinet, or kept in boxes that have approximately the dimensions of a hardcover book and placed vertically on a shelf.

The word *pamphlet* means a small work issued by itself without covers. Pamphlet coined from 'Pamphilus' was derived from Greek, meaning "loved by all". It has the modern connotation of a tract concerning a contemporary issue. By the end of the seventeenth century the most effective means of persuasion and communication in the world was the pamphlet, which created influential moral and political communities of readers, and thus formed a 'public sphere' of popular, political opinion.

In Africa, pamphlets were used for political campaigns and as guides. In Nigeria, the use of pamphlets was popularized through the consistent use of it by market traders. The most popular are the Onitsha and Kano Market Literature which flourished so much before the emergence of real literatures. They were pamphlets dealing with various issues: some literary, some political, some religious and some pedagogical. Some of them are used as satiric attack on the frailties of man in his society. It is interesting to note however, that *People of the City* regarded as the first African novel per se published in 1945 was written by one of the Onitsha Market pamphleteers called Cyprian Ekwensi.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain thoroughly the major difference between a pamphlet and a book.

3.2 Market Literature

A market literature is a consistent form of writing popularized by traders in a given market place or by people living and working in a given commercial centre. Market literatures are printed as pamphlets. They have no standard form or guiding rules covering the subject matters. Most of the subject matters go from moral to amoral, from sacred to profane, from political to apolitical and from pedagogical to generalities. They are usually written with less commercial intention. The authors have the joy of being read by others and being classified among the circle of writers. The pages are usually very few and written in very simple and transliterated English forms.

The language of market literatures is usually entertaining and the lexical selection is usually unconnected but creates fun in the reading. Market literatures are regarded as popular literatures. The Kano Market writers wrote mainly in Hausa with just a handful in English. The critical question has been: was the popular pamphleteering in Nigeria a success or a failure? The obvious answer is that it was a big success. There are several factors which contributed to the success of these market literatures. In 1946, the colonial government of Nigeria sold their used printing presses and shortly after, the local market places were flooded with romantic novelettes and chapbooks. Many traders in Onitsha bought these discarded machines. Cheap production costs also made it possible for large print runs to be produced. The fact that the authors had declared that their main concern was not to make money from their writing meant that the publishers had a free hand to fix cheap prices for the pamphlets.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Differentiate between a market literature and a real literature

3.3 Onitsha Market Literature

Onitsha Market Literature is a term used to designate the popular pamphlets that were sold at the large market in Onitsha, Nigeria, in the middle decades of the 20th Century. Written by and intended for the "common" or "uneducated" people, this literature covered a range of genres including fiction, current events, plays, social advice and language study. Starting in the 1960s, European and American scholars began to take an interest in this form of popular literature, especially insofar as it reflected African social conditions. It is not known whether any individual or group of people ever came together, sat down, planned and worked out the details of what they wanted to do in advance before they started publishing and selling pamphlets in the Onitsha market literature series to the public. However, what is known is that, according to Emmanuel Obiechina, the first pamphlets in the series were published in 1947.

It could be said that the first publications in the Onitsha market literature were written by Cyprian Ekwensi, who later became a famous Nigerian novelist. The titles of the pamphlets written by Ekwensi were "When love whispers" and a collection of Igbo folktales called "Ikolo the wrestler and other Igbo tales". All these were published in 1947. Another factor which spurred people on to writing the chapbooks was the end of the Second World War. The Nigerian soldiers, who fought in India and the Far East, came back with copies of Indian and Victorian drugstore pulp magazines which served as models for the pamphlet literature.

It has been said that a good number of young people with the minimum educational qualification of standard six found their ways to Onitsha either to trade or to work as apprentices in various trades and professions. It was this group of new literates, school leavers, school teachers, low-level clerks, artisans, provincial correspondents of daily newspapers who now devoted their time to writing the Onitsha market pamphlets. Most of the authors of the Onitsha chapbooks were amateurs rather than professionals. Another group of people who wrote the Onitsha market pamphlets were local printing press owners, booksellers, journalists, railwaymen, traders, and farmers. Some of the pamphlets were written by grammar school boys who wrote under pseudo names so that their school authorities would not identify and then punish them. Most of the pamphlet authors maintained that financial gain was not their reason for writing the pamphlets. The authors already had full-time

employment from which they earned their living and they merely took up writing as part-time and for the joy of it. Consequently, even if they earned little money from their writing, that was regarded as a supplementary family income. A good number of the authors wrote a preface to the finished work in which they gave biographical details of their lives. Usually such a preface gave the details as to how and why the authors came to be personally involved in pamphlet writing.

The strategic position of the city of Onitsha on the eastern bank of the River Niger also contributed to the success of the market literature. Onitsha is easily accessible from all parts of Nigeria and people come from all parts of the Federation and also from other countries in West Africa either to buy or sell their commodities at Onitsha. The pamphlets were sold in various bookshops in Onitsha as well as in the open markets. Roadside hawkers as well as peripatetic booksellers helped to sell thousands of copies of the pamphlets. Travellers passing through Onitsha boasted of buying copies of the cheap chapbooks to show to their relatives and friends at home. Onitsha town has a large home-based market and many educational institutions. There are thousands of traders in the Onitsha market and also thousands of grammar school boys and girls in Onitsha who bought copies of the pamphlets.

The publication and distribution of the pamphlets coincided with the period when many people were becoming educated in Eastern Nigeria. Even the Onitsha traders who were not educated, decided to go to the night schools to learn how to read and write. By so doing, they were able to read the stories by themselves. Some illiterate traders who bought the pamphlets but decided not to go to the night schools, availed themselves of the services of the Onitsha public scribes. These were educated people who had it as their full-time job to read or write letters as well as read stories from books to illiterates and charge them for the service.

There were still other factors which contributed to the success of the market literature. By the time the first set of pamphlets was published in 1947, public libraries did not exist in Eastern Nigeria. The market booksellers concentrated their efforts in selling prescribed school textbooks and not popular fiction and general trade books. The people had nowhere to go when they wanted to read some light materials. This meant that for many years, Nigerians were suffering from book hunger. Consequently, when the Onitsha market pamphlets were issued, the people were happy and the cheapness of the retail price enabled them to buy the copies in large numbers. As already stated, the 5-year period, 1958 to 1962 may be described as the heyday of the Onitsha market literature pamphlets. During that period, one could easily go to a bookshop and select up to 200 titles. The popularity of the chapbooks

quickly spread from Onitsha to Enugu, Aba, Owerri, Port Harcourt, Calabar and other cities and towns in Eastern Nigeria. From the East, it spread to the West, Northern Nigeria and to Lagos, to Cameroons, Ghana and other countries in West Africa. As Onitsha could no longer cope with the popular demand, the printing and production were now contracted to companies based in Aba, Port Harcourt, Yaba in Lagos, Enugu and Owerri. The average Onitsha market pamphlet sold 3000-4000 copies per title. There were two titles which sold over 30,000 copies each.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Trace the historical development of Onitsha Market Literature and the factors responsible for its growth.

3.4 Kano Market Literature

Due to historical peculiarities, the Hausa-Fulani comprising all the tribes that speak Hausa language as a first or second language, were less enthusiastic in the pursuit of western Education right from the colonial periods up to the present time. Consequently, several methods that can appeal to their understanding and comprehension were devised to enlighten them on government policies and programs. This gave rise to a medium of mass communication like Town Criers and Drama Series which became very popular as a result of its acceptability among the generality of the people. In that golden period, monetary consideration was never a factor in gauging the success or otherwise of the actors/actress, it was more or less voluntary. The main objectives were simply to enlighten the public, with strict adherence to the rules and regulations which guard against anything that will torch our sensibilities. This ensured the protection of our cultural norms and values jealously over the years. The thespians were just happy and contented to partake in a venture that will lead to the general understanding of government aims and objectives on several issues.

Of the many prominent personalities that took part in the drama series of yester years, suffice it to give a special mention of the following: Kassimu Yero, Kar-Kuzu, Late Alhaji Buguzun, Dan Hajiya, Dan-Magori, Hajiya Tambaya, Me Ayah, Late Mallam Mamman, Golobo, Samanja Mazan Fama, Late Karo-da-Goma, Barmo and several others too numerous to mention. They used their God given talent effectively in mass mobilization and enlightenment and for that, we are very grateful indeed. What is now known as Kannywood, evolved partly out of the booming Kano Market Literature (KML), which made some of the writers instantly famous. The success recorded, made some exuberant youth to begin the conversion of the content of their 'soyayya'

books into films. Subsequently, what started as a small private affair suddenly metamorphosed into a full-blown money spinning venture and the rest is now History.

With the government's inability to cater for its citizens' needs, coupled with the opulent life style of these writers, in addition to endemic poverty; film making readily became a veritable source of employment and instant fame and wealth. This induced mass exodus of all characters from every part of the North and even neighbouring countries to Kano, to the ready embrace of the stakeholders in the industry. Many boys and girls in their teens therefore migrated to Kano, leading to the resurgence of divorce cases in many parts of the north.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What are the major trusts of Kano Market Literature?

3.5 Transition from Pamphlets into Novels

The first book in the Onitsha market literature series was published in 1947. This was quickly followed by other titles some of which were so slim that they numbered less than 20 pages each. In a relatively short time, these chapbooks and novelettes became popular in Eastern Nigeria especially among secondary school boys and girls and among thousands of traders in Onitsha market. From the Eastern Region the popularity spread to the Cameroon, Ghana and other West African countries. The 5-year period, 1958 to 1962 may be described as the heyday when the total number of books published each year was near the 50 titles mark. The language used in the books was suitable for most of the people in the society because not many of them were educated to primary and secondary school levels. By the time the Biafran war ended in January 1970, the publication and selling of the Onitsha market pamphlets and chapbooks was dying a natural death.

The same period in history also marked the transition from writing novelettes with semi-literate population in mind to writing serious trade-books, both fiction and non-fiction, for highly educated people. By general trade books we mean those books written for the general public, mainly the adult population, and published by a commercial publisher. Such books are written for the non-specialist reading public, such as biography, novels, literature, belles letters, etc. Incidentally, these are the kind of books which people usually buy for their intrinsic merits, and they read them for their own sake.

Despite the popularity which the Onitsha market literature enjoyed for nearly a generation, by the year 1975, that literary phenomenon had

ceased to exist. To many people, especially those who enjoyed comfortable living as a result of this special book trade, the demise came rather too quickly and too unexpectedly. Why was this the case? One obvious answer is that the Biafran war of July 1967 to January 1970 had abruptly halted the progress of the pamphlet business. At the end of the war, when people came back to Onitsha, what they saw was a city which had been systematically destroyed. It was like a ghost town. There was little or nothing left for them to use in starting a new life. This state of affairs led to frustration, hopelessness and despair. People even turned round and started blaming their fellow Onitsha inhabitants for being the cause of their woes. The spirit of comradeship, for which the inhabitants of Onitsha were known, had gone. People did not trust one another any more. Rather they started being cagey and secretive. The informality and the openness of life in the Onitsha market had gone. People were no longer prepared to tell their fellow traders the truth.

However, there were people who loved the Onitsha market literature so much that they were determined to reactivate their business. Before long, they discovered that they were facing many odds. Their printing presses and other production equipment had either been stolen or destroyed beyond repair. Buying new machines would obviously cost them more money. Moreover, the resumption of the production of new pamphlets was capital-intensive. The cover price for each new title produced would be increased considerably. Some of the well-known pamphlet authors had disappeared from Onitsha, and some even lost their lives. Obiechina stated clearly that one of the famous pamphlet authors, Chike Okonyia, the author of *Tragic, Niger Tales* was killed during the war.

The whole fabric of society and the special characteristics which distinguished Onitsha from other cities in Igboland had gone. Thousands of people decided to leave Onitsha for good and set up new lines of business in other cities like Enugu, Aba and Port Harcourt. Before the war, some traders were prepared to buy every new pamphlet title published. After the war, the same traders decided not to purchase the publications any more, partly because they had no money, and partly because the new retail prices were too high for them. Few years after the war, even those who thrived on the pamphleteering business had no alternative than to give up the trade. Consequently, it can be said that by the year 1975, the Onitsha market literature had ceased to exist. The people of Eastern Nigeria had to look elsewhere for their reading materials. The disappearance of this literary genre was a loss not only to the Igbos and to Eastern Nigerians but also to the whole of Nigeria and to some West Africans. The Biafran war had changed the philosophy of life of the Igbo people of Nigeria.

Between 1950 and 1970, a period of 20 years, some classic novels written by Nigerian authors were published. The same period coincided with the time when the Onitsha market literature was in vogue from 1947 to 1975. Some of these novels were *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola (1952); *People of the City*, by Cyprian Ekwensi (1954); *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe (1958), and *One Man One Wife* by Timothy Aluko (1959). These represent what Oyekan Owomoyela called the First Wave Writers of West Africa. Their works also represent a transitional period from the novelettes and chapbooks of the Onitsha market literature, to serious fiction written by intellectual authors. One Nigerian novelist who may be said to have spearheaded the transition was C.O.D. Ekwensi. He wrote for the Onitsha market literature as well as serious novels for the more sophisticated readers. As Obiechina has rightly observed, both the pamphlet writers and the intellectual West African writers used their writing as media to provide insights into the contemporary West African life. The pamphlet writers concerned themselves with surface appearances, while the intellectual writers tried to dig deep into underlying causes and explanations.

We have already seen how serious fiction was being published almost side by side with the pamphlets of the Onitsha market literature. Those novels were written by first wave intellectual writers from Nigeria. During the Second wave, we had Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* (1965) and Gabriel Okara's novel, *The Voice* (1964). It was during the Second Wave that Chinua Achebe published his two next novels – *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *A Man of the People*, (1966). Elechi Amadi's book, *The Concubine*, was published in 1966. Achebe's *A Man of the People* dealt with corruption, and ended with violence and a coup. It was during this Second Wave that some of the novels of the pioneer Igbo women writers were published. The first was *Efuru*, by Flora Nwapa (1966), and *Idu* (1969). The other female novelist, Buchi Emecheta, published her autobiographical novels, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen*, (1974).

The writers of the Third Wave were young people writing for an African audience and not for the Euro-Americans as was the case with the first Wave authors. These new Third Wave authors sought not only to entertain like the Onitsha chapbooks, but also to edify and instruct, as well as to forge a common cause with ordinary people. Some of the novels of the Third Wave are *One is Enough*, by Flora Nwapa (1981); Kalu Okpi's *The Smugglers* (1978) and *On the Road* (1980).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Explain thoroughly the factors that led to the demise of pamphleteering.

4.0 CONCLUSION

No doubt, pamphleteering constitutes a very important aspect of the development of the African novel. From the above excursions into the development of pamphleteering and the emergence of market literatures, Onitsha and Kano, it is clear that they represent one of the first attempts at writing and publishing what is real literature. This development process is not an African thing. Early literature writers in Europe and America started through pamphleteering. American literature was pamphlets until recently and even the pamphlets still represent an important aspect of their literary heritage. The works of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson were mainly in pamphlets and they are one of the most revered documents in American literature today. However, the pamphlets of Africa unlike the revolutionary aspects of Europe and America constitute attempts by the half literate Africans at expressing them in the printed words. It represents a beginning that actually saw literature beyond the ordinariness of the spoken words. It elevated the orality of literature to the status of the printed matter. It brings African novels to the realm of the printed words.

5.0 SUMMARY

Pamphleteering developed to market literature in Africa. This is because most of the pamphlets were written by traders and people living in the two most commercial areas in Nigeria: Onitsha and Kano. They are middle educated members of the society that sought for fun and belongingness to the circle of writers. The quantity of works produced is enormous and represent many aspects of man's developmental needs from the physical to the spiritual. The quality reveals beginners with no clear-cut genres, themes and functionality. The works reveal the budding desire of young half educated Africans who wrote to bring African orality into the print. The market literatures marked a real phase in the development of printing in Africa. Thus, pamphlets led directly to the real publishing of African novels and other genres.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions

1. What factors led to the emergence of pamphleteering in Africa?
2. Differentiate critically the thematic differences between Onitsha and Kano Market Literatures.
3. Explain the basic contribution of pamphlets to the development of the African novel.

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UNIT 4 THE RISE OF FORMAL NOVELS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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 - 3.2 The Early Novels
 - 3.3 The Novels of the City
 - 3.4 The Novels of Rural Life
 - 3.5 The Classless Novels
 - 3.6 The Post Independence Novels
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall explore the emergence of real novel in Africa. The last three units have been able to tell us how fiction began to manifest in Africa. It is clear now to explain that Africans have literature before colonialism except that they were oral. Even when people began to learn how to read and write, they did not hesitate at expressing themselves in pamphlet forms. Many Africans who were able to attend foreign universities under scholarship began to write different forms of literature. This is one way they hoped to record their experiences, and affect their societies. At this early stage, writing literature was seen as hobby not a professional thing. Apart from the problem of non recognition, the early writers of fiction could not have outlets in Africa to publish their works. They tried like the Onitsha and Kano market literature writers to express themselves in various genres and get the works printed instead of being published. In this unit we shall explore the various types of novels that emanated in the evolution of African prose fiction. However, much of our examples would be drawn in Nigeria while instances would be mentioned of other areas. There shall be tutor-marked assignments to guide the students' understanding of the unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit the students should be able to:

- recognize the early novels in Africa
- appreciate that African writers write fictions to express their experiences
- understand that the novels come as urban, rural and classless
- see early African novels as tools for fighting for independence.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Literature is about people, their society, their culture, their institutions. But it is also, and especially, about language, the medium through which the people's society, culture, and institutions are expressed. Although oral narratives have existed abundantly in Africa for centuries, it is arguable whether there were novelists or novels in sub-Saharan Africa before the advent of colonization. Whichever way one looks at it, African novelists, since the colonial period, constitute a special kind of creators. Unlike traditional poets or storytellers with whom they are in contact, African novelists who express themselves in European languages acquired their art through the possibility of writing.

Within the framework of literature, the immediate advantage that writing offered to the African was the means to participate in the development of the prevailing literary genre. However, because of the impossibility or difficulty for some African writers to write in their mother tongues, there arose the need for these writers to write in the languages of the colonizers. Because, historically, Africans found themselves placed in this linguistic situation, the early African writers started to write in the languages of the colonizers without considering all the implications involved in the use of such languages. In their zeal to destroy the stereotypical images of Africa and to project their African world view, these writers may have considered the colonial languages as mere tools or means to achieve their objectives.

Language issue apart, these early writers were concerned about the changing society they found themselves. There are new values and attitudes that came from the colonial milieu. They tend to be concerned with the change of this attitude and value and express fears about the adverse effects. They wrote about the city and the rural setting in the colonial society. The educated ones were worried about the way Africa and Africans are being portrayed. They believed that writing in English or other colonial languages would enable them reach a wider audience.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Express the reasons why the early African prose fiction writers wrote in the colonial language instead of their local languages

3.2 The Early Novels

The early African writers were living in search of true identity. The identity that was vandalized by colonial and imperialistic history. They believed that through literature they would form the catharsis for redemption of African lives if they have enough courage and suaveness to live them authentically. There is no need for lofty theories or forms. All that is needed is finding true African identity that is not necessarily derived from other forms and live by it. In 1938, Daniel O. Fagunwa wrote his *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale*, after entering a literary contest of the Nigerian education ministry, the novel was widely considered the first novel written in the Yorùbá language and one of the first to be written in any African language; Wole Soyinka translated the book into English in 1968 as *The Forest of A Thousand Demons*. Fagunwa's later works include *Igbo Olodumare* (The Forest of God, 1949), *Ireke Onibudo* (1949), *Irinkerindo ninu Igbo Elegbeje* (Expedition to the Mount of Thought, 1954), and *Adiitu Olodumare* (1961). Fagunwa's novels draw heavily on folktale traditions and idioms, including many supernatural elements. His heroes are usually Yoruba hunters, who interact with kings, sages, and even gods in their quests. Thematically, his novels also explore the divide between the Christian beliefs of Africa's colonizers and the continent's traditional religions. Fagunwa remains the most widely-read Yorùbá-language author, and a major influence on such contemporary writers as Amos Tutuola. The novel though in local dialect marked a smooth transition from orature to literature.

Amos Tutuola was a Nigerian writer famous for his books based in part on Yoruba folk-tales. His most famous novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was written in 1946, published in 1952 in London by Faber and Faber. The noted poet Dylan Thomas brought it to wide attention, calling it "brief, thronged, grisly and bewitching". *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was followed up by *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* in 1954 and then several other books in which Tutuola continued to explore Yoruba traditions and folklore. Amos Tutuola's *Palmwine Drinkard* was described as a conscious attempt at serious fiction in English from Africa. Amos Tutuola was barely literate; hence his use of English in the novel was full of aberrations, although the language of the novel was loaded with fantastic realisms like a folktale while the language was full of repetitions and emphasis. One fascinating thing about these early novels is the inclusion of the folktale traditions in them. The works of Fagunwa

and Tutuola are written African tales that express African belief systems about their culture, the spiritual essence and affinity with divine powers and the general worldview of their culture. These works marked a transition from orature to literature. The novels are written folktales.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the nature of the early novels especially those of Tutuola and Fagunwa.

3.3 The Novels of the City

With the increasing effect of colonialism, urbanism became a focus. The Colonial masters were busy developing a new type of settlement for themselves and the educated Africans. The rural setting became undeveloped because attention is paid to the city. The city embodies everything ugly: armed robbery, stealing, prostitution, suicide, manslaughter and other negative vices which the rural areas are not always known for. With the arrival of electricity and other communication gadgets, the city became a haven for the educated and the foreigners. Cyprian Ekwensi *People of the City* in 1954 and which was the first book by a Nigerian writer to garner international attention. In this novel, Ekwensi examined the life of the urban dwellers and the effect of colonialism on the Africans. One fascinating thing about these urban novels is that they try to juxtapose the rural setting with the urban setting in order to assess the rural and the urban lives as it affects the Africans. His most successful novel was *Jagua Nana* (1961) which was about a Pidgin-speaking Nigerian woman who leaves her husband to work as a prostitute in a city and falls in love with a teacher. He also wrote a sequel to this, *Jagua Nana's Daughter*. Most of these urban novels especially Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* and *Jagua Nana's Daughter* explored deeply the negative imports of urbanization on the Africans.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Assess the major trends in early urban novels.

3.4 The Novels of Rural Life

With the publication of *Things Fall Apart* in 1958, there was a critical look at the rural setting with the penetration of the colonialists into the hinterland. *Things fall Apart* is a story about an organized community, Umuofia, with its standard laws, government and spiritual make-up. Okonkwo, the hero is much concerned about how to attain greatness in line with the dictates of his society. He offended his society by desecrating the Week of Peace with provoked attempt at shooting one of

his wives. He was found guilty by the elders and was exiled for seven years. He ran to his maternal home to serve the sentence. There too, he proved himself as a man of greatness. When he returned to Umuofia after his seven years banishment, he met a new community with weak men. He discovered that things were no longer as it used to be and that the white men had invaded the community and imposed their taxes and churches. All efforts to bring his people back to the former state of dignity where they were proved abortive. In an effort to fight a one man's war, he committed murder and hanged himself.

This novel is about the pure rural lives of the African with the tragic effect of colonialism destroying the values of the people. Everything fell apart as the real African values of life were thrown into the abyss while a strange culture, law and values were imposed on the people.

Another rural novel of significance is Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*. It is a novel set in a pure rural setting before the advent of the colonial masters. It shows the values of Africans in their natural state with their laws and values at play. The story is about the love life of a young woman called Ihuoma. All the men who indicated interests of marrying her died mysteriously. Emenike her first husband died of locked chest after his fight with Madume over a piece of land; Madume died when he made amorous moves towards Ihuoma and was spat on by a cobra. He went blind before committing suicide. Lastly was Ekwueme the stubborn lover, he rejected his childhood betrothed girl for the widow, Ihuoma. He eventually died after all preparations to bind the 'sea king' troubling Ihuoma was made. The story took place in Omokachi Village. The community had not been invaded by the colonial masters, the values and belief systems were intact, the society has their means of justice and justice. In these novels, the choice of language is usually filled with local colour expressions like idioms, proverbs, songs, and other African ways of expressing aesthetics.

Put in another way, the question of an authentic rural novel remains when we see the authentic African identity unshaded by colonial maladjustments. African writing should be the portrayal of African customs and manners against historical background. African beauty and vividness in writing can also be portrayed through an individual throttling of personal energy trying to improve his/her social condition and achieve personal happiness. As much as literature is the art of outpacing the times, no one man can create or anticipate culture on his own. Culture is naming and giving valuable significance by unconscious intent to that which we all move in; it cannot be contrived.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain thoroughly what qualifies an African novel as a rural novel.

3.5 The Classless Novels

Some African novels are located both in the rural and urban settings. They can not be classed as urban or rural novels since they embody the qualities of the two. This pattern of setting allows the authors the opportunity of analogy of the two settings as they affect the Africans. Most times, this juxtaposition allows the readers perceive the tragic effects of colonialism on the values of the Africans. The terrible effect of this imposition of foreign values on Africans became more revealed in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. To show continuity in the storyline, Obi Okonkwo the grandson of Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* is the hero. Using the urban setting of Lagos, Achebe contrasted the serene, lawful, organized Umuofia with the rough, lawless and disorganized urban setting of Lagos. There is usually a migration effect on the rural setting as everyone attempts to move to the urban areas to earn livelihood. Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* explored the effect of urban life on Africans. She compared the rural and the urban settings favourable in the novel. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child and Grain of Wheat*, set during the days of Mau Mau fight to relinquish colonialism, also explored the urban setting in Kenya during the colonial days.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Distinguish a Classless Novel from the Urban and the Rural novels.

3.6 The Post Independence Novels

With independence came a new vision of writing. Most African writers began to examine their environment with regards to what Africans are doing with the independence they received from the whites. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* attacked the odds of colonialism but his *No Longer at Ease*, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* attacked the African leaders and Africans who have been destroying the cherished African mores by imitating Western Values. Most of these post-independence novels examine the remains of the values and how Africans are managing to put things right. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born* in attacked corruption in Africa using his country Ghana as a micro study. Post independence novels are mainly satirical as they attack misplaced values and propose better means of running a hitch free republic. They attack the individual and the state. Post independence writers write with a sense of

commitment to teach, to direct, to advise and to attack anomalies. They are more concerned with what Africans are making out of the independence they fought for.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Explain the major thematic concerns of post independence novelists in Africa.

4.0 CONCLUSION

One thing is certain, formal novels in Africa began by expressing African worldviews and projecting African culture. The problem of identity and independence were major preoccupations. They try in various ways to express the African situation in unique ways. Besides, the writers of formal novels began from the market literature. Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* was the first novel expressing the effect of colonialism in an urban setting. It would be recalled that Ekwensi was a major contributor to the Onitsha Market Literature pamphleteering. Fagunwa and Tutuola were concerned about telling the African tales. Tutuola was interested in expressing himself in his new found language using African mode of expressions. The formal novels arose out of curiosity and later manifested into a specialized genre satirizing, directing and expressing African experiences.

5.0 SUMMARY

It is clear that formal novels started by taking cue from African orature. This can be seen from the fiction of the pioneer prose writers like D. O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola. Their works have elements of the supernatural akin to the folktale tradition. They also made adequate use of the local communication repertoires like proverbs, idioms, transliteration and other forms of local colour. The rural and urban novelists try in various ways to examine the effects of colonialism in juxtaposition with the natural values and belief system of Africans. The classless and post independence novels satirize and direct for better governance.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions

1. Explain the major concerns of early African novels.
2. What are the major preoccupations of rural and urban novels?
3. The classless novels juxtapose African settings. Explain
4. The post independence African novel is satirical. Why?
5. Formal African novels stated out of curiosity. Explain.

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UNIT 5 THE AFRICAN MILIEU AND THE AFRICAN NOVEL

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 The Sociology of the African Novels
 - 3.3 The African Novel and African Personality
 - 3.4 African Novel and Social Mores
 - 3.5 African Novel and African Culture
 - 3.6 African Novel and the Question of Leadership
 - 3.7 African Novel as Custodian of Tradition
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine the sociology of the African novels with regards to how the African writers have been portraying the African society in their works. Many African writers present the African society, culture and personality in such manners that reveal the totality of African values. The issues of equality, cultural values and social mores are presented in manners that show the placement of attitudes and societal requirements for greatness. The values of leadership are also examined using the African leadership parameters as yardsticks. The novel x-rays the societies in order to find out how the people dictate and pilot their affairs according to stated values. The novel is a product of society and tries to direct the society by using the aesthetic medium. We explore how all these are achieved in African novels using and authors relevant to this study.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- understand that African novels are products of African social environment
- explain why the African novelists project social mores
- relate the form of African novels to African experiences
- see African novels as society based
- distinguish African novels based on the treatment of societal values.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Chinua Achebe explains that Africans did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans. This means that Africans have a system of thought of values and of self-assertion. Anxiety over self-revelation is not much of a problem when the exposure is channelled through conventional forms that mask the writer's identity to some extent. In the African scene, simply telling tragic stories like that of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* used to be a conventional way of telling an African story. But this reached its saturation point about the time Achebe published his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*. Before then, African writing had always favoured a political novel because it doubled over with fighting for freedom. Literature, in the oppressive milieu of the African colonial scene, was testimony to social aspirations, and by necessity, the only available vehicle for social change. The likes of Nadine Gordimer and Wole Soyinka, with their sophisticated obfuscation, flirted and refined the African political novel until it gained the attention of the world, especially the West. They mingled it with modern forms of art that were in vogue in the West but had not yet caught on in the African scene.

3.2 The Sociology of African Novels

African writers have been concerned with their society. The social mores and the cultural values have been of concern with them. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe presented the typical Igbo society before the advent of colonialism. He created a clearer picture of the cultural values, laws and mores of the people. Umuofia is presented as a perfect society with their standard form of government. They have everything moving until the invasion of the whites that disrupted their values. The Igbo society in the novel is presented as pure and full of life. It was the western values that destroyed African values and relegated African laws as primitive and unrefined. African society is presented as a barbarian society in European novels and African writers have been struggling to correct this ugly presentation. That was why Achebe stated in his creed that his mission is to espouse and correct the years of denigration and self-abasement which "the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them".

In Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, we see Omokachi Community in her natural state. There are ways by which physical and spiritual things are treated. There are natural justice and spiritual essence. Madume died because he violated the laws of the gods. Any greedy fellow dies in his greed. Madume suffered that. Ekwueme died because he wanted to twist

the hands of the gods. There is a belief among the people that whoever challenges the gods to a fight always fails. The community believes that the gods have superior power.

In Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom*, we see a writer presenting the South African society at the grips of Apartheid and how the black South Africans have been subjugated to live as animals and turned to slaves in their own land. In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*, the author presented the problem of disinheritance of land from the blacks. The East African society was engulfed with the politics of land as a result of colonialism.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Assess the major concern of African novelists with their society.

3.3 The African Novel and African Personality

Apart from the issue of culture the next issue that bothered African novelists is the issue of African personality. Africans were seen as people without value to life and a lawless people. In some European novels like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* we have distorted images of African personalities which made Europeans brand us as uncivilized. African novelists became concerned about correcting these anomalies. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is presented as a perfect man who acted according to the dictates of his society. At the age of 18, he has three titles, three wives and three yam barns which are the indices of growth in his society. It is the arrival of western values that destroyed a great personality like Okonkwo who got himself hanged for discovering that the values of his society have been thrown into the abyss. However, in *No Longer at Ease*, we see Obi Okonkwo in a mess because he wanted to behave according to the whites by collecting bribe. Achebe tries to present the fact that European values are distorted and worse than African values. In *Jagua Nana*, by Cyprian Ekwensi, we see an urban city filled with prostitution and other forms of vices. The urban city is synonymous with western values. Many African writers have been trying in their various works at placing the African personality in positive lights.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain how African novelists have been presenting African personality.

3.4 African Novel and Social Mores

One fundamental character of the contemporary African novel is that it provides a specific manner of narration which identifies human names in such a way that suggests that they are to be regarded as individuals in the contemporary society. The mark of true realism therefore, is the depiction of an age when the individual's experience and the bourgeois exploration of the individual's experience reaches its highest form and this individual is not a fragmentary experience but the quintessential representation of a particular historical social experience. The political life of a nation and its social national dilemma is thus depicted through an individual experience, the individual himself being shaped by the socio-economic circumstances in which he finds himself. In Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, Idemudia and his three friends depict the dilemma of the Nigerian worker. Their cognitive self-awareness and existence are not only an individual's idiosyncrasy but a reflection of the shaping spirits of their time and environment. Every individual is judged by his way of life as related to the social mores.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

How do African Novelists reflect African social mores?

3.5 African Novel and African Culture

In most African novels, the issues of culture are presented. Apart from Chinua Achebe who presents African culture as a way of telling the whites that Africans did not hear of culture first from them, there are salient aspects of African cultures in most novels. In Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Woods*, the cultural placements of women in Senegal are revealed. We see women struggling to make a better place for their society. Also in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, we see the African culture in a Moslem society where the culture of the people and their religion are mixed. The novel is a long letter narrating the ill-treatment of women according to Moslem rules. Here, a woman's attempts at reforming these odds were met with stringent measures that left her desolate. Back to Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, we see the Igbo culture concerning marriage, hunting, widowhood, belief in the supernatural, respect for elders and natural medicine. It is difficult to get an African novel without elements of culture.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What elements of culture are revealed in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*?

3.6 African Novel and the Question of Leadership

Most African novels seem to be an attack on the ruling class. Since independence the question of leadership has been a very sensitive issue in Africa. The African novelists have been commenting on the bad administration of most African countries. In 1966, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, was described as a prophetic novel because it predicted the first ever military coup in Nigeria. It was glaring as at that time that the civilian government in Nigeria was very corrupt and that military intervention was the only option. In most parts of Africa, there have been the issues of leadership problems. There are countries in Africa where dictatorship and anarchy are the order of the government. In North Africa, for instance, Muamar Gaddafi of Libya has been in power for over thirty years. The same applies in most East African countries like Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Congo DPR etc. The abuse of political power in Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Liberia and Sierra Leone among other countries has been satirized in most African novels. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born* is an attack on the corrupt government in Ghana. Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger* exposes the feelings of hopelessness in Zimbabwe.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

How have African novelists been reacting to the issue of leadership?

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear that the African milieu has so much effect on the African novel as the writers draw their themes and subject matters from their environment. The sociology of the African novels revealed that the African writers are expressing the society to which they belong. They are reflecting the desires and wishes of their society. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o the African writer is like a "sensible needle who records with varying degrees of accuracy and success the conflicts and tensions in his changing society". This means that African writers see themselves as custodians of the people's history, culture, aspiration and development. This is why they question the problems of leadership. This is why they project the culture of the people and record every details of good and bad governance for posterity.

5.0 SUMMARY

The African milieu has provided enough space for the African novelists to weave their stories. African novels have been in the vanguard of projecting African culture, personality, social mores and the question of leadership. They have acted as sensible needles in the record of the

political, social and the economic changes in their societies. Most African novels are written with the commitment to express the African hope, worldview and thought system. In all, they aspire to fashion a near-perfect society for their people.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

- 1) Explain how African novels reflect the sociology of the people.
- 2) African novelists have been described as “sensitive needles”. Explain.
- 3) Using an African novel explain how social mores are reflected in them.
- 4) What are the indices of culture in African novels?
- 5) Relate the form of any African novels to the African experiences in it.
- 6) Distinguish African novels based on the treatment of societal values.

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MODULE 2 MAJOR THEMES AND THREADS IN AFRICAN NOVEL

| | |
|--------|------------------------|
| Unit 1 | Politics of Land |
| Unit 2 | Politics of Apartheid |
| Unit 3 | Independent Africa |
| Unit 4 | Politics of Corruption |
| Unit 5 | Politics of Militarism |

UNIT 1 POLITICS OF LAND

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall concentrate on the theme of land possession and dispossession in select African novels. The politics of land is a common feature of East African novels especially in the novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. East African land is very fertile for the production of coffee and other cash crops like cabbage, carrot, cucumber, onions and other edible vegetables and fruits. The British and Indian immigrants and colonial masters decided to disinherit the Africans of their land. This they converted to personal farms and employed the Africans as slaves to work in their disinherited land. The situation resulted in anarchy and other forms of land policies that never favoured the Africans. The matter became more worrisome when some Africans became agents for the whites in this disinheritance business. The Africans reacted by organizing themselves into guerrilla groups to fight these whites and regain their lands. Many African writers wrote to express their displeasure at this critical situation. Other African writers also wrote about the issue of land but in different forms from what the East African writers did. Some other writers wrote about land from the point of view

of identity and patriotism. For the purposes of this course, we shall concentrate on the politics of land in East African novels for this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, the students should be able to:

- realize that politics of land prevailed in East African novels
- understand that East African climate led to the disinheritance
- identify that East Africans protested disinheritance by forming guerrilla groups;
- see Ngugi wa Thiong'o as a major writer in this theme of land;
- discuss politics of land as a product of the African people and environment;
- argue that other African writers wrote about land in different forms; and
- read and appreciate Ngugi's selected novels as reflective of this theme

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

During the early part of the 20th Century, the interior central highlands in Kenya were occupied by British and other European farmers, who became wealthy farming coffee and tea. By the 1930s, approximately 30,000 white settlers lived in the area and were offered undue political powers because of their effects on the economy. The area was already home to over a million members of the Kikūyū tribe, most of whom had no land claims in European terms (but the land belonged to the ethnic group), and lived as itinerant farmers. To protect their interests, the settlers banned the growing of coffee by the natives, introduced a hut tax, and the landless were granted less and less land in exchange for their labour. A massive exodus to the cities ensued as their ability to provide a living from the land dwindled.

This imposition of taxes and the inability of the natives to acquire land for agriculture resulted in various forms of resistance from the natives. Most writers wrote to protest the injustice. These events were recorded by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in his novels especially *Weep Not Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*. We shall use these two novels in illustrating this issue. We shall also examine briefly the way land politics is portrayed in select African fiction.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain why the white settlers were interested in acquiring lands

3.2 The Politics of land in East Africa

Considering the issue of dispossession of land by the Europeans, the Africans decided to take various measures to fight the injustice. One of such measures was the formation of Mau Mau [a guerrilla group] that attacked the British officers and some Africans who were in support of the Europeans. They had ammunitions with which they fight. They lived and operated from the forest. From October 1952 to December 1959, Kenya was under a state of emergency arising from the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule. The governor requested and obtained British and African troops, including the King's African Rifles.

In January 1953, Major General Hinde was appointed as director of counter-insurgency operations. The situation did not improve for lack of intelligence, so General Sir George Erskine was appointed commander-in-chief of the colony's armed forces in May 1953, with the personal backing of Winston Churchill. The capture of Warũhiũ Itote (a.k.a. General China) on 15 January 1954 and the subsequent interrogation led to a better understanding of the Mau Mau command structure. Operation Anvil opened on 24 April 1954 after weeks of planning by the army with the approval of the War Council. The operation effectively placed Nairobi under military siege, and the occupants were screened and the Mau Mau supporters moved to detention camps.

May 1953 also saw the Home Guard officially recognized as a branch of the Security Forces. The Home Guard formed the core of the government's anti-Mau Mau strategy as it was composed of loyalist Africans, not foreign forces like the British Army and King's African Rifles. By the end of the emergency the Home Guard had killed no fewer than 4,686 Mau Mau, amounting to 42 per cent of the total insurgents. The capture of Dedan Kimathi on 21 October 1956 in Nyeri signified the ultimate defeat of the Mau Mau and essentially ended the military offensive.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss the major reason for the rise of guerilla warfare in Kenya

3.3 The Politics of land in *Weep Not Child*

As a novelist Ngugi made his debut with *Weep Not Child* (1964), which he started to write while he was at school in England. It was the first

novel in English to be published by an East African author. The story entails the plight of the African people. *Weep not Child* is a story about a young boy, Njoroge, as he grows up amidst the Mau Mau war and the conflict between the African natives and the British colonial rulers. The book is in essence about the hopes and dreams of a young boy coming into being and affected by the outside world and how the outside world changes a person.

Two small boys stand on a rubbish heap and look into the future. One boy is excited, he is beginning school; the other, his brother, is an apprentice carpenter. Together, they will serve their country - the teacher and the craftsman. Those who get their education, the intellectual ones, are looked upon as saviours of the African land. Njoroge, the dreamer and accomplished student, must decide where his loyalty lies. In Kenya, those who receive education are looked upon as intellectual saviours of the land. The ironic aspect of the education is that it is being handed down from British rule. Njoroge, the youngest of four brothers, wanted nothing more than to receive an education and provide for the welfare of his family. Njoroge takes his education seriously and excels to the next level. Due to the fact that Njoroge is at a so-called "age of innocence" he has the opportunity to get schooling. The brothers before him have already made their tracks in the roles they are going to take in life. But this is Kenya, and times are against them.

In the forests, the Mau Mau are waging war against the white government, and the two brothers, Njoroge and Kamau, and the rest of their family, need to decide where their loyalties lie. For the practical man, the choice is simple, but for Njoroge, the scholar, the dream of progress through learning is a hard one to give up. The story is based entirely on the existence of the family of Ngotho in which their views and ideas are clearly expressed. The roles in which men and women accept are very evident throughout the entire book. Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed it to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this shamba. The land sloped gently to rise again into the next ridge and the next. Beyond, Ngotho could see the African Reserve. Ngotho was puzzled. Would the prophecy be fulfilled soon? Would these people ever go? It was said that they would eventually return the way they had come.

Also, feelings towards the different cultures; which resulted in certain stereotypes helped in portraying the entire atmosphere in which each culture saw the world through its own eyes. In the beginning of the book, the author explained the atmosphere which is upheld throughout the book. The Black, Indian, and White people all have something in common, they want and need power. Once they obtain this power, they will do anything to keep it and make sure lower class people never reach the status, which they have worked so hard for.

Conflicts have a vast impact upon the development of the plot in *Weep Not Child*. *Weep Not Child* is a novel by an African writer, Ngugi. The plot of this novel is generally about a boy and the hardships he goes through in the course of his life. Conflict is one of the main themes of this novel, and it helps in the development of the plot. The characterization of the people in the novel are mainly a result of the situation they are present in, which is mostly due to the conflicts surrounding each character. In the novel, conflicts have come in a variety of forms, e.g. political, cultural, and class struggles. The most noticeable conflict present in this novel is the political conflict. It can be seen that this novel is set at the colonial times; this was when the British were ruling over Africa.

“Later, our fathers were taken captives in the first Big War to help in a war whose cause they never knew. And when they came back? Their land was taken away for a settlement of the white soldiers.” Here it is seen that Africans dislike the British ruling them, and taking over their lands. Africans were controlled by their rulers; forcing them to speak European languages—they attempted to teach children (future generations) that speaking the foreign language was good and that native languages were bad by using negative reinforcement. Ngugi argues that colonization was not simply a process of physical force. Rather, “the bullet was the means of physical subjugation.”

Weep Not, Child is a powerful, very moving story about the effects of the Mau Mau war on the lives of ordinary men and women. Its author, Ngugi, is one of Africa's most influential and exciting writers, and this, his second novel, is one of the best-known novels in Africa. The novel also addresses the political conflict that was occurring in Kenya in the 1950s. The author incorporates a description of the power of the white rulers, the bitterness of the Africans at being enslaved on their own land and their attempt to rise up against the tyranny, and finally deals with the poor relations between the blacks and Indian merchants, who are looked down upon by the black community. It is a very powerful story; dealing with Njoroge's life, his thoughts and his feelings but due to the length of the novel (136 pages) one only gets a fairly superficial explanation of the historical and cultural context of the book. Also, this novel is a book in translation, so some of the sentence and grammatical structure can be a bit tricky at times. I will explore each of these conflicts in further detail, and prove that conflict plays a key role in making this story remarkable. Conflict is a major issue in this novel.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain Njoroge's greatest wish for attending the Whiteman's school.

3.4 The Politics of land in *A Grain of Wheat*

This is a novel by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o set in pre-independence days in Kenya in the early 1950s - 60s. The place, a rural village in the heart of central Kenya, and through Ngugi's eyes, the landscape becomes alive with the sights, sounds and smells of the area. The book is centered on Mugo, a man affected by his childhood, the years in the State of Emergency, and his own demons within. He rejected his father and was brought up by a disgruntled Aunt who shaped Mugo into the man we see today. During the time of the State of Emergency, life was unkind, hard and brutal. The joys and tensions of this time in his life, reflected in other characters in the book and this leaves you feeling their hearts in a way that makes one wish that they too could have been there in that day and moment in time. Each character has something within him that we can all relate to. A woman will relate to Mumbi, a proud and beautiful young woman with a mind of her own and a love for her brother Kihika, and family. Her strength is admirable, and can be described, to borrow a phrase in a movie, "The greatest honor a family could have was to have a daughter like you".

Another character that gave insight into the soul of a man was Gikonyo. The epitome of manhood- strong, decent, hardworking, industrious and you'll find he is a lot more than what you would initially expect. The State of Emergency was a time when brother turned against brother; families lived in fear of their brethren and the ruling colonialists. It was a time when anyone was arrested on suspicion of being a member of the Mau Mau. And the Mau Mau fought to keep the struggle alive, and killed anyone who got in the way of their great cause. Ngugi tried to show both sides of the coin, the fear felt by Africans and Europeans alike of the Mau Mau fighters; and the people behind the name (Mau Mau) who sacrificed their livelihoods, abandoned their loved ones, realized their civic duty to their country and took up the struggle to take back what was theirs, their freedom.

The central action in this novel takes place in December of 1963 in a village in Kenya that is preparing for the coming of Uhuru (Independence). However, the plot is non-linear, with a wealth of flashbacks and various twists and turns. There are also multiple storylines which are well-woven into a fascinating tapestry. The main story is indeed the coming of Independence Day, part of which involves identifying the person who betrayed Kihika, one of the leading freedom fighters from the village. Many of the flashbacks along this storyline

involve the fight for freedom as well as details about what occurred in the detention camps. Another prominent storyline is that involving a love triangle between Mumbi and her two suitors, Gikonyo and Karanja. A third intriguing storyline involves Mugo, a man whom everyone recognizes as different yet feels drawn to. Ngugi portrays his inner conflict masterfully, especially in using biblical allusions to both Moses and Judas in relation to Mugo.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the theme of betrayal in *A Grain of Wheat*.

3.5 The Politics of land in other novels

The politics of land actually reared its head during the hey days of colonialism. Most educated Africans see the colonialists as scavengers who are willing to do anything to disinherit the Africans. They are seen as people armed with guns and the Bible to either dogmatize the Africans or force them to accept the western values. Thus, the colonial masters from North, West, East and South Africa are seen as people with negative values that impinge on the development of Africa. The English colonialists invaded the hinterlands through the use of warrant officers, Africans who impose rules, taxes and acquire the peoples' properties like land under the guise of implementing the laws of the colony. A similar theme runs through Achebe's novels. In Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Ezeulu was imprisoned by Captain Winterbottom for not accepting the role of a Warrant Officer in Umuaro. Earlier in the novel, Ezeulu played a positive role in resolving the land dispute between his community Umuaro and Okperi, a neighbouring village. The cause of the dispute is basically greed as Nwaka would have wished to use his financial might to acquire the lands whether it was theirs or not.

Another example of the centrality of land is seen in Peter Abraham's work. In Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*, Xuma is struggling to do his best for his country, his land undermining the harsh apartheid realities in South Africa. Xuma discovers that he lives in a land where love has vanished and the realities show that a typical black South African has no right to his ancestral land. This same theme runs consistently in most southern and eastern African literatures.

At another level, we see how Africans perceive land as a precious inheritance in their cultures. In Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Madume and Emenike struggled for a piece of land which led to Emenike's death and later to Madume's death after being beaten by a spitting cobra. In

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we see how the acquisition of farm lands ranks as one of the indices for measuring a man's greatness.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

How do African novelists reveal the theme of land politics beyond colonialism?

4.0 CONCLUSION

African novelists have been treating the theme of land politics in Africa with extreme concern. Especially in East Africa Novelists like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o attempted to present through fictional recollections how the issue of land disinheritance caused the people to go into guerrilla warfare with the colonialists and the African saboteurs. The African novelists see the disinheritance of their lands as a real colonial omen which affected the people's psychological and mental growth. The formation of the Mau Mau fighters is a case beyond the independence of Africans. It is a reaction forced out of a basic necessity revolving on the issue of land politics. Land is a spiritual facility to Africans. It symbolizes a culture, ancestry, birth and death. It is believed that a landless person has no ancestry.

Apart from the East African treatment of land politics, we see the South African treatment of land politics as a more serious one. This is because Apartheid was a very stringent policy of the white rulers in South Africa that maimed the blacks and made them voiceless and powerless. This is the reason why the theme of apartheid dominated the entire South African literatures. The other literary blocks revealed the politics of land in diverse ways but the East African block is very glaringly presented especially in the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

5.0 SUMMARY

African writers write with a purpose. The main focus of African writing is to reflect the experiences of African people in time and space especially regarding their historical experiences. The issue of land is an age-long fact relating to the essence of African culture and personality. There is no African community without recourse to land as a high spiritual essence. In Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's novels: *Weep Not Child* and *A Grain of Wheat*, we see how Kenyans fought to recover their land because of the way the white settlers took over their land and use them as manual labourers on their land. The trauma was unbearable to the extent that the people decided to take up arms to fight for their land. This led to the years of guerrilla wars in East Africa until the demise of colonialism in the region. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o presented the realities of

the war of land in Kenya and the fight for Uhuru (Independence). The other writers reflected politics of land in other ways as in Achebe's and Amadi's novels earlier treated. There are other treatments of politics of land in African novels but none can be seen as very serious like the East African situation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Attempt these questions

1. Explain the reason for the forced acquisition of land by the colonialist in Kenya.
2. In *Weep Not Child* Njoroge sees education as a basic requirement. Explain.
3. What factors portray Mugo as a betrayer in *A Grain of Wheat*?
4. How did Chinua Achebe and Elechi Amadi present politics of land in their novels.
5. Differentiate between politics of land in East Africa and South Africa.

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UNIT 2 POLITICS OF APARTHEID

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- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 The Politics of Apartheid in South Africa
 - 3.3 The Politics of Apartheid in *Mine Boy*
 - 3.4 The Politics of Apartheid in *A Walk in the Night*
 - 3.5 The Politics of Apartheid in other novels
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine the issue of apartheid as a predominant subject matter in the novels of South African writers, which is a reflection of their ugly historical experience. South Africa, because of her rich natural resources like gold and diamond, had early European and Indian settlers who took over power from the citizens of the country and imposed draconian measures to subdue them and make them powerless. Many South Africans were killed and many were inhumanly treated. Racism was at its peak. Many freedom fighters and groups emerged to fight and bring independence to South Africa. Nelson Mandela is known for his dogged fight in the removal of apartheid from South Africa. Desmond Tutu, the radical Anglican priest, also fought alongside Nelson Mandela and other patriots for the dismantling of apartheid. Many South African writers, journalists and politicians went into exile. Most South African writers wrote from diaspora because of the fear of being killed.

More so, South Africa has a complex sociological make-up. There are different types of races: the blacks, the whites and the Coloureds. The blacks are mainly indigenous South Africans; the whites are made up of Europeans, Caucasians, Indians and Asians while the Coloureds are products of mixed marriages between the whites and the blacks. The most troubled groups are the Blacks and the Coloureds. The Coloureds are regarded as blacks by the imperialists though some of them still look like pure whites. The novelists that really exposed apartheid were mainly the blacks and the Coloured writers. For instance, Dennis Brutus, one of the most popular South African poets is coloured. His poetry reflects the evils of apartheid. Unfortunately, the blacks regard the

Coloureds as whites while the whites regard the Coloureds as blacks. They are the most segregated because they have no strong anchor in the apartheid situation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit the students should be able to:

- understand the meaning and origin of apartheid
- appreciate South African Novels
- see apartheid as a dominant feature of Early South African novels
- discuss South African novels as South African experiences
- interpret apartheid as reflected in other African novels

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The key political party in the struggle for South African independence is the African National Congress [ANC]. The ANC has had to transform itself rapidly from a liberation movement espousing revolutionary socialism to a political party defending a culture of human rights, and Mandela reveals his indebtedness to several, not always compatible discourses that in both South Africa and the world opposed apartheid. After a struggle with his own early African nationalism, Mandela acknowledges that he was fighting for a truly united country devoid of class, race or colour. With the family as the model of community, Mandela states unabashedly, about solitary confinement that "nothing is more dehumanizing than the absence of human companionship" and that his son's death while he was in prison "left a hole in [his] heart that can never be filled".

Literature in South Africa is a literature of commitment. Most of the writers write out of the desire to express the experiences in their environment politically and sociologically. They write to reflect and expose the oddities of their history and corruption in their polity. South Africa is rich in gold and diamond. Besides, they have a good natural landscape for agriculture and other forms of arts and crafts. These factors and other reasons were the major attractions to the European and Asian immigrants and/or merchants who decided to make South Africa their mainstay. They realized that political power would enable them control the natives and at the same time have more advantage in their trading. A resistance from the blacks resulted in apartheid policy which was aimed at checkmating the excesses of the blacks vis-à-vis their protest for independence. The situation became more complicated with

years as there were interracial marriages and high level of racism. The South African novelists like Peter Abrahams and Alex Laguma amongst others reflected the evils of apartheid in their works.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain briefly the major thrust of South African literature.

3.2 The Politics of Apartheid in South Africa

Under apartheid, whites were given a political-racial identity which - conterminous with superiority - utilized to its advantage either its Western European inheritance or its long African rootedness. Within this political-racial identity, Afrikanerdom saw itself as culturally distinct from English-speaking South Africans, who were regarded as derivative of the British and, since they had rapidly become townspeople, having little connection to the South African soil. Thus there were also "urban" and "rural" identities, but conveniently when the Afrikaners and the English ganged up against blacks, the common white identity tended to be regarded amorously as Western and middle class. Under apartheid, black people were ethnicised by the State into Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos, and so forth. While Indians and mixed-race "Coloureds" fell somewhere between whites and Africans, the State decreed a rural identity for all Africans: the journey to the city was by government permit.

The reality of urbanization, however, created in African communities both urbans and rurals so that while the majority ideal today might be post-apartheid nationals, many rural Africans cannot be sure where the power of the government - styled as nonracial and democratic - ends and where the power of the chief - local and ethnic - begins. When things do not go its way, the government has not been averse to stepping out of its nonracial role and calling the Africanist race card. The latest attempts at a national narrative is to explain these issues as they occur thereby reflecting the tensions in the people's historical experience.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the major factors that gave rise to apartheid?

3.3 The Politics of Apartheid in Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy*

Mine Boy (1946) by Peter Abrahams was published "two years before the Nationalists gained control of South African politics" and "just before apartheid became entrenched into the South African legal system and racialism became a sanctified governmental policy (Abrahams

5)."Xuma, the major character faces the complexities of urban life in Johannesburg. This was one of the first books to draw attention to the condition of black South Africans under apartheid. The novel started on the Eve of the Apartheid Era. One commentator has noted that Abrahams "is the first South African novelist to pose a possible solution to the continuing crisis of black experience in the industrial city."

Peter Abrahams fictionally recreates this area of colonial history, which presents us with characters who negotiate the uncertain and often tragic terrain of the colonial experiences introduced and induced by diseases. In particular, characters confront and deal, as best as they can, with somatic, psychological, and psychosomatic diseases in ways that highlight the racism of colonial South Africa. A striking revelation of the problems of apartheid as it affects the social and the mental balance of the people who perceive the negative effects of colonialism as something beyond human comprehension.

Peter Abrahams was born in 1919. He is a South African-born novelist and journalist. *Mine Boy* his first novel centres on the effects of the South African apartheid policy. Although Abrahams left for England in 1939 and in 1955 moved to Jamaica, Africa continued to dominate his work, including the short-story collection *Dark Testament* (1942), and *Wild Conquest* (1950), about the Boers' trek. His autobiography, *Tell Freedom* (1954), recreates his childhood in the Johannesburg slums. *A Wreath for Udomo* (1955), one of his most effective novels, tells of the murder of a native leader. Like Abrahams's first work with a Caribbean setting, *This Island, Now* (1966; revised 1971), it views the future of the Third World pessimistically. *The View from Coyaba* (1985) is the story of four generations of a Jamaican family and the struggle for black autonomy.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Critically assess the apartheid conditions experienced by Xuma

3.4 The Politics of Apartheid in Alex LaGuma's *A Walk in the Night*

Alex La Guma (1925-1986), a writer and political activist, was born to a "coloured" (mixed-race) family in Cape Town in 1925. Of French and Malagasy ancestry, he was involved in South African politics from an early age and was arrested for treason with 155 others in 1956 and finally acquitted in 1960. During the State of Emergency following the Sharpeville massacre, he was detained for five months. Continuing to write, he endured house arrest and solitary confinement. La Guma left South Africa as a refugee in 1966 and lived in exile in London and

Havana. He died in 1986. His parents were active in left wing politics and the labour movement, and La Guma grew up conscious of the political and socio-economic implications of South Africa's separatist policies. He did not begin writing fiction until after he turned thirty. He wrote five novels, over a dozen short stories and many political essays. He was repeatedly harassed by the South African government as a result of his political activities, and emigrated to England in 1966. Most of his work, fiction and non-fiction deal with South African subjects, focusing on the conflict between the races. Throughout his work, he stresses the importance of collective action and the need to care for others.

In his first novel, *A Walk in the Night* (1962), La Guma describes the political and social existence of the "coloured" people of the District Six slum in Cape Town. He examines the life of the district through the actions of four characters during the course of one night. He focuses on the decay and despair of the slum, whose residents are frequently too absorbed by their own miserable state to react to it, and thus suffer alone. In doing so, he explores the connection between rights and responsibilities through the unfolding of his characters' decisions and actions. La Guma describes the South African struggles through characters who are involved in political resistance, unlike the lonely victims of his earlier works. Although the main character reached the conclusion that collective action is essential to solving the problems of South Africa's system, the author uses flashbacks to reveal the squalor and despair which are the source of the political movement. The characters overcome the isolation and disconnectedness which plague the subjects in his earlier works in order to work together towards their goal.

Throughout his fictional writings about South Africa, La Guma explores the tension between human rights and social responsibility against the backdrop of the nation's separatist policies. The moral development of his characters is closely tied to their potential to improve their country's future. *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories* reveals La Guma as one of the most important African writers of his time. These works reveal the plight of non-whites in apartheid South Africa, laying bare the lives of the poor and the outcasts who filled the ghettos and shanty-towns.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

As a coloured, Alex La Guma reflects on his apartheid experiences. How true is this in the story?

3.5 The Politics of Apartheid in other Novels

Many African writers wrote about apartheid in South Africa. They wrote to criticize the evils against blacks in South Africa. Many poets, dramatists and novelists revealed in their works the various evils associated with apartheid. Literature is a product of environment. South Africans were shocked at the imperialists' posture of treating them like animals. They were reacting just the way the other parts of Africa were reacting. The world also reacted and imposed sanctions on the country. Nelson Mandela was used as super hero by some novelists in their works and in most cases there are typologies of him. The experiences of colonialism in Africa brought with it several odds in African continent because of the imperialists' economic interests. The colonial masters wanted to use every means possible to subject Africans towards accepting their religion and their political power.

West Africa battled indirect rule system with its incessant constitutional odds. The francophone were made to accept alien cultures as superior to theirs. In all these policies, the total aim is to make the Africans feel inferior and subjective in their own land. The imperialists applied every diplomatic and practical means towards actualizing their economic interests. The first step was to make the Africans feel inferior and thereby have feelings of underdevelopment. Most times, the imperialists used arms to achieve their aims. African writers recorded these dark historical days of Africa. However, the South African experience marked the height of these human degradations in Africa. Many African writers lamented the carnage and brutality. They wrote to express their belief in Africa and the hope that peace would return.

Many African novelists who wrote in the 60s and 70s reflected the South African experiences in their works and each of them wrote with the utmost desire to criticize the deadly system and draw world sympathy towards eradicating it. In some ways it worked as the world imposed sanctions on the system and forced them to step down.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Many African writers criticized apartheid. Explain thoroughly the experiences of colonialism in other parts of Africa.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Apartheid was a very ugly experience for Africans as it marked the height of imperialists' injustice. Africans were made to become slaves in their own land. They were subjected to all manners of injustices just to allow the whites have full control of the country. The black South

Africans and the coloured were the most discriminated as they received all manner of ill-treatment from the whites. Apartheid is not an experience to be forgotten in a hurry in African colonial history because Africans were not only brutally murdered, they were imprisoned, impoverished and enslaved. They were treated like animals, especially like beasts of burden. They were incarcerated, dehumanized and subjected to the most denigrated height of human injustice. Justice took time to come because the imperialists had to satisfy their greedy lusts against the backdrop of human justice and equity. Before sanctions began to be imposed on the traumatic government, many human rights bodies especially Amnesty International amongst others fought to ensure clear measure of justice.

The fight against apartheid was not easy. It took time, many years to be reacted to. Many South African writers were arrested, incarcerated and imprisoned. Most of them went on exile. They wrote mainly from outside the South African shores for fear of being killed. The two authors treated in this unit: Peter Abrahams and Alex La Guma were among the South African writers who told their apartheid tales from the outside. Most of them went back home after democracy was enthroned and peace, justice and equity returned.

5.0 SUMMARY

From the study of Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy* and Alex LaGuma's *A Walk in the Night*, we see two different accounts of the apartheid politics in South Africa. Peter Abrahams is black while Alex Laguma was Coloured. Both races were the most affected in South Africa. *Mine Boy* accounts for the injustices meted out to the blacks even in a black enclave where they were subjected as miners to excavate minerals for the development of the white enclaves. The blacks were ill-treated and made to live in utter impoverishment in shanty towns where no infrastructure is provided. There are clear pictures of anarchy, injustice and dehumanization as clearly presented in Xuma's narration.

A Walk in the Night paints clearer pictures of poverty and anarchy. The stories are written in gutter language for the realization of the true picture of things. We read the story and see the scenes painted in reality. We feel the pains of the people and record the memories of trauma. The South African political history is never a story of lies rather it is the story of a people who became victims of their environment because they have some natural resources which attracted the imperialists. South Africa is rich in diamonds and gold. In order to control these natural resources, the imperialists made life unbearable for the helpless indigenes of the land. The fight to restore democracy in the country took

the joint efforts of the church, the people, their writers and the humane world to actualize.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Attempt the following questions

1. What factors gave rise to apartheid in South Africa?
2. Trace the roles of Nelson Mandela in the destruction of apartheid policies in South Africa.
3. Explain the various racial make up in South African and the groups most discriminated against among them.
4. Explain the reason for Xuma's trauma in the Peter Abraham's *Mine Boy*.
5. Explain how Alex La Guma achieved the presentation of impoverishment in *A Walk in the Night*.
6. Differentiate between politics of land in East Africa and Apartheid politics in South Africa.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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La Guma, Alex. (1962). *A Walk in the Night*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Mbari.

UNIT 3 THE NOVEL IN INDEPENDENT AFRICA

CONTENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

From the independence of Ghana in 1957 through the 1960s there was a period of intense excitement about the potential of newly independent African countries. Leaders like Congo's Patrice Lumumba and Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah were seen as revolutionary icons on a par with Che Guevara. Through the 1970s this optimism turned to despair. Rather than pan-Africanist ideals spreading across the continent from vanguard states, the inertia and corruption that had dogged the more conservative countries became the norm. Activists and artists have been wrestling with the causes and solutions ever since.

By the time *Things Fall Apart* was published, another Nigerian, Cyprian Ekwensi, was already writing popular novels such as *People of the City* (1954) and *Jagua Nana* (1961) about the contradictions of colonial society. Similarly, another Kenyan writer, Meja Mwangi, has approached the problems of the post-colonial state from a different angle. His novels of modern Kenya also range from dealing with the Mau Mau in *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) to life in contemporary Nairobi in *Going Down River Road* (1976) or Aids in *The Last Plague* (2000). His thrillers reach a popular audience in Kenya. Such writers are relevant here, as the writers I have been discussing are consciously trying to relate to a popular audience themselves. Since the 1960s the amount and range of African writing available has increased—notably the number of women writers.

Still, the authors I have discussed fought for their alternative view to be seen and accepted. Achebe was one of the editors of the Heinemann African Writers Series, which helped popularise African writers. There

is an ongoing fight to defend resistance against romanticisation of empire, whether in the Iraq war or Niall Ferguson's attempts to rehabilitate the British Empire. Writers such as Achebe, Sembène and Ngugi remind us that alternatives are possible, and give us an idea of what artistic masterpieces will emerge from the current anti-globalisation movement.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, the students should be able to:

- identify novels that centre on independent African experiences
- see the different views of novelists in post-colonial Africa
- discuss the shift in focus from colonial experience to pure African experience
- appreciate the African novels as products of African experiences
- realize that African novelists in independent Africa concentrate on the individual than the society.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The colonial experience is not an experience that Africans would forget in a hurry. It had its positive and negative effects. The negative effects are quite numerous especially regarding the partitioning of Africa for western interests. The rise in intertribal wars, secessions, environmental degradation as a result of the exploration and mining of natural resources like oil, gold, diamond and the imposition of political leaders that rule according to western control among other factors constitute the bane of Africa's underdevelopment. However, the colonial experience brought with it western education, language and religion. These are positive because with the acquisition of languages like English and French, African countries joined the League of Nations that use the languages and interestingly these two languages are spoken by 70 per cent of the world population. Africans are now policy makers in the United Nations and Africans have had to be the secretary general of United Nations for years. Communication in these world languages created the room for this affinity. Religions like Christianity and Islam found their way to African shores thereby improving and/or adding to the moral development of Africans. Western education also afforded Africans the opportunity of studying and contributing to world development. It is on record that many Africans have distinguished themselves in many fields of learning.

One of the major concerns of African nations is how to extricate themselves from the grip of western interests. Many African nations fought for their independence because the western powers refused to relinquish power to the Africans in their own country. Liberia got an early independence in 1948 because of America's treatment of the place as a country where free slaves were resettled. Ghana in 1957, Nigeria got her independence in 1960. The last of the fight and the most grievous was the South African fight for independence. One question trailing these fights for independence was: Why did the colonialists find it difficult to allow Africans govern themselves? The basic answer was greed. They wanted to rule the world and acquire all the natural and economic benefits of Africa. They saw Africans as sub-humans who have no sense of culture and refinement. Unfortunately for the imperialists, the acquisition of western education by Africans, which was introduced mainly for the economic intentions, opened the critical minds of the African intellectuals who reasoned that Africans should be allowed to decide and rule their countries.

Another unfortunate aspect of western education was that it inculcated western values, culture and politics on the African intellectuals who eventually took over power after the exit of the colonial masters. The point now remains that it was as if colonialism was removed and replaced with colonial attitudes, power, knowledge, politics, greed and all manners of abuse. The masses now fight to restore sanity and cultural values of the Africans. The masses suffer from the corruption which emanated from the imperialists and now being practised by the African ruling class. The African writers, just like African historians, have been recording the African experiences in independent African states.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Critically assess the negative and the positive aspects of colonialism and how they affected the independent African countries.

3.2 The Essence of African Independence

Independence to Africans marks a new dawn. It marks the beginning of greater things and hopes. It marks the hope for economic, social, cultural and human development for the nations. It marks a new phase of history and experience. It marks the beginning of true politics by the people for the people. It marks a period of re-orientation from the shackles of colonialism to the goodness of internal rulership. It marks the end to western slavery in governance. Independence is hoped to bring about peace and an end to rancour, greed, parochialism, anarchy, brutality and economic sabotage. Independence is expected to accord Africans respect for being able to pilot their affairs without interference. These dreams

have come to a stalemate as African leaders have been exhibiting the same, if not worse than the colonial pattern of politics. The African intellectuals and ruling class are products of the same evil they fought against. The African writers have been examining what the African leaders have been doing with the power they got from the imperialists.

Apart from the early experimental novelists like D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola who went back to the African oral tradition to tell their tales, the later works examined the colonial experiences and post-colonial situation. Chinua Achebe has had to write about African historical experiences. *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No longer at Ease* are creative accounts of the colonial phase in Africa. *A Man of the People*, *Girls at War* and *Anthills of the Savannah* are post-colonial or neo-colonial accounts. However, Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City*, the first before Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, is an account of the life in the city of Lagos in contrast to the life in the rural settings. The effects of colonialism on the lives of the people in the city are juxtaposed with the people in the rural setting. The city is presented as a symbol of negativity because of the excesses exhibited by the Africans who practice western lifestyle.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the major concern of Africans for fighting for independence and how did African writers capture it?

3.3 Independence of Ghana in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*

Armah's first and best-known novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are not Yet Born* (1968), describes the life of an unnamed rail worker who is pressured by his family and fellow workers to accept bribes and involve himself in corrupt activities in order to provide his family with material goods. The other workers who accept bribes are able to live a prosperous life, while he and his family live from paycheck to paycheck as a result of his honesty. At times he perceives himself as a moral failure for not providing his family with the money which would allow them to have the beautiful things that they seek. His honesty also makes him a social misfit, and he is a man who is truly alone. The book is filled with images of birth, decay and death, most notably in the form of a manchild who goes through the entire life cycle in seven years. This manchild is a metaphor for post-independence Ghana.

The novel depicts with bewildering harshness post-independence Ghanaian society. The temporal setting coincides with the twilight of Kwame Nkrumah's administration. The work was in part motivated by

the author's disappointment with the sudden collapse of the socialist democratic ideal inaugurated at independence in 1957, although the problem was not peculiar to Ghana but in most post-independent African nations. Nkrumah's regime was like the public waste disposal receptacle (depicted in the novel), which holds much promise in its 'gleaming whiteness' when it was first installed. But it is soon overwhelmed by moral filth and decadence. Hence, the socialist ideals upon which independence was erected were no longer decipherable.

The man child has all the features of a human baby and within seven years it has completed the cycle from infancy to adulthood, to old age and natural death. 'The manchild looked more irretrievably old, far more thoroughly decayed than any ordinary old man could ever have looked' (63). The harsh economic climate which fuels corruption in the society also results in a low sense of self-worth among the people as paradoxically expressed in a writing on the toilet wall: 'PRAY FOR DETENTION/JAILMAN CHOP FREE' (106). There is a collapse of the distinction between freedom and bondage in this newly independent nation. Armah captures his pessimism through the Teacher, a character who has a clear perception of the origin and nature of the nation's crises. It is as if the whole essence of independence is not to dismantle the colonial structure, but to push a few black men closer to the former colonial masters (126).

In its style of narration, characterization and setting, *The Beautiful Ones* does not present a sequentially ordered story of a protagonist whose life affects the course of events in the universe of the novel. Causality as narrative principle is displaced for episodocity. In fact, much of the narration takes place in the interiority of the protagonist, the man and his friend, the Teacher. Armah wraps in symbols and metaphors a nation that is firmly, almost irretrievably, entangled in the web of neo-colonial dependence, where corruption becomes infectious. Examples of such symbols include the *banisterat* the Railway administration building, the public lavatory, the toilet in the man's house and the chichidodo. The untimely decay is further shown through the interconnections of opposites—light and darkness, gleam and gloom, newness and decay, sameness and difference. The preponderance of those who participate in the popular game of graft informs the author's gloomy apprehension of reality. They include the bus conductor at the beginning of the novel, Amankwa the timber contractor, the space allocation clerk, the driver of the bus on the way to Cape Coast who offers a bribe to the police, the driver of the bus at the end of the novel, the landlord who is a party loyalist, Zaccharias Lagos, Abednego Yamoah and Koomson.

The man is a sort of allegorical figure who hovers indistinctly in the realm of familiar reality. He feels completely apart from all that takes

place around him, more often seen on the road, going to work, returning home, visiting the Teacher or the Koomsons. His motivation for movement is ironically not so much a striving to make things better, but a psychological response to failure ‘that would not let him rest in peace’ (46). His life shows how Herculean a task it is to steer clear of corruption in a society with distorted social values. Essentially, he is a one-dimensional character who is not potent enough to change things around him. The only change observed in him is in the direction of deep cynicism, evident in his compromise. The man who rejects the offer of a bribe from Amankwa the timber contractor not only aids the escape of a corrupt minister from the hands of the law, but also asks the boatman to increase the bribe being offered to the night watchman who is standing in the way of a timely escape of Koomson: ‘give it to him, if there’s another one’ (176).

The novel begins with the man going to work at dawn in a decrepit old bus. For dirtying the bus with saliva, the bus conductor insults him. His movement from the bus stop to his office at the Railway Administration offers snapshots of physical and moral decadence—individual and collective—the banister, the ceiling fan. Whatever still retains some physical allure like the Atlantic Caprice is connected with rot. At the office, the man exemplifies the drab life of the Ghanaian bureaucrats. Poorly paid workers trudge from one brief moment of prosperity to long days of penury (Passion Week). To make up, they create opportunities to extract reward, using their offices. The public officer shirks his responsibility or delays its performance. That creates a condition for desperation, which the officer explores to advantage. That is the situation when Amankwa approaches the man to get his timber transported from the bush for a reward. The man declines the offer and tells his wife about it at home. But rather than being commended, his wife sarcastically refers to him as ‘Chichidodo’, a bird that hates excrement but feeds on maggots. It deepens his condition of alienation, which Abiola Irele describes as ‘a willed movement out of the self’ (1982: 25).

To escape further insult, the man visits the Teacher; another alienated being, who has withdrawn into solitude in order to escape participating in the general game of graft. Colonial and independence struggles produce no true saviours, but physical and emotional wrecks like Sister Manaana, Egya Akon and Slim Tano. Pressure from the man’s family further deepens his confusion. An attempt by his wife and his mother-in-law to get rich through a fishing boat partnership business fails. Koomson only fools them. But beyond the personal, the general despondency provides the enabling environment for a forceful overthrow of the government. Politicians of the old regime become birds of prey, hunted by the new rulers. Koomson escapes from the country

with the active collaboration of the man. The humiliating process of his escape through the lavatory and the harbour underscores the vanity of irresponsible power. The novel ends with the man returning home from the harbour. The coup has not really changed anything fundamentally in the life of the nation. Soldiers and police still extort kola—a euphemism for a bribe—from travellers. The man is going back to his home, ‘the land of the silent ones’, and his dull working environment.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Critically comment on the basic symbolic reference used by Armah in *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*, to reveal the corrupt independent state of Africa

3.4 Independence and Neo-Colonialism in Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow*

Though he has continued to write on both literature and politics, it was not until 2006 that another novel was published in English, the epic *Wizard of the Crow*. The book is a satire on neo-colonialism and the attitudes of the black ruling class. The Free Republic of Aburiria—a surrealistically exaggerated Kenya—is governed by a dictator known only as the Ruler. His three fawning ministers have each undergone plastic surgery to enlarge respectively their eyes, ears and tongue, the better to see, hear and denounce dissent. In a luxurious world separated from the suffering poor, the ministers compete to flatter the Ruler. To celebrate his birthday one suggests that they build a tower to heaven, so that the Ruler will be able to pop in on god.

Out in the city the impoverished Kamiti accidentally gains a reputation as a powerful sorcerer, the *Wizard of the Crow*. Along with the radical political activist and feminist Nyawira he uses his notoriety to help the poor and cure the rich of their various illnesses with his “magic” mirror. The most debilitating of these illnesses is “whiteache”, which incapacitates sufferers through a burning desire to be white, like their old colonial masters.

All through the book the Aburirian government try to get the Global Bank to fund Marching to Heaven, but are set back again and again by the activity of the poor, and particularly a group of militant women. Ngugi says of the book: “I was very much influenced by the trickster tradition. The trickster character appears in tales all over the world. In West Africa it is Anansi the spider. Elsewhere it is Hare or Tortoise. The trickster is very interesting because he is always changing. He always questions the stability of a word or a narrative or an event. He is

continually inventing and reinventing himself. He challenges the prevailing wisdom of who is strong and who is weak.”

The main characters Kamiti (“of the trees”) and Nyawira (“she of work”) are archetypal figures, and appear to represent a number of things, including the rural/urban division, and black pride versus class struggle. However, there is a price to pay for making the characters archetypes. One of the strengths of *God’s Bits of Wood* is in the subtle complexity of the portrayal of the strike and its participants. In Ngugi’s books *Devil on the Cross* and *Wizard of the Crow* most of the struggle takes place off stage.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Assess the presentation of neo-colonial situations in Africa as presented in *Wizard of the Crow*.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the African novel gained momentum at a time of social upheaval in Africa. There were intense nationalist activities challenging the whole idea and practice of colonialism in Africa. Yet the educated Africans that is the new bourgeoisie or elite was a product of missionary education. The colonial powers had acquiesced to granting political, but not economic and cultural independence to its colonies. That led the new African social elite to engage in artistic form inherited from the West but inspired by local tradition.

For example, in 1952 Amos Tutuola wrote *The Palm-wine Drinkard* based on Yoruba mythology, using African folktale tradition as form. He was followed in 1953 by Camara Laye with *L’Enfant noir* (translated into English as *The African Child* and later in the American edition as *The Dark Child*), an episodic novel, which relied heavily on African oral tradition to vaunt the merits of the African past, tradition and civilization to a deaf world. In 1958 and from an historical perspective, Chinua Achebe published the novel *Things Fall Apart*, which set out in the very words of its author, “to set the score right about my [his] ancestors.” Ngugi wa Thiong’o followed in 1964 with *Weep Not Child*. It was the year of Kenyan independence and the novelist was making an urgent call to Africans to embrace education and enterprise as a way of ending Western imperialism and Indian entrepreneurship on the eastern coast of Africa.

If the genre of the novel came to dominate the literary scene, it was due in part to its ability to borrow from tradition, but more importantly, it

was a means that those educated in a colonial context, could understand and use to herald African values outside and inside Africa.

However, African writers, like nationalists, politicians and scholars, have shown an abiding concern with the condition of Africa before, during and after colonialism. Their literary creations need to be considered along with other modes of social inquiry in a bid to achieve a holistic understanding of the root of the continent's unending crises. They are also necessary in the task of re-making Africa. From a wide range of theoretical perspectives, scholars have interrogated the challenges of governance and development in contemporary Africa. Since the 1950s, the quest of African nations for political liberation and socioeconomic transformation has remained at the fore of discourse among politicians, social researchers and intellectuals—a group to which creative writers belong. Expectedly, from dependency theory to Marxism, from a functionalist approach to modernization and post-modern options, prescriptions for the continent's development are as varied as the perceived symptoms of its ailment.

5.0 SUMMARY

Unfortunately, political independence has not resulted in the much desired freedom and transformation. The elite, who took over power from the colonialists, rather than dismantling colonial structures of social injustice and oppression merely, preserve them for opportunistic ends. Thus, the post-independence years in many ex-colonies of Africa are characterized by indices of under development: economic dependency, huge local and foreign debts, ethno-religious violence, mass unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, electoral fraud, corruption, inadequate or dysfunctional infrastructure and so on. Neo-colonialism concentrates political and economic power not in the hands of the people but in the hands of minority elite whose loyalty seems to be more toward the advanced nations of Europe/America.

In this regard, many African novelists contend that the source of Africa's underdevelopment is the dislocation of indigenous social formations by Euro-Arabian imperialism. That dislocation accentuates crises of development after independence. Efforts to address the problem should, therefore, begin with a constructive engagement with and not a destructive displacement of the past (as imperialism implies). They commend a social formation that promotes partnership, co-operation, democracy and good governance. Here, self-reliant, communitarian and egalitarian principles of traditional African societies is suggested. They advocate with great clarity a system of education that has Africa as its starting point, in the study of the world—a system that truly seeks to liberate African intelligence to work for the benefit of the

continent. These novels interrogate the nature and causes of, and possible solutions to, the myriad of problems confronting Africa. However, there seems to be a measure of agreement about the negative impact of the trans-Atlantic and trans-Sahara slave trade, Euro-Arabian domination as well as neo-colonialism, on Africa's well-being by most post-independent African novelists. As Mazrui rightly submits, African societies are marked by 'conquerability, docility, malleability, and fundamental inferiority'. All these are depicted in African novels about the post independence era.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Attempt these questions:

1. What factors were responsible for the agitation of independence by African countries?
2. Explain the major discontent of African novelists in the new independent Africa.
3. Critically assess the state of Ghana immediately after independence as exemplified in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*.
4. Ngugi believes that even after independence most African countries are still under the grip of European manipulations. Explain this issue with reference to *Wizard of the Crow*.

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UNIT 4 POLITICS OF CORRUPTION

CONTENTS

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 - 3.2 The Politics of Corruption in *No Longer at Ease*
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Corruption is the act of exploiting the society by taking undue advantage of political power to accumulate common wealth as personal property. Corruption comes in various forms: bribery, manipulation of political roles, rigging, financial misappropriation, stealing from public treasury, giving of nonexistent contracts, etc. One of the most endemic problems African nations have been faced with since the exit of colonialism is the problem of corruption. African leaders have been exhibiting all types of corrupt practices that have hampered the proper development of African states. There have been underdevelopments in many aspects of African lives due to the cases of financial misappropriation.

African writers have been recording with much accuracy the changing tensions in their society. After the colonial experiences, there was a hope of new beginning. There was a hope of a greater tomorrow in the hands of the leaders. The effect of these corrupt practices resulted in borrowing from the World Bank/ IMF for all Third World countries seeking its loans to restructure its economy by engaging in market reforms, privatization, deregulation, liberalization, devaluation of its currency and a minimalist role of the state. The goal of the policy reforms was to diversify the economic base by allowing the private sector to drive the economy based on the principle that this process would generate economic growth that will reduce the observable cases of inequality, unemployment, poverty in the economy.

All the reform proposals were also aimed at enriching the educated Africans. In discussing the role of colonial education, Walter Rodney shows that the roots of neocolonialism lie in colonialism. This shows

that African literature have been recording that neocolonialism is the result of a historical process of class formation by colonialism. Absolutely central to neocolonialism, is the formation of classes or strata within a colony which are closely allied to and dependent on foreign capital, and which form the real basis of support for the regime which succeed the colonial administration.

In this unit, we shall explore how the theme of corruption is treated in at least two select African novels. This will enable us appreciate the efforts of African novelists at attacking and/or satirizing corruption in order to correct it.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students will be able to:

- see African writers as people that are conscious change agents in their societies
- appreciate the attack on corruption by African novelists
- understand that African elites imitate western values which corruption is a part of.
- assess the regular occurrence of corruption in African novels as a reflection of Africa's worries.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Since the exit of the Europeans from African shores, the educated Africans have been in control of political powers in their various countries. Many African writers believe that African literature exists in a historical continuum. For example, neocolonialism prevails today in Africa because of the continuation after "independence" of the economic, political and social practices established by colonialism. An analysis of the economic, political and social contradictions created by colonialism has revealed that the state of anomy in Africa is created by colonialism which has hampered Africa's development. African writers, according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o are "sensitive needles" that record the tensions and conflicts in their ever changing societies.

Corruption which comes in various forms has been the key factor hampering Africa's development. Most African writers especially those that wrote after colonialism, have recorded the existence of these strange acts of corruption among the educated elite who are occupying the political posts. Many Africans thought that independence would bring a

change but it turned out to be a worse aspect of colonial administration. Some novels like Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, A Man of the People, *Anthills of the Savannah*, Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born* amongst other works have treated the issue of corruption with disdain by outlining in major plots of stories, how corruption has been the bane of Africa's underdevelopment. We shall study two of the novels mentioned here to show how this theme is treated.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain critically how European education facilitated corruption in Africa.

3.2 The Politics of Corruption in *No Longer at Ease*

No Longer at Ease is a 1960 novel by Chinua Achebe. It is the story of Obi Okonkwo, who leaves his village for a British education and a job in the Nigerian colonial civil service, but who struggles to adapt to a Western lifestyle and ends up taking a bribe. The novel is the sequel to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which concerned the struggle of Obi Okonkwo's grandfather Okonkwo against the changes brought by the English people.

The novel opens with the trial of Obi Okonkwo on a charge of accepting a bribe. It then jumps back in time to a point before his departure for England and works its way forward to describe how Obi ended up on trial. The members of the Umuofia Progressive Union (UPU), a group of Igbo men who have left their villages to live in major Nigerian cities, have taken up a collection to send Obi to England to study law, in the hope that he will return to help his people navigate English colonial society. But once there, Obi switches his major to English.

Obi returns to Nigeria after four years of studies and lives in Lagos with his friend Joseph. He takes a job with the Scholarship Board and is almost immediately offered a bribe by a man who is trying to obtain a scholarship for his little sister. When Obi indignantly rejects the offer, he is visited by the girl herself who implies that she will bribe him with sexual favours for the scholarship, another offer Obi rejects.

At the same time, Obi is developing a romantic relationship with Clara, a Nigerian girl who eventually reveals that she is an *osu*, an outcast by her descent, meaning that Obi can not marry her under the traditional ways of the Igbo in Nigeria. While he remains intent on marrying Clara, even his Christian father opposes it, and his mother begs him on her deathbed not to marry Clara until after her death, threatening to kill

herself if Obi disobeys. When Obi informs Clara of these events, Clara breaks the engagement and intimates that she is pregnant. Obi arranges an abortion, which Clara reluctantly undergoes, but she suffers complications and refuses to see Obi afterwards.

All the while, Obi sinks deeper into financial trouble, in part due to poor planning on his end, in part due to the need to repay his loan to the UPU and to pay for his siblings' educations, and in part due to the cost of the illegal abortion.

After hearing of his mother's death, Obi sinks into a deep depression, and refuses to go home for the funeral. When he recovers, he begins to accept bribes in a reluctant acknowledgement that it is the way of his world.

The novel closes as Obi takes a bribe and tells himself that it is the last one he will take, only to discover that the bribe was part of a sting operation. He is arrested, bringing us up to the events that opened the story. Obi Okonkwo, grandson of the protagonist in *Things Fall Apart*, is the pride of his Nigerian village, Umuofia. The villagers pooled their money to send one native son off to England to be educated and Obi was chosen. Now he has returned to a prestigious job with the civil service in Lagos-he's the Administrative Assistant to the Inspector of Schools. He bears the burden of his people's expectations but his exposure to Western culture has distanced him from tribal life and though he is now earning a magnificent living by their standards, he has trouble making ends meet as he tries keeping up with the Joneses in the big city. Borrowing money, he ends up "digging a new pit to fill up an old one."

Further complicating matters is his love affair with the lovely Clara, an osu, one of the socio-religious outcasts who also figured prominently in *Things Fall Apart*. As financial and romantic pressures continue to mount and his beloved mother sickens and dies, Obi must also deal with temptation, offers of money and sex if he will use his position to assist scholarship applicants. For as long as he can, Obi juggles all of these problems, but gradually they come crashing down on him.

More directly than almost any author I'm aware of, Chinua Achebe faces head on the issues which confront the developing nations in a post-Colonial world. In *No Longer at Ease*, even as he pokes fun at the remaining English bureaucrats and their condescending ways, he honors their tradition of relatively honest civil service. Meanwhile, he questions whether at least this first generation of natives who are replacing the departing Europeans are truly prepared to meet the same standards or whether a slide into corruption is nearly inevitable.

Obi is a decent enough man and he has the best of intentions, but he gets in way over his head, bringing tragedy down upon himself and disgrace to his village. His situation, as portrayed by Achebe-caught between the traditions and expectations of his village on the one hand and the modern ways and legal constraints of the West on the other-puts him in an untenable position, one where something must give. Achebe offers a fully realized portrait of one of those returned who are "no longer at ease," aliens in their own country. It's a terrific book.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What factors are responsible for Obi Okonkwo bowing to the act of corruption?

3.3 The Politics of Corruption in *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born by Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah tells the story of a nameless man who struggles to reconcile himself with the reality of post-independence Ghana. He works at a railway station and is approached with a bribe; when he refuses, his wife is furious and he can't help feeling guilty despite his innocence. The novel expresses the frustration many citizens of the newly-independent states in Africa felt after attaining political independence. Many African states like Ghana followed similar paths in which corruption and the greed of African elite became rampant. Corruption in turn filtered down to the rest of society and the 'rot' that characterized post-independent Ghana in the last years of Nkrumah is a dominant theme in the book. The novel provides a description of the existential angst of the book's hero who struggles to remain clean when everyone else around him has succumbed to 'rot'. [Refer to Module 2 Unit 3 Section 3.3 for more details on *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*].

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

The Man is a victim of corruption even as he denies being a part of it. Explain thoroughly.

3.4 The Politics of Corruption in Other Novels

Colonial education did more than corrupt the thinking and sensibilities of the African; it filled him/her with abnormal complexes which alienated him/her from the needs of his/her environment. Colonial education has thus dispossessed Africans from developing their societies. The narrator in Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger*, for instance, is culturally alienated because of his Western education. In

Mission to Kala by Mongo Beti, Medza's role model is America. Medza cannot make decisions in relation to the needs of his society nor have a new vision relevant to African society. He sees everything Africa as odd. He prefers being corrupt and acting according to the dictates of western values that are detrimental to his African belief system. Medza's colonial education makes him a privileged political and economic functionary in a colonial system that militates against the interests of his own people. The neocolonial situation in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* is a legacy and a logical consequence of the situation depicted in Beti's *Mission to Kala*. Thus, Colonial education did more than corrupt the thinking and sensibilities of the African, it filled him/her with abnormal complexes which de-Africanized and alienated him/her from the needs of his/her environment.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Briefly explain how corruption as theme has been applied in some African novels.

4.0 CONCLUSION

According to Walter Rodney, "The educated Africans were the most alienated Africans on the continent. At each further stage of education, they were battered and succumbed to the white capitalist system, and after being given salaries, they could then afford to sustain a style of life imported from outside . . . That further transformed their mentality." (96) This was the case with Obi Okonkwo in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. He was a man from the great lineage of Okonkwo who would do anything positive to retain his image in his community. Okonkwo is a man who believes in self struggle rather than cheap accolades. He rose to the highest position in his society by hardwork and dedication. But obi Okonkwo seemed different from him. He was pushed to take bribe and even to marry an Osu (outcaste). In *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*, we see The Man struggling to come to terms with the rot in his society. He discovers that the colonialists have implanted corruption and other types of social vices on the African society. Before colonialism and with their indigenous learning mode, Africans had a system of justice and decency; truth and sincerity were the order of the society.

5.0 SUMMARY

Colonial education, therefore, creates black elite to succeed it and perpetuate its political and economic interests in the post-independence period. This links African literature of the two periods because neocolonialism is the result of a historical process of class formation by colonialism. Central to neocolonialism, is the formation of classes or

strata within a colony which are closely allied to and dependent on foreign capital, and which form the real basis of support for the regime which succeed the colonial administration. It is clear that African elite are imitating the characteristic behaviours of their masters who have inculcated the act of corruption into them.

African writers have responded to this social malaise. They have recorded in several ways the different manifestations of corruption in their countries. They have created works of fiction out of their social and political experiences impinging on the very acts of corruption. The two novels treated here have represented the theme of corruption by revealing the various causes of such ills. It is clear that Obi Okonkwo and *The Man* are victims of foreign cultures in Africa. Obi is a product of western education which alienated him from his culture while *The Man* is a product of the same western education but refused to bow even as he sees himself unable to fight the cankerworm alone. At the end both of them compromised as they became a disgrace to their society and culture.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Attempt the following questions:

1. Explain thoroughly what corruption means.
2. Explain thoroughly how Armah and Achebe captured the theme of corruption in the two novels treated in this unit.
3. According to Walter Rodney, "The educated Africans were the most alienated Africans on the continent..." How correct is this statement?
4. How correct is the claim that corruption is part of human nature as every literature reflects it.

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UNIT 5 POLITICS OF MILITARISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
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- 3.0 Main Content
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 - 3.2 The Politics of Militarism in *A Man of the People*
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Military politics is one of the unfortunate offshoots of colonialism in Africa and consequently a recurrent theme in the African novel. In African culture, there are people traditionally trained to fight wars in case of external aggression. These trained men are often seen in the time of need. They obey those occupying political or traditional executive positions that they vowed to protect. They do not imagine themselves occupying the political positions as heads of government or heads of their communities. However, when the colonialists came into Africa, they trained Africans in their art of wars. They exposed Africans to wars by recruiting them into fighting the first and the second world wars. These African military men encountered European soldiers in battle field. They learnt new logistics of military intelligence.

Some of them were later trained in military tactics abroad and in some of such trainings they were taught on how to govern their countries as corrective governments. This led to the emergence of military governors and presidents in Africa some of who later turned into brutal monarchs in their countries. We have had such tyrannical leaders as Field Marshal Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, General Charles Taylor of Liberia and General Sani Abacha of Nigeria. We still have Muarmar Ghadaffi of Libya amongst others still governing with military might in their countries.

More so, the political scenes in Africa are occupied by retired military men who still hunger for power in their countries. Most of these military leaders still govern the people like the military they are: imposing decrees, violating human rights, imposing sanctions on the people and introducing stringent governmental protocols.

African writers in these countries have been recording these experiences for the world to read and react. In this unit, we shall use two African novels to explore how African novelists have treated the theme of militarism in their novels.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit the students should be able to:

- understand the reasons for military politics in Africa
- assess the extent of military damage in African politics
- appreciate the use of militarism as theme in African fiction
- identify African fiction with military politics as subject matter.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The military rulers who tasted power never wanted to relinquish power. For instance, since Nigeria's independence 48 years ago, the military have served in the political arena for over 30 years. The military rulers held on to power with endless promises of democracy. Many African writers who wrote about militarism have presented them as being corrupt more than the people they are supposed to correct. Most of them developed into being dictators like Muarua Ghadaffi of Libya and the late Sani Abacha of Nigeria. Many African countries are still under the grip of militarism because it is either their leaders are military rulers or ex-military in civilian rulership. One still sees the same military politics even as the people are hopeful of a democratic government in place.

Many Africans believe that military politics was a reaction to the corrupt practices of the political class. For instance, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* was described as a prophetic work because it was launched almost at the brink of the first military coup d'état in Nigeria. Chinua Achebe believed then that the corruption going on among the First Republic politicians in Nigeria might trigger off a possible coup as a corrective measure. However, this dream of correction turned into pure anarchy as the military leaders projected their militarism as tactics in governance. These military rulers siphon the people's economic base and save huge sums of money in foreign accounts. They turn the country's treasury into their personal accounts. The situation seems very pathetic.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What factors led to the rise of military politics in Africa?

3.2 The Politics of Militarism in Achebe's *A Man of the People*

In *A Man of the People*, two contrasting groups of people, one from a political base and the other from a social aspect base in West Africa are presented. The groups are the old and the new generations of politicians and two characters represent them. Odili, the narrator, represents the new intellectual generation, while Chief Nanga, Odili's former teacher, represents the old style of politicians. The conflict between the old and new ways is portrayed through the two characters as they not only disagree and quarrel over political views but also women. The story ends with a military coup that foreshadows the Nigerian Revolution of 1966. Chinua Achebe proved to be a better prophet than any of the political scientists, in his writing of the novel. Achebe captures the inside reality of the lives of the contrasting characters as he demonstrates energy and brightness as well as violence and corruption.

In the novel, Chief Nanga is referred to by the narrator, Odili, as a man of the people, and the most approachable politician in the country. He is the minister of culture and his speeches to the public represent everything that a politician should do and be. But as Odili tells the story, it becomes clear that Chief Nanga does not practice what he preaches. The money that is supposed to go towards helping his community he uses instead to build four-storey buildings, which he rents out for profit.

Chief Nanga is supposed to be standing up for the tradition and beliefs of the pre-colonial African culture by defending the common man and opposing the European-oriented post-colonial intellectuals. The politicians in this novel stand as an intermediary between the government and the common people but are portrayed by Achebe as the evil side. Chief Nanga learns to be greedy and learns how to win elections through the corrupt system of politics he was against in the first place. The important thing for Chief Nanga is that the people trust him. He relates to them more, because he considers himself closer to the common man and far away from the intellectual, who represents a more European style of living and thinking. By representing his country after colonialism he has the incentive to stay as far away from the European style of life and politics as possible. As Odili explains the story, however, Chief Nanga only tells the people what they want to hear about defending their culture and way of thinking, and Nanga acts in a voracious way to obtain what he wants in his personal life; money, power, and women.

Chief Nanga's corrupt way of leading the people by telling them one thing and doing another is what eventually brings his reign to an end. Nanga taught Odili when he was young and Odili respected and liked him as a teacher. He learned many things from him and was happy when

he heard he was first elected. But as Nanga grew more powerful within his office and country, Odili began to grow smarter and he became more aware of the corrupt reality. It was not finally realized though, until he actually had the chance to live with Chief Nanga and witness how Nanga abused his money and power by over-spending his money and having his way with the women he desired. Odili gives his insight on this situation when he narrates:

We ignore man's basic nature if we say, as some critics do, that because a man like Nanga has risen overnight from poverty and insignificance to his present opulence he could be persuaded without much trouble to give it up again and return to his original state. A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors the whole time. The trouble with our new nation as I saw it then lying on that bed was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say, to hell with it. We had all been in the rain together until yesterday.

He goes on to talk about his group of people as the smart and the lucky and how they had scrambled to the one shelter their former rulers left and taken it over. The metaphor here is very powerful and it really clarifies the point Achebe is trying to explain. The point is that a person who goes from having nothing (Nanga) to having everything is going to be more reluctant to go back to having nothing compared to someone that has had everything the whole time, thus making him more greedy to gain power and more defensive against giving up this power. Odili emphasizes that the new rulers were never indoors, but together in the rain, and they desperately needed to experience a little shelter. The arrival of the military seemed like an aborted dream to the politicians. The question now is: were the military able to bring about the desired change or correct the corrupt politicians? Chinua Achebe gave answer to this question in his last novel entitled *Anthills of the Savannah*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain clearly the reasons for the rivalry between Chief Nanga and Odili?

3.3 The Politics of Militarism in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

The novel starts out by describing a Cabinet meeting. After the session is closed it turns out that outside the palace there is a crowd of people from the province of Abazon who try to get to meet the President. The people are dissatisfied because, as it later turns out, Sam has caused them to suffer by shutting down water-holes in the province, which is suffering from drought. He refuses to meet the delegation. After this event, Ikem goes to meet the delegation. It turns out that he is in a way one of them, born and raised in Abazon, and has come to be greatly respected by the Abazonians as the famous editor of the National Gazette. When he leaves the Abazonian delegation that day, he is stopped by the traffic police because of some misdemeanour. It is later revealed that he was followed by State Research Council agents who needed proof that Ikem had actually visited the delegation in order to be able to accuse him of treason for siding with the rebellious Abazonians.

Some time after this, Ikem is fired from the National Gazette by orders from the President, who thinks Ikem's writing in the Gazette is too critical of his "administration". The President actually wants Chris to do the firing, but he refuses. After being sacked, Ikem makes a radical speech at the University of Bassa (the capital of Kangan). The speech is purposefully misquoted in the Gazette the next day, giving the impression that Ikem wants the President dead. He's charged for treason and conspiracy, soldiers come to pick him up from his home and shoot him dead, claiming it was an accident.

After this episode, Chris feels he can no longer work under President Sam as Commissioner for Information. He is afraid he is going to end up like Ikem, and goes into hiding. A while later, he too is charged with treason and becomes a fugitive for real. After a couple of weeks hiding, he decides to travel away from the capital to the province of Abazon. When he reaches the province, it turns out that there has been some kind of a coup d'état and the President has fled the country. Upon hearing this he joins a celebration on the street and meets a drunken policeman. By accident, the man shoots him dead.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chinua Achebe writes about the problems facing newly independent African states. The prevailing theme and the most visible one of these problems is the corrupt, dictatorial rule set up in Kangan (Nigeria) and most of the other "new" African states that let down the dreams and hopes that were associated with independence. Although the rulers were no longer European, and although they were a lot closer to the people than their European predecessors, they fairly soon distanced themselves from the people. The first instance of this

alienation in the novel is the way Sam deals with the problem of the Abazonian delegation. Instead of going out to meet them by himself, he assigns someone else to do it. The fact that he's built himself a luxurious lakeside mansion is another representation of this.

There is also the theme of oppressive dictatorial rule. The way Sam deals with Ikem is reminiscent of traditional totalitarian states, especially the Latin American juntas. This is also the case with freedom of speech in Kangan. The paper, apparently the only one in the country, is censored and orders regarding its contents often seem to come straight from the President.

Another theme of the book is described in Ikem's peculiar dilemma. Despite his position as editor of the Gazette, he wants to appear like just another Kangan worker. Therefore he doesn't ride a company car to work, but drives by himself in an old beat-up car. The dilemma is pointed out to him by a taxi driver: by driving himself, he is taking away a job opportunity from some poor Kangan chauffeur. The larger problem here is the position of the black, African elite in the new African countries, where the elite has traditionally been of European origin. There was no elite class in the pre-colonial period in Africa.

The novel also deals with the theme of being a been-to, an African who has come back to his country after a longer stay in the West. The main characters are all been-tos and this is reflected in the ways in which they try to position themselves in relation to the "common" Kangans. An example of this is how Chris relates to Emmanuel, a university student leader; and Braimoh, a cab driver.

There is a direct reference to the West in the scene in which Beatrice goes to a party that Sam has organized to impress an American journalist. The journalist wraps the President and the whole Cabinet around her finger, lecturing them about how Kangan should take care of its foreign affairs and debt. She represents the attitudes of the West to the African countries in general and their unequal standing in world politics. Rodney also observes that the colonial machinery created a military elite that later became military dictators in the post-independence era. A good example is Sam, the military despot in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Critically explain how Sam, the military president, exhibited dictatorial governance in Kangan.

3.4 The Politics of Militarism in other novels

Many African countries have had and still have military leaders in power. The state of these countries is totally pathetic because these military leaders have been ruling in violation of democratic procedures because they were not elected by the people. Most of them went into the executive power through coups and counter coups to the detriment of the masses. A country like Liberia and Sierra Leone just got extricated from the military grip. They had series of wars. Many countries in Africa that suffered wars and that had history of wars were the countries under military leaderships.

Nigeria in 1966 under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon experienced the most traumatic war because another military man Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu decided to secede with his people the Igbos because of the marginalization and killings of the people. They declared Biafran Republic but this was resisted by the Nigerian army. The war lasted three years. Many African countries like Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Kenya, and Mozambique have been having wars and they are under military rulers. Literature like history records these experiences. The writers in these countries have been writing literatures of commitment where they expose these sad history periods in their countries. Most times they go into exile so that they will not be killed for exposing the state of human carnage in their country. There are numerous novels treating the issue of militarism and wars in Africa.

Some writers have also treated the issue of militarism by exposing the ills that go on in military barracks, military base, and military headquarters. A novel like Frank Mowah's *Eating by the Flesh* is an incursion into a typical military camp and what they do wrong which ought to place them as people that lack the will power and the moral standing for governance. They kill each other. They lack human sympathy. They sleep with each other's wives. They rape their colleague's children amongst other atrocities. A close reading of Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* will expose so much about the odds of militarism from a global perspective. We shall learn more about this in the unit treating war novels.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the traumatic experiences of African countries with military leaders.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The role of the military in Africa has been more of the negative. As seen in the two novels under study, they come to correct but end up destroying what they ought to correct. A 'post-colonial' view of African history is an entirely ugly record because of the ugly military imposition of power. This study enables us to understand what a people have become in the process of a particular form of political and cultural contact. It tells of an important, even crucial, moment in a process of becoming a stable political nation. It acknowledges that colonialism was a fact of history that Africans can not dismiss urgently. Post colonialism, in this sense, is an age after innocence. But though not irrelevant, this approach to history can be a limiting, and possibly a misleading, one. Post-colonial African history thus becomes the story of the end of old history, of old identities, and of moral standing.

The military created regimes of trauma. In such regimes, national identity is a mere fabrication, defined by passports and legal instruments merely, a form of identity. In such a situation, history is the account of the post-colonial encounter because there are no longer nations and peoples, and there is nothing to remember or recall. The military reminds us that the experience of colonialism dissolves all identities, erases nationalities, makes destiny irrelevant and even problematic. It is different from the condition created by national histories, even when that history is rife with exile and dispersal. That is why it helps to see that *Anthills of the Savannah* is not about nation-building in the post-colonial era, but about the destiny of particular peoples, a destiny conceived as having a life and purpose of its own. The anthills of the savannah are eternal reminders of the many wild fires of every national history. Their only theme is renewal, a renewal that crashes at the point of hope. The coup in *A Man of the People* which ought to bring respite to the people ended up bring up a regime more traumatic than the preceding government.

5.0 SUMMARY

Novels of militarism are common in Africa because of the endless military leadership resulting from colonial experiences. We see Sam, Chris and Ikem as the residues of western colonial might entrenching western values in various ways in African polity. Clearly, of course, both Chris and Ikem, two of the principal thinkers in the novel, think they are intellectuals engaged in the building of a new and just post-colonial, or more exactly, a post-independence, society. Clearly, also, as the narrative suggests in its time-line, the old-style colonial era - the Age of European Empire - has passed, and has been replaced by the neo-colonial but they are wrong since they think act more like their colonial

predecessors. With all this present, it would not be totally absurd to see the action of the novel as post-history. Even so, the climax of experiences of the novel returns us, not to the country, but to the national trauma. The final issue is not about the future of the state, but the future of the people.

The struggle which the elder speaks about is the struggle of the Abazon people; and the path which will be kept open is not only the path to the redeeming ideas associated with Ikem, but the path to the future survival of Ikem's people in a world whose delimitation now includes the state of Kangan. There is no lament for Kangan at the end; only a re-grouping for another start in Abazon. The endless strife continues especially as the western world fuels it for their advantage. Chief Nanga, Odili and Max represent the same post colonial odds that prevailed much in the military era. There is often an endless run of anarchy in the African polity and the African novelists have been recording these experiences while suggesting a regeneration of ideas and ideals to make the African states anarchy free.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

- 1) Explain why African novelists use militarism as themes in their works
- 2) What are the reasons for military intervention in *A Man of the People*?
- 3) Sam, the military president, acted according to European directives in *Anthills of the Savannah*. How true is this statement?
- 4) There are no differences between Sam and Nanga. Explain the roles of the two major characters in the two novels under study here.
- 5) Assess the influence of colonialism on post-independent Africa as reflected in African novels of military themes.

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MODULE 3 VARIETIES OF THE AFRICAN NOVELS

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| Unit 1 | Anti-Colonial African Novel |
| Unit 2 | African Novel and Marxism |
| Unit 3 | Novels of Social Realities |
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UNIT 1 ANTI-COLONIAL AFRICAN NOVEL

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine what anti-colonialism entails in African novel. Most works of African literature in all genres have the thematic perspective of revealing mostly, the negative import of colonialism in Africa and on African people. Most elite Africans have come to realize that colonialism affected almost every aspect of African culture and sociology. There are reasons to believe that the educated Africans who embraced European values and attitudes have started retracting their colonial mentality and thereby exposing the evils associated with colonialism. African writers have been at the fore-front of this retraction. They have often exposed the evils of colonialism and have strongly proved that the anomalies in African politics and sociology stem from European indoctrination. Some African writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Sembene Ousmane, Ayi Kwei Armah amongst others have often focused on anti-colonial themes in their novels. They have often attacked African politicians, leaders, intellectuals and African who practise European ideals against their rich African values. We shall examine Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* in treating this theme.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- understand the reasons for anti-colonial themes in African novels
- appreciate African novels with anti-colonial themes
- discuss anti-colonial subject matters in African novels
- realize that African literature is often a reaction to history and experiences
- assess the basic historical reasons for anti-colonial novels.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The contemporary African novel is a vast phenomenon. However, that magnitude is perhaps the least of the difficulties facing the critic in attempting to capture a fair view of this ever-growing field. A more formidable problem arises from the fact that African writers are writing two different kinds of fiction. First, there is the social-realistic narrative convention that has been familiar to readers and still exists. Second, there is the other kind in which a new language prevails; this is relatively unfamiliar to many – perhaps even most – readers. This is premised on the awareness that there is always a close relationship between African literature and its historical context(s). The multiple paths that are followed include a thorough examination of the ideologies and context(s) within which the work was produced, the consideration of the expression of life of disenchantment and pain in the novel. All lead to the unmasking of the novel as a socially symbolic act, that is, a reflection of the problems of the author's immediate society, in particular, and the African continent in general.

Many African novelists have been termed anti-colonial because of the manner in which the African colonial experiences are attacked. It also exposes the traumatic effects of colonial power on Africa's development. Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have often been described as anti-colonial writers because they have often chronicled the experiences of Africans during colonial days. They write to draw sympathizers from non-Africans and to direct Africans properly in avoiding the repetition of such experience. Some other writers like Ayi Kwei Armah, Okot P' Bitek, Taban Lo Liyong, Cyprian Ekwensi are also among those who wrote anti-colonial novels.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

It is the duty of the writer to direct his society properly. Explain how anti-colonial novels achieved this.

3.2 Anti-Colonial Disillusionment in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*

Petals of Blood is widely regarded as an important work in Ngugi's career, in which he moves to reveal the anti-colonialist base in his early works. It is the first of Ngugi's novels which is fairly and squarely about independent Africa. *Petals of Blood* was received as a "political bombshell" in Kenya and elsewhere. The story is set in the small remote village of Ilmorog, which serves for Ngugi as a metaphor for developments throughout Kenya in the postcolonial era. Four characters, each originally from the larger nearby city of Limuru, make their way to the village. Each character comes to Ilmorog motivated largely by a desire to escape the pervasive malaise afflicting Kenya after Uhuru (independence); and each of the four characters serves to illustrate a different strategy for coping in the oppressive conditions of the new black-run country.

Godfrey Munira is a declassé bourgeoisie, the "black sheep" of an otherwise successful Christian family. His father Ezekiel Waweru is a wealthy and pious landowner who had been attacked by the Mau Mau rebels as a collaborator with the British colonizers. The change in regime has hardly affected his fortune; in fact, it has offered additional opportunities. Munira started on his path to "failure" when he is expelled for his relatively minor role in a student strike at the elite Sariana High School. After several years as an itinerant educator, during which time he marries a Kenyan "pagan" who converts to Christianity to ingratiate herself to her powerful in laws, Munira finds refuge as the headmaster of the poorly attended Ilmorog Elementary School. His strategy for coping with the new Kenya, until interrupted by events, is to keep his head down, or "quietism." Munira is preceded in arriving at Ilmorog by Abdulla, who shares to a lesser extent the schoolteacher's demoralization and has come to the remote village to run a small store. "I wanted to go deep into the country where I would have no reminder of so bitter a betrayal" (255). However, Abdulla has the psychological advantage over Munira of having participated as an active fighter in the liberation struggle, losing part of a leg in the process. Abdulla had also once worked in a shoe factory that experienced frequent labour disputes, which had caused him to become class conscious and to question the realities of the national economy:

He had asked himself several times: how was it that a boss who never once lifted a load, who never once dirtied his hands in the smelly water and air in the tannery or in any other part of the complex, could still live in a big house and own a car and employ a driver and more than four people only to cut grass in the compound? (136)

Abdulla copes by reinventing himself as circumstances demand, shifting his principles within a narrow range.

Soon Munira and Abdulla are joined by Wanja, another refugee from the city, the granddaughter of one of Ilmorog's elder matriarchs. A once promising student, Wanja had been shaken by a disastrous affair with the unscrupulous businessman Hawkins Kimeria. However, Wanja is not one to passively take life's blows, and survives by constantly metamorphosing into new roles. She abandons the infant child resulting from the affair, and after a brief career in the city as a "barmaid," arrives in Ilmorog to begin anew. She persuades Abdulla to hire her, transforming the sleepy store into a lively watering hole, and beginning a (largely platonic) partnership that will continue throughout the book. As the old Ilmorog is destroyed by "progress," Wanja finally succumbs to the apparent national creed of the new postcolonial Kenya:

This world ... this Kenya ... this Africa knows only one law. You eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you. [...] Kimeria, who had ruined my life [...] this same Kimeria was one of those who would benefit from the new economic progress of Ilmorog. Why? Why? I asked myself. Why? Why? Had he not sinned as much as me? That's how one night I fully realized this law. Eat or you are eaten. [...] Nothing would I ever let for free. [...] No, I will never return to the herd of victims. (291 - 294)

The final arrival in Ilmorog is Karega, another one-time student rebel expelled from Sariana, and former pupil of Munira (and erstwhile lover of the headmaster's late sister Mukami.) Like the others, he comes to Ilmorog seeking answers to his own situation amid the ubiquitous national confusion. Eventually, after a period of drunken dissipation in the city, Karega settles into Ilmorog as the assistant teacher in Munira's growing school. While sharing Wanja's and Abdullah's capacity for personal transformation, Karega resolutely refuses to accept the new status quo, seeking an answer in collective struggle. Dismissed from his Ilmorog teaching post by Munira's jealous machinations, Karega studies and travels, and eventually becomes a union organizer in the new Ilmorog. His character provides the clearest articulation of Ngugi's politics.

Ngugi places these four characters in remote Ilmorog, once a thriving commercial center, now inhabited only by those too old, young, feeble or tired to move to a city and its greater opportunities. A few of Ilmorog's older residents, such as Wanja's grandmother Nyankinyua, offer residual memories of the village's former glory. The community is presided over by Mwathi wa Mugo, the unseen and mysterious occult priest.

When a persistent drought threatens the very survival of the village's residents, Karega suggests a delegation travel to Nairobi to appeal for assistance from their Member of Parliament. The four former city dwellers lead a motley group of peasants on a pivotal trip that will forever change the fortunes of Ilmorog. Ngugi uses the delegation's reception in Nairobi to reveal the hypocrisy of various elite-run institutions in postcolonial Kenya. A church leader, Jerrod Brown, offers the ailing Ilmorog group mere "spiritual" sustenance, refusing to provide the weary travelers any food, water or shelter. The educational leader Chui is entertaining a select crowd and can't be bothered assisting poor villagers. Wealthy businessman Kimeria holds some members of the delegation hostage while raping Wanja. And Ilmorog's MP, Nderi wa Riera offers a reluctant welcome before unleashing the police on his ragged constituents for disturbing the (his) peace.

The most propitious event of the villagers' urban sojourn is their connection with "the lawyer," a liberal or social-democratic Kenyan who attempts to uphold the grand vision of Uhuru, using his education to assist Kenya's poor. The lawyer becomes the Ilmorog contingent's most important benefactor in Nairobi, offering them shelter, but more importantly becoming their advocate and spokesperson. The lawyer also benefits from the publicity surrounding the Ilmorog delegation's visit and rebuke by their MP, eventually gaining election himself to parliament.

The lawyer is also significant for helping to direct Karega into class-conscious political activism, through conversation, correspondence and shared reading materials. As he grows and develops his politics, Karega suggests something of author Ngugi's own dissatisfaction with African literature:

Imaginative literature was not much different: the authors described the conditions correctly: they seemed able to reflect accurately the contemporary situation of fear, oppression and deprivation: but thereafter they lead him down the paths of pessimism, obscurity and mysticism: was there no way out except cynicism? Were people helpless victims? (200).

When the lawyer is assassinated--with little doubt as a consequence of his reformist efforts in parliament--he provides another lesson to Karega: that relief from neo-colonial oppression won't come from elite institutions such as Parliament. The lawyer, though a relatively minimal presence in *Petals of Blood*, has crucial importance for relating Ngugi's political views. While hosting the Ilmorog delegation, the lawyer gives the most explicit account of how Kenyan liberation was sacrificed to the capitalist "monster-god." The lawyer also begins to transcend race and nationality, indicating the international class dimensions of the post-colonial dilemma. He relates his experiences in the United States, where he gained direct experience with racist violence and oppression directed against blacks:

Is this not what has been happening in Kenya since 1896? So I said to myself: a black man is not safe at home; a black man is not safe abroad. What then is the meaning of it all? Then I saw in the cities of America white people also begging ... saw white women selling their bodies for a few dollars. In America vice is a selling commodity. I worked alongside white and black workers in a Detroit factory. We worked overtime to make a meagre living. I saw a lot of unemployment in Chicago and other cities. I was confused. So I said: let me return to my home, now that the black man has come to power. And suddenly as in a flash of lightning I saw that we were serving the same monster-god as they were in America ... I saw the same signs, the same symptoms, and even the same sickness. (166).

After the pivotal Ilmorog delegation's visit to the national capitol, *Petals of Blood* concludes by relating the destruction brought to the old village by "progress." For a brief period the rains and optimism return to Ilmorog, allowing Karega and Wanja time to fall in love, realizing a brief shared moment of personal satisfaction. However, the village is soon visited by increasing intrusion from the city: a church, a police station, the African Economic Bank and eventually the Trans-Africa highway, which symbolically crushes the abode of the town's elder spirit Mwathi wa Mugo. The New Ilmorog becomes a boom town, complete with all the urban vices, led by the most despicable of selfish exploiters: Kimeria, Mzigo and Chui. Just as this demonic trio are about to plot their response to Karega's successful union agitation, they are consumed in a fire at Wanja's brothel started by Munira, a recent convert to fanatical Christian evangelism.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain how European influence affects African politics and government as presented in *Petals of Blood*.

3.3 Anti-Colonial Themes in *Arrow of God*

Arrow of God centres on Ezeulu, the Chief priest Ulu, the god that protects the whole villages of Umuaro. Ezeulu has been very careful in the management of the affairs of the village since his position as the Chief Priest bestowed on him powers akin to that of a political head in the village. Ulu the god is seen as the great protector of the village, revered and feared, so its priest is respected beyond the usual spiritual control to a political height. He determines the day for the new yam feast as he meticulously eats each of the select 12 yams at the appearance of every new moon. The eating of the last yam predetermines the date for the new feast.

Umuaro village is in peace until the arrival of the colonial masters into the hinterlands of Nigeria. They came with religion and their gun in order to force the natives to work within their whims and caprices. Ezeulu saw the whites as people with high wisdom. He sees their religion as something a little powerful. He decides secretly to send his son Oduche to the church in order to acquire their power. He was challenged by his arch-rival, Nwaka, of Umunneora village. Nwaka, the Chief Priest of Idemili, senses that Ezeulu's decision might affect the efficacy of Ulu. He openly challenges Ezeulu on the matter. The rivalry becomes severe when Oduche imprisoned a python in a box. He was attempting to kill the highly revered snake which is the symbol of worship of Idemili. More so, Ezeulu's insistence that the land, which was in dispute between Umuaro and Okperi, belonged to Okperi sparked more trouble for him. Although this sincerity on the land issue drew him closer to the colonial administrator in charge of the area, Captain Winterbottom, little did he know that it would cause much harm to the village of Umuaro. Captain Winterbottom had no option but to appoint him a Warrant Chief because of his sincerity and integrity. He refused the offer and was held in Winterbottom's custody for three months within which period he could not eat three sacred yams. He expected that his people would come and rescue him from the Whiteman's grip but they never budged. He was really provoked and vowed to make life miserable for them. He was expected to eat the three sacred yams he missed as a result of his arrest but he refused insisting that he would begin his count from the day he was released. Ezeulu's stubbornness led to famine and starvation in Umuaro Village because he refused to name the day for the new yam festival. In all the confusion, he lost his most beloved son, Obika and even went mad in the process. The confused

villagers had no option but to go to the Christian god for solace and protection.

The novel is anti-colonial because it exposed the inconsiderate attitude of the colonialists who believe that the Africans have no mind of their own. Imagine the detention of Ezeulu for refusing to accept an appointment from Winterbottom. He was treated with disrespect and unnecessarily detained which led to the famine in the land. Laws are imposed on the Africans as if they have no human rights. More so, the use of arms in settling local conflicts was intimidating. Africans were meant to believe that they were inferior to the whites.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Ezeulu and Captain Winterbottom represent two different cultures. Explain how Achebe presented them with regards to their sense of politics and religion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear from the two novels under study that Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe have revealed to a large extent, the negative influences of colonialism on Africans. They have explained how Africans were made slaves in their own countries and how African customs and tradition were manipulated to suit the interest of the colonial masters. Africans were given the orientation that they were inferior to the whites. They were told that African religion was fetish while the European religion was the only key to meeting God Almighty. They were taught that African culture and systems of government were impracticable and should be discarded. All these issues and more were attacked in the two novels under study and these are anti-colonial elements.

5.0 SUMMARY

Anti-colonial novels are reactions by African novelists to the evils of colonialism. Chinua Achebe stated in his authorial creed that he would be quite satisfied if his novels especially the ones he set in the past could do no more than make his readers realize that their past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans, acting on God's behalf, delivered them. He explained that Africans did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans. His novel *Things Fall Apart* was a direct reaction to Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* which was a novel filled with ugly pictures about Africa and the African people. Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and most African writers have been writing anti-colonial novels as a reaction to the ugly of presentation Africa by European writers. Most of Africa's

problems emanate from colonial times and there are evidences of European manipulation of African governments in order to have positive gains while imposing negative vices like war and injustice on the Africans.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

- 1) What was the major anti-colonial issue presented in *Petals of Blood*?
- 2) Explain the attack on Christian religion as presented in *Arrow of God*.
- 3) Defend the statement by Achebe that Africans did not hear of culture first from the Europeans.
- 4) If anti-colonial novels attack colonialism, what do they teach Africans?
- 5) Is it possible for a novel to be anti-colonial without discussing colonialism?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 AFRICAN NOVEL AND MARXISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we shall examine what Marxism is as a political and literary theory and how African writers have responded to it. Marxism is an economic and social system based upon the political and economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. While it would take veritably volumes to explain the full implications and ramifications of the Marxist social and economic ideology, Marxism is summed up in the Encarta Reference Library as “a theory in which class struggle is a central element in the analysis of social change in Western societies.” Marxism is the antithesis of capitalism which is defined by Encarta as “an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods, characterized by a free competitive market and motivation by profit.” Marxism is the system of socialism of which the dominant feature is public ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange.

Under capitalism, the proletariat, the working class or “the people,” own only their capacity to work; they have the ability only to sell their own labour. According to Marx a class is defined by the relations of its members to the means of production. He proclaimed that history is the chronology of class struggles, wars, and uprisings. Under capitalism, Marx continues, the workers, in order to support their families are paid a bare minimum wage or salary. The worker is alienated because he has no control over the labour or product which he produces. The capitalists sell the products produced by the workers at a proportional value as related to the labour involved. Surplus value is the difference between what the worker is paid and the price for which the product is sold.

Armed with this philosophy aimed at assessing the state of polity in African states, African novelists have been examining the political and economic situation of their countries with the aim of correcting the anomalies. Some of the anomalies include the steady rise of the rich while the poor get poorer resulting from the imbalance in the distribution of resources. The commoners or the masses are not fairly treated and they constitute the majority in the countries and reveal high poverty level because of the ever increasing poverty.

We are going to examine Festus Iyayi's *Violence* and Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* in the application of this philosophy in African novels.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- understand what Marxism is
- appreciate African novels with Marxist themes
- assess Marxist tendencies in African novels
- discuss the use of Marxism in African literature.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Since the independence of most African nations, there have been lingering imbalances in the distribution of the resources of the countries. An increasing immiseration of the proletariat occurs as the result of economic recessions; these recessions result because the working class is unable to buy the full product of their labors and the ruling capitalists do not consume all of the surplus value. A proletariat or socialist revolution must occur, according to Marx, where the state (the means by which the ruling class forcibly maintains their rule over the other classes) is a dictatorship of the proletariat. Communism evolves from socialism out of this progression: the socialist slogan is "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work." The communist slogan varies thus: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

Although the independence sought is ultimately achieved by African countries, nothing tangible has happened to the resolution of the crises of status and the economy. The economies still reflect the interest of the imperial power and the associated dominant groups. New forces and ideas come to the fore, presaging major social and economic changes. The society still reflects some characteristic social and economic structures created by colonial rule. African novelists like Ngugi wa

Thiong'o, Festus Iyayi, Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Maik Nwosu among others have been revealing Marxist ideals in their works. They have often examined what the elite are doing with powers left in their hands by the colonialists. They have often attacked the excesses of governance that impinges on the proper administration of the states. They have examined the various deceits, nepotism, injustice and all forms of economic sabotage in their countries. They are often seen as angry writers crying out for peace and justice in Africa.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the basic ideals of Marxism and why African writers adopt it as a way of presenting the African situation.

3.2 Marxism in Festus Iyayi's *Violence*

Socialist realism as exemplified in *Violence* questions an existing social order and articulates a revolutionary option. Capitalism is an economic system in which the factors of production are concentrated in a few hands resulting in the alienation of property from the direct producers - the workers. The means of production thus shifted, become the property of the capitalist - the movers of the bourgeois society. The direct result of this is apparently a dichotomy between two classes - the labourer (the worker) who receives his means of subsistence in exchange for his labour-power, and the capitalist who receives the worker's labour and appropriates all the proceeds arising from it. The worker only receives an insignificant portion of the proceeds only for survival. Social crisis is therefore bound to arise as a reaction by the exploited workers who are in the majority.

In the capitalist society the worker is an exploited and alienated. He is without capital or investment or ground rent and lives entirely on his labour. He is used "just like a horse needs only receive so as enables him work." He is not considered for leisure as a human being and rather than fulfill himself in the work, he does deny himself. He does not develop freely a physical and mental energy but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. While at work, the worker feels homeless because the work is not his own. Since he works for someone else, he does not belong to himself but to another person (ibid., pp. 177). These conditions are the consequent creation of the capitalist society as portrayed by Iyayi's *Violence*.

Idemudia, struggles with unemployment and poverty in a social background of class intolerance. Right from the cover design of the novel, Iyayi depicts clearly a class conflict; the bourgeois class is represented by a modern society, enriched with skyscrapers. The masses

are depicted in a dilapidated tent in a shanty slum. Idemudia unfortunately ends his secondary education in class four when his father could no longer pay his school fees. He is alternatively thrown into the labour market unprepared. He fails to secure employment after many years. Marries and has a son, he sends the child to the village. He is forced to hang around *Iyaro* for hire as a common labourer - a life of agony of having to feed a loyal and determined wife who grows increasingly bitter because of their condition. Iyayi portrays Idemudia's dilemma as not only arising from his poor education, but also lacking an opportunity to improve himself through his labour. In the Nigerian capitalism, even the educated are unsafe from exploitation. The bourgeois take the advantage of Idemudia's unskilled labour to exploit him, so that though he works hard, he is underpaid and his condition suffers consistent degeneration. Idemudia, his wife and his three friends, (Osaro, Omoifo and Patrick) represent the Nigerian worker. Their social dilemma and deprivation is the subject of Iyayi's criticism in *Violence*.

This explains the argument of Marx in his appraisal of capitalist ideals as the worker is simply exiled and dehumanized. An indebted Idemudia and his wife cannot pay their debts yet the man works hard but is paid so little – a paltry sum of N5 at the end of the month. Iyayi postulates that there is too much injustice in this system. The Nigerian employer who Queen Obofun represents is constructed as a slave driver who is insensitive of the basic needs of his worker. He is ever ready to extort and exploit especially those who lack the guts to say No! And Iyayi calls this *Violence*.

When a man is denied opportunity, of being educated, of getting a job, of feeding himself and his family properly, of getting medical attention cheaply, quickly and promptly, the act of violence is committed against him (ibid. pp. 193).

An overt contrast to this condition is the world of the opulent depicted by Obofun and his wife Queen, whose ill-gotten affluence places them on the apex of the society. The Obofuns whose wealth is accumulated through fraud in collusion with the government live in sheer luxury, own a fleet of cars, and own a chain of hotels. While Idemudia is so poor that he cannot even replace an old broom in his room, the wealthy Queen (his employer) throws away left-over food in her refuse bins. The employment of labourers in her construction company is to save her low-cost housing contract which the government had threatened to terminate for her delay in executing the project. At the work-site work condition is extremely unbearable. The workers are slave-driven, sacked at will, intimidated and denied the opportunity to negotiate for a higher wage. "... they worked in subdued silence like prisoners, coming and

going in the intense light of the sun” (ibid. pp 246). This condition eventually forced Idemudia and his co-workers to embark on an industrial action. And Iyayi argues that physical violence is a moral option against psychological violence.

Class dichotomy in a capitalist society generates class discrimination and breeds hostility. In *Violence*, class intolerance affects even the running of the hospital. Idemudia’s illness and subsequent admission in the hospital reveals class consciousness in the administration of the hospital. Idemudia can only go to a lower Ogbe hospital where the general wards are so congested that patients are paired up in beds irrespective of the nature of their diseases. Unlucky patients are forced to sleep on the bare floor along the corridor in front of the wards. “Senior service” wards are for the rich and in most cases the executive wards are virtually empty, because the rich who seldom fall sick have the best hospital facilities reserved for them while the poor who are prone to frequent ailments have no hospitals. Iyayi portrays this situation as injustice against workers. Idemudia and Osaro sell their blood to a man in a Mercedes Benz car, showing that capitalism saps the last drop of blood of the common man and rapes his manhood.

In the mock-drama embedded within the plot of the novel, also titled “Violence”, the Defence Counsel puts the whole society on trial and postulates that the society lacks moral qualification to punish crimes. Iyayi through the Defence counsel argues that every form of sabotage, crime or prostitution in the society is a direct consequence of lack of opportunity propagated by irresponsible government as well as intolerant class stratification. The lack of privilege and opportunity to the worker is a greater violence than whatever reaction the aggrieved worker might project. Here again Iyayi insists that it is the social institution that makes the man and determines his level of morality. In fact, through the Defence Counsel, Iyayi calls to question the moral eligibility of judges; because individuals are no more responsible for their actions than the society conditions them. Iyayi insists that it is the poverty of Idemudia’s family, the lack of food and the lack of money to pay Idemudia’s hospital bill that drive Adisa to adultery. Adisa must convince herself that her poverty justifies her offering her body as a way of solving her material problem. Festus Iyayi sees the Nigerian capitalist society as committing various forms of violence against the masses. To him capitalism is violence, and violence should be answered with violence. He advocates for a mass revolt which hopefully would usher in a new socio-economic order.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain thoroughly how Idemudia and Adisa tried to survive the harsh economic realities in their society.

3.3 Marxism in Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*

In *Kill Me Quick* the reader encounters a new realistic fiction from Kenya. There is a concentration on the perennial dissonance among individuals, especially as this discord manifests itself in the areas of prime interest to the novelist – social classes, races, genders, religions, politics and domestics. It presents a harsh account of urban life in postcolonial Kenya. His fiction reveals that one major unfortunate problem runs through the (neo) colonial African societies – frustration or betrayal of trust. Mwangi's novel also reveals that in African neo-colonial societies, the seeds of disharmony, mediocrity and macabre corporate distrust have been sown; corruption and rampant scarcity of personal integrity have replaced the hitherto peaceful existence. In fact, the novel has altered the traditional map of African fiction beyond recognition because of his undisguised depiction of postcolonial decadence and the harshness and abruptness of its style. The novel is a chronicle of the existential and societal realities of the neo-colonial Kenyan nation.

The theme of postcolonial decadence in the text thus becomes a metaphor for the history of neo-colonial African nations, which are encumbered with dislocation, alienation, depression and deprivation. Resonating through the novel is an echo of the painful existence of the masses in the neo-colonial society, which creates a motley array of failure and ridiculous figures. Kenya, the referent society of the text, has been enmeshed since 1963 in the crucible of deaths and births, agony, poverty, dehumanization and starvation. These, despite their differentiating phraseologies, work towards the same objective: the vitiation of human dignity. Hence, *Kill Me Quick*, like many other postcolonial African novels, reveals an atmosphere of fear, hate, humiliation and an aura of repression, in forms of arrest, exile and execution. It highlights the dictatorial and oppressive tendencies of the imperialists and neo-colonial rulers in African nations. This is the general visceral sentiment that forms the background of Mwangi's fiction, as well as most postcolonial African texts. Common issues in postcolonial literary works include tyranny, corruption and other forms of oppression. There emerges from Mwangi's handling of disillusionment and pain a virulent critique of the African past and present, and a pessimistic view of future evolution. The social injustices of neo-colonialism constitute the driving dynamic in the novel. The problem of class stratification in neo-colonial African societies is captured vividly at the beginning of the novel:

Meja sat by the ditch swinging his legs this way and that. A few people passed by engrossed in their daily problems and none of them gave the lanky youth a thought. But the searching eyes of Meja missed nothing. They scrutinized the ragged beggars who floated ghostly past him as closely as they watched the smart pot-bellied executives wrinkling their noses at the foul stench of backyards. And between these two types of beings, Meja made comparison (*Kill Me Quick*, 1).

Mwangi selects realistic details from ordinary life, and his novel chronicles the fate of an impotent silent majority. He has a vision of life as hell. His fiction shows him to be a humanist because human concerns like class and gender inequality remain largely foregrounded in the novel. In consequence, in *Kill Me Quick*, Mwangi's thematic focus centres on the portrayal of the terrifying, the painful, and a common insistence on postcolonial disillusionment. As a naturalist, he observes the panoramic view of his society and fictionalizes it as it is. He exposes his society's filth, decay, contradictions and conflicts with a view to presenting a true picture of it. In the novel, Mwangi gives a scathing indictment of the failure of the new state to provide opportunities for the youths.

The issues of disillusionment and pain, which are found in Mwangi's previous novels, are shown in their contemporary fullness in *Kill Me Quick*, the novel in which he takes up the fact that conflict is unavoidable in human society, and shows what happens when one engages in social conflict with one's society. It takes as its thematic focus the foregrounding of the exploitation of the masses by the ruling class, betrayal of public confidence, administrative bureaucracy, highly decadent and socially stratified society that breeds and nurtures exploitation and oppression of the less privileged in society. In the main, the text dwells on the suffering endured by innocent humanity, as a result of exploitation and crises of the world. Social relationships are permanently tense in the novel, and are marked by continuous dissonance, frustration and incompatibility. As if natural calamity is not an albatross about the neck of the Kenyans, there is also the problem of class. This is an index of unfulfilled hope.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Assess how Mwangi presented the living condition of Kenyans in the hands of neo-colonial elites.

3.4 Marxism and African Novels

Ayi Kwei Armah in his *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Debo Kotun in his *Abiku* are Marxist in outlook especially in their thematic concerns. The sense of dismay with which they confront the corruption and divisions in the new post-independence regimes in their countries are unmistakably clear in the novels. Ngugi's early narratives - *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child* and *A Grain of Wheat* – elegantly reconstruct the story of Kenyan freedom movement. The touching narratives prompt readers to take a fresh look at colonialism and freedom struggle. It examines where things had gone wrong, capturing the hope of freedom and the disillusionment that ensued. Examination of the past is one way of turning the country's attention to the present: highlighting the oppression of the "Neo-colonialists", which is more ruthless than the colonial predecessors. However, Ngugi's works since 1967 -- *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the Cross*, *Matigari* and recently *Wizard of the Crow* were more explicit and outspoken about the atrocities of the Kenyatta and Moi regimes. Through these works, he even calls for the continuation of resistance. Like many fellow African writers, Ngugi considers literature to be a weapon that brings about social and political change. His voice in these novels reveals him as a hard core Marxist fighting against all manners of economic and political slavery that his people have been subjected as a result of neo-colonial capitalism and other forms of economic ills. Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars Strike* and Sembene Ousmene's *God's Bits of Wood* also reveal Marxist attacks on the political anomalies of African states. Many African novels, especially those examining the state of politics in post-independence Africa, have often cried out about the anomalies in their various countries with strong Marxist base.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Many African novelists write to attack the imbalances in politics and economy in their countries. Using some novels explain the Marxism inherent.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Literature does not grow or even develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Our culture over the last hundred years has developed against the same stunting dwarfing background. What is

true for literature, and all culture, is also true for politics. In Africa, as elsewhere, the genuine Marxist tradition has been marginalized in political discourse. Immersed in the postcolonial African milieu, Mwangi and Iyayi can only offer hints in *Kill Me Quick* and *Violence* of the international struggle necessary to achieve a democratic, egalitarian society in Kenya, Nigeria and, in fact, the rest of the world. Mwangi and Iyayi's intelligence, integrity and passion suggest their great potential to overcome this political malady, which indeed afflicts the global progressive movement. One senses a feeling of commitment on the part of these writers as they identified the political course for overturning the ugly political and economic situations hampering the proper development of Africa. The Marxist writers are protesting against all forms of anomalies in the system, which create imbalances in the development of Africa and most independent African writers have residues of Marxism in their works.

5.0 SUMMARY

Violence is Iyayi's intimate projection of the imbalance in Nigeria's economic situation after independence. It protests the social and economic anomalies which could lead to violence as portrayed in the plot of the story. We have here presented an imbalanced class classification where the poor gets poorer and the rich gets richer. The novel is purely an assessment of the post colonial Nigerian situation where capitalism is criminally imposed on the helpless citizens who believe strongly in the power of the educated elite to pilot the economy of the country properly in order to give them respite and economic independence. It is actually the non-fulfillment of these hopes that leads to violence. The novel is a pure Marxist approach towards assessing the evils of neo-colonial independent Nigeria. This situation is common in most African states.

Kill Me Quick sums up Mwangi's concern for the prevalent social anomalies in neo-colonial Kenya, and it is a graphic demonstration of Mwangi's sympathy for the underprivileged members of his society. His choice of this vision is unique, reflecting his awareness of people's predicament even in the midst of abundant resources. The characters are presented in such a way that they signify the overwhelming disparity between the dominant, privileged exploiter-class and the exploited. The characters in the novel constitute the class of people that groans under "food crisis, deplorable mass poverty, decimating diseases and pervasive illiteracy". The novelist uses their daily experiences to harp on the helplessness of the masses in neo-colonial African societies. The common man rendered abstract and shadowy, is living in a world of anonymity. Meja and Maina are sketched out in a society in which they think they are pariahs. At the beginning of the story, they are frustrated

and almost destroyed by poverty. They are entrapped in their woeful and painful world. Also, their painful conditions of living are revealed in their feeding and dressing. Actually, the old and shabby dresses they wear locate them in their social class. Unlike the socialist realist who believes in the inevitability of change, Mwangi, the naturalist, simply depicts his society in the way it is without suggesting how to change the situation. His literary agenda is to present life in all its details, free of any preconceived notions of its meaning

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

1. Explain the major concerns of Marxist novelists in Africa. Ensure that adequate references are made to novels.
2. With reference to Iyayi's *Violence* explain how extreme capitalism could lead to unrest.
3. Relate the Nigerian situation presented in Iyayi's *Violence* with the Kenyan situation portrayed in Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*.
4. Do you believe that colonialism is the cause of African capitalism? Assess how this issue is treated by African novelists with Marxist intentions.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Iyayi, Festus. (1989). *Violence*. Ibadan: Longman.

Meja Mwangi. (1973). *Kill Me Quick*. London: Heinemann.

UNIT 3 NOVELS OF SOCIAL REALITIES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall examine the concept of social reality in African novels. Social realities include those prevalent behavioral and social factors that reveal to a large extent the social make-up of the African people. One of these strong social realities is religion. Religion is a key factor in the definition of Africa's social development. Religion here comes in two ways: the traditional original practice of Africans and the foreign religions of the colonialists and the invaders of Africa's entity. Other social realities include politics, rites of passage like birth, death, marriage, community relations and cohesion. Most African novels focus on these issues and more in order to expose certain facts about Africa with regards to her social structure and existence.

As we discussed in Unit 2, African Marxist writers attacked a lot about religion. They believe that the worker under the capitalist regimes was miserable and alienated, religious beliefs were sustained. Religion, according to Marx was the response to the pain of being alive, the response to earthly suffering. Marx wrote, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances." Marx indicated in his writing that the working class, the proletariat, was a true revolutionary class, universal in character and acquainted with universal suffering. This provided the need for religion. Thus, religion becomes a tool for achieving political motives. What about religion in the traditional setting before colonialism? What about politics in the Traditional setting? Do the people believe in religion as escapism or as a part of their worldview and necessary rite of passage? By examining religion and politics as social realities in select novels in this unit, we shall give answers to these questions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, the students should be able to:

- recognize African novels with social realities as theme
- identify pre-colonial Social realities in African novels
- appreciate post-colonial Social realities in African novels
- discuss politics, religion and marriage as social realities in African novels
- assess social mores as essential social realities in African novels.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Religion and politics are two social factors that affect the social structure of any society. They are both linked and are tied to the proper management of the spiritual and spiritual well-being of individuals in a community. Religion is the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life. In the beginning of history, it was the forces of nature which were first so reflected and which in the course of further evolution underwent the most manifold and varied personification among the various peoples. At a still further stage of evolution, all natural and social attributes of the numerous gods are transferred to one Almighty God, who is but a reflection of the abstract man.

Within a purely African philosophical context, man is a political animal embellished in religious thought system. If we assume that the religion of any population have become co-coordinated to individuals and the various levels of grouping that include them as a result of a process of selection or politics based on perceived relevance to particular goals at particular levels of structural reference, we can expect to find meaning in the existence of the people as some implication of relevance in the particular social context where it has become fixed. So, politics and religion are interlinked in the development of every nation and African states are part of these developmental frameworks that shape the social realities of the people and development.

Most African novels have elements of religion and politics in them. The reasons are not far-fetched. African states before the advent of colonialism had strong religious and political structures that were strong and made the inversion of colonialism difficult at the early stage. There was resistance because there was a structure on ground. Africans have strong religious and political structures that worked for the people. Chinua Achebe tried to a very large extent to reveal these structures in

Things Fall Apart as a reaction to the insinuations by the Europeans that Africans did not have culture, religion or political structure before colonialism. And in his subsequent novels, he gradually exposed how colonialism destroyed these structures in Africa. Ngugi wa Thiong'o amongst others also towed the line of exposing European destruction of African value system.

We shall use Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, a novel set in pre-colonial times, to examine the true structure of religion in Africa before colonialism while we use Debo Kotun's *Abiku* in examining the political structure of Africa after colonialism. Thus, a comparative presentation of African religion before colonialism and African politics after colonialism would be thoroughly exemplified for proper understanding of Africa's historical experiences and the writers' burden transmitting these values for posterity.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss religion and politics as basic social realities in Africa's development as applied in African novels.

3.2 Religion as Social Reality in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*

Elechi Amadi is a Nigerian educator, novelist and dramatist, writing in English. Amadi has interpreted in such novels as *The Concubine* (1966), *The Great Ponds* (1969), and *The Slave* (1978), the life and values of the traditional village society. His stories often deal with people who try to change their course of life but fail in it. Amadi's early novels, like Chinua Achebe's, are set in his traditional African world, but they deal with timeless societies which are not poisoned by the effects of colonialism, rationalism, or modern change. Amadi's first novel, *The Concubine*, was published in 1966, six years after Nigerian independence.

The story was set in the area near Port Harcourt. It starts out as a depiction of village life, its conflicts, ancient customs, and gods, but then it proceeds into mythological level. Ihuoma is the most desirable woman in Omigwe village and the tragic heroine, whose well-fed look does a great credit to her husband. He dies, but she has won the heart of the hunter Ekwueme. They deny their love so that Ekwueme can marry another woman, to whom he has been betrothed since birth. At the end Amadi reveals that Ihuoma is actually the wife of the Sea-King, the ruling spirit of the sea, but she had assumed the human form.

The first half of the book pays particular attention to the religious institutions of Omokachi village and demonstrates by aid of apposite narrative incidents the central place these institutions occupy in the daily life of the Omokachi villagers. The opening action focuses on the fight between Emenike and Madume over a piece of land. This conflict sets the realistic tone, and maintains it over the new elements that result from and amplify the dispute. Having defined a realistic frame of reference at the social level, Amadi then injects the religious element into it:

Madume was relieved when he heard that Emenike was back home. It was true he was in very bad shape himself, but the possibility of killing a man filled him with fear. The cost of the rites of purification was prohibitive and even after that he would still be a branded man (3).

Here is revealed in a nutshell the religious basis of Omokachi's social organization: it is not the possibility of a court trial that fills Madume with fear but the looming threat of divine chastisement. A man who kills his kinsman has wronged the gods primarily and must seek absolution in purification sacrifices commensurate with his crime.

Emenike's illness after the fight with Madume provides the occasion for ritual intervention, in the course of which the religious fabric is given sharper scrutiny and exposition. Anyika, the central religious personage comes into view, and so too do the attributes of his office: "Anyika the medicine man was sent for... to the villagers he was just a medicine man and a mediator between them and the spirit world" (5-6). This presentation is then substantiated by the practical exercise of his office, in which he is seen pouring libation and hanging amulets on doors to keep away evil spirits. The exposition is progressive and judicious. The reader is being introduced to the main corners of the stage, and concurrently to the principal actors. Anyika's libation shows man, the gods and the ancestors communing in a spirit of sacred and secular harmony. The gods are not far; they are near. Invisible physically, they fill man and object with their spiritual presence, and partake of human action in ways that are essentially concrete. Amadioha is king of the skies; Ojukwu is the fair, and the other gods have dominion over the Night, the Earth, and the Rivers, elements through which man comes into permanent experience of the divine presence and influence.

The ritual act performed by Anyika is part of a complex structure of religious observation defined by rules and ordinances. When Ihuoma proposes a sacrifice to Amadioha on her sick husband's behalf, the god's priest Nwokekoro answers: "My daughter, that will be on Eke, the usual day for sacrifices" (9). Details of this kind demonstrate a religious order with a solid internal logic and organization. The priests too are men chosen for their integrity:

The next caller was Nwokekoro, the priest of Amadioha the god of thunder and of the skies. He was a short fat man, old but well preserved and had an easy-going disposition. He never seemed to be bothered about anything. He had no wife and no compound of his own. His small house was in his junior brother's compound. He was getting too old for active farming, so his yams were few and he owned very little property. He was friendly with everyone and was highly respected. His office as high priest of the most powerful god lent him great dignity (8).

The gods are brought down from their abode and presented at work among the villagers. Mini Wekwu, for instance, curbs evil both within and between the adjoining villages, thereby promoting good neighbourliness. The gods of Omokachi are deployed in a hierarchic order that points ultimately to the superstructure of Omokachi's religious belief, culminating as it does in Chineke, "the creator of spirits and men." (59).

The review of the village pantheon ends with Amadioha, Omokachi's principal deity, first among "God's associates." (*The Concubine*, 75) Ruler over the skies and purveyor of rain and sunshine, Amadioha is the most feared and the most venerated of all the gods, a deity whose name no man can invoke when guilty. He holds his worshippers in chaste fear through which they acknowledge the god's supreme authority and their own inferior humanity. But the villagers' relationship with Amadioha, as indeed with all the other deities of the local pantheon, is one of concrete communion. Worship at his shrine therefore takes on the nature of a close personal dialogue between god and man, through which complaints are resolved, wishes met, and during which the god reveals himself to men so that they can better testify to his existence:

After the main rites Nwokekoro built a fire from a glowing orepe brand which one old man had brought along. The cocks were killed according to ancient rites and boiled with the yams. Before any part of the meal was touched, the priest cut off one wing of the chicken and threw it casually to the right side of the temple. The old men were evidently used to this and did not watch his movement... in a matter of seconds a huge grey serpent crawled out from behind the shrine and began to swallow its share of the feast. It showed no fear and the old men bowed their heads in reverence. The god having been fed, the men fell on the remains of the feast. (17-18).

This worship scene closes the first half of the novel's action, but no mention has as yet been made of the sea-king, the principal actor in the collective drama of the village. The reader has been made familiar with the sea-king's other divine peers, their powers, and method of retribution: perjury exposes its perpetrator to Amadioha's thunderbolt; anti-social behaviour to Ojukwu's smallpox; and witchcraft to extermination by Mini Wekwu.

This religious activity comes against the background of Emenike's illness, and more especially against that of his marriage with Ihuoma. Emenike dies unexpectedly shortly hereafter, and veers the dialectical significance of structuring unto its main course. A solid religious foundation has already been laid, so that when the sea-king finally appears, he is accepted for the same reasons that the other deities were accepted; that is to say as a living force within the specific socio-religious context of Omokachi.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Assess the implication of religion in determining marriage, conflict and death as applied in Amadi's *The Concubine*.

3.3 Politics as Social Reality in Debo Kotun's *Abiku*

Debo Kotun's novel *Abiku* has reconstructed the myth of Abiku to critique the evil machinations under military rule in Nigeria. In the novel, Kotun makes use of highly abrasively bitter and gruesomely satirical temper. He is able to lampoon the military for ravishing and devaluing Nigeria, the hitherto giant of Africa. He depicts the foibles of the military rulers lucidly - corruption, brutality, press censorship, graft, nepotism, lack of freedom and all sorts of neocolonial decadence. In the novel, Kotun relies heavily on the method of magical realism. Improbable events are made probable; the dead enter into phatic communion with the living; African gods and goddesses are also called to a feast. Actually, in *Abiku*, Kotun, like Okri, vividly illuminates some autochthonous oral traditions of African people in general and the Yoruba people in particular, in order to artistically reconstruct the deadly political subterfuge of Africa.

Debo Kotun's *Abiku* can be situated within the inherent root-seeking quest of the African self. Thus, the novelist engages history and societal realities set in Nigeria under military dictatorship to provide a discourse in social history as he refreshes one's knowledge of recent Nigerian history by introducing literary embellishments which contribute to his enduring brilliance as a creative writer. As one reads the novel he naturally gets immersed in his satiric agenda, and the intermittent

“remembrance” of mythic undercurrents in the book betrays the work as basically committed to social and political reformation, and a conscious engagement in social reality, for example ‘when Dr. Ademola entered, the mood in the operating room changed. He took one look at the face of the little boy who lay unconscious on the bed. But the ones that caught his attention were the two old scars on each cheek of the boy’s face....” (46) These foregoing instantiations of Kotun’s attempt to assert mythic relevance unconsciously makes his plot discordant, but certainly does not encumber his literary agenda, and in fact, his satire is well orchestrated and satisfies the African literary heritage of commitment to the letter.

Kotun’s experiment in fusing history into fiction and vice-versa is remarkable, and thus brings Africa’s messiahs of pain to the centre stage while scarcely veiling their identity thus he describes a set of African rulers:

Sakara looked up and saw a seven-headed phantom seated where Akin had been only seconds before. From the neck down the monster was dressed in uniform of a general. The head farthest from the neck on the left reminded Sakara of the warlord from the horn of Africa. The next one looked like that of the butcher of Entebbe, irritating its neighbor, the five-billion dollar man from Kinshasha. In the middle was the obnoxious head of the sleeping giant of Africa from Lagos, lashing an effeminate smile at the Sergeant-turned General from Monrovia. Next was the Tuareg Colonel turned president for life from Tripoli (pp. 144-145).

Accordingly, the novel postulates, highlights and fictionalizes social-historical realities as we remind ourselves that African literature and its writers share boundaries of social consciousness and functionality, which explains the political activism of writers like Christopher Okigbo, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka and others who incorporate the satirical temerity of their works. And notwithstanding, Kotun blanks off pretension and dons pungency in the novel that can possibly link to the concrete situationally of the post-1983 Nigerian state, and virtually all the major events and personalities in the country’s political landscape till 1994 are adequately represented in his work. Kotun’s central character Sakara, a student of military power benefits from the machinations of Babassa, and through Sakara, becomes a searchlight who understands the psychology of power while the consequences of unquenched thirst for power leaves the society desolate economically and psychologically. And in like manner, he uses his characters to lament Nigeria’s breakdown of facilities, norms and values:

... Ademola walked over his desk in the parlor and, hoping against all odds that a miracle might be in the offing.... He stared at the black rotary telephone which looked more like a decorative relic than a communication instrument. Intimidated, the phone did what it had always done... (p.24).

Thus, the grim realities of misrule and socio-economic decadence are captured by Kotun reflecting a reality of power play and corruption setting the fulcrum of discourse. And like several other African writers, he shares a vision of social reformation via a deployment of aesthetic and artistic light to champion a fresh course. Kotun sees a better society through a people with a perfect knowledge of their history that would enable the right cause of action as he fulfills the imperative of a literature and art of social commitment. Therefore, there is a drive for social and historical engagement which accounts for the novelist's artistic honesty, without leaving any benefit of doubt for his critics. As a result, we can say that approaching the subject of history in contemporary African novel has been confounding, as demonstrated by Kotun illustrating that what is responsible is actually inseparable from the economic woes that contribute to the African literary canon. Consequently, the preservation of history as a well utilized modus in *Abiku* helps to drum the fictive essence of the narrative while the characters hardly disguise, and thus are identifiable figures in Nigeria's political history with the mention of specific names and places. For example, Ikeja hospital certainly exists in the Nigerian state (44), and in fact names of towns like Lagos, Abeokuta and Yola are evidences of a writer's commitment to representing the nation's history in his fictional work, a tendency situated in Kotun's confessed literary impetus.

In refining the history of the *Abiku*'s milieu, the novelist understands the role of the artist as the society's teacher, and although there is a veiled attempt at presenting a people's history, Kotun still succeeds in conserving the fiction aspects of his historicity. Hence in representing military rulers, he unifies them in logic rather than personality to construct the event that informs the plot. This is interestingly not particularly restricted to any military government in Nigeria, placing it as instructive to understanding the psychology of military adventurisms, irrespective of time or space. This posture seemingly places Kotun as a meta-historical narrator whose art is heavily dependent on social reality as he proves that a constant revisit of history in African creative imagination is pertinent for political order and tranquility.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Western politics destroys the social well-being of the African people. Using Kotun's *Abiku* assess this proposition.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* presents pure African religious realities before colonial time. We see a society that is enmeshed in religious beliefs about everything around them. Everything within the African society has religious attachment which determines the way the people react to their environment and to their social cohesion. All aspects of African belief system revolve around religion. African religious rites of passage are a social factor that brings the people together in all their beliefs and practices. This novel exemplifies this social reality.

In a final consideration, Kotun's convergence of history and fiction, in *Abiku*, although not the first, represents a major voice as he reveals his perception of the political anomy in Africa. Kotun's novel demonstrates the back and forth of Nigeria's history, and locates the solution to the imperatives of "the drama of existence which compounds the drama of being" within the Nigerian society. Undoubtedly, this novel reveals the immediate engagement with history in order to unveil political truths and odds about Africa. The self apprehension of the African world in terms of concepts and categories can be embodied in properly placed African forms which can be considered to have artistic merit for its true revelations. In the novel, we see military politics as it gradually destroys the stronghold of the people's social being. Every aspect of human rights is destroyed thereby destroying the people's well-being.

5.0 SUMMARY

Religion and politics as social realities have been examined in the two novels under study. All aspects of traditional religious beliefs are revealed in *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi. We see a people with defined religious beliefs in God, gods and other elemental forces. There are patterned modes of worship. There are natural phenomena which have meaning in the religious lives of the people. All these worked until the invasion of Christianity. In the novel, we see a pure African society before colonial invasion which corrupted the people's beliefs. The novel reveals that Africans have a workable religion that sustained the people's social structure. In Debo Kotun's *Abiku*, we see a strange political setting where force and other forms of anarchy were the order of the day. Human values were destroyed because the government practises politics of bitterness. As military rulers, they applied all manners of severe rules to destroy the people's well-being. Here, the

social realities are harsh as the people lived in fear of the unknown. These two novels have shown to a large extent, how the African novelists have recorded the social realities of the African people from different dimensions.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

- what social realities are constant in African novels? Discuss them.
- explain religion as a social force in Amadi's *The Concubine*.
- appreciate Debo Kotun's *Abiku* as a political satire.
- assess the treatment of social realities in any African novel of your choice.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Amadi, Elechi. (1966). *The Concubine*. London: Heinemann.

Kotun, Debo. (1998). *Abiku*. Pasadena, California: Nepotist.

UNIT 4 GENDER IN AFRICAN NOVEL

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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 - 3.2 Feminism in Ba's *So Long a Letter*
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we discuss feminism and gender issues as treated in two African novels. We shall examine select African novels to understand how African novelists treat gender issues. African women, who are also concerned about sexual politics, understand that a discussion of feminism must grapple with more than the issue of sex. As a result, the debate concludes that African women have to modify the word "feminist" in order to articulate their own concerns fully. Again, black women who claim the word feminist as part of their identity are often criticized by African men and women who reject the notion of African women being subjugated. So many issues are raised when the issue of feminism is discussed in African literature. They include: the representation and mis-representation of women in literary texts; the education of women; the access of women to the economic means of survival; motherhood; women in the domestic sphere; women as part of their communities; women's role in politics and revolution; sexuality; and the direct treatment of women by men, and men by women. Underlying this array of specific interests are questions of gender in representation and of the reality or realities of life for women in Africa - past, present, and future. All these offer much for the consideration of feminist thought with respect to African literatures.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the unit the students should be able to:

- understand what gender issues are in the African novel
- appreciate African novels with gender themes
- recognize gender themes in African novels
- distinguish novels with gender bias from others with different themes.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The role and history of feminist politics or activism on women's rights in Africa is a discourse which African women are studying and clarifying for themselves. The debate over feminist criticism and the development of an African feminist theory has been a concern to African gender scholars. As a Senegalese figure, Mariama Ba represents a kind of feminine Leopold Sedar Senghor. She shows that not only men are important in this world. She also shows that to succeed in this life, women should identify themselves and also trust in themselves to overcome the multiple darkneses that compose life. In showing the importance of women, their role in bringing up families and keeping them together in time of calamity is clearly brought out in the novel. This still is a powerful expression of the unheeded voice of the previously silent woman in Africa. Ba is actually calling on women to take responsibility for their lives throughout the novel.

Buchi Emecheta has a different view. She believes that a woman is worth anything if she becomes a mother, a symbol of greatness and height of womanhood. Nnu Ego, as did other women in the Ibo society, bore many children in the hope that she would have someone to take care of her in her old age. Again, this was an Ibo custom. As Nnu Ego herself tells her father: "When one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no children, and your parents have gone, who can you call your own?" (Emecheta 38). Some argue that it is not the responsibility of the children to support and care for Nnu Ego. They argue that Nnu Ego's children had the right to choose in what manner and to what extent they would do so, if at all. Others argue that there was never any real communication with regard to this expectation of Nnu Ego from her children, that this message was never expressed. Although that may have been the case, the understanding was implicit. It was a cultural understanding, a cultural expectation that, although not fully expressed, was always understood. Some would further argue that because Nnu Ego's children were not raised in their native culture, they would not have known this was expected of them. Although it is not right for mothers to bear children with the sole intent of having caretakers in their old age, it is a moral obligation for children to take care of elderly parents, in poor health or not. It is a case of motherhood appreciation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba are novelists with feminist background. Explain their various views of gender.

3.2 Issues of Feminism in *So Long a Letter*

Mariama Ba is a novelist, a teacher and feminist, who was active from 1979 to 1981 in Senegal, West Africa. Ba's source of determination and engagement came from her background, her parent's life and her schooling. Indeed, her contribution is significant because she explained and portrayed the disadvantaged position of women in general and especially married women. This situation led her to focus her work on women's consideration and to show people how this grandmother, this mother, this sister, this daughter, this cousin and this friend is the "mother of Africa" and how important she is for the society.

Mariama Bâ was raised a Muslim home, but at an early age came to criticize what she perceived as inequalities between the sexes resulting from African and Islamic traditions. Raised by her traditional grandparents, she had to struggle even to gain an education, because they did not believe that girls should be educated. Bâ later married a Senegalese member of Parliament, Obèye Diop, but divorced him and was left to care for their nine children. Her frustration with the fate of African women—as well as her ultimate acceptance of it—is expressed in her first novel, *So Long a Letter*. In it she depicts the sorrow and resignation of a woman who must share the mourning for her late husband with his second, younger wife.

Bâ died a year later after a protracted illness, before her second novel, *Scarlet Song*, which describes the hardships a woman faces when her husband abandons her for a younger woman he knew at youth, was published. In 1981, *So Long a Letter* was awarded the first Noma Award for Publishing in Africa. In this book, the author recognized the immense contributions African women have made and continue to make in the building of their societies. This book has already been published in more than a dozen languages and is about to appear in more.

The book is written in the form of a letter, or a diary, from a widow, Ramatoulaye, to her childhood girlfriend, Aissatou, who lives in the United States. The discriminatory use of power forces Ramatoulaye to deal with its consequences. This discriminatory power is in the novel a form of male domination coming from society's construction of a patriarchal ideology. Because Ramatoulaye is a woman, she seemingly has no right determining her destiny. Aissatou rejects this notion and chooses her own life without being denied a life of her own by her husband Mawdo. This strong exploration of feminism is perhaps what makes the novel a strong voice for the oppressed women in Africa. The woman is oppressed by culture and by virtue of her position. Aissatou rejects this and slowly Ramatoulaye realizes she cannot look to her culture for much. To demonstrate how males are instinctive, Ba uses

female rationality and responsibility. She also portrays men's irresponsibility by using their sexual instincts. Mawdo, Aissatou's husband, differs from her. He emphasizes the bestiality of men's instincts, while she urges her daughter against them. She argues that a man's instinct is "through his self-control, his ability to reason, to choose his power to attachment, that individual distinguishes himself from animal." (Mariama Ba, 1981).

Through her character Ramatoulaye, Mariama Ba has expressed herself. This includes the statement that she: "has not given up waiting to refashion her life. Despite everything (disappointment and humiliations) hope still lives within her... the success of a nation depends inevitably on just such families." She also shows that books can be a weapon, "a peaceful weapon perhaps, but they are weapon." (Mariama Ba, 1981). According to her:

The power of books, this marvelous invention of astute human intelligent. Various signs associated with sound: different sounds that form the word. Juxtaposition of words from which springs the idea, Thought, History, Science, Life. Sole instrument of interrelationship and of culture, unparalleled means of giving and receiving. Books knit generations together in the same continuing effort that leads to progress. They enabled you to better yourself. What society refused you, they granted...

Let us examine the characters of Ramatoulaye and Aissatou in order to appreciate the feminine power in the novel.

Ramatoulaye

The protagonist, Ramatoulaye, is inspired by her friendship with Aissatou and by her resolute behaviour in the face of adversity. At the beginning of the story, Ramatoulaye was stressed. She writes to her friend to relieve this stress. As a Muslim, she refers to God when her husband Modou Fall died. She also refers to him and to Sharia law concerning polygamy, when her husband, after twenty five years of marriage, marries her daughter's friend Binetou. Even though Modou abandoned her and spent his money on Binetou, Ramatoulaye decided to stay with him because of her faith. Having any choice, because life goes on, Ramatoulaye has done everything which is needed in the house. Taking care of her family and paying duties and bills and finding food, Ramatoulaye was lonely and she misses her "warm" husband. To overcome these shyness or shame, she use to go to the cinema to change her mind, but alone. She has only found peace and warmth in her religion, so she started living for it. Ramatoulaye started to forbid

trousers and occidental clothes to her daughter. In talking to Aissatou about the hardships in her life, Ramatoulaye is actually reflecting on her own experiences. Because the two have reacted to their husbands' polygamous states differently, Ramatoulaye wants to know if it was worth it staying in this marriage. One thing is for sure however, they both take the right decision. Aissatou's is so radical but still represents a woman who wants to be free from the bondages of tradition. She therefore is a character worth admiring in the novel.

Aissatou

Aissatou rises out of her position to disprove oppressive culture. She is a radical woman and an inspiration for Ramatoulaye and her daughter Daba. Aissatou takes her life into her hands and chooses to walk out of a polygamous relationship. It is clear that she cannot be anywhere the same as young Nabou but the fact that she still has a life to hold on to, an integrity to move by and an enslaving culture to challenge is an apparent aspect developed through this woman. She therefore still acts as an inspiration for a woman suffocating under the whims of culture.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are strong feminists in a Moslem culture. How much feminism did they achieve in their society?

3.3 Gender Issues in *the Joys of Motherhood*

One of the many issues raised in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* is the conflict Nnu Ego feels in embracing and accepting new ideas when she moves away from her Ibo society to make a new life for herself in Lagos. Nnu Ego is caught between two cultures. While she sees that her old customs and beliefs are not conducive to a better life for her or her children, she is unable to come to terms with Lagos's different societal rules. It is shocking to her that money is now the status quo, not children. She finds it hard to believe that gender roles have been exchanged. Men now work as household servants for the "white man." Women are no longer having a large number of children. Nnu Ego finds it difficult to adjust to her new life. Her strong cultural beliefs are in direct conflict with her new life in Lagos. These cultural beliefs are the cause of her enslavement.

Nnu Ego's cultural background is one in which women are exploited to men's advantage. Womanhood is defined by the ability to bear children. The more male children a woman has, the higher her status. In this patriarchal society, a woman's duty is to bear male children for her husband to continue his lineage. A childless woman is considered a "half

woman," a failed woman. The man, therefore, is of critical importance to the woman, for a woman cannot bring forth a child without a man. This way of thinking can be seen in Adankwko's advice to Nnu Ego: "Have you ever heard of a complete woman without a husband?" (Emecheta 158). A husband who can father male children is greatly admired.

In Nnu Ego's society, a daughter's value to her parents is only as high as the bride price she can fetch. The Ibos' way of thinking is that daughters are raised to glorify another man when her turn comes to produce male offspring. That is why daughters are not as highly regarded as sons are. In Nnu Ego's patriarchal society, women are viewed as tools of production. The younger the woman is, the better able she will be to reproduce. Women are valued in terms of their economic worth. In Nnu Ego's Ibo society, a woman is always owned by a male. First, she belongs to her father until she is of an age where she can be sold. Pre-arranged marriages are normal. How the daughter feels toward her husband is of little importance. After acquiring her, she is chattel and only valuable in terms of "producing" offspring, preferably males. She is his to command. Her duty is to obey him always.

All of these beliefs and customs are embedded in Nnu Ego's subconscious. Her new life in Lagos does not change that. She is not surprised, therefore, when Nnaife chides her for questioning him: "What did you say? Did I not pay your bride price? Am I not your owner?" (Emecheta, 48)

The Joys of Motherhood is a mirror image of today's society in Africa and in many other parts of the world. It speaks of the struggles and conflicts of women and the gender roles imposed upon them. It further speaks of women's struggles to gain independence from their subservient roles as wives and to gain a voice of their own. Women in third world countries are still hesitant to speak out and make themselves heard for fear of being punished by their husbands and society in general. Their objections to being treated unfairly are seen as unimportant.

In Ibuza, wife beating was also common and, indeed, accepted. Since wives were property, husbands had the authority to do as they pleased. Wife beating elevated a husband's self-esteem and gave him a sense of control. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnaife threatens to beat Nnu Ego when she presses him to find a job. He actually beats the pregnant Adaku when both she and Nnu Ego go on strike for more housekeeping money. Things have not changed very much for women in Third world countries. They are still considered second class citizens. Although they work alongside the men in various fields, in addition to taking care of

the household, their contributions are seen as insignificant. A woman is faceless. Her identity is forever linked with that of her husband's. They are as one.

Nnu Ego's conflict with her new life in Lagos first becomes evident when Adaku comes to live with them. Although in her Ibo society husbands have many wives who live together harmoniously, Nnu Ego resents Adaku and does not like to share Nnaife with her. Nnu Ego is torn between her Ibo customs and the reality of her poverty filled life in Lagos. As she struggles to put food on the table for her children with the little money Nnaife earns, she comes to the conclusion that she is a prisoner because of her role as mother and senior wife. She reflects on the way her life would have been in Ibuza as a senior wife. She dreams of having the courage to abandon Nnaife and leave her children with him. As senior wife in Lagos, she has many responsibilities but none of the rewards that come with being a senior wife in Ibuza:

On her way back to their room, it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, and imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, she felt, the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her. (Emecheta 137).

Gender Roles

When Nnu Ego first comes to Lagos, she is shocked to discover that Nnaife works as a domestic servant who washes "women's underwear." She questions his manhood and loses all respect for him. She would have preferred that he had a "real" man's job, like working on a farm. Her constant comparisons to Amatokwu must have been a source of pain and humiliation for Nnaife, who is content with the work that he does and does not understand Nnu Ego's exasperation and disbelief. Nnu Ego comes from a male dominated society where men and women each have their assigned roles.

Nnu Ego feels obligated to her family, her husband and her children. Everyone makes demands on her. Although she takes care of the household, the children and her husband in the traditional way, she also has to take charge of supporting her family when Nnaife is unable to do so. Although at times Nnu Ego expresses her anger and exasperation to Nnaife, her attitude changes when she realizes that because of him, she is a mother, she is a woman, therefore she is complete. To Nnu Ego, Nnaife proves his manhood by fathering many children. According to

the Ibo ideology, Nnaife has made her a woman. That is why, although Nnu Ego loses respect for Nnaife when he doesn't find a job, she still clings to the Ibo custom of silence. "All the same, like a good woman, she must do what she was told, she must not question her husband in front of his friends" (Emecheta 114).

Nnu Ego's hesitancy in expressing her emotions and anger is common in many societies even today. The woman's role is to obey her husband and accept any decisions he makes in silence. To express your opinions could mean a night of abuse. Nnu Ego's conflict further comes into evidence when Adaku receives a visit from Igbonoba's wife. When she sees how elegantly dressed this woman is, she feels desperate and angry. Not at the visitor, but at herself. She has begun to realize that the high status she so desperately sought by having so many children is of little value in her new society in Lagos. Values have changed. Money is now the status symbol. Yet all because she was the mother of three sons, she was supposed to be happy in her poverty, in her nail-biting agony, in her churning stomach, in her rags, in her cramped room . . . Oh, it was a confusing world. (Emecheta 167). Nnu Ego is in a state of transition. She is slowly moving away from her Ibuza customs and beliefs but is still hesitant to fully embrace new ideas.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Nnu Ego is a mother who desired the joys of motherhood. Does this expectation reveal her gender roles?

4.0 CONCLUSION

Mariama Ba is a novelist, a teacher and feminist, who was active from 1979 to 1981 in Senegal, West Africa. Ba's source of determination and engagement came from her background, her parent's life and her schooling. Indeed, her contribution is significant because she explained and portrayed the disadvantaged position of women in general and especially married women. This situation led her to focus her work on women's consideration and to show people how this grandmother, this mother, this sister, this daughter, this cousin and this friend is the "mother of Africa" and how important she is for the society. *So Long a Letter* is a novel written with deep concern for the African woman who is under the chain of religious and cultural manipulations that deprive them of their freedom.

Being a woman from Nigeria, Buchi Emecheta knows firsthand the unfairness of a patriarchal society and the conflicts it causes. Although she is reluctant to be called a feminist, Ms. Emecheta writes about the plight of African women and their struggle for freedom and equality.

We can see that she does not think very highly of the patriarchal society from which she came. Through her writings, Ms Emecheta hopes to be able to empower women, especially women from Third world countries, to educate themselves. Only through education can these women overcome the many obstacles in their paths. *The Joys of Motherhood* is about a woman from a Third world country who, because of the patriarchal society which she lives in, cannot liberate herself from the chains of poverty. It is an honest look at women in the society of a colonized nation who, before, during and after colonization, do not quite fit in. They are still enslaved by men and their society.

5.0 SUMMARY

Nnu Ego and Ramatoulaye are two different African women in two different cultural and religious backgrounds. Both of them are interested in their self assertion and independence in a man's world. They see themselves in a male dominated culture and seek to redefine their future. Ramatoulaye believed that being independent would give her her long lost independence. Being the first wife of a polygamist in a religion that is compliant with polygamy places her at very tight corner in attacking polygamy which Moslem religion appreciates and African culture practices. On the other hand, Nnu Ego is woman who believes strongly that man gives a woman her relevance. She needed children from her husband who would eventually grow to be her joy. She toils to feed her family and raise her children. Her children made her relevant. Nnaife remains complacent even as he marries a second wife just for fun. Nnu Ego becomes a victim of her cultural belief that children make motherhood great while husbands should be adored even in their imperfections.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

1. Discuss the various issues of gender that African novelists have been projecting.
2. Mariama Ba believes that independence is the key to a woman's happiness. Did she achieve that in *So Long a Letter*?
3. Nnu Ego is mother that knows the worth of her husband and children. Explain how her gender roles helped her achieve motherhood.
4. The male characters in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *So Long a Letter* are very queer. Does this reveal anything about African gender novels?
5. Appreciate feminism as a major trend in the African novel?

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UNIT 5 AFRICAN WAR NOVELS

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- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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 - 3.2 Africa and Civil War: Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine African novels that treated the issue of wars. African countries have had history of wars. Some of these wars are caused by tribal differences while others are caused by certain civil issues like the killing of an Umuofia woman in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the war over land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. Communal wars are common in Africa but the effect of civil wars in most African countries over the past three decades has been disastrous. The wars are direct manipulations of European powers that cause wars among Africans for their selfish reasons. We have had South African war, Nigeria-Biafra War, Liberian war, Congo war, Rwandan war (or genocide) and now Sudan war. There are many more not mentioned but the reasons for the wars are not far from colonial experiences. There are many war novels in Nigeria about the Nigeria-Biafra war. They include: Eddie Iroh's *Forty Eight Guns for the General* and *Toads of War*, Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace*, Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, Achebe's *Girls at War* amongst other numerous titles. We shall use Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* as reference texts for this unit as both novels treated two different war experiences: African Civil war and world war experiences by Africans.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, the students should be able to:

- understand that African war novels exist
- appreciate African novelists writing war novels
- assess any African novel with war themes
- recognize African novels with war themes
- identify African novelists that write about wars.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

A war novel is a novel in which the primary action takes place in a field of armed combat, or in a domestic setting (or home front) where the characters are preoccupied with the preparations for, or recovery from, war. The war novel's main roots lie in the epic poetry of the classical and medieval periods, especially Homer's *The Iliad*, Virgil's *The Aeneid*, the Old English saga *Beowulf*, and different versions of the legends of King Arthur. All of these epics were concerned with preserving the history or mythology of conflicts between different societies, while providing an accessible narrative that could reinforce the collective memory of a people. Other important influences on the war novel included the tragedies of such dramatists as Euripides, Seneca the Younger, Christopher Marlowe, and Shakespeare. Shakespeare's *Henry V* provided a model for how the history, tactics, and ethics of war could be combined in an essentially fictional framework. Romances and satires in Early Modern Europe--Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, to name two of many--also contained elements of military heroism and folly that influenced the later development of war novels. In terms of imagery and symbolism, many modern war novels (especially those espousing an anti-war viewpoint) take their cue from Dante's depiction of Hell in *The Inferno*, John Milton's account of the war in Heaven in *Paradise Lost*, and the Apocalypse as depicted in The Bible's Book of Revelations.

As the prose fiction novel rose to prominence in the 17th Century, the war novel began to develop its modern form, although most novels featuring war were picaresque satires in which the soldier was a rakish rather than realistic figure. The war novel came of age during the 19th Century. Works such as Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, about the Napoleonic Wars in Russia, and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, about the American Civil War established the conventions of the modern war novel as it has come down to us today. All of these works feature realistic depictions of major battles, visceral scenes of wartime horrors and atrocities, and significant insights into the nature of heroism, cowardice, and morality in wartime.

3.2 Africa and Civil War: Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*

Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* is a war novel that explores the psychological make up of characters in the war drama. In this novel, the Federal and the Secessionist armies are locked in a fierce battle. But the author plays down the drama of external violence and concentrates fully on its deeper human dimensions. We have committed characters giving

account of their experiences and roles in the war. We have Chief Toje, a big chief who conspired to the arrest and detention of his greatest business rival Oshevire. He used the opportunity of Oshevire's arrest to attempt sexual exploitation of his wife, Aku. Aku is from the secessionist part of the country and feels unprotected in the course of the war. Chief Toje pretends offering her protection but with the intension of exploiting her. However, Toje's impotence could not allow him achieve his evil intention. His nephew, Odibo, the cripple often goes on errand for him to Aku's place. Aku, being sexually abused without actualizing it decides to allow Odibo calm her troubled sexual nerves. This single act makes Odibo realize that he is beyond destitution. He begins to challenge Chief Toje and this leads to the most heinous experiences of the war beyond the battlefield. Both men slaughtered each other. Aku is taken over by Major Ali for protection. Oghenovo, Aku's son and the only child narrator in the story is busy expecting the return of his father from prison. All he does is to fight against Onome or anyone who calls his father a thief. At the return of Oshevire after being proved innocent of the charges against him, he decided to do his last duty of restoring his image, home and conscience. This leads to another tragedy which marks the unending trauma of wars.

By adopting the "collective evidence" technical style of narration, we watch without any inhibition, the adventures, the feelings, the hopes, the fears, the emotional burden and the moral state of the characters in their process of formation. Each character's narrative portion and perspective is proportionate to his degree of involvement, and response to the conflicts. By presenting action from many points of view, the writer allows the reader to judge the entire situation himself. The dramatized or pictorial adopted allows Okpewho to give full and free verbal expression to his characters' emotions, even those that will normally be suppressed as a result of public consciousness.

Starting with Major Ali, both the narrative and the plot structures expand gradually as if from an aperture into a wider channel until the climax is reached when the three main characters lose their lives tragically over a woman. The themes also come tumbling in one by one, one linking the other until there is a complex network of themes: the disruption in communal life, the mischievous manipulation of military authorities for the settlement of private scores, the sexual oppression of a destitute and forlorn woman, the abuse of children and the handicapped, the heroic assertion of personal integrity in the face of daunting odds, moral chastity pulverized by destitution, domestic crises, psychological depression, sexual impotence, etc.

In the novel, we see each character contributing his quota to the main issue. The main issue is not the civil war demon that is currently

devastating the land as this is only a catalyst for the internal psychological crises plaguing all the major characters. The war only reverberates at the background and remains peripheral to the main plot of the narrative. The writer's emphasis is on the series of individualized "civil" wars that each individual has to confront: the desperate tug-of-war between Chief Toje and his failing manhood, his death-knell struggle with his business rival, Oshevire, the fratricidal war between him and his servant over the beautiful wife of another citizen who has been jailed on trumped up charges, his pursuit of pre-war social and financial privileges, Oshevire's struggle against war time wickedness, Aku's moral battle with destitution and unlawful sexual urges, Major Ali's fight to maintain law and order, etc.

In the novel we see that there is much emphasis on honor, honesty, integrity and fellow feelings. The novel does not celebrate any heroic exploits in battle, but a heroic resolve to be just and compassionate under impossible circumstances. The series of micro "civil wars" are bitter, more destructive and more physically and spiritually agonizing than the real civil war. There is economy, not only of words and action, but also of details. The tragedy is worked out within the strategic temporal space of a border town. By selecting a small border town as setting, we are offered the sense of an enclosed arena, which allows no intrusion, or escape from this world of tragedy. Okpewho chooses appropriate characters to dramatize the tale, from the peasant to the noble, from the honorable to the villain. The nature of the human problem presented in the narrative is as complex, touching and realistic as the deft technical construction of the work. Okpewho displays an impressive understanding and insight into the deep world of his characters' inner lives. Okpewho explores this grave human situation with responsibility and sympathetic understanding. Each character makes his choice and bears the consequences of his decision. In Okpewho's artistic vision, choices stem from the characters' inner selves; thus he explores the characters' thoughts fully. He focuses his tragic vision on a closely-knit series of events and maintains this vision through a supremely controlled authorial distance as well as a dramatized angle of observation. There is an effective combination of emotional detachment and an incisive display of sympathy and fellow feelings.

Okpewho has helped to make the war alive to us in a new and fresh way. He succeeds very well in deploying techniques to make the reader a collaborator with him and with the characters in creating a conception of the Civil War that leaps out of the text. The novel enlarges our sympathy and opens our eyes to areas of civil war experience we never really knew well. The novel explores the dark places of human nature, the ethical and moral values of both pre-war and during-the-war Nigerian

society. One basic tendency in some of the best war novels is that many of the narrators see war in more personal than social terms. They seem to have concentrated on the fate of the innocent individuals who are trapped by a destructive machine whose magnitude they cannot even imagine and whose power they are helpless to oppose. Not even children are immune. The extent to which children are affected by war is driven home by the experience of the little Oghenevo in *The Last Duty*. War is an organism that consumes all who come in contact with it.

3.3 Africa and World War: Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy*

Burma Boy is set in the Second World War. Biyi Bandele presents the comic tale *Burma Boy*, a novel that tells the story of Nigerians that fought in the Second World War as part of the Burma campaign of 1944. In the novel we meet Ali Banana, a thirteen-year-old former blacksmith's apprentice who lies about his age to join the army. He becomes the youngest member of the D-Section Brigade, a group of Chindits, an unconventional and quick strike special division whose job it is to go behind the enemy lines of the Japanese. Besieged with ambush after ambush and attack after attack the Brigade, led by the one-eared veteran Samanja Damisa, make their way to a British stronghold where from there a routine troop, a 'floating' exercise leads to a fatal conclusion. Bandele's novel is inspired by his father's participation in the war. His father, Solomon 'Tommy Sparkle' Bandele Thomas was once a proud member of the Signal Corps of the Nigeria Regiment of the Royal West African Frontier Forces in 1943. *Burma Boy* is dedicated to his memory.

Biyi Bandele combined childhood memories of his father's tales of "carnage, shell-shock and hard-won compassion" with biographical research into the lives of Orde Wingate and other Chindit leaders, and further studies of the Second World War's "least documented and most brutal theatre". Yet there is no whiff of the lamp about this taut, tense and utterly riveting tale of comrades-in-arms undergoing conditions of such adversity as to defy belief.

The novel has two heroes: Wingate himself, for whom the saying about genius being akin to madness might have been invented, and the scarred Sergeant Damisa, a veteran of Wingate's Gideon Force in Abyssinia (where he lost an ear in hand-to-hand fighting against the Italians), who takes the novel's protagonist, 14-year-old Ali Banana, under his wing. Bandele's portrayal of the manic, bearded, Old-Testament-prophet-like Wingate is as vivid and compelling as everything else in this novel. He prefaces the Chindit story with a graphic account of a suicide attempt by the (then) major during a bout of malaria in Cairo. Many officers who later served under Wingate in Burma may have wished it had been

successful, since they were deeply offended both by his attitude to the wounded and his often unflattering remarks about their beloved troops. For every one who thought him a genius there were others who dismissed him as a charlatan whose strategy was not as original as he liked to make out.

But such historical controversies are outside the scope of this book, and Bandle's account of the way Wingate's sudden death in an aircraft crash orphaned the Chindits is absolutely authentic. As for the Gurkhas, they are known in the novel as "Thik Hais", from their constant use of the Urdu phrase for "all right", and feature only as sure-footed walkers who provoke the Africans' curses as the latter try to keep up with them on gruelling forced marches.

Ali Banana is one of the reinforcements flown in to shore up the besieged "White City" fortress against frantic assaults by the Japanese. After enduring weeks of bombing raids by Mitsubishi Zeroes and suicidal mass attacks on foot and by tank, "the stronghold had turned into a purgatory... being inside the block, or anywhere near it, was like being trapped inside an airtight canister filled with methane". When they set out on a mission, Banana's comrades are delighted to leave this hell-hole that is a paradise only for vultures and flies. But sadly for them, it is a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire. *Burma Boy* explores to the full the inhumanity of modern warfare while celebrating the humanity of warriors caught up in it. It gave the unheard West African Chindits a voice of their own.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear that wars are not good experiences to humanity. It diminishes human integrity and arouses man's animalistic nature to the extent of destroying feelings and fancy. In *The Last Duty*, we see Africans fighting each other against the backdrop of immoralities. Many people are victims of the war because of fabricated facts. The civil war in Nigeria provided a lot of traumatic facts in the development of this novel. In *Burma Boy*, we see innocent Africans as victims of wars they never caused. World War II was a training ground for blacks in the atrocious wars man had caused for himself. Although written several decades after the Second World War, *Burma Boy* reveals that the effects and experiences of war are not easily forgotten memories. It lingers because of the scares and the endless pains. Chimamanda Adichie wrote *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the story of Nigerian war, after three decades of the war.

The two texts under study have given us different views and experiences of wars from an African perspective. War novels are records of

historical realities. It seems to be a new literary development. It is expected that these new literary developments will force writers to become more experimental in motivating character, in fashioning new techniques in the fictional use of history to portray the evil effects of war on ordinary lives, and more war novels will focus on the common soldier or civilian rather than the general on horseback. The great war novels in this trend deal with ordinary heroes such as the recruit soldier in Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, Aniebo's *The Anonymity of Sacrifice*, and in Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, the man of integrity and the defenceless forlorn woman in Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, and the ordinary country girl in Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. War has been portrayed variously as a heroic and glorious adventure, as an evil that destroys and kills, and as bringing out the best and the worst in individuals and societies. It has been described as an inevitable manifestation of natural human, aggressive instincts.

5.0 SUMMARY

There exists in almost every part of the world a vast body of literature on war. From the primordial tribal wars, the Greek/Trojan wars, the Israelites' wars with their neighbours, the Chinese Civil war, the American Civil War, the Vietnam War, World Wars I & II, the Nigerian Civil War - to the recent wars in Algeria, Sudan, the Congo, the Burundi-Rwanda Civil Wars; the list is endless and continues to expand by the day. Almost every society has one war story of some sort to recount in history books and in fictional works. War has been an ever-recurring theme in human affairs all through the ages. Myths, legends, epics and other manifestations of oral and written literature bequeath to us traditional stories of war in ages past. Many of the world's notable philosophers, statesmen and writers have had one thing or the other to say about man and his numerous wars.

A tragic conflict such as war must give rise to stories because it is an event that is capable of altering the human situation drastically and completely. War is one man-made tragedy, a primitive monster, very ubiquitous and invincible even to modern man and his superior intelligence. Rulers prosecute it while political philosophers rationalize it. Even the law under certain circumstances justifies it. Niccolo Machiavelli in *The Prince* (1513) – one of the influential pioneering treaties on political science – asserted that the principal duty and profession of a ruler is the prosecution of warfare. He recommended that the ruler should apply himself exclusively to war and to the regulations and training it requires: War is the sole art looked for in the one who rules, and is of such efficacy that it not merely maintains those who are born princes, but often enables men to rise to that eminence from a private station; while, on the other hand, we often see that when princes

devote themselves rather to pleasures than to arms, they lose their dominions. And as neglect of this art is the prime cause of such calamities, so to be a proficient in it is the surest way to acquire power (37).

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

1. Explain the major concerns in most African war novels.
2. Distinguish between the war narration in *Burma Boy* and *The Last Duty*.
3. what are the major causes of civil wars in *The Last Duty*.
4. Using the experiences of Major Ali Banana in *Burma Boy*, explain the exploitation of Africans in World War 11.
5. Appreciate the major themes resulting from wars as exemplified in the two novels under study in this unit.

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MODULE 4 MAJOR BLOCS OF AFRICAN NOVELS

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UNIT 1 THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN FICTION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall study the major characteristics of prose fiction from French African countries. We shall trace the historical development of prose fiction as genre in French Africa. Unlike the British African countries, the French colonies had quite a different experience. The French colonies applied the principles of assimilation and association in order to make the blacks a part of the French nations. This approach made the blacks feel that they have nothing to offer as humans. They were meant to believe that being a part of French nation would give meaning to their existence. Thus, they become indirect slaves since they have no thought system of their own. More so, being a part of the French colonies did not stop the high racism towards the blacks. In this type of situation, many of the blacks who had the opportunity of western education could not but form movements that could fight for the restoration of the dignity of the African people. One of such movements is 'Negritude' spearheaded by Aime Cessaire of Martinique and Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal. We shall use Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* to x-ray the colonial experiences and Sembène Ousmene's *Xala* to study the post-colonial experiences of Francophone Africa.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- discuss Negritude as a major philosophy in Francophone African prose fiction
- assess the Francophone colonial and post –colonial experiences as revealed in prose fiction
- identify the major characteristics of Francophone African fiction
- understand that the experiences of Francophone African people is akin to that of other colonized countries.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The French began colonizing parts of Africa in the mid-19th Century. The areas they occupied covered most of West Africa—including what is now Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, and Senegal—as well as Madagascar. By the 1960s almost all the French territories had gained independence. After independence Négritude came under severe criticism from young Francophone intellectuals who regarded its adulation of blackness as out of place. These critics felt that a continent beset with severe social, political, and economic problems was in need of self-criticism and calls to action instead. In response, the tone of Francophone prose shifted to match a growing disillusionment and recognition of the need for change.

African fiction in French emerged in the 1920s, with the publication in Senegal of Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne’s *Les trois volontés de Malik* (Malik’s Three Wishes, 1920). The novel tells of a hard-working youth whose diligence, combined with a benevolent colonial atmosphere, brings all his wishes to fruition. This book, like Ousmane Socé’s *Mirages de Paris* (Mirages of Paris, 1937), is typical of early Francophone fiction in its admiration of the French. These works were superseded in the years leading to independence by fiction with a markedly different attitude toward France, including *Une vie de Boy* (1956; *Houseboy*, 1966) by Ferdinand Oyono of Cameroon and *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* (1956; *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, 1971) by another Cameroonian writer, Mongo Beti. Both books direct merciless satire at French colonialism.

In fiction as in poetry, writers turned their attention to social problems soon after independence. A good example of this shift is *Xala* (1973; translated 1976), by Senegalese writer Ousmane Sembène, which presents a denunciation of corrupt government officials. Other works

attest to the increasing visibility of women on the Francophone literary scene. They include *Une si longue lettre* (1980; *So Long a Letter*, 1981) by Senegalese writer Mariama Bâ and *La grève des bàttu* (1979; *The Beggars' Strike*, 1981) by Aminata Sow Fall, also of Senegal.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the characteristics and emergence of Francophone prose fiction.

3.2 Colonial Francophone Experience in Oyono's *House boy*

In *Houseboy*, Oyono tells the story of Toundi Joseph, a boy from French Cameroon who flees his father's brutality to become the houseboy of a priest at a Catholic mission in a nearby town. The book is structured like a diary. The story starts in Spanish Guinea with a Frenchman on vacation, who finds a man named Toundi. He has been injured and soon dies. The Frenchman finds his diary, which is called an "exercise book" by Toundi. The rest of the story is of the diary (exercise book) that the Frenchman is supposedly reading. There is no further discussion of the Frenchman after this point.

The first "exercise book" starts with Toundi living with his family. His father beats him constantly, and one day he runs away from his home. He runs to the rescue of Father Gilbert, a priest who lives nearby. His father comes back for him, telling Toundi that everything will be alright if he comes back. He denies his father's offer and after this point he no longer acknowledges his birth parents. Toundi treats Father Gilbert as his new father. Father Gilbert teaches Toundi to read and write, and he teaches Toundi about Catholicism. Toundi believes in Catholicism, but as the story progresses he drifts from his beliefs until the end, when he does not believe in God.

Father Gilbert dies in a motorcycle accident a few months after meeting Toundi. Toundi is eventually taken to live with the Commandant, a religious man who tours the countryside to spread religion. He serves as the houseboy for the Commandant, and later Madame, the Commandant's wife. It becomes very clear that the events that go on in the house are more important to Toundi than his own life. After about six months since Toundi comes to live with the Commandant, Madame, the Commandant's wife arrives from France. She initially is a warm and caring woman, who is very beautiful. She catches the eye of almost every man in town, much to the Commandant's excitement.

Soon after Madame arrives the Commandant leaves to go on tour again. Toundi is left with Madame to take care of the house. As time goes on, Madame becomes more and more hostile and disrespectful towards

Toundi. When the Commandant returns, she is portrayed as a ruthless woman. While the Commandant was still on tour, it becomes obvious that she is bored with her life. She begins to have an affair with M. Moreau, the man in charge of the prison. M. Moreau is perceived to be ruthless against the Africans. One of Toundi's first experiences with M. Moreau had him whipping two other Africans nearly to death.

The Second Exercise book begins as the Commandant returns from touring, and it is later discovered that he knew about his wife's affair and returns because of it. The Commandant has a terrible argument with her, but after a few days they are getting along again. Madame becomes very disrespectful towards Toundi, partly because she does not like being there anymore, but mostly because she knows that he knew about her affair. She informs M. Moreau that he was stealing from the salaries from the other workers in the house, and he is dragged away, as Madame Skips back into the house in excitement.

Toundi is held in a hut near the police headquarters. Fortunately he has a friend who works there named Mendim, who is described as a very muscular man. He is feared by most other people but he soon comes to be known as Toundi's ally. M. Moreau orders Mendim to beat up Toundi, but Mendim throws ox's blood on him to make it look like he is injured. They spend the rest of the day playing cards. Toundi becomes sick and Mendim takes Toundi to the hospital. They have to wait a very long time to see a doctor because the black doctor is the only doctor there, the other white doctor was promoted to captain. The doctor finds out that Toundi's ribs are broken and have punctured his bronchi. While still at the hospital, while Toundi is in a dazed state, M. Moreau returns with the white doctor. He talks about punishing Toundi some more. At this point, after M. Moreau has left, Toundi escapes from the hospital, not knowing exactly where to go.

In the work, Oyono showed himself a master of irony, imagery, and keen observation. Toundi's youth and naïveté are foils for the evils of the colonials, who dominate the natives. Scholars have found the images of physical destruction to echo the colonials' psychological destruction of the Africans. The book, though short, is layered with irony. One commentator notes, for example, Oyono's use of the name Joseph as the priest's name for Toundi, linking it with the Joseph of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, the Israelite who, enslaved in Egypt, rises in the estimation of his masters until he is falsely accused of desiring the wife of an Egyptian. It has also been noted that Toundi enters into his relationships with the colonials with frank admiration, accepting the alleged superiority of Western ways and culture until disillusioned by the truth. Not only is Toundi given a Christian name on joining the church and the colonial world; it is practitioners of

Christianity who set him on the path that leads to his destruction in spite of his innocence.

Houseboy reveals insights into the psychology of oppression. At first dazzled by the education his servitude affords and the loveliness of the Commandant's wife, Toundi is eventually doomed by his close association with the colonials because he learns too much about their real character. Because he knows of the Commandant's wife's indiscretion and of the agricultural engineer's affair, he represents a threat, although his diary reveals no intent to betray anyone. Shortly before his arrest, Toundi writes bitterly of his place in the Commandant's household: "Kicks and insults have started again. He thinks this humiliates me and he can't find any other way. He forgets that it is all part of my job as a houseboy, a job which holds no more secrets for me."

Houseboy reveals the psychological aspect colonialism has on its victims. The story is about a young boy named Toundi who grows up in a small village. Life in the village is rough, but Toundi, who is renamed Joseph, goes to work for a mission led by Father Gilbert as his houseboy. Joseph develops a close friendship with the father and he comes to look up to him. The boy's attitude toward his own people and country is apparent in the beginning: "My ancestors were cannibals."

After the priest is killed in a motorcycle accident, Joseph is sent to live with a commandant and his wife. There Joseph is able to see the peculiarities of the colonialists for whom he works. Joseph falls in love with Madame, but she abuses him and other members of the household staff, and has an affair with another man. The story takes a tragic turn when one of the colonialists is robbed by his lover, whom Joseph also knew. He is arrested and beaten as a conspirator.

Houseboy focuses on the imbalance of political power that the Africans have under colonialism. Joseph is neither given due justice of the law or an attorney, which would have been the due course in France. He is arrested simply on the word of the white lover who was robbed. All throughout the story, Joseph is warned by Baklu, the laundryman, not to get too close to the whites but he does not heed his words until it is too late. As a houseboy, though, Joseph is given a bird's-eye view of the private interactions of the whites. It is while watching the Commandant and his wife that Joseph's opinions begin to change about whites and the values they hold. Yet his closeness to them also puts him in trouble. He is often dragged into their domestic squabbles and is accused of spreading gossip of the Madame's affair with M. Moreau, though it is apparent that her affair is a secret to no one in the village but her husband.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain thoroughly how religion is used as a weapon of colonization in *Houseboy*.

3.3 Post-Colonial Francophone Experience in Ousmene's *Xala*

Xala is the story of El Hadji Kader Beye, a Muslim businessman living in Dakar, Senegal, and the misfortune he suffers after his third marriage. The novel follows several weeks in El Hadji's life and his "rapid decline from affluence to total humiliation and ruin." After the wedding ceremony, El Hadji is unable to consummate his marriage to N'Gone. He believes himself to have been cursed with xala (pronounced "hala") a condition which leaves him impotent. El Hadji agonizes over this dilemma and sees numerous marabouts (healers) suggested by his trusted friends and colleagues. None are able to help him and El Hadji continues to obsess over his sexual loss, ignoring his business and financial affairs, which he discovers are failing miserably. His colleagues pounce on his misfortune and vote him out of their business group.

The next morning, a beggar comes to El Hadji's door. He's the same beggar who has haunted El Hadji's office building for several years. The beggar is accompanied by other diseased beggars who pillage the villa. The beggar reveals to El Hadji that it was he who cursed him with the xala because El Hadji had ruined his life years before. The only cure to the curse is for all the beggars to spit twice upon El Hadji while he stands naked. Desperate, El Hadji agrees. As El Hadji endures this abuse, the police, expecting a riot, surround the house with loaded guns.

Like in *Things Fall Apart* and Agatha Moudio's *Son*, *Xala* represents a culture changed by Europeans. The novel centers on El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, a successful businessman in Dakar, Senegal. He believes himself untouchable, refusing the superstitions of his culture until the curse of the xala is placed upon him. El Hadji has assimilated into a successful westernized businessman – power hungry, and seeking to restore his power he has lost under the curse.

There is Class Divisions in post-colonial French. El Hadji, as a successful and wealthy man, has separated himself from many others in his community. Because of his wealth and power, he has chosen to alienate those in lower socioeconomic classes than himself. He has turned his back on the poor men of his community. Unlike the strong Efurú who does not allow class differences to affect her, this stress between socioeconomic classes creates the hole into which El Hadji

allows himself to fall. His alienation of the lower classes is similar to those of characters in some Indian novels such as *The Painter of Signs* and *God of Small Things*. The curse of the xala that has inflicted impotence on El Hadji...takes on a symbolic connotation as the impotence that afflicts the emerging Senegalese bourgeoisies becomes apparent. El Hadji represents, experiences, and eventually articulates the impotence of his class.

Hadji's business group, as he recognizes himself, is corrupt. He knows that it works as a social system in which he and his business partners profit from the poor, but El Hadji also realizes that there is a Colonial empire profiting off of his group. "The colonist is stronger, more powerful...hidden inside us" (Sembène 93). He recognizes that to succeed, he must assimilate to the Colonial power using "the Englishman's self-control, the American's flair, and the Frenchman's politeness" (Sembène 85). El Hadji is stifled as in his business as much as he is by his xala. The only cure is from the beggar who placed the xala on him.

The novel then becomes a story of independence, of uprising and revolution by those who are oppressed against their oppressors. Sembène does not leave his novel to tie itself so easily at the end. The battle against the colonist is not yet won. The beggar and the other oppressed are surrounded by the police, who "outside...raised their weapons into the firing position" (Sembène 114).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Assess the effect of colonial education on the ruling class as exemplified in *Xala*.

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the two novels under study, we have been able to examine a typical Francophone colonial and post-colonial situation. In *Houseboy*, we see the indoctrination of the young African to the fact that anything African is barbaric. Joseph is a victim of indoctrination of western values. He never believed in his Africanness and as a result he became a victim of a western culture that places him in a bad state. He was condemned even while innocent. *Xala* epitomizes the class differences created by western education on Francophone Africans. Those at the top maltreat those below and make it impossible for the poor to have basic conveniences. Thus, western education creates a wide gap between the educated and the uneducated, the rich and the poor and the peasants and the rulers. Sembène is a noted independent film director. He attended school only briefly before taking work as a fisherman and trying his

hand at other manual labour jobs. While working as a stevedore, he wrote his first novel, *Le Docker Noir* (The Black Docker), opening his future in the arts. He is known not only for his literature, but also his films. He is a product of the peasant situation in Francophone Africa and reenacts that in his works.

5.0 SUMMARY

The Francophone African states have been under severe identity problem. The blacks are meant to see themselves as poor, underdeveloped and without a thought system. The novel *Houseboy* reveals to a large extent, the maltreatment of the blacks during the colonial era. It shows how uncaring the colonists were to the Africans. It also exposes the trauma of the blacks in the hands of the whites who perpetuate evils in the name of religion. *Xala* is a call to black sanity. It calls on the black elite to avoid colonial behaviours of class consciousness. It calls for the need to bring in the real African communal living where the rich and the poor co-exist in harmony. It attacks the rulers who want to hold firmly to power in order to achieve more economic advantage. The xala disease is a reaction by the people, a response by their gods and a revelation of impending tragedy in the people's polity if things are not properly done. Francophone African experiences, as revealed in these colonial and post colonial novels, are not easy traumas by which the French colonials acting on economic pretences enslaved them.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

1. Explain the philosophy behind négritude in French Africa.
2. Assess the colonial indoctrination which removed Joseph from his root with reference to Oyono's *Houseboy*.
3. The post colonial Francophone African state is a continuation of the colonial traumas. Discuss with reference to Ousmene's *Xala*.
4. From the two texts discussed in this unit, describe the characteristics of the colonial and post-colonial African states.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Oyono, Ferdinand. (1966). *Houseboy*. London: Heinemann.

Ousmene, Sembene. (1976). *Xala*. London: Heinemann.

UNIT 2 NORTH AFRICAN NOVELS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Colonial Literature in North Africa: Driss Chraïbi's *The Simple Past*
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- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall study the select novels from North Africa. Before that, we shall examine the characteristics and the historical experiences of the people which aided their creative arts. North Africa had an early literate indigenous civilization (Ancient Egypt) some of whose hieroglyphic writings survive. North Africans also contributed to writing in Phoenician, Greek and Latin. Phoenician material, from Carthage and other colonies on the continent, has been very largely lost. Encouraged by the royal patronage of the Ptolemaic rulers, scholars in Alexandria assembled the famous Library of Alexandria and Alexandrian writers contributed not insignificantly to the material housed in this institution. North Africans writing in Latin include Apuleius and Saint Augustine. In Islamic times, North Africans, such as ibn Khaldun attained great distinction within Arabic literature.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Maghrebian literature is the literature of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. 'Maghreb' is also the Arabic word for Morocco and comes from the word that means 'the place where the sun sets,' to distinguish it from the eastern part of the Arab world. The area has long been a crossroads of north-south and cultural commerce between Europe and Africa south of the Sahara and east-west religious/intellectual exchange. French, Arabic

and Berber are the major literary languages. The so-called Greater Maghreb includes Mauritania and Libya, but the linguistic bonding through French has tended to cause people to group the first three countries, despite great differences in their internal political and social structures. There are writers in North Africa who were born and raised in North Africa but are, or were, French Pieds-Noirs, that is descendants of French settlers and, thus, not strictly-speaking Maghrebians.

Literature written in French by Arabs and Berbers exploded on the scene in the 1950s and '60s, with the writings of Moroccans Ahmed Sefrioui and Driss Chraïbi, Algerians Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Mammeri, and Kateb Yacine, and Tunisian Albert Memmi. Some of these novelists, like Feraoun, wrote in an ethnographic vein, describing from the inside cultural attitudes and events which had previously been ignored or misrepresented by European writers. Others, like Chraïbi, Kateb, and the later Dib, analyzed the implications of colonization and cultural hybridization. The major works of this early period are Kateb Yacine's masterpiece *Nedjma* (1956), Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer* (*Who Remembers the Sea*, 1962), Chraïbi's *Le passe simple* (*The Simple Past*, 1954) and *Succession ouverte* (*Heirs to the Past*, 1962), Mammeri's *La colline oubliee* (*The Inspired Hill*, 1952), Albert Memmi's *La statue de sel* (*The Pillar of Salt*, 1953) and several essays on the psychology of colonization, and Feraoun's *Le fils du pauvre* (*The Poor Man's Son*, 1950, new ed., 1954), a novel widely read today in Algerian schools.

Algerian writers who survive are tormented by the events and feel compelled to write about them and to honour those who have died. For example, Assia Djebar's work in recent years has dwelled on this tragedy. She has wanted to return to a tetralogy that she has nearly completed, but when she tries to do so, she feels she must first write yet again about the problem: *Le blanc de l'Algerie* (1995) was followed by *Oran, langue morte* (1997) and *Les nuits de Strasbourg* (1997). And BoudjeIdra (*FIS de la haine*, 1992) and Mimouni (*De la barbarie en gendral et de l'integrisme en particulier*, 1992) penned works critical of the rise of fundamentalism in Algeria. Maghrebians started writing in Arabic shortly after the Islamization and subsequent Arabization of the people in the Eighth Century. If Tunisia still lags behind Morocco, and especially Algeria, in Francophone literary production, its Arabic-language literature is more significant both in quantity and quality.

The strength of Berber literature lies in its strong allegiance to orality and the popular traditions of the folk tale and poetry; and the drama of Berber literature lies in the fact that the Berbers (or Imazighen) have long had to struggle to vouchsafe the survival of their language and its cultural corollaries. The Berber presence in Northern Africa goes back

to times shrouded in mystery and there is much debate as to the origins of this group and its language(s). Despite this age-old presence, of which they are justly proud and protective, the Berber's "literature" has, in many areas, remained an "orature" and does not have an extensive written tradition or canon.

North African experience is an ineradicable part of the lives, and writing of a number of French authors. One can divide them roughly into four categories: (1) those, like Gustave Flaubert and Andre Gide whom some have termed tourist or "post-card" authors because they came to North Africa as to a foreign, exotic land; (2) those, like Jacques Derrida or Marie Cardinal, who were born and raised in North Africa but who left and more or less minimized their North-African roots until quite recently; (3) writers, like Camus, who continued to live their lives as North-African Frenchmen until Independence and then withdrew with some rancor; and 4) writers who cast their lot with the Independence movement and/or placed justice above personal interest, like Jean Senac, Emmanuel Robles, and Jean Pelegri. Within these larger linguistic categories of French, Arabic, and Berber, there are, of course, differences, for the Maghreb has for centuries lain at the crossroads of cultures of three continents that have interacted and continued to interact synchronically and diachronically with them.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss in details the complex characteristic make up of North African literature.

3.2 Colonial Literature in North Africa: Driss Chraïbi's *The Simple Past*

Driss Chraïbi is a French-Moroccan novelist, considered to be the father of the modern Moroccan novel. Chraïbi's works draw heavily on his own life. Central theme in his novels is the clash between different cultures, the East and the West, Arab and French. Chraïbi's range of style changes from epic to comedy. He has been among the pioneers of Maghrebian writers to explore the oppression of women and children in an Islamic, patriarchal society. His father was a tea merchant, who perceived Western education as a means to modern Morocco. Chraïbi attended Koranic school as a young boy. When the family moved to Casablanca, Chraïbi continued his studies at the French Lycée. At age of nineteen he went to France planning to study chemical engineering and neuropsychiatry. After abandoning his studies, he traveled throughout Europe and Israel. Chraïbi settled in France with his first wife and children, and eventually devoted himself in 1952 to literature and journalism. In 1954 Chraïbi began writing for the National Radio and

Television Broadcasting System. In 1978 he married Sheena McCallion. From his first marriage he had five children. Chaïbi taught in Canada for a year after his second divorce but returned then to France. Chraïbi's works have been translated into English, Arabic, Italian, German, and Russian.

As a novelist Chraïbi made his debut with *Le Passé simple (The Simple Past)*, which was published in 1954, two years before Morocco gained its independence. The book arose much controversy because of the inflammable political situation in North Africa. Chraïbi was criticized as a traitor to the Arab world and French conservatives saw that the book revealed the reason for French presence in Morocco. The protagonist in the novel is a young man, Driss, who revolts against his tyrannical Moslem father. The father banishes Driss from the home and Driss begins his wandering on the streets. Finally he returns home only to find that his mother has committed suicide in his absence. The novel ends with Driss's departure for France. Driss is an outsider in his own country, oppressed by his family and the feudal, religious traditions. Chraïbi was so disturbed by critics, that he publicly rejected the novel in 1957, but later regretted his action. The book was banned in Morocco until 1977.

In *The Simple Past* (1954), a student in a French missionary school confronts the violence he has done to his identity:

You were the issue of the Orient, and through your painful past, your imaginings, your education, you are going to triumph over the Orient. You have never believed in Allah. You know how to dissect the legends, you think in French, you are a reader of Voltaire and an admirer of Kant. [9]

Such existential crises may no longer seem likely in postcolonial Morocco, which seems, to the passing tourist eye at least, more liberal and Westernized than most Muslim societies. In the novel, a strange phenomenon called the Thin Line addresses the protagonist, Driss Ferdi, in an accusatory manner. It gives him a history lesson, makes fun of his predilection for things Western, and questions his beliefs:

The Thin Line is clear at present. Everything got misty in front of my eyes so that it would be clear. It said to me: you are black. You are black from generations back, crossed with white. You are about to cross the line. To lose your last drop of authentic black blood. Your facial angle opened up, and you are no longer woolly-haired or thick-lipped. You were the issue of the Orient, and through

your painful past, your imaginings, your education, you are going to triumph over the Orient. You have never believed in Allah. You know how to dissect the legends; you think in French, you are a reader of Voltaire and an admirer of Kant. Only the occidental world for which you are destined seems to you sewn with stupidities and ugliness you are fleeing from. Moreover, you feel that it is a hostile world. It is not going to accept you right away, and, at the point of exchanging the box seat you now occupy for a jump seat, you have some setbacks. That is why I appear to you. Since the first day I appeared to you, you are nothing but an open wound (Chraïbi 56).

What is not clear is where the Thin Line is located. Is it speaking from within Driss or outside of him? In essence, the Thin Line exists in the interior and exterior worlds of the protagonist. It is an intensely subjective moment where the boundaries between the inner and outer worlds of a person blur. The Thin Line cautions Driss that he is about to cross over a line, however, it seems that he has already entered into this strange state of extreme subjectivity that is both within and outside of him, and, perhaps, simultaneously, is neither these locations. It may also 'mark' the distance, intimacy, and alienation within oneself. This hallucinatory dissolution between the interior and exterior states of being informs the form of the novel, with its fragmented stream-of-consciousness narration, and, in the difficulty in telling apart interior and exterior realities. In a way, it may not matter which is which. The novel represents the shattering of the narrator's perceptions due to the disjunctions in his psychic and social lives. Driss Ferdi is in a state of irreconcilable realities.

If the Thin Line represents this sense of extimacy, an ambiguous intimate and distant awareness of one's states of being, it manifests itself in the act of writing in Chraïbi's novel. More specifically, the author signifies this multiple movement of the self in the form of the hand. Chraïbi writes:

My hand? You probably do not even feel it. Nevertheless, in that hand as in a kind of refuge, I shall transform everything, flesh and wound and avatars and grandiose complexes, into delirium. I have told you: I am nothing but a hand (Chraïbi 109).

All else disappears, except for this hand. It is a metonym for his divided body, consciousness, and, more importantly, the act of writing; and it is poised, like the expressive hands in Picasso's *Guernica*, with silent anguish. A similar self-reflexive moment surfaces in Paul Smail's *Smile*,

which references Chraïbi's novel, among others. Smail's 'trance-like state' sounds a lot like the experience of the Thin Line. In both cases, the act of writing causes at least a double movement of intimacy and alienation within oneself. And it is through writing that both protagonist and author are able to transform and represent their painful, contradictory realities. Moreover, it is through these self-reflexive moments of writing where protagonist and writer intersect, or the *entre-deux* that occurs in the understanding of the Thin Line. In effect, it is in this intersection caused by self-awareness that the painful subject is borne, the subject that is able to write and express his pain. Yet what is interesting is what happens to expressions, specifically expressions of pain that are not as well articulated as in the forms of literature. What is the status of that kind of language of pain, since it is mediated by a psychiatrist-activist and an anthropologist, respectively?

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How do western values create the thin line that places the North African in a state of disconnection from his society? Use *The Simple Past* as your reference point.

3.3 Post-Colonial North Africa: Hisham Matar's *in the Country of Men*

In the Country of Men, its narrator Suleiman, a nine-year-old child in Libya, describes a statue of the Roman emperor Septimius Severus in Tripoli's Martyrs' Square. The Libya-born Severus stands with one arm pointing toward the sea, as though "urging Libya to look toward Rome." Suleiman himself often dreams about the lands across the Mediterranean, from where his father, a businessman, brings him his most cherished gifts. However, this is 1979, and as Colonel Qaddafi ruthlessly consolidates his regime, torturing and murdering thousands of dissenters, Libya appears to have moved far from its cosmopolitan past. Visiting Lepcis Magna, the Roman seaside colony where Septimius Severus was born, Suleiman finds that "absence was everywhere." Standing in the antique city's ruins, Suleiman's best friend's father, Ustath Rashid – one of the political liberals stealthily working against Qaddafi – recites an Arab poem: "Why this nothingness where once was a city? /Who will answer? Only the wind."

As *In the Country of Men* goes on to describe, Qaddafi's Libya suffers from a similar blankness, a political and intellectual vacuum maintained through fear and terror: in one of its scenes that dramatize the precariousness of the independent thinker in Libya, Qaddafi's Revolutionary Guards chase a man who has a typewriter. Exalted as the country's sole "Guide," Qaddafi not only disseminates his half-baked

ideology of Islamic socialism through billboards, books, and magazines; he also invades people's homes through television, enforcing conformity through live telecasts of the interrogations and public hangings of his opponents.

A few educated and well-traveled men such as Ustath Rashid and Suleiman's father dare to challenge the regime. Gathering in a flat in Martyrs' Square, they write pamphlets inciting students to revolt against Qaddafi. But it doesn't take long for them to be discovered and then, under torture, to betray their colleagues. Ustath Rashid is publicly interrogated and then hanged in a basketball stadium. Though he does not name Suleiman's father as a coconspirator, the latter is nevertheless kidnapped and tortured by Qaddafi's guards.

For all the grim news it brings us from a murky region, *In the Country of Men* is not overtly political or polemical. It has few details about the scale and scope of anti-Qaddafi dissent in Libya in 1979. Far from being idealized, the pro-democracy activists in the novel come across as naive and inept. Matar's primary fidelity is to the truth of Suleiman's experience. Since he lives in Libya, the obscure deeds of distant adults have filled his life with more than the usual private mysteries, joys, and sorrows.

Living in a well-to-do suburb, Suleiman spends his school holidays playing on the roof of his house or in the streets with friends, swimming at the nearby beach, and climbing mulberry trees – daily activities that the disappearance of his father and the mysterious "illness" of his mother (what the reader recognizes as alcoholism) do not much restrict. At the heart of the novel is Suleiman's great love for his mother, who, in a country dominated by men, faces both domestic and political oppression.

Listening to his mother, Suleiman is able to reconstruct a central event in her life. Caught by a relative while holding hands with a boy at an Italian café in Martyrs' Square (most of the novel's dramatic events occur near the statue of the Roman emperor pointing to the promise of Europe), she is forced into marriage at the age of fourteen by male members of her family – the so-called "High Council," an ironic reminder of Qaddafi's revolutionary councils and committees. (Given her experience of men, Suleiman's mother tends to regard her husband and his colleagues as dangerous fools.) Each night, drunk on surreptitiously bought alcohol, she pours out her bitter stories to Suleiman, the son whom she had tried to abort and who develops a touching desire to protect her against a cruel world:

Mama and I spent most of the time together—she alone, I unable to leave her. I worried how the world might change if even for a second I was to look away, to relax the grip of my gaze. I was convinced that if my attention was applied fully, disaster would be kept at bay and she would return whole and uncorrupted, no longer lost, stranded on the opposite bank, waiting alone. But although her unpredictability and her urgent stories tormented me, my vigil and what I then could only explain as her illness bound us into an intimacy that has since occupied the innermost memory I have of love. If love starts somewhere, if it is a hidden force that is brought out by a person, like light off a mirror, for me that person was her. There was anger; there was pity, even the dark warm embrace of hate, but always love and always the joy that surrounds the beginning of love.

Suleiman's family phone is tapped, with threatening voices interrupting conversations. His mother is forced to burn her husband's books and put up pictures of Qaddafi on the walls. Revolutionary guards constantly monitor the house from a car parked outside. In this suffocating atmosphere, Suleiman's feeling for his mother grows:

She often, during those empty days when Baba [her husband] was away, walked aimlessly around the house. And she never sang to herself in that soft, absentminded way she often did when taking a bath or painting her eyes in front of the mirror or drawing in the garden. That singing that had always evoked a girl unaware of herself, walking home from school, brushing her fingers against the wall: a moment before the Italian Coffee House, a moment sheltered in the clarity of innocence, before the quick force that, without argument, without even the chance to say, "No," thrust her over the border and into womanhood, then irrevocably into motherhood.

Matar shows how ordinary human beings under severe pressures are as capable of great cruelty as of great sympathy. Suleiman, who is fascinated by the apparently powerful guards who stalk his house, abruptly beats up the local beggar. The novel really describes the arduous growth, in extremely unfavorable conditions, of a moral and emotional sensibility. In this, there is clean, supple prose. This vividly evokes days of idleness, long warm afternoons, the sensations of extreme heat, and the coolness of shuttered interiors.

After Suleiman's father returns home with a face disfigured by Qaddafi's torturers, his parents decide to send him away to Egypt. Years pass before he sees his mother again, fittingly in Alexandria, "the city of

fallen grace." While still in Libya Suleiman had longed to grow up and distinguish himself from the people around him. "I couldn't wait to be a man. And not to do all the things normally associated with manhood and its license." It is the renewal of the filial bond – and remembrance and art – that seems to offer Suleiman some refuge from brutal machismo.

Having escaped Libya's oppressive solitude, Suleiman wonders about his new life in Egypt: "how readily and thinly we procure these fictional selves." The exile's experience of deracination and painful self-invention is also the fate of Laila Lalami's Moroccan characters in her novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. The young hijab-clad Faten, who has been a radical Islamist as a student in Rabat, becomes a prostitute in Madrid, uneasily satisfying the Arabian Nights fantasy of a Spanish client. Having failed to interest tourists in visiting Paul Bowles's home in Tangiers, Murad, who has a college degree in English literature, turns to hawking Moroccan artifacts. Another well-educated young man, Aziz, leaves a wife he barely knows to work as a dishwasher in a Madrid restaurant. Fleeing a violent husband in a Casablanca slum, Halima almost drowns in the sea off Spain. Rescued by her ten-year-old son, she returns to Morocco to see him unexpectedly exalted as a folk saint.

Political despotism is only partly to blame for the displacement and bewilderment suffered by Lalami's characters. Though Morocco's King Mohammed VI wields absolute power, commanding loyalty bordering on sycophancy from the parliamentary parties, Moroccans enjoy a higher degree of political freedom than their North African neighbors, the Algerians, Tunisians, and Libyans. However, corruption, especially in business deals with France, taints many politicians and bureaucrats, increasing the appeal of radical Islamists among the young and the unemployed.

The intense and usually thwarted search by young people for a stable job infects many lives with anxiety and anomie. Uprooted from their traditional livelihoods and exposed to modern education and urban life, millions of them have found their basic hopes disappointed throughout Morocco's postcolonial history. Not surprisingly, they find the promise of modern life incarnated with tempting vividness in Europe, particularly Spain, one of Morocco's former colonial overlords, which, increasingly prosperous and democratic, lies just a few miles across the Strait of Gibraltar.

Unable to create enough jobs, Morocco's economy is propped up by remittances sent by the approximately four million Moroccans abroad—roughly 12 percent of the country's population. Many of these often well-educated and skilled Moroccans live, often illegally, in Spain, the Netherlands, France, and Italy, bolstering the local economies with their

low-paid jobs. Their growing presence in relatively homogeneous societies has helped right-wing politicians in Europe to incite xenophobic sentiments against immigrants, particularly Muslims.

As it turns out, only two of them make it; the others are intercepted by the Spanish police and sent back to Morocco. The rest of the novel describes, in careful, limpid prose, their separate pasts and futures. Lalami, who was educated in Rabat and London, and now lives in Portland, Oregon, writes about her home country without the expatriate's self-indulgent and often condescending nostalgia. She brings a calm sympathy to all her characters, and so well chosen are they, from different classes and regions, that they manage to represent a broad panorama of a Moroccan society in troubled transition.

Returning to Morocco after a spell in Spain, Aziz notices a growing number of women wearing Islamic head-scarves; his own usually submissive wife startles him by claiming that it is "the right way." In Madrid Aziz has suffered the humiliations inflicted on all North African immigrants; but he has also found there a new idea of himself. Distractedly making love to his wife, he remembers the women he has slept with in Spain, and wonders "what his wife would look like in a sexy bustier, straddling him, her arms up in the air, moaning her pleasure out loud. He couldn't imagine Zohra doing it." Briskly and subtly, Lalami shows Aziz's growing alienation from his relatives and friends in Morocco; her evenhandedness offers us no scope for easy judgments.

Even those of her characters who are unable to make it to Europe find their inner lives in thrall to the Continent. Murad, the English literature major and reader of Paul Bowles, has spent much of his life imagining a life for himself in metropolitan Europe. In doing so, he has cut himself off from his own society; he can't remember any of the stories he heard as a child from his father; he feels he has no inherited culture to pass on to his own children. In a scene rich with irony he appears as a salesman in a gift shop. Half-listening to Western backpackers looking for bargains, he reconsiders the larger consequences of his perennial longing for the West:

He'd been so consumed with his imagined future that he hadn't noticed how it had started to overtake something inside him, bit by bit. He'd been living in the future, thinking of all his tomorrows in a better place, never realizing that his past was drifting. And now, when he thought of the future, he saw himself in front of his children, as mute as if his tongue had been cut off, unable to recount for them the stories he'd heard as a child.

In Morocco, as in many colonized countries, material want and constant fantasizing about a life elsewhere seem to have gradually damaged individual memory and, eventually, an entire cultural tradition built upon the transmission of memory. Murad follows in a long line of damaged men in postcolonial African fiction whom a Western-style education has unmoored from their tradition, and who abandon their own indigenous culture and society for the sake of the catastrophic, even suicidal, journeys to the Northern metropolises. With the best of intentions that went into setting up modern educational institutions, it created generations of rootless and confused men, who were likely, eventually, to focus their rage and despair on the modernizing West.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Post-colonial Libya is a hybrid of corruption and anarchy. Using Matar's *In the Country of Men* as reference novel, expatiate on this issue.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The North African novel is a complex web of languages: French, Arabic and Berber. Maghrebian literature is a reaction to these complex realities. One observes that the novelists, especially the post colonial writers are concerned with identity because of the enslavement they experienced. There was that search for self. The thin line situation in Chraïbi's *The Simple Past* is an inquiry into purpose of being in their existence. There is the psychological torture which has affected the sensibilities of the people and makes them question the moral dispositions in their enslavement and/or colonialism. Thus, the past is not one simple past but a complex experience.

Hisham Matar's *In the Country of Men* takes a jab at post-colonial Libya. The grim situation is akin to the general experience in North Africa where monarchical ruling drowns democracy. Speaking of the corruption and injustice of the Moroccan elite, the student radical Faten says, "If we had been better Muslims, perhaps these problems wouldn't have been visited on our nation and on our brethren elsewhere." More often disappointed than realized, this sentimental vision of faith nevertheless remains popular among Muslims. This shows why religion remains attractive to so many North African writers because it would help in dictating a particular national setting, against the backdrop of political despotism, a stagnant economy, and deeply entrenched class divisions. Islam seems the moral board for their proper governance and existence.

5.0 SUMMARY

Both novelists, Chraïbi and Matar have revealed the true states of North Africa at the two periods under review. We see them focus on specificity and distrusts large abstractions – the abstractions that have become of the greatest importance in understanding the diverse political and cultural choices of Muslims, who seem to have become subject to wilder generalizations than would be deemed intellectually respectable for non-Muslims. Both of them offer no false optimism. A meager modern society that consists of severe economic inequality, the stranglehold of corrupt ruling elite, and the crippling dependence on a widely distrusted West will continue to force many people in Muslim countries into the simple solutions and consolations of faith-based politics. As they reveal the darkening ambiguities of North Africa and its relationship with the West, these first novels make for antique exhortation to learn that Europe is not a good experience for them.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

1. What are the major thematic concern of colonial north African Novels?
2. Assess Maghrebian novels as Islamic teaching literature.
3. Compare the colonial experiences in *The Simple Past* with the post-colonial experiences in *In the Country of Men*.
4. “North African experience is an ineradicable part of the lives, and writing of a number of French authors.” Discuss this statement.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 THE LUSOPHONE AFRICAN FICTION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine the prose fiction from the Lusophone African countries. Lusophone literature are the literatures from Portugal's former colonies - now Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Mozambique - is the least extensive and least known of the African literatures in European languages. Portugal's African empire was small compared with the empires of France and Great Britain, and Lusophone works are not as readily available in English translation as are Francophone works. Portugal's contact with Africa, the longest of any European country, dates back to the 15th Century. It gave rise to an intellectual class constituted of European whites who lived in the urban centers, Africans, and *mestiços* (people of mixed African and European ancestry). Members of this class are responsible for African literature in Portuguese. We shall use da Silva's novel *Chiquinho* to examine post Colonial Lusophone Prose and Bernardo Honwana *We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Stories* to examine Colonial Lusophone Prose.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

3.1 MAIN CONTENT

3.2 General Overview

Poetry was the first genre to thrive in Lusophone literature. As early as the 1930s, its blossoming marked the rise of political consciousness among intellectuals, who used poetry to celebrate a unique identity and experience. Notable among the poets of cultural authentication are the

Cape Verdean Jorge Barbosa, whose volume *Arquipélago* (Archipelago) was published in 1935, and Mozambican Noémia de Sousa, the first female Lusophone poet in Africa, best known for the poem “Sangue Negro” (Black Blood, 1976). The wars of liberation, which began in the 1960s in the Portuguese colonies, gave rise to a poetry that called for action. “Anti-evasão” (Anti-Evasion, 1962) by Cape Verdean Ovídio Martins exemplifies the poetry of this movement, which renounced the escapism of earlier poets in its insistence on addressing social, economic, and political issues. The end of colonialism in 1975 brought about a new type of poetry characterized by delight in language. Mozambican Luís Patraquim, whose best work appears in *A inadiável viagem* (The Urgent Voyage, 1985), represents this change.

Beginning in the 1940s, Lusophone prose writers sought to provide a more authentic image of Africa than that popularized by colonial writers, which tended toward racism. Their works typically borrow extensively from oral traditions. Cape Verdean Baltasar Lopes da Silva’s novel *Chiquinho* (1947) tells of a man who leaves Cape Verde to follow his father to America. One of the few Lusophone works available in English is *Nós matamos o cão tinoso* (1964; *We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Stories*, 1969) by Mozambican Luís Bernardo Honwana. José Luandino Vieira, author of *Luuanda* (1964; *Luuanda: Short Stories of Angola*, 1980), and other Angolan writers experimented with language by superimposing features of their native Kimbundu language on the Portuguese and by using Kimbundu words liberally.

Drama was the least developed of the literary genres in the colonial era because of strict Portuguese censorship of all mass media. The beginning of drama in the Portuguese territories is generally dated to a bilingual musical about *bride price*—a payment by a groom or his family to the bride’s family—which was performed in Luanda, Angola’s capital, in 1971. During the liberation struggle, however, freedom fighters encouraged performances of politically charged works in the areas they controlled. Theatrical performances began to flourish after the Angolans dislodged the Portuguese from urban centers, and independence brought about the establishment of urban theater groups. Noteworthy among Angolan plays is Henrique Guerra’s *O círculo de giz de bombó* (*The Manioc Chalk Circle*, 1979), a children’s play inspired by a play by German dramatist Bertolt Brecht. In Mozambique, Belo Marques inaugurated a series of radio dramas, structured after traditional storytelling sessions, in 1978.

The new trend in Lusophone African literature manifests itself mainly in poetry and combines an interest in issues of identity, ethnicity, alienation, and language with what one critic has described as tropical sensuousness. Examples appear in the works of two Angolan writers:

Ritos de Passagem (Rites of Passage, 1985) by Paula Travares and *Sabores, odores & sonho (Flavors, Scents & Reveries, 1985)* by Ana de Santana. Other writers whose work exemplifies this trend include the Mozambicans Hélder Muteia, author of *Verdades dos mitos (Truths of Myths, 1988)*, and Eduardo White, in *O país de mim (The Country That Comes from Me, 1989)*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the major characteristics of Lusophone African literature.

3.2 Colonial Lusophone Prose: Luis Bernardo Honwana *We Killed Mangy Dog & Other Stories*

These are colonial stories set in the colonial era. The world of the stories of Luis Bernardo Honwana is no longer a world of belief: the structures of traditional society are absent in the post-contact phase. Accordingly, a strong structural organisation is also no longer present in the narratives which concern themselves with this time. However, although there is no central spatial framework, aspects of space provide a key to interpreting this world in which the relationships between the personae are as tenuous as the narrative situations often are.

In the case of the story called "Dina", there is the fact of expectation created by the story and then denied or frustrated. With regard to the action, firstly, a confrontation is developed between the Overseer and the men, the outcome of which is not fully shown. When the Overseer realizes that he has committed a shameful act, his reaction, and the reaction of the men, lead the reader to believe that the situation of the Overseer may well be precarious. Then follows the unexpected acceptance of the wine, and the outspoken youth of the kraal gang is killed. Whether or not there are any consequences of this second violent act is again not given. What is the effect of these open-ended structures? As the reader's attention has been directed wholly at and through the figure of Madala, a lacuna is created in the reading experience. The result is that the reader seeks meaningful connexions elsewhere than in the action. As in many of Honwana's stories, spatial features such as (in this story) the cornfield, the wine, and the weeds seem to be the keys to revealing the latent meanings.

Owing to the juxtaposition of the forced labour of Madala with its pleasant physical setting, the 'sea' of the cornfield, his work is made to seem even more painful by being placed in this contrastive setting. The way Madala organises his work is also significant: out of the pain and difficulty of his labour he creates a little order, by lining up the weeds he pulls up. However, this order seems meaningless, because it is not

related to anything - except perhaps to the obsessiveness that Madala has developed as a defence against the destructive nature of his life. The line of weeds is evidence of what he personally has done of his own volition, thus giving him back belief in his own freewill, which in fact has been taken away from him. On the other hand he has become so profoundly conditioned to the habit of hard work that he goes on working during the dinner break, but pulling up only imaginary weeds.

As for the wine, even if it were not a conventional symbol for the experience of communality, this meaning is established in any case by Madala's reflections. He is in the habit of sharing his wine with friends at the cantina; the Overseer on the other hand never shares, although he does not finish the bottle. It is only when he is driven by the shame which the reader must imagine he feels as a result of his degraded act that he gives the dregs of his wine to the offended father, an offering which is utterly inadequate to heal such a wound. Such is Madala's degradation, however, that he accepts the offer. Perhaps then it is the denatured state of Madala and his friends that we can see in them the "strange fish" of the ending of the story. The use of this natural image implies how very unnatural the situation of the 'peonised' worker is. The attempt to harmonise man with this landscape deliberately fails. The tone of the ending ironically merely appears to pacify the anger which is latent in the action - anger, it is implied, which cannot and should not be allayed while the situation remains.

Whereas the anger is at least partially demonstrated in the case of "Dina", with the story which follows it in the collection, it is well concealed. The reader has to work hard to find the strangeness in the story, precisely because it is presented so familiarly. But again, if one looks closely at the juxtaposition of spatial features, one sees the incongruity of the richness of the intellectual life of the narrator's family as contrasted with the poverty of their material circumstances. The former is implied by the presence of the narrator's drawing materials and the magazines, which are not only very numerous but also placed in a hierarchy of value; the latter is obvious in most of the other details. An examination of this kind enables the reader to fill the undetermined gaps in the implied action, which are mostly related to Papa. No reason is given for his imprisonment, nor is his hospitalization with what we infer a back injury. It is possible for the reader to close these gaps by inferring a connexion between the factors mentioned: poverty, intellectual activity, imprisonment and injury, but only by inferring an ideology in the work.

In "The Old Woman" also, an ideational structure is buried in the work, in the connexion between the mother figure and the "good years" as opposed to the present with its "nauseous, nauseating stares" and

feelings of "a slow, soft erosion". This is carried through the narrator's ambivalent feelings towards his mother - the superficially derogatory title for example - and actual fact implies also the ending which merely seems to resolve the situation while in the impossibility of such a resolution. The attempt to hold onto the past only reveals the fact that it is past.

The ending of "The Hands of the Blacks" is also ambivalent, in a more superficial way, in that we do not know why exactly the mother is crying. What is clear is the ideology of the story. Different versions of myths explaining the origin of the pale hands of the black peoples reveal different degrees of intolerance or concern. The mother's story is the only one which is manifestly moral; it therefore causes all the others to be seen, retrospectively, in a moral light.

Turning to the title story, one is immediately struck by certain aspects of the print level, such as the subtitles. Titles and subtitles are usually seen as being in the authorial register, that is, under the direct control of the author, as opposed to being part of the mediation process. But in the present case, this is not necessarily so; and examination reveals that a particularly elusive kind of textual indeterminacy is operating, which recalls for example the Aeolus section of *Ulysses*. In that part of the novel which deals with the newspaper offices, Joyce makes use of a quasi-headline for each small section of the chapter. However, the contents of the section are not necessarily related to the preceding 'headline'. A dialectic is thus set up by the expectation created by the text which the reader has to try to resolve. In this way, the reader becomes more involved in the reading process, as he is forced to create his own meaning for the relationships between different aspects of the text.

In "*We killed Mangy-Dog*" the first subtitle could well be authorial, as it sums up both the subject of the first section and also directs attention to the ambivalence of the image of Mangy-Dog's pathetic blue eyes, simultaneously sick, yet appealing. However, the second subtitle (p.82) is clearly mediated by the figure of the narrator, involving one more degree of complexity. The statement is not of the conventional form of a sub-heading, and does not seem adequate to head the whole section, as it is only relevant to the first two pages. It seems to be merely an anticipatory interruption.

Honwana's text draws attention to itself as such, although initially not by self-reflexive elements in the narration, but by devices in the authorial register, and at the print level. It remains unclear, however, why the sub-headings are indecisive and sometimes misleading. It seems that the indeterminacy and the ambivalence of the subtitles (in their partial

misdirection of expectation) is congruent with the indeterminate nature of the presentation of the narrator's consciousness, which leaves much to be inferred.

The same thing applies to the variations in typeface which occur in the climactic passages. There is some uncertainty as to what the use of a particular typeface precisely denotes. Their main effect is to indicate confusion in the narrator's mind about how strongly he should be feeling the force of what he is saying or thinking. There is a quality of hysterical overstatement and repetition which suggests that he is not sure that his feelings and thoughts are appropriate to the circumstances. This confusion may be seen in his actions also: why does Ginho run to fetch his gun if he is sympathetic to Mangy-Dog; why does he allow himself to be persuaded by the gang to fire a shot when later he holds onto a mere girl while she blocks his ears? All these confusions at different levels accord with confusions which are essential to the text's ideology, in which manliness is construed as a pose of cynical callousness and affection is perverted and shameful.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Using any story from Bernardo Honwana's *We Killed Mangy Dog & Other Stories* examine the immediate expectations of hope in most Lusophone countries.

3.3 Post-Colonial Lusophone Prose: Baltasar Lopes da Silva *Chiquinho*

Chiquinho is a Cape Verdean novel written by Baltasar Lopes da Silva in 1947. The probability of the literary work is the most common in Cape Verde, it marked the beginning of the typical literature in Cape Verde along with local themes in Creole culture. Along with Claridade, Baltasar Lopes participated with Manuel Lopes and Jorge Barbosa as founding members of the literary league /review and the name was the movement in the main activists of the same replica of Lisbon's famous Torre de Belém, found in the Cape Verdean city of Mindelo, which stands today as a physical reminder of the continued role played by colonial subjects in Portugal's 20th literary Century empire. As a facsimile of one of the metropolitan capital's most famous edifices, the Cape Verdean tower was clearly designed to evoke the mother country's glorious Age of Discovery and, thereby, to generate local pride in the role that Cape Verde played in Portugal's heroic past. As such, it stands as a concrete reminder that not only political control of their archipelago originated in the metropolis—the bases of a Cape Verdean historical imaginary were also to be dictated by metropolitan models.

In *Chiquinho*, the title character and his fellow teenage friends join the revelry at one of Mindelo's raucous nightclubs during Carnival. Suddenly, a badiu (someone from Santiago Island) initiates a batuque, and the narrative voice in the novel proclaims:

The room is in pure Africa, sun on the plain and a view of the savannah, with monkeys cavorting. The badi[u] takes everyone with him on a trip back through the centuries.(23)

The novel is a tribute to the island of Chiquinho. The Isle of Chiquinho which was a shrine to knowledge and an understanding of that found in streams of the island as in the mountains, valleys and the beauty of Cape Verde. Indeed, Baltasar Lopes boasts and celebrates the island that saw his birth.

Chiquinho is considered quintessentially Cape Verdean: after growing up in a rural community on Sao Nicolau, a young man discovers a more cosmopolitan life when he moves to Mindelo for his secondary education, and ultimately, when drought strikes Cape Verde, he decides to follow in his father's footsteps and embark on the next boat for America. This novel problematically posits Portugal as the origin of a one-way cultural flow, with Portuguese travelers disseminating the seeds of Lusophone culture on three continents, it also suggests a way for Cape Verdeans to live both in the "homeland" and the "host country" when they venture to Portugal. Since Cape Verde is an integral part of Lusofonia, Cape Verdeans do not in theory have to shed their national identity when integrating into a larger "Lusophone" identity in Portugal. This poses a challenge to the formulation of diaspora communities, wherein alienation and segregation in the host country is tempered by mythical memories of a homeland. Lusophone literatures imagine that a perfect Lusophone community is always possible, whether or not the various speakers of Portuguese involved were born in Portugal. The metaphor of "utopia" (which literally means "no place") is particularly apt, since Lusofonia suggests that the Lusophone identity exists betwixt and between the territorial boundaries of the seven Portuguese-speaking countries.

Baltasar Lopes' semi-autobiographical novel *Chiquinho* like-wise inscribes the colonial relation and explores questions arising from Cape Verde's political, cultural and economic dependence on the metropolitan centre. However, the story told in Lopes' novel originates in the colonial periphery and the dynamics linking the copy to its original are reversed, as the narrator engages in a version of mimicry that closely parallels Homi Bhabha's theories regarding the ambivalence of colonial discourse. Baltasar Lopes conceived his novel as promoting of a theory

of Cape Verdean Creole culture and language that was similar to and dependent upon metropolitan models, but unwittingly, perhaps, he concurrently ensured the strategic failure of this project. This novel, therefore, constitutes an effect of flawed colonial mimesis that at once entails both resemblance and menace.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Chiquinho is a Cape Verdean novel written to expose the quest for identity. Explain.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Certainly, the Lusophone literary culture is not as consistent and popular as other literary cultures in Africa. The Anglophone and Francophone writers in Africa are more prolific than the Lusophone. Besides they enjoy wider readership since the writers in Lusophone countries write mostly in Portuguese, a less wide language than the other two languages. Only a few of Lusophone literature writers have been translated into English. African Literary writing has historically been tied to resistance to Portuguese colonialism and for this reason was largely censored before independence. Writers such as Luis Bernardo Honwana were imprisoned for their work. Many of the writers have the quest for identity as a major concern. *Chiquinho* by Baltasar Lopes da Silva explores the inevitable traumas of colonialism on the people and how the necessity of general reaction inspired creative impulses. This work has been described as a typical literature of Cape Verde and Lusophone world because of the inherent ideological quest for peace, justice and proper identity.

5.0 SUMMARY

From the study of the two texts here selected to cover the two most important Lusophone periods in history, it is clear that the Lusophone bloc in Africa have the same historical experience with the other blocs. Baltasar Lopes da Silva is one of the popular writers in Lusophone bloc. His works contributed so much to the development of literature in Portuguese Africa. *Chiquinho* is one of his collections of stories about the Portuguese experiences in the colonial times and the battle for survival and identity. Honwana, another writer here treated, is best known for the book *We Killed Mangy Dog*, which combines personal and cultural autobiography. Virtually all the poets and writers use the colonial Portuguese language as their medium. Many of the writers use Portuguese, particularly with the infusion of local African words, as an important part of their nation's cultural heritage. Many other Lusophone writers apply this medium of creative art in their literatures. They regard

it as means of retaining their culture and calling for the application of African languages as their national languages. Because of a lack of education and other disadvantages, women have been underrepresented in the literary realm. One exception is Noemia De Sousa, who is known as the mother of Mozambican writers. When she began writing in the 1950s and 1960s, she was the only mestiça writing in Portuguese in Africa. She takes on the subject of African women and their work and has become a voice for the women of her country.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

1. Discuss the emergent factors which gave rise to Lusophone novels.
2. Critically evaluate the major impulses which affected the development of Lusophone literature like the other blocs.
3. Review the themes in Honwana's short stories in *We Killed Mangy Dog*.
4. Compare and contrast the major thematic concerns in Lusophone fiction with those of Francophone and Anglophone fiction.
5. Examine critically how Baltasar Lopes da Silva treated the issue of disillusionment in his novel *Chiquinho*.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 4 CENTRAL/EAST AFRICAN BLOCS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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 - 3.2 East African Prose: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine African prose fiction from the East African bloc. East Africa is one of the regions in Africa with strong historical experiences which resulted from the rough colonial roads they treaded. The use of guerrilla war fare among other tactics that aided them in securing independence from the colonial masters, revealed the region as one of the most troubled zones in Africa's historical and political experiences. During the post-colonial era, east African countries experienced the reign of vicious leaders like Obote, Idi Amin and other self imposed leaders who wanted to remain as president for life. There were leaders with draconic governance in the region. In Central African countries, there are terrifying experiences of war, hunger, starvation, gender inequalities among other socio-political factors which have been the bane of their traumas. Most novels from this region reflect these problems. We shall use Ngugi's *The River Between* and Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* in studying this literary bloc.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- trace the background to East African prose fiction
- know East African literary bloc
- understand the recurrent themes in east African prose fiction
- appreciate Ngugi's *The River Between* and Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

East African literature includes literatures from Kenyan, Ugandan and Tanzanian amongst others. It is literature with one entity, but the justification proposed—that the three countries were joined under British rule as the East African Protectorate – is misleading. Tanzania has a double German-British colonial heritage, Kenya was a settler colony where the peasants in the highlands were expropriated, while in the Ugandan Protectorate the established kingdoms of Buganda, Toro, and Bunyoro continued to play important roles under "indirect rule." All these factors make for very different post-independence histories. Beyond the political differences, language policies in all three countries have varied drastically: In Tanzania, Swahili was adopted as the national language, whereas in Uganda, Luganda speakers rejected Swahili, considering it as the language of the military and of oppression.

The significance of Idi Amin's era in Uganda lies in creative impulses it engendered among Ugandans and non-Ugandans alike, leading to an almost unprecedented flowering of literature in East Africa. It is true that Amin's reign of terror provided subject matter for a number of novels, plays, and films. But it is also true that Amin not only killed intellectuals and writers but also destroyed the whole cultural infrastructure, driving writers, artists, and intellectuals into exile. At the end of the Amin-Obote terror, the flourishing literature, publishing, and theatre scene of the "Golden Age" had completely vanished, and the only thing left was the shallow commercial theatre of domestic farce. In the case of Ugandan literature, the issue of selection also becomes apparent. It is always easy, of course, to argue about inclusions and exclusions in reference works. Uniformity and consistency in structure and methodology are essential in a reference work.

Okot p'Bitek from Uganda and Taban Lo Liyong are among the most significant writers from East Africa, whose works have impacted on their countries positively. Many East African writers, especially Ngugi wa Thiong'o, has emphasized that East Africa is not a literary desert undermining the people's government which pounces heavily on writers and most often sends them on exile. Other writers like Grace Ogot, Micere Mugo and the recent Caine Prize Winner Biyavanga Wainana have been in the pivot of making literature live in East Africa.

Central Africa seems a large expanse including East Africa. It includes countries such as Congo, Cameroon, Somalia, Gabon and Rwanda amongst other countries. They all have complex colonial experiences. Most of the countries were colonized by the French and the Portuguese.

A country like Somalia was colonized by Britain and Italy at the same time. Unlike West Africa with French and British colonial experiences, the Central African bloc had a hybrid of colonial invasion with complex linguistic, political and sociological make up. These are parts of the reasons why Central African countries have been described as 'enclave of freight and the suburb of scavengers'

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the complex socio-political make-up of Central and East Africa which are reflected in most of their prose fiction.

3.2 East African Prose: Ngugi's *The River Between*

The River Between is a good example of colonial East African novel. Ngugi's first novel was originally to be called *The Black Messiah*: it was written during 1961 during a period when he was reading for his degree. He read D. H. Lawrence who he says influenced him with "his way of entering into the spirit of things." Such an attitude could easily be potentially attractive to anyone whose inherited culture sees an essential unity between the spiritual and physical aspects of the world. Ngugi goes on: "You know I felt as if he was entering into the soul of the people, and not only of the people, but even of the land, of the countryside, of things like plants, of the atmosphere." This interpenetration may be seen in *The River Between*, in the role of spatial features such as trees, the ridges and the river.

Ngugi's use of spatial features in his longer works is prefigured by certain of his early stories. In the earliest of these, "The Fig Tree", the tree of the title is the locus of the turning point. The central character Mukami achieves a kind of spiritual vindication and self-knowledge in the shelter of the sacred Mugumo tree. And in "The Return" the River Honia plays an important role. Kamau returns from the camps of the Emergency period carrying a bundle which "held the bitterness and hardships of the years spent in the detention camps." He is dismayed to hear that his wife has in the meantime gone with another man, but begins to find reconciliation with this and other changes when the symbolic bundle is washed away by the healing river.

Both the sacred fig tree and River Honia reappear in *The River Between*, the former when Waiyaki's father takes him to the Mugumo tree and reveals his destiny. The tree is sacred because it was there that Gikuyu and Mumbi, the father and mother of the tribe, stood; so Chege brings him here to tell him that he is born of a line of prophets, and is very likely to be the foretold saviour who will come from the hills to deliver the tribe from the white man. Waiyaki remembers the occasion as he

endures the pain of the circumcision (p.53); and he revisits the place as he prepares for the final confrontation of the action, in an attempt to understand the nature of his dedication and to renew his contact with the mythic past (pp.161-164).

Another sacred place in *The River Between*, and one which is central to the work, is the initiation grove, where Waiyaki and Muthoni are both circumcised, and where he and Nyambura meet. The connexion with the soil is established at the moment of the symbolic operation: "Blood trickled freely on to the ground, sinking into the soil. Henceforth a religious bond linked Waiyaki to the earth..." (p.53) The same place is later the scene of Waiyaki's declaration of love for Nyambura. It is here, where Muthoni was initiated, that she can feel close to her dead sister. The area is given further significance when it is associated in Waiyaki's thoughts with the precinct of the fig tree: "Waiyaki could not tell why the place reminded him so much of the sacred grove where long ago his father had taken him and revealed the ancient prophecy. This place she was in was sacred too." (p.119). Finally, it is the "sacred ground" where Waiyaki and Nyambura make love. The confluence of all these elements of the action with this spatial feature is completed by the proximity of the river. The River Honia is, as the title suggests, the most significant of these features in the work, the central element in its structure.

The structure of *The River Between* is lucid: its ideology finds its basic symbolic expression in a simple combination of three elements, the river and the two ridges between which it runs. The ridges, it seems, represent the opposition which exists between two social groups as a result of their espousing a different metaphysics, while at the same time showing their common humanity; the river also corresponds to other features of the work in its ambivalence. While obviously dividing the two ridges and the two factions, it further embodies the possibility of union - by joining the two banks. It is emphasized that its name "Honia" means 'cure' or 'bring-back-to-life' (p.1).

The ridges, Makuyu and Kameno, are the most predominant of a series of binary oppositions. Each of the groups living on the ridges claims predominance over the other because of its own favourable version of the origin myth. Each has its patriarchal figure; but whereas Chege of Kameno is a descendant of Mugo wa Kibiro, the seer who warned the tribe of the coming of the white man, Joshua of Makuyu has been won over to the European religion and is its local representative. The ridges have now been divided: the ideal of the conservation of tribal beliefs and customs confronts the pragmatic acceptance of Europeanization.

Attempting to overcome this opposition and unite the divided people are the children of the patriarchs, who are associated with the river in its

role as a symbol of healing and unity. Muthoni, Joshua's younger daughter, attempts to live in both worlds. Although not wishing to give up Christianity, she nevertheless wants to be circumcised, so as to become "a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges" (p.29), and also to become eligible for marriage. But she is disowned by Joshua and then dies as a result of infection after the operation. Her death hardens attitudes on either side; it also has the effect of altering the way in which she is seen by the reader: her role in the work takes on a deeper significance.

Waiyaki's role is special from the outset as has been indicated above. He is set apart by his birth for the role of hero who must perform the rites of passage: separation, initiation, return. He is sent by Chege away from his family to the European school at Siriana. At this point, Waiyaki is separated from the 'here' of the tribal environment and enters the 'there' of the territory of the newcomers. The space of the action expands to include an only partially seen quasi-European environment. The main threat to the world of the book is thus distanced and left somewhat mysterious. The hero returns from the mission school having been 'initiated' into the ways of the Europeans, so that he will be better able to help his people to resist them. However, unlike Muthoni who is prepared to live out the ideal of unification, Waiyaki is unable to close the gap: he embodies the ambivalence which runs through the book at all levels. He can see the strengths of both the opposing religions but cannot reconcile their systems; he sees the need for political unity and joins but then leaves the Kiama, the organisation for tribal unity and purity; he wants to give Western education as his gift brought back from outside, but knows that the tribe will disintegrate without its roots in the past. Although "committed to reconciliation" (p.125), at the crucial moment he 'forgets to speak of it.

This ambivalence may also be seen in the way the narrative breaks off before the resolution of the fate of Waiyaki and Nyambura. The open structure in the narration is resumed in the final image of the river, its "beat ... reaching into the heart of the people of Makuyu and Kamen", thus allowing the possibility of unity, while at the same time continuing to manifest division.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Carefully assess the juxtaposition of African and Christian religions and how they affected the lives of the people in *The River Between*.

3.3 Central African Prose: Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*

Nuruddin Farah is known as one of the most stimulating contemporary prose writers in Africa. His works typically address the theme of individual freedom in the face of arbitrary power that is relevant to Africans and non-Africans alike. Farah's novels demonstrate a facility with poetic language and great intellectual depth, and frequently focus on political and social issues in his homeland of Somalia, a nation in the Horn of Africa. While Farah's work contains an undeniable political element, he does not preach a particular political vision for his nation. Farah's experiences as a young person in Somalia give his writings an international appeal. The history of colonization and border conflicts in Somalia, coupled with Farah's travels and educational opportunities, gives him access to a wide variety of cultures and enables him to write about Somalia with a detached perspective. The rich oral culture in Somalia and Farah's command of several languages also make his writing unique. Farah's novels are noted for their poetic and symbolic nature and for their epic and satirical elements as well.

From a Crooked Rib examines the plight of women in traditional Islamic societies through the eyes of a young village girl, Ebla, as she struggles with issues of female circumcision, arranged marriages, and polygamy. The story is written from the perspective of Ebla (perhaps so named because at the time of the writing in 1968, Italian archeologists had just identified the site of ancient city of the same name in Syria), an 18-year-old nomad woman who flees her rural settlement when she learns of her impending marriage to a middle-aged man. In doing so, she is spurning the traditional values of her culture – perhaps foreshadowing for the societal changes that will come with independence and modernity.

Sneaking out of her hut in the wee hours, she flees without a plan, leaving her brother and grandfather behind. Her first stop is a small town (although quite large and bewildering to her), where she stays with a distant cousin. There, she cares for her cousin's pregnant wife and makes the acquaintance of a confident woman next door. Drawn into smuggling by her cousin and alerted to his plan to sell her off as a bride, she flees again, this time to Mogadishu with the nephew of the neighbour. Here, life is even more confusing, as she becomes his bride. When he leaves for several months training in Italy, she must rely on another self-sufficient older woman in her building. She somewhat passively reacts to this abandonment by allowing herself to be propelled into the arms of yet another man, who pays her for the distinction of becoming his "wife."

The cultural mechanics of all this are somewhat confusing to the non-native reader and a certain amount of annotation would certainly help this almost 40-year-old book. For example, some background on the quasi-Islamic practice of informal "temporary" marriages at the time would provide some much-needed context for some of Ebla's actions. So while the broad theme of Ebla's treatment as just another "beast" or "cattle" subject to the whim of the men around her is evident, there's a good deal of nuance that lost along the way. Written when Farah was only in his early 20s, the English prose is rather awkward and makes for choppy reading. While certainly of interest to those interested in feminism in Africa, those seeking a more accessible introduction to Farah's work might be better off trying his more recent novels, *Links* and *Knots*, which are set in Mogadishu during and after the American peacekeeping efforts in the early '90s.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Nuruddin Farah is male but writes for the cause of women. Explain how the socio-cultural situation in Somalia prompted this.

4.0 CONCLUSION

East and Central African states were and still are environments of anarchy. This is because there are still high neo-colonial effects in their governance. According to Ngugi, "Struggle" is a part of nature and a part of our history and cultures in East Africa. As a central concept in my aesthetic or cultural vision, "struggle" has been developing, I think, starting from my essays on writers and politics. One can see this theme become more and more dominant in my cultural theory and aesthetic theory. "Struggle" is central to nature, to human art and to my history. For the proletariat to be able to dictate its will to modern society, its party must not be ashamed of being a proletarian party and of speaking its own language, not the language of national revanche, but the language of international revolution. In *The River Between*, we see the struggle by the people to overcome the forces of oppression. Heroes emerge from among the commoners to fight the rich and the colonials in order to restore peace in their enclaves.

Farah's artistic sources are an eclectic mixture of Somali oral traditions, Italian culture, and Anglo-Irish modernism. Reviewers praise Farah for his highly textured prose style and mythical imagination. The influence of Somalia's oral tradition on Farah's style reveals in the powerful imagery, exotic symbolism, and richly textured language, which are traits evolved out of the rich poetic heritage of Somalia. The influence of Italy on Farah's works is enormous because both Italy's colonization of Somalia and the time that Farah spent living in Italy affected his writing

style. Although there is a definite element of political commentary in Farah's work, especially in *From a Crooked Rib*, critics are quick to point out that Farah does not espouse a particular ideology. Many people laud Farah for his stark portrayal of the effects of patriarchal subjugation of women, praising him as one of a select few male writers willing to critique a patriarchic system. Although Farah's novels are essentially African, they are thematically relevant not only to the realities of African societies, but also to universal human conditions, in a manner which transcends the contemporary settings of his works.

5.0 SUMMARY

East and Central African prose fiction reflect the socio-political make-up of their countries. Ngugi has been in the vanguard of fighting imperialism and this is reflected in most of his novels. According to Ngugi, Christian religion and English language were the two imperial spells that stole the soul and mind of Africans. It was mainly through the colonial system of education that cultural and psychological colonization of Africans was achieved. Though calling Ngugi an anti-imperialist may be fitting, understanding his works merely in that context might limit his wider aspirations. It is also possible to view his works as Marxist or feminist, as they portray gender and social equality. Ngugi though, would like to gloss over such minor confines.

Nuruddin Farah is known as one of the most stimulating contemporary prose writers in Africa. His works typically address the theme of individual freedom in the face of arbitrary power that is relevant to Africans and non-Africans alike. Farah's novels demonstrate a facility with poetic language and great intellectual depth, and frequently focus on political and social issues in his homeland of Somalia, a nation in the Horn of Africa. While Farah's work contains an undeniable political element, he does not preach a particular political vision for his nation. The rich oral culture in Somalia and Farah's command of several languages also make his writing unique. Farah's novels are noted for their poetic and symbolic nature and for their epic and satirical elements as well.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

- 1) Critically assess the socio-political climate in Central African Somalia as reflected in Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*.
- 2) Colonial East Africa was described as a climate of fear. How true is this in Ngugi's *The River Between*?
- 3) What gender issues did Farah attack in *From a Crooked Rib*?

- 4) Explain the roles played by Waiyaki which portrayed him as the hero in *The River Between*?
- 5) Compare the colonial situation in Kenya and Somalia as portrayed in the two novels under study in this unit.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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Ngugi wa Thiong'o. (1965). *The River Between*. London: Heinemann.

UNIT 5 ETHNIC NOVELS IN AFRICA

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Ethnic Literature 1: Wole Soyinka's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemon*
 - 3.3 Ethnic Literature 2: Ken Walibora's "Kipara-Ngoto" [Clean shaven...]
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall study ethnic prose in Africa. Ethnic literature has been described as literatures written in African languages which carry the people's cultural and sociological make-up. It is called ethnic because it is made to be read by those who can read in the languages in which they are written. In this vein, it is a literature written purposely for people to read in their L₁ language situation. These works are actually meant for the promotion of reading in local languages. Literatures in African languages have received little scholarly attention, in part because of a Western bias in favor of literature in European languages. Another barrier is that few scholars of African culture know any African languages, and few Africans know an African language other than their own. The best-known literatures in African languages include those in Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa in West Africa; Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu in Southern Africa; and Amharic, Somali, and Swahili in East Africa. We shall use D. O. Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemon* as translated by Wole Soyinka and Ken Walibora's "Kipara-Ngoto" [Clean shaven...] a short story written in Swahili in Kenya.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- understand the concept of ethnic literature
- discuss ethnic literature as a part of African literature in translation
- appreciate *The Forest of a Thousand Daemon* as translated by Wole Soyinka and Ken Walibora's "Kipara-Ngoto" [Clean shaven...] a short story written in Swahili in Kenya
- Realize that literatures in African languages are relevant.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

In West Africa, Yoruba writing emerged after Bishop Ajayi Crowther, a former slave, developed a script for the language and in 1900 published the first Yoruba translation of the Bible. Isaac Babalola Thomas published the first work of fiction in Yoruba, *Sègilolá eléyinjú egé* (*Segilola of the Seductive Eyes*, 1929). It appeared in serial form in *Akéde Èkó*, a newspaper in Lagos, Nigeria, and warns of the woes in store for women who live a life of prostitution. The most important Yoruba writer, Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa, used his writings to commend Christian virtues to the public. His first work is also the first full-length novel published in Yoruba: *Ògbójú ode nínú igbó irúnmalè* (1938) was translated by Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunter's Saga* (1968). It tells of the exploits of Akara-Ogun, a fearless hunter in a forest infested with a myriad of unnatural creatures, and draws extensively on Yoruba folklore. Writing emerged in the Hausa language earlier than in the Yoruba language, with such works as *Wakar Muhammadu* (*Song of Muhammad*, 1845?), a portrait of the prophet Muhammad by poet Asim Degel.

In Southern Africa as well, writing was introduced by missionaries who established themselves in the 1820s at Lovedale, near Alice (now in Eastern Cape Province). In addition to the Bible, one of the texts the missionaries translated for instruction was *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678 and 1684) by English author John Bunyan. This work provided the model for the first South African work of fiction, Thomas Mofolo's *Moeti Oa Bochabella* (1906; translated as *The Traveller of the East*, 1934). Like Bunyan's book, this Sotho-language work uses allegory to tell the story of a man's spiritual journey after converting to Christianity. Also associated with the Lovedale mission is Samuel Edward Krune Loliwe Mqhayi, whose Xhosa-language novel *Ityala lamawele* (*The Case of the Two Brothers*, 1914) recreates the legal proceedings he observed at the court of his great-uncle, a chief. He is also known for his poetry, for which admirers named him *Imbongi yesizwe jikelele* (the poet of the whole nation). In the Zulu language, *Abantu abamnyama lapha bavela ngakhona* (1922; *The Black People and Whence They Came*, 1979), by Magema ka Magwaza Fuze, tells of Zulu history and presents an early plea for black unity in Africa.

In East Africa, a system of writing for the Somali language was not developed until the early 20th Century, long after writing in Arabic had become widespread among Somali-speaking peoples. Literature in Somali is predominantly in verse, and its greatest figure is Sayyid

Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, who was born in the mid-19th Century and died in 1921. He criticized the European colonizers and their native collaborators in such poems as “Xuseenow caqligu kaa ma baxo idam Ilaahaye” (O Xuseen, God willing may good sense never leave you). The short novel “Qawdhan iyo Qoran” (Qawdhand and Qoran, 1967), by Somali writer Axmed Cartan Xaarge, is about two lovers who cannot marry because a marriage for the woman had already been arranged. Although literature in Amharic, now the official language of Ethiopia, did not flourish until the 20th Century, much earlier writings do exist, including the anonymous 17th-Century religious works *Mazmura Dāwit* (The Psalter of David) and *Waddaseē Māryām* (Praises of Mary).

Literature in Swahili dates back to the 17th Century. Early writings, by Muslim scholars and clerics, consist largely of celebrations in verse of religious figures. Modern Swahili literature, in prose and in verse, dates from 1925, when the countries then forming British East Africa (now Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda) adopted Swahili as the only African language for use in their schools. The first important modern Swahili writer was Tanzania’s Shaaban Robert, who wrote in prose and verse, praising his traditional culture. Very different in subject and style is the later *Simu ya kifo* (*Phone Call to Death*, 1965), a police thriller by Tanzanian writer Faraji Katalambulla.

The European languages most commonly used in Africa are English, French, and Portuguese. Literature in the English language, known as Anglophone literature, is the African literature best known outside Africa, followed by Francophone (French-language) and Lusophone (Portuguese-language) literatures. The British began colonizing Africa in the early 19th Century. Their holdings eventually grew to include what is now Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya in North and East Africa; Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria in West Africa; and in the southern part of the continent, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South Africa. African literature in English is more extensive than African literatures in other European languages, but it generally made a later appearance than Lusophone or Francophone African literatures.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Trace the beginning of ethnic prose fiction in African literature. How popular is the type today?

3.2 Ethnic Literature 1: D.O. Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemon*

D.O. Fagunwa known throughout Yorubaland as the father of the Yoruba novel, pioneer writer, blazed the trail for creative writing in Yoruba with five seminal works, classics in their own right, leaving a literary legacy still preeminent today. Responding early to the need for a literature for the growing literate population shortly after the language was orthographed, Fagunwa soon distinguished himself not only as the purveyor of Yoruba culture but also as the consummate story teller whose gift for fusing sound with action in his adventure stories pushed the boundaries of Yoruba language. Critics and readers consistently point to the latter – his love and mastery of the language – as his distinctive claim to literary genius. In speaking about Fagunwa's works (although scripted), we must emphasize at the outset that the distinction usually made between oral and written literature in African literary criticism obtains only in a very limited literal sense, and only when strictly applied. Because African writers writing in mother tongue or in European languages cull materials for their imaginative works from their African experiences and indigenous surroundings through a "trans-creative" process, we must note, as Ruth Finnegan, Ayo Bamgbose, and a host of African writers themselves have concluded, that any rigid distinction between the oral and written African literatures is arbitrary, simply one of convenience. The structure of Fagunwa's tales and those of his successors attests to this. African writers.

The Forest of a Thousand Daemon contains a very interesting story and adventure of a West African Hunter in a dreadful forest, who eventually found the secret of lasting happiness and peace of mind. The reader is easily swept away by many adventures of the heroic hunter in this book. The story is captivating, and emotion-laden. The Forest of Irunmale is very symbolic. The "Forest of a Thousand Daemons" is itself a symbol for entering this world, to which we shall refer as the "world of Irunmale" in the following, for the sake of brevity. This term, however, is intended to comprise other places of this same peculiarity that appear in the novel, such as the city of Mount Langbodo or the Great Forest, which is the place where Kako lives before he joins the main hero's, Akara-ogun's, expedition. This world is, as we shall see later, a symbolic representation of human life. On the hero's journey through the Forest Irunmale, he encounters various characters which are themselves symbols of human qualities and troubles and who incorporate various human patterns of behaviour.

The first impression we get from reading *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is that we are faced with a world which is incomprehensible and unpredictable. The characters have strange shapes and behave in a

way that we fail to understand. So does the hero, although we can feel certain disorientation in this weird world on his part as well. On a second thought, however, we find the world of *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* somehow intuitively comprehensible, although it is still hard for us to explain what message we actually get from reading the novel.

The Hero has a world view that is richer, because of his belief in magic and witchcraft, and is different from the "world of Irunmale", because on entering it, he is taken by surprise. It is only by a process of experience and of instruction that he gradually learns how to behave in the environment of the Forest Irunmale and how to deal with the weird creatures he encounters there. He has to work out the laws, rules and restrictions of the Forest of Irunmale. The hero must rely on the fact that the "world of Irunmale" has certain regularities. Otherwise, no orientation in it would be possible. The hero's first orientation scheme is naturally that of his everyday experience, that of his society, and reflects the world view of the Yorubas. This world view involves certain thought patterns which differ from ours. The most conspicuous difference is perhaps his belief in magic and witchcraft. Indeed, he knows how to put to good use various charms and spells. These spells fit into the causal chain as its regular components. But the hero's way of understanding the world which he faces in the Forest of Irunmale leaves him at a loss many times and he has to substantially modify his orientation scheme in order to come to terms with it.

We see that the behaviour of the inhabitants of the Forest of Irunmale follows rules. The hero usually knows the principles guiding the behaviour of the beings or someone explains them to him. The same holds true for various physical objects as well as for the charms. Thus the hero seems able to classify the creatures he finds in the Forest of Irunmale, he refers to the "usual run of ghommids" (p. 43), for example, and the like. There are very foreseeable moral laws. We often find the moral behaviour of the beings weird, but it nevertheless fits into a scheme of moral actions, good brings good in effect and evil is punished. Kako kills his wife in a very cruel and unintelligible way, but his deed brings misfortune to the whole group, and it must be redressed by the sacrifice of a bird (p. 75ff.).

There is a regularity shown in the symbolic usage of numbers. This makes future events foreseeable. The examples are numerous. Symbolic numbers are, for example, the number of three: there are usually three tasks that the hero and his companions have to perform, the third being the most difficult. The number of six is also very important (it is six times that Ajantala abuses his surroundings; the gifts from the king of

Mount Langbodo to the king of Akara-Ogun's town are always in six), as is the number of seven (the seven days in the house of Iragbeje).

The repetition of actions makes future events foreseeable, too. We find several examples. During the fight with Agbako, Agbako mends the hero's cutlass, then his arm. Another instance of this is the repetition during the above-mentioned number symbolism. And finally, the inhabitants of Irunmale behave partly like humans. They have human feelings (pride, sorrow etc.), they respect many moral laws that humans have, and their motivation is mostly understandable from the human perspective.

The hero's initial state is a state of ignorance. He does not know the appropriate rules and he has to learn them on his way through the Forest of Irunmale. That he does learn is clear from his later reactions. One example is his later fear of Agbako: in the beginning, he boldly faces the monster and nearly perishes during the fight with him. When he meets Agbako later, he is wiser and reacts by taking to his heels. There are many more instances where it is apparent that the behaviour of the hero has changed in accordance with his newly-acquired knowledge of the regularities of the world of Irunmale.

The hero travels to the Forest of Irunmale, but the forest is a metaphor of a different world. The return from this world to the normal world of the hero's life happens often by means of the metaphor of a house: the hero is mysteriously transported to his room at the end of his first journey to the Forest of Irunmale (p. 34), his second journey is finished by finding a hut (p. 66), where his cousin resides. This hut is the abode of the normal - of the hero's family, of his connections to the world of humans. Significantly, the house is no longer needed when the hero has acquired such dexterity in travelling to the Forest of Irunmale that he can reach and leave it at will, i.e. during his last expedition.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

D.O. Fagunwa exploited the folktale tradition in the writing of *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. Defend this statement.

3.3 Ethnic Literature 2: Ken Walibora's "Kipara-Ngoto" [*Clean Shaven...*]

Kenyan writer Ken Walibora's Swahili short story "Kipara-Ngoto" (*Clean shaven, like the knuckles of a clenched fist*) the African American features briefly as a metaphor of ludicrous character. The narrative is jocular, but it reveals profound issues about the relations between diasporic and continental Africans. The story is about a badly

behaved city boy, Matata (Swahili for Trouble) who is taken to the rural areas to see whether he can be reformed. The story figures him with metaphors and references to foreignness and artificiality. The narrator, a rural boy and cousin of Matata's, associates the urban boy with popular music icons and he presents his cousin chewing gum continuously, a city habit. What is intriguing is the way the African American is brought in as a metaphor to complete the ludicrousness of the urbanite:

Baba aliporejea kutoka kazini jioni, alimkuta mgeni mheshimiwa kajiwetaka kochini, asoma James Hadley Chase kwa sauti kubwa kama redio. Ungemdhani Mwamerika Mweusi anatingoa. Shabash! Kimombo kilimtoka cha ajabu! (62).

When dad returned home from work in the evening, he found the guest of honor lodged on the coach reading James Hadley Chase in a loud voice like a radio. You would have thought him a Black American in a public-speaking exercise. Alas! Strange English issued from him.

In calling Matata “mgeni mheshimiwa” (guest of honour, or guest to be greatly respected), the narrator is engaging in ironically worded sarcasm. The irony is sharper and more caustic in the original language, where the term would be reserved for a highly respected person, usually an esteemed leader in public functions; in a private space like the home where the action is taking place, there cannot be a “mgeni mheshimiwa”. The narrator has quite little respect for Matata, whose strange habits he finds laughable and, to him, the strangeness of Matata can only be comprehended by putting him in the context of the behaviour of African Americans. To understand the attitude to African Americans as displayed in this text, it is imperative to remember that in a metaphor, the vehicle (the concept we compare the subject with) is more familiar and concrete than the tenor (the subject of discussion). In this metaphor, it is assumed that we know African Americans in a woeful mode more concretely than we know the badly behaved city boy among us. We can only comprehend his conduct by seeing it through what we know about African Americans and their habits.

Although the unreliability of the narrator is not well brought out in the story, we can assume that, told by a child, the story registers more than it is aware of. It could even be holding in high esteem Matata and his African American ways, but as a figure of protest against commonsense. Unconsciously, the narrative indicates the source of the image of the African American to be popular texts that the narrator has interacted with – popular music, advertisements and novels. The text also shows that texts by African Americans reach only a small fraction of Africans

that the majority would not want to associate with – the city middle class with a warped sense of morality. African Americans, then, are associated with that bourgeois class that celebrates rootlessness. In the narrator's metaphor, we also hear a sense of frustration at his inability to understand Matata's hybrid language. In fact, there appears to be a subtle admiration of Matata's city way but the language puts off the narrator from his relative. The implication here is that Matata's incomprehensibility is seen as an African American phenomenon. This indicates that the African American language is misunderstood in the continent by the poor who cannot meaningfully interact with the materials. There is thus need for African Americans to speak the languages spoken by the majority in Africa and collaborate with local artists in creating music that African people, such as the young narrator, in the story would comprehend. Although we cannot say that authentic Africa is limited to the rural areas, it is in the rural Africa that, according to more recent texts, that the African American can fully realize his or her potential.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

By using Swahili in telling a tale that addresses international issues, Walibora has added dignity to his ancestral language. Discuss.

4.0 CONCLUSION

According to Ngugi "Language and literature are taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds, so long as African writers write in English, they continue to enrich European languages and culture. He remains a slave to it. Ngugi believes colonialism of the mind undermines one's dignity and confidence which is the worst outcome of colonization. If an African writer really wants to 'decolonize his mind' from European slavery, he has to write in his own language. Besides, African writers have a duty to enrich African languages and cultures. Ngugi regrets the choice of writers like Soyinka and Achebe to write in English. In talking about African literature, there is a tendency to forget that the whole of African art is linked with oral literature which has been the mainstay of both traditional and modern Africa.

Often times, African written literature is a transcription, adaptation, translation or exploitation of oral material, irrespective of the language chosen by the author to write her/his piece. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Obi Wali believe that any work that is African must be written in one of the languages of Africa while Chinua Achebe and Ama Ata Aidoo are of the opinion that African literature can also be written in a foreign language.

All three authors do agree that oral sources are at the heart of African cultures.

Chidi Amuta and others shift the emphasis to considering African literature as an institution of several associated units thus African literature is "the sum total of all *national* and *ethnic* literatures of Africa." Ethnic, in this sense, being literatures written in the native languages of the African people which embody African culture, oral art, sociological and mythical properties. The two works under study here have revealed to a great extent, the oral arts of the African people. Fagunwa's *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* reveals the rich African mythical make, the supernatural beliefs, the powers of nature, man and his environment, man and his society while Walibora's "*Kipara-Ngoto*" written in Swahili about contemporary experiences of neo-colonialism reveals African oral arts in contemporary discourse.

5.0 SUMMARY

Abiola Irele finds it futile to de-emphasize the social function of literature, because without its social functions, African literature does not merit to exist. The problem of defining Africa's limits is relegated to the background, and the need to establish the affinity of Africans to their root becomes paramount through reference to social experience and history. One of the hopes in actualizing this is the translation of literatures written in African languages. These ethnic literatures capture the essence of African culture in its totality. It presents undiluted pictures of African society and culture in the natural language of the people. There are vast literatures written in African languages which have been relegated to the point of non-recognition because of the craze for the acquisition of scholarship in foreign languages and culture.

The two literatures under study here have revealed that African prose in African languages is rich, if not richer than the ones written in foreign languages. Even in the translated version of Fagunwa's work by Soyinka, one still feels that sense of originality in the way African culture is presented. Writing in Swahili never stopped Walibora from expressing his worldview about the influence of the west over Africans. It is clear that ethnic novels exist in translation in African literatures in English and for literature to reflect its society, it must be presented in the form that comes naturally to the people's appreciation of art.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

- 1.) Explain the factors to be considered in tagging a literature ethnic.
- 2.) What advantages have ethnic novels over the ones written in national languages?
- 3.) Most African novels have elements of African language. Discuss
- 4.) In *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, Fagunwa epitomizes the magical realism of African myths. Discuss
- 5.) Walibora in his short Story presented a universal phenomenon in a restricted language. How true is this assertion?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Fagunwa, D. O. (1938). *Ògbójú ode nínú igbó irúnmalè* (1968). translated by Wole Soyinka as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunter's Saga*.

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MODULE 5 CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN NOVELS/THEMES

| | |
|--------|------------------------------------|
| Unit 1 | The New Writers in Africa |
| Unit 2 | The Diaspora Novelists |
| Unit 3 | Alternative History Novels: Memoir |
| Unit 4 | The Short Fiction |
| Unit 5 | Other New Novels |

UNIT 1 THE NEW WRITERS IN AFRICA

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall study new writers in Africa. By new writers we mean, those writers whose works introduced a new phase in contemporary prose fiction. After the first generation African writers who were concerned with the issue of restoring or recognizing Africa's place in the scheme of things, Africa's personality, African culture and belief system, we shifted base to the second generation who were interested in African independence and the exposition of imperialists trauma. We now moved to the third generation of writers who were attacking the misuse of government principles and the abuse of power. The new writers wrote with a different view. They attack injustice. They expose evil. They suggest the way forward and they write in unique ways. Their approach is not a common style. They write basically to create effects. They attack the society by attacking the individuals. They apply new techniques of fiction in the conveyance of their message. They write allegorically. They write satirically. They write with unique styles that convey their message while entertaining. Their works are made in layers, layers of meaning and ideology. We shall study the application of magical realism in new African fiction using Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* as a case study and understand the use of social

realism in new African fiction using Maik Nwosu's *Invisible Chapters* as case study.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- categorize African writers as new writers and other generation writers
- appreciate the novel of new writers in thematic content
- differentiate the new writers from other generations
- understand the application of magical realism and social realism in new African prose fiction
- recognize and cite the novels with new approach to African fiction.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Fiction in Africa has taken a new turn with the production of realities in factional modes. The need to tell the story from the 'inside' could have been one of the reasons for these significant literary productions. In the works of the new novelists, there are critical presentations of the oddities in African politics, as the continent trudges in the biting tyrannical trauma of the military and anarchical leaderships. These aspects are x-rayed beyond the micro setting (families) to the macro society (countries) as the inhabitants, represented by the major characters, experience unruly torture in their experiences of governance. Charles Nnolim (2005) explains critically that the new writers exhibit "a literary jungle- rich with varieties of life and growth, awe-inspiring and full of breath-taking surprises..." (8). This is not far from a description of the new writers in Africa.

The need to expose the traumatic situation in Africa has often occupied the minds of modern day writers in Africa. Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, *Astonishing the Gods*, *Infinite Riches*, Helon Habila's *Waiting for An Angel*, Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Akin Adesokan's *Roots in the Sky* amongst a host of others represent another critical fiction examining the African situation in new voices and/or approaches.

They create protest voices against bad governance in different forms but as the realities of governance become much more biting these writers adjust their 'pens' to accommodate the excesses. The use of the growing character technique enables Adichie to achieve historical exposition of

the trauma in African society. One observes with keenness, the narrative stance of the dumb character that exposes several military oddities with the eyes of an innocent observer.

The ethics of human relationship emphasizes the correction of odds and the actualization of truth. Most new writers draw from the sociological front, the idea of exposing the odds as a way of affecting the truth. History is not left out. It becomes a tool for the perfection of their craft. Drawing from history brings in the much desired truth. Politics is a necessary human quality but these writers see the misapplication of politics as the bane of governance. The motif of politics in these novels examines governance as individual problem. The family gets better and the society gets better. Religion should be a guide not a prison wall. We see in these novel a very trying attempt at creating what Iroegbu (2005) calls in philosophical terms, 'globalized ethics' and further explains, "a globalized ethics is both a reality and a project, yet to be fully achieved" (21).

The need to refine the odd politics, the odd cultures, odd religious dogma constitutes a global war as reflected in these novels. We have these four paradigms of focus in the thematic structure of these novels:

1. **Politics:** Greed, anarchy, violence, brutality, injustice, murder
2. **Religion:** hatred, violence, culture clash, dogma imposition
3. **Gender:** discrimination, hatred, cultural laws, brutality
4. **Ethics:** harsh upbringing, wife battery, conflicts, moral development

One sees the effects of each of these issues examined in these novels and each of the effects results in a dangerous phenomenon. As shown above, each odd situation or revelation results in hard traumas. The coups and killings result out of bad governance. Attacks and killings result from religion and gender. Murder results from ethical misappropriation. These novels are embedded with complex webs of odds and each odd unfolds with painful realism.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss in details the various thematic strands that distinguish the new African prose writers from the old writers.

3.2 Magical Realism: Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

Ben Okri is a Nigerian poet and novelist. Having spent his early childhood in London, he and his family returned to Nigeria in 1968. He later came back to England, embarking on studies at the University of Essex. He has received honorary doctorates from the University of Westminster (1997) and the University of Essex (2002), and was awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) in 2001. Since he published his first novel, *Flowers and Shadows* (1980), Okri has risen to an international acclaim, and he is often described as one of Africa's greatest writers. His best known work, *The Famished Road*, was awarded the 1991 Booker Prize. He has also won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Africa, the Aga Khan Prize for fiction, and was given a Crystal Award by the World Economic Forum. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He has also been described as a magic realist, although he has shrugged off that tag. His first-hand experiences of civil war in Nigeria are said to have inspired many of his works. He writes about the mundane and the metaphysical, the individual and the collective, drawing the reader into a world with vivid descriptions.

Plot Summary

Shortly after birth, it became clear that Azaro was a spirit child. He had vivid dreams, which foretold the future and he could see spirits interacting with the living. The spirits called to him and caused him to leave his body for a time, which caused his parents to think he was dead. He woke up in his own coffin and his parents found they could not afford the spiritual ceremony to cut his obvious connection with the spirit world. Azaro grew and learned more about his "gift." He ran out of his compound (forcing his mother and father to follow) just before it went up in flames. Priestesses who saw his true power abducted him. Azaro made a narrow escape, only to end up in the house of a police officer whose dead son tried to communicate with him.

The Famished Road is the amazing story of the journey of a spirit child through the poverty and suffering of modern day Africa. In the pseudo-reality where the book is set, there is a spirit, as well as a physical world. A spirit child is one who only wants to be in the spirit world, so they kill themselves whenever they reincarnate in the physical world. The story is centred on Azaro, an *abiku* or spirit child. Spirit children are born into the world of the living but some promise that as soon as they are born they will die and thus return to their friends in the land of spirits. Azaro makes such a promise but on being born he is stopped by the beautiful, suffering face of his mother and decides that he will try life. His spirit companions do not like this and haunt him to return to the land of the dead. This makes the childhood of Azaro both beautiful and harrowing.

In almost every scene of this novel the world familiar to us leaps and pours with the beauty of a spiritual presence. Spirits mingle with the living, in human or animal form, or in the form of lights and omens. Sometimes Azaro disappears altogether onto a spiritual level and a world that is both magnificent and terrifying run by the reader.

Azaro is haunted by these spirits and some scenes can be quite distressing, even terrifying in places. The undead come as blind lecherous old men who want to use the eyes of children, beggars with misshapen limbs and horrific wounds, freaks and wild animals. Even the road of the title in this story is an entity with a stomach, a being who will destroy unwary travellers who do not leave proper sacrifices.

The novel is set in Nigeria and has a very African feel to it. We are always in the ghetto with Azaro's family, always just on the brink of starvation. Spirits, herbalists and witches and wizards all have their places in the communities, the people are riddled with superstition but in the context of this story every superstition is a real answer and cure. Each one works and we as readers see the spirits being affected by the superstitions of the living.

Azaro lives with both abuse and a prevailing love. One of the most intriguing characters of the book for me was Black Tyger, Azaro's father. A great boxer, Black Tyger is an abusive father and husband, the almost unbearable suffering of his life taken out on his wife and child. He is also a powerful and noble man crying to be heard. The boxing sequences of 'The Famished road' are among some of the most dramatic action scenes I've ever read, the opponents of Black Tyger don't always come from the land of the living but from the land of fighting ghosts. The strength of the man and the power he draws from makes gripping reading. When he decides to become a politician we see he is noble in his thoughts, all he wants is to build schools for the beggars, the people laugh at him but I admired him.

Azaro's mother likewise suffers hopelessly, etching out a miserable living by labouring all day to sell goods. At times it gets too much for her and she takes it out on Azaro but the love she also feels for her child and husband is heart warming. At the lowest points of our characters lives we sometimes get a glimpse of love or happiness that seems like a diamond found in a pile of coal. The novel is throughout harrowing and painful but the overall message is one of progress and hope.

Politics play a large part in the story as the party of the rich and the parties of the poor vie to get the people of the ghetto's votes. Progress is represented by the splendid, voluptuous character of Madame Koto. This kindly, overweight lady begins the story running a poor bar of palm wine and her famous peppercorn soup.

Without giving too much away she is the first to bring electricity to the ghetto and the first to own a car, both stupendous, magical artifacts to the eyes of the very poor. The richer she gets though the nastier she becomes. It is brilliantly done. You will feel suffering reading this novel, you will feel hunger and long with the characters to find even the smallest of successes. In return you will be rewarded with some of the most beautiful prose I've ever read, as one critic on the sleeve of the novel says: "Okri is incapable of writing a boring sentence."

Characters

1. Azaro is the story's narrator. He is an abiku, or a spirit child who has never lost ties with the spirit world. The story follows him as he tries to live his life, always aware of the spirits trying to bring him back.
2. Azaro's father is an idealistic labourer who wants the best for his family and the community. He suffers greatly for this, eventually becoming a boxer and later a politician. Azaro's father loves him deeply, but is often bitter at having an abiku and occasionally goes on angry violent tirades.
3. Azaro's mother works very hard selling anything she can get her hands on for the family. She cares for her family deeply and constantly gives up food and security for her family and their ideals. She is proud that Azaro is her son and goes to great lengths to protect him.
4. Madame Koto is proprietress of a local bar. She has a liking for Azaro, though at times is convinced he brings bad luck. She starts out as a well-meaning woman, trying to get along with everyone else. However, as the story progresses, she becomes richer, siding with the political party of the rich, and is often accused of witchcraft. She tries to help Azaro and his family on numerous occasions but seems to try to take Azaro's blood to remain youthful.
5. Jeremiah, the Photographer is a young artist who brings the village to the rest of the world and the rest of the world to the village. He manages to get some of his photographs published, but practices his craft at great personal risk.

The story moves between Azaro's adventures in the real world with his struggling parents and dirty politics, and another peculiar world limited to Azaro's vision – Madame Koto's palm wine bar, the (famished) road and the forest – which are crowded with spirits, and supernatural

elements. Often it is Azaro's visionary world that leads him through all the tribulations of the real world.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the application of magical realism in the satirical presentation of politics in *The Famished Road*.

3.3 Social Realism: Maik Nwosu *Invisible Chapters*

Maik Nwosu was editor of *The Source* news magazine in Lagos and now Assistant Professor of African literature in University of Colorado in Denver, USA. He is also a fellow of the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany. His first poetry collection, *Suns of Kush*, won the Association of Nigerian Authors/(ANA) Cadbury Poetry Prize in 1995. His first novel, *Invisible Chapters*, was awarded the ANA Prose Prize in 1999. In his review, Ochia Ofeimun, former president of the ANA underscored its presentation of "a nuanced picture" that unveils "the unchanging ways of power as they have not been so studiously presented since Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*." Obi Nwakanma, arts editor of *Sunday Vanguard* at the time, had earlier noted: "No novel, not since Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, has created, and with such power, the mood of our post-colonial society. Maik Nwosu's novel has finally declared the arrival of the new generation, and the inexorable passing of the old." Nwosu has also published a collection of short stories, *Return to Algadez*, and a second novel, *Alpha Song*. As a journalist, he has received both the Nigeria Media Merit Award for Arts Reporter of the Year and the Nigeria Media Merit Award for Journalist of the Year.

Plot Summary

"Maroko is the great Nigerian novel writing itself" says Prinzi, principal character in *Invisible Chapters*. The novel focuses not so much on the redefinition of the so-called great Nigerian novel, nor the writing of it (as the author would want to make the reader believe), as it does on the unearthing of a particularly significant past event. There are two Marokos in the novel: the old and new. Beyond these, there is an historical Maroko, now a mere speck in the sands of time, which Nwosu has appropriated as paradigm for his reconstruction of the Nigerian socio-political experience. Once upon a time, Maroko was a bristling settlement of the poor and less privileged, a slum, a shantytown on the fringe of the Lagos lagoon. In spite of attendant vices and squalor, it was home to thousands of Nigeria's down-trodden who had drifted there in search of succour from a system that was increasingly riddled with vast inequalities and life-threatening contradictions. Nonetheless, wrapped in

the warmth of their exciting but lowly world, the residents of Maroko were oblivious of the anguish their existence caused their rich and influential neighbours living in nearby highbrow Ikoyi.

In writing about the city, they write about themselves, ourselves, our lives, our fears, and the politics of our land. Inasmuch as their effort is worth the trouble, it served the needs of the latter. They were at once the craftsmen, factory-hands, labourers, cooks, who the affluent exploited to keep their progress unhindered. Yet, looking down upon Maroko from the balconies of their enchanting mansions, with tell-tale frowns and wrinkled nostrils, these high and mighty could not help but wish Maroko's instant disappearance from the face of the earth. Their wish was soon granted through a military fiat. One morning, the residents of Maroko woke up to find impatient government bulldozers growling at their doors, a detachment of soldiers had been assigned with the express task of enforcing the quit order previously issued the residents by the Governor of Lagos State. His Excellency's excuse, shallow and controversial as it seemed, appeared hinged on the fact that Maroko was dangerously sinking below sea level and as a result, could no longer be regarded as habitable. But no sooner had the bulldozers reduced the shantytown to rubble than the apportioning of choice parcels of the same land to the rich began in earnest. The dispossessed were thus left to their own devices, at the mercy of chance.

The foregoing analogy applies to Maik Nwosu's fictive Maroko. Here, hope is temporarily rekindled in the dispossessed with the promise of resettlement in a better and healthier environment. Subsequently, the government hurriedly sets up a Resettlement Board to oversee the fulfillment of this promise. But when the masses eventually arrive New Maroko, they discover, to their consternation, a wasteland of sorts spotting a huge incinerator belching toxic fumes, as the dominant feature of the landscape. Maroko's story is in a very significant way, the story of Nigeria. The people involved in the tale are stereotypes drawn from real life. The wretched, dispossessed residents are representative of the wretched and misruled masses of Nigeria. The under-currents of lies, intrigues and conspiracies that act to annul Maroko's existence are similar to the factors which threaten the corporate existence of the country. In this novel, the masses are pitted in a vicious and continuous struggle for survival, while the ruling class, through its fawning agencies, employs mythmaking as a tool to plough through to the heart of new Maroko. When this fails, it quickly resorts to victimization and repression of their (the masses') will.

Invisible Chapters in part seeks to trace out the psychological trauma suffered by resilient masses in their quests for a better deal from the ruling class. The plot unfolds in four segments or books. The first book

concentrates on a significant event in the life of New Maroko serving as link between the past and the present. The second book, in typical flashback tradition, affords the reader a glimpse into the immediate circumstances preceding the eviction and resultant exodus of people from old Maroko. The third and middle part of the story begins where the first part ends and progresses on to the fourth and conclusive segment. The story is told in a compelling manner, with appropriate symbols and signs which vary as the plot progresses. The author's pre-occupation with symbols is evident from on-set of the narrative. The Rastafarian record shop owner in New Maroko, Haile's unusual switch from playing protest music to the music of 'pure white Christmas' signifies an invocation of the neo-colonialist spirit at a period when residents are still reminded of the sad events of their immediate past. Also, Prinzi's pre-occupation with the theory of opposites (pp5-8) sets the tone for the progress of events in New Maroko by hinting at the complementary nature of good and evil, with good enhancing evil and destruction existing possibly for the sake of reconstruction.

The story of Elo, Ka and Minitimma, which underlines the relationship between materialism and discord, is also a fable that describes a progressive condition of being. The sudden deaths of Ignatius, Madam Bonus and Goomsu evoke a mystique that ultimately results, first, in the March to old Maroko and, second, an all-night vigil on the eve of Christmas, which are both held in commemoration of the destruction and reconstruction of the settlement to appease "whatever spirits remain to be appeased". Kaabiyesi, the faceless patriarch of Crocodile Island and apostle of "authority stealing", symbolically prefigures the enthronement of a ruling hegemony, while the Resettlement Board also symbolizes ineptitude in high places. The communion of the long tide and Kaita's bazaar, signify a battle for the soul of the masses between art, morality and materialism. Even, the Prinzi-led Maroko left-wing find expression in dances and rituals which are symbols depicting prevailing moods, and also acknowledging the transitory periods in the life of the settlement.

Thematically, *Invisible Chapters* is in more ways than one an indictment of the military and military governments. Thus, the military is cast in the image of a monster, an accomplice in the grand plot to keep masses of people perpetually subjugated. Soldiers thrive both on corrupt practices and outright intimidation of the defenseless masses they are supposed to protect. Military training, it seems, vests the average soldier with the license to unleash violence at will, with or without provocation. In as much as freedom becomes an impossible song under the Military, open dialogue is constantly discouraged among the people and dissenting voices are bridled with brutal force. Governor Raji Omo-ale's visit to Maroko in the days before the destruction of the settlement reveals the

penchant of Nigerian military rulers for double-speak and insincerity in the discharge of their duties. Omo-ale does not only tell blatant lies and may be false promises; he goes on to polish the same through the government-owned media.

Perhaps one of the engaging features of this novel is the endless discourse it spawns on the future of the Nigerian novel and its enduring place in literary culture. Aside his concern for justice and fairness regarding Maroko, Prinzi appears to be absorbed in the task of charting a course for his art from a seeming void. In the process of brainstorming with Ashibodi and Razabi, issues are raised and discarded while questions are as bad. The "latitude to be" becomes a fundamental principle upon which all art and, of course, the great Nigerian novel must be anchored; it is the kernel of all human activity, the spiritual responsibility of everyman to the next person, irrespective of class, tribe or creed. Thus, when this principle upturns or is disregarded, society loses its essence. Life its value, and art its substance. In the resurrection of Maroko from the ruins of the old to the new, lies a glimmer of hope. But this is hope soon transformed, in the light of fresh and incisive manipulations, into gloom. It is a recurrent and vicious cycle of gloom in which every misfortune becomes an opportunity to be amply exploited (even the name of God is exploited for gain). And as soon as this happens, those affected are forced to recoil into their shells, stunned and full of questions.

Invisible Chapters has a mission to fulfill, which is to open readers up to some hard truths about the conditions of human life on the African side of the globe. It is illustrative of the 'insignificance' of life against the backdrop of constant devious schemes and man's inhumanity to fellow man. Coming therefore in the nick of time, as the cliché goes. Maik Nwosu could not have chosen a more auspicious moment than the present to impress a bold statement upon the cultural/political landscape of Nigeria. History cannot be merely obliterated; hence Maroko will forever remain an epochal landmark in the convoluting history of Nigeria. There cannot be a better explanation for Nwosu's commitment to his tale which aims to unveil African social realism.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Comment on the juxtaposition of Old and New Maroko in *Invisible Chapters*, as satire on bad governance in Africa.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Each historical moment in the African experience has thus produced its own interpreters, whose discourses, fortunately, have not gone unchallenged by Africans themselves, especially in more recent times. African writers have used the medium of creativity to articulate their own point of view on a matter that they see first and foremost as their concern. Chinua Achebe once said that “The writer’s duty is to help (his people) regain (their dignity) by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost” (8). Thus, the ‘new’ writers are approaching this sensitive task with utmost seriousness in ways that transcend mere style and method.

Ben Okri applied African magical art in modern forms beyond what D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola had done. Okri applies this method in reacting to social vices, political turmoil and spiritual decadence. He applies magical realism in patterns that make his creativity reveal that human beings and the supernatural beings intermingle in addressing the human situation. It also brings in realism as it pertains to African belief system. *The Famished Road* exposes the incessant military coups in Africa and the attempts by the ruled to restore sanity to their polity. The Azaro, an Abiku child, is used as a symbol of the incessant political odds, military odds and social injustices. The coming and going of the child represents the consistent coups and odds in African governance. The style is unique because it entertains, educates and exposes one to certain elements of truth.

Maik Nwosu explicated the trauma of the downtrodden in order to reveal the odd social realities that emerge from bad governance in Africa. The juxtaposition of the Old and New Maroko helps in several ways to reveal the vast gap which exists between the rich and the poor in Africa. The neo-colonial mentality of the African elite who wants to remain at the top while their brothers remain down below is satirized. The insensitive government policies which work against the destiny of the poor are also satirized. Even the educated poor are not spared since they could not rise because they lacked the necessary attitudes or connections to rise from squalor. *Invisible Chapters* is an X-ray of the downtrodden in the merciless hands of the inconsiderate bourgeoisie.

5.0 SUMMARY

The new writers exploit new trends in telling their tales. They devise various methods of storytelling that are different from the early writers. Their approach exercises tremendous influence on African writing ever since their emergence; for writers on the continent have felt the urge to do battle for African culture, to restore it to its pre-colonial wholeness,

especially in the face of western ideological distortions and the resultant effects of these distortions on the African image. Attractive as their militant exhortations are, they also carry within their works certain elements of ambiguity which, if not reined in, could defeat the very purpose of its utterance; namely, to restore the dignity of the African. The first of such elements is the naïve arrogance of the pronouncement, echoed in the claim that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans. Whether Africans heard of culture for the first time from Europeans or not is really not the matter at issue. Was this African culture able to stem the tide of European invasion? That is the kind of relevant question we ought to be asking and that is the major preoccupation for the new writers. *The Famished Road* and *Invisible Chapters* represent the new writers, their focus, ideologies and styles.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

1. Explain what makes the new African prose fiction writers unique.
2. What is magical realism? Compare its application in Okri's *The Famished Road* with that in Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*.
3. Social realism entails the x-raying of social odds resulting from bad governance. Expatiate on this issue using *Invisible Chapters* by Maik Nwosu as reference.
4. The task before the new writers is to touch the untouched using unique vehicles of style. How true is this from your study of the new writers in this unit?

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UNIT 2 THE DIASPORA NOVELISTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall study the diaspora novelists from Africa. By diaspora novelists, we mean those novelists who are Africans but have lived abroad or in the diaspora. They are African writers, who by virtue of inter-marriage, immigration status, exile and other factors have remained writers expressing African cultural values in distant lands. They are Africans with African blood running in their veins but they are hardly in Africa and have been opportuned to gain African cultural and social experiences by interaction and studies. They write about Africa, African values, African culture and African lives because they are Africans and respond to African values as concerned Africans. It is also clear to distinguish between African writers abroad and African writers in the diaspora. The former refers to African writers who live abroad or moved abroad as a result of certain anomalies in their countries while the later refer to African writers born abroad as a result of mixed marriages or because their parents relocated to a foreign land. Many African writers have gone into exile as a result of injustice in their home countries. Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Peter Abrahams, Ayi Kwei Armah, Okot P'Bitek, Taban Lo Liyong, Sembene Ousmane amongst others are some African writers who went into exile to protest against injustices in their home countries. Many of them have since returned home to contribute to the development of their countries. We shall use the novels of Helen Oyeyemi and Diana Evans in studying the diaspora novels.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- distinguish between diaspora Africa writers and African writers in exile
- appreciate the thematic patterns in diaspora novels
- compare the treatment of Africa and African values in diaspora novels with those of the writers in Africa
- answer questions regarding the contribution of African writers in diaspora to the rich African literature
- accept African writers in diaspora as pure African writers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The part that literature plays as a unifying institution of art is paramount to our understanding of how a people can survive the present and win the future. In investigating the relationship between Africa and its Diaspora today, in the face of decades of fruitless efforts by scholars to determine who is African and what the criteria should be for determining what might be classified as African, one needs to reconsider the benefits to society of the literary genres prevalent among African writers. Pan-Africanism in contemporary history should be about uniting all peoples of Africa wherever they find themselves. From separate distinctive currents at national and regional levels, one should work hard towards a certain type of unity in diversity, where the black person becomes once again a strong, dignified and free person across boundaries. This is why the definition of African literature continues to torment scholars, for indeed they recognize that, in a way, works of literature mirror their epochs. One needs to re-examine the functionality of African literature as an institution of art today.

Chinua Achebe was once questioned on his thoughts on the African novel and the novelist. Rather impatiently, he responded that definitely the African novel had to be about Africa as a geographical expression and as a metaphysical landscape. He added that it should be about "a view of the world and all of the cosmos perceived from a particular position." On the qualifications for becoming an African novelist, he added:

It is partly a matter of passports, of individual volition and particularly of seeing from that perspective.... Being an African, like being a Jew, carries certain penalties... as well as benefits, of course. But perhaps more penalties

than benefits... (Joseph Conrad of *Heart of Darkness* was a European who did not want to be an African)...And it is not even a matter of colour, for we have Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing and others.

The term "African" appears to correspond to a geographical notion but we know that, in practical terms, it also takes in those areas of collective awareness that have been determined by ethnic, historical and sociological factors, all these factors, as they affect and express themselves in our literature, marking off for it a broad area of reference. Within this area of reference then, and related to certain aspects that are intrinsic to the literature, the problem of definition involves as well a consideration of aesthetic modes in their intimate correlation to the cultural and social structures which determine and define the expressive schemes of African peoples and societies. The affinity of Africa and its Diaspora especially in matters concerning the ability of literature to express their similarities in social and cultural questions is also considered. The essential elements of African literature which should include the obligation to represent the image of Africa, given that Africa is relatively still unknown, underestimated and despised in the world should be criteria. Some African writers like Camara Laye and Ferdinand Oyono, two Francophone African novelists, have respectively depicted Africa's past and traditions, for their contributions towards the better understanding of Africa. The problem of defining Africa's limits is relegated to the background, and the need to establish the affinity of Africans and Diasporans becomes paramount through reference to social experience and history.

Furthermore, for literature to reflect its society, it must be presented in the form that comes naturally to the people's appreciation of art. Moreover, in time to come, due to extreme pressures of life in modern cities, society will resort to less time-consuming ways of reading and communicating by finding new means, and new forms and then new definitions of changing practical consciousness.

However, the term diaspora in the sense of this unit of discourse is not about the African Americans rather about Africans living abroad writing about Africa and African values from abroad. They may not have been to Africa or they may have left Africa at younger ages. They are writers writing about Africa as African by birth partly or wholly. Even though they write abroad, they still reflect the africanness in their works in terms of ideology and thematic properties. They treat African themes but the manner of their presentation reveals a kind of uniqueness from those written by African writers living in Africa.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Clearly distinguish African American writers from African writers in Diaspora and/or African writers in exile.

3.2 Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*

Helen Oyeyemi was born in Nigeria in 1984 and moved to London when she was four. *The Icarus Girl* was written while Oyeyemi was studying for her A-levels and she is also the author of two plays, *Juniper's Whitening* and *Victimese*. She is currently a student of Social and Political Sciences at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge and is working on her second novel about Cuban mythology. The title 'Icarus' is taken from a Greek mythology and it means 'protector'.

Plot Summary

The Icarus Girl is a story of overwhelming, corrosive loneliness. Jessamy Harrison lives in London, the only child of a Yoruba mother and an English father. As the novel opens, this intellectually precocious, angry, solitary eight-year-old has shut herself into a cupboard because only in such confined spaces does she feel in control. Jess's alienation springs from everyday realities. She has been moved up a year in school because of her academic gifts. Her rages and screaming fits distance her further from her classmates. She is a stranger to her mother's family and language. On a deeper level, Jess is haunted by other identities which threaten to take over and destroy her own. The strongest of these takes the form of a little girl, Titiola, whom Jess encounters when she first visits Nigeria. Jess names the girl TillyTilly, and she appears to be the typical imaginary best friend of an isolated child. But TillyTilly is far more powerful than this. It emerges that Jess is not an only child, but a surviving twin. It also becomes clear that this novel is as much metaphysical as it is realistic.

The Icarus Girl takes its premise from the Yoruba belief that twins inhabit three separate worlds: the Bush, a 'wilderness for the mind' (page 298), the normal world and the spirit world. Oyeyemi has said that TillyTilly is from the Bush, 'a world that doesn't have the same structure as our world'. Through Jess's loss of her twin and her isolation at school, Oyeyemi explores themes of loneliness, alienation and the difficulties - particularly for a young child - of being very obviously different. Jess's mixed race, her precocity and her tantrums set her apart from her schoolmates, marking her out and only serving to intensify the loneliness she already feels. Helen Oyeyemi has drawn on her own experience in exploring this emotional terrain. She describes herself as 'a real mess at school', isolated from her classmates and regarded as 'the

weird girl'. At the age of fifteen she took an overdose and while recovering took refuge in reading: she still proclaims herself to be 'more of a reader than a writer'. That summer, another family visit to Nigeria set the seal on her recovery although she doesn't feel wholly Nigerian: 'I'm just British' she says.

Twins bring blessings in Yoruba culture, but may also bring misfortune. If one twin dies at birth, the surviving twin is thought to have lost half her soul. A sacred image of the dead twin, an *ere ibeji*, must be carved and then tended like a living child; in its turn the *ere ibeji* protects the family. Otherwise, disaster follows in the form of sickness, death and barrenness. This fate overtakes Jessamy Harrison's family. Helen Oyeyemi describes Jess's psychic torment and near disintegration. Her father is sucked dry by depression, her teacher disappears on sick leave, and Jess's one good friend is almost killed during a sleepover from hell. Oyeyemi's writing is powerful if uneven. But at its best this is a chilling story about the anguish of separation from all that should be most familiar and dear. In the end, it is only in Nigeria, within the traditional family compound, that wounds can begin to heal.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How realistic is the treatment of Yoruba belief about twins in *The Icarus Girl*?

3.3 Diana Evans' 26a

26a tells the story of the Hunter family, and especially the twins Bessi and Georgia. We follow them from childhood to adulthood, in Neasden and Nigeria, and through the different experiences of their lives. One of the impressive aspects of this novel (and there are many) is the way that Evans gives the reader such an impression of what it means to be a twin, not by characters telling us but by showing us the way the twins think and interact so that we can see and feel it for ourselves. But it would be wrong to give the impression that the focus is entirely on the twins.

The rest of the Hunter family all have their own character journeys which are extremely well handled. You might not like each member of the family all the time, but they are still compelling and real. All of the incidental characters in the novel also leave a strong imprint on the mind of the reader; even if their appearance is fleeting, such is Evans' skill with swift characterization. Each character is totally believable with their gentle warmth and personality and with the writer's use of language and description form a brilliant image in your mind and a place in your heart.

26a is a tribute to the world of twins. "It's a very special, magical relationship and it's fascinating, even to me," Diana says. "Most people build armour to protect themselves from other people but when you're a twin, everything's stripped down. You know each other so intimately and you don't have that armour."

Diana Evans drew upon the idiosyncrasies of her own twin-hood to create Bessie and Georgia, who enter the book as a vision of "two furry creatures with petrified eyes, staring into the oncoming headlights". She explains that when they were young she and her twin sister were timid, sharing an idea of themselves as two furry little beings. The image still fits: the adult Diana has something of the timid creature about her, with her wide, nervous-looking eyes, soft voice and inclination to pull her clothes self-protectively around her small, compact frame.

For Bessie and Georgia, the world turns out to be a pretty frightening place and for Georgia especially, the journey into adulthood is difficult. When the young Georgia watches her pet hamster, 'Ham', die she realizes it is possible "to choose the time, to leave when you're ready", and we get our first glimpse of her dark final destination. It is Georgia, the shade to Bessie's light, who will later hang herself in what becomes an apparently inevitable act.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

There is a deliberate attempt at blending European belief in suicide with African belief in twin's affinity. Discuss with reference to 26a.

4.0 CONCLUSION

From their brief biographies, the two novelists under study here are African writers in diaspora. They are not African Americans. They are not writers in exile. They are not African writers writing about non African situations. They are African writers writing about Africa from their foreign enclaves. They are writing to contribute to the vast African literature in English. Even though we observe the lack of depth in their handling African issues, we notice a serious appeal to Africa in the novels. Both writers wrote in the UK but cannot be categorized as British authors because they have African parents, they have African blood, they wrote about Africa as a part of their contribution to African literature and they believe in Africa as the hope of mankind. Definitely, the reference to Africa is just to reflect her Africanness. While Oyeyemi's story of twins is deeply rooted in Yoruba cultural belief, Evans' story is hinged on western belief in suicide as a provocative resort. Even as Africans engage in anti-African moves in their bids at calling Africa names, here are two writers of Africa contributing from

the developed world about their little knowledge of Africa where they come from. Their novels deserve attention by African scholars and literary critics.

5.0 SUMMARY

These two writers wrote their novels from outside Africa with African tales. Their stories reflect Africa. Helen Oyeyemi was born in Nigeria but relocated to UK at the age of four. Definitely at that age, she never knew anything about Africa her ancestral home. So, writing about a cultural issue like the Yoruba belief in the affinity of twins seems surprising. Definitely, she must have written her work based on what her parents told her. The character of Jess in the novel reveal a child alienated from her culture, a true picture of how Helen may have felt at younger age. *The Icarus Girl* reveals some misrepresentation of African cultural situation as a result of misinformation.

Diana Evans seems different from Helen Oyeyemi. She handled the issue of twins' affinity in two ways: the African and the Western. Suicide is not common in Africa. It is a taboo. In *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, Okonkwo hanged himself and his body was rejected by the community even though he lived as one of the greatest men in Umuofia community. Suicide to the west is a common thing and just tagged as social malaise. Thus, the story of Bessie and Georgia in *26a* is significant. Diana Evans has a Nigerian father and a British mother.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

- 1) Distinguish clearly African writers in diaspora from African American writers
- 2) Carefully examine the way Oyeyemi and Evans treated the issue of twins in their novels.
- 3) From your reading of these novels, do you think they deserve to be called African writers?
- 4) African writers in exile are not African writers in diaspora, yet both contribute to African literature. Discuss.

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UNIT 3 ALTERNATIVE HISTORY NOVELS: MEMOIRS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall study memoirs as a type of African prose. It may not be purely fiction but they make for interesting reading. They also contribute to the teaching of African cultural values. They are didactic and at the same time they entertain. Autobiography is a chronicle of events in the lives of great people who have contributed to the development of their societies. It is a recall of the past events in the lives of people recorded by them. This is different from biography which is a record of someone else's life by another person commissioned to do that. Many critics believe that every form of memoir has elements of fiction. This type is also termed faction being the blending of truth and untruth in the presentation of realities. Memoirs entertain just like other types of prose but the difference lies mainly in the less fiction in the story. We shall use Nnamdi Azikiwe's *My Odyssey* and Wole Soyinka's *You Must Set forth at Dawn* in treating this essential topic.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- understand African memoirs as types of African prose
- appreciate memoirs as contributing to African prose in English
- assess the fictional qualities in memoirs
- recognize memoirs as a distinct type African prose fiction
- identify memoir elements in African prose.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Discussions of African literature usually exclude essays and other nonfiction works, although some of these works constitute an important component of African writing. Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938) combines anthropological, sociological, and mytho-historical information about the Kikuyu, Kenya's largest tribal group. Cape Verdean political leader Amílcar Cabral details his political vision in *Return to the Source* (1973). South Africa's Bessie Head explores the making of modern Botswana and its character in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Winds* (1981). Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981) is the first in a series of his family memoirs. Also noteworthy are autobiographies by women, especially those of South African women imprisoned during the apartheid period. Prominent among these are Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* (1985), Caesarina Kona Makhoere's *No Child's Play: in Prison under Apartheid* (1988), and Emma Mashinini's *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* (1991). Thus, autobiographies are important aspects of African literature in English. In Nigeria, for instance, almost all great men especially the political and religious men have memoirs written by them or by those they commission to do so. The consistency and the large stock of this type of prose actually show that they ought not to be neglected. They chronicle history thereby giving focus and direction to issues affecting the African polity. A discussion of African prose without memoirs is incomplete.

There are several memoirs written by great men in Nigeria. Because of the history of Nigeria, especially the Nigeria-Biafra war, many of the actors have written memoirs in order to state their position or role in the situation. Olusegun Obasanjo chronicled his role in his memoir entitled *My Command*, while some others wrote theirs too. Memoirs are self expressions of personal living. It tells others what they never knew about the author or corrects the ugly news regarding a person's role in a given national situation. Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu tells of his role in Nigeria-Biafra war, in his book entitled *Because I am Involved*. This memoir was written just after his return from exile.

Memoirs entertain even as they relate to real life situation. Many critics have argued that there are elements of fiction in every memoir. No writer of memoirs would want his story to be uninteresting. They would wish to add certain literary elements in order to make it interesting.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

In every memoir there are elements of fiction. Explain the relationship between fiction and memoir as types of prose.

3.2 Nnamdi Azikiwe *My Odyssey*

My Odyssey is the memoir of Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe (November 16, 1904 – May 11, 1996), usually referred to as Nnamdi Azikiwe, or, informally and popularly, as "Zik", was the founder of modern Nigerian nationalism and the first President of Nigeria, holding the position throughout the Nigerian First Republic. *My Odyssey* is his writing about his political, social and general lives. Azikiwe was born on November 16, 1904 in Zungeru, northern Nigeria to Igbo parents. After studying at missionary schools in Nigeria, Azikiwe went to the United States. While there he attended Howard University, Washington DC before enrolling in and graduating from Lincoln University, Pennsylvania in 1930. He obtained a masters degree in 1933 from a prestigious Ivy League institution, the University of Pennsylvania. He worked as an instructor at Lincoln before returning to Africa

My Odyssey reveals further that after Zik taught at Lincoln, in November 1934, took the position of editor for the *African Morning Post*, a daily newspaper in Accra, Ghana. In that position he promoted a pro-African nationalist agenda. He also criticized those Africans who belonged to the 'elite' of colonial society and favoured retaining the existing order, as they regarded it as the basis of their well being." As a result of publishing an article on May 15, 1936 entitled "Has the African a God?" written by I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson he was brought to trial on charges of sedition. Although he was found guilty of the charges and sentenced to six months in prison, he was acquitted on appeal. He returned to Lagos, Nigeria, in 1937 and founded the *West African Pilot* which he used as a vehicle to foster Nigerian nationalism. He founded the Zik Group of Newspapers, publishing multiple newspapers in cities across the country.

After a successful journalism enterprise, Azikiwe entered into politics, co-founding the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) alongside Herbert Macaulay in 1944. He became the secretary-general of the National Council in 1946, and was the following year elected to the Legislative Council of Nigeria. In 1951, he became the leader of the Opposition to the government of Obafemi Awolowo in the Western Region's House of Assembly. In 1952, he moved to the Eastern Region, and was elected to the position of Chief Minister, and in 1954 became Premier of Nigeria's Eastern Region. On December 12, 1959, he became the Governor General, and with the proclamation of a republic

in 1963 he became the first President of Nigeria, while Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was the Prime Minister.

Azikiwe and his civilian colleagues were removed from power in the military coup of January 15, 1966. During the Biafran (1967–1970) war of secession, Azikiwe became a spokesman for the nascent Igbo republic and an adviser to its leader Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu; in 1969, however, he switched to the side of the Nigerian government. After the war, he served as Chancellor of Lagos University from 1972 to 1976. He joined the Nigerian People's Party in 1978, making unsuccessful bids for the presidency in 1979 and again in 1983. He left politics involuntarily after the military coup on December 31, 1983. He died on May 11, 1996 at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, in Enugu, Enugu State, after a protracted sickness.

The writings of Azikiwe spawned a philosophy of African liberation Zikism, which identifies five concepts for Africa's movement towards freedom: spiritual balance, social regeneration, economic determination, mental emancipation, and political resurgence. Highly cosmopolitan, the young Zik, a zealous Young Turk, traversed the earth in search of knowledge. His quest took him to Hope Waddell Institute, Calabar and later to Wesley Boys High School, Lagos. As is usually the hallmark of all great men, Zik was only a 16-year-old boy when his perception of life changed. That was at Methodist Church, Tinubu, Lagos upon listening to the sermon of one of Africa's most fiery and sincere activists, Reverend James Kwegyr Aggrey. Zik would later recount his experience in his epic autobiography, *My Odyssey*. He wrote "after that day, I became a new man, my ideas of life changed so much that I tried in my dream, hoping against all hope for the time when it would be possible for me to be like Aggrey".

Though the Europeans were the visitors, they became lords and masters over the native Africans, something akin to a tenant ejecting the landlord. They were hostile to Africans even on their own soil. It was in this hostile and harsh environment that Zik was born. His father was then serving in the British Army as a minor official. The rarity of Zik's odyssey was typified by his triumph over monumental obstacles including but not limited to the mere fact that he was a young black man in a white man's land.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

My Odyssey chronicles the life of Nnamdi Azikiwe but it also sets out to teach, entertain and enlighten. Compare this memoir with any prose fiction of your choice.

3.3 Wole Soyinka: *You must set Forth at Dawn*

You Must Set Forth at Dawn is the follow-up book to Wole Soyinka's acclaimed memoir of his childhood, *Ake*, published back in 1981. The Nigerian political activist and acclaimed writer won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, the first African ever to do so. This new memoir of Soyinka's adult life, concentrates more on his activities in Nigeria than his long periods abroad, and on the interplay between the private writer and the public figure he feels the urge to become. It reveals that Soyinka has not a quiet, individual life, but a life lived in the fullness of an epic. It is an important chronicle of his turbulent life as an adult in (and in exile from) his beloved, beleaguered homeland, Nigeria.

In the tough, humane, and lyrical language that has typified his plays and novels, Soyinka captures the indomitable spirit of Nigeria itself by bringing to life the friends and family who bolstered and inspired him, and by describing the pioneering theatre works that defied censure and tradition. Soyinka not only recounts his exile and the terrible reign of General Sani Abacha, but shares vivid memories and playful anecdotes—including his improbable friendship with a prominent Nigerian businessman and the time he smuggled a frozen wildcat into America so that his students could experience a proper Nigerian barbecue. More than a major figure in the world of literature, Wole Soyinka is a courageous voice for human rights, democracy, and freedom. *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* is an intimate chronicle of his thrilling public life, a meditation on justice and tyranny, and a mesmerizing testament to a ravaged yet hopeful land. Prof Soyinka starts the book from where *Ake: The Years of Childhood* and *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* ended. There is some reference to Ibadan but this time not through his alter ego Maren who obviously was Prof Soyinka in Ibadan. His story is essentially the story of Nigeria written from a personal perspective since he came of age as an adult in the early 50s during the pre independence era.

In the 60s he describes in detail his opinions of the politics of the time and his thoughts about the treasonable felony trial of the late sage Chief Obafemi Awolowo. His thoughts are that indeed some Nigerians from the Western Region had undergone training in Nkrumah's Ghana in paramilitary techniques but he agrees with the general opinion of the time that Awo knew nothing about this and was wrongfully jailed. However other members of the Action Group had some knowledge. He does not mention the name of the Judge in The case but the Judge was Mr. Justice Sodeinde Sowemimo who later rose to be the Chief Justice of the federation. He talks about the alliance between the Splinter party from Action Group known as Democratic Party led by the late Aare Ona Kakanfo of Yoruba land Chief S .L Akintola and the Northern Peoples

Congress led by Sir Ahmadu Bello and on the opposing side the Action Group led by Awo in alliance with NCNC then led by the Eastern region premier Dr Michael Okpara, "Okpara Power". He lets the reader know the high stakes political intrigues of the time.

He also gives in details the help Okpara gave to Action Group financially and otherwise when Awo was in jail in Calabar. He gives credit to Mazi Ukonu from the Eastern Nigeria broadcasting service that set up a broadcasting station in Awo's house, unbeknownst to Awo, as a counter weight to the Western Nigeria government media outlet which was critical in the highly contested 1964 election. In the mid 60s he also gives details of his substitution of the tape for a broadcast by the Premier Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola for his own tape. There was reference to this in *Ibadan: the Penkelemes years* but in this book he goes into more details including his trial and eventual acquittal in the court of the Judge who was none other than the Honorable Mr. Justice Kayode Esho who later became a Supreme Court Judge.

He ends the 60s by discussing the civil war and the coups of that time. His meeting with Colonel Victor Banjo and Phillip Alale before the former invaded the Midwest. He also recounts his last meeting with the poet Christopher Okigbo who later perished a day or 2 later at the warfront. He talks of his delivering a message to none other than Colonel later General Olusegun Obasanjo from Victor Banjo in a midnight trip through Ibadan. There have been varying accounts of the discussion but this is Prof Soyinka's account. Obasanjo gave his own account in *My Command*. Banjo wanted to get to Lagos from Benin through the western region but Obasanjo who was then the military commander of the West in the early days of the civil war refused. This has also been discussed in the book a *Break in the Silence* which is a biography of Colonel Victor Banjo written by his sister Prof. Adetoun Ogunsheye. He also said that Banjo was phoning a lot of people from Benin after the Mid West invasion including Him, General Gowon and even Awo. However, the rest is history. Banjo was recalled to Enugu, tried for treason and executed along with Phillip Alale and Emmanuel Ifeajuna the University of Ibadan graduate, Commonwealth high jump champion of the Commonwealth games of 1954 who was also one of the 5 Majors that plotted the coup of January 1966. Professor Soyinka was then arrested by government and jailed in solitary confinement for 22 months. The details of these are in Soyinka's book *The Man died*. He also talks about University politics and the intrusion of regional and National politics which led to the resignation of several lecturers from University of Ife in the mid 60s. Notable examples are Dr (later Prof) Samuel Aluko who was forced to relocate with his family to University of Nigeria, Nsukka also Professor Oyenuga an Agriculture expert who also resigned.

The book is also an ode to long standing friendship which the author had with Femi Johnson the insurance magnate and actor and the economist Prof. Ojetunji Aboyade. The relationships were indeed touching and lasted several decades most especially with Femi Johnson. Prof Soyinka through numerous anecdotes tell of their hunting trips and other significant events in his life that particularly Femi Johnson played a role. Femi Johnson actually acted in Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* and later by the dint of his hard work built the only other skyscraper in Ibadan apart from Cocoa House which he named Broking House.

He discusses his relationship with various military rulers such as General Obasanjo and IBB. He also gives an account of the dramatist Prof Ola Rotimi's encounter with members of the Armed forces at a check point after the civil war; there he was flogged in front of his family and almost shot dead. Prof Ola Rotimi was famous worldwide for his epic play *The Gods are not to Blame* which is his version of the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. He discusses his complex relationship with Obasanjo including their collaboration in the FESTAC preparations and hosting and also the search for the Original *Ori Olokun* which is a sacred mask to the Yoruba that was excavated by a German explorer but somehow ended in Britain during colonial times. This is an adventure story in itself. This was indeed a forerunner for the valiant efforts of the recently departed late Apena of Ife Chief Omotosho Eluyemi's actions as head of the National Museum and antiquities unit to get more of the looted treasures.

He details his reasons for establishing the Federal Road Safety Corps and his visit for a meeting with Babangida a few hours before Orkar struck in his coup. He describes how productive the meeting was as they discussed a lot of issues but unbeknownst to both of them something earth shaking would happen just a couple of hours later. He also mentions the effort of the Nigerian Literary triumvirate of Chinua Achebe, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo and himself to save the life of the condemned General and poet Mamman Jiya Vatsa.

He devotes a lot of attention to the June 12 election and its aftermath, the civil resistance, riots and eventual ascendancy of General Sanni Abacha as the Head of State. He explains his exile via Shaki to Cotonou in Republic of Benin and eventual relocation to the United States. His heroic and colossal efforts in the pro-democracy campaign are also outlined. He gives credit to others such as Beko Ransomekuti, Gani Fawehinmi, Femi Falana and Olisa Agbakoba and Bola Tinubu. He however did not in my opinion really like NADECO (National Democratic Coalition) though he sometimes co-operated with them. He also obviously had an uneasy relationship with Chief Anthony Enahoro who moved the motion for Nigeria's independence in 1956 by criticizing

his civil service approach to issues. Their paths had indeed crossed several years ago when Chief Enahoro was the Federal Minister for Information during the Civil War and Professor Soyinka was then incarcerated without trial. This is fully discussed by Professor Soyinka. Incidentally in the 60s Anthony Enahoro was involved in a long extradition battle between Nigeria and Britain for his alleged role in what came to be known as Awo's treasonable felony trial.

Also Chef Enahoro wrote his own account of the events. He had his own organization which later got expanded but had to suspend some members because of people's fixation for posts and in the case of a lady whose family he actually knew and mentions in the book as writing bad cheques and dishonesty. He also goes for the jugular and in my opinion unfairly attacks the physical attributes of one of the members that got suspended, Jude Uzonwanne. His contributions to the democratic coalition which was revealed in the book are sterling because you need at least a whole book to delineate all the activities that went on, including Radio Kudirat and the like and the efforts of Diasporan Nigerians like Bolaji Aluko, Kayode Fayemi etc. Also people like Bagauda Kaltho, Ralph Obioha, Commodore Dan Suleiman, General Alani Akinrinnade, Kudirat Abiola and the Man that paid the Ultimate prize Bashorun MKO Abiola.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

You Must Set Forth at Dawn has been described as an adventure story. Discuss the qualities of literary adventure in the memoir.

4.0 CONCLUSION

A reading of African memoirs makes African cultural and political situation in Africa clearer and easier to understand for they bring out the truth about African milieu. Memoirs examine the political, economic and social circumstances that impelled the sensitivity and ideologies of African peoples. They also emphasize the historical connections that make it possible to understand Africa's dealings with pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history. While personal ideologies form the basis for these works, the artistic forms of literature and other dynamic orature techniques show that they are directed to a new audience. They are written as a unique genre of African prose with lighter elements of fiction. Many critics have engaged in debate about what constitutes African literature. Ngugi believes that memoirs are part and parcel of African prose fiction. African literature in English is really incomplete without those fascinating memoirs. Memoirs express the people's experiences expressed by one man whose service he has put his pen. In this type of prose, the people rediscover the real essence of struggle

through the actions and learn from their great optimism and faith in the capacity of human beings to remake their world and renew themselves. Memoirs constitute a part of the song of the people. Both memoirs under study in this unit reveal both artistic and historical qualities that mark them out as special aspects of the genre of African prose fiction in English.

5.0 SUMMARY

Some critics have advocated that literature or art in general needs to be freed from politics and history. In this vein, memoirs would be removed from the mainstreams of literary discourse. This argument has often been discountenanced by other critics. The truth remains that every good literature must address the question of change. It must deal with the vagaries of virtual reality versus the humdrum of societies. It must adapt and become spontaneous in its response to things as they happen in society. It must write about today for today is tomorrow. Culture is the result, with more or less awakened consciousness, of economic and political activities, the more or less dynamic expression of the type of relations prevailing within that society, on the one hand between man (considered individually and collectively) and nature, on the other hand, among individuals, groups of individuals, social strata or social classes. Thus, memoirs chronicle the people's culture in its entirety. Therefore, they should be a part of the complete genre of African prose fiction. Nnamdi Azikiwe's *My Odyssey* and Wole Soyinka's *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* are works of prose rich with the qualities and functions of a true African prose fiction in English.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

- 1) What qualities of prose fiction can be found in memoirs?
- 2) Memoirs are stories of the life of an individual told with the intention to teach, entertain and enlighten. Prove that memoirs function in the same way as other genres of literature.
- 3) In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, Soyinka through numerous anecdotes tells of their hunting trips and other significant events in his life that particularly Femi Johnson played a role. Assess the elements of fiction in this memoir?
- 4) The title of the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's memoir is *My Odyssey*, a title taken from a Greek literature written by Sophocles entitled *Odyssey*. Explain the literary components in Zik's memoir.

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UNIT 4 THE SHORT FICTION

CONTENTS

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- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall study the short story as a popular variety in the genre of African prose fiction in English. The short fiction is the most popular written literature in Africa. Every novelist started as a short story writer. The short story writer tells stories to entertain and educate "ordinary people" in a way they understand. Like the storyteller, the short story writer holds the audience spellbound by the very beauty of the narrative, giving pleasure and also teaching morals and beliefs of the community, race or nation. The short-story has much in common with African oral tradition which, according to Irele, is better described as "the African classical tradition". Because of the large collection of short fictions by individual authors and in anthologies in Africa, we shall use select short stories to study this type of African prose fiction. We shall use the story “*American Lottery*” by a Cameroonian named Makuchi, “*Love Poem*” the award winning short story by Nigeria’s Helon Habila and finally “*Vengeful Creditor*”, one of the short stories in Chinua Achebe’s *Girls at War*.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, the students should be able to:

- recognize short fictions as one of types of African prose fiction
- differentiate short fiction from the novel
- appreciate African short fictions like the African novel
- identify the short fiction as an extension of African oral tales
- use short fictions to study African literary experiences.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The short fiction is short as its name implies, usually simple in terms of plot and characterization and has wide appeal to its readers. It would be a mistake to believe that its simplicity translates into limited skills on the part of the writer. On the contrary, some critics argue that the short story, after the poem, is the literary genre which makes the greatest demand on the writer. She or he has to capture a moment in time by making a quick statement about a contemporary situation within a very limited space. The roots of the African short story are as old as human society. In all cultures of the world, human beings have engaged in story telling before embracing the longer forms that can be found in both written and oral tradition. In that context, the arrival of the short story on the African cultural scene is a mere evolution, a proof of the adaptability of living cultures. Individual authors have brought out collections which deal with a variety of issues. The short story seems to belong to the people rather than to the elite. An increasing number of critics see it as a new alternative to the African novel whose formal complexity and intimidating status, borrowed from Western hierarchies, have never been naturalized in Africa. With the voice of ordinary people, the short story claims to be the legitimate heir of the traditional legends through which griots chronicled community history. African classical tradition then finds its renewal in the short story because in a familiar way this genre puts in the context of today a number of subjects relevant to traditional and modern African values.

The short fiction shows how economic, political, religious and social situations relate to pre-colonial Africa, colonialism, neo-colonial independence, apartheid, indigenous and imported religions, etc. Thus the themes dealt with by the short story are many and include art, religion, urban-life, tradition and culture, apartheid, ironies of life, and pre-colonial, colonial, and neo-colonial reality, etc. Just as the common storyteller of old, the contemporary short story writer aims at helping his/her society to change while retaining the best features of authentic African cultures. A large number of literary authors of great talent have not lost sight of the short story's potential to enrich human lives and African societies. For example, Aidoo's collection of short stories, *No Sweetness Here*, is set in post-independent Africa and deals with the tension generated by oppression, slavish imitation of white people (e.g. "For Whom Things Did Not Change"), brutality of the former colonial masters (e.g. "Big Man."). The Heinemann Educational Books has published regional collections on contemporary short stories from all four corners of the continent.

More importantly still, hundreds of short stories by African authors have been published in local newspapers and the very few that have made it to the West - and which are not necessarily those which had the most appeal in Africa when they were published - represent only the tip of the iceberg. Thus, they have made use of the versatility of the genre. Interestingly, every novelist in Africa started as short story writer. Other writers who wrote novels earlier later wrote short stories because of its appeal to the people and its shortness which makes for easy reading and quick entertainment.

A few names among the more noteworthy are: Bessie Head, Sembene Ousmane, Bartho Smit, Nadine Gordimer, Christopher Hope, Kojo Laing, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ben Okri, Flora Nwapa, Chinua Achebe and the recent Caines' Prize winner Helon Habila amongst others.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

The short story has been described as the popular prose genre in Africa. Explain why this statement is true.

3.2 John Makuchi: "American Lottery."

Cameroonian John Makuchi's "American Lottery" in *Your Madness, Not Mine: Short Stories from Cameroon*, shows the devaluation of the African American, thanks to the media which distort the black diaspora. In this collection of short stories, Makuchi captures the gender, ethnicity, class and linguistic tensions in the postcolonial Cameroon. Her story "American Lottery" dramatizes the various levels of marginalization that a black person suffers in the current era of corporate capitalism. Paul, the narrator's younger brother wins the "Diversity Immigrant Visa Program" lottery that grants a visa to the United States of America. Paul's sudden disappearance from the narrative the moment he leaves for America marks his dehumanization and exile. The story also studies the silencing of the African Americans by Africans whose imagination is limited to whiteness.

The narrator laughs at her own community which seems to figure Paul's success in the US in terms of getting not just black friends from the continent, but a white girlfriend. Narrator lingers at the description of the imaginary photograph that the village conjures into existence and sees itself admiring in the near future: Soon, we will receive pictures taken with his brothers and sisters: Cameroonians, Nigerians, Ethiopians, Eritrean, Egyptians, Black South Africans, Kenyans, Senegalese, pictures with some Black Americans, and of course a picture with the inscription on the back that says, "a friend" – a white woman, her hand around his waist as they both laugh and show their

teeth to the camera. She will look so beautiful, almost too happy, as she holds firmly onto my little brother, our African son. And then the years will go by. And the parties will fade into bitter memories, figments of our imagination. (92) While expressing the deluded excitement of the villagers, the story suggests the artificiality that Paul could be living in. Through her satirical tone, the narrator leads us to question the logic behind the visa program: “Some bogus thing about an American immigration lottery that to thousands of aliens! Who are aliens? Where do aliens come from? I ask myself.”

When we first meet the character, he is expressing a shared desire among the post-colonial subjects to relocate to the Western metropolis. Although the people are aware of the exploitation and denigration that the West has visited upon their country, they see the metropolis as their home. The Anglophone part of Cameroon wants to go “home” to England, while the Francophone section desires to go to France. The writer focuses on the irony of a community that denies their own homes to construct illusions of home in exile. Paul’s dream has a sense of novelty because he does not want to go to the traditional destinations of the postcolonial: “No, America was the place to be....He needed to go away to a place where murderous thoughts would not be invading his everyday dreams....to a place where he would stop feeling, thinking, or believing that secession was the only option open to a minority” (76) The narrator regrets having not hidden the forms that facilitate Paul’s alienation. She feels guilty of condemning her brother to the invisibility the black person is reduced to in America. Despite the alienation that awaits Paul as “a Permanent Resident Alien of the United States of America” (93–94), the community is beside itself in celebration of his supposedly good fortune: “America! Their own son, their own friend, their kinsman, was going to America. The frenzy, the joy. Imagine. He will soon be rolling in dollars, their tongues wagged. The very bed on which he will lie will be made of dollars, they chanted.”

The irony resides in the way the story is structured. We have already been shown in the story what America does to the “aliens” who go there. Peter, once a dreamer of the “American Dream”, knows what America does to its black victims:

Then his brother who had left for America when he was barely ten had come back home for the first time after thirteen years, THIRTEEN YEARS! And bored holes, like those left behind on plantation leaves after the passage of hailstones, in his perception of America and the world. His brother had shattered a dream, a child’s dream. His brother had come back home a different person, a stranger: the way he walked; the way he smiled at people; the way he

talked, the way he talked to people, the way he ate, what he ate, when he ate; the way he dressed, what he wore... Who was this person? Peter had wondered. (80)

The narrator has shown the readers the reason behind the village's celebration of uprootment. Through media products, America has been able to market the positive aspects of its culture while suppressing the negative elements. So brainwashed is the community that the people no longer know places by their real names but by names branded on them from films and soap operas shown on the national TV. The story is a complete satire on American neo-colonialism or modern slavery in Africa.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

In a short fiction like "American Lottery", Makuchi unveils a deeper concern about the new American slavery called 'visa lottery'. Did he achieve this satirical intent?

3.3 Helon Habila's "Love Poems" *Prison Stories*

Prison Stories contains short stories about life in a brutal Nigerian state. It won Helon Habila the Caines' Prize - the African Booker. Helon Habila, who the second Caine prize for African writing, was 22 when his father and one of his brothers died in a road accident in Nigeria. Habila was living at home at the time, having returned there after dropping out from college. He was directionless and despondent. "I had no idea what I would do or what would become of me," he says. "I used to quarrel so much with my father." It was then, after the accident, that he began reading literature for the first time - Shakespeare, John Donne, and J.M. Coetzee - and the dream of becoming a writer took inchoate form.

"Love Poems" is a remarkable work of prison literature. It is the account of a young journalist, Lomba, who is incarcerated without trial during the years of General Sani Abacha's oppressive military rule. Lomba is arrested at the scene of a peaceful demonstration where he is performing his journalistic duty of recording the events. While in prison, he is able to use pen and paper to write poems as a means of psychological purgation in his unfortunate disposition. He is later caught as no prisoner is allowed to keep any object, let alone pen and paper. They took all the papers and his pen and put him in solitary confinement. The Prison Superintendent read the poems he wrote on the papers and fell in love with the poems.

One day, the Prison Superintendent, a brutal near-illiterate, visits the journalist and asks him if he would write some love poems which he then claims as his own, sending them to his "educated" girlfriend. He gives Lomba cigarette and soap in place of the poems. The Prison Superintendent's girlfriend knew that her friend was not the originator of the love poems. She demands knowing the original writer which he provided grudgingly. On meeting Lomba, she feels something deeply about him and requests her boyfriend to ensure he leaves the prison. Soon, Lomba is struggling for inspiration, though he wants nothing more than the freedom to write, and so from memory begins adapting great works of poetry, while all the time sending covert messages to his female reader: "Save my soul, a prisoner." The Prison Superintendent explains sheepishly that he refused including Lomba's name among those to be released by Amnesty International when they came to release political prisoners because of the love poems he is writing for him. His girlfriend then demands that Lomba be released if their relationship is to continue. At the end of the story, it is Abacha's death that gives Lomba the hope for freedom which he had wished all the while in prison.

It is a remarkably subtle, agile story, at once brutal and tender, melancholic and funny. It has the authenticity of deep conviction - many of Habila's friends and one of his cousins were imprisoned for many years without trial, disappearing into the lower depths of Nigeria's prison system, with its violence and warring prisoners, its ritualized brutality. "Under Abacha, Nigeria was like a vast prison, both real and metaphorical," Helon says. "You felt continually under pressure, watched. And a kind of military system operates inside the prisons, too, where the prisoners are in cahoots with the wardens. It is all based on physical strength: the strongest prisoner becomes the president of the prison, and then you have generals and subordinates. And then sometimes there are coups, when rival groups attempt to take over the prison. It is terrifying." Thus, the prison symbolizes the Nigerian and/or African nations.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

The themes of political odds and military dictatorship are treated in "Love Poems". How did Habila achieve these in so short a story?

3.4 Chinua Achebe: "Vengeful Creditor" in *Girls's at War*

Chinua Achebe's story "Vengeful Creditor" first appeared in 1971 in the inaugural issue of *Okike: A Journal of New Writing*, a magazine that Achebe founded, and it was later reprinted in his collection of stories, *Girls at War and Other Stories*. The story focuses on the gap between the wealthy and the poor in the tumultuous environment of a

haphazardly modernizing African country. The overt political issue at stake is the government's institution of free primary education for children, a policy the well-to-do resents. Emenikes, a well-to-do family resents it because it means they will have difficulty keeping their servants. In order to obtain a nurse for their baby, the Emenikes promise an impoverished girl that she will eventually be able to go to school—her only chance at obtaining a better life for herself. As it becomes clear that the Emenikes are not going to make good on their promise, the young servant, Veronica, becomes increasingly resentful and acts out her frustration on the Emenikes and their child.

Achebe is known primarily as a novelist, and his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart* is considered one of literature's most important African novels. He has written relatively few short stories in his career, but his collection *Girls at War, and Other Stories* like his novels, has received overwhelming positive reviews from critics. "Vengeful Creditor" in particular is noted for its satirical qualities in depicting "women and their aspirations, blighted by the society and the circumstances that surround them," according to C. L. Innes in her book *Chinua Achebe*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

In the "Vengeful Creditor", Chinua Achebe delved into exposing the wickedness of the bourgeoisie. How did he achieve this in the story?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The short story is akin to the folktales: short, interesting, entertaining and didactic. The short story exposes much in little spaces. It enables a prolific storyteller to fashion several tales for the entertainment of his readers. Since the short story is short, it makes for easy reading and helps those who can not read for longer hours or days to enjoy the sweetness of fiction. As a popular prose type, it enables the readers appreciate a given view in so short a grasp while relating the issues to real life situations. More so, the short story forms the basis for bigger novels. Every short story is a novel in the making. For instance, Helon Habila's short story "Love Poems" is now a novel with the title *Waiting for an Angel* while Chimamanda Adichie's short story entitled "Half of a Yellow Sun" has been turned into a novel with the same title. Even though the stories treated in this unit have no well developed plots and characterization, we still see and feel the messages in them. The important role of every work of art is to impact positively on the consumers and this the short fictions achieve in so short a time.

5.0 SUMMARY

The short story is a very popular genre in world literature but in Africa it is a significant aspect of African literature. The Caine prize concentrates on the short story, reflecting the oral and contemporary development of African storytelling traditions. It is authentically pan-African: work in translation is actively canvassed. It is worth \$15,000 [£10,500] to the winner, it was established by LibDem MEP Emma Nicholson in memory of her husband, Michael Caine, the former chairman of Booker Plc who died in 1999. Caine helped set up the Booker Prize in Britain and then, in 1992, the same prize in Russia. Like the Booker, the Caine aims to inspire a new generation of writers and readers. The organizers of this African Booker see the short story as the best genre for the award because it seems the most popular prose craft in Africa. The select short stories treated in this unit, reveal how the short fiction is used in the treatment of sensitive social, economic and political issues in Africa.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

- 1) Explain the major differences between the short fiction and the novel?
- 2) Every short story is a novel in the making. Assess this statement properly.
- 3) The short story is akin to folktales. Identify the relationship between these aspects of literature and orature.
- 4) In the short stories treated in this unit the themes span global interests. Comment on the thematic advantages of the short story.
- 5) The short story is aimed at the ordinary people. How true is this statement?

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UNIT 5 OTHER NEW NOVELS

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- 3.0 Main Content
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 - 3.2 Political Satire: Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*
 - 3.3 Cultural Satire: Rebeka Njau's *The Sacred Seed*
 - 3.4 Niger-Delta Situation: Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall study the prose fiction of select new African writers. They are mainly those writers who wrote in the new millennium that began in the year 2000. They write about the events that chronicle the experiences of the new millennium. Interestingly, most of them are females. The women of Africa have found a new voice with the novel genre. These new African writers produce artistic works that show that Africa had its own history, culture, and civilization that were equal if not superior to that of the west. These new writers see their works as a service to their societies. However, while reshaping Africa's distorted history, these writers do not idealize it. They reveal that African society had its own contradictions and spiritual crises. Their approaches sharply contrast to the early writers, such as Achebe, Soyinka, Laye and others, whose artistic works idealize Africa. The ideological concerns of these African writers reflected the general mood of African nations. These writers examine social situations from the standpoint of class conflict. They use the English language to suit their purposes. The development of the novel in Africa was also due to the rise of a class, all the authors, Achebe, Laye, Ngugi, were members of an emerging educated African elite, and their works were directed at foreign audiences and local audiences who belonged to their own socio-economic classes. We shall select a few of these writers in order to study their message.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit the students should be able to:

- appreciate the new millennium novelists in Africa
- assess the message in their works
- contrast their novels with the early writers in terms of themes
- discuss the themes in the new novels
- discover the newness in their approaches to the novel
- identify their contributions to the vast African Prose fiction.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

These new writers of the millennium reveal the traumas of the present age: starvation, torture, oil spillage, environmental pollution, AIDS, murder, cultural odds, religious and political traumas have become the background noise of their entertainments. Their tales/images reveal instances of pain and deprivation. Their novels enter the heart by sneak attack. The questions that often trail the minds of their readers are: Why are we so depressed? Is there no joy in our existence? How is it that our best and brightest are not mindful of the end of the machete that hurts our motherland? Regardless, these writers have every reason to be worried about the situation in Africa. The question becomes: What are they doing about it? Many of these writers spend a lot of time painting gory pictures of Africa's sorry state. These writers focus on the continent's corrupt leaders, warlords, "tribal" conflicts, child labourers, child traffickers and women disfigured by abuse and genital mutilation amongst other issues.

They write to correct the horrible images of Africa as one giant beggar-continent that will someday be erased when Africa's intellectuals and writers like these millennium writers direct their rage inwards. They believe the African writers and intellectuals can stop feeding the West stories of irredeemable despair that turn Africa into a caricature continent. They believe there is hope, because there is a return to the oral tradition of storytelling by our ancestors and they call this change.

These new writers write for a precocious generation that went through books with the same intensity with which they surf the pages of the Internet. The pressures on these writers of the new millennium are enormous. Their voices never stopped singing, they delivered story after story, so painstakingly about the odds of the age. As you read their novels, you feel the passion and the love for the word, pulsating through

every word; there is a near obsession for perfection that borders on a disability. The new African millennium writers focus on the true condition of the continent without reducing the land and her people to ridicule.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

These new novelists are engrossed with revealing the totality of Africa's ugly state. Discuss this proposition.

3.2 Political Satire: Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

Kambili, the protagonist in *Purple Hibiscus*, uses the draconic ruling pattern of her father, Chief Eugene Achike, to reveal the problems in the entire Nigerian society. The unnecessary religious conflicts that make Kambili's father to hate Papa Nnukwu; her grand father shows the high-handedness of some African people who use religion as a means of creating discord in their families. Uncle Eugene allows religion to becloud his sense of fellowship with his culture and society. His children must comply with the tenets of Catholicism. It becomes surprising that a man like Chief Eugene Achike who fights for the political freedom of his people through his journalistic ventures could apply what he attacks in his home. He engages in children and wife battery but criticizes those who batter the society. It looks like denying a phenomenon and embracing it at the same time. A paradox! He celebrates the relief that comes from coups believing that a new government means freedom in sight. He expects freedom but blocks it from his vicinity.

Kambili sees the contrast between her father and the military government when she critically asserts, "of course, Papa told us, the politicians were corrupt..., what we needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. *Renewed Democracy*. It sounded important, the way he said it..." (25). This whole dream sounded as if Kambili is expecting a 'renewed approach' to the family affairs first before hoping for a renewed governance in the country. Adichie explains that the issue of governance in Africa would change when the individuals begin to examine within themselves the correct approaches to life that would enhance the development of good governance.

Kambili and Jaja never experienced 'real' love in their home at Enugu. It was Auntie Ifeoma's home that provided the needed environment for them to experience love. Jaja falls in love with flowers and other chores. He expresses himself to his cousins. He visits scenes and places and exchanges gifts and experiences. He sees the love of a 'heathen'

grandfather who tells them moral folk tales and the love of a reverend father who provides the needed atmosphere for peace and joy. Kambili sees the love of a sister who teaches her to cook meals, care for others and accommodate people around her. She 'falls in love' with Father Amadi. Father Amadi sees in Kambili the character of a heroine who talks less but acts more in her mind, "she does not waste her energy in picking never-ending arguments. But there is a lot going on in her mind, I can tell." (173)

Amaka is also a strong voice. She seems to be one of the strongest female voices in our contemporary fiction. Amaka refuses to take an English name for her confirmation because she sees no need for such 'colonial' necessity. She was never forced to accept this 'necessity'. Not even from Father Amadi whose closeness to the family ought to have given the necessary touch for Amaka to choose an English name:

"I told you I am not taking an English name, father," she said

"And have I asked you why?"

"Why do I have to?"

"Because it is the way it's done. Let's forget if it's right or wrong for now," father Amadi said, and I noticed the shadows under his eyes.

"When the missionaries first came, they didn't think Igbo names were good enough. They insisted that people take English names to be baptized. Shouldn't we moving ahead?" (271-272)

Amaka represents the new hope for the coming generation of African women. Amaka seems to be the most vocal of these characters: young, resilient, outspoken and unbending in the things that touch her African pride. Kambili describes her thus: "She walked and talked even faster and with more purpose than Auntie Ifeoma did" (78). She is a rare breed of the new generation of youths. She is creative, accommodating, honest, outspoken and a dogged fighter. Even when Amaka left the country with her mother, she never stops her protests against those things she finds unpalatable in the Nigerian society. Kambili tells us that:

Amaka used to write to the office of the head of state, even the Nigerian Ambassador in America, to complain about the poor state of Nigeria's justice system. She said nobody acknowledged the letters but still it was important to her that she do *something*. (300).

Adichie takes a historical stance in the exposition of the travails of military oddities in the novel. Ade Coker fights the military regime through the *Standard* newspaper. Uncle Eugene sees the fight as his needed role in the correction of military anarchy. Auntie Ifeoma flees the country to the United States in search of peace and academic freedom. Brain drain increases daily. Later, Ade Coker is murdered. Nwankiti Ogechi (a typology for Ken Saro Wiwa) is murdered:

Soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in a bush in Minna. And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead. (200-201).

After this killing, commonwealth countries suspended Nigeria and imposed sanctions. The Big Oga later dies “atop a prostitute, foaming at the mouth and jerking-...” (297). The Big Oga, invariably General Sani Abacha, is revealed as the ending point of Nigeria’s military rule. His death and the death of Uncle Eugene bring in a new hope, a dawn, to the polity. Jaja’s acceptance of the crime of murdering his father, even though his mother had claimed responsibility, shows the yearning of the family to get freedom from the brutal and strict father, just like the needed respite the Nigerian nation experienced with the exit of the dictator, General Sani Abacha. The symbol of the purple hibiscus bringing a new hope in their home is seen in Kambili’s new vision of tomorrow: “I reach out and place my arm around mama’s shoulder and she leans towards me and smiles...The new rains will come soon (307).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Purple Hibiscus is the picture of Nigeria at the zenith of anarchy. Explain how Adichie achieved this.

3.3 Cultural Satire: Rebeka Njau’s *The Scared Seed*

Kenyan Rebeka Njau’s *The Scared Seed* (2003) textualizes in various ways the problems women have suffered under patriarchal political dominance and inserts the role African Americans have in liberating the still colonized women of Africa. Ellen has come to Africa as a missionary but her contribution to the Church, which has deep connections with the state, is “paid back” through the pastor’s attempt to rape her. The ingratitude and greed of the church is underlined in the pastor’s lecherous attempt which parallels other acts of violence against women by the patriarchal traditional society and the state. The main character in the story, Tesa, is raped by the head of state who has also perpetrated ethnic war that affects women most. Ellen is shown in instances of the narrative which indicate possibilities of healing after

tribal cleansing, participating in the reconstruction of Africa. Her moment of self-realization comes when she abandons the church and joins women in a traditional shrine that is also threatened by the state: Ellen felt gratified to have had the opportunity to be around the women who knew how to use their power calmly. She was fascinated by Tesa's music and was moved by her ability to relate to people at all levels. She admired her talent and skill in training the young village boys and girls. Within a short time they had learned to sing and create pictures which expressed their feelings, and told stories of joy and sorrow. (174) Underscored here is the need of direct grassroots negotiation.

African Americans with direct relations with Africa are likely to be interacting with the westernized and power-wielding elite, as Ellen previously did. They will be given honours by the authorities who want to exploit their western connection for funding and business, as the pastor tries to do with Ellen to export gourds to America. The text seems to argue that the diasporic African has a duty to deconstruct the formal structure put in place to oppress the ordinary African by the state and its organs. The creative potentials learnt in Africa and taken to America in painful circumstances can be reinvented to assist the African continent:

Her mother, she recalled, had been a skilful craftswoman. She had made fabrics and rugs using fibre plants which had grown in her backyard. Ellen had learnt the craft and she decided to pass the knowledge to the women before she left for the USA. (174) Rebeka Njau here shows that the intellectual resources stolen from Africa through slavery can be restored to the continent through training. Ellen's mother is a symbol of skilful diasporic Africans that retained their connections with Africa and passed on skills to the next generation. The skills, according to the text, should be repatriated.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Assess the treatment of patriarchy in modern Kenya as revealed in Njau's *The Sacred Seed*.

3.4 Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow*

Kaine Agary claimed that he was inspired by Saro-Wiwa's book entitled *A Month and a Day* in writing the novel. *Yellow-Yellow* was the first novel of Kaine Agary, who grew up in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The honour was to reflect the relevance of the book on how literatures have been used to illuminate the Niger Delta question. Kaine was in the United States of America for a while before relocating to Lagos. *Yellow-Yellow* was all about a young biracial girl, Zilayefa, who was born of a Nigerian mother and a Greek sailor, who left her rustic existence and the

protective grip of her mother in the village in search of a better life in the city of Port Harcourt.

With a recommendation from her pastor, Zilayefa, the main character in the book, took in and was cared for by an elderly biracial woman, Sisi, and her friend, Lolo. She was thrust into the bustling city of Port Harcourt, unprepared for the pitfalls awaiting a young girl so unsure of herself and also in desperate need of direction. She was confronted by prejudices against her racial identity. Zilayefa joined the fast Port Harcourt life, coloured by the presence of expatriates in the oil sector and declining societal values during a military regime.

She struggled with accepting the void left by not knowing her father and tried to fill that void with the attention of an older lover. Through her budding sexuality experiences, Zilayefa grew to a higher level of knowledge and understanding. *Yellow-Yellow* portrayed life and culture in the Niger Delta through the eyes of Zilayefa when she struggled with development of her identity. It revealed a portrait of beauty and social destruction of the Nigerian Niger Delta, giving a picture and a human face to the hardships of the people.

At the early chapters of the book, the author reflected the menace of oil spillage on hectares of farmland that was supposed to be cultivated for food production. The villagers constituted a pressure group to fight against oppression especially from the foreigners, who were operators of the oil companies that laid their oil pipes in the village. They reported the case to the village head for immediate rescue. Some were crying, others were agitating for compensation. The crude oil, as reported by the author, spread out and covered more land and drowned small animals in its path. The air was polluted with bad smell from crude oil and decaying animals. Men and women were covered knee-deep in the crude oil.

The oil company rejected the accusation, declaring a suspect sabotage of the youth in the village. They insisted on not paying any compensation for all the destruction the burst pipes had caused. Many people lost their main source of sustenance to the spillage including the author's mother. Women rowed their canoes farther away to find land for farming. Every year, it was hard to catch fish. It was contrary to the early days of the author's mother when every husband was expected to give his new wife a dugout canoe he had carved out and crafted himself. The wife would use the canoe to fish, earn a living and help to feed the family. The big boys carved out decorative paddles that carried the legends of the Ijaws in every curve.

Sisi, who took care of Zilayefa, stopped schooling at primary six level. She was exposed to all influences that converged on Port Harcourt before Nigeria's Independence from the British. She used the exposure to get contracts for construction and food supply in government hospitals. She was good with creative ideas for projects she was selling to the procurement officers of the establishment. She was involved in the supply of toilet papers and leasing of pick-up trucks. She was the only woman who got contracts from oil companies. At the concluding chapters of the book, the author reviewed how young girls, who wanted to escape poverty, were looking up to white men to rescue them. Girls were trooping into hotel lobbies at Warri and Bonny, looking for how to attach themselves with the white men. There were people on contract, linking up good looking young girls with prospective white men. On one of such night cruises, Zilayefa met Sergio, his former jilted lover whom she thought was one of those hanging out for young girls.

There have been different reactions over the quality of artworks compiled in *Yellow-Yellow* by its author, which made it to gain such befitting recognition at a first trial. *Yellow-Yellow* takes us on an amazing journey through the Delta region of Nigeria: our guide is a young woman trying to find herself seeking her fortune in a big city, a city hungry to swallow her soul and spit out her jaded hollow shell. It is a truly authentic narrative of a region, the burden of its incredible wealth and a young woman's determination to carry it. This literary gem is a must read.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

The Niger-Delta region in Nigeria is a focus of attention because of environmental degradation. How successful is Agary's treatment of the issue in *Yellow Yellow*?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The millennium African novel is based on contemporary human experiences in order to remain relevant because "any African writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being irrelevant" (Achebe, 1975:78). One fundamental character of the contemporary novel is that it provides a specific manner of narration which identifies and assumes human names in such a way that suggests that they are to be regarded as individuals in the contemporary society. The millennium African novel becomes an exploration of the "personality as it is defined in the interpretation of its past and present self-awareness". Thus, every realistic work of art has man as its focal point – man and his society.

The mark of true realism therefore, is the depiction of an age as individuals' experience and the bourgeois exploration of the individual's experience reaches its highest form when this individual is not a fragmentary experience but the quintessential representation of a particular historical social experience. The political life of a nation and its social national dilemma is thus depicted through an individual experience, the individual himself being shaped by the socio-economic circumstances in which he finds himself. These writers reveal social cohesion or social consciousness. They reveal new interests and experiences in their crafts of fiction. Their novels are constantly interrupted in the effort to maintain and expand contemporary artistic activities and institutions in the face of their country's problems and a general sapping of energy and initiative.

5.0 SUMMARY

The new millennium African writers are producing artistic works that show that Africa had its own history, culture, and civilization. These writers apply pathos and emotive power of their works to instigate the oppressors in their societies and to initiate a political and economic reorganization of their society in the interest of the oppressed. However, some critics maintain that the intentions (of the pathos and bitterness of these novels) are to whip the emotions of the people into revolutionary action. The artistic forms reflect the ideological content, for these writers use satire and ridicule as "corrective narrative techniques" to enlighten their society morally. The despair that pervades these works, which portray the oppressed as trapped and helpless, arises in the writers' political misunderstanding. African writers of the millennium have no choice but to join in the people's struggle for survival. In that situation, they will have to confront the ruling elite whose services are not beneficial to all. These writers apply the real language of struggle in the actions and speeches of their people, learn from their great optimism and faith in the capacity of human beings to remake their world and renew themselves.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

- 1) The new millennium novelists reveal every ugly thing that hinders Africa's development. Explain how they achieve this.
- 2) *Purple Hibiscus* touches on the odds of militarism in Africa. Discuss the thematic concerns in the novel.
- 3) A woman's trauma against cultural impediments in modern day Kenya features in Njau's *The Sacred Seed*. Identify the issues of cultural malpractice in the novel.

- 4) There are vast social and environmental traumas in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. Carefully discuss how Agary revealed this in *Yellow Yellow*.
- 5) There are greater promises that Africa's greater novelist would be women as they dominate the new millennium novelists. How true is this statement?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Adichie, Chimamanda. (2005). *Purple Hibiscus*. Lagos: Farafina.

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