

Philosophy and Literature

PHI 309



**University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development**

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Vice-Chancellor's Message

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka

Vice-Chancellor

Foreword

As part of its vision of providing education for “Liberty and Development” for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer

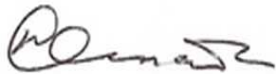
Philosophy and Literature (PHL 309)

skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre's provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bayo Okunade', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Bayo Okunade

Director

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Contents

Study Session 1: Philosophy and Literature in a Society in Transition	11
Introduction.....	11
Learning Outcomes for Study Session 1	11
1.1 The Concept of Philosophy and Literature	11
1.1.1 A Society in Transition	13
1.2: The Goal of Philosophers and Literary Artist's work towards Improving Society	14
1.2.1 Factors Affecting the Effective Roles of Philosophy and Literature in a Society in Transition	16
1.2.2 Ways philosophy and Literature Can Achieve its Role in a Society in Transition.....	17
Summary of Study Session 1	17
Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 1	18
SAQ 1.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 1.1)	18
SAQ 1.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 1.2)	18
Study Session 2: The role of the Philosopher and the Imaginative Writer as Guardians of Public Conscience	19
Introduction.....	19
Learning Outcome for Study Session 2	19
2.1 The Historical Development of Philosophy.....	19
2.2 The Role of the Philosopher and Imaginative Writer in Society	21
2.3 Philosophy and Literary Artists as Guardians of Public Conscience	24
Summary of Study Session 2	26
Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 2	26
SAQ 2.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 2.1)	26
SAQ 2.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 2.2)	26
SAQ 2.3 (Testing Learning outcomes 2.3)	26
Study Session 3: A Philosophical Approach to African Literature	27
Introduction.....	27
Learning Outcomes for Study Session 3.....	27
3.1 Philosophical Approach to African Literature	27
3.2 The Close Affinity between Philosophy and Literature in dealing with Human Life	30
3.2.1 Biyi Bandele-Thomas Novel (<i>The man</i>): Recreation of the Experience of the Poor and the Dispossessed in our Society	32

Philosophy and Literature (PHL 309)

Summary of Study Session 3	36
Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 3	37
SAQ 3.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 3.1)	37
SAQ 3.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 3.2)	37
Study session 4: Gender Issues in African Thought	38
Introduction.....	38
Learning Outcomes for Study Session 4.....	38
4.1 What is Gender?.....	38
4.2 Gender Issues in African Thought	39
4.2.1 Gender-Based Violence	40
4.3 Gender Advocacy: A Critique	43
4.3.1 On Separatist Agenda of Radical Feminism.....	44
Summary of Study Session 4	45
Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 4	45
SAQ 4.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 4.1)	45
SAQ 4.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 4.2)	45
SAQ 4.3 (Testing Learning outcomes 4.3)	45
Study Session 5: Gender Philosophy in Mariama Ba's <i>so Long a Letter</i>	46
Introduction.....	46
Learning Outcomes for Study Session 5	46
5.1 Gender Issues in Mariama Ba's <i>So Long a Letter</i>	47
5.2 Philosophical Approach to Ba's <i>So Long a Letter</i>	52
Summary of Study Session 5	53
Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 5	53
SAQ 5.1	53
SAQ 5.2	53
Study Session 6: Critical Perspectives on Nyambura Gichohi's "In the Name of Love"	54
Introduction.....	54
Learning Outcomes for Study Session 6.....	54
6.1 The Philosophical Significance of Giochohi's 'In the Name of Love	54
6.2 Writer's Reasons against Violence and the Lessons for Contemporary Society.....	57
6.2.1 Violence as a Means of Social Exchange	61
6.2.2 Its Relevance to the African Society.....	62
Summary of Study Session 6	63

Philosophy and Literature (PHL 309)

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 6	63
SAQ 6.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 6.1)	63
SAQ 6.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 6.2)	63
Introduction	64
Learning Outcomes for Study Session 7	64
7.1 A Brief Survey of “A Man of Character”	65
7.2 Critical Perspectives on “A Man of Character”	67
Summary of Study Session 7	73
Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 7	74
SAQ 7.1(Test Learning Outcome 7.1)	74
SAQ 7.2(Test Learning Outcome 7.2)	74
Study Session 8: James Henshaw’s “The Jewels of the Shrine”: A Critical Analysis	74
Introduction	75
Learning Outcomes for Study Session 8	75
8.1 Old Age as Wisdom in African Philosophy.....	75
8.2 Old Age as Wisdom in Henshaw’s “The Jewels of the Shrine”	79
Summary of Study Session 8	85
Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 8	86
SAQ 8.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 8.1)	86
SAQ 8.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 8.2)	86

Study Session 1: Philosophy and Literature in a Society in Transition

Introduction

Philosophy and literature in a society in transition can be taken to mean two things: The role of philosophy and literature in a society in transition and the current position of philosophy and literature in an identified society in transition, that is, the effectiveness of such when in the course of achieving its role.

Specifically, this study session will attempt to show that both philosophy and literature dwell on universal issues, evaluating ethics and morals, with philosophy attempting to find out the right code of conduct and literature doing the same with the characters in the authors' work by using them to embody different people and events.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 1

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

1. Define the meaning of the terms “philosophy” and “literature”.
2. Discuss philosophers and literary artists work towards achieving the same goal of improving the society.

1.1 The Concept of Philosophy and Literature

The word “philosophy” comes from the Greek compound word “philosophia”. The term “Sophia” means “practical wisdom”, “sound judgement” and “intelligence”. The prefix, “philo”, means love. Consequently, philosophy is taken to mean “love of knowledge” or “love of wisdom”. A few definitions have been put forward by individuals but only one will be made reference to only. H.S. Staniland, a philosopher, defines philosophy as a criticism of the ideas we live by.

Philosophy, being a critical discourse, aims at self-understanding. It challenges opinions, both established ones and forsaken ones. Philosophy implies a body of ideas, an outlook and an attitude to life.

It critically examines:

- ❖ Man,
- ❖ His environment
- ❖ The interaction between the two

It seeks answers to questions about motives underlining man's actions and the nature of incidence of events.

Literature, on the other hand, is derived from the Latin word “littera” which means a form of expressive art; a form of entertainment which conveys an experience which is believed to have some significance to our self-understanding as humans.

From this definition, literature can be said to have two main goals as shown in figure 1.1 below:

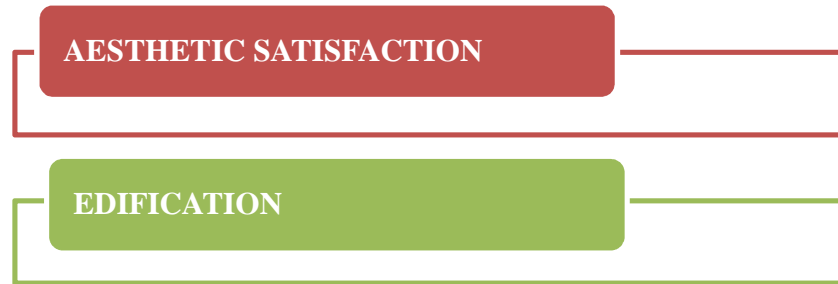


Figure 1.1: Two Main Goals of Literature

Source: Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan

By edification, literature teaches lessons of life, confirming or correcting our prejudices.

Literature uses language to give form to its expression. There are two fundamental types:

- ❖ oral
- ❖ Written literature.

Oral literature

This is comprised of folktales, stories of days gone by, epics, odes, ballads and dirges communicated by the elderly members of a society by word of mouth. It is a heritage, passed on from generation to generation.

Written literature

It can be broadly classified into three: prose, a narrative form written in chapters; poetry, which is written in verses and stanzas; and Drama, written in the form of reported speech with characters talking in turn. *The tools of work of a literary artist are reason, sense experience, memory and intuition, also known as imagination.*

- Which of these is not an example of oral Literature?
 - a. Musical theater
 - b. Riddles
 - c. Drama

■ The answer is C

It is interesting to observe that both philosophy and literature, though divergent as a superficial consideration of the nature of their fields may suggest, have certain things in common. Both seem to be geared towards achieving the same goal of improving the society. This can be seen in box 1.1 below

Box 1.1: Comparison between Philosophy and Literature

1. They are both products of the societies they reflect, as they mirror life in the society.
2. Literature shows life as it is seen and lived even hinting at what is ideal and philosophy questioning life as it is and proposing means of achieving life as it ought to be.
3. Their most immediate concern is the people in their society.
4. Also, they both dwell on universal issues, evaluating ethics and morals.
5. Philosophy attempts to find out the right code of conduct and literature doing the same with the characters in the authors' work by using them to embody different people and events.

Unified in aim with philosophy, literature in itself can be philosophical in nature. Philosophical literature examines thoroughly the ideas put toward in day to day life, fine-tuning them and clarifying the message. In this regard, the didactic nature of literary works can't be lost or missed by an entertained reader or listener.

Philosophy, also, can be presented in the form: literary works take. This makes philosophical ideas more alluring being dressed up under a cloak of words lending it an ability to entertain its reader or listener, thus making philosophy alluring to the common man.

1.1.1 A Society in Transition

What, then, is a society in transition? A society in transition refers to a changing society. According to Longman's Dictionary, transition is the act of changing or passing from one form, state, subject or place to another. A society, according to the Chamber's Dictionary, is fellowship, companionship, company, association, a community, a corporate body or any organized association.

This readily implies a group of people with unified interests and goals. Thus a society in transition refers to a society which is yet to stabilize; still requiring adjustments in the way of life of the people in it to suit the changing times.

The changes that a society undergoes could either be for better or for worse. To properly grasp the idea of a changing society, dealing with the question of why societies change would bring us closer to precise assessment of which society is in transition. Societies have goals and nurture a picture of the ideal; a picture of what they want to be. The aim of change is usually to project into the future.

The yearnings of members of the society for better conditions are what often cause transition. All societies seek to be without strife, economically independent and also to be regarded as one of the best, to become the biblical land of milk and honey. To become the ideal, a society changes by pressing higher towards the mark of perfection.

According to Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher, change is said to be the only constant thing in life. Looking at things in that light, all societies are in transition because there's always room

for change. Like a popular adage says, “The grass is always greener on the other side”, so there’s always something to change to thereby leaving everything “in a state of flux”. Transition is often initiated by external pressures from the people. For example, wars, revolutions, conquests and even commercial connections instigate changes.

A perfect example of a society in transition is reflected in the story of *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. This is the story of a farm owned by a certain Mr. Jones with different types of animals in it. The animals felt their living conditions were very bad and that they were being exploited by humans. This led to a revolution where the animals chased all the humans away from the farm. They sought better living conditions where animals would govern themselves in the best of their own interests.

- Mention two reasons why society will desire change?
- The desire of the society for better conditions and mark of perfection

They made different rules, for instance, the rule which stated that all animals were equal. They thought they had achieved an egalitarian society but they were proved wrong later when their leader, Napoleon, made amends to their constitution to help achieve the ideal picture he had as opposed to that which the society had as a whole.

At this juncture, a particular society with unified goals and interests will be chosen for consistent reference. This is the Nigerian society which is continually in transition largely without assessment of the relativity of its current position to the idea.

1.2: The Goal of Philosophers and Literary Artist’s work towards Improving Society

Philosophy and Literature are both quite important to a society in transition since they serve as a reflection of cultural trends, with culture itself not being a static phenomenon but one subject to the dynamics of change. As culture can’t be separated from the society, it is the role of philosophy and literature to examine the trend of its society’s life and, if need be, to rebel against any aspect of it that it finds repugnant.

Taking the instance of Nigeria, philosophers and literary artists have focused their attention on their homeland, celebrating its virtues and denouncing its weaknesses with the essential aim of liberating the spirits of their fellows and settling them on the part of true pride as well as social and political well-being.

Activity 1.1: Society in transition

Allowed Time: 45 minutes

Task: Considering your own locality, list four transitions (changes) that have taken place?

The philosopher and literary artist have always functioned in all African societies as recorders of the history of their society and even as the voice of the vision of their own time. For a society in transition, it speaks of:

- ❖ What was
- ❖ What is
- ❖ Reminds the society itself of what it seeks to be.

This preserves the link between the past and the present thereby making projections into the future more feasible. In examining the evolution of Nigerian philosophy and literature, it would do well to examine the major trends in the country's history because when a society moves out of one epoch in its search for "greener pastures", literature naturally moves with it.

In the pre-colonial Nigerian society, oral literature was the prevalent, albeit, only form of literature. Even philosophical assessments were made by sages and communicated orally. These cultural versions of philosophy and literature functioned as instruments for entertainment and moral instruction. **Joseph Conrad's** *The Heart of Darkness*, is a foreigner's view of pre-colonial Africa. This clearly gives a view of pre-colonial Nigeria.

Colonization had a powerful impact on Nigeria and most African societies. Philosophy and literature trailed behind documenting the various development and highlighting the evils and goods of colonialism. A work of literature that does this extensively is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* which attributes to the European intrusion the inability of the core of our society, its culture, to thrive. With colonization came the introduction of writing which brought about the documentation of oral literature and philosophy, giving the members of the society permanent record of the past.

The next stage of transition of Nigeria was that of independence, that is, freedom from political bondage. This was an era of self-rule, a stage of political freedom. Most philosophers and literary artists looked upon the newly acquired independence with a high degree of scepticism. Such diverse vices as corruption, tyranny, oppression, segregation, victimization, and so on, reared their heads.

Philosophers and literary artists raised caution through their works. For example, in **Ali Salem's** *The Wheat Well*, wheat well is found and this can be likened to Nigeria's obtaining independence. To maximize the use of the well, other people are brought into the picture to help achieve the set goals even though these people know nothing about the goals or how to achieve them. Many people came into governance just after independence. Unfortunately, these were people who couldn't grasp the reality of total independence.

The post-independence stage of transition has been dragged to extend till date. Things are not much better now than they were then. The problems facing Nigeria, impeding its motion into better and higher stages on the transitory scale, have remained unchanged over the years. These problems come in different forms like:

- ❖ Mental
- ❖ Poverty,
- ❖ Corruption,
- ❖ Discrimination amongst tribes etc

There are quite a number of texts typifying the Nigerian situation, depicting a situation where natural resources available in the country are not available to the citizens, where no man can be 'up to standard' except if he is corrupt and where the standard of living has dropped quite low. It doesn't mean that the society hasn't changed. It has, for the worse with societal problems identified before still there.

In the various literary works, authors have endeavoured to appeal to conscience and moral evaluation of the rightness of the situation and also to stir up a desire for change.

1.2.1 Factors Affecting the Effective Roles of Philosophy and Literature in a Society in Transition

In spite of all the efforts made by philosophers and literary artists to tell the society through their works what the ideal society ought to be, it is obvious that much impact hasn't been made because societal vices already identified are still in existence. Some of the problems that affect the effective roles of philosophy and Literature in a society in transition are identified in figure 1.2 below:

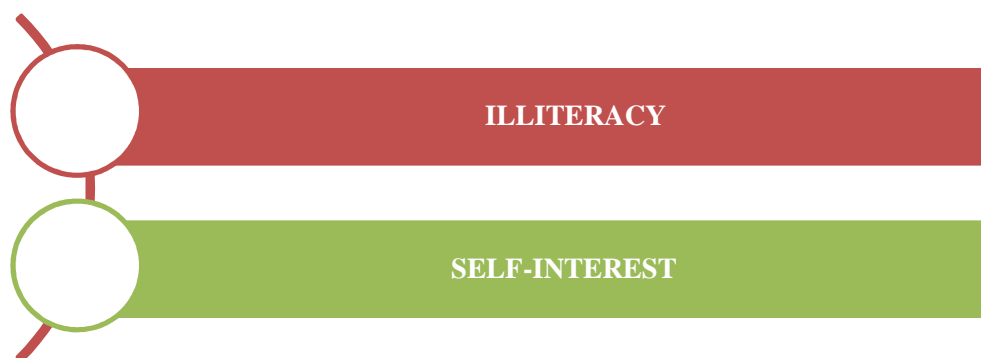


Figure 1.2: Factors That Affect Effective Roles of Philosophy and Literature in a Society in Transition

Source: Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan

Illiteracy

One problem facing the effective achievement of the roles of philosophy and literature in a society in transition is illiteracy. Many members of the traditional Nigerian society are not quite acquainted with the lingua franca of the country, that is, English. Most of the works of philosophy and literature are written in this language, if not all. That takes it out of the reach of the common man.

Self-Interest

Also, another factor affecting this is the self-interest of most members of the society, especially those who control adoption of policies. Instead of borrowing philosophical ideas to further the interest of the general public, they only adopt policies to further their own interests. The people could revolt too if they paid particular attention to the opinion of those who mirror their reality. This is not so; all men are involved in a rat race, a struggle for survival thus they can't spend enough time to think of the plight and future.

They also exist self-interest in our philosophers and literary artists. Most of them now work to make a living instead of working to make a difference. This reduces the value of their opinions because they now play to the gallery selling ideas people want to buy rather than ideas people have to buy because of their life-changing effects.

1.2.2 Ways philosophy and Literature Can Achieve its Role in a Society in Transition

How then can philosophy and literature achieve its role better in a society in transition, especially ours? They can achieve their roles in a society through the following ways:

Medium of Communication

Philosophers and literary artists can achieve its role through a medium of communication available to all citizens by translating their works into different languages so that everybody can have access to their ideas; even when the work is in English, the language should be used in such a way that it will bring out the Nigerian message for a Nigerian audience.

Awareness Campaigns

Philosophers and literary artists should embark on awareness campaigns to reach out to people and sell them their ideas. Public speaking, even in market places, should be encouraged. Workshops could also be organized in villages to intimate them about the particular state of things and how they can make a difference.

Above all, the affinity between the philosopher and literary artist should be reinforced. Both disciplines should also be blended to create entertaining works of literature with clear and well thought-out meanings that would affect not only a reader but also a listener since both disciplines complement each other. It is our belief that if these suggestions are adhered to, to the letter, the transition towards an ideal society which Nigeria (and, indeed, Africa) craves for will be a reality.

Summary of Study Session 1

- (1) Philosophy is defined as the criticism of the ideas we live by. It challenges opinions, both established ones and forsaken ones. Philosophy implies a body of ideas, an outlook and an attitude to life. It critically examines man, his environment and the interaction between the two. It seeks answers to questions about motives underlining man's actions and the nature of incidence of events. Literature, on the other hand, is a form of expressive art; a form of entertainment which conveys an experience which is believed to have some significance to our self-understanding as humans.
- (2) A society in transition refers to a society which is yet to stabilize, still requiring adjustments in the way of life of the people in it to suit the changing times.
- (3) Philosophy and Literature are both quite important to a society in transition since they serve as a reflection of cultural trends, with culture itself not being a static phenomenon but one subject to the dynamics of change.
- (4) One problem facing the effective achievement of the roles of philosophy and literature in a society in transition is illiteracy.
- (5) The affinity between the philosopher and literary artist should be reinforced. Both disciplines should also be blended to create entertaining works of literature with clear and

well thought-out meanings that would affect not only a reader but also a listener since both disciplines complement each other.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 1

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 1.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 1.1)

1. Discuss the relationship between philosophy and literature.
2. What is a Society in Transition

SAQ 1.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 1.2)

With particular reference to a text, discuss how philosophy and literature can help in a society in transition

Study Session 2: The role of the Philosopher and the Imaginative Writer as Guardians of Public Conscience

Introduction

In this study session, you will be introduced to the historical development of philosophy and literature. In the area of philosophy, you will be looking at how philosophy started with the Ionian philosophers who began philosophy by distancing themselves from the mythological narratives of their time and sought the primary stuff from which all things came from.

You will also see how it has been difficult to have a definite definition of philosophy. In the area of literature, how the literary tradition flourished throughout history will be discussed. Our main interest in this study session, however, is to show how philosophers and literary artists have tried to be guardians of public conscience in such areas as politics, economy, and so on.

Learning Outcome for Study Session 2

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 Explain the historical development of philosophy.
- 2.2 Explain how the Greek society placed considerable emphasis on literature.
- 2.3 Give reasons why philosophers and literary artists are regarded as guardians of public conscience.

2.1 The Historical Development of Philosophy

When the Ionians began to philosophize about nature, they were critiquing the “traditional” conception of nature. They sought the primary stuff from which all things came to be. Thales posited water to be the basic stuff; Anaximander proposed that the basic principle is *Apeiron* – unlimited, infinite, boundless, and indeterminate. Nevertheless, from a critical analysis of nature and the physical sciences, philosophy developed into a critique of life generally.

Socrates who lived ca.470 B.C. – 399 B.C. was a critic of the Sophists who used their philosophy to distort the truth. He asserted that “an unexamined life is not worth living”. In his time, Socrates attempted to purify the society of ideas and notions that were not critically examined. This led to his death because he was perceived to be a threat to the society.

- How did Philosophy developed into a critique of life?
- It developed from the critical analysis of nature and physical sciences

Over the centuries, philosophy has developed, but in its developmental strides no definite definition can be said to convene what philosophy is all about. This is as a result of the personal biases and interests of various philosophers. For example, empiricism remains the patrimony of the British philosophers. This does not mean that there are no variances in their various conceptions of empiricism.

Also, German philosophers took philosophy from an idealistic perspective. Hence their philosophy is regarded as German idealism and has renowned proponents like Hegel, Heidegger and so on. The Americans embrace pragmatism, a patrimony that Charles Sanders Pierce and William James bequeathed. Nevertheless, while some generally regard philosophy as a way of life, some hold that it is the criticism of the ideas we live by. Some also see it as a critical inquiry into the deeper meaning of reality.

Whatever definition that may be proffered or proposed for philosophy, it must have the characteristic of being “critical”. In study session, literature was defined as a piece of writing that is valued as work of arts especially works like:

- ❖ novels
- ❖ plays
- ❖ Poems or a piece of writing or printed information on a particular subject

The ancient Greek society placed considerable emphasis upon literature. For some, the literary tradition is considered to have begun with the epic poems. Epic poems like *Iliad* and *Odyssey* remain giants in the literary canon for their depiction of war and peace, love and hatred, honour and disgrace. It was Sappho who defined lyric poetry as a genre, carving a niche for himself in the annals of literary works.

Aeschylus, a playwright, changed Western literature when he introduced the ideas of dialogue and interacting characters to play writing. In doing so, he essentially invented “drama” which is a type of literary work.

With the emergence of the Roman republic and empire, many of the Roman authors chose to avoid innovation, but simply imitated the Greek authors. Virgil (or Publius Vergilius Maro, 70 – 19BC), a Roman poet, wrote *Aeneid* and it turned out to be an emulation of Homer’s *Iliad*. Plautus, a comic playwright, followed the footsteps of Aristophanes who defined and shaped the idea of comedy especially with his *Lysistrata* and *The Frogs*.

Regardless of their imitation of the Greek authors, the Roman authors bequeathed to the literary world a satire as a literary genre. Although Horace (65 – 8BC) had made of it as a tool for argument, but Juvenal, a Roman satirist, made it into a literary weapon.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, the Arabic literature flourished both in Asia and Africa just as Islam spread throughout these continents. For, instance, Ibn Tufail and Ibn al-Nafis were pioneers of the philosophical novel. Ibn Tufail wrote the first fictional Arabic novel *Hayy ibn Yaqdham (Philosophus Autodidactus)* as a response to al-Ghazali’s *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, and then Ibn al-Nafis wrote a fictional novel *Theologus Autodidactus* as a response to Ibn Tufail’s *Philosophus Autodidactus*.

Nevertheless, the most well-known fiction from the Islamic world was *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights)* which was a compilation of earlier folktales told by Scheherazade, the Persian queen.

Around the 1400s, literature underwent a transformation with the invention of the printing machine by Johann Gutenberg. Texts were no longer precious and expensive to produce. This

made literacy to move away from the prized possession of a selected few to a much broader section of the population. This was during the Renaissance era when the focus of learning for learning sake caused an outpouring of literature.

Petrarch popularized the sonnet as a poetic form, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* made romance acceptable in prose as well as poetry; Francois Rabelais rejuvenated satire with *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. Michael de Montaigne single-handedly invented the essay and used it to catalogue his life and ideas.

Just as the Renaissance was a transitional period, literature in that era led to the development of the Baroque literature in the early modern era. From the early modern period, playwrights like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, Moliere and Ben Jonson made numerous contributions. From the sixteenth to eighteenth century, *Commedia dell' arte* performers improvised in the streets of Italy and France though some were written down.

Literature continued to be readapted just as the world experienced change of power, politically, socially and economically. In Britain, around the nineteenth century, which is dominated by the Victorian era characterized by Romanticism, romantic poets like William Wordsworth, Lord Byron and so on developed the gothic novel. However, the twentieth century literature is characterized by a **bipartite division**: *the modernist literature and the post-modernist literature*. This led to the development of the genres such as fantasy and science fiction.

2.2 The Role of the Philosopher and Imaginative Writer in Society

As have earlier stated in study session 1, philosophy challenges opinions, both established and foregone opinions. In carrying out its critical function, philosophy elicits a sort of prognosis of world views; which can be seen in box 1.1 below;

Box 2.1 Critical Functions of Philosopher

1. Engendering new discourses
2. New sciences,
3. New philosophical research programmes and new objectives truths.
4. It also challenges the way we live and
5. proffers new ways of understanding who we are,
6. What we might become and how we ought to live.

From this, you can deduce that the function of the philosopher is, on the one hand, a theoretical function and, on the other hand, a practical function. This classification of function is as result of the classification of philosophy into theoretical and practical. Thus, while the philosopher proffers theories that influence society, he also proffers praxis as to the way people in the society to live and relate with one another. Examples shall be cited on some philosophers who

influenced the consciousness of the public through their philosophizing. One of them is Karl Max. See his picture below;



Figure 2.1: Karl Max

Source: <http://www.biography.com/people/karl-marx-9401219#synopsis>

Karl Marx' philosophy of communism, which is both political and economic, influenced the conscience of the people of the Old Soviet Union. Marx was dissatisfied with the idealistic conception that was prevalent in his time. He saw workers suffer in the hands of the bourgeoisie. For him, history ought not to have been construed in an idealistic way in the manner Hegel propounded it; but ought to be from a materialistic conception.

History, according to him, was going to end in a classless struggle since every society produces the seed for its own destruction. He denounced the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariats and how the selfish attitude of the bourgeoisie has affected almost every facets of life. It had stripped the halo of every occupation and made it to be about money. It had been able to do this by annexing the means of production and as a result agglomerated population, centralized means of production and had these concentrated in the hands of the few.

However, such activities of the bourgeoisie would bring about its downfall because the labourers would be forced to gather and revolt against the injustices meted out to them. This revolution is justifiable because it would result into a socialist society that would eventually lead to communism, where the production is not left in the hands of the few, but "from each according to what he can give and to each according to what he needs."

This communist manifesto of Karl Marx later gave birth to the communism of the Old Soviet Union before its demise in the early 1980s. Nevertheless, some countries like Cuba and China are said to be communist societies, but not in the fuller sense as Marx had proposed.

Another philosopher whose philosophy has influenced public conscience is J.S. Mill. Mill was one of the proponents of utilitarianism. He revised the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and proposed a qualitative utilitarianism instead of a quantitative utilitarianism. He asserted that it is better to be a dis-satisfied Socrates than a satisfied pig. In opting for that which is pleasurable, he argued, the individual ought to seek the pleasure which will bring him the overall benefit.



Figure 2.1: John Staurt Mill

Source: <http://www.utilitarianism.com/js-mill.htm>

His ethical theory has not only formed most people's way of living, but also has been one of the pivotal elements in some countries' constitutions. Mill's utilitarianism was also the foundation for his concept of liberty. He was concerned with the question of the proper limits of society's power over the individual. He acquiesced to the fact that society may interfere based on the principle of self-preservation with regard to preventing the individual from causing harm to others.

An individual cannot for the sake of his own good, whether moral or physical, cause harm to others, neither can the society interfere because it perceives that such interference will be for the good of the individual. Hence, the individual is sovereign over his actions, but his sovereignty should not be a license of bringing about harm to others. Mill was very cautious so that his argument would still be framed on the principle of utility: greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

- What did you understand by JS Mill point of view?
- ☐ The individual ought to seek the pleasure which will bring him the overall benefit and not cause harm to others.

Liberty comprises of the following:

- ❖ First, liberty of conscience which falls within the inward domain of the individual's consciousness.
- ❖ Second, liberty of tastes and pursuits allows the individual to plan his life to suit his own character.
- ❖ Third, liberty of combinations among individuals allows freedom to unite for any purpose of which harm to others is not involved.
- ❖ The other senses of liberty are centred on liberty of the individual whereas this is centred on the individual in relation to other people.

Mill asserted that any society where these liberties are not respected is not free. His concept of liberty has, to some extent, influenced the constitution of the United States of America.

2.3 Philosophy and Literary Artists as Guardians of Public Conscience

Having considered how philosophers have influenced the public conscience of the people, there is also another aspect that is also important in the transformation of any society. Literature is another important factor that influences societal change and guard public conscience. Literature, as have pointed out in study session 1, has the twofold task of aesthetic gratification and edification.

By edification, the literary artist, through his work, teaches lessons of life, affirming or correcting our biases. This is because literature attempts to convey an experience believed to have some significance for human understanding. Like philosophy, it provides a kind of framework within which people can perceive, understand and interpret the world in which they live.

It also challenges some societal norms, values and customs, identifying new possibilities and trends. For example, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a critique of Josef Stalin's era. The author was a member of the Independent Labour Party and was also a democratic socialist. He denounced Stalin's corruption of the original idea of socialism and employed this allegory of his novel to bring to the public's consciousness the ills in Stalin's era.

- Outside Philosophy, identify another thing that influenced public conscience?
- Literature

You can now try to contextualize the role of the literary artist especially as they relate to the African experience. Wole Soyinka, in his novel *The Man Died*, gives a picture of the brutality of military regimes. The novel is about his travails and the travails of other people who suffered brutality in the hands of the military men during the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970. Soyinka was arrested on his return trip from the Eastern part of Nigeria which was about to secede from Nigeria.

He had hoped that dialogue would end the blood-letting instead of tanks, warship and ammunition. As a writer, he had written to some prominent news dailies and his articles were threats to the Nigerian army. He was not in support of the secession neither was he for the position of the Nigerian Government led by General Yakubu Gowon.

During his time in prison, he came in contact with various people. He noticed how some people were unjustly treated for crimes that they did not commit; how Ambrose Okpe and Gani Biban soldiers from the 3rd Battalion who were charged the murder of Emmanuel Ogbonna, an Igbo photographer, were actually living comfortably in prison. This gave him the clue that some high-ranking officers were behind the gruesome murder of the innocent man.

Also, he noticed how some people were so quick to trade the truth and justice for the protection of their lives and, in all this, remained resolute to protect the interest of those who were innocent while he suffered ill-treatment for not disclosing a single name of his fellow associates. In all this experience, he was able to coin the title of the book *The Man Died*. The man who fails to stand for what is right or who is quick to prevaricate to save the hair on his skin is the man who has died.

While the book provides an aesthetic gratification since it was published after the end of the civil war, it also proffers insights into how corrupt a government can be when it ceases the reins of power without the mandate of the people can be.

- The book: *The Man Died* exposes ills in the society and such ills are?
- The brutality of military regimes and how people were so quick to trade the truth and justice for protection of their lives.

James Ene Henshaw's *This is Our Chance* is a collection of various plays put together. The author tried also to depict the society. In the play "A Man of Character," he tried to show the futility of the greed for money. Kobina who represented a man of character was satisfied with his standard of living and was not lustful for riches.

However, he was made to go through the crucible of trials for him to actually prove his character. His wife Ayodele left him because he could not provide for her luxury which other women enjoy from their husbands. As if that was not enough, his office was burgled and no evidence could be traced to anyone, but to him since he had the keys and there was no break in the office's safe.

He stood his ground and remained resolute that, instead of cutting corners just to prove his innocence, he would follow due process. He contacted his lawyer and was later vindicated of the theft in the office and his wife returned appreciating the quality of contentment in the husband. This play has a moral dimension. The author attempted to show that good character pays rather than being dubious.

Also, it portrays what a good law enforcement agent should be as represented in the character-role depicted in the person of Mbedu, who was a police sergeant. The good character depicted by this sergeant reminds us of corrupt policemen who are more than eager to collect bribes even before they are lured into it. He refused to allow himself to be bribed by Serinya, sister-in-law to Kobina, who wanted to vindicate her in-law through dubious means the play also shows that evil act cannot justify good act.

In the two works cited above, some ideological underpinnings can be deduced and inferred. In *The Man Died*, Soyinka is trying to bring to the awareness of the public the ills of military regime. A prognosis that the novel offers implicitly is that evil will continue to thrive unless people stand up against it.

The play "The Man of Character" depicts one argument that is still debatable among some ethicists as to what determines the moral worth of an action. While some argue that the end justifies the means, some are of the opinion that the circumstances surrounding the act determine the morality of an action. Hence, a society can hardly thrive without the contribution of ideas by philosophers and imaginative writers.

Summary of Study Session 2

- (1) Over the centuries, philosophy has developed, but in its developmental strides no definite definition can be said to convene what philosophy is all about. This is as a result of the personal biases and interests of various philosophers.
- (2) The ancient Greek society placed considerable emphasis upon literature. For some, the literary tradition is considered to have begun with the epic poems. Epic poems like *Iliad* and *Odyssey* remain giants in the literary canon for their depiction of war and peace, love and hatred, honour and disgrace.
- (3) With the emergence of the Roman republic and empire, many of the Roman authors chose to avoid innovation, but simply imitated the Greek authors.
- (4) With the fall of the Roman Empire, the Arabic literature flourished both in Asia and Africa just as Islam spread throughout these continents. For, instance, Ibn Tufail and Ibn al-Nafis were pioneers of the philosophical novel.
- (5) The philosophical ideas of Karl Marx and J.S. Mill, among others, have influenced the public conscience in a number of ways.
- (6) George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a critique of Josef Stalin's era and, employing allegories, has brought to the people's consciousness the ills of Stalin's era.
- (7) Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died* reflects the brutality of military regimes and provides insights into how corrupt a government can be when it ceases power without the mandate of the people.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 2

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 2.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 2.1)

Highlight how literature underwent a transformation with the invention of the printing machine.

SAQ 2.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 2.2)

Discuss J.S. Mill's concept of liberty and why this qualifies as an attempt to appeal to the conscience of the people.

SAQ 2.3 (Testing Learning outcomes 2.3)

1. Discuss how the ideas in Karl Marx's philosophy guarded the people's conscience in the then Soviet Union.
2. Briefly discuss the main idea in Soyinka's *The Man Died*.

With particular reference to a novel, written by an African, discuss how the work of a literary artist can help to give a true picture of the state of the nation.

Study Session 3: A Philosophical Approach to African Literature

Introduction

This study session makes a case for the feasibility and plausibility of a philosophical approach to the criticism of African literature. In this approach African literary works would be considered as works of ideas providing categorical frameworks for perceiving, interpreting and transforming the African world or challenging prevailing explanations of ourselves and condition so as to promote African self-knowledge.

There is an illustration of how this critical approach would work in practice through a consideration of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Biyi Bandele-Thomas' *The Man Who Came in From the Back of Beyond*. While not doubting the utility of the linguistic and sociological approaches to literary criticism in Africa, this study session shows that a philosophical approach to African literature can provide opportunities for cross-boundary dialogue between writers, philosophers and critics and also shed a new light on the relationship between literature and society in Africa.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 3

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 3.1 Explain why a philosophical approach to African literature is feasible.
- 3.2 Discuss the close affinity between philosophy and literature and how this has helped the two disciplines to deal with human life (experience) in its various dimensions.

3.1 Philosophical Approach to African Literature

Literary criticism in Africa has been characterized by two dominant approaches. One approach sees a literary work primarily as a work of art whose meaning and significant derives from the manner in which its parts relate to one another to build up a whole. In this approach, which, according to D.S. Izevbye (1975:3), uses "only the internal characteristics of literary works for critical appraisal", form and structure are what matter; socio-historical references and other forms of extra-literary information are irrelevant.

This formalistic approach stands in contrast to the sociological approach which considers the social context of a literary work a crucial element in its critical appraisal. It, as Professor Abiola Irele describes it in his influential book, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*,

attempts to correlate the work to the social background to see how the author's intention and attitude issue out of the wider social context of how art in the first place and, more important still, to get to an understanding of the way each writer or group of writers captures a moment in the historical consciousness of the society (Irele 1981:34).

The aim of this essay is not to examine these approaches which, in any case, are not mutually exclusive as some of their defendants seem to suggest. Rather, the concern is to suggest that another critical approach – a philosophical approach – to African literature is feasible and plausible. In this approach, which has not been adequately explored our literary works, at any rate some of them, would be considered as works of ideas serving two interrelated ends:

Namely, providing a framework for

- ❖ Perceiving,
- ❖ Interpreting
- ❖ Transforming our reality;
- ❖ Challenging certain explanations of ourselves and our condition

Thereby offering new ways in which we can come to understand, in the words of Kai Nielsen, “who we are and what we might become” (Nielsen 1987:104). But what would be the justification for this kind of approach? Two main reasons readily come to mind, one general, the other specific.

The General Justification

The general or theoretical justification has to do with the affinity between philosophy and literature as social phenomena. They are social not simply in the trivial sense that they are produced by people who necessarily are beings-in-society. Rather, they are social in two important respects.

First, even when they spring from the experience of an individual or treat very abstract matters, they constitute a reflection on the phenomenon of life. (It should be noted in this regard that personal experience is still human experience and human experience is invariably social; it is a product of our interaction not only with nature, but also with us).

But philosophy and literature are social in another respect. They are both “born of the intellectual and practical needs of society and the classes comprising it” (Iribadjakov 1974:47). These two aspects of the sociality of philosophy and literature suggest that the close affinity between them drives from the fact that they both deal with the same object – human life (experience) in its various dimensions. But this really does not say much of the relationship between them.

- List the two dominant approaches to literary criticism in Africa.
- Philosophical Approach and Sociological Approach

For if philosophy and literature are interested in human life in its various dimensions, so are other aspects of human intellectual culture, for example, religion. We, therefore, need to be a little more concrete in specifying the nature of both the philosophical and literary engagements with human life and their relationship.

In his intellectual engagement with human life, the philosopher may seek to do one of two things, or both at the same time.

He may seek to:

- ❖ Provide a categorical framework within which various aspects of life and their interconnection can be explained or challenged
- ❖ Establish understandings of us and our condition
- ❖ Through this challenge, seek to identify new possibilities and trends.

However, therefore, it could be said that the quest for meaning and self-understanding is central to the philosophic engagement with human life. The question now is: Does the literary engagement with life seek to achieve the same objective?

This question should be answered in the affirmative. For literature, whether socially engaged or not, is not, cannot be a work for its own sake, as you can see in box 3.1.

Box 3.1: Role of Literature to Engagement with Life

1. It either seeks to convey an experience because it is believed such experience has some significance for human self-understanding or, in some societies, attempts to mould the personality of the individual in society.
2. In performing any of these roles, even that of sheer entertainment, literature operates within some context of ideas which provides an anchor for the web of descriptions, constructions and evaluations which gives it its distinctive character.
3. This and the symbolic and linguistic resources it employs give a literary work the force which makes it possible for it to register some effect on the reader's sensibility.
4. Thus literature, like philosophy, provides intellectual framework within which people can perceive, interpret and transform human experience.
5. And, in providing these intellectual frameworks, it may also seek to challenge established opinions of ourselves and our condition and identify new possibilities of being and existence.

This affinity between literature and philosophy clearly suggests that a philosophical approach to African literature is feasible and plausible.

The second justification for a philosophical approach to African literature derives from the nature of modern African literature. This literature, as Abiola Irele (1981:35) has aptly observed, "Is an indication of an essential aspect of our spiritual evolution" indeed, it "has served as the principal channel through which the collective adventure of the new African is being given expression. In doing this, this literature does not merely mirror the African condition; it also tries to explain why this condition is what it is and, in some cases, offer a vision of what we might become.

- Give one reasons why you think that a philosophical approach to African literature is feasible.
- It does not merely mirror the African condition, it also tries to explain why condition is what it is and offers a vision of what we might become

A literature which attempts to offer an explanation of a given condition within the context of a social vision which can be ascertained and examined, or one that challenged some popular conceptions of ourselves and our situation, calls for a critical engagement which is philosophical. In other words, it calls for an approach to criticism which would make the identification and interrogation of the intellectual framework which provides an anchor for the web of descriptions, constructions and evaluation which it contains possible.

3.2 The Close Affinity between Philosophy and Literature in dealing with Human Life

You can see, then, that a philosophical approach to African literature is not as far-fetched as it ordinary would appear. To see how this approach would work in practice and the kind of insight it can bring into the appreciation of African literature, you consider Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988), a work whose significance lies in its exemplification of the idea of the writer as a socio-political philosopher.

An anthill is a portrait of a repressive, corrupt and insensitive military government in an imaginary African state, Kangan. However, it is not "a mere denunciation of military dictatorship or military rule", it is also an attempt to explain the tragic situation in Africa in which military governments, in spite of their reformist pretensions, fail in the end to correct the ills which they eloquently denounce in their – sometimes monotonous – coup-day speeches.

Three main reasons are adduced for this situation and they are as follow;

- ❖ The pernicious nature of military government
- ❖ The alienation of the people
- ❖ The people as collaborators

The Pernicious Nature of Military Governments:

Most of them are headed by people who, like Sam in *Anthills*, came to power without any preparation for political leadership; they only rely on handful of friends for ideas on what to do.

The Alienation of the People

The alienation of people, particularly the poor and the dispossessed from their rulers, **Achebe** sees in this alienation the prime factor for the failure of military governments in Africa. As he says, though Ikem, "the doomed hero of the novel", the prime failure of the military government in Kangan is neither its massive corruption nor its subservience to foreign manipulation.

*It isn't even this second-class, hand-me-down capitalism
... nor is it the damnable shooting of striking railway
workers and demonstrating students and the destruction
and banning of independent unions and cooperatives
(Achebe 1987:14).*

The prime failure, for Ikem, "is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and the dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being" (Ibid.).

The People as Collaborators

This takes us to the other reason for the failure of military governments in Africa given by Achebe in *Anthills*. This is the fact that the people themselves are collaborators, conscious or unconscious, in their own oppression. Although they complain incessantly that the system is rotten, nothing in what they do suggests that they are prepared to make the required sacrifice to change the system. Indeed, most of them uncritically accept the beliefs, values and attitudes of their oppressors. Consider the workers, for example. These are people who, some scholars think, should be at the vanguard of the revolution. Yet, what we see, as Ikem reveals in his lecture at the University of Bassa, is a situation in which most of them accept the situation as it is and are even prepared to exploit its shortcomings to achieve their own selfish ends. Indeed, their leaders are parasites who accept the world-views and values of their oppressors.

On the whole, Achebe in *Anthills* sees the problems of Nigeria (indeed Africa) as not being that of the system as such, but that of “a basic human failing that may be alleviated by a good spread of a general political experience” (Ibid. 39) whose development is usually gradual. Hence, he considers reform “the most promising route” to social change. We have an apt presentation of this reformist idea in Ikem when he observes that:

The most we can do with a problematic individual psyche is to reform it. No responsible psychoanalyst would aim to do more, for to do more, to overthrow the psyche itself, would be to unleash insanity. 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 (Ibid. 99 – 100).

This observation about the individual is, in Ikem’s view, true of a society: “you reform it around its core reality; not around an intellectual abstraction” (Ibid. 100).

You see then that Achebe’s *Anthills* goes beyond description and explanation, he also offers a view of society and social change which can be discussed and examined. A critical examination of this vision is beyond scope of this essay. Suffice it to note that what you find in *Anthills* is an exemplification of Achebe’s idea of the place and role of literature in the search for enduring values in terms of which we can make a sense of our experiences and develop the right kind of attitudes to our society and its institutions.

For Achebe, literature is an important element in the development process. It not only makes an imaginative encounter with our situation possible, it also can assist us in identifying options that are open to us in the struggle to create a new society and a new man as expressed in his National Merit Award Lecture aptly titled, “What has Literature Got to do with it?” (Achebe 1987:106 – 117). According to him:



■ Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality; enabling us to encounter in the safe, manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts a veritable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found within problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us (Ibid. 117).

Thus, in Achebe's *Anthills* you will see a close relationship between theoretical writing on the nature and relevance of literature to national development and fictional work. This situation, no doubt, makes a philosophical reading of this work feasible and plausible. However, the existence of this affinity need not be a condition for the adoption of a philosophical approach to African literature. For even in cases where this affinity does not exist or cannot be easily traced, you can still, with justification, attempt a philosophical reading.

3.2.1 Biyi Bandele-Thomas Novel (*The man*): Recreation of the Experience of the Poor and the Dispossessed in our Society

Consider, for example, Biyi Bandele-Thomas' first novel, *The Man Who Came in from the Back of Beyond* (Bande-Thomas 1996), which is a recreation of the experience of the poor and the dispossessed in our society. You can go beyond the force of the language which makes this experience as portrayed in the book vivid and disturbing. You can even go beyond its sociological reference to consider it as a work of ideas.

This book (hereafter referred to as *The Man*) is, undoubtedly, a story of misfortune, frustration, misery and violence, depicting the web of drifts and losses which have become the hallmark of "an exploitative, soul-debilitating society" called Nigeria. Indeed, it is easy to see a Bazo, a Deborah, a Rebecca, an Abednego, a Maria, even a Mitchell Socrates, ex-boxer, ex-soldier and then an opium merchant and conspirator, among the millions in Nigeria whose interests and needs are absent from the calculation of power.

However, it is not this, perhaps exaggerated, depiction of the Nigerian reality that is of interest. What is important is the kind of criticism of this society that Biyi Bandele-Thomas attempts. For instance, he agrees that the system is exploitative and soul-destroying. And, for this, he does not hesitate to blame the elders who are unable to see beyond the veil of self-interest to respond "to the real needs of others".

However, while admitting the gripping and corrosive influence which the system can have on the individual, he does not think that this influence cannot be resisted. In other words, he does not see in the crippling fatalism which manifests itself in the readiness of the people to take things as they are and leave them as a viable option in our situation. The system has to be resisted and what kind of resistance?

Here, we see a certain convergence between Achebe in *Anthills* and Bandele-Thomas on the dynamics of social change. Like Achebe, Bandele-Thomas does not see the kind of grand revolutionary gesture to conquer the system that Bozo and his movement attempted in his story as a viable option. Such a gesture can hardly succeed. Indeed, it can easily lead to a situation in which the prospective conquerors are conquered by the system they thought they could conquer. This, it would appear, is an aspect of the lesson of Bozo and the movement in *The Man*.

But change is still possible, Biyi Bandele-Thomas says. A crucial element of this change would be a determination by the victims of the system to refuse to be imprisoned by it, by rejecting the beliefs, values and attitudes of those who maintain and run the system. For one of the banes of our society of which he reminds us is the case with which we blame the leaders while we continue in earnest – like those characters in *The Man* who condemned the unhealthy habits of their fellow-countrymen “who thought they could turn every place into a personal lavatory” only to come back hours later to do what they had condemned (Ibid. 92) – to replicate, in different shades, their beliefs, values and attitude.

For Bandele-Thomas, in spite of the pervasiveness of the corroding influence of the system, it is still possible for each individual to make an historical break with his/her past; there is always the possibility of starting afresh. This, at least, was what Lakemf, the narrator of *The Man*, decided to do after reading and listening to the story of Bozo in the house of Maude, his iconoclastic teacher of Literature and English Language, who himself was a model of self-determination.

Lakemf had decided, after this experience, to turn against his ugly past and make a fresh start. He was determined to be through with the following in figure 3.1 below

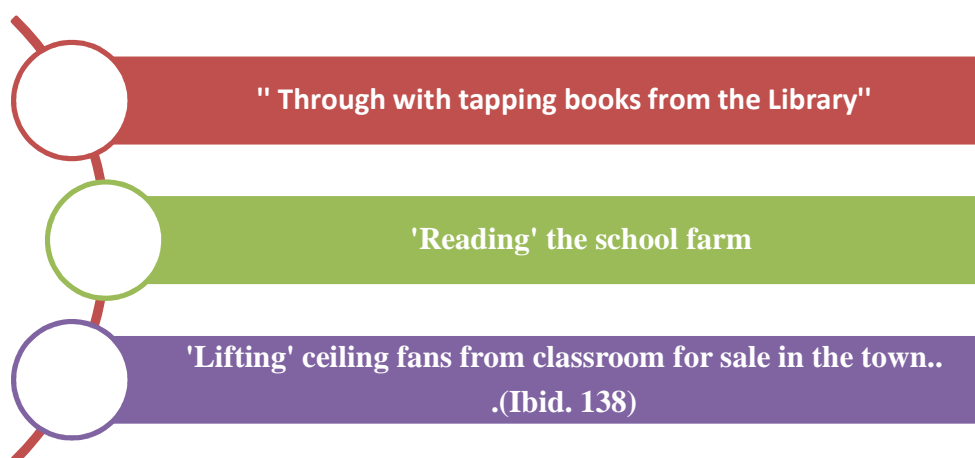


Figure 3.1: Lakemf Decision

Source: Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan

His reason for doing this is that you do not cleanse a rotten system by joining those who make it rot. In addition to this, he was ready to confess his past activities in this regard to the Vee Pee (Vice-Principal) of his school.

This was in spite of the warning or reminder of his friend, Yau, that the path of rectitude and honesty, the proverbial narrow path, is a “rough, rough, and lonely, very lonely, road to travel.” Here, then, is one book which, like Achebe’s *Anthills*, in addition to providing a portrayal of our socio-political situation, also provides a framework for transforming this reality which can be analysed and discussed.

- Mention one lesson you learn from Lakemf decision in the novel by Bandele-Thomas titled *the man*?
- The lesson is that positive change is good for every individual in the society especially in bridging the gap of the rich and the poor

It would appear from the examples discussed above that there is no significant difference between a philosophical approach to African literature and what is usually called the sociological approach. After all, in the brief analysis of the two selected texts made above, it shows that the sociological background has not been entirely neglected.

You can answer this question by, first admitting that there is indeed a close affinity between the philosophical approach to literary criticism and the sociological. This is particularly the case when philosophy is seen as a critical theory challenging established understandings of ourselves and our condition and pointing up the path to future possibilities. It does not required much reflection to see the affinity between this conception of philosophy and what T.B. Bottomore regard’s as “one of the positive and radical features of sociology considered as a science”, namely, the “continuous criticism of all extant theories of society, including those everyday conceptions of the social world which shape practical life” (Bottomore 1975:15).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that although there is a close affinity between sociology as social criticism and philosophy as critique of ideas, there is a difference of degree between them that you need to appreciate. The difference lies in the fact that the range of preoccupations in the latter is wider than the former. The range of ideas on which philosophers reflect is not limited to social ones; they can be metaphysical, epistemological, logical, linguistic, moral, religious, and so on. Hence, although the works examined here are those that concern themselves with socio-political problems, they do not exhaust the range of problems which can stimulate a philosophical investigation of African literature.

But there is also a difference in kind between the sociological approach to African literature as described by Abiola Irele and the philosophical approach. This difference can be expressed in this manner in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Difference Between sociological Approach and Philosophical Approach to African literature by **Abiola Irele**

Sociological Approach	Philosophical Approach
Whereas the primary goal of the sociological approach is to determine the kind of influence which the sociological background which a work yields, emphasis in the philosophical approach is on the idea or body of ideas which provide the anchor for the web of descriptions, constructions and evaluations it contains.	The primary concern of the critic of the philosophical approach would be the assessment of the meaning and value of this idea or body of ideas; he would reflect on it, relate it to the socio-historical conditions of its development and the context of ideas in which it has developed.

Let us return to the texts already considered with a view to providing a brief illustration of how this primary concern can be expressed. Both of them, it is clear, reject violence as a means of change. Achebe rejects this means of change because, for him, there is no guarantee that a violent transformation of society would bring about the desired utopia; indeed, it can lead to social disorder.

What we have in Biyi Bandele-Thomas, on the other hand, is a Tolstian position that all that is required for social change to occur is for each individual to be upright by “acting according to conscience” (Tolstoy 1967:12). What you have, in both cases, is an absolute rejection of violence and an unconditional vote for non-violence as means of change.

This proposal raises a number of questions, one of which is that of whether absolute faith in non-violence as a means of change can be sustained. It is doubtful that there is a solid basis for this kind of faith. This being the case, mainly, because it does not take into account the conservative nature of governmental power which predisposes those who rule to resist change; the nature and extent of resistance depending on their perception of the strength of the threat to the status quo which a struggle for change poses. It is this tendency for governmental power to protect and reproduce itself which makes peaceful change difficult, if not impossible, in many human communities.

In the particular case of post-independence Africa, where the relationship between the people, “power, law and government” is predominantly adversarial and opportunity for the expression of political preferences through dialogue and mass participation in the political process is highly limited, an absolute faith in non-violence as a means of change can easily become a recipe for social inertia.

The point, then, is that the nature and mode of change in a society cannot be determined *a priori*. It is best considered or settled within the context of a people’s social experience. It is also important to note that a revolution, even a violent one, need not be propelled by a grand utopian dream; it can still be based on a realistic appraisal of what is possible or impossible in a given socio-historical context. Of course, elements of utopianism may be present as a means of mobilizing the relevant social forces for change. These, however, need not be dominant.

In sum, there is a “historical component” in the determination of the nature and mode of social change in any human community. Thus, although Achebe’s and Bandele-Thomas’ observation

about the possibility of the failure of grand revolutionary design is correct, there are good grounds of questioning their absolute faith in reform and non-violence as means of change.

The brief analysis made above should give us an idea of the kind of orientation of literary criticism in Africa which the philosophical approach exemplifies. One advantage of this approach is seen in box 3.2 below;

Box 3.2: Advantages of Philosophical Approach to African Literature

1. It can promote a deeper appreciation of our literary works beyond what a linguistic or sociological appreciation of their nature can allow. The outlines of analysis of *Anthills* and *The Man* provided above would seem to support this point. So does Anthony Appiah's analysis of Wole Soyinka's play, *Death and the Kind's Horseman* in his essay entitled, "Soyinka and the Philosophy of Culture" (Appiah 1985:250 – 263).
2. In this essay you see how a philosophical engagement with a play, which many literary scholars regard as Soyinka's most challenging, turn out to be a discussion on what Africa means or should mean in the contemporary world.
3. Thus, a philosophical approach to African literature, apart from providing opportunities for cross-boundary dialogue between writers, philosophers and literary critics in Africa, can shed a new light on the relationship between literature and society and Africa.
4. It can provide opportunities for inter-textual interrogation and dialogue the realization of which could only serve to enrich African discourse.

It would be interesting, for instance, to explore the similarities and divergences between *Anthills* and *The Man*, on the one hand, and between these and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* or Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*. You have in the course of this study session highlighted some of the similarities in ideas between *Anthills* and *The Man*. You saw, for instance, that both are suspicious of grand gestures of revolutionary change.

Yet this is what Ayi Kwei Armah, for instance, would seem to recommend in *Two Thousand Seasons*. But even between *Anthills* and *The Man*, there are divergences. Achebe, in spite of everything, seems to believe in the possibility of an elite-directed change, whereas Bandele-Thomas sees in self-determination the first principle of social change.

Summary of Study Session 3

- (1) It is important to note that in attempting a philosophical reading of African literature, we are not suggesting that all the writers concerned deliberately set out to produce philosophical works. Our point, rather, is that a philosophical reading of these works can shed a new light on the relationship between literature and society in Africa.
- (2) Nonetheless, it is important to recognize a possible danger to which this approach is prone, namely, the danger of over-interpretation. It is possible to read into a literary text more philosophical message than it contains or suggests.

- (3) There is a clear-out antidote to this danger. All that can be hoped is that those who engage in this kind of intellectual practice would be people who are adequately equipped to make a distinction between a work of ideas or a simple portrayal (or record) of a moment in a people's socio-historical evolution and sufficiently charitable to see their approach to literary criticism as simply one among other possible ways of appreciating literature.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 3

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 3.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 3.1)

Discuss the two dominant approaches to literary criticism in Africa.

SAQ 3.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 3.2)

- (1) With particular reference to Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, show that a philosophical approach to African literature is not far-fetched.
- (2) In what sense is Biyi Bandele-Thomas' *The Man Who Came in from the Back of Beyond* a recreation of the experience of the poor and the dispossessed in our society?

Study session 4: Gender Issues in African Thought

Introduction

In the previous study session, you were introduced to the philosophical approach to African literature and how feasible and plausible it could be with particular reference to some African Novels.

However, this study session will focus on gender issues in African thought. So much has been contributed to the discourse on gender issues in Africa. Nevertheless, it would be noted that there are still misconceptions about the focus of the idea of gender liberation and there exists a wide gap between theorizing about gender issues and its praxis. Sexual roles and stereotypes inculcated through the home and school environments, and reinforced by the mass media, are retained in the society.

Rather than acting against these sexual hegemonic norms, the society tends to exaggerate them thus the need for intervention in this area. This study session intends to emphasize the need to make gender advocacy a human, rather than a woman, agenda and discourage any separatist agenda or radical feminist approach to resolving gender issues in African thought.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 4

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 4.1 Define the term “gender”.
- 4.2 Discuss Gender Issues in African Thought
- 4.3 Explain that gender advocacy should not be seen as an agenda to deify a gender above the other.

4.1 What is Gender?

The term “gender” is not a given at birth; it refers to the “non-physiological aspects of sex, a group of attributes and or behaviour, shaped by society and culture, that are defined as appropriate for the male sex or the female sex” (Nju-Abbenyi 2005:258). Gender identity intervenes through the development of the individual sexes. It must be noted that several issues have been subsumed under the discourse of gender both in the west and in African thought system.

Some feminists have argued that gender issues are concerns about the disparity between male and female sexuality; some others have identified the importance of mothering and family relations. Some feminists argue that gender is a social and/or cultural process involving a

complex set of relations that inevitably interlock with other relations of age, race, class, ethnicity, ideology, and so on (Ibid.: 259).

It is argued that African women assume roles or duties similar to that of men or at the same level with men in Africa. It also been contended that “biological categories are misleading in studying sex and gender since either sex can assume socially viable roles as male or female” (Steady 2004:49). Another position on gender issues by some African writers is the rejection of the notion of gender in African thought.

- In your word, what is gender?

Oyeronke Oyewumi, among others, argues that gender must not be taken at face value. This is because feminism or gender issues are articulated based on Eurocentric form of stratification of the nuclear family set up. Using linguistic criteria of the Yoruba, she argues that this does not conform with the social reality in Africa for the African society is not gender-classed (Oyewumi 1997:30).

Here, it must be stated that gender stratification and discrimination is a reality in our present society and cannot be waived as being purely a western or colonial agenda which does not require concrete attention. Beyond the linguistic analysis is the African predicament of gender-based violence which, though cannot be looked at from the spectacles of the western society, need not be attended to with the pretence of a non-gendered society. It is significant to note here also that radical definition of feminism with the agenda of liberating women for women only shows an attitude that does not conform to the African society.

The idea of feminism in African thought connotes a social transformation agenda that encompasses women’s self-consciousness, self-expression or conditions of struggle. It addresses the needs of present African women in relation to their indigenous culture which realizes their social well-being.

4.2 Gender Issues in African Thought

Gender issues especially those in relation to woman advancement campaign has remained a global concern since the 1923 Santiago League of Nations. The codification of women affairs in the United Nations’ founding documents in 1946 contributed also to increased world consciousness and sensitivity to issues affecting women. Some of the gender related problems encountered by females in Africa include:

- ❖ Oppression
- ❖ Alienation
- ❖ Invincibility

Both in historical records and in the society (they are more to be seen rather than heard). These necessitate the need to elicit for women assimilation and to emphasize their relevance, self-esteem and freedom within the African cultural context. This does not however imply an agenda

to usurp the relevance of the males in the society nor their exploitation to the advantage of the African females.

The need for a discourse on gender issues arises out of concern about certain unethical and inhumane acts against the female based largely on their femininity. These actions have been tagged *gender-based violence*.

4.2.1 Gender-Based Violence

The word “violence” can be associated with acts of oppression, injustice and domination (Akintunde 1999:122). Violence against women is in different ways and includes:

- ❖ Assault – This means injury or fear of injury
- ❖ Kidnapping- unlawful removal or confinement;
- ❖ Criminal restraint;
- ❖ False imprisonment;
- ❖ Sexual assault (rape)... (Ibid: 123).

These can be grouped into physical and psychological actions.

The discriminatory acts against females are in diverse forms and, despite written works and presentations; they are still predominant in our society. In relation to education, it must be mentioned that this problem has been succumbed relatively in major urban areas in Nigeria.

For instance, despite the educational opportunities available, career choices for females are not without gender coloration. Also, in rural areas, the level of convictions for female child education is still at low ebbs. This calls for proper dissemination of information, awareness of the importance of literacy to all irrespective of gender difference which would in turn have its impact on the society.

The age-long barrier based on responsibility for the home should be discouraged because nurturing and literacy activities are not mutually exclusive. Males and females alike are to be allowed to make informed choices about their lives to avoid redundancy and frustrated living.

Physically, sex crimes are perpetrated against scores of females even those as young as below a year old and not necessarily by strangers. Rape is at alarming rates even at academic set up where enlightenment seems to be high. Thousands of women are coerced or otherwise abducted into prostitution or sold through other forms of trafficking, especially children between ages 10 – 14 years.

These are in turn victims of assaults, slavery and violent attacks (Mwaura and Kimani 2009:28). This calls for means to thrust aside certain aspects of our cultures that are abusive to females and to embrace principles of solidarity relatedness, survival, creative responsibility, resistance and transformation through which the females can assert their dignity. This can be ensured through continuous emphasis on virtues that call for benevolence.

Activity 4.1: Gender-based violence

Allowed Time: 45 Minutes

Task: In your locality, identify the discriminatory acts against women you have noticed.

Politically, men in Africa have dominated the public sphere, holding the vast majority of official positions of power and authority. This is because of the ideology of subordination of female to male authority and superiority and status system where women showed deference to men.

However, these ideologies and codes of etiquette are not realities because there are societies where women wielded considerable influence and authority like a dual-sex political systems. This calls for a challenge of the ideology though not with the intent of pursuing a win-lose agenda between women and men, but to challenge the ideology and make room for females' participation to a reasonable extent in lending to the political tone.

Culturally, certain activities in African mythology, proverbs, and folk tales contribute to the gender discrimination experienced and the deplorable and negative images ascribed to females in the society. For instance certain Yoruba proverbs portray females as unreliable and inconsistent:

Obinrin l'eke, obinrin l'odale: the female is a false person, the female is a traitor

Obinrin o se finu han: the female cannot be trusted to keep secrets

Such identity is obviously an undue generalization about females and its truth is questionable. However, it has the importunate effect on the society for it excludes the females from holding salient positions as well as creating a limited self-perception of the females, thereby reducing the level of reliance that can be placed on them.

Due to this problem, there is need to give the proper representation of the African females and not a debased one; to embark on a reorder to disabuse the minds of the people in the society on the unjustified sentiment on which the African female identity is hinged; and to change the conscious perception of females from such cultural stance.

- Suggest one way African women can be recognized in the society?
- By proper representation of the African women in the society

Traditional practices and beliefs are central to discussing gender issues in Africa. A notable problem is the plight of widows in Africa. Even till now, there are areas in the society where widows are made to carry out certain unjustifiable and dehumanizing acts, notwithstanding that they are not even allowed to possess what belonged to the husband except if they agree to marry within the deceased's family (forced marriage).

Apart from this is the belief that a woman who has female children only either has no assurance of the home or inheritance for her children since these are not heirs who would retain the names of the family. These are not myths but happenings in our society. Despite these problems, African women still pride motherhood and womanhood and concerns about family value.

One other customary practice consists of the status of the wife in her husband's household which is primarily dependent on her ability to bear children to continue his patrilineage. This makes the

woman to depend solely on bearing children for her status such that the child is what qualifies her as a wife or woman and shows her sustainability in the matrimonial home.

There may of course be the problem from the husband contributing to the condition of no-child-birth, but this is waived as not threatening as the identity of the husband is not directly and profoundly threatened. Also, when a child is born and the child turns out “bad”, then such child belongs to the mother while the “good” or “worthwhile” child is the father’s.

Added to these issues is the relegation of the female child as she is not seen as continuing the lineage; as such a woman who has no male child is not guaranteed inheritance or sustainability in the home since she has failed to produce an heir to the family. Hence, what is required is not campaign against home-building or woman emancipation through homosexuality; rather, what is required, in line with Ndibe’s thought, is that:

The burden of the African feminist is in part to re-humanize the struggle, to suffuse old concepts with new, never before considered meanings...to ultimately move us towards the creation, neither of a man’s world nor a woman’s but of a human world (Ndibe 1991:3).

Box 4.1: African Women

1. African women cannot remain the same with traditions that undermine them.
2. They need to maintain stance to resist myths, theories and any reality that erode their humanity,
3. Encourage self-disapproval and undermine their ability to be their own voices and
4. Act for themselves as agents of culture and of change.

In both pre-colonial Africa and post-colonial period, women have been of immense relevance to their society. For instance, the records of the female dynasty in Daura, Northern Nigeria and the Magira, Borno state whose strong influences were seen in their society. It is also in record that in the Hausa kingdom, Queen Amina, her sister and their mother who reigned were powerful women and their reigns were successful with remarkable results.

In the war-torn Delta area of Nigeria, Queen Kambasa was said to have ruled successfully around the year 1450. There were also records of female warriors who fought for liberation in their society like the 8000 Amazon women of Dahomey who resisted Beecroft in 1851 (Kolawole 1997:46). From these examples, it can be gleaned that females have strong impacts and involvement with the society.

In Nigeria, women were said to be very visible before colonialism. Several of them ruled either directly or indirectly as queen mother and wielded authority and respect. These women were

motivated by their innate convictions rather than gender ideologies while their relevance was in all spheres of the community: political, economic, social and religious.

Even in our present society, several women have contributed immensely to the development of their society both through individual efforts as well as cooperation with others in the society. However, this does not imply that study session intends to portray women as being super humans as this would mean that the position of gender advocates affirms what it intends to deny. What then is the need for gender advocacy?

4.3 Gender Advocacy: A Critique

Feminism in the African context is a call for humane recognition for women and freedom and opportunity which requires the concerted efforts of all – male and female alike. Hence it should be noted that it is not an agenda of separation from others in the society or seen as a cry for individualism or self-centeredness, but the spirit of:

- ❖ Collective consciousness,
- ❖ Mutual reciprocity
- ❖ Role sharing

This calls for emphasis on the capability, and recognition of the innate human personality of the female. However, it is necessary to incorporate the idea of concerns about males as well in gender advocacy. This would strengthen the argument against the separatist agenda that has bedevilled the feminist thoughts and also unify the gender thought system as being of concern about human and not woman.

Gender outcry about women as discussed here incorporates not a mere emphasis on acceptability in the ‘public sphere’ politically, but also the importance of the family, the moral responsibility of individuals in the society as well as this is germane to social development in Africa. The problems of African females can be subsumed under the wider struggle by Africans irrespective of gender to liberate themselves from domination of diverse forms.

- What is Gender Advocacy?

Hence issues of feminism or gender advocacy should not be seen as an agenda to deify a gender above the other or subsuming one below the other. This has been seen in some writings whereby arguments are posed to demonstrate seeming strengths of females over and above their male counterparts. For instance, it is argued in some quarters that, “women possess:

- ❖ Higher psychological,
- ❖ Metaphysical
- ❖ Material powers

Their beauty is power and their component can unbalance the seeming fixidity of men”.

Another of such claims is that of **Iheanacho** who argues that certain acts like wailing at ancestral shrine; persuasion and nagging of the husband; protest march and decree; and mass exodus of women are devices which women use to influence men thereby making the men succumb to these feminine potency and device (Iheanacho 2009:224 – 227).

4.3.1 On Separatist Agenda of Radical Feminism

A Yoruba adage says that “*fotun wosi, fosi wotun lowo fi n mo*”, meaning that all hands need be on deck to ensure desired results or, literally, that “both hands are to scrub one another to achieve proper cleaning”. This is germane to any discourse of human relationship in ensuring a healthy society. The cry of African women advocates as avowed earlier in this lecture is indeed an important call for justice, fairness and equity in recognizing the deplorable state of the female.

It is worth noting that some progress has been realized in the African society in gender advocacy and recognition. Yet, in the bid to portray the humanness of the female, there is need to de-emphasize the uniqueness of femininity. An emphasis on the uniqueness of femininity would be misinterpreted to imply a separatist technique which does not comply with the African perspective to societal relationship.

In reiterating the femininity of women, the focus need not be to forestall the woman as overly important; rather, the motive should be to demonstrate that each person has a role to play in society and no role is more important than the other. This would ensure that the role of the woman in the society will not be denigrated.

The relevance of gender advocacy is not to create an idea of females who can ‘do better’ what men can also do, but it should be to educate the society of the qualities of the female which can be harnessed without exploitation to the benefit of the society; to disabuse the minds of both gender on the assumed frailty of the female which causes her disrespect and mistreatment in the society.

Beyond the emphasis on the concerns about the females, there is need that, in the spirit of collective consciousness of Africa, no gender should be considered as self-sufficient. Thus, gender advocacy need not be a cry for the exploitation of the masculine gender to the advantage of the female, but should be the dissemination of the abilities of the female, its distinction from certain activities that would of necessity be carried out by the males, an attitude of role sharing and mutual reciprocity. This is in line with the position of the Third World group, “Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era” (DAWN) that:

We want a world where inequality based on class, gender and race is absent from every country ... where basic needs become basic rights ... where all institutions are open to participatory democratic processes, where women share in determining priorities and making decisions (Sen and Grown 1987:80 – 81).

Summary of Study Session 4

- (1) There is a distinction between what has been paraded as feminism and what gender advocacy should be. Gender concern does not deny the natural and biological traits and characteristics, but rejects the manipulation of such traits to hold females down; it seeks to enhance female's strength in positive, wholesome ways by highlighting and not effacing femaleness.
- (2) Gender concerns are not to isolate females from men as even nature has set certain principles in place which require no special ability to identify – it is need for mutual relationship, each recognizing its place and pursuing that which calls for development in the society.
- (3) African gender contributors need also not dwell on past achievements but look forward to contributing their quota to societal transformation considering the intricacies of the present society.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 4

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 4.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 4.1)

What is gender?

SAQ 4.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 4.2)

1. Discuss some gender related problems encountered by females in Africa.
2. With particular reference to a literary work, discuss the attempt by contemporary African women's literature to relate the trials that are peculiar to the African woman.

SAQ 4.3 (Testing Learning outcomes 4.3)

1. What is the main idea of gender advocacy?
2. Using an African culture as foil, discuss how certain cultural activities have contributed to gender discrimination in Africa.

Study Session 5: Gender Philosophy in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

Introduction

Peter Barry identifies as one of the major aims of post-colonial criticism the rejection of “the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature” and, more specifically, “to show its limitations of outlook, especially its general inability to empathize across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference” (Barry 1995:198).

Although Mariama Bâ's intentions are not primarily anti-colonial, her novel exemplifies how African literature provides a different perspective of African culture and, despite not fitting the model of the English canon, is valuable and significant on its own terms. You must articulate that Bâ is not necessarily writing in defence of Africa.

In this study session, you will learn about the gender issues raised and philosophical approaches in the book *So Long a Letter*

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 5

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 Discuss the gender issues raised in Ba's *So Long a Letter*
- 5.2 Describe the philosophical approach to Ba's *So Long a Letter*

5.1 Gender Issues in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*

Mariama Ba's novel could be situated within the context of the commonplace belief that life itself is a constant battle for many – marriage, children, religion, illness, and death among the everyday hassles of the human individual. Ba, having located her novel within this inexhaustible context, drew women into it as the receptors of most of these hassles, finding these challenges to be particularly difficult due to the continuing oppression from society as a whole.



Figure 5.1: Mariama Ba

Source: <http://freduagyeman.blogspot.com/2012/01/1-so-long-letter-by-mariama-ba.html>

The oppression of women occurs through a variety of channels, including religious faith. Thus, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* details an African woman's struggle to regain her life following a heart-breaking sequence of events, primarily related to the effects of her religious faith. It is because of this disposition by Ba that one must maintain that, in Africa as a continent, gender and class issues assume an integral place in the engaging novel than race.

It can be argued that rather than writing back to Empire, she is writing back to African male authors on behalf of African women, reclaiming the voice that has been previously denied to them.

African men and women were united in the fight against colonialism under Empire, but, with independence achieved, the division between men and women was often broadened through national sentiments.

This point is reflected by Elleke Boehmer (1995:224) who states that “nationalist movements encouraged their members, who were mostly male, to assert themselves as agents of their own history, as self-fashioning and in control. Women were not so encouraged.” Women were excluded from participating to any significant degree in the social changes, and were in this way kept to the margins.



Figure 5.2: Elleke Boehmer

Source: <http://www.coetzeecollective.net/members.html>

In *So Long a Letter*, Bâ addresses the mechanisms by which women are colonized by the men of their own race. Like Bâ, Ramatoulaye is familiar with the excitement of the liberation in Senegal. According to her,

It was the privilege of our generation to be the link between two periods in our history, one of domination, the other of independence. You remained young and efficient, for you were the messengers of a new design. With independence achieved, you witnessed the birth of an anthem and the implantation of a flag (Ba 2008:25).

But the changes brought about are not translated into equal opportunities for both men and women; Ramatoulaye and Aissatou must contend with the repercussions of colonialism, neocolonialist and capitalist politics, and in turn the patriarchal order that is strongly promoted through national rhetoric.

Daouda Dieng echoes this rhetoric in a conversation with Ramatoulaye:

Women are the nation's primary, fundamental root, from which all else grows and blossoms. Women must be encouraged to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country. Even you who are protesting; you preferred your husband, your class, your children to public life (Ibid.:64).

Daouda thus bestows the responsibility of the success of Senegal's future to its women, while at the same time equating the future to the public sphere that is dominated by men. Further, you could glean that women have chosen to remain in the private sphere of the family, to make it their own, and that they alone must act as the agents of change.

Although they originally come from different social classes, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou, as colonized women, share the same struggles. Aissatou is the daughter of a goldsmith, and has

entered the middle class elite by attaining an education and through her marriage to Mawdo Bâ, a doctor.

Ramatoulaye is born into her status but, like Aissatou, elevates her status as a woman through education. In many ways, both women are active participants in social change in that they have both entered into marriage with partners of their own choice, and have received Western education which, it is argued, was not readily accessible to all women.

Ramatoulaye recalls this time when she and Aissatou were “the first pioneers of the promotion of African women,” (Ibid.:15) suggesting that there were very few women in the struggle.



Figure 5.3: African Women

Source: <http://communityjournal.net/meet-vestine-women-helping-women-in-africa/>

But they also “suffered the social constraints and heavy burden of custom”. As working women, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are not released from their domestic duties as wives and mothers, and both women are often subjected to the scrutiny of their in-laws. Aissatou is rejected by her mother-in-law, who is outraged by her son's choice to marry a woman of a lower caste.

Ramatoulaye is forced to comply with the family hierarchy by dutifully respecting her mother-in-law, who is primarily concerned with flaunting Modou's social success – which includes Ramatoulaye and their home – to her friends. Bâ reveals through her female characters how classism prevents women from forming a collective in the struggle against colonization in Africa.

Bâ also illustrates the difficulties women face in identifying with two distinct cultures. Like the author, Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are raised in traditional Muslim households and yet educated in French schools and influenced by Western ideas. Ramatoulaye acknowledges that, along with the benefits that have come from her dual identity, there exists a certain degree of uncertainty or instability.

She states thus:

You all agreed that much dismantling was needed to introduce modernity within our traditions. Torn between

the past and the present, you deplored the 'hard sweat' that would be inevitable. You counted the possible losses. But you knew that nothing would be as before. You were full of nostalgia but were resolutely progressive (Ibid.:19).

So Long a Letter could best be construed as a sequence of reminiscences, some wistful, some bitter, recounted by Senegalese school teacher Ramatoulaye, who has recently been widowed. In a letter to her friend, Aissatou, Ramatoulaye writes of her emotional struggle to regain her life after Modou's abrupt decision to take a second wife. Although sanctioned by the laws of Islam, Modou's action is a calculated betrayal of her trust and abrupt rejection of their life together.

In the novel, the act of polygamy and its aftermath has been enunciated. In fact, the tenets of polygamy which in the book ridicule the very basis of polygamy, rightly qualify as one of Ba's thematic positions in the fictitious book. Modou, Ramatoulaye's husband, decided to take on a second wife without her knowledge.

Ramatoulaye, a school teacher in her fifties, wrestled with marital challenges, including the task of coping with pressures of dealing with a husband and twelve children. Having drawn herself into the sickening vistas of her friend's world, Ramatoulaye was shocked when she received a visit from some of her husband's friends and family members informing her that Modou had taken on a second wife. This completely devastated her and she thought that her life had been torn apart.

One must recall that Ramatoulaye and her friend were at once part of the colonizers' society and function as the colonized within their community. For these women, institutions that are integral to Islamic culture, particularly polygamy, replicate colonization within marriage and their Senegalese community. Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are presented with the news of their husbands' second marriages after this fact, and are expected to remain loyal and dutiful wives.

While Aissatou bitterly rejects the situation she is faced with, and uses it as an opportunity to seek complete economic and personal independence, Ramatoulaye chooses to remain within the polygamous marriage in the hopes that Modou will uphold his responsibilities as husband, more so that it is endorsed by Islamic beliefs.

Ramatoulaye relates how Modou's neglect of her emotions and the feeling of their children almost destroyed their lives. According to her, she wished she had the strength of her friend to just walk away. She wished Islam, her religion, could blend its tough sanctions incurable from such act, and imagined only if nature could be friendly to enable her raise her children alone. She, therefore, jettisoned her desire to trade the path of her friend, Aissatou.

Writing the letter to Aissatou has a cathartic effect for Ramatoulaye. It serves as a memorial to her late husband, who, along with the pain and betrayal, she can bury in the past. It takes the death of her husband for Ramatoulaye to realize that she can no longer accept her marginal role under colonization.

Through her anger she gains the courage to reject her suitors' proposals for marriage; she knows that Tamsir's interests in her are purely economic, but Daouda Dieng, who genuinely cares for

Ramatoulaye, is also unable to persuade her to marry him. In a letter to Daouda, she explains the reason for her refusal:

“Abandoned yesterday because of a woman, I cannot lightly bring myself between you and your family” (Ibid.:71).

In a letter to Aissautou, she mirrors the twenty-two years of her life ‘traded’ to Modou as her husband, her struggle for the sustenance of their over twenty year old relationship, including her contribution to the lives of their twelve children. She stresses the husband’s pathetic position of introducing a second wife into the family simply because he wanted something new and younger.

You gleaned from Ramatoulaye issues bordering on fidelity and betrayal in human relationships on both the personal and more broadly conceived levels. Those issues assume their most immediate and intense form regarding the physical and emotional abandonment of Ramatoulaye by her husband.

In great pain, Ramatoulaye remembers how Modou Fall, as a young man, vowed to lead a monogamous life with her and he eventually took a young, co-wife, keeping neither with the letter nor the spirit of the *sura* usually cited to authorize polygyny for Muslims. The *sura* says a man can only have two or more wives if, and only if, he can keep perfect balance emotionally between them.

Through all of her pain, Ramatoulaye's heart went out to Modou's new bride, Binetou, who she felt would suffer more in the long run. In Binetou, Ramatoulaye could see herself as a young girl starting out in life with the pressure of poverty and seeking desperately to find a way out.

But unlike Ramatoulaye, Binetou was a young girl of nineteen who was almost forced into the decision of marriage to a man twice her age by a mother who thought wanted her to marry a man who could guarantee her a good start.

At one point Ramatoulaye, apostrophizing Modou, whose death had provided the near occasion for her to take up the pen, writes:

I no longer laugh when I think that [my mother] found you too handsome, too polished, too perfect for a man. She often spoke of the wide gap between your two upper incisors: the sign of the primacy of sensuality in the individual (Ibid.: 15).

Ramatoulaye relates how Modou had completely forgotten his first family and spent all of his time with Binetou. She wrote of her effort to hearten her children to continue to respect their father regardless of circumstances. This was a very hard struggle for her older children who had grown up with Binetou.

Although Ramatoulaye was heart-broken with how Modou and Binetou had no regard for her feelings when they decided to venture into their cohabitation, her most hurtful moment was when

she received a message that Modou had passed away from a heart attack. At that time she had forgotten her problems and her heart went out to Binetou.

With the sudden death of her husband, Ramatoulaye became convinced that the plethora of tribulations she was going through, which she felt were greater than the tallest of mountains, were really only anthills.

After all, Binetou, given the situation on ground, became the one dining with the truest of problems. A woman trapped into a marriage to a man twice her age was now a woman who has lost her 'security blanket' and needing to start over at only nineteen years of age.

- What is the relationship between Ramatoulaye and Binetou?
- They are both Modou wives

5.2 Philosophical Approach to Ba's *So Long a Letter*

One must emphasize that Mariama Bâ clearly demonstrates how colonialism is alive and strong in African society via neo-colonialist politics and Islamic culture. But, more importantly, she celebrates the diversity and strength of African women, not in relation to African men or Western women, but in their own right.

Despite the varying degrees of colonization that women experience under men, the author identifies the ways women are able to overcome oppression and find means of articulating their self-identity. The author, like other colonized women, seeks a voice of her own through literature and, through this medium, reclaims the past for African women.

So Long a Letter is an insightful and subtle novella, and it packs a lot in just under a hundred pages. It moves beyond Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou's individual stories to analyse the wider social, cultural, political and religious climate that encourages women to be thought of as disposable.

Certainly, you believe that you cannot exhaust the context within which this novel responds to social challenges bordering on social structure, class and the place of women, among others.

One thing that strikes an ordinary reader is the way Mariama Bâ subtly compares and contrasts the stories of Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou's lives. A second reading of this comparative skill evokes an honest sense of gratitude and appreciation for the ongoing work of giving women full human status, not merely in words but also in deeds.

Yes, life goes better for one of these women, and it's not difficult to venture a guess as to where Mariama Bâ's sympathies mainly lie. Yet, you suggest as a matter of self reflection that Mariama was only trailing us with the properties of these worlds; the one of Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou's.

The solution an ordinary reader may glean from the novel would certainly close shop on courses of action, for life is far too complex for that. Instead, both choices are presented as valid possibilities and taken seriously accordingly. Some women will be able to take previously inconceivable revolutionary steps, while others will follow convention while suffering in silence inside.

But both deserve your respect, and you can't really dismiss the latter as unwilling or unable to contribute to social change. This is also connected with Bâ's unflinching exploration of the role women themselves play in perpetuating the social climate in which misogyny thrives. The way she breaks the cycle in her own way is most interesting.

Her reaction to her daughter's pregnancy is a first step in this direction. Though she still cares about the convention that demands that women be chaste and modest and pay close attention to their reputations, she's able to give her child the love and support she needs instead of abandoning her. This might not be the kind of action that is usually perceived as a contribution to social change, but it's certainly no small start.

- Who are the main characters in the novel?
- Ramatoulaye and Aïssatou's

Summary of Study Session 5

In Study Session 5, you have learnt that:

1. Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* could be situated within the context of the commonplace belief that life itself is a constant battle for many – marriage, children, religion, illness, and death among the everyday hassles of the human individual.
2. *So Long a Letter* could best be construed as a sequence of reminiscences, some wistful, some bitter, recounted by a Senegalese school teacher, Ramatoulaye, who is widowed.
3. Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* details an African woman's struggle to regain her life following a heart-breaking sequence of events, primarily related to the effects of her religious faith. It is because of this disposition by Ba that one must maintain that, in Africa as a continent, gender and class issues assume an integral place in the engaging novel than race.
4. African men and women were united in the fight against colonialism under Empire but, with independence achieved, the division between men and women was often broadened through national sentiments.
5. The work is a reflection of the crossroads between modernity and tradition.
6. *So Long a Letter* conveys new visions of the woman's experience in terms of the project of defining the New African Woman within the space of a new order of modernity.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 5

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 5.1

In what sense is Ba's *So Long a Letter* a project for women's liberation in Africa

SAQ 5.2

In what sense is *So Long a Letter* an analysis of social, cultural, political and religious climate that often encourages the insinuation that women are disposable

Study Session 6: Critical Perspectives on Nyambura Gichohi's "In the Name of Love"

Introduction

Nyambura Gichohi's "In the Name of Love" can be described as one of those literary works that have a connection between logical realms of possible existence and actual state of human existence because its thematic considerations border on pertinent issues concerning human relationships and social existence.

This study session will reveal that Gichohi's literary piece has some form of verisimilitude (credibility) as it attempts a chronicling of the human situation.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 6

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 Explain the Philosophical Significance of Gichohi's "In the Name of Love".
- 6.2 Discuss why violence is not a means of social change.

6.1 The Philosophical Significance of Gichohi's "In the Name of Love"

Every creative work has its own unique message which the creative artist seeks to communicate to the public. However, the medium employed by each writer to communicate his message varies depending on the inhibitions, perspectives and intended effect which he seeks to communicate to the audience.

There is no doubt that most fictional works are products of imaginative thinking which attempt, sometimes, to mirror real-life situations and, in some other instances, could be directed at describing some abstract apprehensions about diverse subject matters. This notion is aptly captured by Jose Ortega y Gasset, the French humanist, who considers the material of a novel as that which is immersed in an imaginary psychology such that:



People in a novel need not be like real ones, it is enough that they are possible. And this psychology of possible human minds which [he calls] imaginary psychology, is the one that matters to the novel. That a novel may, apart from this, be concerned with giving a psychological interpretation of actual social types and environments can provide an additional piquancy, but it is not essential (Gaset 1968: 103).

Once verisimilitude is achieved by a creative artist, then it may be said that the fundamental purpose of the writer is achieved. It is possibly this reason that makes Isidore Okpewho (1979: 415) to affirm that it is the aim of the literary artist to strain for verisimilitude and not *exactitude* (accuracy).

That is the point of verisimilitude; it is an eclectic device that makes only a limited use of observable reality.

In this sense, **Nyambura Gichohi's** "In the Name of Love", is a representation of how emotions, when poorly managed, can bring some kind of misfortune to mankind. This is evident in her treatment of the theme of "anger" or "rage" which primarily fuels violence and other pugnacious human behaviours. In the prose, you see the central character (simply identified as "mama"), taking vengeance on the villain, who is her erstwhile husband, by attempting to murder him.

She was infuriated by the fact that her husband raped their only daughter, an action that she blamed herself for because she refused to believe her daughter when she tried to tell her about this unscrupulous act, but unfortunately her daughter decided to commit suicide. This conflict-situation is captured in the text in the following words:

One night my daughter ran into my bedroom crying because she had had a nightmare. I gathered her in my arms as she wept. I so much wanted her to open up to me. But five minutes later, dazed with shock and disbelief, I was slapping her and calling her names: prostitute, mad, wicked. I denied what she had struggled to tell me: that her father – my husband – was having his way with her.

No, I could accept that. I threw her out of my room and commanded her never to mention it again (par.6).

The consequence of her disbelief played out when eventually she was called to identify her daughter's body in the school dormitory where her body was found. Obviously, the daughter had committed suicide for not being able to bear the thoughts of her being raped by her own father. This situation is what led to the genesis of the violence that ensues in the novel.

As a way of avenging her daughter's death she took a knife ("I feel the cool steel of the Arab knife in my hand" par. 5), and went on looking for her husband. She eventually attacked him after she found him in a house with one of his numerous girlfriends. Ordinarily, the African woman is not known to be violent or brutal as Gichohi seems to exemplify with her use of imagery.

So Nyambura Gichohi seems to have presented us with "another image of African womanhood," to borrow the words of Prema Nandakumar (1973). The point we are making here is that women are traditionally considered inferior to men and this is why their independent social initiatives tend to be discouraged. So the events in "In the Name of Love" seek to show the after-effect of trampling on a woman's position in the family, even within a patrilineal African society.

Thus, it becomes important to raise the question as regards whether a woman's role within the African society is jeopardised because she refuses to be:

- ❖ Victimized,
- ❖ Oppressed
- ❖ Brutalized by the male folks

Thus, this situation could generate the type of poetic rhetoric, couched by Okot p'Bitek, the Ugandan poet, novelist, and social anthropologist: "woman of Africa, What are you not?"

Well, you can answer Okot p'Bitek by carefully examining Gichohi's metaphoric expressions and thematic considerations which tend to reveal that the African woman is not instinctively violent. She is also presented as a human that possesses and expresses feelings as it is a truism that all humans are disposed towards some form of reaction in conflict situations.

But the issue at stake here is the danger of premeditated violence which is aptly highlighted in the text through the use of the first-person narrative technique. The whole story can be streamlined to the actions of a woman who, unable to put up with her husband's gross irresponsibility and unscrupulous randy behaviour, decided to take the law into her own hands by cutting off her husband's penis which she feels is the progenitor of all her life's misfortune.

Of course she was angered by the fact she has not been fairly treated by the man she has sacrificed so much for, not to think of the fact that her husband had the audacity to rape their only daughter – his own child! In fact, the following lines in the text go to show anger as the harbinger of violence: *"the only emotion I allowed myself now is anger.*

- ❖ Anger at the man with whom I have shared my life
- ❖ Anger at the father of my daughter
- ❖ I have sacrificed everything for him: my pride, my self-respect.
- ❖ My sacrifice should have healed my home.

- ❖ Instead my daughter is dead.

Because of this, everything has now changed.” “...everything has now changed” here refers to change in the negative sense – that is, everything has changed for the worse.

Thus, the important theme which Gichohi seeks to explore is violence as a non-viable means of social change because violent change will always come with its own unpalatable sets of consequences.

6.2 Writer's Reasons against Violence and the Lessons for Contemporary Society

Responding to an offence by violence does not solve human problems because it will end up creating the following;

- ❖ More sorrowful
- ❖ Regretful actions
- ❖ Memories

This is evident in the statement made by the protagonist in narrating her ordeal in these words: “the grief in my heart will never be spent.” This statement speaks volume. There is no doubt that in the prose, “mama,” the protagonist, had been wrongly treated by her husband but she thought that by carrying out a violent revenge she would bring some form of purification to her soul but this was not the case.

Rage can bring torment to a person's mind for a long time and even for a life time. The following lines in the prose also buttress this point: “...like the angry lioness I was, I caught him in the act of relieving himself and cut off that part of him that had killed my daughter and shamed me in the neighbourhood.

- ❖ I can still hear his scream of pain;
- ❖ I can still see the blood spluttering all over the toilet basin onto the tiled floor.
- ❖ I can still hear myself as I screamed over and over again.”

What lesson is in this for Africa? A critical assessment of Gichohi's “In the Name of Love” will reveal its underlying message for Africa.

There are many conflict situations in the African continent that emanated through violent revolutions against the state or regional governments which oftentimes come with life-long devastating effects. A good example of this is the Nigerian civil war of 1967 that lasted for thirty months; apart from the fact that many lives were lost during this conflict, there were other atrocities like

- ❖ Rape,
- ❖ Subjecting human being to gruesome torture,
- ❖ Hunger,
- ❖ The spread of diseases and so many others

Among the reasons that fuelled the rise of the civil war was the agitation and marginalization generally felt by the Igbo extraction of the Eastern part of Nigeria, on the way they were being

treated by the federal government of Nigeria, coupled with the pockets of sectarian violence brewing in the Northern part of Nigeria in the early 60's.

While our interest here is not in giving an account of the war, the point we are trying to make with our reference to this conflict situation is that the aftermath of violence always leaves an indelible mark on the minds of those who experienced it. One of such effects that has lingered is the stigmatization of the children that were born of rape during the period of the war. From a sociological point of view, Ikuomola (1999:2) observes that:

Evidences are abound today in many communities in the Eastern part of Nigeria and border states where the war had its largest casualty of victims, indigenes and non-indigenes alike especially families from the Old Mid-Western Nigeria (later Bendel State and presently Edo and Delta states), who were caught up in the war but had to return with their young daughters with pregnancy resulting from rape by troops of either side. Also a lot of married women were raped apart from losing their husbands in the war to both the Nigerian and the Biafran troops, the effect was more on single girls and ladies (unmarried) many who became pregnant and have to give birth to children whose paternity are still unknown today.

Apart from the issue of the social consequences of giving birth to “bastards” within the society, it should also be noted that, traditionally speaking, the African society, despite frowning at rape, also vehemently dislikes the act of having children outside wedlock. The repercussions are enormous mostly on ladies as these tend to reduce and even prevent potential suitors’ hands in marriage. Thus, this is probably one of the reasons why Gichohi frowns at violence as a means of social change, especially within the African society.

Importantly, every work of literature has something to say about the society or is saying something about the society no matter how diminutive (tiny). So one crucial point which Gichohi seems to emphasize in his literary piece as regards the inability of violence to bring about social change is the fact that violence destroys the sense of community; and it also cripples an individual’s consciousness of humanity which is necessary from moving from a state of disorder to a state of community within the social whole.

This is captured with the following lines in the prose; “my sister had hired a lawyer for me. The term ‘temporary insanity’ kept coming up in the court proceedings.

- ❖ I was numb.
- ❖ My daughter was dead
- ❖ My marriage was dead
- ❖ My marriage was over.

In the media they hashed over my failures. Some called me monster, others defended me.” Here, you should note that the term “marriage”, which is the symbol for the basic unit of social

organization, is described in the following words: “dead” and “over”. This helps us to illuminate the consequences of violence as a means of social change within the society.

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 between the Hutus and Tutsis is still fresh in our memory. This violence was spurred by the battle for cultural and ethnic supremacy between these two groups...” The figure in 6.1 below shows Rwandan genocide:

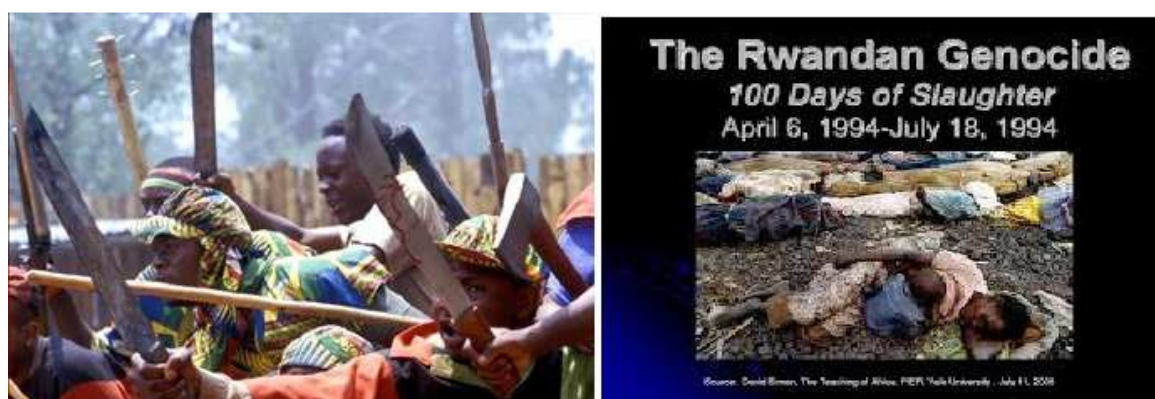


Figure 6.1: Rwandan Genocide

Source:<http://modernhistoryproject2012.wordpress.com/brief-history-of-events-leading-to-genocide/>

In order to prove that they were the higher or superior ethnic group in Rwanda, the Hutus embarked on a killing spree against the Tutsis who were derogatorily referred to as “cockroaches...” In the frenzy that ensued, there was a total loss of every sense of humanity as people were being killed, maimed, and raped in large numbers on a daily basis.

In this type of situation, violence is not actually the best means of solving the problem of ethnic or cultural differences, if at all there were something of that kind. The case of Rwanda that you have cited is among the many conflict situations in Africa where the supposed differences between cultural groups have led to endemic conflicts, like in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, South Africa, to mention just a few.

It is high time that African societies realized that conflict and violence does not solve problems, because rather than solving the problems that bother the human mind, it further tears us apart. There is need to exhibit the attitude of restraint or to think twice before embarking on any violent engagement of any sort because such actions come with its own devastating consequences.

Looking through the lines of “In the Name of Love” will reveal Gichohi’s emphasis that violence does not always bring purification to the soul; it is unnecessary and should be avoided if we are to achieve social change within the society. In the story, we are told that even after “mama” attempted to carry out vengeance over the death of her daughter by cutting off her husband’s penis, she still did not feel the satisfaction she would have hoped to derive from such a violent action.

- Mention one lesson you derive from this novel: In the Name of Love

- Violence should be avoided, if any society wants to achieve social change

As if this was not enough, “mama” was jailed for five years for attempting to murder her husband. This line from the text illuminates the point emphasized here; in the box 6.1 below:

Box 6.1: Mama: In the Name of Love

“No matter, I remained numb – as one dead. After serving a five-year sentence, I am now free.” This notion of freedom is that from the restrictions of prison but not from the perpetual mental agony that will torment her all through her life. Hence the statement; “I am still paying the price for what happened that day all those years ago” (par.2).

Thus, violence needs to be discouraged within African societies because the consequences of violent acts often aggravate rather than solve human problems. A good example of this is the conflict situation in many Nigerian Universities between University administrators and students’ representatives which are often violent in nature. There are cases whereby in protest of certain unfavourable policies or management decisions, the student representatives often instigate the entire student population to revolt against such policies seen in Marxist terms as shown in figure 6.2 below;

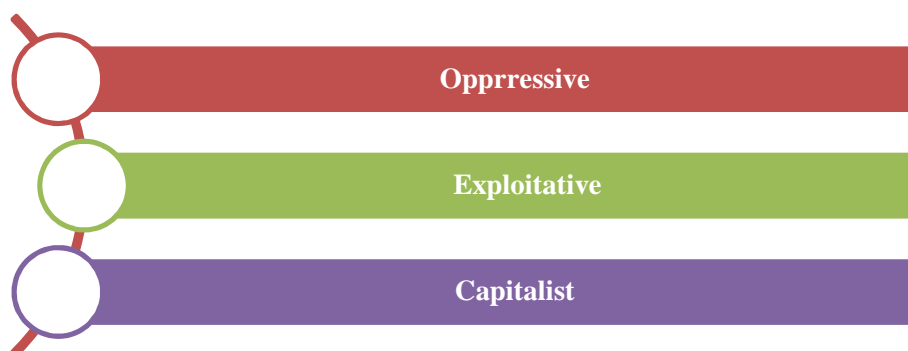


Figure 6.1: Marxist Term

Source: Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan

This protest often transmutes into violence whereby valuable property may be destroyed or vandalized. However, in the end, the entire student’s population would be forcefully made to pay for all the properties that were destroyed. Such is the vanity that comes with violence. It is this idea of vanity of proceeding to institutionalize change through violence that Gichohi attempted to capture with the use of this metaphor: “in the distance, the city looks like a stage on which a million fireflies are dancing.” This implies that in the city where there are violent struggles, there could only be the prevalence of the following in the box 6.2:

Box 6.2: Consequences of Violence

1. Chaos
2. Anarchy
3. War
4. Death
5. Trouble
6. Sickness
7. Blood-shed
8. Tears
9. Unhappiness and so many others

It is the intention of Gichohi to address this problem by showing us that all of these things can be avoided within the African society once we stop seeing *violence as a means of social change*.

6.2.1 Violence as a Means of Social Exchange

Another reason why Gichohi would have rejected violence as a means of social exchange especially within the African community is that violence attracts some form of negative consequences both for the person or persons that perpetrate it and for the society at large. The point we are making here is that, in every situation of violent conflict, there are victims.

In this sense, the husband of “mama” can be regarded as a victim because even though he did not die, his penis has been cut off, so he has to live through life without the ability to bear children. In most African societies, any man who is incapable of impregnating a woman is considered as an incomplete man because the idea of manhood within this social setting is tied to the ability to impregnate a woman.

In another sense, we can also regard “mama” as a victim of her own premeditated violence because she became a prisoner and an ex-convict just because she decided to take the law into her own hands in a bid to seek restitution for the wrongs done to her by her husband.

- Based on the consequences that are itemised in box 6.2, is violence advisable in a community?
- Violence is not advisable, because its after-effect is more dangerous than good as can see in the case of Mama.

6.2.2 Its Relevance to the African Society

This novel has some form of relevance to the African society. That is, those who are premeditating or master-minders of violence should know that whatever the consequence of the violence they support in some way, will eventually come back to them. In other words, the repercussion of violence does not only lay with those to which it is directed, it also negatively affects those who master mind it.

For example, in Nigeria, there are some politicians who are known to sponsor violence in their states in order to remove incumbent governors from office. This situation was prominent in the 2003 gubernatorial elections in some states in Nigeria. The case of Anambra State is quite interesting, whereby a sitting governor who broke ties with his “God-father” or financier, was punished by facing impeachment from the state house of Assembly.

There was so much rioting and fighting by the supporters of the embattled governor on the one hand and with those who are supporters of the “God-father” on the other hand; this violence recorded high casualty figures and property worth huge sums were lost.

The point then is, just as the protagonist in Gichohi’s “In the Name of Love” suffered the consequences of her actions, so will anyone within the society face the music of the sounds of violence he is a party to. This is one good reason why Gichohi seems to paint the imagery that violence should be rejected as means of social change in contemporary African societies.

In conclusion, you should also note that although the main thematic issue is “violence,” Gichohi seems to be implicitly pointing our vision to the fact that forgiveness, instead of violence, can serve as a form of restitution. As the writer concludes in “In the Name of love,”

- ❖ “Inside I am dying for a love that will never be reciprocated,
- ❖ Guilt that will never be assuaged
- ❖ A life wasted in agony.”

The craving for love which is expressed by the protagonist here is something that is unique to all human beings; we all desire to be loved at some point or the other in life. By way of inference, if the protagonist had thought about love as a human ideal, probably she might have forgiven her husband and, by so doing, would have prevented the violence that ensued later.

The point in this is that, in contemporary African societies, the virtue of forgiveness had to come to bear in our everyday dealings with human beings because, where human relations are concerned, there is bound to be conflicts, disagreements and misunderstandings. Also, when we feel aggrieved about certain things, whether at a personal or intra-personal or societal levels we must try to apply the principle of forgiveness or exercise restraint by refusing to allow rage, anger and frustration to take over our sense of judgement, resulting into a state of catharsis.

This study session also tells you something about the status of the African woman in the contemporary society through the analogy of the female child who is subjected to male capricious sexual behaviour and the mother who faced the consequences of her failed attempt to atone for her husband’s misdeeds.

- Instead of Violence, what will you recommended to any society?

■ Forgiveness

In the main, the lesson in all of this is that the maltreatment of women within the society will not augur well in the quest for development in contemporary African society. It would be extremely difficult for women who have been subjected to abuse and domestic violence like rape, battering, and other unfair treatments to be psychologically disposed to contribute their own quota to the development efforts in the society. So violence, in all its ramifications, should be avoided in African societies in order to promote the idea of holistic human development.

Summary of Study Session 6

- (1) Nyambura Gichohi's "In the Name of Love" is a representation of how emotions, when poorly managed, can bring some kind of misfortune to mankind. This is evident in her treatment of the theme of "anger" or "rage" which usually fuels violence and other pugnacious human behaviours.
- (2) There are many conflict situations in the African continent that emanated through violent revolutions against the state or regional governments which oftentimes come with life-long devastating effects. A good example of this is the Nigerian civil war of 1967 that lasted for thirty months; apart from the fact that many lives were lost during this conflict, there were other atrocities like rape, subjecting human being to gruesome torture, hunger, the spread of diseases and so many others.
- (3) Violence needs to be discouraged within African societies because the consequences of violent acts often aggravate rather than solve human problems.
- (4) In contemporary African societies, the virtue of forgiveness had to come to bear in our everyday dealings with human beings because, where human relations are concerned, there is bound to be conflicts, disagreements and misunderstandings.
- (5) Gichohi conveys the fact that violence destroys the sense of community; and it also cripples an individual's consciousness of humanity which is necessary from moving from a state of disorder to a state of community within the social whole.
- (6) Gichohi paints the imagery that violence should be rejected as means of social change in contemporary African societies.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 6

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 6.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 6.1)

Discuss how the events in "In the Name of Love" seek to show the after-effect of trampling on a woman's position in the family.

SAQ 6.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 6.2)

1. Briefly explain the writer's reasons against violence and the lessons for contemporary African society.
2. Critically discuss some moral issues raised in Gichohi's work.

Study session 7: Social Problems in Africa: A Critical Examination of James Ene Henshaw's "A Man of Character"

Introduction

It is indisputable that any society that experiences the leap of progress or development which ensures the flourishing condition of both its members and its structure has succeeded in nipping in the bud the major factors that hinder the growth of human virtues (in inter-personal relationship) and social values.

Not only this, it has enhanced a thorough ransacking of the "thorny and rebellious acts" inherent within the different sectors of such society, that confers roles, duty, status and, subsequently, ideals of expectation on these sectors.

In the light of this, James Ene Henshaw's drama, "A Man of Character," sets to portray the optimistic reality that the prevailing social problems of Africa are not endemic as there is still a spill of hope that "things can fall together", as long as everyone in the polity (government, lawyers, police, politicians, citizens and others) desire a virtuous life, a life of character.

In this study session, you will have a brief explanation of the characters and also a critical perspective of the book "A Man of Character"

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 7

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 Briefly explain the characters in "A Man of Character"
- 7.2 Highlight Critical Perspectives on "A Man of Character"

7.1 A Brief Survey of “A Man of Character”

The drama begins with the conversation between Ayodele and Serinya, two sisters, who exchange pleasantries after a long period of time, following Serinya’s trip to the States. Serinya, in a short time afterwards, stimulates Ayodele’s thought about the poor condition Kobina (Ayodele’s husband) has earned for their family due to high-handedness, principles, morals, laxity and contentment with a sincere lifestyle.



Figure 7.1: James Ene Henshaw’s

Source: <http://www.jameseneshenshaw.org/the-playwright/>

At the departure of Serinya, Ayodele grants Serinya’s insinuation a consideration, and reacts to her husband’s resignation to honesty, uprightness and sincerity to life; having witnessed Kobina’s rejection of the “free-gift” (tip) offered by Anosse (Serinya’s husband). Kobina rejected the “tip” Anosse offered him on the condition that he would not be a party to recommending a man who does not merit a job in the government office.

Ayodele and their daughter, Ibitam, packed out of the house, claiming they had suffered and endured enough. Kobina is left alone mourning solemnly the departure of his family while Seboh, the male-servant of the house, acts pretentiously and showing his concern of consolation.

However, little did Kobina know that this ugly experience would be crowned by another misfortune; the stealing of five hundred pounds in his office safe. Beckoning on Serinya, Kobina narrated his encounter with Anosse two weeks earlier. He indicted Anosse as a suspect of the theft since Anosse had threatened him that misfortune was going to befall him.

Annoyingly, Serinya rebuff Kobina’s accusations and became curious to reveal the devil behind such act. She encouraged Kobina to report the case to the police. Declining this suggestion, Kobina set to fetch his lawyer, Diyego, to assist in filing the case before the court.

Coincidentally, the police sergeant, Mbedu, and the magistrate, Kpoechi, strolled into Kobina’s house to express their regards and well wishes on Serinya’s return from the States. Kobina walked through the door at the same instance with Diyego, his lawyer. The duo met to their surprise, the magistrate and police sergeant.

Serinya at this point believed the stage was set for the hearing of the case as the whole set-up of the law court was readily at hand. Without wasting time, Serinya let the cat out of the bag despite Diyego and Kobina's admonition that the house was not a rightful place for fair hearing of such case.

Serinya persuasively compelled the magistrate and the sergeant to intervene in the case. Diyego, the lawyer, presented the case, and the lot began to project the suspect or the culprit who engineered the theft. The investigation that was carried out revealed two possibilities or suspicions.

- ❖ Kobina himself, who is being suspected of having a motivation for the theft in order to provide enough money for his family and get them back
- ❖ Ayodele or Seboh in collaboration with an outsider

It was in the heat of this investigation that Serinya informed the house that Ayodele and Ibitam were to arrive soon and return to Kobina, as they have realised their wrong behaviour and action. Seizing this opportunity, Diyego proposed a possible way of detecting Ayodele's involvement in the theft. Hurriedly hiding in a room and peeping through a window, all except Kobina is left in the living room.

- Is Seboh the male-servant of the house a sincere person?
- No, he was a pretender

The lot observed as Kobina pretended and put up an act before his wife and child, informing them of stealing five hundred dollars in his office safe in order to make it up to them. Weeping regretfully, Ayodele castigated Kobina's act and urged him to return the money; for Kobina was a "man of character that had honesty running in his blood". The hidden lot at this point reveal them and the curtain draws.

A look at Act II, Scene II is most instructive here. This scene begins with Kopechi, Kobina, Diyego and Mbedu considering the possibility that Seboh, the male-servant, may be responsible for the crime. Not much longer that this was raised, a stranger trudged in, claiming he heard all that has been said and the conniving attempt to cover up the culprit of the crime, that is, Kobina, who has confessed he was responsible for the theft.

The stranger presented the case as he recorded it, proving that he was a witness to Kobina's declaration as the culprit who stole the money. The stranger threatened to blackmail all the agents of law for conniving to conceal the perpetrator of such a crime.

Reeling out the consequences of his actions on the career and life of these victims, the stranger cajoled them to reach a compromise. This compromise would be on the basis that they let go his brother Seboh or he forward the recorded statements to the Governor, newspapers, commissioner of Police and the Chief Justice.

Serinya and Mbedu realized fully well what the stranger was driving at and pleaded with the others to reason to the compromise. Diyego and Kopechi firmly warn against such conspiracy against the law, while Kobina, though uncertain of what to do, was so certain of the sinister intention of the stranger to blackmail them.

Observing the reluctance of the lot to agree to his condition, the stranger decided to count down to ten, but, not higher than his fourth count-down, doom knocked the stranger down. Some police constables arrived to inform Sergeant Mbedu of the mischievous breaking-in of the Government office safe by a felon, who turned out to be no other person but Kobina's servant, Seboh. The stranger tried to flee but it was too late as Mbedu's men pinned him down.

The scene, however, comes to an end with the arrest of the stranger (who displayed his prowess and pride of stolen keys) and Seboh, who are to be arraigned before the court. As all other characters move out, Kobina kneels in reverence to God and apologises to Serinya for indicting Anosse and makes a promise not to say a word (of such insinuation) to Anosse.

- Who was the man of character?
- Kobina

7.2 Critical Perspectives on “A Man of Character”

Before examining the significance of the play, it is expedient to hint that there are certain predominant features exhibited in the drama. First, there are different African states (most obvious, is the West African states) represented by the characters. Ayodele, of course is a symbol of the Nigerian nation, Kobina, of the Ghanaian nation while Seboh, Mbedu, Diyego, Kopechi and others are seemingly representatives of other African states.

The aim of the author here is indeed an intentional one, to imply that the problems that beset the African nation as a whole is a peculiar one that crosses borders between and within African states. These problems do not differ by the boundaries that demarcate one state from another in Africa. It becomes necessary then that the play be perceived as a mirror of the pervasive problems that stare the African nation as a whole in the face.

The second feature noticeable is the dominant number of men in the drama. This is employed to portray that African society is highly patriarchal, a male-dominated society. Men are seen as leaders, as well the custodians of norms and values in the society. Least of all is the manner of lingual expression in the play.

This expression connotes that there is literal and metaphorical meaning to words and statements in Africa. This is glaring in the various attribution to “being a gentleman” in the play.

At this juncture, it becomes necessary that we understand the symbolic representation of each character in the drama. Let us begin by examining the character of Anosse. Anosse, Serinya's husband, is an emblem of corruption within the society. He is a symbol of those that could be the “cut-throats” of the society, who parade themselves in disguise as businessmen and politicians.

They claim to know the psychology that drives and motivates the society, thus they are people who hold strictly to the principle “the end justifies the means”. Anosse's character depicts the bribery and “shinning of cues” that take place in the African society. He belongs to the kind of people who drain the members of the society of their “suited merit” by currying favour, giving and taking bribes. This is reflected in Anosse's conversation with Kobina:

Anosse: Listen to this carefully ... I have recommended a man for employment in your office. I have taken something from him as a sort of security – you know, for my trouble.

Kobina: I do not understand ... Don't you know he must have borrowed that money, perhaps at exorbitant interest?

Anosse: But people are used to it. (p. 65)

Ayodele's character is an exhibition of a contented African woman, one who "bathes and basks" in culture for the respect or regard for men within African traditional society; though she was not in all things materialistic but also desires the wants and needs of a woman in the society.

This attitude of hers is reflected from the beginning of the play till the time Serinya, her sister, who came to complain about her living conditions, and her return to Kobina, her husband. Some of her utterances in the play attest to this:

Ayodele: I am a woman, Kobina. I need a house of my own. I need clothes ... (p. 66)

Ayodele: Ibitam, do not speak to your father like that. (p. 67)

Ayodele (on her return to Kobina): ... And I said, "Here is a gentleman, a man of character, I must return to him". Do you think I was so ambitious as to expect you to do such a thing? (p. 82)

Ayodele (to Serinya): Please do not talk like that. I am happy here. (p. 91)

Diyego, in the drama, is a symbol of justice, law and unyielding compromise. He is a man who believes in the order of "whatever a man sows, he shall reap"; the law of Karma that operates with no room for sympathy, manipulation or exemption. His character is a display of ideal attitude that should be imitated by the African man.

His intervention in the case of the stolen money was from a duty-point of view, an objective and unprejudiced state of mind. For instance, in responding to the stranger's cajole that they reach a compromise, Diyego warns Serinya: "...but madam we have no right to keep our parts of this bargain" (p. 87)

Ibitam, the daughter of Kobina and Ayodele, is a sheer case of the extent of moral decadence among youths in Africa. She serves a reminder to the upcoming generation that "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown". More so, her role is also to show the extent of deviant behaviour or attitude in the culture and tradition of respect for elders and parents. Is this not glaring in the uncultured manner that Ibitam spoke to her father?

Ibitam: I heard it all. I want to tell you that my mother and I have endured enough. (p. 67)

Kobina is the protagonist in the play, the major character whom the plot of the story revolves around. Kobina is a replica of the genuine African man, who is connected to the tunes and demands of culture, frowns at corruption in the society and loathes the misappropriation of values. For instance, he condemns the manipulative acts of Anosse.

Though it should be noted that Kobina is a fatalist as he lives a life of resignation to good deeds, honesty, sincerity and contentment, Kobina does not believe the problems that stare Africa in the face are endemic. Herein lays the optimistic reality of the play through the character of Kobina. In an instance in the drama, Kobina suggests practical ways of overcoming the pervasive problem of corruption in African society. Speaking to Anosse, he says:

Kobina: You can refuse such gifts. And anyone who receives them should be reported to the police. (p. 65)

By the virtue of this, Kobina passes the muster as a “gentleman, a man of character” in every sense of the word. Kobina’s character is a portrayal of people/individuals who live by the standards or ideals of moral principles but gain, in return, victimization from the society. The isolation of his family from him and the stolen money speak volume on this.

The character of Kobina is symbolic to intimate the average rational person to live a life of contentment guided by virtues that are dutiful, sincere and honest. Even when all these virtues do not work out, one should live a life of resignation to good and upright deeds (fatalism) because it pays in the long run.

Kobina: when you realise that you have fought for this, and struggled for that and have won at the end by honest means, you are satisfied. That is one of the victories of life. (p.68)

Magistrate Kopechi seems to be on the right side of the law together with Diyego; he is a symbol of acting in accord to the imperative of duty and avoiding compromise. Committing himself to the task, he says (when the stranger was arrested):

Kopechi: I have succeeded in several occasions in showing people like him that crime does not pay, and I shall continue to do so with all the powers at my disposal. (p. 91)

The police sergeant, Mbedu, is a representative of the Law Enforcement Agency. His character in the play reminds us of those law enforcement agents who appear to be zealous to uphold the law, but are sometimes lured to compromise their position due to their selfish interests. This is reflective in Mbedu’s gullible manner of nearly giving in to the compromise of the stranger.

In terms of this, Serinya too does not exhibit a different attitude. They are thus a symbol of the “fallen apart” structure of the society that needs a tutorial of value orientation. In quick response to the Stranger, Mbedu, the Police sergeant, says: “Yes, we promise, but ...” (p.87)

The character of Seboh, the servant, is not lesser to the dubious act of his brother, the Stranger. Seboh’s character reflects set of people who feign love and concern for the society but who go around “selling” information to aid the looting of both public and private treasury. They are the “secretary’s ear” among us.

They are simply the “hypocrites and thorns” to the social development of Africa. It is quite unfortunate that they are at the lowest cadre of the society, mostly the peasants (as portrayed in the role of Seboh, a servant). These are people who often blame the despicable state of the nation on their leaders.

Another formidable character in the drama is Serinya. Serinya in fact is the propeller of the plot of the drama. She represents the high-class of the society who lavish and display their affluence everywhere they go. She says repeatedly at any opportuned moment: “it has been a wonderful time, Las Palmas, London and Paris. Very expensive, but it was worth it...” (pp. 60, 62, 74, 75, 76).

Serinya is a symbol of the “well-placed” citizens that belong to high social-status who cast a suspicious look at the action of others below their social rank or class. This is evident in her dislike for Seboh right from the time she sets her eyes on him. The characters of this set of women, in S. Leith Ross’ view, are accentuated by symbols of “women elite” in the African society, falling under any of the categories below:

- ❖ Tribal status (either as mothers, wives of chiefs or titleholders)
- ❖ Membership of some guild (such as women potters in some areas)
- ❖ Wealth (as among women traders or business women)
- ❖ Possessing specialised knowledge (as medicine women, charismatic women, educated or vastly travelled among others) (Ross 1965:222).

Serinya’s character suitably fits the last category, one who claims sophistication to the extent of disrupting cherished cultural values and norms, all in the name of “women’s right”. She is indeed an epitome of “displaced and misappropriated values” of the African society. Not only that, she is a reference to the set of social high-class women who live exotic and exuberant lifestyle and put so much premium on their prestigious image in the society.

Thus, such people could make desperate moves to subdue justice in order to save their own image. Her gender advocacy is also something of note in her utterances. Some of her utterances substantiate the foregoing:

Serinya: ... If I had known there was to be a photo, I would have put on one of my foreign hair styles ... (p. 61)

Serinya: ... I have every right to say ... The sooner you men realise that women have rights ... (p.61)

Serinya: ... He is a spy. Confess it. You spy on my sister. Oh, you men! (p. 70)

Serinya: But it is a fair bargain. We are promising him something in exchange. (p. 87)

Last on the list of the characters is Stranger. Stranger is the antagonist in the drama. He is a symbol of deviant acts in the society, an emblem of tyranny, corrupt practices, ill-gotten wealth (robbery) and distortion of the virtues of contentment, endurance, sincerity and honesty. He is the tag for manipulation and the phenomenon of blackmailing and victimization of law-abiding citizens in African nations, a power usurper.

The implication of the role of Stranger is to illustrate the reality of absurdities in the African society, where a robber becomes a judge and those who are actually innocent stand at the peril of his mercy.

- Who were the protagonist and antagonist of the play?
- Kobina and Stranger respectively

This is the case of the present-day reality in contemporary African society where a politician, business tycoon or citizen squanders public and private funds, yet celebrates himself as a prince in the society, dispensing at his own will, favour and judgement on others. By the turn of tables, the innocent becomes entrapped in his jurisdiction and becomes victim. This is succinctly portrayed in Stranger's statement:

Stranger: ...“There now”, I said to myself “are a magistrate, a police sergeant, and a lawyer sitting down and plotting how to save a criminal who has confessed to stealing five hundred pounds from an office safe”. (p. 84).

Even though Stranger is a symbol of the “ills of society”, he is also used as a stroke against the ills of status-holders within the society. This is comparable to the scenario in Adebayo Faleti's film “Fere Bi Ekun”.



Figure 7.2: Adebayo Faleti

Source: <http://www.nigerianbestforum.com/generaltopics/adebayo-faleti-toasting-an-octogenarian-talent-at-80/>

The point of reference here is the scene between Laboopo and Fere-bi-Ekun (the pirate) who accosted each other with the nature of their practices as a politician and a thief. Their dialogue sends a note to the audience that both of them had involved in the looting of private and public treasury, even though Laboopo was a political warlord. In “A Man of Character”, for instance, Stranger says:

Stranger: Wait sergeant and let the commissioner hear that one of his men left the barracks and come here to plot against the law. Someone confesses he had stolen money ... Does he arrest the man? No. He sits down in a friendly way with the thief and drinks orange juice. (p. 84).

The foregoing insight into the drama is not only informative, but also critical as it has been able to establish that the problem confronting Africa is one that emanates from a bulk of vices that cuts across the different sectors of the society, ranging from the basic unit of the society,

- ❖ the family (that is, the household of Kobina and Ayodele in contrast to the household of Anosse and Serinya)
- ❖ the public sector of the Police (Mbedu),
- ❖ Legal sector (Kopechi and Diyego), and
- ❖ the subsistent or lower class sect (Seboh and Stranger)

These vices, explicitly stated, include bribery and corruption, disruption of values, impatience, materialistic motivation, disrespect for cultural norms (among youths), robbery, gossip/eaves dropping, exuberant or extravagant lifestyle of social class and blackmailing. It thus would not be wrong to suggest that these vices are what generate complications for the progress of the African nation. They trigger in Africa the problems which could be distilled into three, namely:

- i. Value Problems: value problems simply connote the tension that arises between the indigenous cherished values and those values informed by importations from foreign cultures and contemporary challenges. The analysis of Pierre Van Den Berghe is applicable here.

He argues that cultural fusion or change poses a challenge to social transformation as he emphasises that “acculturation has created a Westernised ... elite that often transcends ethnic particularism” (Berghe 1965:84).

In this sense, the drama displays the overarching influence of the exterior – cultural traits that disrupt the regard for cultural particularism of the African patriarchal society. This is vividly portrayed in Serinya’s attitude to respect for men in the drama.

- ii. Institutional Problem: this is another friction in the wheels of African development, as portrayed in the drama. The setting of the play indeed is an earmark of this problem. This is observed in the presentation or hearing of the case of the stolen money in Kobina’s house, in the absence of the defendants who, as at then, were only mere suspects.

This is to exhibit the impression that African nations have formed the attitude of fixing “round pegs in square holes”, simply because we do not distinguish the rightful place of institutional roles in the society. A home should not be taken for a court and vice-versa. This is the point thinkers like M.G. Smith stresses.

According to Smith, though institution should deal with the phases of life, it must tend to form a systematic cluster and, to forestall confusion, there must necessarily be a cluster of sub-systems within the institution (Smith 1965:64).

These sub-systems include kinship (like marriage, extended kinship forms and others), and governmental systems like the police, law, parliament, civil and military administration who are responsible for explicit regulative institution.

Each of these institutional arrangements has links with one another in ensuring greater consistency, interdependency and coherence, which are necessary for the maintenance of an integrated equilibrium for the formation of a viable institutional system in Africa.

- iii. Social Status and Class Problems: this factor is glaring and evident in the drama. It simply elucidates that one of the militating factors of progress in Africa is the attempt to attain a height or status of affluence like the other “well-placed” members in the higher social strata or class of the society.

This is what amounts to the contemplation of greed and discontentment in the society. Gustav Jahoda argues that difference in social class or strata is a factor in the cause of anomies (normlessness) in the society. Gustav says:

...even if one rejects the notion of a drift towards anomies it does not affect the likelihood that conflicting norms will exist side by side during the transition phase, so that individuals may lack a firm guide for their conduct in various situations (Jahoda 1965:143 – 144).

In the above excerpt, Jahoda opines that this factor influences people to change and adopt new goals, which may be difficult to achieve and, thus, it would generate anxiety and lack of contentment. This account is informative in the comparison of the lifestyle of Kobina and Ayodele with that of Serinya and Anosse.

Serinya, of course, belongs to the social rank of the “high class” while Ayodele is the wife of a humble and contented civil servant. The gap in the class strata between Ayodele and Serinya is what intimidates Ayodele to display loss of contentment, thus longing for material possessions, bothering less whether they are ill-gotten or not.

- What is the main aim of the author?
- That the problems that beset the African nation as a whole is a peculiar one that crosses borders between and within African states

Summary of Study Session 7

In Study Session 7, you have learnt that:

- (1) In “A Man of Character”, emphasis is laid on engaging in virtuous acts and a campaign for the eradication of vices among the various sectors of the African society. In all, the drama displays the theme of virtue against the vices of compromise, impatience, exuberance and greed for affluence (materialism).
- (2) The play mirrors the present-day reality in contemporary African society where a politician, business tycoon or citizen squanders public and private funds, yet celebrates himself as a prince in the society, dispensing at his own will, favour and judgement on others. By the turn of tables, the innocent becomes entrapped in his jurisdiction and becomes victim.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 7

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next! Support meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 7.1(Test Learning Outcome 7.1)

Discuss how the play reflects the idea that cultural fusion or change poses a challenge social transformation in Africa.

SAQ 7.2(Test Learning Outcome 7.2)

In what sense is the play a reflection of the institutional problem facing Africa?

Study Session 8: James Henshaw's "The Jewels of the Shrine": A Critical Analysis

Introduction

This study session will take a critical analysis of James Henshaw's novel titled 'The Jewels of the Shrine'. The writer is often regarded as the society's eyes because he uses literary skills and techniques to capture the everyday experience of man within the society.

James Henshaw is one writer that has successfully employed the skills of a literary artist in presenting or representing African beliefs and dynamic cultural experience in a significant way. A cursory assessment of the thematic significance of his "The Jewels of the Shrine" would reveal his undaunted commitment towards this preoccupation.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 8

At the end of this study session, you should be able to:

- 8.1 Explain the affiliation of Old Age as wisdom to the enterprise of African philosophy.
- 8.2 Discuss the philosophical significance of Old Age as Wisdom in Henshaw's "The Jewels of the Shrine".

8.1 Old Age as Wisdom in African Philosophy

According to George Sefa Dei, there is in Africa a general belief that "old age comes with wisdom and an understanding of the world" (Dei 1994:13). A.B.C. Ocholla-Ayayo (1976: 42), using his people (the Luo) as a point of reference, is also of the view that old age is the basis of wisdom.

Like the Luo and other ethno-linguistic units in Africa, the Yorùbá also place a premium on old age and this reflects in a Yorùbá proverb which reads *Àgbà kîí wà lọja kórí ọmọ tuntun wọ* [An elder cannot be present in the market and let the head of a young baby (on its mother's back) twist to one side] (Delano 1979: 38).

According to I.O. Delano, this proverb suggests that elders, due to their age and experience, are expected "in all situations to make sure that misunderstandings which may lead to unpleasantness are explained and removed" (Ibid: 39). The import of this proverb is much more corroborated by Àtàrí Àjànàkú in the following thought-provoking lines:

Àgbà ooo

Gbà mí oo

Àgbà ooo

Gbà mí oo

Lojọ ìdánwò

Àgbà ní gbani

Lojọ àìríjẹ

Àgbà ní gbani

Lojọ àìrímu

Àgbà ní gbani

Lojọ isọfọ

Àgbà ní gbani

Bọjọ bá rújú

Àgbà ní gbani

Àgbà Àgbà Àgbà

Àgbà ní gbaniii...(Àjànàkú 1998: 57).

O Elders

Rescue me

O Elders

Rescue me

In trials

Only the elders can rescue

In penury

Only the elders can rescue

In crisis

Only the elders can rescue

Elders Elders Elders

Only the elders can rescue...

The above verse accentuates the fact that “there is in general among traditional African communities an emphasis on age as a necessary condition for knowledge and wisdom” (Kaphagawani and Malherbe 1998: 212). You must reinstate here that this emphasis on age in traditional Africa is perhaps one of the major issues that continue to intensify the debate between the modernists and the traditionalists in African philosophy. As you can see in table 8.1 below:

Table 8.1: The Traditionalists and the Modernists View on Age as a condition for Wisdom and Knowledge

The Traditionalists	The Modernists
<p>1. The traditionalists presented as philosophy African traditional worldviews which were predominantly oral and, by extension, “produced forms of literature which are not conventional in present-day Western culture” (Hallen 2002: 11).</p> <p>2. The traditionalists, to the consternation of the modernists, did maintain also that such worldviews are mostly appreciated as philosophical when examined through the eyes of the elderly or aged in Africa.</p>	<p>1. On their part, the modernists felt that the traditionalists overlooked a conception of philosophy as a critical and systematic enterprise which, by this latter standard, means that “real” philosophy cannot be left in the hands of the aged alone as the traditionalist project seems to suggest.</p> <p>2. According to the modernists, an emphasis on age denies epistemological authority to the young and able (Kaphagawani and Malherbe 1998: 212).</p>

This modernist stance therefore brings to mind the general assumption in the industrialized West where “the measure of an individual’s value came to be based on his or her ability to be economically productive rather than age or accrued wisdom and experience” (Butler and Fillit 2003: 701). In the industrialized West, the elderly are considered as a burden to society and old age is perceived as that which brings about an inevitable decline in intelligence.

The belief among the Yorùbá that old age comes with wisdom (and not an inevitable decline in intelligence) captures the traditional African approaches to an understanding of the world. But this, according to Kwasi Wiredu, is unfortunate and no doubt the “authoritarian odour” that permeates African cultures. Wiredu then comments that:



Our social arrangements are shot through and through with the principle of unquestioning obedience to our superiors, which often meant elders. Hardly any premium was placed on curiosity in those of tender age, or independence of thought in those of more considerable years
(Wiredu 1980:4).

In the above excerpt, Wiredu seems to speak in the same tone as Paulin Hountondji who enjoins us to engage in “revolutionary iconoclasm, a ‘destruction of traditional idols’ which will enable us to ‘welcome and assimilate the spirit of Europe’” (Hountondji 1983: 172). By ‘traditional idols’ Wiredu and Hountondji would mean the elders who are the major representatives of ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy and who, in print, are represented by Marcel Griaule’s *Ogotemmel* (Griaule 1965).

Hountondji, for instance, believes that philosophy is essentially “a pluralistic discourse, in which different interlocutors question one another within a generation or from one generation to another” (Hountondji 1983: 83). For Hountondji, ethno-philosophy puts a premium on the collective communal outlook and therefore “aspires to confer a wisdom that is eternal, intangible, a closed system sprung from the depths of time and admitting of no discussion” (ibid.: 84).

It is interesting to note that Kwasi Wiredu in a publication different from the one cited above points out that certain African concepts are more imaginative than those of some Western philosophers. According to Wiredu, “the Western philosopher tries to argue for his thesis, clarifying his meaning and answering objections, known or anticipated; whereas the transmitter of folk conceptions merely says: ‘This is what our ancestors said’” (Wiredu 1984: 157).

The views of both Wiredu and Hountondji could be distilled as an attempt to bring to the public glare the authoritarian nature of African gerontocratic society which, in their understanding, stifles youthful initiative. The two philosophers are no doubt in agreement with P.T. Bauer who contends that the authoritarian traditions in traditional Africa were responsible for “lack of sustained curiosity, experimentation and interest in change ...” (Bauer 1976: 78).

More importantly, Wiredu and Hountondji are of the view that Africans do not believe in individualism and this, in their view, distances Africa from the universal problematic of philosophy and is equally responsible for what Hountondji (1983: 67) calls “collective cultural exhibitionism.”

8.2 Old Age as Wisdom in Henshaw’s “The Jewels of the Shrine”

The important role which writers play in the society is aptly captured by Ayo Kehinde (2010: 30) when he maintains that writers are useful as watchdog in societies,As:

- ❖ They help protect the public from those who do harm – from government officials to petty criminals.
- ❖ They help to shape public thoughts, spark debates and fight for societal good and against societal ills.
- ❖ They embolden the masses and give them hope when there seems to be none.

However, you will find such task playing out in “The Jewels of the Shrine” where the Old man (Okorie) thought he was going to die unceremoniously and hopelessly, but in the imaginative capacity of Henshaw, this did not actually come to pass. Henshaw is able to change the hopeless situation and despair of Okorie into delight at the end of the play.

This further buttresses the point that characters are like mere pawns in the hands of writers because it is through this medium that writers communicate their intentions and ideas across to the public.

It is worthy of note that the thematic preoccupations of Henshaw's art is what has established him as one of Africa's foremost pioneer creative writers. His plays, often simple in nature, are reflections of a society undergoing the following:

- ❖ Radical social
- ❖ Political, and
- ❖ Economic transformations

They have served as a foundation on which the works of art of younger Nigerian playwrights have been predicated. One of such works is “The Jewels of the Shrine”, Henshaw's second play, that was published in 1956 as part of a collection that includes *This Is Our Chance* and *A Man of Character*. It has a cast list of only five, and all the action takes place in the mud-walled house belonging to an old man, Okorie, the central character.

As with every play by Henshaw, the didactic importance is glaring in its explication of the African belief that old age comes with wisdom and an understanding of the world. This is captured in the following lines offered by the protagonist in the play who is the emblem of old age, namely, Okorie: “*the old ways did not leave me; the new ways did not wholly accept me...with all their education, my grandsons lacked one thing – respect for old age*” (p.42).

Now you see, through these lines, the obvious message which Henshaw is trying to communicate across. This is the fact that the values that come with old age are enduring while new ways of doing things often clashes with the enduring values of traditional society; a sort of literary expression of the notorious debate between tradition and modernity which has permeated intellectual discussions in the humanistic disciplines in the postmodern world.

Through “The Jewels of the Shrine,” Henshaw shows the link between literature and the preservation of cultural values. He teaches the virtues inherent in being responsible, in being humane, and in respecting the older and ageing members of society. In the play, the aged are seen by the youth as embodiments of senility and backwardness.

- In ‘The Jewels of the Shrine’ what is the writers view about old age?
- The writer is of the view that old people should be respected in the society and not seen by youth as examples of backwardness

However, from Henshaw's perspective, old people are the epitome of invaluable experience and are symbols of the centuries-old cultures of Africa's diverse tribal entities. The cultural experience in Africa entails the appreciation of old age as an institution that helps in preserving not only social cohesion within the society but also wisdom which encompasses African manners and customs and refreshing details about everyday life.

In most African societies, it is believed that no matter how wise a young person is, he can never outwit an old man because an old man is far too experienced in the issues of life not to know when he is being deceived by the younger person.

In fact, in some cultures, like the Yoruba culture, a high premium is placed on old age not only because of the geronto-sagacity that is associated with the attainment of old age but also in the transcendental potentials of an old person. An old person who lived a morally worthy life during his peregrination on earth has what it takes to become an ancestor. According to O.B. Olaoba (2005: 138):

The elders among the Yoruba are well respected. Age and experience are viable instruments of social control. Thus with wealth of wisdom and experience, the elders are always in control of social conflicts.



Figure 8.1: Prostration among Yoruba Culture

Source: <http://www.nairaland.com/786977/prostration-among-yoruba-israelites>

The above observation goes to show that the elders or old people in African culture are seen as an embodiment of wisdom; wisdom that grows with the duration or length of human experience. However, it is pertinent to state that giving much regard for old age is not peculiar to the Yoruba people alone.

Dismas A. Masolo (2002: 22) also captures this African belief among the Luo of Kenya. In his view, among the Luo of Kenya, genealogical knowledge was important both in itself and for social and moral reasons. Knowledge of the larger social system of which one was part, and of one's exact location within it, was crucial for determining one's own and others' rights and duties as well as general customary comportment towards others.

Individual and community were related in a constant mutual dependency: the specific behaviour of individuals in various contexts gave the community its cultural boundaries and identity just as much as the normative standards of the community regulated the practices of individuals and groups within it.

As one grows up and attains the age of adulthood in this cultural environment, this knowledge and the derivable behavioural expectations become more demanding. An adult Luo man or woman is always expected to behaviourally relate to others - by speech and deeds - within the limitations provided for (or expected of) the kinship relations between them.

One knew or could know her or his relatives and calculate or adjust their behaviour toward them accordingly. Also, because the socio-economic distributive system was based on such relations, knowledge thereof provided a critical source of socio-political hierarchy, justice and the practice of justice.

In "The Jewels of the Shrine," you see the good sense of judgment associated with old age in Africa expressed in *Scene 2* (p. 48) thus:

Bassi: So you went and worked at night. You should not have done it, even to forestall your grandchildren.

Okorie: My grandsons would never have found it.

Bassi: But you said that they heard us talking of the treasure.

Okorie: You see, I suspected that my grandsons were in this room. So I told you that the treasure was in the farm but in the actual fact it was in the little garden behind this house, where the village Shrine used to be. My grandsons travelled half a mile last night to the farm for nothing.

Bassi: Then I am glad I did not waste my time.

Okorie: (*with delight*). How my grandsons must have toiled in the night! (*He is overcome with laughter.*) My grandsons, they thought I would die in disgrace, a pauper, unheard of. No, not now. (*Then boldly*) But those wicked children must change, or when I die I shall not leave a penny for them."

In this scene, one sees an expression of Okorie's wisdom over the folly of his two wayward grandsons who thought that their grandfather was senile and helpless; Okorie's assertion that "my grandsons travelled half a mile last night to the farm for nothing" highlights this point very well.

This statement obviously attempts to correct the erroneous impression that old people are unwise and unintuitive. In this case, Henshaw tries to bring to the fore the fact that old people should be respected because they have not only wisdom but also a good understanding of the world. This is evident in the play; Okorie (the Old Man) was able to manipulate his two grandsons by outwitting them.

Even though Arob and Ojima (Okorie's two grandsons) were supposed to take care of their grandfather, they maltreated him and left him for dead because they mistakenly thought that he was absolutely dependent on them. This statement, however, captures the plight of Okorie that led him to demonstrate his wisdom over his two grandsons:

...I thought that my old age would be as happy as that of my father before me. But death played me a trick. My son died and I was left to the mercy of his two sons. Once more unhappiness gripped my life. With all their education my grandsons lacked one thing – respect for age (p. 42).

A crucial idea which Henshaw attempts to explicate here is the fact that wisdom does not necessarily come through education or, put differently, education may bring enlightenment and intellectual development to a person but it certainly is not the ultimate guarantee for wisdom. Rather, wisdom comes with age. This idea seems consistent with the African belief that old age comes with wisdom and understanding of the world.

Meanwhile, there is another notion which Henshaw attempts to elucidate with the statement above and that is the fact that old age comes with the search for life's ultimate fulfilment and satisfaction. Thus, it is pertinent to ask; what is the secret of a fulfilling and rewarding life in old age? In her article titled, "Wisdom and Life Satisfaction in Old Age," Monika Ardel (1997: 15) maintains that:

A large body of research exists on the impact of objective life conditions, especially in the domains of health, income or financial assets, socioeconomic status, physical environment and social relationships and support, on satisfaction with life in old age. These conditions, however, explain only a small part of the variation in life satisfaction. Other studies suggest that personal characteristics and developmental influences across the life course and are stronger predictors of subjective well-being in old age than objective circumstances.

There is no doubt that old age, which is the last chapter of life, is not a uniform experience. Some elderly persons achieve a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment in their later years, while others

turn bitter and bewail the decline of their physical abilities and social significance. In line with James Henshaw's "The Jewels of the Shrine," is the proposal that satisfaction in old age does not depend primarily on the objective situation of the elderly but on psychological development across the life course such as an old person's degree of wisdom.

For instance, the Yoruba people associates wisdom with old age not because of the number of years but an emphasis is placed on the wealth of knowledge that old people would have acquired over a long period of time through a broad spectrum of experience in life. This is well articulated by Olufunke Adeboye (2007: 263) in her article titled "The Changing Conception of Elderhood in Ibadan, 1830 -2000," thus:

One remarkable thing about how the Yoruba conceive of elderhood – ipo agba – is that it was also regarded as oke agba (the summit of elderhood). This idea of elderhood as a summit, with younger people at the base implied an age hierarchy and unequal access to valued social roles and social rewards. It also presupposed the prospect of mobility: young people, with some effort beyond age could therefore anticipate their own 'ascent' to oke agba.

In this regard, *oke agba* was not only applied to old age, but also to other forms of seniority such as formal positions of authority within or outside the lineage. Old age was also metaphorically represented as the twilight (*ojo ale*) of a person's life. In contrast, *owuro* (morning) is regarded as the time of youth.

Several Yoruba sayings therefore admonish the youth not to waste their *owuro* through idleness but work hard so they could relax and reap the fruits. This sort explains why, in the play, Okorie was frustrated by the fact that he was going to die without the benefit of enjoying a celebration of his death which would make him seem like a useless old man within the society. In order to avert this from happening to him, he had to apply his wisdom in ensuring that his grandsons not only change their hostile disposition towards him, but also make sure that he was given a befitting burial by them.

The lesson in this is that the wisdom of old age is needed in understanding the world today; most problems that confront the society can be grappled with if the sagacious endowments of the elderly within the community are sought and subscribed to.

It is important to note that every age has its blessings and also its challenges and hardships. And the following can be especially true with old age.

- ❖ It can be a time of physical decline,
- ❖ A time of extreme loneliness
- ❖ It can be a time of seeing lifelong friends pass on and apparently leave.
- ❖ It can be a time of loneliness when a spouse has already gone to the other world.
- ❖ It can be a time of depression, physical pain, a time of wondering, "What is my use in this world?", "Am I merely a burden on society?" or "What would my burial look like?" In fact the worries and concerns of old age are as diverse as the experiences that form the world-views of individual old persons.

In this case, the major worry of Okorie was how he was going to make his grandchildren give him a befitting burial after his demise. This is why, in *Scene 3* of the play, he was heard telling his grandsons that: “do not forget that I am the oldest man in this village. An old man has a right to be decently buried.” However, Okorie decided to apply his wisdom to confront his fears. This implies that older people are expected to possess wisdom, tact, and maturity accumulated through experience over the years (Adeboye, 2007: 263).

So why is the African perspective on the attainment of old age different from those held elsewhere? Widely held attitudes in many countries of the world perceive old age as a time of decline and loss. In the African context, observers have identified modernisation (in particular, education, urbanisation, migration) and industrialisation as key factors impinging on the traditional participatory role of the ageing in the community.

Meanwhile, in Africa, traditional words used to describe the old are neither derogatory nor demeaning. On the contrary, common expressions used to describe elderly people in African languages like "elder", "he who knows", "he who has vision" clearly reveal the guidance role which society expects of the elderly. Literal translations of "old age" in many African languages define it synonymously with wisdom.

Furthermore, symbolism, which is an important factor in many African languages, codifies the ageing process and accords old people a place in the daily life of the community. In the traditional African society, therefore, age is meaningful only in terms of the shared knowledge and experience it offers (Apt 1992: 131). These are the truths which Henshaw attempts to illuminate in “The Jewels of the Shrine”.

In conclusion, there are some lines that you need to pay attention to towards the end of the play, offered by “Stranger”. The character of “Stranger” serves as a kind of mediating point or middle ground between the elderly and the young ones in the African society. While “Stranger” was reading the will of Okorie (the Old man), he offered the following lines:

*I can tell you a few things. First of all, I have discovered
no treasure at all. There was never anything like the
“Jewels of the Shrine.” (p.57)*

These lines signify the communication of the wisdom of the old age to the younger generation who had been beguilingly tricked into believing that there was something called “Jewels of the Shrine” when in reality, there was nothing of such. So the phrase: “...tell you a few things” implies the statement of wisdom that comes with old age but which the younger ones lack. Also these lines help in communicating the writer’s major intentions:

*When I was a child, one of my first duties was to respect
people who were older than myself. But you have thrown
away our traditional love and respect for elderly person. I
shall make you pay for it. Shame on you, young men, who*

believe that because you can read and write, you need not respect old age as your forefathers did! (p. 57).

This statement can be referred as the summit of the basic theme which Henshaw aims to explore in “The Jewels of the Shrine,” the fact that the elderly in the society need to be respected, especially in the African society, because they possess wisdom which could serve as a veritable source of social transformation. Invariably, it also seeks to highlight the fact that if the wisdom of old age is neglected, then we should be ready to pay the consequences just as Okorie’s grandsons were made to pay for taking their grandfather for granted.

Apart from this, the text seeks to address the problem of distorting African traditional values by the currents of modernity. The modern society with all of its promises of the scientific achievements and the advancement of the culture of writing should not overlook the fact that “wisdom” is not limited to literacy alone.

- Why does it make sense to subscribe to the opinion that old age comes with wisdom and an understanding of the world.
- It make sense because they possess wisdom which could serve as source of social transformation and they help have experience life better than younger people.

This issue is further strengthened by the fact that literacy (the ability to read and write) does not necessarily translate into wisdom which is codified by the statement, “shame on you, young men, who believe that because you can read and read and write, you need not respect old age...” (p.57). All of these boil down to one fact – that is, unlike how it is conceived elsewhere, in Africa, old age is, and should be, accorded some level of respect because with it comes wisdom and understanding of the world.

Summary of Study Session 8

- (1) There is in Africa a general belief that old age comes with wisdom and an understanding of the world.
- (2) In the industrialized West, the elderly are considered as a burden to society and old age is perceived as that which brings about an inevitable decline in intelligence.
- (3) Writers help to shape public thoughts, spark debates and fight for societal good and against societal ills. They embolden the masses and give them hope when there seems to be none. We find such a task playing out in “The Jewels of the Shrine” where the Old man (Okorie) thought he was going to die unceremoniously and hopelessly but, in the imaginative capacity of Henshaw, this did not actually come to pass.
- (4) Through “The Jewels of the Shrine,” Henshaw shows the link between literature and the preservation of cultural values. He teaches the virtues inherent in being responsible, in being humane, and in respecting the older and ageing members of society.
- (5) A crucial idea which Henshaw attempts to explicate in “The Jewels of the Shrine” is the fact that wisdom does not necessarily comes through education or, put differently, education may bring enlightenment and intellectual development to a person but it certainly is not the ultimate guarantee for wisdom.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 8

Now that you have completed this study session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning outcomes by answering the following questions. Write your answers in your study Diary and discuss them with your Tutor at the next study Support Meeting. You can check your answers with the Notes on the Self-Assessment questions at the end of this Module.

SAQ 8.1 (Testing Learning outcomes 8.1)

- (1) Discuss how James Henshaw's "The Jewels of the Shrine" explicates the African belief that old age comes with wisdom and an understanding of the world.
- (2) Discuss how the play shows the link between literature and the preservation of cultural values.

SAQ 8.2 (Testing Learning outcomes 8.2)

- (1) Critically examine the claim that old age is a necessary condition for knowledge and wisdom.
- (2) In what way is "The Jewels of the Shrine" in support of the traditionalist programme in African philosophy?

Reading List

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Endnote

¹Though with little modification, Lecture Three of this course material is the revised version of a paper read by late Professor Olusegun Oladipo at a meeting of the Premier Circle, an informal group of scholars at the University of Ibadan, in June 1997. The late professor gave me the material at the time I was teaching this course at the Dominican Institute, an affiliate of the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan. I am still indebted to him.

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