

# **ENG881 - STUDIES IN AFRICAN FICTION**

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## **Introduction**

ENG 881 is a one-semester course, which involves intensive study of African prose fiction in its various forms. It focuses mainly on the historical, sociological and contextual aspects of this genre. It will take the student through the specific issues in contemporary Africa as reflected in its literature –issues relating to the nature of knowledge and existence in Africa, issues relating to the environment, conflict, gender, fundamentalism, tradition, etc. It consolidates the knowledge you have acquired in the lower levels and aspires to make you able to advocate for the listed issues in society. The knowledge imbibed is so tangible that its application comes easy. It is structured in such a way that students go beyond mere formalist analysis of plot, setting, text based thematic issues, in short form!

The course will treat the various texts to be studied as a canvass of human activities rife with so many dynamics. The reader/student is an observer of those activities and dynamics. He or she will be required to note of the behavioural patterns and thought processes of the characters on the canvass, their utterances, narrator’s comments, and so on, which emanate from real human experiences and which give him or her insight into human nature, nature of ethnic conflicts, the state of the environment, nature and causes of religious fundamentalism, gender issues in the society, issues regarding obnoxious traditions as well as the general human condition in the referred or fictional nation. The reader/student of the texts, whose interest in the state of the nation with regard to the various issues already listed has been awakened, is expected to transform the information from the utterances and thought processes and moods of the characters as well as the narrator’s comments, which all represent the dynamics in the society, and turn them into knowledge: knowledge of the root causes of corruption and how they manifest, knowledge of the root causes of ethnic conflicts and how they manifest as well, knowledge of the causes of environmental degradation, religious fundamentalism and so on. He or she is expected to understand that to transform this knowledge into judgement and action is to want to make a change.

In order to do justice to all these issues confronting contemporary Africa, the course will be segmented into units and literary works that preoccupied itself with each unit will be studied. Unit one will make the reader/student understand why we study fiction. Unit two will be on literature and the nature of being in Contemporary Africa. Unit three will study Literature and

Ethnic Conflicts; unit four will be on Literature and the Environment; unit five will study Literature and Gender; unit six will focus on Literature and Fundamentalism, unit seven will focus on literature and ideology/politics, unit eight will study African fiction and ideas, while unit eight will look at Literature and issues of Tradition, especially obnoxious traditions.

In this interactive course guide, you will be able to see what the course is all about in the course description. You will also find the course materials you will need, the relevant literary works and some secondary works, tutor-marked assignments as well as the time you will need on each of the eight units and related tutor-marked assignments. Once you can follow them diligently and critically, your success is guaranteed.

## **Course Aims**

This Course is designed to familiarize you with issues in contemporary Africa as reflected in some literary works, and thereby enable you create a discourse situation from the issues:

- It will make you knowledgeable about the African world and experience
- It will avail you with all the information in the various conditions of existence and being in Africa
- It will make you create a discourse situation in the process of responding to those issues raised in those texts
- The discourse situation created by you and the texts will help you turn the pieces of information into knowledge –knowledge of all the conditions
- Armed with tangible knowledge, arising from the interaction between you and the text, a predisposition to knowledge application becomes the nature of the acquired culture of the scholar

## **Course Objectives**

The course objectives are those things we expect you to be able to do at the end of the study of this course. These objectives will guide you as study the course. They will also help at each point in time to assess yourself to know whether you are on course or whether you need to improve on your learning and study habits. By the end of the course, you be able to

- Advocate on gender issues in the society (Gender Advocacy)

- Advocate on ethnic conflict issues in the society and possibly mediate in conflict resolution (Conflict Advocacy and Mediation)
- Advocate on Environment restoration (Environmental Advocacy)
- Advocate on religious fundamentalism (Advocacy on Fundamentalism and Terrorism)
- Advocate for best practices in regard to traditions (Best Practices Advocacy on Tradition)

## **Working through this Course**

There are eight study units which you have to go through in this course. You should study the contents in each unit before you attempt the questions. Furthermore, you should pay attention to the objectives of each study unit to guide you through the unit. You should be ready to think and write as you go through this course material because it has been designed to make you do so. You will be assessed through tutor-marked assignments which you are expected to do and turn in to your tutor at the right time. You are also expected to write an examination or seminar papers or both at the end of the course. The time of the examination or the time to begin writing seminar paper will be communicated to you.

## **What you will learn in the Course**

Through ENG 881, you will be made familiar with the situations of the environment in Africa and how it could be solved; you will be made familiar with the nature and causes of ethnic conflict in some African societies, the nature and causes of religious extremism as well as the forming of a fundamentalist; you will be made familiar with gender issues in contemporary Africa as well as the problematic of unwholesome traditional practices. If you do not know what it means to be in advocacy for all the mentioned conditions, you will then know. Eventually your advocacy is what will eventually bring about a solution to the problems.

## **Course Materials**

The major components of the course are:

- 1) Course guide
- 2) Study units
- 3) Textbooks
- 4) Assignments
- 5) Presentation Schedule

## **Study Units**

Each study unit is week's work and this is preceded by the objectives which you are expected to study before going through the unit. Each study unit contains the reading materials and the self assessment exercises. The tutor-marked assignments; the study units, the tutorial will help you to achieve the stated objectives of this course.

There are twelve units in the course and they are as follows:

### **Module 1**

- Unit 1 Why we study fiction
- Unit 2 Between fiction and facts
- Unit 3 The truth of fiction
- Unit 4 Why African Studies in Fiction

### **Module 2**

- Unit 1 African Fiction and Humanism
- Unit 2 African Fiction and Formalism
- Unit 3 African Fiction and Marxism
- Unit 4 African Fiction and Pragmatism

### **Module 3**

- Unit 1 African Fiction and the Nature of Being and Existence in Africa
- Unit 2 African Fiction and the Environment
- Unit 3 African Fiction and Fundamentalism
- Unit 4 African Fiction and Ethnic Conflict/Resolution

### **Module 4**

- Unit 1 African Fiction and Gender Issues
- Unit 2 African Fiction and Obnoxious Traditions
- Unit 3 African Fiction and Ideology/Politics

Unit 4 African Fiction and Human Psychology

## **Module 5**

Unit 1 African Fiction and the Scholar

Unit 2 African Fiction and Mediation

Unit 3 African Fiction and Advocacy

Unit 4 Review

## **Set of Textbooks/References**

Each Module has a list of recommended textbooks and reference materials that go with each unit. Read through the recommended texts and materials for requisite help while going through the units and before attempting the exercises.

Module 1

Unit 1

Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1981.

Adair, John. *The Art of Creative Thinking*. London: The Talbot Adair Press, 1990.

Aronson, Elliot, et al. *Social Psychology*. New Jersey, 2010.

Deane, Mary & Bor, Erik. *Inside Track: Critical Thinking and Analysis*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2011.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory. An Introduction*. England: Basil Blackwell, 1983

Harris, Robert. *Introduction to Creative Thinking*<[www.virtualsalt.com/crebook1.htm](http://www.virtualsalt.com/crebook1.htm)> April 2, 2012

Guerard, Albert. M. (ed). *Literature and Society*. New York: Kraus Reprint, Co, 1972

“Human Capital and National Development” *Sun News*, October 14, 2007

Magnet, Myron. *What Use is Literature?* City Journal, 2003

Unit 2

Berlin, Isaiah. *The Roots of Romanticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001

Beton, André. *The Manifesto of Surrealism*. Michigan: University of Michigan

Press, 1969

Ile, Onyebuchi James. *Fundamentals of Literary Studies*. Lagos: Apex books Limited, 2013

Ian Watt. *The Rise of the Novel*. California: University of California Press, 1957

Kostelanetz, Richard. *The Avant-Garde Tradition in Literature*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1982

Licciardi, Bryanna. <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-surrealism-definition-artist.html>

Matthew, J.H. *The Imagery of Surrealism*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1977

Mosse, George C. *The Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: An Introduction*. London: John Murray, 1963

Pizer, Donald. *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth Century American Literature (Crosscurrents Modern Critique)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984

Valgema, Mardi. *Accelerated Grimace: Expressionism in the American Drama of the 1920s*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972

Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Decolonizing the Mind*. London: Heinemann, 1986

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Expressionism>, last updated 12-2-2014

### Unit 3

Achebe, Chinua. *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1960

Bach, Richard. *Ilusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*.

Lessing, Doris. *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography*.

Moore, Brooke Noel & Bruder, Kenneth. *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*.

Scott, Michael. *The Warlock*.

<<https://viennachinuaachebe.wordpress.com/2013/10/11/the-truth-of-fiction-good-and-bad-fiction/>) by Dr Barker Derek

### Unit 4

Arnold, Mathew. *Literature and Dogma*. London: The Macmillian Company, 2006  
 edited b Jane Garnett . *Culture and Anarchy*. London: Oxford University Press, 2009

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1976

Johnson, Paul. *The Renaissance*. London: Phoenix Press, 2001

Nietzsche, Fredrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale.  
 London: Penguin, 1975

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003

## Module 2

## Unit 1

Johnson, Paul. *The Renaissance*. London: Phoenix Press, 2001

Ile, Onyebuchi James, "Literature and National Security: The Almajiri Education in Nigeria", Fountain Journal Magazine, Issue 95, September-October, 2013

Ile, Onyebuchi James. *Fundamentals of Literary Studies*. Lagos: Apex Books Limited, 2013

## Unit 2

Rivkin, Julie & Ryan, Michael (eds.). *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1983

Moore, Noel Brooke and Bruder, Kenneth. *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*. London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990

## Unit 3

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Basil Blackwell Publishers, 1983

Irele, Abiola. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. London: Heinemann, 1981

Moore, Noel Brooke & Bruder, Kenneth. *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*. London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990

Robin, Regine. *Socialist Realism: An Aesthetic Impossibility { Le réalisme socialiste: Une esthétique impossible}* Paris: Payot, 1986

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1993

Thomas, Dominic. *Nation-Building, Propaganda, And Literature in Francophone Africa*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002

Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Writers in Politics A re-engagement with issues of Literature and Society*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1997

Wellek, Rene and Warren, Austin *The Theory of literature*. England: Penguin Group, 1993

## Unit 4

Adair, John. *The Art of Creative Thinking*. London: Kogan Press, 2009

Ashcroft, Bill. *Post-colonial Transformation*. London/New York: Routledge, 2001  
Deane, Mary & Borg, Erik. *Inside Track. Critical Thinking & Analysis*. London: Longman Pearson, 2011  
Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003

## Module 3

### Unit 1

Catholic Encyclopaedia <<http://www.newadvent>

Ikoku, Ogonnaya (PunchNewspaper Reporter, Umuahia), Punch Newspapers, Wednesday, October 26<sup>th</sup> (2016) <[odili.net/news/source/2016/oct/26/831.html](http://odili.net/news/source/2016/oct/26/831.html)>(<http://www.mediaissuesng.com/2016/10/29/i-behead-her-because-i-dont-want-to-run-mad-suspect-2/>).

Moore, Brook Noel & Bruder, Kenneth. *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990

Obioma, Chigozie. *The Fishermen*. Abuja: Cassavarepublic Press, 2015

Richards, Leslie N. & Schmiege, Cynthia J. *Problems and Strategies of Single-Parent Families: Implications for Practice and Policy*. From 41.87.71.30, Monday, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 13:40:26 UTC <<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

Rivkin, Julie & Ryan, Michael (eds.). *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998

Sunwall, Mark R. *The Suprarational Grounds of Rationalism: Maimonides and The Criteria of Prophecy*, Meru Foundation Research and Findings, 1996.

### Unit 2

Armah, Ayi Akwei. *The Beautiful One are not yet Born*. London: Heinemann, 1969.

Beck, N. Robert ed. *Perspectives in Philosophy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, INC, 1969.

Dibia Humphery. *A Drop of Mercy*. Lagos: Learn Africa Plc, 1987.

Ike, Chukwuemeka. *Toads Forever*. Ibadan: Drum, 2007.

Moore, Brooke Noel and Bruder, Kenneth. *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990.

Okediran, Wale. *After The Flood*. Lagos: Learn Africa Plc. 2012.

### Unit 3

AbdulQadir, A. Idris. "The Almajiri System of Education in Nigeria Today." *21<sup>st</sup> Convocation Lecture of Bayero University, Kano* <<http://www.gamji.com/article5000/NEWS5956.htm>> (2003)

Agbo-Paul, Augustine. "Nigeria: Almajiri Schools –the Rot and the Blame Game (1)." 11 Apr. 2012. *Vanguard Newspaper* <[allafrica.com/stories/201602081287.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/201602081287.html)>

Asogwa Ikechukwu Sebestine & Asogwa Dominic Obeta. "The Amajiri Schools and National Security: A Critical Analysis and Social Development Implication." *Global Journal of Management and Business Research: B Economics and Commerce*.

Elnathan, John. *Born on Tuesday*. Abuja: Cassava Republic Press, 2015

Gülen, M. Fethullah. *The Status of Our Souls*. New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2009

Ile. Onyebuchi James. *Fundamentals of Literary Studies*. Lagos: Apex Books Limited, 2013

Iro, Ismail. "From Nomadism to Sedentarism: An Analysis of Development Constraints and Public Policy Issues in the Socioeconomic Transformation of the Pastoral Fulani of Nigeria." <<http://www.gamji.com/fulani1.htm>> Oct. 5 (2016)

Moore, Brooke Noel/Bruder, Kenneth. *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas*. Mountain View California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990.

Ünal, Ali. *Living in the Shade of Islam*. Clifton Ave. Clifton: Tughra Books, 2010

Nwakaudu, Simeon. "As President Jonathan rolls out 64 Almajiri Model Schools." *Dailytrust*. <<http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/weekly/index.php/opinion/14509-as-president-jonathan-rolls-out-64-almajiri-model-schools>> Nov.2 (2013)

The Quran, 4:24: <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=4&verse=24>

#### Unit 4

Abu-Nimer, Mohammed. *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*. Lanham, MD:

Lexington Books, 2001.

Apex Organization of the Entire Igbo People of Nigeria (Ohaneze) "Petition to the Human Right Violation Investigating Committee", October (1999).

Bienen, Henry J. *Political Conflict and Economic Change in Nigeria*. London: Routledge, 1985.

- Cottam, Martha C. *Introduction to Political Psychology*. Trenton NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.
- Dudley, B. *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1973.
- Emechata, Buchi. *Destination Biafra*. Oxford: Heinemann educational, Publishers, 1994.
- Furlong, Gary T. *The Conflict Resolution Toolbox*. Ontario: John Wiley and Don Canada, Limited, 2005.
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- Gurr, Ted Robert. *People versus State: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 2002.
- Harnischfeger, Johannes. "Sharia and Control over Territory: Conflicts between 'Settlers' and 'indigenes' in Nigeria." *African Affairs: The Journal of the Royal African Society*, Volume 103 Number 412 July (2004), 443.
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- Lewis, Louis in Abu-Nimer, Mohammed. *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence: Theory And Practice*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001.
- Meyer, Reinhard et al. *Konfliktregelung und Friedenssicherung im internationalen System*. Hagen: FernUniversität in Hagen, 2007.
- Nnoli, Okwudiba. *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978.
- Nwankwo, Arthur A. *Before I die. Obasanjo-Arthur Nwankwo Correspondence on One-party State*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1989.
- Nwankwo, Arthur A. and Ifejika, Samuel U. *The Making of a Nation: Biafra*. London: C. Hurst and Co., 1969
- Biafra: The Making of a Nation*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970.
- Ojiji, Ochinaya Odaba. *Value Orientation And Preference For methods Of Conflict Resolution In Nigeria*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Research Publications, 1998.
- Olutayo, Olanrewaju Akinpeju. "The Igbo Entrepreneur in the Political Economy Of Nigeria." *African Study Monograph* 20(3): 147-174, September, 1999.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1993.
- *Orientalism*. London: Pengiun Books, 2003.
- *The World, The Text and The Critic*. U.S.A: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Sklar, L. Richard. *Nigerian Political Parties*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Zartmann, William I. [ed.]. *Governance as Conflict Management: Politics and Violence in West Africa*. New York: Brookings Institution Press, 1997.

## Module 4

## Unit 1

Aihevba. *Literary Criticism: A Practical Approach*

Burdick, Judith. *Women in Transition: Contemporary Feminist Debates*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007

Emecheta, Buchi. *Joys of Motherhood*. London: Heinemann, 1976

Ogundipe-Leslie, Molaria in Olaniyan, Tejumola & Quayson, Ato (eds.) *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007

Wikipedia

## Unit 2

Akinbi, Joseph Olukayode. "Widowhood Practices in Some Nigerian Societies: A Retrospective Examination." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 5 , No. 4; April 2015 67, , Web. 14 Feb. 2017

Okeke, TC, USB Anyaehie, and CCK Ezenyeaku. "An Overview of Female Genital Mutilation in Nigeria." *Annals of Medical and Health Sciences Research* 2.1 (2012): 70–73. *PMC*. Web. 14 Feb. 2017.

Akor, Ojoma. "The need for a law against harmful traditional practices." *Daily Trust*, Jul 26 2013 Web.10 Feb. 2017, dailytrust.com

Yusuf, Bilkisu. "Sexuality and the marriage institution in Islam: An appraisal." *African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre*, June 9 2005, arsrc.org Web. 15 Feb. 2017

## Unit 3

Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. London: Heinemann, 1987

Okri, Ben. *Dangerous Love*. London: Phoenix house, 1996

Wikipedia

## Unit 4

Aronson, Elliot, et al. *Social Psychology*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2010

Eagleton, Terry. *The Idea of Culture*. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2000

Ile, Onyebuchi James. *Fundamentals of Literary Studies*. Lagos: Apex Books Limited, 2013

Kant, Immanuel, translated by Beck, White. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1978

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Middlesex: Penguin Book Limited, 1973

----- . *On The Genealogy of Morality*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited, 2013

Okri, Ben. *Dangerous Love*. London: Phoenix House, 1996

WA Thiong’O, Ngugi. *Weep not Child*. London: Heinemann Educational Publishes Limited, 1964

William, Raymond. *Keyword: A Vocabulary Culture and Society*. London: Croom Helm, 1976

## Module 5

### Unit 1

Amuta, Chidi. *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*. London: Zed Books Limited, 1989

Ashcroft, Bill. *Post-colonial Transformation*. London/New York: Routledge, 2001.

Fowler, D Jeaneane. *Humanism: Beliefs and Practices*. Uk: Sussex Academic Press. 1999.

Moss, Joyce and Valestuk, Lorraine [eds.] *World Literature and Its Times Volume 2*. New York: Gale Group, 2000.

### Unit 2

Achebe, Chinua. *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1966.

-----*No Longer at Ease*, 1960.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back*. New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 1989.

----- *Post-colonial Transformation*. London/New York: Routledge, 2001.

Burton, John and Duke, F. [eds.]. *Conflict: Readings in Management and Resolution*. Hammsphire. Macmillan, 1996.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory. An Introduction*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

----- *Criticism and Ideology*. London: NLB, 1976.

Ekwensi Cyprian. *Iska*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1981.

Emechata, Buchi. *Destination Biafra*. Oxford: Heinemann educational, Publishers, 1994.

Fowler, D Jeaneane. *Humanism: Beliefs and Practices*. Uk: Sussex Academic Press. 1999.

Furlong, Gary T. *The Conflict Resolution Toolbox*. Ontario: John Wiley and Don Canada, Limited, 2005.

Heath, Robert Lawrence and Bryant, Jennings. *Human Communication Theory And Research. Concepts, Contexts and Challenges*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000.

Irele, Abiola. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1981.

Lomperis, J. Timothy, et al. *Reading the Wind. The Literature of Vietnam War: An Interpretative Critique*. Durham:

- Duke University Press, 1987.
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- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1993.
- *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- *The World, The Text and The Critic*. U.S.A: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Soyinka, Wole. *The Man Died*. London: Arrow Books Limited, 1987.
- *Myth, Literature and the African World*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- *Season of Anomy*. London: Arrow Books Limited 62-65 Chandos Place, London WC2N 4NW, 1988.
- Thomas, Dominic. *Nation-Building, Propaganda and Literature in Francophone Africa*. USA: Indiana University Press, 2002.
- Thomson, A. *An Introduction to African Politics*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Writers in Politics: A re-engagement with issues of literature and society*. Nairobi: Heinemann, 1997.
- Wright, Sue. [ed.]. *Language and Conflict: A Neglected Relationship*. Birmingham: Multilingual Matter, 1998.

### Unit 3

The Actionaid Nigeria

The Advocacy Institute

John, Elnathan. *Born on a Tuesday*. Lagos: Cassava-republic, 2015

### Unit 4

Review

## Assignment File

In this file you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for grading. The mark you obtain from the assignment will be added to the final mark you obtain from this course. Additional information on assignment will be found in the assignment file itself as well as in the section on assessment in this course.

## Presentation Schedule

The “presentation schedule” which has been included in your course materials gives you the important dates you are expected to complete your Tutor-Marked Assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit your assignments whenever it is expected of you.

## Course Marking Scheme

The table below gives a breakdown of the Course Mark

Assessment	Marks
Assignment 1-15	Three assignments, best three marks of the assignments counts for 30% of course marks
Final examination	The final examination counts for 70% of overall marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

## Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of works you should take to complete the course.

Units	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (end of unit)
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	Course Guide	1	Assignment 1
<b>Module 1</b>			
1	Why we study fiction	2	Assignment 2
2	Between fiction and facts	3	Assignment 3
3	The truth of fiction	4	Assignment 4
4	Why Studies in African fiction	5	Assignment 5
<b>Module 2</b>			
1	African Fiction and Formalism	6	Assignment 6
2	African Fiction and Marxism	7	Assignment 7
3	African Fiction and Pragmatism	8	Assignment 8
4	African Fiction and Humanism	9	Assignment 9
<b>Module 3</b>			
1	African Fiction and the Nature of Being and Existence in Africa	10	Assignment 10
2	African Fiction and the Environment	11	Assignment 11
3	African Fiction and Fundamentalism	12	Assignment 12
4	African Fiction and Ethnic Conflict	13	Assignment 13
			Assignment 14
<b>Module 4</b>			
1	African Fiction and Gender Issues	14	Assignment 15
2	African Fiction and Obnoxious Traditions	15	Assignment 16
3	African fiction and	16	Assignment 17

	Ideology/Politics		
4	African Fiction and Human Psychology	17	Assignment 18
<b>Module 5</b>			
1	African Fiction and the Scholar	18	Assignment 19
2	African Fiction and Mediation	19	Assignment 20
3	African Fiction and Advocacy	20	Assignment 21

Table2: Course Overview

## How to get the best from the Course

The study units in this course have been written in such a way that you will understand them without the lecturer being physically there with you: This is why your programme is a Distance Learning one. Each study unit is for one week. The study unit will introduce you to the topic meant for the week; it will give you the stated/expected objectives for the unit and what you are expected to be able to do at the end of the unit.

You only need to be focused and consistent in your effort to becoming an advocate for all the critical areas studies in fiction covered. If you follow the instructions and do the exercises that follow, you will find yourself a better advocate for the critical areas studies in fiction covered.

### Assessment

You will be assessed in two ways in this course, (1) through the tutor-marked assignment and (2) through written examination. You are expected to do the assignments and submit them to your tutorial facilitator for formal assessment in accordance with the stated deadlines in the presentation schedule and the ‘assignment’ file. Your tutor-marked assignments will account for 30% of the total course mark.

### Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMA’s)

ENG 881 is a course that is designed to expose you to works of fiction and the issues in society they engaged –issues of the environment, the nature of being, tradition, fundamentalism, ethnic conflicts and gender. You are expected to be an advocate for all these issues in society

represented in the listed texts. You are advised to follow the instructions given to you and see the texts as places of experiencing. You will be assessed on the role of literature and the environment, ethnic conflict, etc. You will be tasked to synthesize the information you receive from the texts and turn them to knowledge and you will be encouraged to find ways of making the knowledge applicable, for example, advocacy. Your assignments will be result oriented. What this means is that the discourse situations the texts will present will be such that must dispose you towards solutions or enlightenment. It is expected that each time you are given an assignment; the completed ones must reach your tutorial facilitator before the stated deadline and must be sent with your tutor-marked assignment.

Continuous assessment while include the assignments will be 30% of your total course mark. Assignments for the units in this course are contained in the assignment file. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information materials contained in your set of textbooks, reading and study units. You are expected to use other references to broaden your knowledge of the subject in the context of the various critical areas.

### **Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination for ENG 881 will be a two and half hours paper in which you are expected to answer 4 questions from 6. Each question accounts for 17.5 marks, giving you a total of seventy (70) marks for the examination. The thirty marks for the tutor-marked assignments and seventy marks for the examination will give you a total of one hundred marks (i.e.  $30 + 70 = 100$ ). The patterns of the questions for your examination will not be very different from those you are familiar with in your tutor-marked exercises. You should read the recommended texts and follow the suggested patterns of creating discourse situations from them and eventually making the knowledge gained functional in advocacy. These are processes you will be expected to be very familiar with before the final examination.

### **Tutors and Tutorials**

There are 15 tutorial hours for this course. The dates, time, location, name and phone number of your tutorial facilitator and your tutorial group will be communicated to you. Feel free to relate with your tutorial facilitator who will mark, correct your assignments and monitor your attendance/performance in tutorial-marked assignments. You should always contact your tutorial facilitator by phone or e-mail if you have any problem with the contents of any of the study units.

### **Summary**

ENG 881 is specifically designed to make you familiar with all the critical issues on society and in life articulated in works of fiction. The essence is make such knowledge available to you. However, it is not enough to just have knowledge: knowledge must be functional for it to make

any meaning. Therefore, availing yourself of the knowledge of these fundamental issues in society and life means that your knowledge of them created from discourse situations between you and the texts in an interactive modus will demand of you involvement in finding solutions to the issues problematized in the texts. The course introduces you systematically to these issues from the outset by making you aware of why we study fiction; by making you understand the nuances between fiction and facts as well as the truth of fiction. It introduces you to the connection between fiction, critical thinking and problem Solving. It makes you aware of the humanizing force of fiction as well as the need by some to approach fiction formally or through the Marxist approach. It also makes one aware of the need for knowledge in the studies in fiction to be pragmatic. It guides you to the understanding of the nature of being and existence in Africa as well as the condition of the environment, the causes of religious fundamentalism, gender situations, the nature of ethnic conflicts in African societies, the obnoxious traditional practices in Africa or Nigeria as well as the ideological and political issues in the large society. The idea is to make the scholar involved in development, having been sensitized by the knowledge of issues in these areas. The course also guides the student toward application of knowledge gained in the praxis segment.

Finally, at the end of the course, you will be able to answer questions as:

- 1) Can the studies in fiction humanize us?
- 2) Can it make us better human beings?
- 3) Can we make that state of being better human beings concrete and practical
- 4) Can the scholar now responsibly advocate for the environment, tradition, fundamentalism, gender issues?
- 5) Can the scholar functions as a mediator in conflict resolution?

## **MODLE 1, Unit 1**

### **Why We Study Fiction**

#### **Contents**

##### **1.0. Introduction**

There are many reasons we study fiction, but we will concentrate on the two most important reasons proffered by Achebe through the narrator in his novel *Anthills of the Savannah* and Robert Harris. As Achebe puts it:

So why do I say that the story is chief among his fellows?  
The same reason, I think, that our people sometimes will  
Give the name Nkolika to their daughters –recalling is greatest  
Why? Because it is only the story that outlives the sound of war  
Drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the  
Others that save our progeny from blundering like blind beggars  
Into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort;  
Without it we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort?  
No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us  
And directs us. It is the thing that makes different from cattle;  
It is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their  
Neighbors ... so the arrogant fool who sits astride the story as  
Though it were a bowl of foo-foo set before him by his wife  
Understands little about the world. The story will roll him into  
A ball, dip him in the soup and swallow him first (114).

So you see, Achebe has succeeded in making us know why studies in fiction is very important. Now, let us see what Harris has to say. According to him, “the creative associations we find in literature are precisely those useful for developing a creative mind.” According to him the brain works by creative associations. The overlapping of thoughts makes way for such creative association in the brain, which in turn lead to problem solving. Therefore, with the studies in fiction, our brains work in such creative associations and therefore make us able to solve problems.

## 2.0. Objectives

The objective of this unit is to make us see why it is not a waste of time studying fiction. It is intended to make us aware that we have to be directed by our stories to all facets of life in our society. The story directs us to know about the state of our

nation, the environment, etc. and because in studying them, our brain bring the issues in creative associations and we create discourse situations from them and are then better prepared to solve the problems arising from them.

### 3.0. Main Content

#### 3.1 Why we study fiction

The former Nigerian Head of State, Ibrahim Babangida, had once noted that the text or literature was the best prism through which peoples could view not only themselves but also their social environment and comparative location in their material world, the empirical observation of which science claims. He maintained that this opportunity provided by literature makes it possible for us to be able to protect our humanity, and even raise it to a higher level of honour and integrity<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, George Gordon, also known as Lord Byron, who was the first English Professor of English Literature, had said in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when England seemed to be out of compass in its navigation as a result of the godlessness of the age occasioned by tremendous progress in science and technology which engendered industrialization, that England was sick, the churches having failed in their duties and social remedies being slow, English Literature had triple function: to entertain, instruct and save their souls and heal the state. How then could this happen. You see, when you study the novel – I prefer to use study here because there is a difference between you, who reads the novel professionally and those who just read it for entertainment. So when you study the novel, you are exposed to a lot of things going on in the mind of the characters that are representations of real human beings. Now, texts reflect the nature of society and even the nature of individuals in the society. In fact texts reflect values in society. Therefore, if one studies fiction one possibly understands society and the individuals that make them up. One understands the differences and similarities among peoples. One understands the root causes of many things that bedevil society. Texts are keys to the different worldviews of peoples, their emotions, fears and anxieties as well as the evolutionary events that have brought them to the present point in their historical development. It gives insight into their sorrow, their

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<sup>1</sup> “Human Capital and National Development” *Sun News*, October 14, 2007

pains, joy and so on and so forth. You also become aware of the thematic preoccupations of the writers and how the characters in the works in question live them out. It could be about the state of the environment or traditional practices or about religious fundamentalism or even about some political ideologies. We gain insight from these and become sensitized enough to engage the issues with a view to making a change.

Robert Harris guides us into how it works. According to him, new ideas enter our working memory when we study fiction. When they do, our brains take a look in its long term memory storehouse to find things similar it can compare the new idea to. He called this **schema retrieval**. In reading texts, we are entertained by the writers' style, his use of figures of speech to evoke certain kind of feelings in us. With these figures of speech, we compare unlike things, feelings, etc and see images. According to Harris, schemas also work that way. By studying fiction we also analyze textual, inter-textual and extra-textual materials; and by so doing according to Harris, we develop our ability to think analytically. "This ability," according to him, "is part of critical thinking, which is one of the most important products of education." Furthermore, in studying fiction, we are able to interpret and evaluate information in them from a variety of sources, making complex intellectual connections across disciplines, cultures, and institutions. And since the information in texts is a carrier of knowledge, we are able to appropriate the information in them and transform them into knowledge –knowledge of the human condition, the corruption, injustice, obnoxious traditional practices, environmental degradation, religious fundamentalism and ethnic conflicts –and then transform that knowledge into action. Through this whole process, you are merely trying to get the concrete basis of ideas. To get the concrete basis of ideas, you must do controlled thinking. Controlled thinking is a form of thinking that is conscious, intentional, voluntary, and done with effort [105]. Therefore, the concrete basis of ideas lies in a thinking that is conscious and intentional and with effort so that the result in terms of ideas is functional.

In other words, studies in fiction re-engineer the human psyche. The re-engineering of the human psyche is indeed a complex phenomenon. Psychic engineering is a form of social psychology, the phenomenon of which is social influence –that is, 'the effect that the words, actions, or mere presence of other people have on our

thoughts, feelings, attitudes or behavior, according to Aronso [35].’ The discourse situation created between the reader and the text makes room for some cognitive experience; for, as human beings, reading fiction is as if we are constantly observing objects and events, interpreting them, comparing them with past experiences, placing them into categories and encoding them into memory, a cognitive process involved in perception, organization, interpretation and comparing of information derived from observing the physical world or the world of the text and the happenings therein as well as the inner world which we carry in us. And because cognition is part and parcel of memory which involves the storage and retrieval of the pieces of information so far gathered, it allows for reason, which is the ability to make references and draw conclusion using the knowledge gained from perception, having stored them for eventual retrieval. Through reflection, which is symbiotic to memory, cognition and reason, the quality of the stored information is evaluated and prescribed to solving problems.

In fact, what you need to understand is that everything in life revolves around the story. For example, if two people are fighting and you come to intervene, you will possibly ask them to say why they were fighting. They will definitely tell you a story. When you see a heap of rubbish dumped on the road so much so that it causes traffic jam, everybody will be talking about it. When stories are told, it is intended that people’s consciousness regarding a particular situation is heightened. Heightening people’s consciousness about any issue is to bring it to a point of resolution as a problem. This alone already implies a responsibility on your shoulders as somebody who hears or reads a story – a responsibility of being a solution provider. Therefore, studying fiction is a very serious business. Therefore when George Gordon said that it was English literature that would instruct English men, save the English soul and heal the state, he meant that English literature would make English men and women know what the problems are and also equip them to be able to solve the problems.

#### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

Now, let us see whether or not you have followed the unit 1 course.

Give two reasons why you think the story is chief among its fellows

### **3.1.1 Why the story is chief among its Fellows**

Fiction or the story is chief among its fellows because recalling is greatest; it is only the story that outlives the sound of war drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others that save our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence.

### **3.1.2 Why Studying fiction can make us creative, critical, analytic and solution oriented**

I think studying fiction can make us creative, critical and analytical thinkers as well as problem solvers because the creative associations we find in literature are precisely those useful for developing a creative mind. This is so, according to Robert Harris because the brain works by creative associations. The overlapping of thoughts makes way for such creative association in the brain, which in turn lead to problem solving. Therefore, with the studies in fiction, our brains work in such creative associations and therefore make us able to solve problems.

### **3.1.3 The qualities studying fiction can cultivate in us**

Fiction cultivates the humanist culture in us and helps us develop fellow-feelings in understanding the pains and suffering of others, their joys and happiness. It sharpens our sense of justice because through the travails of characters in works of fiction we study, we are able to understand the need for social justice, the need for equity. In fact, fiction helps us, to become fully evolved human beings that are active in God's vineyard.

### **3.1.4 How Fiction can make us better persons**

Just as fiction can make us better human beings, it could also make us bad persons. However, the humanism derivable from studies in fiction refrain us from being bad persons because

those who care about the needs, interests and well-being of man can only do everything possible to elevate humankind.

#### Self Assessment Exercise 2

- a) Which areas of life could fiction possibly cover?
- b) How can we deploy the qualities fiction has implanted in us in these areas?

#### 4.0 Conclusion

The importance of the study of fiction cannot be overemphasized. We learn about other cultures through fiction. We gain insight into human psychology through fiction. Fiction cultivates the humanist culture in us and helps us develop fellow-feelings in understanding the pains and suffering of others, their joys and happiness. It sharpens our sense of justice because through the travails of characters in works of fiction we study, we are able to understand the need for social justice, the need for equity. In fact, fiction helps us, to become fully evolved human beings that are active in God's vineyard. It could also make us bad persons. However, the humanism derivable from studies in fiction refrain us from being bad persons because those who care about the needs, interests and well-being of man can only do everything possible to elevate humankind.

#### 5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have tried to understand the reason we study fiction through Achebe's point of view about the story as chief among his fellows. We also learnt Robert Harris' view on how reading fiction develops our creative thinking ability as well as our capacity to analyze things and solve problems. We became aware from George Gordon that fiction cannot only entertain us but it can also instruct us, save our souls and heal the nation. In the concluding part, we learnt how fiction can help us empathize, develop fellow-feelings, cultivate humanistic culture in us and so on and so forth.

#### 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) Why do you think fiction or the story is chief among its fellow?

- b) Why do you think studying fiction can make us creative, critical and analytic thinkers as well as problem solvers?
- c) What qualities can studying fiction develop in us?
- d) Why do you think studying fiction can turn us from being evil?

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## Unit 2

### Between Fiction and Facts

#### 2.0 Introduction

To say that there is a fact is to assume that there is a knowable truth. Whether we can know the truth or not has been a subject of discourse among philosophers for centuries. For Plato, “what is truly real is not the objects we encounter in sensory experience but rather forms, and these can only be grasped intellectually” (see Moore & Bruder, 38). Descartes articulated the truth of his existence in the following statement: I think; therefore, I am. Locke for his part argued that knowledge is an object of experience. Postmodernist theory, for its part, does not favor any belief in a single truth, but in perspectives.

The truth of being is exactly what fiction mirrors. In order to do that appropriately fiction can be expressionistic or impressionistic; it could be realistic or surrealistic. Through all these ways, it completely makes experience as real as reality. When sometimes people say “this is not fiction: it is real”, they sound as if fiction is not that which shows them the reality they would not want to confront. But because it does it subtly through de-familiarization, we are able to confront our reality more comfortably. But then what is reality? If the so called real world we see is not actually the real world, according to Plato, then how can we be truly sure that fiction is truly fiction and not the actual reality?

### 3.0 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to make us see that fiction is called fiction not because it is useless and has no bearing to reality but because it is a mirror of reality. Even fairytales serve useful purposes because we learn things needed for survival in the so-called real world.

### 4.0 Main Content

#### 4.1 Understanding the Thin Line between Fiction and Fact

We cannot understand this unit without knowing the phenomena between fiction and fact. Fiction writers have, over the centuries, tried to reify their experiences of the real world in their works –that is, to make it as real as possible. This started as a movement in literature during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first theorist of realism was Jules-Francais Champfleury. He has theorized that realism’s aim was to reproduce “objective reality” and focus on showing every day quotidian activities and life, mainly among the middle or lower class society without being

idealized or dramatized romantically (encyclopedia2). In other word, the artist represents the reality he or she knows faithfully. This representation follows the argument, according to Ian Watts in his *The Rise of the Novel* that “truth can be discovered by the individual through the senses (1957, 12). It is that truth that is knowable to the artist that he represents in his works objectively through the characters who represent people in society. In fact, realism favored fact, logic and objectivity over the imaginative, symbolic and the supernatural..

Before Realism, Romanticism held sway in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The age of Enlightenment and science had engendered industrialization. A culture of alienation reigned so much so that people functioned like the machine: no emotional and intuitive life. Everything had become scientific. Therefore Romanticism sought to bring back our humanity, which has been taken away from us. Therefore, intuition was valued over logic or reason. The subjective life was valued over the objective life, etc. (ile, 36-38). The implication was that fiction also depicted things valued by romanticism. Emotions, feelings, intuition, nature, etc are all part of man’s reality.

There is also a branch of realism that is known as Naturalism. It is a literary movement like all other movements. Here, the artist approaches his or her work from a detached position, where he or she observes as a scientist would and then analyzes the real forces or phenomena in nature which affect humankind, forces or phenomena as misery, corruption, disease, poverty, racism, violence and even prostitution.

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new art movement started in Germany. This new art movement was called expressionism and it was a revolt against realism. It sought to achieve a psychological or spiritual reality instead of recording events that belong to external reality in logical sequence as in realism. The artist, therefore, portrays the subjective emotions and responses, which objects and events arouse within him or her. He or she achieves this by distortions, exaggerations, primitivism, fantasy and vivid, jarring, violent or dynamic application of formal elements (<https://www.britannica.com/art/Expressionism>).

Surrealism as a literary movement started in France in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and lasted till about 1940s. It was articulated by Andre Benton in his book entitled *The*

*Manifesto of Surrealism.* According to Bryanna Licciardi, it is an artistic attempt to bridge reality and the imagination by overcoming the contradictions of the conscious and unconscious and creating unreal or strange juxtaposed narratives. The aim of surrealism is to shock man and push him or her out of their comfort zones. The technique helps to excite the reader's imagination and expand his or her idea of reality, thereby opening the reader's mind to many other possibilities of reality. It uses imagery and metaphors to force the reader to think deeper and reveal the subconscious realities (<http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-surrealism-definition-artists.html>).

As you have seen fiction has explored or mirrored various types of reality in various ways through Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism and Expressionism –even through surrealism. And so we have come to be aware of realities in a reality through fiction.

#### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

Through which ways have fiction represented realities?

##### 4.1.1 The realities of Realism

It is the belief that the real world is knowable that makes the artist try to objectify his or her knowable world in his work. Thus he or she allows the characters in his or her work to live like real men and women in knowable societies. He or she makes them have the usual experiences of real men and women in the real world so much so that we all can see ourselves or our situations in the lives of those characters.

##### 4.1.2 The real world of Naturalism

Here the artist approaches the world of his or her work scientifically. He or she tries to understand the essence of phenomena by observing them and analyzing them.

##### 4.1.3 The realities of Romanticism

The artist makes us aware of other realities marginalized by objectivity and science –the realities of the subconscious; the truth of intuition and many more.

#### 4.1.4 The real world of surrealism

When we are fixated to a particular truth or reality, we tend to think that no other thing counts. For example, people in theocratic regimes will tend to see one dimensional reality engineered by their religion. However, surrealism will shock them out of their comfort zones and allow insight into some other possibilities

#### 4.1.5 The realities of Expressionism

Expressionism reveals through exaggerations, fantasies and primitivism the inner realities that are often bracketed out by realism or objective and empirical realities

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand the relationship between fiction and fact

Realities are multi-dimensional. Explain

### 5.0 Conclusion

Fiction –whether fairytale, folktale or prose fiction have their use in the real world. Ngugi Wa Thi’ongo had made us familiar with the power of story in his essay, *Decolonizing the Mind*. As he puts it:

The stories, with mostly animals as the main characters, were all told in Gikuyu. Hare, being small, weak but full of innovative wit and cunning, was our hero. We identified with him as he struggled against the brutes of prey like lion, leopard, hyena. His victories were our victories and we learnt that the apparently weak can outwit the strong. We followed the animals in their struggle against hostile nature— drought, rain, sun, wind— a confrontation often forcing them to search for

forms of co-operation. But we were also interested in their struggles amongst themselves, and particularly between the beasts and the victims of prey. These twin struggles, against nature and other animals, reflected real-life struggles in the human world... (385).

Here from Ngugi's narrative we are able to know that even folktales and fairytales have very serious implications for the human world, how much more prose fiction with human characters.

## 6.0 Summary

It has been argued here that fiction and fact cannot be defined categorically without running into some difficulties because what we consider as fact or fiction may be relative. This is so because when we consider what things can be real, we will see that our feelings are real even when they are not tangible. There are also different kinds of reality, which may not necessarily be knowable in terms of the real world experience, and yet they are real. All in all, we have come to the understanding that fiction mirrors the real world and helps us gain more insight into what we may term unconscious realities.

## 7.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) Explain the various ways fiction has tried to explore many other realities
- b) Can we in all certainty define fact and fiction?
- c) What is objective reality?
- d) What is subjective reality?

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## Unit 3

### The Truth of Fiction

#### 3.0 Introduction

Writers in most countries of the world have suffered incarceration and sometimes even death because of what they have written. An Islamic Fatwa was placed on the head of Salman Rushdie for his novel entitled *Satanic Verses*. Chinua Achebe barely escaped death in the hands of the Nigerian soldiers after the Nigerian first military coup predicted by Achebe in his *A Man of the People*. Now the question is this: if these works of fiction were not true enough to the reality of their time, why would anybody bother with their message? The truth of fiction, therefore, lies in fictions ability to imitate reality. As Richard Bach opines in his *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah*, “If you will practice being fictional for a while, you will understand that fictional characters are sometimes more real than people with bodies and heartbeats” (n.pag).

#### 4.0 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to make us see that fiction can be so real that we may be deceived to believe that indeed its import is true. This, however, does not suggest that its import is false. It simply means that the writers can feel the pulse of their societies and be able to predict the society and events. It means that the human imagination is a phenomenon of activities –real and imagined –concrete phenomena so much so that whatever emerges from it can be felt positively or negatively. It is a place of reality and fiction, which exist symbiotically. As Michael Scott had said in his *The Warlock*, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand” (n.pag).

#### 5.0 Main Content

In Chinua Achebe's essay "The Truth of Fiction" (1978), he had written that the great virtue of literary fiction was that it was able, by engaging our imaginations, to lead us to discovery and recognitions by an unexpected and instructive route; that it helped us locate again the line between the heroic and the cowardly when it seemed most shadowy and elusive, and that it did this by forcing us to encounter the heroic and cowardly in our own psyche. Furthermore, Achebe had wondered how often we heard people say: "Oh I don't have the time to read novels," which implied that fiction was frivolous? He stated that people who said this sort of thing would generally add – lest you considered them illiterate – that they read histories or biographies, which they presumed to be more appropriate to serious-minded adults. Such people, he insisted, were to be pitied; for they were like a six-cylinder car which thought it could do well with only three sparking-plugs. Well, even if it could manage somehow its movement would sound like an asthmatic motorcycle!

Therefore, Achebe opined that the life of the imagination was a vital element of our total nature. If we starved it or polluted it, the quality of our life would fall or get bad. The implication therefore, according to Achebe, is that "we must not celebrate the beauties of imagination and the beneficent fictions that are spun in its golden looms without mentioning the terrible danger to which it can be exposed."

He went further to give us particular examples: the belief in superior and inferior races; the belief that some people who lived across our frontiers or spoke a different language from ourselves were the cause of all the trouble in the world, or that our own particular group or class or caste had a right to certain things which were denied to others; the belief that men were superior to women, and so on – all these in his opinion were fictions generated by the imagination. However, what made them different from the beneficent fictions was that bad fiction as racism and its malignant cousins never realized that they were fiction, while beneficent fiction never forgot that it was fiction (Dr Derek Barker <<https://viennachinuaachebe.wordpress.com/2013/10/11/the-truth-of-fiction-good-and-bad-fiction/>>).

Furthermore, from the classical Greece, we see how thinkers of the time, through the power of imagination, tried to understand the nature of our being, the nature of our existence as well as the nature of knowledge.

Today we know that the complex world we experience is made up of a few basic substances like HYDROGEN, OXYGEN, CARBON and other elements). But the truth is that there was a time when people did not know or even think this.

THALES (640-546 BC), the ancient Greek thinker thought that the basic substance was from which all things were made was WATER (Moore and Bruder 25-27).

ANAXIMENES (585-528 BC) supposed the basic substance to be AIR because AIR becomes different things through the process of condensation and rarefaction (28).

ANAXIMANDER (611-547 BC) a pupil of THALES argued that the basic substance out of which everything comes must even be more elementary than water and air. It must be FISH (Moore and Bruder, 28)

PYTHAGORAS (582-507 BC) and his followers thought that all things were NUMBERS. Numbers are not stuff but they believed that relationships between musical notes could be expressed numerically and so all relationships could equally be expressed numerically (28-29).

HERACLITUS (535-475 BC) AND PARMENIDES believed that the basic substance out which all things were made was FIRE. However, Heraclitus believed that BEING was ceaselessly changing; while Parmenides believed that BEING was unchanging (30-31).

EMPODOCLES (495-435 BC) thought that true reality was permanent and unchangeable; however objects of experience do change, but they contain basic particles of MATTER that do not change. He postulated that these basic particles were of four kinds -Earth, Air, Fire and Water (31-32).

ANAXAGORAS (500-428 BC) believed that each substance contained particles of every other kind. He also believed that the source of all motion was the NOUS or REASON OR MIND (33).

DEMOCRITUS (460-370 BC) was one of the Philosophers called the ATOMISTS because they believed that ALL THINGS were COMPOSED OF PHYSICAL ATOMS (34).

PLATO (427-347 BC) In his Theory of FORMS, stated that what was truly REAL was not the objects we encountered in sensory experience but rather FORMS, which could only be grasped intellectually (36-43).

ARISTOTLE (384-322 BC) for his part thought that EACH THING was MATTER AND FORM: a statue, for example, is a chunk of marble with a form;

therefore, for there to be a THING, it must be possessed of MATTER and FORM (42-48).

Now, did all these thoughts by these great thinkers not seem fictional? These positions were all fiction at a time. However, we know today that they are mostly true. This is how true fiction can be; as Doris Lessing puts it in her *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography*, “there is no doubt fiction makes a better job of the truth” (n.pag).

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

What do you understand by the truth of fiction?

#### 5.1.1 The Truth of Fiction in Chinua Achebe’s Context

Achebe had written that the great virtue of literary fiction was that it was able, by engaging our imaginations, to lead us to discovery and recognitions by an unexpected and instructive route.

#### 5.1.2 The Truth of Fiction in Doris Lessing’s Context

She believes that fiction makes a better job of truth –that is, it gives us a clearer insight into the real nature of truth

#### 5.1.3 The Truth of Fiction in the Context of Imagination

The human imagination is a place beyond reality and fiction, where reality and fiction exist symbiotically. As Michael Scott had said in his *The Warlock*, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand” (n.pag).

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand the truth of fiction

After the January 15, 1966 Military coup in Nigeria, soldiers were looking for Chinua Achebe to arrest him because the coup coincided with the publication of his novel, *A Man of People*, which predicted a coup. Explain this phenomenon in the context of The Truth of Fiction.

## 6 Conclusion

The truth of fiction lies in the fact that, fiction truly mirror society so much so that what it tells us are the truths of life as they are in society. It uncovers the veil of our fictive appearances and exposes the truths that lie deep in our being. It shows us those things we would rather not see and guides us even into deeper truths.

## 7 Summary

It has been argued here that fiction confronts us with our fears, which most often are realities; that our imagination is a place where realities and fictions live symbiotically so much so that it is impossible to dismiss fiction as frivolous. It was shown that the whole history of man has been that of the truth of fiction; for those theorizing about the nature of being and knowledge started out with the convictions of the power of their imaginations. Such imaginative thoughts might have been considered fiction in their time by many, but have been known today as truths. That is exactly how true fiction can be.

## 8 Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) What is the difference between malignant and beneficent fictions
- b) Why did soldiers go after Achebe upon publication of his novel *A Man of the People*?
- c) How would you describe people who consider fiction frivolous and why?
- d) What are some of the negative fictions the imagination had churned out?

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Unit 4

Why Studies in African Fiction?

## 4.0 Introduction

Studies in African Fiction involve intensive study of African prose fiction in its various forms. It focuses mainly on the historical, sociological and contextual aspects of this genre. It will take the student through the specific issues in contemporary Africa as reflected in its literature –issues relating to the nature of knowledge and existence in Africa, issues relating to the environment, conflict, gender, fundamentalism, tradition, etc. so much so that a heightened knowledge of the various issues bedeviling Africa will bring the scholar to the point of wanting to participate in bringing solutions to them. The texts are a canvass of human activities rife with so many dynamics. The scholar is an observer of those activities and dynamics. He or she will be required to take note of the behavioral patterns and thought processes of the characters on the canvass, their utterances, narrator's comments, and so on, which emanate from real human experiences and which give him or her insight into human nature, nature of ethnic conflicts, the state of the environment, nature and causes of religious fundamentalism, gender issues in the society, issues regarding obnoxious traditions as well as the general human condition in the referred or fictional nation. The scholar of the texts, whose interest in the state of the nation with regard to the various issues already listed has been awakened, is expected to transform the information from the utterances and thought processes and moods of the characters as well as the narrator's comments, which all represent the dynamics in the society, and turn them into knowledge: knowledge of the root causes of corruption and how they manifest, knowledge of the root causes of ethnic conflicts and how they manifest as well, knowledge of the causes of environmental degradation, religious fundamentalism and so on. He or she is expected to understand that to transform this knowledge into judgment and action is to want to make a change.

### 4.1 Objectives

This Course is designed to familiarize you with issues in contemporary Africa as reflected in some literary works, and thereby enable you create a discourse situation from the issues. The objectives are to

- make you knowledgeable about the African world and experience

- avail you with all the information in the various conditions of existence and being in Africa
- make you create a discourse situation in the process of responding to those issues raised in those texts
- help you turn the pieces of information into knowledge –knowledge of all the conditions
- make you acquire the culture of applying the knowledge you have gained from studying the texts.
- enable you advocate on gender issues in the society (Gender Advocacy)
- Advocate on ethnic conflict issues in the society and possibly mediate in conflict resolution (Conflict Advocacy and Mediation)
- Advocate on Environment restoration (Environmental Advocacy)
- Advocate on religious fundamentalism (Advocacy on Fundamentalism and Terrorism)
- Advocate for best practices in regard to traditions (Best Practices Advocacy on Tradition)

#### 4.2 Main Content

Terry Eagleton in his *The Death of Criticism*<sup>2</sup>, had spoken of the rude shock a clerk in his office might experience when she stumbles on the thought that her boss was actually paid, and very well for that matter, for just reading poetry and prose. If she realized this and perhaps began to make noise about it, the authorities might again realize that, indeed, they might be wasting money on a venture that had no purpose. When they come to realize this, it would mean the death of criticism.

Terry Eagleton chose this anecdote to relay his message of how people might come off with the impression that literary education was an exercise in futility because, as Edward Said had demonstrated in his *Orientalism* in an exchange with an old college friend of his who once worked in the department of defense for a period during the Vietnam war, literature or the cultural realm and its expertise seemed institutionally divorced from their real connection with power (see Said, 2003: 2-3). In fact, what he implied was that literary education should be taken

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<sup>2</sup> *The Death of Criticism* was a lecture delivered by Terry Eagleton at the Hesburgh Centre Auditorium on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2008.

very seriously, because it contained things needed to build a man or woman for social change. In other words, African texts contain macro and micro information types, which if properly harnessed and transformed have the capacity to release great energy enough to change Africa.

On the individual level, African culture as a macro-information type has micro-information types, for example, values, morals, belief systems, ethics. African Politics as a macro-information type has micro-information types, too, for example, power dynamics, power relations, political players and politicking. The micro-information types of religion in Africa are the denominational issues, the Muslim/Christian issues, the supernatural issues, etc. The micro-information types of history in Africa will be all about origins, evolutionary trends, hindsight and foresight, etc, while the micro-information types of social behavior in Africa will orientate the scholar on human relations in Africa, the motives, interests and needs, gender problems in Africa etc. The philosophical micro-information types will be on life in Africa, its essence, its future, how it is spent, etc; and finally the human psychological micro-information types are always about human behavior and psychology in African context in relation to the wider world.

All these are pieces of information derivable from Studies in African Fiction, but which also demand transformation into knowledge. It is at this stage that information transformed to knowledge becomes power. This power that the individual, that is, the scholar of African literature possesses is actually that state that he has attained in his level of cognition that has made it possible for him or her to become a better person or a bad person. That state must, however, be made concrete and practical through the application of the knowledge, which has actually made him or her powerful.

The ability of the scholar of African literature to become a mediator in Conflict Resolution is only one aspect of his or her method of making his knowledge practical. He or she may decide to apply his or her knowledge, which has become a source of power for him or her in fighting against oppression and injustice anywhere he or she senses them. He or she may decide to go into party politics and seek elective office to affect people's lives thereby. He or she may even begin to apply words to paper, that is, become a writer or an advocate to the environment, against harmful traditional practices, etc.

Today in Nigeria, for example, Nigerians are faced with the challenges of insecurity occasioned by religious extremism. As always, the terror is unleashed by religious sects. Previously in history, a macro-information type, the Maitasine Islamic sect terrorized Nigerians and justified their action through misappropriation of Koranic injunctions. Today in history, the Boko Haram are

terrorizing Nigerians and justify their action through a medley of reasons that are religious, political and ethnic.

The chaotic state of the African states at present could be compared to the situation of England during the Victorian period, where the progress made in science and technology brought man to the brink of apostasy. The fact that science could not verify the existence of God led many to trust solely in the proven capacity of the human mind. Boldly the German philologist and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche declared in his fictional work, *Thus Spoke Zoroaster* or *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, that God was dead ... that He died in his pity with humanity (see Nietzsche as translated by Hollingdale, 1975, 114). The Godlessness of the age as well as the doubt cast upon the divine authority of the Church led Matthew Arnold to propose in his *Literature and Dogma* (2002) the need for Literature to take the place of religion (see Arnold). This he thought was possible because in his *Culture and Anarchy* (2004), his social criticism and his own way of defining his Humanism, literature was carrier of culture, because its humanism consisted in getting rid of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, prejudice and a continuous quest for the ideal. Therefore, in his *Literature and Dogma* (2002), he argued that sacred texts should be read as literature because values and morals are derived from them and as such they contained things to make us better persons. In other words, the people of that time should read sacred texts whether or not the existence of God was verifiable or not, because reading them would eventually make them men of culture or people who have overcome their ignorance, prejudice, narrow-mindedness and continually desire the ideal or perfection.

By implication, therefore, African literature must come to the aid of religious bigots. As George Gordon, the early Professor of English Literature had said, 'England is sick and ... English Literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature now has triple function: still, I suppose to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the state.'<sup>3</sup> Rephrased one may say: Africa is sick and literature must save it. Our religions having failed, and social remedies being slow, literature must now not only delight us, but also instruct, heal the state and save our souls.

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

Briefly explain why studies in African Fiction is very important

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<sup>3</sup> This is quoted by Chris Baldick, 'The Social Mission of English Studies' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford 1981), p.156 and which Terry Eagleton was considerably indebted because of its excellence in scholarship. It was later published as *The Social mission of English Criticism* (Oxford, 1983).

#### 4.1.1 African Fiction and Content

African texts contain things needed to build a man or woman for social change. In other words, they contain macro and micro information types, which if properly harnessed and transformed have the capacity to release great energy enough to change Africa.

#### 4.1.2 African Fiction, Culture and Politics

African fiction is a carrier of culture and culture as a macro-information type has micro-information types, for example, values, morals, belief systems, ethics. It also reflects the state of African Politics. African politics as a macro-information type has micro-information types, too, for example, power dynamics, power relations, political players and politicking.

#### 4.1.3 African Fiction, Religion, Sociology and History

African texts depict religious issues, and the micro-information types of religion in Africa are the denominational issues, the Muslim/Christian issues, the supernatural issues, etc. The micro-information types of history in Africa is all about origins, evolutionary trends, hindsight and foresight, etc, while the micro-information types of social behavior in Africa will orientate the scholar of African Literature on human relations in Africa, the motives, interests and needs, gender problems in Africa etc.

#### 4.1.4 African Fiction, Philosophy and Human Psychology

Studies in African Fiction delve into philosophy. Human psychology is also what it thrives on. The philosophical micro-information types in the African fiction centre on life in Africa, its essence, its future, how it is spent, etc; while the human psychological micro-information types are always about human behavior and psychology in African context in relation to the wider world.

4.1.5 African Fiction, Conflicts, Mediation, Traditions and the Environment. The Studies in African Fiction also exposes the nature of ethnic conflicts in Africa. The texts will never resolve the conflicts. It is human agents that will do that by properly articulating the conflict issues they raise. They show the obnoxious traditional practices in Africa as well as the state of the environment. As always, making us conscious of these issues means that we will continue to be disturbed until we find solutions to the teeming problems.

Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand why studies in African fiction are very important.

What qualities can the studies in African fiction cultivate in us?

## 5.0 Conclusion

African fiction as a course is highly invaluable because it exposes us to almost all the issues about Africa and Africans. Recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria had shown interest in getting to the root causes of religious extremism among Moslems in Nigeria. The Almajiri factor has been identified as one of the causes of religious extremism in Nigeria. Somehow, they have come to terms with the fact that the high rate of poverty and ignorance among some class of individuals or Almajiris in the North, whose condition was occasioned by some form of religious perception and belief, caused the frustration that led to this cataclysmic turn of event in Nigeria. Now the federal government considered rehabilitating this class of individuals through education. Now the question is: what type of education do these people need? What type of culture will the education teach them? Education liberates the mind, especially good education in the humanities. Vocational education no doubt will teach them practical skills, which could help them in creating employment for themselves; however, for their ignorance to be conquered, for their minds to be liberated, for them to become truly free and genuine human beings, who will harness the potentialities of their mental faculties, who will make their knowledge functional and applicable, they need that type of education that will make them become men and women of culture. They should be exposed to the transformational effect of knowledge. Their education should be such that occurred in Renaissance and Reformation period in Europe (see Johnson, 2001:44), where a brand of humanism, literary humanism and a method of approach to textual issues evolved. Like a humanist, they should be encouraged to look at things objectively, to value the power of reason without necessarily rejecting the Godhead, to question the origins, authenticity and credentials of texts, even sacred texts, to, in fact, practice rational Islamism and see whether it is possible to evolve Islamic humanism. They should be bombarded with texts, African literary texts of various shades and themes, simplified if need be, so as to promote sympathy and fellow feelings among them; African literature should be made to train them in the habits of pluralistic thought and feeling, persuading them to acknowledge that more than one viewpoint than theirs existed...(see Eagleton,2008:22).

## 6.0 Summary

In treating this subtopic, why we study African Fiction, we have considered what people as Terry Eagleton, Edward Said, George Gordon and William Blake have written concerning the power of literature. We tried to narrow all their positions down to studies in African fiction; for all that they believe literature can achieve is also extendable to African literature. We went even further to make the argument that since African literature captures almost every phenomena in African society, its scholar have a responsibility to be critical purveyors of ideal situations upon African conditions. The impact of studying African literature should be far-reaching in so many departments of African national life –be it the environment, politics, gender, etc

#### 7.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) What attributes do studies in African fiction cultivate in us?
- b) How can African fiction heal the state and save our souls?
- c) What are the major objectives of studies in African fiction?
- d) What are the micro-information types of culture in African fiction?

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## Module 2

### Unit 1

#### African Fiction and Humanism

## 1.0 Introduction

Humanism in relation to African Fiction will mean a devotion to African literary culture, which emphasizes the highest human values and ideals. African Literature carries African culture; therefore, the culture must align itself with Mathew Arnold definition of culture, which is the need to get rid of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, prejudice and a steady quest for perfection or ideal in African Humanity. However, let it be known that the African humanity does not exist independent of all humanity. In fact it is part and parcel of the global humanity; therefore, the humanism of African fiction must of necessity be the same as everywhere.

### 1.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to show that the humanism of African literature centers on life as lived in Africa, the well being of Africa and Africans, their interests, wants and needs as reflected in African texts and the fact that the aim of studying these texts is to humanize us, to make us more feeling and in tune with our good conscience –in short to make us people whose idea of culture will become a quest for the ideal as well as a desire for the best that is spoken or written.

### 1.2 Main Content

In order to understand humanism in relation to African fiction, we must understand humanism in a larger context. During the Renaissance, people yearned after classical traditions of Rome and Greece; and there was a growing need to make education more practical and scientific. Therefore, a group of scholars, writers and educators known today as renaissance humanists devoted themselves to this task.

In England, some scholars and writers had to travel as far as Italy to study the classical tradition by learning from the great humanists of that time. One of such early travelers to Italy to be trained in humanistic principles was Robert Flemmyng and then Thomas Linacre (1460-1524). He was a student under the great Italian humanist called Politan. After Linacre, the next to travel to study under Politan was William Grocyn. Thomas More and John Colet were students under William Grocyn. When Grocyn returned to England, he delivered the first public lecture on Greek at Oxford (see Johnson, 2000: 43-44).

As can be seen, these men penetrated the universities and began thus to initiate great changes in the spirit of Renaissance Humanism, which insisted that literature or texts must represent the greatest values and ideal; as such its criticism must avoid looking at texts on their face values. In critiquing a text, they asked questions

about its origins, its credentials, its authenticity as well as the objectivity of its contents (Johnson, 2000: 44). This critical approach to textual issues was to prove fatal to the unity of the Church once renaissance humanist began to apply their method to sacred texts too. It was not until 1497 that John Colet evolved a different approach in the critique of sacred text. His approach was different from the scholastic approach which seemed to always want to pull down. His approach was greatly praised and thought to represent a historical approach (2000: 45).

Other forms of humanism have emerged quite apart from Renaissance Humanism. There is religious humanism, which comprises both Christian and Islamic humanism. There is also modern humanism, which comprises both philosophical humanism and secular humanism. While religious humanists may believe in God, secular and philosophical humanists may not necessarily do. However, all humanists have one thing in common: they are rational, objective and pragmatic. They desire the best for human life, needs, interests and values on earth. Furthermore, humanism represents the ideas of individualism, occasional secularism, skepticism and liberalism.

Therefore, we must approach studies in African fiction rationally, objectively and pragmatically. What this means is that our studies of it must be geared towards making our knowledge functional in tackling some of the issues raised by them; and we already know these issues tackled by studies in African fiction –issues relating to tradition and culture, the environment, religious fundamentalism, gender issues and a whole lot of others.

Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

What is the relationship between African fiction and Humanism?

#### 1.2.1 African Fiction and Humanism

African fiction is like a psyche with various archetypes as culture values, morals, politics, etc. Culture as a macro-information type has micro-information types, for example, values, morals, belief systems, ethics. Politics as a macro-information type has micro-information types, too, for example, power dynamics, power relations, political players and politicking. The micro-information types of religion are the denominational issues, the Moslem/Christian issues, the supernatural issues, etc. The micro-information types of history will be all about origins, evolutionary trends, hindsight and foresight, etc, while the micro-information types of sociology will orientate the individual on human relation, its motives, interests and needs, gender problems, etc. The philosophical micro-information types will be on life, its essence, its future, how it is spent, etc; and finally the human

psychological micro-information types are always about human behavior and psychology (ile).

All these are pieces of information derivable from African texts, but which also demand transformation into knowledge. Humanism presupposes intellect and objectivity as well as the betterment of humankind; therefore, having that in mind, we deploy the things we learn from these texts to better human life and living conditions of man in Africa.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand why African fiction has a lot to do with Humanism.

What is Humanism and what has African Fiction got to do with it?

### 2.0 Conclusion

African fiction as a course is highly invaluable because it exposes us to almost all the issues about Africa and Africans. We have seen that the humanism of African literature centers on life as lived in Africa, the well being of Africa and Africans, their interests, wants and needs as reflected in African texts and the fact that the aim of studying these texts is to humanize us, to make us more feeling and in tune with our good conscience –in short to make us people whose idea of culture will become a quest for the ideal as well as a desire for the best that is spoken or written, to make us better human beings, who will create better societies!

### 3.0 Summary

In treating this subtopic, African Fiction and Humanism, we have considered what people as Terry Eagleton, Edward Said, George Gordon and William Blake have written concerning the power of literature. We tried to narrow all their positions down to studies in African fiction; for all that they believe literature can achieve is also extendable to African literature. We went even further to make the argument that since African literature captures almost every phenomena in African society, to such an extent that it humanizes us. We have seen that once we are humanized, we seek the best that there is for man and by extension for all African societies.

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) What is humanism and how can African Fiction humanize us?
- b) What does being humanized imply?
- c) What are the various issues of humanity treated I African Fiction?
- d) What are the various types of humanism that there we know?

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## Unit 2

### African Fiction and Formalism

#### 1.0 Introduction

Formalism refers to critical approaches that analyze, interpret, or evaluate the inherent features of a text. These features include not only grammar and syntax but

also literary devices such as metaphors, oxymorons, etc. The formalist approach reduces the importance of a text's historical, biographical, and cultural context. It rose to prominence in the early twentieth century as a reaction against Romanticist theories of literature, which centered on the artist and individual creative genius, and instead placed the text itself back into the spotlight, to show how the text was indebted to forms and other works that had preceded it (Wikipedia).

African fiction falls with the critical purview of formalism. However, most African intellectuals and writers believe that we cannot afford to be studying African texts just for their sake because of the fierce urgency of the African condition. Even in the West where it started, formalism is regarded now simply as bourgeois past-time.

It must not, however, be forgotten that formalism was a way of abiding to the age of the period –the age of the greatest influence for science and technology. As such, formalist borrowed largely from Edmund Hummerl's philosophy of science known as phenomenology in which judgment is suspended on the external or physical world outside of the thing being considered. The aim of this philosophy was to support the claim of science that all truth was grounded in empirical facts knowable through scientific methods (Moore and Bruder, 531-2). So this was also deployed in literary studies.

## 1.2 Objective

The objective of the unit is to critical examine the history of formalism in order to show that, though African fiction can be studied from the perspective of formalism, it is not necessary given the fact that most African writers have mirrored the conditions of society and life as lived in Africa in their works; therefore, it will be a disservice to Africa for scholars to engage theirs works from the perspective of arts for arts' sake. There is nothing wrong, though, to apply some of the formalist's techniques in literary appreciation, for they help too. However, the need for education to be functional will never be overlooked. This explains why scholars need to apply the knowledge of what they have learned from studying these texts to the betterment of Africa particularly and the world at large.

## 1.3 Main Content

There are mainly three formalist schools –the American New Criticism, Russian Formalism and European Structuralism. Some have also included Marxist Criticism as a form of formalist approach. However, we shall consider Marxist Criticism differently.

- Russian Formalism

Russian Formalism refers to the work of the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOYAZ) founded in 1916 in St. Petersburg (then Petrograd) by Boris

Eichenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky and Yury Tynyanov, and secondarily to the Moscow Linguistic Circle founded in 1914 by Roman Jakobson.

Russian Formalists had particular aims, which were:

- To produce "a science of literature that would be both independent and factual" which is sometimes designated by the term *poetics*.
- To see that linguistics became a foundational element of the science of literature, since literature is made of language.
- To prove literature is autonomous from external conditions in the sense that literary language is distinct from ordinary uses of language.
- To show that literature has its own history, a history of innovation in formal structures, and is not determined by external, material history.
- To demonstrate that what a work of literature says cannot be separated from *how* the literary work says it: Form and content are same (Wikipedia).

The truth is that we can subject African fiction to being studied the Russian formalist way. In fact, we can do that and still study them as reflections of the African condition. Of what use will it be though, if not just for mere literary aesthetics, to be considering all these things Russian formalism set out to prove without factoring in or considering that fact that even the writer and his texts are products of society?

The Russian formalist in embarking on his studies of the text as an autonomous whole, concentrate on the novel essentially.

- The American New Criticism

The New Criticism was a formalist movement in literary theory that dominated American literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century. It emphasized close reading, particularly of poetry, to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. It was inspired by the idealist philosophers as Benedetto Croce. It was an attempt to develop a new philosophy of aesthetics or arts.

The major aims of this new philosophy of arts are to oppose the claim of science that truth emanates from empirical or scientific enquiry and also assert the claim that art provides access to another kind of truth than is accessible by science. This kind of truth can only be accessed through the insight made possible by certain tropes of language, that is, figurative language which deploys connotation in its usage.

For the New Critics, literature was autonomous and unconnected to the real world around it; it was also irrelevant as social practice: as such it should not be dragged down to mere economic exchange in the socioeconomic world. By this singular effort, they only opened up a new practical engagement for literature, which was no longer going to be in any other domain outside of the text.

As Russian Formalism, American New Criticism had its own aims too, and they are:

- To prove the idea that universal truth is available through art of a kind that is not determined by material social and historical circumstances.
- To restore belief in traditional religious and aesthetic values, which was being displaced by science
- To restore the emotive life destroyed by the industrialization going on in the North of America.
- To ensure that with the death of Religion literature or poetry became the new religion, to which one could run and be insulated from the realities of industrial capitalism.

Unlike Russian formalism, The American New Criticism preferred to concentrate on studying the poem. For it, the poem existed as a self-enclosed object, which is mysteriously intact in its own unique being: it cannot be paraphrased in another language other than itself. Furthermore, one can say that New Criticism is not entirely a formalist method because it still believes that what the poem expresses is a reality, but which is contained inside itself, not outside it. It saw the poem as an object independent of authorial intention or what they called “intentional fallacy” or the reader’s interpretation, what they called “affective fallacy”. Therefore its criticism should be that of disinterestedness, not getting involved, only passively receiving by investigating the tensions created by the poem, its paradoxes and hesitations as well as how all this are resolved and integrated by the poem’s solid structure.

And indeed, we can choose to study African fiction thus. However, studying texts thus has its merits and demerits. The merits are as follows:

- It provided a comfortable method of teaching literature to cope with a growing student population in America.
- It was easier to give students poems to study in new critical ways than introducing a great novel about the progress of the world
- It proved attractive to liberal intellectuals during the cold war because of its disinterested reconciliation of opposing attitudes, that is, not taking sides.

Its demerits are as Follows:

- It is a recipe to political apathy or lack of action
- It leads to submission to political status quo (Eagleton)
- European Structuralism

Like Russian Formalism, European Structuralism is formal in every ramification. It is concerned with STRUCTURES and looking closely at the general laws by which these STRUCTURES work. For example, Structuralism believes that the individual units of any system have meaning only by the fact of their relations to

one another. In fact, one of the major avant-garde of European Structuralism was Ferdinand Saussure. He viewed language, even the language of literature, as a SYSTEM OF SIGNS, which has to be studied “SYNCRONICALLY”, that is, as a complete system at a given point in time, rather than “DIACHRONICALLY”, that is, in its historical development. Here, each SIGN is seen as being made up of a SIGNIFIER (a sound image or its graphic equivalent) and a SIGNIFIED (the idea of the meaning). A close understanding of Saussure is only possible when we try to make a sound image of say RAT –that is a signifier. When we do that, we immediately associate the sound image to the idea of the meaning, which we know already. However, according to Saussure, there is no inherent or logical reason (arbitrary) why the sound image we evoke and the idea of the meaning should be the rodent we know as RAT. It is the rodent RAT because of cultural and historical convention.

Again, as always, we can study African fiction structurally; but then to what purpose?

#### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

Can we study African Fiction using formalist methods?

##### 1.3.1 African Fiction and Formalism

It will be a disservice to Africa for scholars to engage their works from the perspective of arts for arts’ sake. There is nothing wrong, though, to apply some of the formalist’s techniques in literary appreciation, for they help too. However, the need for education to be functional will never be overlooked. This explains why scholars need to apply the knowledge of what they have learned from studying these texts to the betterment of Africa particularly and the world at large.

The truth is that we can subject African fiction to being studied the Russian formalist way. In fact, we can do that and still study them as reflections of the African condition. Of what use will it be though, if not just for mere literary aesthetics, to be considering all these things Russian formalism set out to prove without factoring in or considering that fact that even the writer and his texts are products of society?

##### 1.3.2 African Fiction and the Merits and Demerits of studying it using Formalist methods

We can choose to study African fiction using formalist methods. However, studying texts thus has its merits and demerits. The merits are as follows:

- It provided a comfortable method of teaching literature to cope with a growing student population in America.
- It was easier to give students poems to study in new critical ways than introducing a great novel about the progress of the world

- It proved attractive to liberal intellectuals during the cold war because of its disinterested reconciliation of opposing attitudes, that is, not taking sides.

Its demerits are as Follows:

- It is a recipe to political apathy or lack of action
- It leads to submission to political status quo (Eagleton)

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand the place of African fiction in choosing to study it using formalist methods.

Should we adopt the formalist methods in studying African Fiction?

## 2.0 Conclusion

We have tried here to show that African fiction is not one extra terrestrial phenomenon: it could be subjected to all the formalist approaches if need be, since the methods are all ways of looking at the text bracketing off all the realities outside of the text. As we said earlier, Russian Formalist concentrated on the novel and to some extent on poetry too. When they looked at the text, they concentrated on the operations of the text on the one hand, and concentrated on sound in verse when they analyzed poetry. They also concluded that the narrative prose comprised two major components –the plot and the story. The plot here means for them the story as told within the pages of the book in chronological order or not, containing point of view or main character, the protagonist, etc., while the story by which they meant the sequence of events in the order and the actual duration in which they occurred. With the plot and the story known, the main analysis begins: they look at the features of the storytelling, the literary devices, characterization as well as how suspense is created and sustained. They also locate the narrative voice. Therefore, fiction which is imaginative is a manipulation of plot and the storytelling devices, according to the formalists. (Rikin & Ryan).

THE CONSEQUENCE IS THAT WE CAN NOW STUDY, FOR EXAMPLE, *THINGS FALL APART* for its narrative strategies instead of for the ways in which it depicts life in pre-colonial African society! But we know that we can study these things and still study the ways in which they depict life in our society and then be better equipped to help in the development of our societies.

## 3.0 Summary

We have looked at African fiction and the possibility of studying it using formalist methods. We have known what the different formalist schools are and the role they

played in their time. We have also seen that it is possible to study the text formalistically and still study them for the knowledge they provide –knowledge of society, human conditions, etc, not necessarily for their sake.

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) Russian Formalism was founded on which philosophy?
- b) American New Criticism was founded on which philosophy?
- c) What and what constitute imaginary fiction for the formalist?
- d) Why do you think New Critics thought poetry can replace religion?

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## Unit 3

### African Fiction and Marxism

#### 1.0 Introduction

**Marxism** has been defined by Wikipedia as a socio-economic and political worldview or inquiry based on a materialist interpretation of historical

development. Karl Marx had adapted the Hegelian philosophy of phenomenology of spirit, which had theorized that the world unfolded as mind or spirit through a dialectic process toward the ideal. Karl Marx anchored that unfolding of the world as mind in matter or a material process in man's historical development. In other words, Marxism is a philosophy that tries not only to understand the world but also to transform or change it. That materialist unfolding of the world would be towards the ideal of a communist world, where there will be no economic classes, no wages, no money, no private property and no exploitation; in fact, a Utopia. Recall that Thomas Moore, in the Renaissance period had written a book called *Utopia* (1516, page). So in reality, Karl Marx had had double influences –Hegel and Moore. Furthermore, to understand Marxism, one must look at man a social animal with needs. So, just as Aristotle considered man a political animal (Moore & Bruder, 293), Marx considered man a social animal with needs, physical needs. These physical needs can, however, only be satisfied when man develops or produces the means to satisfy them. For example, man needs shelter; therefore, he develops or produces the means to build a house. These means of producing the satisfaction to his need for a house is called **Forces or Means of Production** (Moore & Bruder, 326). Now, the progressive contradiction in man's satisfaction of his needs consists in the emergence of new needs whenever man uses any one set of means of production: the use of any one set of means of production leads to a new need or needs. This process is the dialectic process of the history of man in his various stages of development of the means of production. This, however, does not happen in isolation –whether man uses a simple tool as shovel or a complex machine – those means or forces of production involves some social relationships. For example, to build a house, one needs sand, cement and labor: these are means of producing the satisfaction of his need for shelter. One goes to where sand is sold to buy it, just as one goes to a place cement is sold to buy it too. Then one also deploys various labor forces to use these materials; all these are deployed by and under someone. These are the social relationship network in the bid to satisfy the need for shelter. These social relationships Marx called productive relations. The productive relations depend on the stage of evolution of the means or forces of production. However, according to Karl Marx, the forces of production at a given stage develop to a point when they come into conflict with the existing social relationships. These social relationships are replaced by new social relationships. This follows a dialectic process.

Recall that the forces of production of the industrial age developed to a point when they came into conflict with the existing social relationship of the feudal age. It led to the emergence of the capital owning bourgeois class, hence capitalism.

Therefore, this dialectic process repeats itself over and over again and it is the history of man, economics, and society; “history, therefore, is the result of man’s productive activity in interplay with his social relationships” (328). According to Marx, this interplay is responsible not only for man’s socio-economic-political situation, but also for his morality, law, philosophy, religion, literature and art.

### 1.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to show why Marxist Criticism postulates that texts, literary texts are a mirror or representation of society because the writer himself is a product of society with its socio-economic classes as well as inherent dynamism.

### 1.2 Main Content

It is logical to believe that out of the writer’s commitment arises literature’s practical implications; as such, for Edward Said, however, all the textual postures toward literature, while they, no doubt, are intellectually interesting and worth studying and possessing the capacity to make all the domains of human activity to be seen, and lived, as a unity, they nevertheless have only succeeded in making literature impractical, uninvolved and a seemingly frustrating endeavor that borders on nihilism. In other words, according to Edward Said, these textual postures disable and dis-empower what was empowering and interesting about the original insights (287).

What is the use of the higher pleasure derived from studying the text when the pleasure is already extra-textual? However Rene Wellek strongly believes:

[W]hen a work of literature functions successfully, the two “note” of pleasure and utility should not merely coexist but coalesce. The pleasure of literature, we need to maintain, is not one preference among a long lists of possible pleasures but is a “higher pleasure” because pleasure is a higher kind of activity, i.e. non-acquisitive contemplation. And the utility – the seriousness, the instructiveness – of literature is a pleasurable seriousness, that is, not the seriousness of a duty which must be done or of a lesson to be learned but an aesthetic seriousness, a seriousness of perception (31).

The kind of Utility Rene Wellek was talking about was the utilitarian utility, where it becomes literature’s duty to depict not only the most beautiful of human

condition, but also its most deplorable situation in a critically instructive way with the aim of ushering in the good through change and ensuring the greatest happiness of all peoples of the world.

For Marxist Criticism, another theoretical effort at practically reengaging literature, the intent of the writer is always a code for a particular set of ideologies in the writer's own day. For Marxists Realists authorial intent is inherently present in the text and must be placed in a context of liberation and materialist dialectic. Marxist Critics believe that the writer cannot be separated from their works, just as their works cannot be separated from their informing society. For them writers are the critical purveyors of the imperatives of our human condition.

According to Ngugi, literature is as much about human beings as politics is. In other words literature reflects "actual men and women and children, breathing, eating, crying laughing, creating, dying, growing, struggling, organizing, people in history of which they are its products, its producers and analysts"(67).

Ngugi, being a Marxist, is of the opinion that there is no aspect of human life, including the boundaries of imagination that is not affected by the way that society is organized through the whole paraphernalia of power; that is, how and by whom that power has been achieved; which class controls and maintains it; and the ends to which power is put.

Marxists, according to Ngugi, believe that society is structured according to class; therefore, the class in power controls not only the forces of production in the society, but also the cultural forces. And because the society is an interaction of so many forces –production, exchange, distribution and so on, the quality of life of the individual in society is therefore affected in so many ways: the forces affect their way of consumption of goods and services, their private and social lives (67). These activities in both the social, political and cultural life of the individual, as he believes:

[C] onstitute a universe of moral significance, of values and determine the quality of human life and are what imaginative literature is about. The universe is itself simultaneously a product of a reflection on the material process of living. Its method may entail a refraction of the material process in order to reveal its inner vitality (67).

Marxist Criticism as a form of literary criticism originated in the former Soviet Union. According to Dominic Thomas:

[O]n April 23, 1932, all Soviet literary and artistic organisations including the Association of Proletarian Writers, were dismantled and merged into the new Union of Soviet Writers. The term *Socialist realism* first appeared in print on May 23, 1932, when the *Literaturnaia gazeta* published a statement I. Gronskii had made on May 23, 1932, declaring Socialist Realism the only acceptable literary form. By August 1934, Socialist Realism had been inaugurated as the official mode for literature (20).

It is very obvious that the writer is expected, in the context above, to be an instrument of the state, for, in the opinion of Thomas, “the fundamental tenets of Stalinist Socialist Realism included popular appeal, class-consciousness, ideology orthodoxy, partisanship or adherence to party line and typicality.” Furthermore, Regine Robin believes:

[S]ocialist Realism, as the basic starting point of Soviet literature and literary criticism, requires that the sincere writer offer a historical concrete presentation of reality in its revolutionary development. In this manner, veracity and the historically concrete dimension of the artistic representation of reality should combine with the task of achieving ideological change and educating workers according to the principles of Socialism (40).

This, however, differs from Social Realism, a reactionary development against idealism, and the exaggerated ego encouraged by Romanticism. During the romantic period, the consequences of the industrial Revolution had become apparent; urban centres had sprung up, slums had proliferated *ad nauseam*. Such poverty was a massive contrast to the affluence of the upper classes. With a new sense of political consciousness, the Social Realists dedicated themselves to fighting this over-indulgence on wealth and beautiful art as well as any style that appealed to the eye or emotions. They focused on the ugly realities of contemporary life and sympathized with working-class people, particularly the poor. They recorded what they saw in an objective manner. Social Realism shocked the public, somehow, because they could not face its graphic portrayal of the realities contemporary life (Thomas, n.p).

While Socialist Realism encouraged propaganda in literature because of the fact that literature had become an instrument of state, Social Realism depicted the whole of life as it was experienced. In all, it was about literature being transformative, using the social context as raw material. This is unlike the liberal

humanist's formalist approach to literature and abstract concept of the ability of literature to make us 'better persons' isolating the social contexts of life. That is why Terry Eagleton writes that what it means to be a better person, then, should be concrete and practical – concerned with people's political situations as a whole. In other words, being a better person should no longer be about the immediate interpersonal relations among people; it should be a question of political and moral argument (208).

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

What is the place of African Fiction in relation to Marxist Criticism?

### 1.2.1 African Fiction and Marxist Criticism

According to Ngugi, literature is as much about human beings as politics is. In other words literature reflects “actual men and women and children, breathing, eating, crying laughing, creating, dying, growing, struggling, organizing, people in history of which they are its products, its producers and analysts”(67).

Ngugi, being a Marxist, is of the opinion that there is no aspect of human life, including the boundaries of imagination that is not affected by the way that society is organized through the whole paraphernalia of power; that is, how and by whom that power has been achieved; which class controls and maintains it; and the ends to which power is put. Marxists, according to Ngugi, believe that society is structured according to class; therefore, the class in power controls not only the forces of production in the society, but also the cultural forces. And because the society is an interaction of so many forces –production, exchange, distribution and so on, the quality of life of the individual in society is therefore affected in so many ways

### 1.2.2 Marxist Criticism, African Fiction and Social Realism

On the one hand, Marxist Criticism as a form of literary criticism originated in the former Soviet Union. It was then expected that the form of literary production to be coming out to reflect socialist realism in which case art or literature is deployed to serve as a tool of social control be being propagandist; on the other hand, Social Realism, is a reactionary development against idealism, and the exaggerated ego encouraged by Romanticism. During the romantic period, the consequences of the industrial Revolution had become apparent; urban centers had sprung up, slums had proliferated *ad nauseam*. Such poverty was a massive contrast to the affluence

of the upper classes. With a new sense of political consciousness, the Social Realists dedicated themselves to fighting this over-indulgence on wealth and beautiful art as well as any style that appealed to the eye or emotions. They focused on the ugly realities of contemporary life and sympathized with working-class people, particularly the poor. They recorded what they saw in an objective manner. Social Realism shocked the public, somehow, because they could not face its graphic portrayal of the realities contemporary life (Thomas, n.p).

While Socialist Realism encouraged propaganda in literature because of the fact that literature had become an instrument of state, Social Realism depicted the whole of life as it was experienced.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand the place of African fiction in relation to Marxist Criticism.

Explain what you understand by Marxism and the Criticism derived from it in relation to Fiction, especially African fiction

### 2.0 Conclusion

It is incontrovertible that African writers have never hidden the fact that their works serve socio-cultural and political purposes by reflecting life as lived in Africa as well as conditions of existence in Africa. It is obvious that they have never wished that their works be studied just for their own sake. In other words their position on the use of literature tallies with the position of Marxist Criticism.

As Chinua Achebe once wrote, “[A]ll art is propaganda, though not all propaganda is art” (in Irele, n.p). For Abiola Irele, this terse and cogent statement by Achebe sets before us the truth about literature which is, more often than not, made hazy by theories, which fail to recognize the fact that all forms of artistic expression especially literature ought to refer to human life and consciousness if they have to assume any significance at all. In other words, the literary work of a writer ought to bring to our consciousness the whole range of processes and forces that determine our experience in the modern age (n.p).

### 3.0 Summary

In this unit, we have tried to understand what Marxism is –which helped us to understand the criticism derived from it in relation to art or literature. This understanding helped us see why it is important that African fiction must reflect

life as lived in African societies as well as the general human condition there. Indeed this will help us as scholars of the literature to understand that our roles become even more crucial in engaging the various issues African fiction raises in regard to Africa.

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) What is Marxism?
- b) Is it proper for African Fiction to mirror society?
- c) Which is better socialist realism or social realism and why?
- d) Should we study African fiction just for its own sake?

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### Unit 4

#### African Fiction and Pragmatism

##### 1.0 Introduction

John Dewey in his philosophy, known largely as instrumentalism, has argued that “thinking is not a search for “truth” but an activity aimed at solving individual and social problems, a means by which humans strive to achieve a satisfactory relationship with their environment” (Moore & Bruder, 111). Dewey is described as “the originator of modern thinking about critical thinking” (Deane & Borg, 4). He was, as a matter of fact, “a pragmatist, a philosopher whose writings focused on the practical nature, effects and outcomes of thought and belief. He distinguished what he called *reflective* thinking from the thoughts that we all have constantly, at least while we are awake” (4-5).

What this all means is that African fiction as texts are there to be read by anybody. However, while anybody can read it anyhow, reading it as duty is the job of the scholar of those texts. He or she does this because he or she knows they contain very important body of knowledge worth knowing. Therefore, his target is to assimilate those bodies of knowledge and make them his own.

### 1.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to show that the act of reading is a professional demand on the scholar of African narratives. It is so because his or her aim is to make the knowledge gained from studying the texts functional.

### 1.2 Main Content

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is hoped that Studies in African Studies would make students of literature to really appreciate the fact that the ability of studies in African fiction to make them better persons ought to be such that would make that state of being a better person really practical and concrete; that is to say, studies in Africa fiction ought to be enough preparation for them to face the challenges of life and to be useful to Africa and particularly their various societies in a positive and impacting way, so that literature or the cultural realm and its expertise will never again be institutionally divorced from their real connections with power – a case which was wonderfully illustrated for Edward Said by an exchange with an old college friend of his who worked in the department of defense for a period during the Vietnam war (2-3). To read already foregrounds thinking.

As Ashcroft theorized, a reader rewrites the text in the process of reading the text and just as the reader-function is present in the writing as the focus of “meanability” of the writing, the author is also present in the reading (73). For Ashcroft, “this is the specific and practical way in which consumption and production are linked. Again, this is firstly true at a conscious level, where the reader accepts the conviction that the author is telling him or her something through the text (2001).” Therefore, he argues further that readers respond to the text as telling them something because language is used in such a way as to make

the text tell something. However, in his opinion, “one cannot tell others anything that they do not incorporate or tell themselves” (Ashcroft, 73); for as he argued, “the mind is active in knowing: whether a child learning a language or a scientist “observing” an “objective” universe, knowing is conducted within the *situation* of horizons of expectations and other knowledge” (Ashcroft). Furthermore, Ashcroft is of the opinion that as a reader reads a text, a horizon of expectation is partially established by the text as it unfolds, while the horizon of knowledge which is acquired through other texts, a *relevance* of other knowledge, is established by exploration. The reader thus constructs the other dialogue pole of discourse. This dialogue pole of discourse entails critical thinking, and critical thinking, according to Deane and Borg, “is active and persistent; it looks for reasons, considers implications and is reflective ...it is a way for you to contribute to knowledge in your field” (11).

As can be seen, reading African texts, we interact with the content. We ask questions why things are so and so. We deduce reasons and even further deconstruct it. We relate the contents to our condition in society. In doing this, the interaction continues, and deduction continues and even deconstruction. We eventually get better knowing what we know. We move further, to unleash the energy of being better on our condition or the conditions of things in society. We insist on having best of things. We know, however, that the ideal is not stationary: in fact it pulls us to it.

#### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

What does reading African Fiction make us do?

##### 1.2.1 African Fiction and why we read them

African fiction, as texts are there to be read by anybody. However, while anybody can read them anyhow, reading them as duty is the job of the scholar of those texts. He or she does this because he or she knows they contain very important body of knowledge worth knowing. Therefore, his target is to assimilate those bodies of knowledge and make them his own. Reading them sets me off thinking critically because of the issues raised in the given texts. However, this sort of thinking reflects on itself and does that actively or progressively.

##### 1.2.2 How can we apply the knowledge derived from studying African Fiction?

In reading African texts, we interact with the content. We ask questions why things are so and so. We deduce reasons and even further deconstruct it. We relate the

contents to our condition in society. In doing this, the interaction continues, and deduction continues and even deconstruction. We eventually get better knowing what we know. We move further, to unleash the energy of being better on our condition or the conditions of things in society. We insist on having best of things. We know, however, that the ideal is not stationary: in fact it pulls us to it.

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand the connection between reading African Fiction and making our knowledge of it pragmatic or functional.

Explain Dewey's pragmatic philosophy called *instrumentalism* and relate it to studying African fiction.

## 2.0 Conclusion

As students of narratives, we must become conscious that we are professionals in making use of ideas and deploying them in solving problems. We have to learn to regard the text as our raw material to solving human and societal problems

## 3.0 Summary

We have tried to understand the pragmatic philosophy of Dewey which we need to make good use of the knowledge we gain from studying the texts. We have also tried to show how this works in the realm of the abstract. We tried to demonstrate how to translate this into something concrete and tangible.

## Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) What is pragmatism?
- b) Explain Dewey's instrumentalism?
- c) What is critical thinking?
- d) What is reflective thinking?

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## MODULE 3

### UNIT 1

African Fiction and the Nature of Being and Existence in Africa: *THE FISHERMEN* BY CHIGOZIE OBIOMA

## 1.0 Introduction

The Fishermen is a dense narrative that exposes the tragedy and meaninglessness of existence. It is so tragic that one just gets angry at life and the game it plays on and with us. It is the story of an Igbo family that lives in Akure. A once happy family whose woes begin immediately the head of the family and breadwinner, who works at CBN, is transferred to the CBN branch in Yola. Once he lives, his children took to fishing in a certain river, called OMI-ALA. This is a past-time they adopted to live out the freedom they enjoy in being boys being looked after by a woman –their mother: they are becoming delinquent as a result of their father’s absence in their lives at a time he is needed for disciplined upbringing. The river to which they go to fish is famous with legendary tales of death and fear. It is in that river that they were seen by Iya Iyabo, the groundnut seller, who tells their mother. When then Mr Agwu visits home from his new base, Yola, the wife gives him information on everything that happened in his absence, especially the new past-time of his children, fishing (35-41). They are punished severely by their father, Eme, who leaves for Yola the following day.

That thrashing with his guerdon as he calls it, of course Ikenna, being the eldest, receives the most and hardest flogging. The thrashing changes Ikenna’s character, he begins to metamorphose. With his metamorphosis, a gap begins to appear in his relationship with his siblings, Bojanonimeokpu, Obembe and Benjamin, the narrator of the tale. He begins to bully and intimidate them. He begins to talk back to his mother. For Adaku, that was it.

Ikenna’s metamorphosis had a cause. As Adaku, their mother enquired from Ikenna’s siblings the cause of the rift between Bojanonimeokpu and Ikenna, digging into their psyche. Obembe tells the mother that Ikenna’s metamorphosis began the day they encountered Abulu, the madman with evil prophecies. He had prophesied that Ikenna would be bound like a bird on the day he would die; that he would be mute; that he would be crippled; that his tongue would stick out of his mouth like a hungry beast and would not return back into his mouth; that he would lift his hands to grasp air, but he would not be able to; that he would open his mouth to speak on that day but word would freeze in his mouth; that he would swim in a river of red but would never rise from it again; that he would die like a cock died, and finally that he would be killed by a fisherman (89-92).

This prophecy becomes a fear that ate Ikenna up; a fear that fed on his being until it drove him to paranoia so much so that he believed that his brothers would kill him, hence his resentment of them. He ensures he sleeps alone in a room he

shares with Obembe. He begins to lose faith and even says he has become a scientist and does no longer believe in God (117). When, on one occasion he locks himself inside the room and refuses to open the door, Boja says he probably was dead. Ikenna interpreted that to mean that Boja wanted him dead. They get into argument and start fighting. Ikenna inflicts wound on Boja. Boja is taken to the hospital. On another occasion they get into a fight that was the fiercest they had had. Ikenna breaks Boja's nose and Boja bleeds. Boja retreats, goes into the house, takes a knife and murders Ikenna: he swam in the river of red and never rose from it as Abulu, the madman had prophesied (144-149).

Boja is devastated. He kills himself by diving headlong into the well and drowns. It seems the Agwu-family typified the tragedy that is human life. Adaku, Eme's wife and mother to the Agwu family, becomes demented by the tragedy of losing her children in such a horrific way. She eventually recovers, but the troubles are far from over; for Obembe plans to avenge his brother's death by killing Abulu the madman. He bullies Ben into the plan and they eventually hack Abulu the madman to death with their fishing hooks that they had turned into weapons. They are identified by two soldiers. They manage to escape from them, but Benjamin is eventually arraigned before a court. Obembe runs away to far away Benin in order to escape arrest. All this had happened after their father had struggled to see that they left for Canada. By killing Abulu and getting themselves in confrontation with the law, they ruin the opportunity to migrate to Canada, for as the narrator puts it, 'Hope was a tadpole: the thing you caught and brought home with you in a can, but which, despite being kept in the right water, soon died' (245). Obembe runs away to escape justice; Benjamin is going to jail, where he is going to spend eight years. He eventually spends six years in jail. In fact, one could say that this was a family battered by fate so much so that one would begin to wonder if they had committed any crime apart from the fact that they were just a family full of hope for the future and certain of a wonderful life.

## 1.1 Objectives

The aim of this unit is to see whether there is any correlation between a prophecy uttered about somebody and what happens to the person whom the prophecy was intended for; whether the absence of a father-figure has any effect on children and whether there are forces outside our control, which unleash their will on us!

## 1.2 Main Content

The Problematic of studying this text lies in the issues it raises which are essentially metaphysical; for example, is prophecy something we can believe in? Is our lives destined to end in a certain way? How can we be happy in this world that is full of pain and misery? Now the issues thrown up by the text are indeed things we face every day in the world. Yet we are told that these things are either based on superstition or outright phenomena of diseased minds. Therefore, the major problem we will encounter in the study of this text will be that knowledge that one has, which is the need for things to be proven scientifically. It is pretty difficult to prove or to quantify the capacity of the human mind and will; yet in everything we do we exert our mind and will to it. A case in point is that of Obembe who was blinded by hate and so channeled all his power towards avenging the misfortune brought upon his family by Abulu. In planning the vengeance, we are exposed in practical terms to the working of the human mind and will. He demonstrates how what we read, shape us; how they become our vision; how we believe in the visions, and how what we believe often becomes permanent (203). As the narrator puts it, 'because he read somewhere that if someone drew a sketch of any problem and visualized its complex make-up, they could solve that problem, he spent most of the day drawing matchstick men portraits of his plan to avenge our brothers, while I sat and read' (203-204). And indeed this is true of the human will and mind yet there is no parameter for measuring this to prove that it is true. These are the major challenges one encounters in studying the text.

The novel *The Fishermen* raised three basic issues that are very germane to life as it is lived in the world and especially in Nigeria. They are the issue of the nature of the existential world we live in which there is too much suffering, pain and misery; the issue of prophecy in a deeply religious or superstitious society as ours and the issue of parenting or bringing up of children.

In order to position the issues raised by the work within some theoretical framework, it is necessary to ask some questions as: Why was life so cruel to the Agwu family? How did Abulu know that Ikenna would die in the hands of a Fisherman; that he would be bound like a bird on the day he would die? How did he know that he would be mute; that he would be crippled; that his tongue would stick out of his mouth like a hungry beast and would not return back into his mouth; that he would lift his hands to grasp air, but he would not be able to; that he would open his mouth to speak on that day but word would freeze in his mouth; that he would swim in a river of red but would never rise from it again and that he would die like a cock died (89-92)? And why did the prophecy come to fruition?

The area into which the novel *The Fishermen* delved is far removed from the plane of material reality. It is an area difficult to research into yet possessing the reality of everyday life; otherwise how else could one explain the phenomenon of Abulu's prophecy on Ikenna and the fact that it materialized. Now it is important to understand the phenomenon of prophecy. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, prophecy is defined in its strict sense as the "foreknowledge of future events, though it may sometimes apply to past events of which there is no memory, and to present hidden things which cannot be known by the natural light of reason" (*Catholic Encyclopaedia* <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12473a.htm>>). However, Mark R. Sunwall in his paper on *The Suprarational Grounds of Rationalism: Maimonides and The Criteria of Prophecy*, threw more light into the phenomenon of prophecy through a critical discourse on the work of Maimonides, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Jewish Rabbi and Philosopher. Maimonides had defined prophecy, "in truth and reality, an emanation sent forth by the Divine Being through the medium of the Active Intellect, in the first instance to man's rational faculty, and then to his imaginative faculty" (225). For Sunwall, "this definition encompasses an identification of the source, the medium and finally the receptive faculty of prophecy" (Meru Foundation: Research and Findings). In other words, God, who is divine, gives messages in the form of prophecy and human faculties receive them through a medium, which itself is the "Active Intellect". To understand what "Active Intellect" is, one must become familiar with the Aristotelian classification of the human mind into active *nous* or thought or intellect or reason and the receptive part. In other words, if human thought or intellect is caused by a divine force, "and the receptive element is constituted among the particular minds of human individuals, it would be accurate to say that while people can have thoughts, that only God can create them" (Sunwall). How true can this be? For even those who commit heinous crimes must have thought them through before the act. If this is so, then according to Maimonides' and Sunwall's hypotheses, God created those thoughts of evil which were then received by those who eventually committed the heinous crimes. Or could one suppose that those thoughts of evil, even when they were created by God, had only to serve a karmic purpose and thus the consequence of a previous action in some previous earth-life? Furthermore, Maimonides's classification or ranking of prophetic modes was also enumerated: In the forty-fifth chapter of the Guide, Maimonides puts forth a ranking of prophetic modes which is outlined below: Inspired actions, Inspired words, Allegorical dream revelations, Auditory dream revelations, Audiovisual dream revelations/human speaker, Audiovisual dream revelations/angelic speaker, Audiovisual dream revelations/Divine speaker, Allegorical waking vision,

Auditory waking revelation, Audiovisual waking revelation/human speaker,  
Audiovisual waking revelation/angelic speaker

If prophecy is divine, must the medium of transmission be a depraved mad man? It could be claimed that prophecy is simply energy. However, once the energy is connected into by a medium and the message transmitted, what happens thereafter will depend completely on the person for whom the message was meant. Through fear, joy, hate and all such energies, which inhabit the ‘unconscious’, the prophetic energy finds anchorage and begins to germinate in the host. It becomes a leech as the narrator in *The Fishermen* articulates; for as the narrator, Benjamin, articulates, ‘I had never thought the madman could be blamed directly even when I could see signs that it was he who planted the fear in my brother’ (202). Just as fear leeches on Ikenna and ate him up, hate for Abulu leeches on Obembe and ate him up too. These energies are what Freud thought inhabited the area he called the ‘unconscious’ the expression of which is symptomatic of neurotic disorder: a disorder that results from the conscious ego’s inability to control the inordinate drives of the *Id* or the ‘unconscious’ so much so that the *Id* begins to express itself directly in spite of the ego (Rivkin & Ryan, 119-123). Indeed such was also the case with Abulu the madman, who had become the conduit of evil expressed not only in his prophetic utterances, but also in the despicable acts of perversion he orchestrated: acts that expressed themselves directly from the unconscious after he had been involved in an accident that impacted on his brain and made him lose his conscious control of his *Id*. Just recently, the social media was awash with the story of a young man who beheaded a young lady in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria, because a mad woman had told him that he needed to throw a human head into a river to avoid running mad (<http://www.mediaissuesng.com/2016/10/29/i-behead-her-because-i-dont-want-to-run-mad-suspect-2/>). While the one is fiction, the other is a real life situation. Therefore, it is not out of place to be studying this particular text in order to understand this particular situation.

Furthermore, we understand that the problem of the Agwu family started immediately their father was transferred to the Kano office of the Central Bank of Nigeria. This particular incident brings to our attention the issue of single parenting. The fact that Mrs Agwu would sit by her husband “on the big lounge in the sitting room and detail how the house had fared in his absence” (33), shows that Mr Agwu’s role as the head of the family is unquestionable. It seems everything about the care of the house revolves around him. He is the one the children feared because he is also the one that enforces discipline in the house (39-40). That lopsidedness of influence with regard to parenting by Mr and Mrs Agwu could be blamed on the patriarchal nature of the society the couple belongs to. In

traditional patriarchal societies, the man wields the authority with regard to the family, because he is the one who provides for the family: that leaves the woman with a passive role in the family and of course at a disadvantaged position. Therefore, leaving now for Yola and making his wife the sole guardian of the children makes her, in that particular situation a single parent, however temporary.

Systems theory is the social science theory found comprehensive in understanding the issues of single-parenting. According to the theory as articulated by Scanzoni, et al quoted in Richards and Schmiege, “families are changing entities, exhibiting continual morphogenesis, rather than working towards equilibrium or a morphostatic state” (277). Furthermore, according to Ahrons & Rogers & Gongla, “families change over time as a consequence of the development of individual members, interactions with expanding and contracting kinship networks, and forces within the larger social environment” (277). And this is exactly the case with the Agwu family, because the change in the Agwu family started immediately Mr Agwu was transferred to the Yola branch of CBN, which is good for his career development, but bad for his family. Furthermore, the inability of Mrs Agwu to be in charge once the husband is no longer there seems to be more of a personality issue rather than the condition of being disadvantaged as a woman with lesser power or influence in a patriarchal society. This is so because there are numerous women in Nigerian society and the Igbo society particularly who are single parents but are in total control of their household –quite unlike Mrs Agwu who is portrayed in the novel as weak and passive in the issues of the family.

Indeed we seem to live in a world full of suffering and pain and so much arbitrariness. In fact, Arthur Schopenhauer, the great German pessimist of philosophy, had proposed that we are driven by a will to live, which in itself is a blind and purposeless impelling force among other forces; in fact, according to him, it is this Will that determines human behavior, not reason. Furthermore, the suffering and endless strife in the world is as a result of the conflict between individual wills. As he puts it, “the world is torment, and people are driven in endless pursuit of unattainable goals, or goals that, if attained, bring only temporary satisfaction” (Schopenhauer in Moore and Bruder, 98). He continues in his argument that “through sex and ‘love’ we succeed only in introducing more people to his grim rock, and it is for this reason we think of sex as shameful” (Schopenhauer in Moore and Bruder). How then should we live in spite of the tragedy that living is and in view of the experiences of the Agwu family?

Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

What do you think of *The Fishermen* in relation to the African ontology?

### 1.1.1 *The Fishermen* and African Ontology

The novel *The Fishermen* raised three basic issues that are very germane to life as it is lived in our part of the world, especially in Nigeria. They are the issue of the nature of the existential world we live in which there is too much suffering, pain and misery; the issue of prophecy in a deeply religious or superstitious society as ours and the issue of parenting or bringing up of children.

### 1.1.2 *The Fishermen*, Prophecy and the African World

Africa is a continent, where majority of its people are religious. The implication is that the issue of belief and prophecy will always arise: the issue of prophecy in a deeply religious or superstitious society as ours and the issue of parenting cannot be glossed over.

### 1.1.3 *The Fishermen* and Patriarchy

The Patriarchal nature of the African society has made a woman lose that capacity to be in charge. Even children tend to disregard her authority once the male figure is not present, and that explained why Mrs Agwu was not able to keep her children under control once her husband was away in Yola.

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you *The Fishermen* helped you to understand the nature of our being as Africans.

If Prophecy is superstition, why did it materialize with the Agwu family

## 2 Conclusion

The tragedy of living is part of the experience of being human and alive. There will always be strange and inexplicable occurrences which we may never be able to

come to terms with rationally. Life will present us with its good, bad and ugly sides; but not giving up on life will always be the best bet; for Boja gave up on life when he committed suicide by jumping into the well after killing his brother, Ikenna in a moment of rage. Ikenna gave up on life the moment he allowed fear to feed on him like a leech and drove him mad; Obembe gave up on life when he allowed hate to take over him like fungus. Indeed, fear, rage and hate are all forces, which if not managed properly can lead to such tragedy as we witnessed in Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*, and as we can witness in the life we live on a daily basis.

### 3 Summary

In *The Fishermen*, we have seen how arbitrary the world can be. We have seen how a once prosperous family met its waterloo through the prophecy of a mad man, who prophesied that Ikenna would die in the hands of his brothers. We have seen how the energy of the prophecy overpowered the persons involved and fed on their fears until it became a reality.

### 4 Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) From the experiences derived from studying *The Fishermen*, can one say that prophecy is something we can believe in?
- b) Is our lives destined to end in a certain way?
- c) How can we be happy in this world that is full of pain and misery?
- d) Why would tragedy dog our lives relentlessly?

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## Unit 2

African Literature and the Environment: Ama Akwe's *The Beautiful Ones are not yet born*, Wale Okediran's *After the Flood*, and Humphery Dibia's *A Drop of Mercy*

### 2.0 Introduction

Apart from a few Journalists who have made the environment the focus of their enterprise, only literature seems to portray the problematic nature of the environment in Nigeria: in a situation where people take as normal the subhuman conditions they live in, where human beings become slaves to nature instead of partners of nature, it behooves us then to take recourse to the information provided by some of Africa's, especially Nigeria's literary texts to create a discourse situation out of the nature of our environment as mirrored in them.

Everything about the environment for the so-called environmental activist has always been about deforestation, desertification and the depleting of the ozone layer through human activities. However, protecting the environment goes beyond the afore-mentioned. We have to first understand and work with nature all around us before we could be properly positioned to appreciate the effect of the depleting ozone layer. But this seems not to be the case in Nigeria. Again, because we seem to take things around us for granted, especially our environment, we have to let art or literature teach us –for that is indeed what art or literature does –to understand or comprehend, for the first time, what we have hitherto overlooked or taken for granted; for with art or literature experiences are evoked in us which we would not otherwise have had and it also enables us, out of the fullness of experience, to become conscious of that which had always been there, but which we have never been conscious of (Beck, ed. 21). Studies in African Fiction will make us to become conscious of our environment as well as to make sense of it all in terms of how to apply the knowledge so far gained from being conscious.

We will be looking at the texts listed above and how they help us appreciate our environment. You are required to read each individual text so as to be able to generate a discourse situation.

We already know that *The Beautiful One Are Not Yet Born* by Aye Amah Akwei describes the life of an unnamed rail worker who is pressured by his family and fellow workers to accept bribes and get involved in corrupt activities in order to provide his family with the good things of life. The other workers who accept bribes are able to live a prosperous life, while he and his family live from pay check to pay check 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. The environment is portrayed as decayed and it seems as if the beauty in human beings in Ghana or Africa has been destroyed and as such the decay people carry in them manifests in the environment; in spite of the effort of the Ministry of Health to provide containers for waste matter at strategic points all

over the city to enhance its cleanliness –note that the budget for that was also over-bloated –“people used them well, so that it took no time at all for them to get full. People used them and they overflowed with banana peels and mango seeds and thoroughly sucked-out oranges and chaff of sugarcane and most of all the thick brown wrapping from a hundred balls of kenkey”(8).

In page 39, how the people relate to the environment when the bus arrives and the waiting people slide towards it, but the conductor walks away down the road. In a few moments the waiters can hear the sound of his urine hitting the clean city can. After urinating the conductor goes to bread sellers and returns while eating a shiny loaf of bread.

In page 40, Man gets in the bus choosing a seat by a window. On the way through different streets there is a hot smell of caked shit, rubbish, crushed tomatoes and rotten vegetables. The smell makes people spit so much in the bus. Across the aisle on the seat opposite the man, there is an old man sleeping and his mouth is open to the air rushing in the night with many particles.

In Page 42, we see that when Man arrives at his home he tells his wife Oyo of his meeting Koomson and his wife, of how he shook hands with the wife and how he could still smell her heavy parfum. Oyo is not pleased at all with the message and she tells herself that life has treated Mrs Koomsom well. Man also tells his wife how he rejected a bribe today in the office; but rather than being praised, his wife sarcastically refers to him as “chichi dodo”, a bird that hates excrement but feed on maggot (45).

In pages 56-57, we see how Man’s wife and Oyo and her mother show high regard for the minister plenipotentiary Joseph Komsoon and very little regard for man. Komsoon had promised to buy them a fishing boat. This is what they expected man to do but he could not because he was poor. He remains poor because he refuses to soil his hand in bribery and corruption.

In page 58, man explains how his wife, Oyo, uses proverbs to remind him to start doing things other men as Komsoon do to get money. He went further to say that the wife told him that “life was like a lot of roads, long roads, short roads, wide and narrow ones, steep and level, all sorts of roads...” “This was the point at which she told me that those who wanted to get far had to learn to drive fast, Komsoon had learnt to drive fast.”

In pages 69-94, we see what frustration can cause. Kofi Billy, a former employee of the Transportation company had an accident that got his leg amputated and was

also sacked without compensation. He becomes a drug addict and alienates himself from society. The same goes for the Teacher, who alienates himself from his home because he is incapable of taking care of his family –all these are men dying out of despair and hopelessness.

In pages 101-105, we see that in the morning Man goes to take his birth. We see the state of the bathroom: the door of the bathroom is rotten at the bottom and the smell of dead wood was everywhere. The water outlet is partly blocked with the sponge strands of the users of that bathroom, making the water drain too slowly. When he gets to the office he sees human vomit, a normal sight. When he was pressed and needed to use the restroom, he sees that the big officers locked the toilets they use and so he goes to use the public toilets. The toilet is a sorry state.

## 2.1 Objectives

Essentially, the objective of this unit to drive home the point that cooperating with nature to create a decent environment is part of the essence of being human; to engrave into our psyche and body politic that cleanliness is next to godliness; that poverty does not necessarily translate to sub-humanity; that existing in a developing country does not mean accepting as normal, living in bits and pieces.

## 2.2 Main Content

Let us take a practical tour of conscience down the lane of our environment. First, let us consider this character, Dr Adetunji's take on the environment in Chukwuemeka Ike's book, *Toads Forever*:

The Child's cry is seen as its spontaneous protest against  
The un-conducive environment into which it has been  
Ejected, as compared with the warm, heavenly environment  
Of the womb! All through life, we live in an environment  
Un-conducive in some respects and conducive in others  
Our entire life on earth sees us battling with our environment  
In an effort to make it as conducive to each of us as possible (127).

The question now is: have we made our environment conducive? Are we able to make it conducive? In the advanced economies such as Germany, Switzerland,

Sweden and the United States of America on the one hand, the environment has been made largely conducive. The problem of the environment in these countries is largely as a result industrialization, which has green-house effects, which affect everybody on the planet earth. On the other hand, the story is the same from Nigeria to South Africa, Ghana to Cameroon. In these African countries it is a different story; and it seems the state of our environment is a reflection of our level of cultural consciousness and development. Furthermore, let us look at how a comparison was made between the developed societies in Europe and the not-so-developed ones in Africa by the narrator in Wale Okediran's *After the Flood*:

River Ogunpa, the principal river in the city of Ibadan  
Runs across the city. The river is to Ibadan what River  
Seine is to Paris and the Thames to London. However,  
This is where the comparisons end. For unlike the  
Thames or Seine, River Ogunpa is not a big navigable  
And apart from one segment of the river that is dammed  
For fishing purposes, it really serves no other useful purpose  
Whereas the Seine and the Thames are about six hundred  
And three hundred long respectively, the Ogunpa is not  
More than thirty-two kilometers long. However, the  
Inhabitants of the poorly planned city have found the river  
Useful for refuse disposal. During periods of scarcity of  
Portable water, the river becomes a source of water supply (62).

The graphic picture painted here shows one the level at which our environment has been degraded. Why do people dump refuse in the river? It may be because refuse disposal bins have not been made available by relevant authorities. Again why would a human being resort to a polluted river for drinking water: it may again be because the relevant authorities have not made portable water available to the people; one may ask again, why have these basic amenities not been made available? It is possible that funds made available for them have been embezzled. Therefore the degraded state of our environment could have also been caused by corruption among public office holders saddled with the responsibility of caring for our environment.

In Ayi Akwei Armah's *The Beautiful One are not yet Born*, in spite of the effort of the Ministry of Health to provide containers for waste matter at strategic points all over the city to enhance its cleanliness –note that the budget for that was also over-bloated –“people used them well, so that it took no time at all for them to get full. People used them and they overflowed with banana peels and

mango seeds and thoroughly sucked-out oranges and chaff of sugarcane and most of all the thick brown wrapping from a hundred balls of kenkey”(8). In fact, “people did not have to go up to the boxes anymore. From a distance they aimed their rubbish at the growing heap, and a good amount of juicy offal hit the face and sides of the box before finding a resting place upon the heap” (8). Therefore, what you find obtainable in Nigeria, you also find in Ghana as can be seen from Armah’s novel.

Let us observe again how the narrator in the work of Dibia Humphery entitled *A Drop of Mercy*, articulates the state of the environment in an area in Lagos as mirrored in it:

Much of Lagos was a slum where millions  
Of people lived like gutter creatures. But  
Bariga was something else. It was a place  
So bestial, so filthy, so congested, so empty  
Of light or health or comfort. The marshy  
Flooded alleys and driveways were so littered  
With garbage and excrement that it reeked  
Of sickening squalor. The breath of it could  
Send anyone retching for days on end (19).

The interesting thing about literature is that one does not need to be in Lagos to obtain information on the state of the environment there: an American leaving in New York gets a clear picture of the Lagos environment without necessarily being there, simply by reading *A Drop of Mercy*. Therefore, the one committed to improving one’s environment, upon reading *A Drop of Mercy*, is immediately sensitized by that knowledge. Furthermore, there is also something very remarkable about how the environment is portrayed in this book: the narrator does not fail to inform the reader that the problem with the environment in that Lagos area is not only the despicable state of it but also the fact that people who live there do not seem to be aware of the filth all around them:

It was in this unsightly hell-hole, in a house of  
Easy virtue, that Miki went to prove his manhood. He  
may have taken notice of the environment, but he didn’t  
Mind. Why should he, having lived at Malu Road  
Most of his life (19-20).

The question that immediately comes to mind on reading the above citation is: why do slum dwellers not know that they live in subhuman conditions? It will be difficult to believe that human beings could be gutter creatures. Something terrible must have killed what makes them human beings. What then could that be?

In Africa people live in nature and seem unable to break loose from its stranglehold; at every major road, you see open jagged spaces reflective of a degraded environment; that our environment is breeding ground for diseases and we seem to take it for granted; that Taxis block every major road waiting for passengers and for us it is normal; that, in fact, there is a general state of anarchy, degradation and filth and still we take them for granted: we refuse to see the filth here and there and one wonders why it is so. One might be tempted to attribute this state of affairs to poverty; but is poverty enough to make people become gutter creatures? It could be argued that people who are poor will likely live in slums because those are the places they could find affordable accommodation. Attributing dirtiness to poverty cannot really hold water as an argument because there are poor people who detest filth. Could it be then a lack of culture? Probably yes, because in the context of being cultured culture means a quest for the ideal; a desire to get rid of ignorance and narrow-mindedness. However, this state of mind in the evolution of a people is not an exclusive preserve of the elite, but a state of mind a nation's body politic should assume. It is such state of mind that will make the leaders of any nation aspire for the best for their country –be it economically, politically, culturally, socially and even environmentally. When a nation's body politic assumes such a state of mind, policies are formulated to actualize the dream and laws are enacted to execute the plans to realize the dream.

Recently in Lagos, Nigeria, the news of roll-shoe riders or skaters on major Lagos roads is everywhere. Lagos State Government even threatens to deal decisively with any youth caught riding on roll-shoes or skating on major roads. But nobody seems to be awake to the fact that this development is a clarion call that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you don't construct a road without providing walk-ways for pedestrians as well as bicycle and roll-shoes ways for bicycle and roll-shoe riders.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

In What way can Studies in Fiction make become conscious of the state of our environment?

#### 2.1.1 African Fiction and the Environment

We usually take things around us for granted, especially our environment; therefore, we have to let art or literature teach us –for that is indeed what art or literature does –to understand or comprehend, for the first time, what we have hitherto overlooked or taken for granted; for with art or literature experiences are evoked in us which we would not otherwise have had and it also enables us, out of the fullness of experience, to become conscious of that which had always been there, but which we have never been conscious of (Beck, ed. 21).

### 2.1.2 *A Drop of Mercy* and the Environment

With remarks as this by the narrator in *A Drop of Mercy*,

Much of Lagos was a slum where millions  
Of people lived like gutter creatures. But  
Bariga was something else. It was a place  
So bestial, so filthy, so congested, so empty  
Of light or health or comfort. The marshy  
Flooded alleys and driveways were so littered  
With garbage and excrement that it reeked  
Of sickening squalor. The breath of it could  
Send anyone retching for days on end (19).

We are immediately sensitized by this knowledge. And if we are committed, we can then begin to rearticulate a better environment.

### 2.1.3 *The Beautiful One Are Not Yet Born* and the Environment

In this work, we are able to see how man relates with the environment. There is total disregard of the environment by man and as such, he litters everywhere, throws garbage around, spits everywhere and lives decay everywhere. We see also see how corruption is at the root of all the problems in Ghana, including the state of the environment.

### 2.1.4 *After the Flood* and the Environment

In the work we see how man totally abuses the environment by dumping refuse in a river. We see the consequences of man's disregard and uncooperative relationship with the environment. Nature retaliates with great human disaster which manifests as flood. We also see that man returns to the river in which he dumps refuse for his drinking water and thereby jeopardizes his health.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand why studies in African fiction with regard to the Environment are highly invaluable.

Are we able to advocate for a better environment through the knowledge we gain from studying fiction?

### 3.0 Conclusion

We have argued above that the one committed to improving one's environment, upon reading *A Drop of Mercy* for example, is immediately sensitized by that knowledge. Getting sensitized is the first crucial step. The next step will be to make the issue a public discourse. Bringing the issue on the public platform is a practical step at applying the knowledge so far gained. Getting people who are responsible for formulating policies is also very important; getting legislators to get a bill in that direction passed is equally important. Then, of course, attention has to be paid to the two possible methods of solving the problems that our environment presents:

- Infrastructural/Technological Solution
- Socio/Cultural Solution

#### The Infrastructural Solution

Sometimes one hears of cry of unjust treatment and neglect whenever slum dwellers' abodes are destroyed or reclaimed or even relocated by Government. Sometimes we hear of flood disasters because drainages are blocked with plastic bags and sundry recyclable materials. The questions that come to mind are: has government done enough to provide good and sealed drainages to prevent flooding, especially in slums? Have town and urban planning laws been properly enforced in slum areas? Why can't slum-areas be properly planned so that the environment could be clean in spite of the poverty of the dwellers? Do we need slums? The truth is that there will always be poor people; but being poor does not mean living in dirty environment or in subhuman conditions. Therefore slums

could be opened up if where they are located belongs to the initial master plan of a given city or town. Urban and town planning laws should be enforced there; what this means is that good roads with sealed drainage systems should be provided there. These drainage systems should be channeled to the central drainage system. In advanced societies, even rain-water coming down from the roofs is provided with channels that ensure that rain-water is collected and channeled properly. One of the reasons erosion ravages some parts of our society is simply because rain-water, during heavy downpours, flows down the roofs of many houses, hits bare earth, joins forces with other rain-water from many other roofs and rushes down the streets and roads carrying sand from bare earth, blocking drainages, causing erosion and flooding. Does our society need to be Europe for these simple things to be articulated and enforced? The answer is no!

#### Socio/Cultural Solution

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the definition of culture should go beyond mere beliefs, customs, traditions etc. However, if societies are driven by all these, why do our values, beliefs, ideas and customs not stop us from hate, evil, prejudices, discrimination based on ethnicity, corrupt practices, religious and racial differences? Why do they make us enemies of our own environment so much so that we will dump refuse on the streets, defecate where ever we see, block up our drainages through our unfriendly relations to our environment? May be because there is something inherently specific and limiting about our values, our customs, or beliefs, our ideas that make them unable to build us into fully evolved human beings, there is a cankerworm of ignorance imbedded in value specificity, custom specificity, and belief specificity, etc. Therefore, there must be a point where our values, beliefs, traditions, customs, etc meet for the BEING in us to begin a journey to being fully evolved, to lose its specificity; and that point where they ought to meet is the point where we begin to drop tradition, custom, etc and begin to trust more on common sense or reason; it is the point where we must begin to re-engineer our values and evolve a third culture, a meta-culture of sorts. This type of culture aspires for the ideal: it understands that cleanliness is next to Godliness. This type of culture aligns itself with the prayer the biblical Jesus taught his disciples: Thy Kingdom come ...Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. With the evolution of such a culture, we will begin to strive to domesticate or tame our environment. We will begin to aspire attain beauty in our nature and let it radiate through our environment.

#### 4.0 Summary

In this unit we have tried to see how fiction sensitizes on the state of the environment. It shows us how our actions and inactions help to contribute to the degradation of the environment. From *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* through *A drop of Mercy* and *After the Flood*, we see all these and gain knowledge thereby. It is the knowledge that we have gained, coupled with our now heightened consciousness that we can now thinking of intervening for the environment.

### 5.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

- e) What comparisons did *After the Flood* use to awaken our sensibilities on the state of our environment?
- f) Why do slum dwellers no longer see the filth around them as portrayed in *A Drop of Mercy*?
- g) What message was Ayi Amah Akwei trying to pass along to us by his graphic portray of the decay in the Ghanaian environment in *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*?
- h) From the knowledge we now have regarding our environment through studies in African fiction, how can we bring solutions?

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## Unit 3

### African Fiction and Fundamentalism

#### 1.0 Introduction

*Born on a Tuesday* is a gruesome story of violent religious extremism and its causes. It is the story of a young man, Dantala, whose father, following a traditional Islamic practice in Northern Nigeria, sends him and his brothers out to Quranic schools to learn under Islamic scholars so that they would eventually become Mallams or religious teachers. As we see in *Born on a Tuesday*, the parents of these boys pay for the training or at least show appreciation by providing the Mallams or Sheikhs with food such as millet every year.

When Dantala finishes his training after six years and is to go back to Sokoto, Malam Junaid, under whom he trained, gives him only seventy naira transport fees. The Malam is angry that Dantala's father did not pay for last year's training nor did he pay for the training of the year before. Dantala, however, needs about 300 Naira to be able to get back to Sokoto; but the truth is that years of being separated from family have also alienated him emotionally and even spiritually from it. This sense of alienation is also noticeable in his two brothers, who were also sent out like him but who somehow joined another Islamic group, the Shiites. They too have also lost that sense of brotherhood. So not necessarily wanting to go back home and also not having enough transport fare, Dantala decides to join a group of boys known as the Kuka tree boys, who engage in criminality. It is in being with the Kuka tree gang that the narrator explores that nature of fundamentalism and how it starts; for there, 'the boys like to boast of the people they killed' (1). The leader of the gang, Band, 'doesn't like to talk about it. He just sits there and smokes wee-wee while they talk over each other's heads' (1). Furthermore, being only boys, there is also the possibility of sodomy as is the case between Abdulkareem and Bilal (59-60).

The Kuka tree boys are indeed street urchins, because they made a living through touting and criminality as well as through being used by politicians for their machinations. Violence, death and killing have become normal to these children. They have lost the capacity to feel. But when they indeed indulge in the luxury of feeling, they attribute the deaths, violence and killing to fate, the way God wants it. Moreover, the Bayan-Layi society has been culturally conditioned religiously to attribute everything that happens to be the will of Allah; as the narrator in the work puts it 'no one separates fights in Bayan-Layi except if someone is about to be killed or if the fight is really unfair. Sometimes, even then, we just let it go on because no one dies unless it is Allah's will' (2-3). The way Allah's will is repeated in the text shows that there is indeed a problem with this particular mind-set.

You are expected to read this work in order to be able to understand its import

## 1.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to study the major themes the text focused on: issues as (1) the Almajiri question, (2) the issue of assigning anything that happens to one to fate or the will of God and (3) the issue of religious extremism: how it grows, what causes it and why it mostly and always has to do with Islam?

## 1.2 Main Content

*Born on a Tuesday* is a work that is set in Northern Nigeria. It aims at giving insight into religious extremism, especially Islamic religious extremism in Nigeria. It articulates the consequences of sending little children far away from home to learn the Koran.

Sending children away from home to Quranic schools to learn under Malams and Sheikhs brings them automatically within the system known as the Almajiri. According to Asogwa I. S and Asogwa D.O, ‘the word Amajiri was derived from Arabic “Almuhajiri” meaning an emigrant. It usually refers to a person who migrates from the luxury of his home to other places or to a popular teacher in the quest of Islamic knowledge’ (Vol. 15 Issue 5 Version 1.0, 2015). It has been an age-long practice that dates as far back as the Kanem-Bornu Empire, one of the oldest empires of the world that extended from the frontier of northern Libya. The system collapsed with the advent of colonization during which the invading British Empire around 1904 conquered and colonized the Northern Nigerian territories and imposed Western form of education at the detriment of the already existing Almajiri system of education, which had been under the sponsorship of the then ruling Emirs, whom the British had deposed during their invasion and made to function as mere traditional rulers (Asogwa, I.S & Asogwa D.O.). Having now been relegated to the background by the British as a mere religious school, the internal dynamics of the system as sustaining collapsed as well, exposing the children to various hazards including exploitation by their teachers or Mallams, who had been exposed to the so-called civilized life-style of the West, and receiving no more financial support from the state, had to subjugate the children brought under their care to begging and other menial jobs to survive (Asogwa I.S & Asogwa D.O.)

He further argued that begging as a component of the Almajiri system became inevitable after the British had vanquished the emirs and stopped the state support of the system reason being that the state could not support it because it was part of a religious practice. In place of the Almajiri system, *Karatun Boko* or Western Education was introduced and this system had state support (AbdulKadir).

Separating children from their parents under whatever intention exposes them to a lot of hazards: First, the bond that is supposed to be created between a child and its parents is lost. Of course being alienated from family destroys whatever love that is supposed to be built between parents and children. The children are exposed to poverty of the worst kind and so they resort to begging or work or even go into crime. For example, when Dantala finishes his training after six years and is to go back to Sokoto, Malam Junaid, under whom he trained, gives him only seventy naira transport fees. The Malam is angry that Dantala's father did not pay for last year's training nor did he pay for the training of the year before. Dantala, however, needs about 300 Naira to be able to get back to Sokoto; but the truth is that years of being separated from family have also alienated him emotionally and even spiritually from it. This sense of alienation is also noticeable in his two brothers, who were also sent out like him but who somehow joined another Islamic group, the Shiites. They too have also lost that sense of brotherhood. So not necessarily wanting to go back home and also not having enough transport fare, Dantala decides to join a group of boys known as the Kuka tree boys, who engage in criminality. It is in being with the Kuka tree gang that the narrator explores that nature of fundamentalism and how it starts; for there, 'the boys like to boast of the people they killed' (1). The leader of the gang, Band, 'doesn't like to talk about it. He just sits there and smokes wee-wee while they talk over each other's heads' (1). Furthermore, being only boys, there is also the possibility of sodomy as is the case between Abdulkareem and Bilal (59-60).

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Is it the will of God that people should be killed as we see in *Born on a Tuesday*? Dantala tells us of the boy who had tried to steal some gallons of groundnut oil from Maman Ladidi's house in Bayan Layi. He is caught. They ask him his name and he says Idowu. Dantala knows he is lying for as he argues, he looks Igbo. He is

beaten, with long nails pierced into his head and neck. He runs away and is later found dead. As the narrator says ‘see how Allah does his things –we didn’t even beat him too much. We have beaten people worse, *wallahi*, and they didn’t die. But Allah chooses who lives and who dies. Not me. Not us’ (3-4). But does God really interfere in the affairs of men? If God is power, is He responsible for what humankind do with that power? Aren’t we responsible for the good we do as well as the bad we do? Don’t we have a choice to either do good or bad? Won’t there be consequences for what we eventually choose to do? Any attempt to answer these questions will bring one to the knowledge that if through our experiences on earth we gain full consciousness of our being, then it follows that we were prior to gaining consciousness probably unconscious spirits (Abd-ru-shin, 210; 973); that at the point of unconsciousness, there was probably no fatality to our fate. In other words, predestination or fatalism entered in the course of experiencing, so that experience becomes our history and this history could span thousands or even millions of years. The experiences thus determine our fate. But what about free will? To attribute all that happens to us to fate is tantamount to saying that we have either been doomed or saved from the very beginning. Looking back at how Idowu died and how he had been treated before he escaped and later found dead, one could argue that the gang had a choice, which is, to hand Idowu over to the police to face criminal charges. But the reality is that this is a gang of youths with criminal tendencies, a gang of youths to whom crime, violence and killing were second natures. Are they then doomed from the beginning? That Dantala is the narrator of the story means that the choice he had made in spite of being a member of the gang brought him to that safe place from where he was able to tell his story. He had even acknowledged the fact that Banda was never an *almajiri* like him; that he was born in Sabon Gari like most of the other boys but that he didn’t attend the Quranic school; he admitted that Malam Junaidu had warned them about the kuka tree boys, who came to the mosque only during Ramadan or Eid days –the *yan daba*, thugs, who did nothing but cause trouble in Bayan Layi. He admitted that they despised these boys because they did not know the Quran and Sunna like them and did not fast or pray five times a day: one could not be a Muslim if one did not pray five times a day. However, now that Dantala was also under the kuka tree, he has come to the knowledge that they were just like him and even though they didn’t pray five times a day, some of them were kind, good people (7). The implication of this enlightenment on the part of Dantala is that the universe does not function in the rigid way that our human mind wants it to. In other words, labeling the kuka tree boys damned –as Malam Junaidu had made Dantala and others to believe –was not entirely proper because, as theological determinism would make one believe –and of course Malam Junaidu was a theological person –

the kuka tree boys were damned. But because Dantala knew his groove and even understood the humanity of some of these kuka boys, he knew that his future depended on the choices he had to make –that is, free will.

The idea of determinism can be traced as far back as the pre-Socratic period as philosophers struggled to understand the nature of the universe or metaphysics, being or ontology and knowledge or epistemology. It was Heraclitus who had argued that all was fire because of fire's ceaselessly changing nature as the root substance of the universe; and by this postulation, he wanted to draw attention to the fact that reality was a ceaseless change. In other words, permanence was illusory. He believed that the process of change was not random but determined by a cosmic order, which he called logos or word (Moore and Bruder, 30). Philosophers have, however, argued that determinism and free will are incompatible; because predestination already precludes free will just as free will precludes predestination (Moore and Bruder). However, Oskar Ernst Bernhardt or Abd-ru-shin believes that free will is the choice made by the spirit-germ, which attracts the vibrations around in line with its manifold tendencies. This choice in relation with these tendencies eventually determines man's fate or destiny (311). One may however question what these tendencies are –that is, are they pure or not? If they are not, why are they not? If the so-called spirit-germs were unconscious and seeking development through being conscious, why were they able to have the so-called manifold tendencies?

The problem of religious fundamentalism is that it has always been seen as an Islamic phenomenon, even when many Muslims will be quick to tell anyone who cared to listen, that Islam is a religion of peace. According the online Encyclopedia, Wikipedia Islam has two denominations –the Sunni Islam and Shia Islam. These two denominations are divided along belief lines: on the one hand, the Sunni Muslims believe that the father-in-law of Prophet Mohammed, Abu Bakr, was Prophet Mohammed's first Caliph or religious successor; while on the other hand, the Shia Muslims believe that Prophet Mohammed's first Caliph or religious successor was Ali Ibn Abi Talib, his son-in-law and not his father-in-law.

Furthermore, the Sunni branch of Islam is of the belief that, as a head of state, a caliph should be elected by Muslims or their representatives; while adherents of the Shia form of Islam believe, however, that a caliph should be an Imam chosen by God from the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the "Family of the House", Muhammad's direct descendants).

The differences in beliefs were not limited to who was the first caliph or not: the differences permeated the entire fabric of communal life; for example their ideas of family differed with regard to marriage and by implication sex. While the Sunni Muslim saw values as determined in this regard, the Shia Muslim looked at values as merely constructed, hence their view of marriage as contractual: this view is not just being bandied about, it is based on a Quranic passage (Qu'ran 4:24). Many Islamic scholars, especially those of Sunni denomination feel that any justification of the passage is misplaced; but a Kuwait Shaykh in a YouTube message threw some light in the discourse where he justified the *Zawaj al-Mut'a* or temporary marriage or pleasure marriage. His argument was that the Prophet Mohammed (SAW) permitted it; and since he did, it was wrong for any person to claim it was wrong or that it was prostitution or adultery: otherwise one would be accusing the Prophet of adultery and prostitution (July 17, 2011). For Ali Ünal, temporary marriage which happens between two individuals for a specified period in exchange for specified amount of money is not in tune with the initial plan of God for marriage and as such has no place in Islam ( 214).

Then, of course, the issue of a Martyr being met in paradise by 72 virgins; all these issues are definitely capable of being misconstrued or interpreted out of context. But they are indeed some of the motivating factors or some of the drivers of Islamic extremism.

Attributing everything to fate is the beginning of an anchorage in extremism, hence the constant repetition of and consignment of everything to Allah's will by Muslim Umma or faithful in *Born on a Tuesday!* This mind-set is already a given in Muslim societies. Then begins the sending away of children to far-away places to learn or memorize the Koran under some Malams or Sheikhs. The unformed or forming minds of these children are exposed to machinations of these so-called Malams and Sheikhs. They live a regimented life of prayers and memorizing of Koran. However, being humans, they also get hungry; for as Dantala, the narrator narrates:

I do my ablution outside by the taps and rush in, attaching myself  
To the end of the long row that has quickly formed. Shoulder to  
Shoulder. Toes to toe. I have not prayed like this since the last Eid.  
It feels nice. 'Praying in congregation makes us equal before Allah,'  
Malam Junaidu liked to say, 'shoulder to shoulder.' Even though of  
Course he did not treat us like we were equal to him. My knees hurt  
When I kneel to pray but I don't mind. I am praying next to a short  
Person. I think he is aboy like me until I turn and see he has a long

Thick beard.

The prayer is over and I am thinking of what to eat when this

Man who is who prayed by my side stretches his hand to me and says,  
'Salamu alaikum.'

'Wa alaikum wassalam,' I reply

His voice is bigger than he is and sounds as if it is coming from some-  
Where out of his body. I wonder if the beard is heavy for his face. He  
He asks me if I have eaten and tells me that there is free food outside

The Mosque (25).

If there were no free food, it means someone would need to buy food in order to eat. And to buy food the one has to either go work to get paid or beg to sustain oneself. The implication of all this is that whoever provides the free food has a major stake in the life of the children and even their Imam. And most often those who provide these Quranic schools with free food are politicians, who, through such generousities win the trust of these children through their teachers or Malams or Imams. As usual, it is the politician that will insinuate to these children and even their teachers that, the Southerners are attempting to take power away from their people, whose turn it is to rule (27).

Again when in the mosque, instead of teaching these children positive values as love for one's neighbor, peace and need for peaceful coexistence, etc., their Imams or Malams preach hate and politics to them. For example, the man with the grey and black hair, who supposedly is the Imam of the mosque tells them that 'this country is a slave to Jews and their usury ... this is why the West pushes our leaders to make laws that force us to go to Western schools at an early age, so that they can teach our children that this system of the Jews is the best and by the time they learn otherwise it is too late' (30). His speech is manipulative and penetrative as he rambles from one topic to the other, even the election, which makes the people to murmur and keep silent (30). He has no talk about the election because the politician provides his mosque with free food for the people that come there to eat, especially the almajiri. When he said Allah would judge those who sold their brother for money, he said it slowly so that every word went under the skin of the people listening to him (30). Then, as narrator narrates, 'The short man with the big voice walks in and whispers something into the ears of the Imam; then the Imam says to us that Alhaji Usman has sent breakfast and those who want to eat can go outside' (30).

Furthermore, one needs to understand the structure of the mosque administration in order to gain insight into its politics: recall that when Dantala returns from visiting his people in Sokoto, he finds that Sheikh Jamal was not only the Imam of

the mosque but he was also a member of the committee that is in charge of running the mosque. As the narrator puts it:

The mosque committee is responsible for choosing the imam and His deputy and raising funds. Sheikh is the vice-chairman while Alhaji Usman, who is rarely around because he travels so much, Is the chairman. Alhaji Usman built the mosque and still sends Food for sadaka many Fridays. The three very old men, who always Pray in front, Malam Yunsa, Malam Abduljalal and Malam Hamza, Are on the committee too (56).

As can be seen, the mosque actually belongs to an individual, the politician, Alhaji Usman, who doles out money to the Sheikh. The Sheikh may have explained this scourge away in terms of poverty not being able to make a man decent and in terms of how poverty is not piety as well as money not being able to make a man evil (168). But the truth is that, somehow, he who foots your bill exerts some influence over you. There is, however, no doubt that the Imams or Malams or Sheikhs have immense power over those they are teaching, just as the politicians have over them.

Sheikh Jamal we are made to understand is the voice of reason in the text and so he represents all the moderate voices, who teach the children the Koran. However the statement above coming from a man represented as moderate leaves much to be desired. However he made a very good impression in the mind of Dantala. For example when Malam Addul-Nur introduces Dantala to the Sheikh, who is his boss –he had wanted the Sheikh to admit Dantala to their mosque –the Sheikh tries to confirm that Dantala has been of good behavior. Knowing that Dantala has been graduated from Quranic School, the Sheikh ensures that he returns home to his mother first before he can be inducted into his fold. For Dantala that was it: the value for family. The Sheikh drums it in by saying, ‘The Prophet teaches us to be kind to our parents, to help them. I am sure there are ways you can help her. Then ask her if you can come back. If she says yes, come back. But only if she says yes...’ (35).

The fact is that joining the Sheikh Jamal’s fold helps Dantala to escape being an extremist, because the Sheikh guides him all the time to that which he thinks is right and oftentimes it helps Dantala to maintain balance in a society that easily gets radicalized. All the same it is the same Sheikh who tells them that the World Bank is an institution put in place by Jews to hold the world to ransom (30); so as you can see, there is a very thin fringe between extremist tendencies and balance of outlook. Furthermore, when the Sheikh begins to teach Dantala about Islam after he had seen the picture of Sheikh Inyass, which Dantala cherishes

because of how his mother revered him, one sees how Dantala tries to admit reason because he does not see how cherishing a picture translates to ‘joining of any other thing with Allah subawata’ alla’ (73-74). This brings me to the question I have always asked my students in class during a lecture on literary studies or history of ideas, especially when we are looking at renaissance humanism and how through scholastic criticism, rational Christianity was encouraged (ile, 9). Is rational Islamism possible? My students, who are overwhelmingly Muslims, often are silent at that question, because somehow they believe that it is a sin to question the Koran. All the same, I always referred them to supposed Islamic countries as Turkey and Egypt, where secularism is encouraged in spite of the preponderance of Islamic religion there. I referred them to the Turkish scholar of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Yunus Emre as well as the Turkish intellectual and Islamic scholar of the 21<sup>st</sup> century who is, for want of a better term, a rational Islamic scholar, because the stands that he takes on religious issues are stands that promote global peace and peaceful coexistence. He had argued that,

The third attribute of the inheritors is turning to science with the trio of reasoning, logic and consciousness. In an era in which mankind is being dragged along behind some dark fantasies, such a turn, which will also be a response to the general tendencies in human beings, will be a significant step for the salvation of the whole of mankind (Gülen, 34).

Now that Sheikh Jamal has decided to make Malam Abdul-Nur the headmaster of the new school that will be built, he begins to prepare himself for the job. He tries it out with Dantala when he asks him these questions:

‘If Allah asks you to do something, will you refuse?’

‘No,’ I said, confused.

‘Are you just saying it, or do you understand it, what it means to do what Allah wants when He wants it, without asking why?’ (82)

As can be seen, the children are taken advantage of by manipulatively instilling fear in them: when the time comes they will have to prove how much they love Allah by doing what He wants them to do: these things He would want them to do are obviously the things the Imams tell them are His will. For example, when a

group of five men had paid Sheikh a courtesy visit and had tried to encourage the Muslim faithful to convince the world that Islam is a religion of peace –and this had become necessary after the eleventh September terrorist attack on the twin towers in New York –Malam Abdul-Nur interjected by correcting the man that had just spoken that ‘Islam does not mean peace ... Islam means submission: submission to the will of Allah. And the will of Allah is not the will of the infidel or the will of America. Islam means that we do not submit to anything or anyone but Allah’ (84). With this outburst, it is obvious the Malam Abdul-Nur has shown himself to be toeing the line of radicalization. Again he is known to be always beating or slapping the children, who he feels are doing wrong. He always beats his brother Jibril mercilessly and he is also very high-handed with his wife.

As Dantala learns to speak English, we see that by building his vocabulary, he makes us see what they are taught and how they are taught. We see how the Sheikh teaches them who is a real Muslim and who is not. He does this when he learns the word Patron. Sheikh is patron to everybody even Sheriff and Adamu, who ran away from home because he did not want to be a Shia Muslim again. And so from the patron he knows that Shiites are not true Muslims. But is that true? If the Prophet instructs in the Hadith, ‘Of whomsoever I am the mawla, Ali is his mawla. O Allah! Love him who loves Ali, hate him who hates Ali’ (107), Muslims cannot claim to be true Muslims if they don’t accept Shiites as Muslims. However, it seems that what the Sunna Muslims detest about the Shiite Muslims are their practices; for Dantala admits, ‘Even the Sheikh preaches against the way the way they pray only three times instead of five and how they act so uncivilized during the festival of Ashura, covering themselves with mud and dirt, flogging themselves, even wounding themselves to mourn the killing of Imam Hussein in the battle of Karbala’ (107). I know that they quarrel with their idea of marriage. However, the point is that whatever they practice is derived from a teaching and the Prophet had already instructed that whoever hates them will be hated by Allah. In other words they are no less Muslims than the Sunni. But this injunction does not seem to make sense to most Muslims. How one wished they also saw others injunctions like that?

The Sheikh refrains though from preaching hatred even when he shows his dislike for the Shiites. During election periods, he encourages Muslims to go and exercise their rights but he does not tell them who to vote (116); with his positions, it is easy to see the positions of Malam Abdul-Nur as extremist.

From the word desolate, the meaning of which Dantala learns, we see how Jibril is desolate as a result of the being kept miserable by Malam Abdul-Nur

and because Jibril has become desolate, that is empty, lonely and gloomy, he refuses to share word with Dantala and Dantala is in turn desolate (94-96). From learning the word gibberish, he thinks that most of the things Malam Abdul-Nur is teaching them is gibberish or nonsense –things like they should stand up and fight against the government because they are not doing anything about Muslims that are killed by those Berom people in Jos and that they should burn all the drinking places and the mosques of those who are not agreeing with them; that those working for the government in power are working for the devil or Shaitan and are making themselves enemies of Islam; that people who send their children to university are kafiri or infidel (97). However, Dantala does the needful because he lets all that he learns of is taught to pass through his sift, which is reason; for example he does not want to have the feeling he had while he was with the kuka tree gang and lived a life of killing and violence and so the call for them to burn mosques and drinking places were calls he could not hid. He does not also see how every person who works for government works for the devil, after all Alhaji Usman whose generosity they all enjoy is a government man and even the Sheikh, who is also a member of the State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, works for government by being a member of that board. What this means is that there is a need, an urgent need for Muslims to learn to question things, to learn to interact with the Holy Koran and ask questions about things that don't seem to follow in their structure of reasoning, after all, reason is also a gift from Allah.

From the word terrify, which Dantala newly learns, we see how Malam Abdul-Nur terrifies his audience through his preaching and how Dantala is terrified by what he says. For example, it is terrifying to Dantala how it is easy for Malam Abdul-Nur to say the word *kill* especially when he is talking about the Shiites and the Darigas ...how he says that the Shiites are worse than the Christians ... how everyone is afraid of him because of how he shakes when he is talking ... how his preaching is sweet and compelling. But each time, he arms himself with reason by disagreeing with what Malam Abdul-Nur teaches; for example he did not understand how a Muslim could be worse than a Christian (119). This shows that he at least reasons and with sheer common sense, one is able to interact with texts, even sacred texts.

At some stage the Sheikh is attacked and we are made to believe that it was the handy work of the Shiites. But it could also have been planned by Malam Abdul-Nur in his rabid quest for power. When he comes to the mosque in the evening, he electrifies the audience with his oratory, blaming the Shiites for the attack on the Sheikh, stating how they have endure them even when the Prophet had instructed that they should be severe with infidels who do what they do, for example, setting up gods in opposition to Allah, and be merciful to themselves,

who are Allah's true worshippers. But he insists they have been merciful to the Shiites and they in return have paid them back with death (127). Apparently he seems to be grieving more than Sheikh who was wounded and was hospitalized. The Sheikh himself had warned Malam Abdul-Nur not to politicize his situation because he knew how these things played out: enemies of Islam incite Muslims against themselves by bombing each other's mosques, engineering thus a war among Muslim groups (130). But Malam Abdul-Nur goes ahead to engineer the burning of the big Shiite mosque on Balewa Way (131).

The return of Malam Abdul-Nur from Saudi Arabia –he had been sent away to Maradi en route to Saudi at the height of the tension of religious killing between the Shiites and the Sunni Muslim –marked the full onslaught of Islamic extremism that bordered on terrorism. He returns and as usual he becomes even more popular because his teachings appeal to the ordinary Muslim in the street. He labels his own group the Firqatul Mujahadeen Li Ihyau Islam and organizes them into units and teams and collects taxes through the unit leaders and in turn provides loans to people to start business (186). With this method, his circle of influence increases so much so that many jobless Muslim youths previously with Sheikh, moved over to Malam Abdul-Nur's camp (187).

With his debate with the Sheikh in Saudi Arabia, he articulates his stand as an extremist group: he is anti Western Education, which he thinks eats at the root of Islamic civilization, which is self-sufficient, with liberal ideas, killing Islamic values: therefore, as far as he is concerned, 'working for the cause of kufr makes a person a kafir. He emphasizes the 'kafir' and says that it is the obligation of every able Muslim to forcefully challenge and remove ungodly, infidel rulers; not through elections, because elections themselves are part of a system of kufr, but by force, because Muslims are bound by submission to the will of Allah' (196). In spite of his extremist posture, the Sheikh counters his argument by insisting that Quranic education by itself is not sufficient: the people also need Western Education in order to understand the root causes of their problems in order to be able solve them. He supports his argument with the injunction of Prophet Mohammed that they should seek knowledge of which Western Education is part (198).

Apparently both Sheikh Jamal and Malam Abdul-Nur are extremists of some sort: the only difference between the two is that on the one hand Malam Abdul-Nur wants to have nothing to do with Western Education, which government as it is represents for him and he is more than willing to violently overturn the whole system and establish an Islamic state; on the other hand, the Sheikh favors Western

Education as a way of empowering Muslims to participate in government, get the better of it and eventually establish a state inspired by Islam but not necessarily based on Islam considering the fact that there are some other Nigerians that may not be Muslims. But when he urges Malam Abdul-Nur to work with him instead of working against him, it becomes obvious that all things being equal, they would both prefer an Islamic state to a secular one which they think is Christian inspired (199). After all, the Sheikh, while he preaches in the mosque and tells the congregation about the death of the governor, he also speaks about the cluelessness of the federal government and why they need to support and vote for a Muslim president in the next election (217). The emphasis here is on the need to support and vote for a Muslim president in the next election. Why? Because there is this kindred feeling that both Malam Abdul-Nur and Sheikh Jamal have that everything would be better once Islam holds sway.

Finally the brutal murder of the Sheikh by decapitation climaxes the extremism of Malam Abdul-Nur, who has become very violent with his group and has begun to terrorize the people. The situation becomes an emergency one so much so that the military gets involved in the search for the killers of the Sheikh, arresting everybody connected to the Abdul-Nur and spreading fear thereby.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

What do you think of *Born on a Tuesday* in understanding religious fundamentalism in Africa, especially Nigeria?

#### 1.1.1 *Born on A Tuesday* and the understanding of religious Fundamentalism

The novel helps to understand how religious extremism begins through the children who are sent away by their parents to study the Koran under Islamic teachers. We are able to see that, in the first place, the major reason for sending the children out is because the parents cannot take care of them. We see that when the children leave home, the connection to parents are break. We see that having still unformed mind, they get exposed to the dangerous teachings of most teachers. They are also used to generate income by their teachers. We also see how they get recruited by politicians to do bad jobs.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand how religious fundamentalism begins among illiterate and ignorant children in Northern Nigeria.

What lessons have you learnt about religious fundamentalism through *Born on a Tuesday*?

## 2.0 Conclusion

The solutions to religious fundamentalism can be sought in both the cultural and economic realms: In a course that I teach the postgraduate students in my department, literature and conflict resolution, we had used *Born on a Tuesday* as a primary text for the course. I had asked them, after we had critiqued the whole thrust of the text's argument, what solutions they would proffer if they were asked to proffer solutions to religious extremism in Nigeria with regard to *Born on a Tuesday*. They mentioned the need for education. But the question is, what sort of education. They also talked of the need to eradicate poverty; but again, how can this be done? They talked about cultural re-orientation; once again, one needs to understand which culture has to be re-oriented.

Obviously, poverty contributed to Dantala's father sending his children away to Quranic schools; for as Dantala puts it, "All I know is that when the rains first stopped falling and the millet dried up in the farm, my father sent them –Maccido, Hassan and Hussein –to become almajirai in an Islamic school in a place called Tashar Kanuri"(43). Once nature in the form of flood wreaked havoc on his farm, it became obvious to him that he would not be able anymore to cater for his family: Almajirci would now be, according to Sule in Yusha'u et al., "a perfect excuse for some parents to reduce the burden of rearing children..." (129).

It is not enough to just suggest that education is needed in order to get a nation, especially Nigeria rid of religious extremism. It is important to know what kind of education is needed to achieve this. The Almajiri education was introduced by the Goodluck Jonathan administration in order to re-engineer the almajiri situation, which is a situation conditioned by religion; for as Dantala reads from a book written in Hausa by Mahmud Yunus:

Actions are but by intentions and every man shall have only that which he intended. Thus he whose migration was for Allah and His Messenger, his migration was for Allah and His Messenger, and he whose migration was to achieve some worldly benefit or to take some woman in marriage, his migration was for that for which

he migrated (40).

And so sending children away to memorize the Koran becomes a cultural practice. The Council for Nomadic Education was established as far back as November 1986 and two approaches were introduced: the mobile education approach with collapsible classroom and radio and television approach. The latter approach was predicated on the belief that the pastoral, nomadic Fulani clutched lovingly his radio while on the move. Their rural camps had to be provided with television and generators (Iro, <http://www.gamji.com/fulani1.htm>). This attempt failed for various reasons; as Iro puts it:

Nomadic education in Nigeria is affected by defective policy, inadequate finance, faulty school placement, incessant migration of students, unreliable and obsolete data, and cultural and religious taboos. While some of these problems are solved by policy and infrastructure interventions, most of the problem are complex and difficult to solve. The persistence of these problems is causing the roaming Fulani to remain educationally backward (<http://www.gamji.com/fulani1.htm>).

But it was the Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Administration that established the model Almajiri schools in Nigeria, one of which was launched on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2012 in Sokoto. His government had made provision for feeding in the model schools. Requisite school accessories as uniforms, books and school bags were provided. Facilities as language laboratory, dining halls, Mallams' or Islamic teachers' quarters, recitation halls, clinics, classrooms and dormitories were also provided (Nnabugwu,, Vanguard Newspaper, April 11, 2012). As the special Assistant (Media) to the Supervising Minister of Education under the Jonathan regime puts it:

As stated earlier, this is part of a comprehensive drive to completely tackle The out-of-school children challenge that is negatively affecting the nation's overall development. At present, based on existing data from UNESCO, Nigeria has 10.5million out-of-school children. Of this number, over 9million are Almajiris. Therefore, the decision to comprehensively tackle this unwholesome social challenge was deliberate and geared towards emancipating the down-trodden in parts of the north and other parts of the country where they may have migrated to. The consequences of the ubiquitous

presence of the Almajiris across the north and in other parts of the country are felt by all Nigerians, directly or indirectly. At the base of this decision to educate the Almajiris is the conscious effort to empower them with the required knowledge base and entrepreneurial skills to survive in a knowledge driven economy (Simeon Nwakaudu, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/weekly/index.php/opinion/14509-as-president-jonathan-rolls-out-64-almajiri-model-schools>).

However, there has been arguments against the model Almajiri schools established by Nigeria's former president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. In a research conducted by a reporter at Leadership Newspaper, a parent, Ahmad Mohammad Bunza, of a pupil in one of the schools, was interviewed and he faulted the programme in many ways. As he puts it:

One fundamental mistake people make is to assume that the Almajiri system of education is not a system that can stand on itself without being integrated into the Western education system .... it has not been really coordinated to a point that it became open to abuse for three obvious reasons. One is the issue of poverty from the scratch, the issue of perception and that of conception. Initially, this local mallams travelled from one place to another and that is why they are referred to as Almuhajirun or migratory people.

The problem here is that the elite from the North always try to advance sophistry rather than objectively help government find solutions to the Almajiri question. For example, Mr Bunza argues that 'Islamic education does not group students in one location for learning', (Agbo-Paul, Leadership News [allafrica.com/stories/201602081287.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/201602081287.html)). This argument is deceptive because it wishes to support as normal, the fact that kids can leave their homes in search of Quranic knowledge, while he blames government for not finding a system to support the migration of children from their homes instead collecting them in a school system designed to impart survival skills in them. His argument that the way the former president introduced the system opened the gate for contractors to chase after gains rather than provide quality education does not remove from the fact that the government genuinely wanted to solve the Almajiri problem. The corrupt practices of the contractors are part of the decadence the Nigerian society is grappling with. Again his argument that billions of naira were spent in building schools while very little was spent on catering for the welfare of the Malams and

pupils is misplaced because it is wrong to assume that there has to be provision for feeding the kids and the Mallams for the system to work. Instead, there has to be a way of reengineering the psyche of both the Mallams and the kids from thinking that the system has to be about feeding them; for as he Mr Bunza argues

That an Almajiri school was built in Sokoto at the cost of N495 Million and computers purchased at the cost of N170 Million. By the time you make a total calculation, the school will cost over N1 Billion but up to the time I am talking to you, not up to N100 Million has been spent on the welfare of the mallams and pupils. So the system is more concerned with procurement than it is for the integral aspect of education it is supposed address (Agbo-Paul, Leadership News)

Furthermore, he proposes that the federal government should listen to the ideas of the local Mallams; know the nature of the pupils and subjugate western education to Islamic education and not otherwise. But this argument is retrogressive because the whole essence of setting up the schools was to liberalize and humanize Quranic education so that students of the schools will acquire a disposition to question things they are thought; to ask questions and objectively interact with their religion and the Quran. Furthermore, it will not be enough to listen to the ideas of the local Mallams: the Mallams should themselves be subjected to constant training with the aim of ensuring that their ideas are constantly deconstructed to prevent a possibility of turning them into a dogma. Only Mallams who constantly subject themselves to this sort of training, should be allowed to teach in these schools. The curricular must be such in which, apart from vocational subjects, imaginative literature and foundational courses in philosophy must be an integral part: these are subjects that will create a possibility for both the teachers and the students to cultivate fellow feelings, look at things from various perspectives and question the origins of things and the things themselves.

### 3.0Summary

This unit provided us the opportunity to know how the journey to religious extremism and even terrorism starts. It shows us how parents send their children away to study the Koran under some Islamic teachers. It shows how the children eventually get alienated from the family and live at the mercy of these so-called

teachers some of whom are fundamentalist. It also shows us the possible solutions to the issue the problems of religious fundamentalism

#### 4.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) From the text studied, what can you say are the reasons parents send their children away to study the Koran under some scholars?
- b) When does the journey to extremism start?
- c) What do you make of Dantala, the protagonist of the novel?
- d) Having been made conscious by the novel, what solutions can you proffer in solving religious fundamentalism in Nigeria?

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## Unit 4

### African Fiction and Ethnic Conflict/Resolution: **Ethnic Identity Construction and Ethnic Conflict in Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra***

#### 10.0 Introduction

It is a well known fact that without peace there will be no development. Examples abound of countries torn apart by war, violent conflicts and terrorism. In fact, Nigeria is a case in question. War, violent conflicts and terrorism do not exist in isolation. They are brought about by our human failings, misrepresented and misinterpreted values, prejudices, hate, stereotype formations and ignorance. *Destination Biafra* by Buchi Emecheta is a work of art that exposes Nigeria's ethnic conflicts, which was believed to be responsible for the Biafran/Nigerian civil war as well as the role of colonial masters in creating stereotypes which they used to identify members of Nigeria's individual ethnic groups and which Nigerians began to use to identify themselves once the colonial masters left.

Our arts, that is, painting, literature, music, orature, dance carry our cultural types, our values, beliefs, worldviews, etc. While they are repertoire for our cultural types, they also serve some special purpose: many at times we seem to take things as tolerance, love, justice, equity and fairness for granted; and when we do, we have conflict situations, war and terrorism. However, art comes to our rescue once we are faced with such challenges and are searching desperately for peace: it helps us to understand or comprehend, for the first time, what we have hitherto overlooked or taken for granted; for with art experiences are evoked in us which we would not otherwise have had and it also enables us, out of the fullness of experience, to become conscious of that which had always been there, but which we have never been conscious of (Beck (ed.), 21). Once we become conscious of that which we took for granted, we begin to theorize about it until we become pragmatic with our theory and then begin to solve our problems to ensure peace and engender development.

If you have been a keen observer of people and events, you will notice that when people are talking, or even when teachers or lecturers are speaking to an audience, they make the most impact when they use anecdotes or stories of something or some events to illustrate their points. With such stories, they paint a picture –mark the word, paint a picture which creates an impression that drives home the point in the minds of the audience. This method in itself is a demonstration of what art can do, for stories are art forms just as pictures are. Once those impressions are created in the minds of the audience, a discourse situation is created for an exchange and interchange of ideas that are geared towards solutions. This paper will demonstrate a very practical example in the literature review of Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* in understanding how art contributes to peace building and development.

## 10.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to show that African Fiction when reconnected to its source which is life would assume its rightful position in the centre of power, the power to re-engineer society toward peace and development.

## 10.2 Main Content

It is obvious in Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* that it is the clash of values that resulted in the two military coups that redefined the terms of ethnic relations in Nigeria. Again, value is identified as a cultural type in this paper. Incidentally, some of these values were fuelled and sustained by the opinions held by the colonial masters about the ontological make-up of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. In the book, Alan Grey, a colonial administrator believed it would have been much easier for the British if they only had the Northerners to contend with. Their ill-luck, therefore, was having the intelligent and greedy Igbo and the enlightened Yoruba to also contend with (8). Sir Fergus himself was of the opinion that the Igbo arrogance would soon land him into very big trouble. This was a case of construction of ethnic identity. The prejudice resulting from it was going to be instrumentalised by the political elites of the various ethnic groups (Meyers, et al., 3; Gurr, 5). By implication, what Grey and Fergus were trying to say was that the Hausa-Fulani were not as intelligent as the Igbo or Yoruba. Therefore, they would be able to live with the British but as inferiors; in other words, the British could contend with them. The Igbo and the Yoruba, then, would likely have a very warped opinion the Hausa-Fulani in terms of mental capacity. In other words, prejudice is built immediately against the Hausa-Fulani.

The first military coup of January 15, 1966 by Kaduna Nzeogwu and his group, who were overwhelmingly Igbo military officers, was based on their value judgment that the Aegean stable called Nigeria needed to be sanitised (Nwankwo & Ifejika, 3). As Henry Bienen puts it:

[T]his coup was perceived widely as Ibo sponsored coup, although its originators were largely officers who were not ethnically motivated but who were interested in freeing Nigeria from what they understood to be the thrall of ethnic strife and corruption ( 10).

An instance of the imputation by the coup plotters on the leaders at the time of encouraging ethnicity is traceable to the statement made by the then prime minister, who was both a Northerner and a Muslim: He talked openly of the

possibility of continuing the uninterrupted Islamic conquest of the sea ( See Sklar, 1963, 98). Incidentally, the spread of Islam never succeeded in the South-east and South-south Nigeria, which are the homes of the Igbo people of Nigeria. Furthermore, the Sarduna of Sokoto, and the then Premier of the Northern region, Ahmadu Bello, had once said that the Northernisation policy did not only apply to clerks, administrative officers, doctors and others, but it also applied to all strangers. Therefore, they did not want to meet strangers catching fish in their waters and taking them away, leaving them (Northerners) with nothing. They did not want to go to Sokoto and find a carpenter who was a stranger nailing their houses; he said that he did not want to go to Sabon-gari Kano and find strangers making the body of a lorry, nor did he want to go to the market and see butchers who were not Northerners (Uzoigwe (eds), 73). Statements as these will make one understand why many prominent personalities from the North in the persons of Sarduna of Sokoto, the spiritual head of the Islamic North, as well as the incumbent Prime Minister, Tafewa Balewa, were all murdered at the time of the coup in January 1966. Nevertheless, the North believed there was an Igbo conspiracy to dominate Nigeria (Jarmon, 59). Therefore, no matter how well-intentioned Brigadier Onyemere, the character that represents Major General Aguiyi Ironsi in *Destination Biafra*, wants to be, meanings would be read from all his actions and inactions (Jarmon). Naturally all his unification policies, especially the civil service unification policy, which was to usher in merit in the recruitment of staff, was seen as a ploy to flood the Northern civil service with the better qualified and better educated south-easterners. This mind-set reminds one of the discourse on advanced and backward groups expounded by Danold Horowitz (233). Already, the average Northerner had been made to believe, though prejudicial statements, that the Igbo were everywhere exploiting (Dudley, 132) other people; that they were greedy, loved money and could do anything for it. The aim of these prejudices was to imply to the average Northerner that the Igbo wanted to dominate the country; if they did not want to do that, why would they rush into the army, the government and the professions as demonstrated in *Destination Biafra* during the counter coup by a Nigerian Soldier forcing an Igbo Nigerian Soldier to eat his excrement while shooting him (78).

It is common knowledge that art or the cultural realm and its expertise have been institutionally divorced from their real connections with power – a case which was wonderfully illustrated for Edward Said by an exchange with an old college friend of his who worked in the department of defence for a period during the Vietnam war (Said, 2-3). This disconnection seems to be the major problem here, hence the need for reconnection. As can be seen from the literature review,

*Destination Biafra* by Emecheta is an artwork that captures the whole gamut of the problems that have bedeviled Nigeria from the day of her independence to the present. Emecheta wrote the work not for its own sake, but to bring the problems to the point of consciousness so that we will begin to find solutions to them. Now the critical question to answer is: Can African Fiction contribute to peace and development?

We are aware that African Fiction is not life necessarily but a representation of life. However, the reason it represents life is to get life to live authentically, conscientiously and positively. Once we become aware of this fact, the art form, of which African fiction is part, will begin its natural reconnection to power. The ideas contained in a work of art as *Destination Biafra* are signs to the fact that the work itself is connected to real things in society, to life, to government and even politics. Instances of misinformation, prejudice, misperception or even a mass of received negative information being portrayed in that particular work of art contribute greatly to the escalation of ethnic conflict in Nigeria, which is a concrete situation: what would it mean, for example, for a leader, in *Destination Biafra*, in the character of Chief Oluremi Odumosu of the south-west to refer to the Northerners as *gwor-eating* (a derogatory term for a lazy imbecile, who does not care the least about things happening around him or her once he or she has some teeth-staining kola-nuts in his or her mouth)? Such derogatory language derives from a negative opinion about the person or group referred to.

In the work, one sees again that a Nigerian soldier, after the counter coup of 1966, tells another soldier Ejiofor, who is Igbo and whom he had shot in the shoulder that the Igbo want to rule the country by rushing into the army, the government, and into all the lucrative positions in the country. By doing that, he is only relaying a mass of accumulated negative information about the Igbo greed, ambition and exploitative tendency. And when their counter coup succeeds and they begin to rule the country, which they have always accused the Igbo of wanting to rule, the Igbo may begin to accuse them of arrogance of power, of lacking in initiative and intelligence and of being illiterate. In fact, *gwor-eaters* from the North!

The phenomena of prejudice, fear, anxiety, avoidance, discrimination and even physical attacks and extermination are offshoots of psychological conditions engendered by particular states of affairs. A prejudiced person like Chief Oluremi Odumosu is bound to make negative remarks about the next person or group that he or she dislikes. *Destination Biafra*, which a work of art, presents itself as a means of national orientation for peace building and development, in that it embodies maps or carriers of different models of conflict resolution strategies, for

its structures and representations approximate reality in a simpler and clearer way (See Furlong, 8).

Structurally, the first Nigerian republic was a parliamentary system, that is, it had a head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces, whose functions were largely ceremonial and a Prime minister, who was the head of the government. Furthermore, Nigeria had, at the time, three federating regional units: the Northern Region, The Western Region and the Eastern Region, all with its own premier. As such political power was decentralised. Each region administered itself independently, sharing, however, certain responsibilities with the federal government in its concurrent lists. Yet again, there were areas where the federal might prevailed, that is, in the executing of the executive responsibilities of the federal government. And because so many factors contributed to the emergence of a Northern Prime Minister, factors like colonial interests and demographic imbalance, conflicts, that is, ethnic conflicts were already fore-grounded. Apparently, the southerners especially the Igbo and the Yoruba, being educationally highly qualified, occupied all requisite positions in the government and its agencies: a situation that would later be reversed by the government presided over by a Northerner, hence the introduction of the Northernisation policy. The consequences of these are corruption, ethnicity and nepotism, which the patriotic military officers, led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, intended to address with a change of government, which was later to fall to the lots of General Ironsi, who originally did not support the coup (Nwankwo & Ifejika, 4), but who was called upon as the most senior officer to lead the government after the bloody coup had failed. Himself being Igbo, like the other coup plotters, the coup was seen by the North as an Igbo conspiracy to dominate the country.

Ironsi's government in wanting to restore integrity to governance abolished the federal structure of government that involved the regional federating units. In the place of a federal government was a unitary government, where ultimate power emanated from the centre. The implication of the unification policy was the unification of the federal services, so that merit became once again the only criterion of getting into a government or corporate employment thereby exposing the Northern services to the influx of better qualified southerners. This would mean again to the average Northerner another ploy to keep them under subjugation. This policy aroused displeasure in the heart of the Northerners, who planned and executed a counter coup in July of the same year, 1966, in which Ironsi and so many other Igbo and Yoruba military officers and civilians lost their lives (Nwankwo & Ifejika, 4). Before then, the Igbo had to be demonised in the North as greedy, self-seeking, over-ambitious and dangerous; as such they had to be eliminated (Nwankwo & Ifejika ). Apparently, according to Martha L. Cottam,

“Social stereotypes, group conflict, and social comparison processes are important factors in understanding ethnic conflict in Nigeria [...]” (173).

Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu, while not in support of the coup, had to accept it as the reality of the time. However, to ensure that this circle of revenge was broken, he insisted that the person to be the next head of state must be the highest ranking military officer. Lieutenant colonel Momoh as represented in *Destination Biafra* or Gowon, who was rather more interested in protecting the interest of the Northern Establishment, refused to heed what Lieutenant Colonel Abosi, as represented in *Destination Biafra*, or Ojukwu was suggesting. Momoh went ahead to become the head of state. Abosi refused to acknowledge him as his head of state. The Igbo having been demonised as greedy and wanting to dominate the country, they became targets of attack in the North. The Igbo, feeling unsafe in the North, where there was an organised genocide against them, moved en masse home, bringing along with them their dead. Abosi was forced to declare the republic of Biafra since the South-easterners no longer felt safe and protected under the federal republic of Nigeria under Momoh.

Therefore, the ethnic conflict typical of multi-ethnic societies was responsible for the civil war. There is no proof, however, that all the ethnic prejudices, stereotypes, communalism and suspicion have all been overcome in a post-war Nigeria. Nevertheless, the need for Nigerians to coexist peacefully cannot be over-emphasised. However, this peaceful coexistence should not be an imposed order like the Nigerian state tries to always do but a strong desire for a harmonious coexistence devoid of physical or structural violence. An imposed peace is a negative peace, while peace achieved through structural violence may be termed to an extent positive peace. Louis Kriesberg insists, “Negative peace refers to the absence of war; it may connote order and security, but it may also connote suppression of struggles to redress injustice (Kriegberg, in Abu-nimer, 47-9).” Furthermore, he believes “positive peace refers to at least a minimal level of equity in the life conditions of the people in the social system (Kriegberg, in Abu-nimer, n.pag.)” All the same, Nigeria requires neither negative nor positive peace; it requires instead justice and equity in the real sense of the words. Her leaders should be able to give the people a sense of belonging.

Besides, the achievement orientation value of the Igbo was probably what gave them an advantage over their neighbours in the North. For according to Green (1947, 88) the Igbo emphasise in the earlier upbringing of their children values as honesty, hard-work, discipline, wealth and loyalty to community. Therefore, such qualities, which, of course, are not the exclusive preserve of the Igbo should be encouraged in the generality of the Nigerian body politic instead of trying to hold any progressive section of the country down with cheap policies that encourage

ethnicity. For example, the Igbo have argued that they have been excluded from occupying certain “sensitive” (Petition, 1999) offices since the end of the civil war, even when they contribute more than other groups to the socio-economic development of Nigeria. As Olanrewaju Akinpeju Olutayo observed:

With little or no government assistance, the Igbo have moved from trade to industry since the end of the war. Most of these new Industrialists possessed elementary education, apprenticeship, and trading experiences before they undertook their industrial venture (147-174).

It could also be possible that the Igbo value or outlook were misconstrued by their neighbours and as such evaluated wrongly. It could also be possible that the Islamic orientation of the cultural system of the Hausa-Fulani is such that advocates subservience to one’s superiors: these superiors are mostly aristocrats or religious leaders. The ordinary Hausa-Fulani person possibly accepts his status as ordained by providence and therefore depends on his or her superiors (Odada, 163). On the other hand, Okwudiba Nnoli insists:

[...]. I gbo society looked down on people who accepted superiors, depend[sic], or relied on them for their progress. Subservience and unquestioning obedience signified weakness and lack of masculinity. It placed a premium, instead, on occupational skill, enterprise and initiative. The man who was respected, powerful and influential was the one who was self-motivated to work hard and successfully compete with, and challenge the power and wealth of his superiors. His success was basically self-made rather than attained through climbing the socio-economic and political apron-strings of his superiors (132).

Emecheta was dealing with the nature of the relationship of the ethnic groups in Nigeria, particularly between the Igbo and the Hausa: A relationship marked with prejudices, stereotypes, misperceptions and religious intolerance. In each one of these cases, the values, interests, economic states and power equations, always determine the nature of the relationship. As such, art in the form of literature has been used here to make us conscious of the problem and probably how to begin to

solve it. Some of these problems are discriminatory policies consciously made by governments headed by people of the same ethnic stock. Policies abound in Nigeria which tends to be discriminatory and harmful to development (Lewis, in Birdsall, et al., (eds.), 95). Moreover, as Johannes Harnischfeger puts it:

[T]he policy of discrimination against non-indigenes started in the Northern region, at the end of colonial rule, when the three regions into which Nigeria had been divided were given internal self-government. Northerners resented the appointment of Nigerians from the south to most of the administrative positions. The majority of these civil servants were Christian Igbo and Yoruba, who were, by and large better educated [...] with the Northernization policy, initiated in 1954, most of them were retrenched from the regional service, but they often stayed in their new home where they established themselves as traders and artisans. Their success in the private sector, however, also caused resentment, so the Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello promised to push them out (443).

Even Donald Horowitz emphasised that at the national level, regional quotas were also used for recruitment to the officer corps of the army and for scholarships for higher education. He believed that the Biafra war, about which Emecheta occupied herself in her novel, *Destination Biafra*, altered the way Nigerians thought about such things as quota system. In general, quota system strengthened the forces opposed to parochial discrimination. However, before the return to civilian rule, the military regime set aside state policies that permitted preferential terms of employment for indigenes of a state (Horowitz, 655). Furthermore, Horowitz writes:

Nevertheless, the constitution of the second republic contained provisions, stating in general terms that public-sector appointments should “reflect the federal character of the country” and insure that “there shall be no preponderance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups” in central government agencies (655).

It is also common knowledge that on the basis of the constitution of the second republic there are demands to review the existing imbalance in the composition of the Nigerian civil service, in which the North is overwhelmingly

represented more than other groups in spite of the fact that they are the least qualified (Jarmon, 56).

There are many negative things we say to people the consequence of which we may not appreciate: the stereotypes we form, the prejudices we harbor as well as the injustices we support consciously or unconsciously are things we take for granted. It is the work of art as *Destination Biafra* that will make us realize the enormity of the problem we create with those negative energies. Following, as we read the work, the communications and utterances of the characters in the work as well as the narrator's comments we begin to interact with the art work and begin to get conscious of our situation with regard to the negative energies we have put in place. Once we have become conscious of these as we read the work, we begin to consciously or unconsciously clarify these issues in our minds. We may then begin consciously to expose the implications of the perceptions and misperceptions as well as the prejudices, which are all causes of ethnic conflicts.

The work of art by itself cannot make any change. It needs the human agent to bring about the change. The work of art can only make us conscious; it makes us to know. When we know, our knowledge will mean nothing if it is not put to use. Once we come to the stage of making our knowledge functional, it means we have become aware of what the problems are. It may necessitate that we begin to create the awareness of the inevitability of conflict in the Nigerian state. It means we will begin to look at various ways of ensuring that we live in peace among ourselves. We will begin to generate options of ensuring we live together in peace to ensure development. However, while efforts should be made by every research on ethnic conflict and resolution in Nigeria to articulate and clarify the values, interests, goals and orientations of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, the role of responsible and visionary leadership play in giving the people a sense of belonging and faith in the country should not be underestimated; because it is when the results of these researches are responsibly articulated into policies and applied that these conflicts would possibly get a chance of being resolved. Eventually, development is guaranteed only in peaceful circumstances!

Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

Explain what you understand by Art as Life and how African fiction can be relevant in conflict resolution and peace building

### 10.3 *Destination Biafra* as Art form and Art as Life

Art is not life necessarily but a representation of life. However, the reason it represents life is to get life to live authentically, conscientiously and positively. Once we become aware of this fact, the art form, of which African fiction is part, will begin its natural reconnection to power. The ideas contained in a work of art as *Destination Biafra* are signs to the fact that the work itself is connected to real things in society, to life, to government and even politics. Instances of misinformation, prejudice, misperception or even a mass of received negative information being portrayed in that particular work of art contribute greatly to the escalation of ethnic conflict in Nigeria, which is a concrete situation

10.4 How African Fiction can make us become conscious of something in society we take for granted?

There are many negative things we say to people the consequence of which we may not appreciate: the stereotypes we form, the prejudices we harbor as well as the injustices we support consciously or unconsciously are things we take for granted. It is the work of art as *Destination Biafra* that will make us realize the enormity of the problem we create with those negative energies. Following, as we read the work, the communications and utterances of the characters in the work as well as the narrator's comments we begin to interact with the art work and begin to get conscious of our situation with regard to the negative energies we have put in place. Once we have become conscious of these as we read the work, we begin to consciously or unconsciously clarify these issues in our minds. We may then begin consciously to expose the implications of the perceptions and misperceptions as well as the prejudices, which are all causes of ethnic conflicts.

#### 10.5 African Fiction and peace building

The African Fiction by itself cannot make any change. It needs the human agent to bring about the change. It can only make us conscious; it makes us to know. When we know, our knowledge will mean nothing if it is not put to use. Once we come to the stage of making our knowledge functional, it means we have become aware of what the problems are. It may necessitate that we begin to create the awareness of the inevitability of conflict in the Nigerian state. It means we will begin to look at

various ways of ensuring that we live in peace among ourselves. We will begin to generate options of ensuring we live together in peace to ensure development.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand why studies in African fiction can help us to be relevant in peace building and conflict resolution.

What incidents of ethnic conflict can you locate in the African Fiction, *Destination Biafra*?

### 10.6 Conclusion

While the colonialists saw the need to grant independence to Africa, they did also see the need to make sure that the colonies never ceased to be sources of raw materials for the enrichment of the imperial centres. In the case of Nigeria it was not only coal, rubber, iron ore and various other raw materials that were of great interest to the colonialists, but also crude oil, the discovery of which became the bane of the Nigerian nation. This important discovery was of great concern to the British in regard to granting independence to Nigeria as well as dividing the country constitutionally: There had to be a demographic imbalance for their plan of being neo-colonially relevant to materialise. This constitutionally accepted demographic imbalance was to ensure that the North, which they 'could' deal with, as a result of all the imputed "shortcomings" peculiar to backward groups, remained in power, that is, if majority votes won would always be a criterion for ruling the country (see Nwankwo & Ifejika, 2).

At Independence, therefore, just as sir Fergus in the novel had suggested, the British were very careful how they divided the country because, having their values and interests uppermost in mind, they made sure power remained in the North. From then on, according to Gboyega in Zartmann ed., "electoral victories are only expected to confirm the North's predetermined right to rule, and if they do not, they are treated as illegitimate and subject to reversal (150).

Furthermore, the disparity in the level of educational attainments became also another serious source of ethnic conflict in Nigeria. The overwhelming presence of South-easterner in the army, government and all the lucrative positions in the country (as mentioned by the soldier, who had shot Ejiofor in the shoulders in Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*) which was as a result of their educational qualification and skill, was rather seen by the average Northerner as a proof of southern domination of the whole country. Therefore, the phenomena of prejudice, fear, anxiety, avoidance, discrimination and even physical attacks and

extermination were all offshoots of psychological conditions engendered by particular states of affairs. A prejudiced person like Chief Oluremi Odumosu or persons were bound to make negative remarks about a person or a group that he or they disliked. Indeed, *Destination Biafra* presented itself as a means of national orientation, development and peaceful coexistence, in that it embodied maps or carriers of different models of conflict resolution strategies, for its structures and representations approximated reality in a simpler and clearer way (Furlong, 8).

Finally, in the process of trying to involve art or a work of art as *Destination Biafra* in peace building, it behooves the scholar to capture and clarify to the public or an audience the communications and utterances of the characters in the work as well as the narrator's comments. The implications of the perceptions and misperceptions as well as their expressions of prejudices, which were all causes of ethnic conflicts, needed to be exposed by him. Awareness on the inevitability of conflict in the Nigerian state should be created; options of resolutions should also be generated. The conflict issues that the work of art, *Destination Biafra* brought to the fore should be an opportunity for the mediating scholar to make the parties know that conflicts could not be viewed as misunderstanding but a situation of conflict in which parties must be allowed to communicate their grievances clearly and completely. The clarification may be in the form of expressing the perceived injustices meted out to a party or the stereotypes and misperceptions.

However, while clarification is one of the ways of resolving the ethnic conflicts, incompatibility of objectives or values as Robert Lawrence Heath and Jennings Bryant (253) have argued have to be stated as some of the major causes of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria: while the average northern person, who is likely to be a Muslim is concerned with being a good Muslim as well as accepts his situation in life as a given, the average southern person, especially the Igbo hardly accepts his situation as a given (Nnoli, 132). These outlooks influence their objectives in life and even contribute to the way they perceive themselves.

Therefore these values or objectives have to be identified in a collaborative way; thereafter, how they clash to cause conflicts should then be clarified so that the groups involved would understand where the problem lies. Using the art or *Destination Biafra* as a big screen for the groups would be very helpful. Having identified the values and objectives of the various parties involved in the conflicts as well as clarifying to them where these values and objectives clash to cause conflict, all within the context of the references made to those things by art or *Destination Biafra*, compromise would be suggested to the groups in conflict as a way for them to resolve their conflicts and build peace, since their conflicts revolve mostly around their values and their values already predetermined their goals as well as their interests. As such, a *zero-sum-game* theory of winning at one thing

and loosing at the other may be applicable (Meyer, et al, 97). Naturally, *zero-sum-game* theory entails compromise. And compromising certain ideals and values that drive their various goals and objectives, would make competition among the groups to be healthy, in that what used to be stereotypes, prejudices and misperception would lose their negative attributes, making the groups to bring out the best in them from what used to have negative connotations. However, while efforts should be made by every research on ethnic conflict and resolution in Nigeria to articulate and clarify the values, interests, goals and orientations of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, the role responsible and visionary leadership play in giving the people a sense of belonging and faith in the country should not be underestimated.

### 10.7 Summary

In treating this subtopic, African Fiction and Conflict/Resolution, we have tried to establish the fact that African fiction as a genre of Art represents life, makes us become conscious of things we take for granted as well as how it can help us to resolve conflicts and build peace. To become aware of this, the work of Art, *Destination Biafra* exposed to us the causes of the ethnic conflicts that resulted in the civil war that was fought at some point in Nigeria's history.

### 10.8 Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) Is Art Life?
- b) Can African Fiction make us better persons?
- c) How can we make the better person we have become concrete and practical?
- d) How can African Fiction help us build peace?

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## **Module 4**

### Unit 1

African Fiction and Gender Issues: Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*

#### 4.0 Introduction

The socio-cultural and economic struggles of the African woman have always been one of the major sources of material for various African writers. Buchi Emecheta, for example, shows in *Joys of Motherhood* the struggles of the average African woman through life as a mother, wife and female in general. She presents a society that places child-bearing,, especially that of a male child, over love and happiness. In the novel, Amatokwu, Nnu Ego's first husband says quite callously to her, after she is unable to conceive. As Amatokwu says, "I am a busy man. I've no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. If you really want to know, you don't appeal to me any more..." (38).

Many male writers have often suggested that the burden of the woman was somewhat exaggerated by their female counterparts. All the same, the fact is, that literature mirrors experience and as such female writer have only mirrored the experiences of women and their struggles with male domination. In fact, it is probably literature that will energize the struggles of women for emancipation.

Nnu Ego's story clearly reveals how the story of the typical African woman changes drastically immediately after marriage: she becomes her husband's property and must do as he says.

Nnu Ego's disappointment over her new husband's means of living does not affect the man. The man proudly tells her that she must accept his way if life because he has paid her bride price. As the man puts it, "did I not pay your bride price? Am I not your owner? The question then is: why do women suffer gender inequality?"

#### 4.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to examine the struggles of women and how they are reflected in African Literature, and to understand how these women face these challenges.

#### 4.2 Main Content

Recall that Nnu Ego dedicated all his time to caring for her home, clothing and feeding her children, leaving no time to take care of herself. Even during the periods of her husband's absence, she is forced to play the role of the breadwinner as well as mother.

Adaku herself had her own fair share of humiliation for having no male child. When she has an issue with Nnu Ego and Nwasukor mediates, Adaku receives unfair judgment just because she does not have male children. Nwasukor even goes ahead to tell her that she has no rights as a woman without a son and that not having a son amounts to a sin against her husband. With this we see the place of

the man in the typical Igbo society and the place of the woman who cannot have mail children.

From the characters and the roles they play in *Joys of Motherhood*, we are made aware of gender issues in our societies. We become also sensitive to the plight of women in typical African societies. Becoming conscious of the problems make us disposed to finding solutions to them.

We have to bear in mind that feminism as a concept is Euro-American. It also became an issue for most African women who have received education and being informed, were beginning to feel marginalized within the African cultural space and context. They were beginning to feel that, like children, they were seen but not heard. The need to be heard in order to expose the unfavorable situation of the female gender became their driving force. Now we need a working definition of feminism.

According to Aihevba, “feminism is a revolutionary movement that is focused on specifically the female subject by representing and challenging the mentality that women are subordinate to men. It is a fight against cultural representation of women as domestic and sexual objects only good for nothing else” (132); For Judith Burdick, it is “an explicit reduction of the life style created by strong coercive norms that define what women are and can do” (56). She, further, states that “feminism is a psychological revolution based on women’s insistence that they have the basic right to make choice and be judged as individuals” (57).

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

### What is Feminism in Gender Studies?

#### 4.2.1 Feminism

It is interesting to note that feminism as cultural movement went through three waves: According to the wikipedia, in the mid-1800s the term ‘feminism’ was used to refer to “the qualities of females”, and it was not until after the First International Women's Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term, following the French term *féministe*, was used regularly in English for a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes.

Although the term “feminism” in English is rooted in the mobilization for woman suffrage in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th century, of course efforts to obtain justice for women did not begin or end with this period of

activism. So some have found it useful to think of the women's movement in the US as occurring in “waves”:

#### 4.2.2 The so-called First Wave of Feminism

On the wave model, the struggle to achieve basic political rights during the period from the mid-19th century until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 counts as “First Wave” feminism (Wikipedia).

#### 4.2.3 The so-called Second Wave of Feminism

Feminism waned between the two world wars, to be “revived” in the late 1960's and early 1970's as “Second Wave” feminism. In this second wave, feminists pushed beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for greater equality across the board, e.g., in education, the workplace, and at home. More recent transformations of feminism have resulted in a “Third Wave” (wikipedia). Third Wave feminists often critique Second Wave feminism for its lack of attention to the differences among women due to race, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion, and emphasize “identity” as a site of gender struggle.

#### 4.2.4 Alternative voices in Feminism

However, some feminist scholars object to identifying feminism with these particular moments of political activism, on the grounds that doing so disregards the fact that there has been resistance to male domination that should be considered “feminist” throughout history and across cultures: i.e., feminism is not confined to a few (White) women in the West over the past century or so. There is the queen Amina saga, Aba women's riot and these are feminist phenomena in other cultures as the case may be. In addition, even when we consider only relatively recent efforts to resist male domination in Europe and the US, the emphasis on “First” and “Second” Wave feminism ignores the ongoing resistance to male domination between the 1920's and 1960's and the resistance outside mainstream politics, particularly by women of color and working class women (Cott 1987).

#### 4.2.5 African Feminism

Feminism has been considered through a different prism by African female intellectuals. Many consider the works of the Nigerian writers as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, etc as feminist works in the sense that they all show in no small measure how the female gender is disadvantaged in society. They do not

necessarily believe that there should be any competition between the male and female as they all have different roles in nature to play. Some as Nwapa, Acholonu and Emecheta prefer to be seen as womanists while other intellectuals as Ogundipe-Leslie prefers the term Stiwanism. In Stiwanism, Molar Ogundipe-Leslie argues that:

- a) Feminism is not a cry for any one kind of sexual orientation –she argues that she is neither homophobic nor heterosexist; for sexual practice in Africa tends to be private and considered private. Same sex sexuality still awaits attention and research and homosexuals are not persecuted by the state in West Africa<sup>4</sup> (?)
- b) Feminism is not the reversal of gender roles (Gender is defined as a socially constructed by Leslie. I however think that it is the roles that are socially and culturally constructed. Gender is biologically determined if it has to do with nature.
- c) Feminism is not penis envy or gender envy: that is, wanting to be a man as they say to women.
- d) Feminism is not necessarily oppositional to men: it argues instead that a woman's body is her inherent property not to be owned, used and dumped by men.
- e) Gender is not setting the woman against the man nor is it setting the white race against other races gender-wise.
- f) It is not simply imitating the Western woman's rhetoric about feminism.
- g) Nor is it opposed to African Culture and heritage, but argues that culture is dynamically evolving and certainly not static –that culture should not be immobilized in time to the advantage of men as most men in Africa want it to be (Ogundipe-Leslie)
- h) It is not a choice between extreme patriarchy on the one hand or hateful separatism from men

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand the connection between fiction and Gender studies.

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<sup>4</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, Stiwanism: Feminism in an African Context in African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, Olaniyan and Quayson (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007)

How has Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* portrayed the situation of the female gender in Africa, especially in Nigeria?

## 5.0 Conclusion

Most African societies are patriarchal in nature, whereby the man is at the top of the hierarchical echelon. It is therefore patriarchy that has fore-grounded the dehumanization and degradation of the value of the female gender. According to Makama, "the patriarchal society sets the parameter for women's structurally unequal position and families and markets by condoning gender-differential terms in inheritance rights and legal adulthood by tactically condoning domestic and sexual violence" (16).

Three views have emerged in recent times as serious explanations for women exploitation and oppression. These three views have been categorized as the *materialist perspective*, the *radical feminist position* and the *postmodernist perspective*.

### 5.0.1 The Materialist Perspective

The materialists see oppression of women as systematic and built into the structure of society. For them, women subordination has a material base essentially caused by private and primitive accumulation, which is what capitalism represents. For them, private accumulation engenders class formation in society, usually structured hierarchically in patriarchy, where man is the head. The argument of the materialist is twofold: the first is that women are socialized into low paying jobs, while the second is

## 6.0 Summary

In this unit, we have tried to understand the condition of women in Africa through Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*. We tried to equate the condition of African women with their counterpart in the West through understanding feminism in their own context. We have done this following the various waves in feminism, including womanism, a variation of feminism that originated with the African American, Alice Walker. We also looked at the African brand of feminism, which with Emecheta is feminism with little letter f; it is stiwanism with Ogun-dipe-Leslie and womanism with Nwapa and Acholonu.

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) In what way does *Joys of Motherhood* reflect the travails of women in an African Patriarchal society?

- b) What does Buchi Emecheta mean with being a feminist with little letter f?
- c) Differentiate between Western Feminism and African Womanism?
- d) What does Ogundipe-Leslie mean by Stiwanism?

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## Wikipedia

## Unit 2

African Fiction and Obnoxious Traditions: Adam Abubakar Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*

### 11.1 Introduction

Traditions are generally defined as the transfer of customs, beliefs and behaviour from one generation to another within a community or society. The word is said to

derive from Latin meaning something to be handed over. Included in tradition is language, objects, beliefs, practices, institutions, music, dance, art, sculpture. They are usually developed over a long period sometimes even centuries and they keep on evolving. For some, tradition is simply a collection of age-old customs, accepted, not on critical grounds, but merely because things have always been so or have always been done that way. Any attempt at improvement is opposed in the name of tradition.

We can also speak of the traditions of an organization for example traditions of educational institutions, the military or church or mosque or even of families. There are also national and regional traditions. Tradition is also regarded as being more than mere conservatism.

It includes the continual presence of a spirit and of a moral attitude. Africa has a lot of traditions and Africans take pride in their traditions which are expressed in music, art, dance and sculpture. These traditions have been passed from one generation to another through oral traditions. Music and poetry in African traditions are very important and are often rendered in call and response form. Songs regularly accompany marriage, birth, rites of passage, farming, hunting and even political activities. Music is often used in different African cultures to ward off evil spirits and to pay respects to good spirits, the dead and ancestors.

African tradition is also seen in dance which utilizes symbolic gestures, masks, costumes, body painting and props to communicate. The dance movements can be simple or complex with intricate actions including fast rotation, ripples of the body and contraction and release. Dance is used to express emotion, whether joyful or sorrowful and it is not limited to just the dancers. Often spectators will be encouraged to join in.

Another area of African tradition is in the arts and in Nigeria every part of the country has historical art works. For example the Nok culture with their terracotta, the bronze work of the Igbo Ukwu and metal art works of Ile Ife. Traditions being an integral part of human society are important for a number of reasons

1. They reinforce values like respect for elders, hard work, integrity, faith etc.
2. Tradition contributes to sense of belonging and enhances community spirit as well as giving people a sense of identity.
3. They contain knowledge collected over the years.
4. Tradition helps mould and develop positive attitudes and characters.

5. Teaches the next generation about a particular or shared past.

## 11.2 Objective

The Objective of this unit is see how literature exposes obnoxious traditional practices in Africa, especially Nigeria and what such exposition means to the scholar of African literature.

## 11.3 Main Content

*Season of Crimson Blossoms* is a story of forbidden relationships in a conservative Muslim northern community. It tells the story of Binta Zubairu and opens with the statement “Hajiya Binta Zubairu was finally born at fifty five when a dark-lipped rogue with short, spiky hair, like a field of miniscule anthills, scaled her fence and landed boots and all, in the puddle that was her heart” (Ibrahim 3). What does it mean that a fifty five year old woman was reborn?

Hajiya Binta was a widow who lost her husband to one of the incessant religious and ethnic crisis that characterises Northern Nigeria. He was killed by the very boys he was helping. Munkaila her son moves her to Abuja away from the crisis in Jos but they end up with another crisis. It started when Hassan ‘Reza’ Babale a twenty six year old thug and weed dealer breaks into her house. She reminds Reza of his mother and he reminds Hajiya Binta of her dead son Yaro. Binta had been married off to a man she barely knew when she was just fifteen years and sexual relations with her husband was a duty to be performed as a wife. Hassan stirred up something in her which was culturally forbidden.

However her passion got the better of her and she started an affair with a man thirty years younger. Reza would meet her at her house when her granddaughter and niece had left for school. However Hureira her daughter arrived suddenly having separated from her husband. This presents the lovers with a major problem. Hajiya Binta tries to get Hureira to go back to her husband’s house and clear the coast for her and Reza but she refuses. Finally they resort to using Shagali (enjoyment in Hausa) hotel. This step is what leads to their exposure. Malam Haruna, Hajiya Binta’s suitor coincidentally sees her and Reza arriving and leaving the hotel. He makes the right connection and conclusion and goes on to tell Uztaz the Islamic teacher. Unfortunately Uztaz’s wife overhears the conversation and the issue becomes talk of the town such that Hajiya Binta is derided at the Islamic school. Meanwhile her relationship with Reza begins to unravel as seen where he almost slapped her and he begins to compare her with Leila the young lady they

had kidnapped. Things come to a head when Malam Haruna reports her to Munkaila her son. He comes to the house and meets Reza there confirming what he was told. In the end Reza in a bid to escape strikes Munkaila who dies. Themes in the book include that of relationships, politics and criminality.

The book's thrust revolves around the affair of fifty five year old Hajiya Binta and twenty six year old Hassan 'Reza'. This kind of relationship is regarded as taboo in virtually every culture in Nigeria. However it is more so in conservative Muslim northern Nigeria. The irony however is that what is regarded as taboo for women is a regular practice by men. Society tolerates a fifty five year old man who has an affair with a twenty something or even less year old lady but changes the rules when it comes to women. Related to this is the issue of sexual repression among women. Hajiya Binta wanted more out of her sexual relationship with her husband but is restricted by a culture that regards women who do so as wanton or promiscuous. Note Dijen Tsamiya's lecture to a teenage soon to be bride about sex, it's all about the man (51). Sex is therefore exclusively for the man's satisfaction and the wife's feelings are immaterial. One can therefore see why Hajiya couldn't stop once she started the affair with Reza. She continued even after she knew that their secret had been exposed when the other women in her Islamic school began to insult her.

Another unwholesome tradition that the book addresses is the issue of early marriage. The 2003 Child Rights Act sets the age of marriage in Nigeria at eighteen years, however only twenty three states have taken concrete steps to implement it. Thus in northern Nigeria particularly in the rural areas girls are married off before their eighteenth birthday. This is the reason for the high cases of Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF) in northern Nigeria. Hajiya Binta is lucky to have escaped this traumatic and humiliating condition. However as she told Reza love had no place in her relationship with her husband. She hardly even knew him before their wedding (186). Early marriage is actually forced marriage because the girls cannot refuse. Hajiya Binta dared not refuse to marry Zubairu although she clearly wanted an education. Some teenagers who are bold have rejected these marriages with grave consequences. A case widely reported in both local and foreign media was that of fourteen year old Wasila Umar in Kano state. She killed her husband and three other guests when she concealed rat poison in their food. Her father had forced her to marry the thirty five year old man.

Hajiya Binta had to also endure the tradition of 'Kunya'. This is where mothers develop an avoidance relationship with the first child and refrains from calling the child by its name or showing affection to the extent of not even talking to the child

in extreme cases (Yusuf 11). Hajiya Binta's love and affection for her first child Yaro could not be expressed due to this culture and when the child dies tragically she is traumatized. One can argue that her affair with Reza was fallout of her relationship with Yaro. Nagu stated that their escapades had an incestuous look to it because she reminded him of his mother and he reminded her of her son.

#### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

Do you think it was proper for Hajiya Binta to be born at 55 years of age?

##### 11.3.1 Marriage as Bondage in *Season of Crimson Blossoms*

Society tolerates a fifty five year old man who has an affair with a twenty something or even less year old lady but changes the rules when it comes to women. Related to this is the issue of sexual repression among women. Hajiya Binta wanted more out of her sexual relationship with her husband but is restricted by a culture that regards women who do so as wanton or promiscuous. Note Dijen Tsamiya's lecture to a teenage soon to be bride about sex, it's all about the man (51). Sex is therefore exclusively for the man's satisfaction and the wife's feelings are immaterial. One can therefore see why Hajiya couldn't stop once she started the affair with Reza. She continued even after she knew that their secret had been exposed when the other women in her Islamic school began to insult her.

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##### 11.3.2 Hajiya Binta and the predicament of child marriage

The 2003 Child Rights Act sets the age of marriage in Nigeria at eighteen years, however only twenty three states have taken concrete steps to implement it. Thus in northern Nigeria, particularly in the rural areas, girls are married off before their eighteenth birthday. This is the reason for the high cases of Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF) in northern Nigeria. Hajiya Binta is lucky to have escaped this traumatic

and humiliating condition. However as she told Reza love had no place in her relationship with her husband. She hardly even knew him before their wedding (186). Early marriage is actually forced marriage because the girls cannot refuse. Hajiya Binta dared not refuse to marry Zubairu although she clearly wanted an education.

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand why *Season of Crimson Blossoms* is relevant in fighting the menace obnoxious traditional practices.

What lessons have you been able to learn about harmful traditional practices after reading *Season of Crimson Blossoms*?

## 11.4 Conclusion

*Season of crimson Blossoms* is a powerful narrative of forbidden relationships and the underlying cultural practices that can make a fifty five year old woman find satisfaction in a relationship with a twenty six year old man. The book accurately portrays issues that women in Nigeria's Muslim north contend as well as issues that limit their self-actualization. Traditions ought to serve society and therefore should be dynamic. Holding unto discriminatory and harmful traditions as we have seen in the book does not do society any good. In the end there will always be some form of revolt as Hajiya Binta did with rather grave consequences!

### 6.1 Summary

In this unit, we have been able to gain insight into the dangers of traditional practices support wit ignorance. We have seen how the sexual energies repressed by tradition resurfaced in Hajiya Binta and how this sexual energy was reawakened by a love affair with a young man the age of her son, whom she could not show love because of tradition.

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) What obnoxious traditional practices can be found in *Season of Crimson Blossoms*?
- b) Was it wrong for Hajiya Binta to have engaged in sexual escapade with Reza?

- c) Why did Hajiya refuse to marry the elderly man Subairu?
- d) What do you think about tradition?

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### Unit 3

African Fiction and Ideology: Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Okri's *Dangerous Love*

#### 1.0 Introduction

According to Wikipedia,

The term "ideology" was born during the Great Terror of French Revolution, and acquired several other meanings thereafter.

The word, and the system of ideas associated with it, was coined by Antoine Destutt de Tracy in 1796, while he was in prison pending trial during the Terror. The coup that overthrew Maximilien Robespierre allowed Tracy to pursue his work, assembling the words *idea*, from Greek ἰδέα (near to the Lockean sense) and *-logy*, from -λογία. Tracy reacted to the terroristic phase of the revolution by trying to work out a rational system of ideas to oppose the irrational mob impulses that had nearly destroyed him. He devised the term to refer to a "science of ideas" which he hoped would form a secure foundation for the moral and political sciences by examining two things: 1) sensations people experienced as they interact with the material world; and 2) the ideas that formed in their minds due to those sensations. He conceived of "Ideology" a liberal philosophy which provided a powerful defense of individual liberty, property, free markets, and constitutional limits on state power. He argues that among these aspects ideology is the most generic term, because the science of ideas also contains the study of their expression and deduction.

From the etymology of the word ideology we are able to see that Tracy tried to work out a rational system of ideas to oppose the irrational mob impulses that nearly destroyed him; and that rational system of ideas that was mobilized to oppose the irrational mob impulses is what we know now as ideology.

Interestingly enough, most works of African writers have been diligently articulated –as the muse led – to project an ideology or a rational system of ideas that oppose the irrational mob impulses that ordinarily can destroy society.

### 1.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to show that most African fictions are ideological in the sense that they oppose in their entirety the irrational mob impulses that tend to stifle societies.

### 1.2 Main Content

In the works of fiction listed above, we can see vividly how the writers build a rational system of ideas that oppose the irrational mob impulses that ordinarily can destroy society. In Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, we can observe how Achebe does this through the characters, Ikem and BB, Chris's girlfriend: Ikem had

recalled the lesson he had learnt from Beatrice, who, he argued had charged him with assigning to women “the role of a fire-brigade after the house has caught fire and been virtually consumed” (98). According to Ikem, her charge has forced him to sit down and contemplate the nature of oppression--how flexible it must learn to be, how many faces it must learn to wear if it is to succeed again and again (99). Then immediately, Achebe begins through Ikem to build a rational system of ideas that oppose the irrational mob impulses that ordinarily can destroy society.

'Experience and intelligence warn us that man's progress in freedom will be piecemeal, slow and undramatic. Revolution may be necessary for taking a society out of an intractable stretch of quagmire but it does not confer freedom, and may indeed hinder it.

'Bloody reformist? That's a term of abuse it would be redundant to remind you I have had more than my fair share of invoking against others across the years. But I ask myself: beyond the pleasant glow that javelin of an epithet certainly brings to the heart of the righteous hurler what serious benefit can it offer to the solution of our problems? And I don't see any.

'Reform may be a dirty word then but it begins to look more and more like The most promising route to success in the real world. I limit myself to \_most promising\_ rather than \_only\_ for the simple reason that all certitude must now be suspect.

'Society is an extension of the individual. The most we can hope to do with a

problematic individual psyche is to \_re-form\_ it. No responsible psychoanalyst would aim to do more, for to do more, to overthrow the psyche itself, would be to unleash insanity. No. We can only hope to rearrange some details in the periphery of the human personality. Any disturbance of its core is an irresponsible invitation to disaster. Even a one-day-old baby does not make itself available for your root-and-branch psychological engineering, for it comes, trailing clouds of immortality. What immortality? Its baggage of irreducible inheritance of genes. That is immortality.

'It has to be the same with society. You re-form it around what it is, its core Of reality; not around an intellectual abstraction.

'None of this is a valid excuse for political inactivity or apathy. Indeed to understand it is an absolute necessity for meaningful action, the knowledge of it being the only protective inoculation we can have against false hopes and virulent epidemics of gullibility.

'In the vocabulary of certain radical theorists contradictions are given the status of Some deadly disease to which their opponents alone can succumb. But contradictions are the very stuff of life. If there had been a little dash of contradiction among the Gadarene swine some of them might have been saved from drowning.

'Contradictions if well understood and managed can spark off the fires of invention. Orthodoxy whether of the right or of the left is the graveyard of creativity.

'I didn't owe this insight to you, BB. I drank it in from my mother's breast. All I've ever needed since was confirmation. "Do I contradict myself?" asked Walt Whitman. "Very well, I contradict myself," he sang defiantly. "I am large, I contain multitudes." Every artist contains multitudes. Graham Greene is a Roman Catholic, a partisan of Rome, if you like. Why then does he write so compulsively about bad, doubtful and doubting priests? Because a genuine artist, no matter what he says he believes, must feel in his blood the ultimate enmity between art and orthodoxy.

'Those who would see no blot of villainy in the beloved oppressed nor grant The Faintest glimmer of humanity to the hated oppressor are partisans, patriots and partyliners. In the grand finale of things there will be a mansion also for them where they will be received and lodged in comfort by the single-minded demigods of their devotion. But it will not be in the complex and paradoxical cavern of Mother Idoto' (98-101).

Furthermore, Ben Okri in his novel *Dangerous Love* builds a rational system of ideas that oppose the irrational mob impulses that ordinarily can destroy society. We see how Omovo's thoughts become a practical way the narrator begins the formulation of a concrete ideology:

[...]. In vision begins responsibility – and even as we die, and shrink, and are taken over, reduced, seen as animals, as invisible, even as the streets spill over with the poor, even as we dance our lives away, and celebrate the powerful, worship like servants at their vulturous shrines, we can utter psychic decisions and set forces into motion that could change our lives forever –in vision begins action –in action begins our destiny –for the things that you do change you – and the changes affect other things you do – to him that hath shall be given –seek and ye shall find –to

him that hath not shall be taken from, even that  
which they haveth – you either become, or you die  
– (Okri, 362).

Again, during the moment of illumination, a word kept repeating itself to Omovo. The narrator tries therewith to hypnotize his audience with the ideology into action. He guides them on how to begin the action:

[T] ransfiguration – transfigure the deception of  
education – all education is bad until you educate  
yourself – from scratch – start from the  
beginning, from the simplest things – assume  
nothing –question everything – begin again the  
journey from the legends of creation – look again  
at everything – keep looking – be vigilant –  
understand things slowly –digest thoroughly  
– act swiftly –re-dream the world – restructure self  
– all the building blocks are there in there chaos –  
USE EVERYTHING – USE EVERYTHING  
WISELY –EVERYTHING HAS SIGNIFICANCE  
– (363).

In each one of the works, we see how the writers consciously project their ideology on to the reader, with the sole of aim destroying the false structures that have been erected over a long period of time.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

To which extent could an African fiction be said to be ideological?

#### 1.2.1 African Fiction and Ideology

African Fiction could be said to be ideological to the extent that it could be seen through the utterances of the characters or the narrators to build a rational system of ideas that oppose the irrational mob impulses that ordinarily can destroy society.

#### 1.2.2 African Fiction and the nature of their ideological positions

Whenever works of fiction are ideological, we see not only how they build those rational systems of ideas that always oppose the irrational mob impulses that ordinarily are capable of destroying societies –as Achebe had observed in *Anthills of the Savannah*, but we also see how they subtly project them on to the readers.

They are usually educative, informative and enlightening-so much so that the reader feels his or her psyche being re-engineered.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand how African Fiction can be Ideological.

Read the three works listed above and find out in the various pages where the writers have taken ideological positions

### 2.0 Conclusion

It is a fact that the above works have been ideological in some instances in the texts. However, there is a danger of mistaking ideological positions for propaganda. It is not so. It was Achebe who once said that all art is propaganda but not all propaganda is art. And this is an apt capturing of the essence of literature and ideology.

### 3.0 Summary

In this unit we have defined ideology and also tried to use this definition to understand how African fiction as art can be ideological and what it uses these ideological systems to achieve. We used two works by African writers to demonstrate how ideology works in these texts and what they are used to achieve.

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) What is Ideology?
- b) Use this definition as a working definition for understanding ideology in African fiction.
- c) How is ideology usually used in texts?
- d) What are the aims for building ideological positions in African Fiction?

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## Unit 4

### African Fiction and Human Psychology: *Ben Okri's Dangerous Love*

#### 13.0 Introduction

Social Change or societal engineering is a concept that is bandied about without people being really conscious of how this can happen. Psychic engineering is even more apt in terms of the implications of social change and societal engineering. In essence, it may not be possible to change a society without the change happening inside a man's being or without allowing the inner man to radiate the goodness that is within man, which he in turn radiates to his society. There is an Igbo adage

which says that when a finger contaminates itself with oil, the oil spreads to other fingers or contaminates the other fingers. By implication, whatever good we conceive and apply affects the whole society the way oil spreads to the whole fingers from the one it first touched. We will not delude ourselves, though, that we can bring down paradise on earth; no, we cannot; but we can try to make life for the greater part of our humanity much better.

In *Dangerous Love*, Ben Okri tries to expose the ills of the Nigerian society and has suggested how we could cure ourselves of the ills. Curing the ills of the society can only be done when we see the entire structure as defective and possibly begin to rearticulate it.

### 13.1 Objective

The objective of this unit is to prove that it is possible to re-engineer and transform human psyche in the process of nation building in Africa, especially in Nigeria; that once a cultured man or woman emerges, a healthy nation automatically evolves with his or her emergence!

### 13.2 Main Content

Over the centuries, scholars have occupied themselves with the question of education, societal transformation and change. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jean-Jacque Rousseau suggested a kind of education whereby moral education would be introduced to the child before the age of 18. From 18, religious education should then be introduced. The aim is to produce a human being capable of understanding the import of religious doctrines without being derailed into fanaticism (ile, 39-40). Furthermore, the German Philosopher Immanuel Kant in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, as translated by Beck, sought the known truths which might be used to erect a general system of laws by a rigorous study of certain laws as duty established through a priori knowledge or reason, that is, knowledge independent of experience or empirical reality. Through this rigorous enquiry he established when an action was moral and when it was not. He went further to make argument for goodwill as the sole determinant of good and happiness. He then argued that there were moral imperatives limited by condition and therefore not categorical. However, moral imperatives that were not limited by condition were always categorical, for one was expected to act only according to that maxim by which one could at the same time will that it should become a universal law (9-22). By implication, therefore, Kant was trying to guide man towards moral actions

that would indeed become beacons of light to all humankind in their universality. What this means is that man has never existed in a vacuum. Things were always put in place to guide human behavior, to engineer human psyche. Even Thomas Hobbes envisioned a social contract between the people and the state whereby the people were expected to submit their will to the state, which in turn guaranteed social order (Ile, 18-19). In all this, one sees that what has always been intended was social and psychic engineering in a bid to ennoble and improve humanity. This is what Ben Okri sets out to achieve in his novel, *Dangerous Love*.

He tries to awaken in the reader the desire for change, to create a “mode of information” as propounded by Murray Krieger which he thought should replace “mode of production” as history’s controlling force. This means that we can look at the historical process of change or transformation through the dialectic process of the drive to satisfy the desire for change or transformation: as a desire for a particular kind of change dies out, another desire for a new kind of change arises. To understand the concept “mode of information” very well, one must understand the Marxist “mode or means of production” by looking at man as a social animal with physical needs. These physical needs can, however, only be satisfied when man develops or produces the means to satisfy them. For example, man needs shelter; therefore, he develops or produces the means to build a house. These means of producing the satisfaction to his need for a house is called Forces or Means of Production. In the case of “mode of information” man is looked upon as having inner needs for the ideal; however, these needs can only be satisfied when man uses the right information types in a certain way to satisfy them. In other words, it is not enough to have information: the information we have remains information until we have turned it into knowledge by letting it be filtered by our critical faculty which should always be guided by objectivity; and thereafter, what matters is what we do with the knowledge which the information we have turned into knowledge avails us. For example, Okri presents the character, Ifeyiwa to the reader in such a way as makes the reader look at Ifeyiwa as representing a repressive cultural practice among the Nigerian ethnic groups, where young girls are forced into marriages they would, under normal circumstances, not contract, by their parents, who have their own selfish interests at heart in contracting the marriages: he represents Ifeyiwa and Takpo her husband as a mismatch. While the former is young and has formal education, the latter is old, relatively rich, but illiterate. By implication therefore, certain cultural practices are repressive. Apparently certain cultural practices are repressive, while others are not. What this implies is that culture in terms of values, beliefs, and so on are constructs as the great German Philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche had tried to prove not only in his

*On The Genealogy of Morals* but also in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. But whenever man aspires towards the ideal in terms of transformation, he constructs also ideal cultural values as Kant argued in his proposal of *categorical imperative*, which states that “moral imperatives command unconditional conformity of our subjective maxim to a law, while the law contains no condition, that is, no reference to specific goals on which it depends” (Kant as translated by Lewis Beck, xii). For example, “an imperative is hypothetical (i.e., it has an ‘if-clause’) if it states that some action is right or advisable as a means to some specific goals” (xii). And so Okri’s *Dangerous Love* is an attempt to transform Nigerians by destroying the pieces of information they have accumulated over so many centuries without necessarily being able to turn them into knowledge which would have engendered the ideal through transformation of individual psyches.

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

Can you describe Psychic Re-engineering in *Dangerous Love*?

### 13.4.1 **Psychic Re-Engineering in *Dangerous Love***

Although the text has as protagonist, a certain Omovo, yet the story is woven around other great characters that represent human experiences: Ifeyiwa, her relatively older husband Takpo, Dr Okocha the master artist, Omovo’s father, his wife Blackie, his run-away sons Umeh and Okur, Tuwo the woman seducer and returnee from England, Keme the journalist, Okoro and Dele, who are both Omovo’s good friends and a host of others who represent ordinary people in Nigeria’s complex societies.

Omovo is the life-force of the novel, because through his experiences, the writer is able to give us insight into the complex human nature as well as the nature of things in the Nigerian Society from which the setting is derived. Omovo lives with his father and his stepmother. He falls in love with a young girl of his age, Ifeyiwa, who unfortunately is Takpo’s wife.

Omovo’s father lost his first wife, who is Omovo’s mother, and so he relapses into drinking; and having no good job, he is unable to provide for his sons, especially Umeh and Okur, whose secondary school certificate results are good enough to take them to the university, but who cannot because their father is not able to sponsor their education. They lose all respect for him and he frustrates them into leaving home. Their departure, which sobers Omovo, however, becomes a

way for him “to explore the hidden meanings of his life and to come to terms with the miasmic landscapes about him. Painting became for him a part of his response to life: a personal and public prism” (84). Okri as narrator uses Omovo’s painting to structure information flow to the reader: he creates a scenario where Omovo,

[T]urns his gaze upwards at the sky. With his eyes wide open he tried to imagine objects. He tried to imagine darkness. He couldn’t. Then, shutting his eyes he tried to imagine trees, but he could not see them in all their solidity. He found that, as always, he had to create the image within him, he had to bring it into being as if he were painting it internally [...]. He began to think about the concrete basis of ideas, and about the long silent phases it had taken him to trap the scumscape on canvas, when his mind clouded (86).

The concrete basis of ideas could possibly be explained in the context of Platonic Metaphysics whereby that which is “truly real is not the objects we encounter in sensory experience but rather Forms, and these can only be grasped intellectually” (Moore/Bruder, 38). Furthermore, it seems the narrator tries to explain the concrete basis of ideas through controlled thinking, using the quiet ruminations of the protagonist, Omovo. According to the narrator, “Omovo did a quiet stocktaking. He had lost his mother. His brothers had gone out into the world and were destroying themselves. He loved Ifeyiwa, but she was married. He is alienated from his father. He had a bad school certificate result. He had a mindless job in a hostile office” (92).

Controlled thinking, according to Aronson, is a form of thinking that is conscious, intentional, voluntary, and done with effort (105). Therefore, the concrete basis of ideas could necessarily lie in a thinking that is conscious and intentional and with effort in order to capture the concrete basis of a particular situation and turn it into knowledge. Knowledge so captured could then be made functional through practical application to change situations. Thus being the case, Okri consciously and intentionally guides the reader systematically to action. The deliberate way in which he does this is identifiable in his choice of words and ways of saying them. From being controlled, Omovo’s thoughts become *counterfactual*<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>5</sup> See again, Aronson et al: counterfactual thinking refers to when people go off automatic pilot (thinking) and think about things more slowly and consciously especially when they experience a negative event that was a ‘close call’,

In his moodiness, with a head inundated with thoughts, he remembers the body of the mutilated girl, a victim of ritual killing, he and his friend Keme, the journalist, had seen in the course of their sauntering in the night. Then:

[H] e wondered if the police, notoriously slow in their duties, had begun to investigate the horrible crime. As he thought about the girl, he felt guilty. He felt he should do something about it. But he was powerless. He felt a curious need of redemption. He felt that his powerlessness, and the powerlessness of all the people without voices, needed to be redeemed, to be transformed. With this feeling his urge to do the painting reached fever pitch (93).

Obviously the narrator wishes his works to redeem both his powerlessness and the powerlessness of people without voices; he wishes that his works speak for them; he wishes that they transform the powerlessness of those people without voices into an active weapon of engagement. One of the ways this could be done could be observed during the encounter between Ifeyiwa and Omovo. Ifeyiwa meets Omovo where he is reading Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*, a novel she had just read. They begin to discuss the novel:

"I cried when I finished it," she said.

"I didn't like the idea of the hero wanting to commit suicide."

"The world should not make people want to do that."

"He was young, and too much of a visionary, and people of the world are trapped in social roles."

"I like the title."

"It's from Walt Whitman."

"Weep not, child."

"let none of us weep" (Okri,102).

The experience of reading a text that captures the totality of human experience creates room for a discourse situation which involves controlled and intentional thinking towards concretizing or grasping ideas. Therefore those who read gain information, which becomes knowledge eventually through critical dialogue with oneself or through discourse situations as the above between Omovo and Ifeyinwa. And once ideas are grasped as such, problems are solved and individual psyches as well as a nation's body politic is transformed or re-engineered through the

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for example, failing a test by just a point or two, by mentally changing some aspect of the past as a way of imagining what might have happened –Compare this to what Omovo was doing!

application of the knowledge so gained; for consciously or unconsciously, the narrator shows in the above dialogue in *Weep not Child* how literature could be put to practical use in the discussion between Ifeyiwa and Omovo. He makes us see the need to discuss ideas and the cognitive experience such discussions will avail the reader; for, as human beings, we are constantly observing objects and events, interpreting them, comparing them with past experiences, placing them into categories and encoding them into memory, a cognitive process involved in perception, organization, interpretation and comparing of information derived from observing the physical world and the happenings therein as well as the inner world which we carry in us. And because cognition is part and parcel of memory which involves the storage and retrieval of the pieces of information so far gathered, it allows for reason, which is the ability to make references and draw conclusion using the knowledge gained from perception, having stored them for eventual retrieval. Through reflection, which is symbiotic to memory, cognition and reason, the quality of the stored information is evaluated and prescribed to solving problems.

#### 13.4.2 The Psychic Re-engineering Process in Dangerous Love

The re-engineering of the human psyche is indeed a complex phenomenon. Psychic engineering is a form of social psychology, the phenomenon of which is social influence –that is, “the effect that the words, actions, or mere presence of other people have on our thoughts, feelings, attitudes or behavior” (Aronson, 35). For example, in a bid to re-engineer our collective psyche, to help us re-memory, the narrator takes the reader back to Ifeyiwa’s village in his typical flashback style, thereby imposing the warped human conditions on to our consciousness so that we can make our thoughts of changing the situation conscious, controlled and intentional and thereafter crystallize a solution. Observe the portrayal of the warped human condition in the society:

[H]er village was still in a state of aggression with the neighbouring village of Ugbofia [...] The two villages were about a mile from one another. The stream that flowed past both villages connected them in many ways. In the past they had intermarried. Then a boundary dispute grew and acquired serious dimensions. They now regarded one another with deep mutual suspicion. The things that connected also provided elements for discord. Histories were dredged up. One village called the other the descendants of slaves. The other village

replied in words just as strong. The forest that separated them, the stream that connected them, the air that they both breathed, became permeated with violence. Ifeyiwa wondered bitterly why there should be any fighting at all (108).

One wonders why two villages that had intermarried among themselves in the past now regard one another with deep mutual suspicion. This thought will arise immediately one wants to find a solution to the problem by trying to be conscious of one's thoughts and charge it with focused power. One may want to understand the root causes of problems; for example one may want to understand the causes of prejudice. These are valid social psychological conditions that one may have to become conscious of in the bid to finding solutions to them as problems. According to Aronson et al., "one first explanation for what causes prejudice is that it is the inevitable by-product of the way we process and originate information –in other words, it is the dark side of human social cognition" (429). As had earlier been implied in this paper, information is not power; knowledge is. The pieces of information we take in remain information until we process them or sift them through our objective filter. Once we have done that those pieces of information become knowledge or positive information, which we then must apply for the knowledge we claim to have to be meaningful; for true knowledge or positive information brings enlightenment or illumination –the kind of illumination the novel's protagonist, Omovo, receives toward the end of the book which is like "a tumble of words turning in him, exploding into thoughts and speeches, in being and words, in visions and emotions deeper than the urge that made him paint" ( Okri, 362).

In such a state, Omovo sees time break up into every moment, into endless possibilities of life. Time is the sea for him – a million lights revolved on every crest – where past meets present, and present meets future. And so shaking with excessive love, he sees the vision of terrifying and unfinished portrait of Humanity in its helplessness, where hope is betrayed and where corruption reigned. He feels burdened by desperate but unheard prayers of slaves and ancestors. He feels the treachery of leaders, the lies and corruption of the old generation, their destruction of future dreams, their rape of the past of their country and how they collectively rape their future. He wonders why Nigerians never learn their lessons. And since they refuse to learn from history, their existence becomes a vicious circle of squalor, which keeps producing mad and angry youths. Omovo wonders why there are traitors and disunity everywhere; he feels that if Nigerians remain deaf to history, then they will be enslaved not only by history, but also by themselves,

their attitudes and their tribal madness and so each person will be for himself and the smiles of the rich will grow more predatory while children will cry their lives away burning in infernos of hunger and disease. He reasons that if Nigerian history has hurt Nigerians enough, they would stop betraying themselves and instead transform themselves (Okri, 364). Omovo's thoughts become a practical way the narrator begins the re-engineering of our collective psyche:

[...]. In vision begins responsibility – and even as we die, and shrink, and are taken over, reduced, seen as animals, as invisible, even as the streets spill over with the poor, even as we dance our lives away, and celebrate the powerful, worship like servants at their vulturous shrines, we can utter psychic decisions and set forces into motion that could change our lives forever –in vision begins action –in action begins our destiny –for the things that you do change you – and the changes affect other things you do – to him that hath shall be given –seek and ye shall find –to him that hath not shall be taken from, even that which they haveth – you either become, or you die – (Okri, 362).

Again, during the moment of illumination, a word kept repeating itself to Omovo. The narrator tries therewith to hypnotize his audience into action. He guides them on how to begin the action:

[T] ransfiguration – transfigure the deception of education – all education is bad until you educate yourself – from scratch – start from the beginning, from the simplest things – assume nothing –question everything – begin again the journey from the legends of creation – look again at everything – keep looking – be vigilant – understand things slowly –digest thoroughly – act swiftly –re-dream the world – restructure self – all the building blocks are there in there chaos –  
**USE EVERYTHING – USE EVERYTHING WISELY –EVERYTHING HAS SIGNIFICANCE**  
– (363).

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand how social change starts in the human psyche in *Dangerous Love*.

Is it possible to re-engineer human psyche?

### 13.5 Conclusion

From culture to the individual, from the society to Education, every facet of the Nigerian life needs re-engineering as Ben Okri's (1996) *Dangerous Love* has proposed. Indeed, as the narrator urges us, we must "transfigure the deception of education" (363). If we must transfigure the deception of education, then we must begin to transfigure our idea of culture. This concept as we know it must be dismantled. As Eagleton puts it, one of the original meanings of culture is "'husbandry' or the tending of natural growth" (1). The Nigerian peoples, for example hold their traditions, their ways of life, their values and beliefs very dear to their hearts. However, change means that they must begin the journey of transfiguration by beginning again the journey from the legends of creation to looking again at everything (Okri, 363). In other words, there must be a point where our values, beliefs, traditions, customs, etc meet for the BEING in us to begin a journey to being fully evolved, to lose its specificity.

We face religious, ethnic, social and political challenges. Therefore, to live as human beings, we must look for positive values where ever we can –in sacred books, texts as well in inter human relationships. We must let reason, which is also a gift from God, be the filter of everything that goes into us. We must ask questions, even ourselves. We must weigh things objectively, we must continually seek justice, conquer prejudice, get rid of ignorance and narrow-mindedness. We must train our minds to be democratic. As the narrator in *Dangerous Love* says, "we must look again at everything –keep looking –be vigilant –understand things slowly –digest thoroughly ..." (363). In other words, we must know what we experience –that is, we must know what justice is, for example, what prejudice is, what ignorance and narrow-mindedness are. When one does a favor to somebody even when the person is least qualified to obtain the favor, the one doing the favor is being unjust and awakens in the person denied a feeling of resentment. When one denies somebody something due him, one is unjust and thereby awakens the resentment of the person deprived. When we entertain a feeling or massage our ego that we are better than somebody based on accumulated negative information or stereotype, then, we are prejudiced. When we do not know and we do not know that we do not know, then we are ignorant. When we are not able to know that

another opinion apart from ours exists, then we are narrow-minded. Again, we must recognize a mind as democratic if the mind refuses to be dogmatic and recognizes that other views exist; if the mind accepts individual differences and is courageous enough to ask questions; if the mind develops the capacity to filter things we take into our God-given filter, which is reason. That mind must also at all times be objective in appreciating things.

Finally, a cultured man emerges from this process and he or she becomes an aristocrat of the soul, a democrat of the mind, a thoroughly educated man with all his or her mental faculties ready for use. Terry Eagleton in his book *The Idea of Culture* had explicated on the various versions of culture: culture as cultivation or as Francis Bacon puts it, *manurance* of the mind (1); culture as source of action and negation of it (19); culture as “a complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence” (81). As Eagleton further puts it, “if culture means the active tending of natural growth, then it suggests a dialectic between the artificial and the natural, what we do to the world and what the world does to us” (2). Therefore, a cultured man is the man who has conquered prejudice and gotten rid of ignorance. He or she continually seeks the ideal or perfection and is at peace with the world. And with his or her emergence, culture assumes a new definition: a constant fight to get rid of ignorance and prejudice, a constant struggle toward the ideal. And just as a cultured man or woman has emerged, a healthy nation evolves automatically with his or her emergence.

### 13.6 Summary

In this unit we have examined how human psyche could be re-engineered. We have even tried to re-engineer the psyche following what the writer of *Dangerous Love* did in the text. Okri attempts to use the power of words to hypnotize the reader and in the process dismantle all the structures of miss-education erected by the people and thereby pen up a process for the erection of a new structure.

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) How can the whole body of a people’s culture be changed in a bid to transform them?
- b) Since *Dangerous Love* is made up of words and ideas, is it possible that it becomes an agent of transformation?
- c) According to Mathew Arnold, culture is a continuous quest for the ideal, a way of getting rid of ignorance and narrow-mindedness as well as the best

all that is written and spoken; therefore, is it possible to assume that *Dangerous Love* carries such culture? Explain.

d) Having read *Dangerous Love*, do you think psychic re-engineering is possible?

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## Module 5

### Unit 1

#### African Fiction and the Scholar

##### 1.0 Introduction

Most African texts reflect the nature of African societies and even the nature of individuals in the societies. Therefore, if one studies African texts one possibly understands the society and the individuals that make them up. One understands the differences and similarities among the peoples. They are keys to our different worldviews, our emotions, fears and anxieties as well as the evolutionary events that have brought us to the present point in our historical development (Moss & Valestuk (eds.), 2001:vii). These texts are products of people in society, and collectively, according to Chidi Amuta, “a social institution, a super-structural manifestation of a fundamentally material process, the process of creation of ideas and values within limits prescribed by the social essence of language” (9).

The scholar is here the one who reads African fiction. He studies African fiction professionally, not just for entertainment.

## 1.2 Objective

The objective of this unit is to show how the reader or scholar of African fiction gets prepared to create a discourse situation upon reading the text. In fact, it is the discourse situation which makes the reader or scholar to get functional with the pieces of information he or she is able to turn into knowledge.

## 1.3 Main Content

Bill Ashcroft’s constitutive theory may be useful in understanding what happens between the writer/work and the reader or scholar of African fiction. The book goes beyond what happens between the writer/work and the reader or scholar to demonstrate what can be done with that which happens between a writer/work and the reader or scholar, and of course the teacher, the professional humanist, who may as well be a reader or scholar. Ashcroft theorized that just as a reader rewrites the text in the process of reading the text and just as the reader-function is present in the writing as the focus of “meanability” of the writing, the author is also present in the reading (73). For Ashcroft, “this is the specific and practical way in which consumption and production are linked. Again, this is firstly true at a conscious level, where the reader/scholar accepts the conviction that the author is telling him or her something through the text (Ashcroft, n.p).” Therefore, he argues further that readers/scholars respond to the text as telling them something because language is used in such a way as to make the text tell something. However, in his opinion, “one cannot tell others anything that they do not incorporate or tell themselves” (73); for as he argued, “the mind is active in knowing: whether a child learning a language or a scientist “observing” an “objective” universe, knowing is conducted within the *situation* of horizons of expectations and other knowledge

(Ashcroft, n.p).” Furthermore, Ashcroft is of the opinion that as a reader/scholar reads African fiction, a horizon of expectation is partially established by the text as it unfolds, while the horizon of knowledge which is acquired through other texts, a *relevance* of other knowledge, is established by exploration. The reader/scholar thus constructs the other dialogue pole of discourse. This is possible because speaking is a social act (Ashcroft, n.p). However, according to Ashcroft:

Readers do not simply respond to the “intentionality” of the work itself, quite apart from imputation of an author. The work is a way of seeing and responding, a way of directing attention to that which is “given to consciousness”. It is more accurate to say that the reader sees according to, or “with” the text rather than “see it”. This orientation to the intentionality of the text occurs whenever we assign an author to a text. We can deduce from this that the intentionality of the text can be *put for* the direction of the author’s consciousness. Thus interpretation is never univocal but the reader is subject to the situation, to the rules of discourse and to the directing other as the author is subject to them (Ashcroft, 2001: 73).

In trying to see “with” the texts by analysing their contents as conflict stories so as to apply them to the resolution of conflicts, the various dynamics they contain have to be identified by the critic. However, detailed linguistic analysis may not be necessary except acknowledging the effect of the writer’s use of language.

A scholar of narratives or professional humanist, quite unlike the ordinary reader, is constantly active<sup>6</sup>; that is, he or she is in a position to be transforming knowledge into judgment and action: The information acquired from reading ought to affect him or her in a different way because even when he or she derives pleasure in reading, reading, evaluating and interpreting are the demands on him by his profession: his or her responsibility is to consciously transform information into knowledge for his or her audience: the students and perhaps the public.

Once the responsible scholar, that is, the professional humanist or literary critic, gets conscious and energized by what he or she reads, he or she takes up the responsibility of social change –he or she becomes socially, politically and culturally involved with his society. In other words, he or she has accepted the

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<sup>6</sup> Being a professional humanist, or somebody that earns a living by teaching literature, he or she has to prepare for lectures; for example, if he or she is to teach, say Shakespeare, he or she must have read Shakespeare and prepared the lessons or information he or she would give out to his or her students or at least information that would engender a situation of discourse between him or her and his or her students. The act of having to read Shakespeare might be a leisurely act for an ordinary reader; but for the professional, it has to be both a leisurely and professional act, hence being constantly active.

conviction that the writer was telling him or her something through the text and he or she begins, therefore, according to Ashcroft, to construct the other pole of discourse (Ashcroft, 73). By doing this, he or she seeks balance. And Jeaneane D. Fowler believes:

Balance means an active and dynamic approach to life. It means a certain *struggle* to maintain a healthy balance in societal and global policies and out-comes, and it means meeting the challenges that threaten the stability of a healthy balance in all areas of life[...]. (1999: 140)

The visions of such texts go beyond the ordinary in the logical interaction of their components. The conscious scholar/reader is of course part of those components, just as the writer is. It is, therefore, the interaction between the writer, the text and the scholar or reader that justifies the texts as social praxis. What this means is that the texts make possible situations of discourse between them and the reader or scholar. Such situations of discourse are moments of trying to make knowledge tangible and functional.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

Explain the processes of processing information by a scholar in texts for practical use.

#### 1.3.1 The Scholar and Practical Reading

Scholars ought to respond to the text as telling them something because language is used in such a way as to make the text tell something. However, Ashcroft had opined that, “one cannot tell others anything that they do not incorporate or tell themselves” (73); for, “the mind is active in knowing: whether a child learning a language or a scientist “observing” an “objective” universe, knowing is conducted within the *situation* of horizons of expectations and other knowledge (Ashcroft, n.p).” Furthermore, as the scholar reads African fiction, a horizon of expectation is partially established by the text as it unfolds, while the horizon of knowledge which is acquired through other texts, a *relevance* of other knowledge, is established by exploration. The reader/scholar thus constructs the other dialogue pole of discourse. This is possible because speaking is a social act (Ashcroft, n.p). That other dialogue pole of discourse is the point of practical intervention by the scholar in relation to society.

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see if you now understand what the text means to the scholar in the functionality of knowledge.

What practical purpose does the text serve in relation to the scholar?

### 2.0 Conclusion

The scholar of African fiction, who also is a professional humanist, quite unlike the ordinary reader, is constantly active<sup>7</sup>; that is, he or she is in a position to be transforming knowledge into judgment and action: The information acquired from reading ought to affect him or her in a different way because even when he or she derives pleasure in reading, reading, evaluating and interpreting are the demands on him by his profession: his or her responsibility is to consciously transform information into knowledge for his or her audience: the students and perhaps the public, and, of course, make the knowledge functional or practical.

### 3.0 Summary

In this unit we have tried to show that reading African texts has a professional demand on the scholar. We showed how the scholar interacts with the text and how it affects him and what he does with how the text has affected him

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) Why is the scholar considered a professional humanist?
- b) How does the text affect him or her?
- c) How does he relate to the text?
- d) What is expected that he does with how he or she has been affected?

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<sup>7</sup> Being a professional humanist, or somebody that earns a living by teaching literature, he or she has to prepare for lectures; for example, if he or she is to teach, say Shakespeare, he or she must have read Shakespeare and prepared the lessons or information he or she would give out to his or her students or at least information that would engender a situation of discourse between him or her and his or her students. The act of having to read Shakespeare might be a leisurely act for an ordinary reader; but for the professional, it has to be both a leisurely and professional act, hence being constantly active.

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## Unit 2

### African Fiction and Mediation

#### 1.0 Introduction

One of the challenges that threaten the stability of African states is ethnicity. Therefore, it is onus on the scholar to seek to eradicate the malady that is ethnicity, which threatens the stability of most African states. He or she needs only to be properly equipped by the knowledge he or she will gain from the texts.

Texts as Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *No Longer at Ease*, Cyprain Ekwensi's *Iska* and Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* come in handy. They are not textbooks on conflict resolution, though; therefore they cannot be prescribed in a direct resolution of conflicts. They are, instead, like a canvass of human activities rife with so many dynamics. The scholar is an observer of those activities and dynamics. He or she takes note of the behavioral patterns and thought processes of the characters on the canvass, their utterances, narrator's comments, and so on, which emanate from real human experiences and which give him or her insight into human nature, nature of ethnic conflicts as well as the general human condition in African societies. Therefore, it is incontestable that the scholar of African fiction can function as a mediator in conflict resolution.

### 1.1 Objectives

The objective of this unit is to prove that African literary texts reflect all types of human conditions, from religious extremism, obnoxious traditional practices, politics to ethnic conflicts, and that scholars of African fiction can apply themselves to the resolution ethnic conflicts in their various countries by studying the relevant texts as conflict stories.

### 1.2 Main Content

One of the challenges that threaten the stability of African states is ethnicity. Therefore, the balance the scholar or professional humanist may seek in this regard will consist in eradicating the ethnic conflicts that threaten the stability of the African states with the help of Nigerian texts.

Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and *No Longer at Ease*; Chimamanda's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, Cyprain Ekwensi's *Iska* and Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* are not textbooks on conflict resolution and therefore they cannot be prescribed in a direct resolution of conflicts. They are, instead, like a canvass of human activities rife with so many dynamics. The scholar is an observer of those activities and dynamics. He or she takes note of the behavioral patterns and thought processes of the characters on the canvass, their utterances, narrator's comments, and so on, which emanate from real human

experiences and which give him or her insight into human nature as well as the nature of ethnic conflicts in Africa, especially Nigeria.

The process of applying relevant African texts in conflict resolution starts, first of all, with a professional scholar, that is, a critic, for whom reading is a profession, reading the texts as conflicting stories. In reading the texts, he or she may get captivated by the writers' use of language. The beauty and force of their language may urge him/her to read on. He or she follows the developments of the texts and reads on patiently and assiduously. He or she gets immersed in the world of the texts. It may strike him or her in the process that the writers are talking about something serious. In other word, the texts are telling him or her something (Ashcroft, 73). The characters express the feelings he/she most likely is very familiar with as well as the experiences he/she knows: he/she, therefore, jumps in and out of the texts at will, acquiring thereby a deep understanding of his/her nature and respect for the complex identities of others, including diverse Nigerian histories and cultures. He/she begins to interpret and evaluate the information in the texts from a variety of sources in relation to the society and the writers; he/she would definitely make complex intellectual connections across disciplines, cultures, and institutions of Africa while reading the books. He/she will begin to exchange the world of the texts he/she is immersed in with the world that he/she knows; and the world that he/she knows is Africa: he/she becomes, therefore, conscious of the African condition. He will then begin to categorize the dynamics, that is, the values, relationship, external factors, data and structure.

Value operates on the cultural and political realms, while relationship is a social phenomenon. Resources pertain to the economy and Information is the carrier of knowledge. Furthermore, Africa as a continent functions under particular structures of government. Having largely multi-ethnic societies, the values of the groups in Africa are bound to differ. These values also possess the capacity to determine the state of the relationship among the ethnic groups.

The way resources are distributed contributes a great deal to how the ethnic groups in various African countries will relate to themselves, while the information they assimilate will either make or mar them.

To begin his or her work of conflict resolution using the relevant texts, he or she compresses the conflict stories, presenting them in summarized formats to his audience, making sure that the summaries contain all the probable causes of ethnic conflict in African societies as presented by the writers of the works. This is possible because as Timothy J. Lomperis, Pratt and John Clark argue, "through

literature we can explore ambiguities and work toward synthesizing an enormously complex and painful experience” (Lomperis & Clark, 5).

The knowledge of the history of various African countries as Nigeria helps him or her to draw parallels between the contents of the texts and the complex and painful experiences of, say, the Nigerian condition.

Furthermore it has to be imagined that the work of conflict resolution is taking place in the classroom and that the audience is sophisticated because they are all literature scholars and as such must participate in the diagnosis and the analysis of the conflict stories, so that the mediating scholar wouldn't be biased. The interaction between the instructor of the texts and the other scholars, who constitute the audience, is already a situation of discourse. Their discursive choices would, definitely, reflect views about conflict, its origin and where justice lies. By decoding the pattern of views they could understand how to avoid conflict. While important, the decoding process is also risky, because it involves multiple moments of interpretation and translation; and third party facilitators encourage the conflict parties to perceive the shadow of the future and to contemplate cautious cooperation (Smith in Wright (ed.), 18).

Reading the texts, while it could be a leisurely act, will always be a professional demand on the scholar; as such, the literary texts ought to be telling him or her something (Ashcroft, 73). The interdisciplinary historical and theoretical knowledge derivable from literary studies, the need for balance as is requisite of scholarship in the humanities (Fowler, 140), offer them the opportunity of being able to function as mediators. However, whether they would be better mediators or not would depend on how able they are to make the better persons which they have become, (that is, persons, who are determined to make knowledge functional) concrete and practical (Eagleton, 208).

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

How can the scholar of African fiction mediate in conflict?

### 1.2.1 The African scholar narratives and Conflict Resolution

The scholar of African fiction is an observer of the activities and dynamics in African texts. He or she takes note of the behavioral patterns and thought processes of the characters on the canvass, which is the text, their utterances, narrator's

comments, and so on, which emanate from real human experiences and which give him or her insight into human nature, nature of ethnic conflicts as well as the general human condition in African societies.

He starts by reading the texts as conflicting stories. In reading the texts, he or she may get captivated by the writers' use of language. The beauty and force of their language may urge him/her to read on. He or she follows the developments of the texts and reads on patiently and assiduously. He or she gets immersed in the world of the texts. It may strike him or her in the process that the writers are talking about something serious. In other word, the texts are telling him or her something (Ashcroft, 73). The characters express the feelings he/she most likely is very familiar with as well as the experiences he/she knows: he/she, therefore, jumps in and out of the texts at will, acquiring thereby a deep understanding of his/her nature and respect for the complex identities of others, including diverse Nigerian histories and cultures. He/she begins to interpret and evaluate the information in the texts from a variety of sources in relation to the society and the writers; he/she would definitely make complex intellectual connections across disciplines, cultures, and institutions of Africa while reading the books. He/she will begin to exchange the world of the texts he/she is immersed in with the world that he/she knows; and the world that he/she knows is Africa: he/she becomes, therefore, conscious of the African condition. He will then begin to categorize the dynamics, that is, the values, relationship, external factors, data and structure. Therefore, it is incontestable that the scholar of African fiction can function as a mediator in conflict resolution.

### 1.2.2 Mediation

In the process of trying to involve African fiction in ethnic conflict resolution, the communications and utterances of the characters in the works as well as the narrator's comments have to be clarified. The implications of the perceptions and misperceptions as well as their expressions of prejudices which are all causes of ethnic conflicts have to be exposed. Awareness on the inevitability of conflict in African states has to be created; options of resolutions have to be generated too. With all these, ethnic conflicts stand the chances of being resolved and the scholar of literature, aside of his mediating role in articulating the conflict stories and facilitating the resolution of the conflicts presented by the texts can now function conventionally as a mediator in ethnic conflicts in Africa. The conflicts should no longer be viewed as misunderstanding since misunderstanding could be resolved by ensuring that the groups communicate their grievances clearly and completely.

The perceived injustices, stereotypes and misperceptions inherent in the texts have to be clarified in the process of trying to understand the causes of ethnic conflicts in African societies as well as the possibility of using their literature to resolve the conflicts. However, it is indubitable that ethnic conflicts are not necessarily resolved simply by clarifications. In other words, while clarification is one of the ways of resolving the ethnic conflicts, incompatibility of objectives (Heath & Bryant, 253) or values as Heath and Bryant have argued are the major causes of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, especially.

Furthermore, in seeking to make clarifications, the values of the varying ethnic groups must be identified in a collaborative way from how they are expressed in the relevant texts; how they clash to cause conflicts should also be clarified so that the groups involved would understand where the problem lies. Using the literary works as a big screen for the groups would be very helpful.

Having identified the values and objectives of the various parties involved in the conflicts as well as clarifying to them where these values and objectives clash to cause conflict, all within the context of the references made to those things by the texts compromise would be suggested to the groups in conflict as a way for them to resolve their conflicts, since their conflicts revolve mostly around their values and their values already predetermined their goals as well as their interests. As such, a *zero-sum-game* theory of winning at one thing and loosing at the other is applicable (See Meyers, et al., 2007: 97). Naturally, *zero-sum-game* theory entails compromise. And compromising certain ideals and values that drive their various goals and objectives, would make competition among the groups to be healthy, in that what used to be stereotypes, prejudices and misperception would lose their negative attributes, making the groups to bring out the best in them from what used to have negative connotations. However, while efforts should be made by every research on ethnic conflict and resolution in Africa to articulate and clarify the values, interests, goals and orientations of all the ethnic groups, the role responsible and visionary leadership play in giving the people a sense of belonging and faith in the country should not be underestimated; because it is when the results of these researches are responsibly articulated into policies and applied that these conflicts would possibly get a chance of being resolved. And the application of these policies would require not only social scientists, but also well-meaning individuals of repute as well as relevant non-governmental organization (Meyers, et al., 100-108).

Therefore, A. de Reuck's belief that in the resolution of conflicts, "representative of parties in a dispute should meet in the presence of a small panel

of disinterested consultants, professionally qualified in the social science, in order to analyze and possibly also resolve their conflict, in conditions of total confidentiality” (Reuck, in Burton & Duke (eds.), 1990: 183), is questionable, because the consultants or mediators must not necessarily, as has been proven, be qualified in the social science to be able to mediate or facilitate the resolution of the conflicts. Furthermore, Myron Magnet believes the social scientist’s mantra, “the plural of anecdote is not data” is totally mistaken (Magnet, *City Journal*, Summer (2003), because, he continues:

An accumulation of accurate stories about how the human world works, stories that provide an account wrapped in an interpretation, adds up to knowledge, better knowledge than we can get elsewhere. Data are meaningless until we can articulate a story that makes sense out of them, and literature makes sense out of the data of human experience (*City Journal*, Summer (2003).

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see whether you now understand how a scholar of African fiction can be a mediator in conflict resolution

What is the difference between an ordinary reader and a professional reader/scholar?

## 2.0 Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, knowledge of all kinds has to be functional and impactful. This does not mean, however, that Cultural, Peace and Conflict studies have never been functional and impactful. No, not at all; only that too much emphasis on science and technology seems to have made studies in other disciplines, in the Nigerian context, like a waste of time and resources: Unless the man in us is properly developed, development of whatever sort will always elude us; moreover, all the natural laws at work on earth are all there for man not the other way round, and unless any given society is properly interpreted, and the place of man within it properly understood, the technological development we seek, will never come to be.

Peace and Conflict studies have become very important areas of study in the twenty-first century because of the yearning of the peoples of the world for peace and harmonious coexistence. Besides, no meaningful development will be made in any society if that society is steeped in conflict. Therefore, the serious nature of

Peace and Conflict Resolution in relation to Culture makes it always imperative for an interdisciplinary approach.

Finally, it is my hope that this book will make students of literature to really appreciate the fact that the ability of literary studies to make them better persons ought to be such that would make that state of being a better person really practical and concrete; that is to say, literary studies ought to be enough preparation for them to face the challenges of life and to be useful to the entire humanity and particularly their various societies in a positive and impacting way, so that literature or the cultural realm and its expertise will never again be institutionally divorced from their real connections with power – a case which was wonderfully illustrated for Edward Said by an exchange with an old college friend of his who worked in the department of defense for a period during the Vietnam war (See Said, 2-3).

### 3.0 Summary

We have tried to show in this unit that scholars of African fiction can indeed function as mediators in conflict. We have done this by showing that the onus is on the scholar, who must approach reading the texts with professionalism by allowing the texts to tell them something, bringing them and the texts in discourse situations. We tried to show that such discourse situations are situations that make provision for applicable knowledge. In other words, relevant texts are read as conflict stories.

### 4.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

- a) What is ethnicity?
- b) Define mediation?
- c) What is conflict?
- d) Who is a professional reader or scholar?

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## Unit 3

### African Fiction and Advocacy

#### 1.0 Introduction

There is no doubt that, Studies in African fiction make the scholar aware of a range of issues in African continent and even beyond. The range of issues are numerous –from the environment, physical and metaphysical, traditional, gender, fundamentalism or extremism, conflict and mediation, political, social, cultural and even spiritual.

The studies are on the one hand liberal in the sense that the scholar's scope of knowing is broad; and on the other hand it is functional or practical in that the knowledge so far gained is intended to be applied. The scholar's sensibility to all these range of issues is heightened. And a heightened sensibility is what is needed in the process of actions toward change to begin.

## 1.2 Objective

The objective of this unit is to see that the student understands that the aim is to make him or her sensitive and conscious enough to the point of moving him or her to action. It is intended to make the student know that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, every knowledge must have the capacity of being applied so much so that it no longer enough to have knowledge but to deploy the knowledge in the service of humanity.

## 1.3 Main Content

The *Actionaid*, Nigeria, had defined Advocacy as the process of influencing key decision-makers and opinion-formers (individuals and organizations) for changes to policies and practices that will work in poor people's favor.'

It was further defined by *The Advocacy Institute* as a series of actions designed to persuade and influence those who hold governmental, political and economic power so that they will formulate, adopt and implement public policy in ways that will benefit, strengthen and improve the lives of those with less conventional political power, and fewer economic resources.

Advocacy encompasses a range of activities, all focusing on a process of change. This change may be in any one of several areas

- in attitudes and political will
- in policy/decision-making
- in policy implementation
- in people's awareness of policies
- in monitoring policy implementation

Now the fact is that to be an advocate means that one must be thoroughly informed about the areas one seeks to advocate on; and being thoroughly informed means to have a good knowledge about the area in question.

The first step to gaining knowledge is through experiencing, and reading is a place of experiencing. Recently the news is agog in the media and social media that the former American president, Bill Clinton is about to introduce the first novel he wrote on how the white house functions to the public. The question then is why did he choose the fictional platform? Now, the truth is that most often fiction allows us the freedom to tell the truth: because we give life to characters that live the life that eventually tells the story we could not bring ourselves to tell directly. When then people read the stories, they gain insight into something that, ordinarily, they would never have known. And certainly, Bill Clinton, by telling this story, will give Americans the opportunity and privilege of knowing how things work inside the White House. This is so for every other work we read –be it on gender, environmental, extremism, etc.

Advocating starts immediately we have gained knowledge on what we are targeting; for example, reading a book as *Born on a Tuesday* by Elnathan John, we gain knowledge on religious fundamentalism in Nigeria. We immediately identify the Problems that lead to it. We are driven to research the issue further to avail ourselves of secondary data to support our findings. Then we begin to set our objectives towards becoming involved. We then start to design strategies and build alliances and networks. Having built alliances and networks, we may begin to source for funds –that is, begin fundraising and then finally begin execution and implementation of our plans. Thereafter, we set up mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of our strategic plans. This process is the same for every area we have decided to advocate on. The areas, of course, are determined by the texts we have decided to read for experience.

## Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 1

What is Advocacy?

### 1.2.1 The African Fiction and Advocacy

Studies in African fiction make us aware of a range of issues in African continent and even beyond. The range of issues are numerous –from the environment, physical and metaphysical, traditional, gender, fundamentalism or extremism, conflict and mediation, political, social, cultural and even spiritual. We seek to be thoroughly informed about the areas we seek to advocate on; and being thoroughly

informed means to have a good knowledge about the area in question. Once we have gained adequate knowledge about the area, we begin to identify the Problems that lead to it. We are driven to research the issue further to avail ourselves of secondary data to support our findings. Then we begin to set our objectives towards becoming involved. We then start to design strategies and build alliances and networks. Having built alliances and networks, we may begin to source for funds –that is, begin fundraising and then finally begin execution and implementation of our plans. Thereafter, we set up mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of our strategic plans. This process is the same for every area we have decided to advocate on. The areas, of course, are determined by the texts we have decided to read for experience.

### Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE) 2

Let us see whether you now understand how a scholar of African fiction can be an advocate in particular areas of interest.

Why did the former US President, Bill Clinton decide to write a novel which will reveal life as lived in the White House?

### 2.0 Conclusion

The whole essence of studies in fiction is to avail the student of knowledge about life, man and the whole conditions of being human. If such knowledge was sought after for its own sake, then the whole essence of going to the university to study narratives will have been defeated. We are exposed to so many forms of experience through fiction and we are expected to make the knowledge we have acquired functional. And one of the many ways we can be functional with our knowledge is through advocacy, just as we could through mediation.

### 3.0 Summary

In this unit, we have tried to understand what advocacy is and how we can gain experience through the works of fiction we read. We tried to see how the former American President, Bill Clinton, has demonstrated the truth of the experience of

that fiction avails us through the novel about life in the White House which he intends to make available to the American public.

### Tutor-Marked Assignment

- a) What is Advocacy?
- b) How can we gain experience from reading fictional works?
- c) What do we do with the knowledge we have gained from studying fiction?
- d) Why do you think Bill Clinton chose the fictional platform to talk about life on the American White House?

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