African Prose Fiction

ENG444

University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development
Version 1.0 ev1

ISBN: _

General Editor: Prof. Bayo Okunade

Page layout, instructional design &development by EDUTECHportal,
www.edutechportal.org

University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
University of Ibadan,
Nigeria

Telex: 31128NG

Tel: +234 (80775935727)
E-mail: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng
Website: www.dlc.ui.edu.ng

Vice-Chancellor's Message

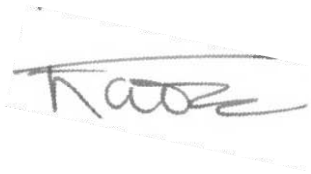
The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in 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 fulfillment 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. Isaac Adewole

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.

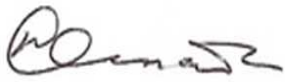
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist 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 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.



Professor Bayo Okunade

Director

Course Development Team

Content Authoring	Francis Olafemi Olatokunbo
Content Editor	Prof. Remi Raji-Oyelade
Production Editor	Dr. Gloria O. Adedoja
Learning Design & Technologist	Folajimi Olambo Fakoya
Managing Editor	Ogunmefun Oladele Abiodun
General Editor	Prof. Bayo Okunade

Contents

About this course manual 5

How this course manual is structured 5

Course Overview 7

Welcome to African Prose Fiction ENG444 7
Course outcomes 7
Timeframe 7
How to be successful in this course 8
Need help? 9
Academic Support 9
Activities 9
Assessments 10
Bibliography 10

Getting around this course manual 12

Margin icons 12

Study Session 1 13

Background to the Study of Africa Prose Fiction 13
Introduction 13
1.1 African Prose 13
Study Session Summary 20
Assessment 20
References 20

Study Session 2 21

The Tradition of African Prose Fiction 22
Introduction 22
2.1 The Tradition of African Prose Fiction 22
Study Session Summary 27
Assessment 28
References 28

Study Session 3 29

Ideology in the African Prose 29
Introduction 29
3.1 Ideology in African Prose 29

Study Session Summary 36
Assessment 36
References 36

Study Session 4 37

The Archtype African Novel: Chinual Achebe's Things Fall Apart 37
Introduction 37
4.1 Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* 37
Study Session Summary 43
Assessment 43
References 44

Study Session 5 44

The Burden of Colonialism: Oyono's Houseboy and the Old Man and the Medal 45
Introduction 45
5.1 Thematic Preoccupation in Oyono's *Houseboy* and *The Old Man and The Medal* 45
Study Session Summary 51
Assessment 52
References 52

Study Session 6 53

Assimilated Negritude: a Study of Camara Laye's Artistic Vision 53
Introduction 53
6.1 Assimilation, Negritude and African Prose Fiction 53
6.2 Camara Laye's Artistic Vision 56
6.3 Assimilated Negritude: *The Radiance of The King* 58
Study Session Summary 60
Assessment 61
References 61

Study Session 7 61

Colonial Injustice: a Study of Alex La Guma's Creative Works 62
Introduction 62
7.1 Analysis of Alex La Guma's Works 62
7.2 The Stone Country 66
Study Session Summary 70
Assessment 70
References 70

Study Session 8 71

A Vision of Society: The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 71
Introduction 71
8.1 Social Criticism in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 71

Study Session Summary 79
Assessment 79
References 79

Study Session 9 80

The Novel in East Africa: The Example of Ngugi Wa Thiongo 80
Introduction 80
9.1 East African Novel 80
9.2 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o 81
9.2.1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Writings in Gikuyu 86
9.3 A Survey of the Works of Meja Nwangi 87
9.3.1 Nwangi's Thematic 87
9.3.2 Nwangi's Development as a Writer 88
9.3.3 The Mau Mau Novels 89
9.3.4 Writing about the Urban Downtrodden 89
Kill Me Quick (1973) 90
Going Down River Road (1976) 90
Study Session Summary 92
Assessment 93
References 93

Study Session 10 94

Thematic Thrusts in Wole Soyinka's Interpreters and Chinua Achebe's a Man of the People 94
Introduction 94
10.1 The Context of Soyinka and Achebe's Novels 94
Study Session Summary 101
Assessment 101
References 101

Study Session 11 102

North African Novels 102
Introduction 102
11.1 Mohammed Dib's Literary Works 102
11.2 Yusuf Idris' Literary Works 104
11.3 Nawal al-Saadawi's Literary Works 106
11.3.1 Feminist Ideals 107
11.3.2 Thematic Preoccupation of al-Saadawi's Fiction 107
11.3.3 Nawal al-Saadawi's Novels 108
Study Session Summary 109
Assessment 109
References 109

Bibliography 110

About this course manual

African Prose FictionENG444 has been produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. All course manuals produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centreare structured in the same way, as outlined below.

How this course manual is structured

The course overview

The course overview gives you a general introduction to the course. Information contained in the course overview will help you determine:

- If the course is suitable for you.
- What you will already need to know.
- What you can expect from the course.
- How much time you will need to invest to complete the course.

The overview also provides guidance on:

- Study skills.
- Where to get help.
- Course assignments and assessments.
- Margin icons.

We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your study.

The course content

The course is broken down into Study Sessions. Each Study Session comprises:

- An introduction to the Study Session content.
- Study Sessionoutcomes.
- Core content of the Study Sessionwith a variety of learning activities.
- A Study Session summary.
- Assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.
- Bibliography

Your comments

After completing African Prose Fiction we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this course. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Course content and structure.
- Course reading materials and resources.
- Course assignments.
- Course assessments.
- Course duration.
- Course support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.)

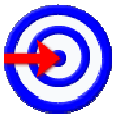
Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this course.

Course Overview

Welcome to African Prose FictionENG444

This course surveys the development of the novel from Africa and focuses attention on issues such as the language(s), the audience, the central themes, and the stylistic peculiarities of African fiction in English. The course attempts to identify the distinctive character of African prose fiction in English with a view to showing the similarities and/or differences between and among works from West, East and Southern Africa, as well as establishing the nature of the contribution of African women writers.

Course outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of African Prose FictionENG444 you will be able to:

- *discuss* the development of prose friction in Africa
- *analyse* literary works from specific regions of Africa.

Timeframe

How long?

This is a 15 week course. It requires a formal study time of 45 hours. The formal study times are scheduled around online discussions / chats with your course facilitator / academic advisor to facilitate your learning. Kindly see course calendar on your course website for scheduled dates. You will still require independent/personal study time particularly in studying your course materials.

How to be successful in this course

As an open and distance learner your approach to learning will be different to that from your school days, where you had onsite education. You will now choose what you want to study, you will have professional and/or personal motivation for doing so and you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic responsibilities.

Essentially you will be taking control of your learning environment. As a consequence, you will need to consider performance issues related to time management, goal setting, stress management, etc. Perhaps you will also need to reacquaint yourself in areas such as essay planning, coping with exams and using the web as a learning resource.

We recommend that you take time now—before starting your self-study—to familiarize yourself with these issues. There are a number of excellent resources on the web. A few suggested links are:

- http://www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/resources/studyskill.pdf

  This is a resource of the UIDLC pilot course module. You will find sections on building study skills, time scheduling, basic concentration techniques, control of the study environment, note taking, how to read essays for analysis and memory skills ("remembering").
- http://www.ivywise.com/newsletter_march13_how_to_self_study.html

  This site provides how to master self-studying, with bias to emerging technologies.
- http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php

  Another "How to study" web site with useful links to time management, efficient reading, questioning/listening/observing skills, getting the most out of doing ("hands-on" learning), memory building, tips for staying motivated, developing a learning plan.

The above links are our suggestions to start you on your way. At the time of writing these web links were active. If you want to look for more, go to www.google.com and type "self-study basics", "self-study tips", "self-study skills" or similar phrases.

Need help?

Help

As earlier noted, this course manual complements and supplements ENG444at UI Mobile Class as an online course, which is domiciled at www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc.

You may contact any of the following units for information, learning resources and library services.

Distance Learning Centre (DLC)
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Tel: (+234) 08077593551 – 55
(Student Support Officers)
Email: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng

Head Office
Morohundiya Complex, Ibadan-Ilorin Expressway, Idi-Ose, Ibadan.

Information Centre
20 Awolowo Road, Bodija, Ibadan.

Lagos Office
Speedwriting House, No. 16 Ajanaku Street, Off Salvation Bus Stop, Awuse Estate, Opebi, Ikeja, Lagos.

For technical issues (computer problems, web access, and etcetera), please visit: www.learnersupport.dlc.ui.edu.ng for live support; or send mail to webmaster@dlc.ui.edu.ng.

Academic Support

Help

A course facilitator is commissioned for this course. You have also been assigned an academic advisor to provide learning support. The contacts of your course facilitator and academic advisor for this course are available at the course website: www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc

Activities

Activities

This manual features "Activities," which may present material that is NOT extensively covered in the Study Sessions. When completing these activities, you will demonstrate your understanding of basic material (by answering questions) before you learn more advanced concepts. You will be provided with answers to every activity question. Therefore, your emphasis when working the activities should be on understanding your answers. It is more important that you understand why every answer is correct.

Assessments

Assessments

There are three basic forms of assessment in this course: in-text questions (ITQs) and self assessment questions (SAQs), and tutor marked assessment (TMAs). This manual is essentially filled with ITQs and SAQs. Feedbacks to the ITQs are placed immediately after the questions, while the feedbacks to SAQs are at the back of manual. You will receive your TMAs as part of online class activities at the UI Mobile Class. Feedbacks to TMAs will be provided by your tutor in not more than 2 weeks expected duration.
Schedule dates for submitting assignments and engaging in course / class activities is available on the course website. Kindly visit your course website often for updates.

Bibliography

Reading

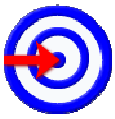
For those interested in learning more on this subject, we provide you with a list of additional resources at the end of this course manual; these may be books, articles or websites.

Getting around this course manual

Margin icons

While working through this course manual you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to "signpost" a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this course manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

 Activity	 Assessment	 Assignment	 Case study
 Discussion	 Group Activity	 Help	 Outcomes
 Note	 Reflection	 Reading	 Study skills
 Summary	 Terminology	 Time	 Tip

Study Session 1

Background to the Study of Africa Prose Fiction

Introduction

This Study Session will provide student with the background to the study of the African prose fiction. We will attempt to examine the various world view of African prose fiction.

Learning Outcomes

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

1.1 *explain* the origin of African prose fiction.

1.1 African Prose

The novel could be said to be the pre-dominant creative for in African today. Although it has overtaken the essay, poetry and drama, it is still relatively new on the African literary scenario. The beginning of the modern African prose fiction might be rightly traced to Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1925), a historical romance which was written in Sesotho early in this century. In the word of Jan Heinz Jahn:

> This book was written in 1980 but its publication was delayed by the author's missionary patrons because of 'pagan' elements in it which were considered to be anti-Christian and it was not published until 1925.

Solomon Plaatje's *Mhudi* (1930), also appeared on the early literary scene. As a result, disparate minor works began to appear mainly in south, but also in East and Central Africa.

Tip

Thomas Mofolo and Solomon Plaatje are the known pioneers of African prose fiction.

Over the last two decades of its growth African literature has been dominated by one major theme, an assessment of Africans contact with the West. The spiritual and social implications of this contact have been the concern of most writers. Hence, the meeting of Africa and Europe has been presented as a conflict. The lesser writers have been content with a general presentation of typical incopatibilities but the better writers have

dug deeper and attempted to determine the specific implications of this conflict for particular African communities (1977).

Hint

In African fiction writers have treated African's contact with the West as a form of conflict.

Importantly, the attainment of independence by many African countries in the early sixties led to a noticeable decline in the theme of cultural conflict, until recently, one is hardly aware of warring or opposed ways of life. Noticeably the country dictions of widely conflicting value are still inescapable reality which the writer has to confront According to Aime Cesaire:

> Whether we like it or not, we cannot pose the problem of colonialism, for all native cultures are today developing under the peculiar influence of a colonial, Semi-Colonial or Para-Colonial situation (1977:1).

Modern African prose fiction has been largely concerned until interpreting the more recent implications of a history extending over the last four centuries. The aspect of this history which attracted creative instincts would be laid-bare.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century when Africa had a contract with the West, and the Portuguese explore, Vasco da Gama, called into a few harbors along the West African coast. The slave trade which later started on a large scale was the phenomenon which shook Africa out of countries of quietude and isolation which resulted into a long period of wars and internal conflicts which lasted for a long time until surface stability was imposed by the European powers when they decided to divide and rule the continent directly. According to Author Gakwandi

> During the period of slave-trade the West must have remained a cruel mystery to most Africans; the social turbulence would have been too vast and too hard to comprehend. This together with the wide-spread illiteracy which existed on the continent must be part of explanation for the long delay in the emergence of writer literature(1977.2).

Notably it was among the set of Africans who crossed the seas and came into closer contact with West that the first seeds of the new literature were sown. Their interaction had brought to them a greater interest aiding of the process of history in which they were caught than could be attained by the African in his nature place.

A handful of the ex-slaves wrote on their harrowing experiences to civilization among the best known of these chronicles being by Olandah Equiamo. In the account, we recognize the African who has been subjected to the injustices of the West but is the very process set apart from the simpler values of this original community. In the words of Janheins Jahn, this eighteenth century literature by black people in the new world has been tagged, 'apprentice literature; this is because according to him, it merely tried to imitate European models of the period. However, within the context of those works, we see the

beginnings of agitation against the injustice of the white races and the development of ambivalent attitude forward those races, both of which have been the subject of much modern black writing.

Dr William Dubois and Marcus Garvey has been said to have deeply influenced African nationalism and Pam-Africanism. According to Colin Legum;

Dubois happens to be the first major link between political consciousness and literary awakening. These leaders organized various conferences on Pam-Africanism which were to play a decisive role in the development of committed nationalism among African student who were studying abroad. According to Gakwandi:

It was at the sixth political independence was first proclaimed as a goal of nationalism. The previous congress had been concerned with social and legal quality for the colonial peoples (1977:3).

In addition, the conflict between the West Indian and African intellectuals in Paris led to the growth of a new literary movement which in the forted became known as negritude. As a movement, negative was established during the colonial era, and the term 'negritude' was first used in the student newspaper, *The Negro Student*, established in Paris in 1934. The paper was naturally seen as political organ through which the negro voice against colonial domination could be heard. Edward Blyden was the pioneer of this movement. He was the first black man to attempt an objective appraisal of African cultures. This writings are coloured by the romantic views of his contemporary world. He tried to rehabilitate the living cultures of African communities which had been abused by three countries of degradation. He took pride in his blackness and implored his fellow Afro-American to do the same. Blyden urged the black races to hold-on to their history and culture and utilize them as the base for building the future. Modern scholarship, which has attempted to rehabilitate African culture and to view African history in a more scientific perspective, must acknowledge, must acknowledge a debt to Blyden.

Note

As a movement, negative was established during the colonial era, and the term 'negritude' was first used in the student newspaper, *The Negro Student*, established in Paris in 1934..

However the first non-white novelist to gain wide regarding public was Peter Abrahams whose novel, *Song of the City* (1945), It was not until the fifties that the African novel began to acquire its own identity and generate the present literary explosion.

Late in 1951, an unknown Nigerian writer with six years of primary school education subtitled the manuscript of his first novel to the British publishing house of Faber and Faber. The manuscript, which was called *The Palm-Wine Drunkard* was published, Amos Tutuola became the first novelist from typical Africa to gain extensive exposure among Western Literary audiences.

Every writer is influenced by the tradition in which he acquires the tools of writing the language the styles and the forms which he is familiar with before he starts writing. According to a study made by Lilyan Kesteloot

> Most African writers of French expression have been influenced by French, Russian and American literatures in that order. Many of the writers who were interviewed claimed to have been influenced by vernacular literatures of their communities (1965:4).

Since no comprehensive study of the numerous vernacular literatures of the continent has yet been made it is difficult to guess the degree to which they have influenced writers. Hence, to talk of African prose fiction is to assume that it has its own distractive features which distinguish it from other works in other areas of the world written in the same language.

Janheinz Jahn have argued that these is an essential similarly between all works written by people whose origins can be traced back to Africa. To give this assumption any credibility evidence would be needed to show that there was cultural conference in Africa before its contact with the West; But since no such evidence has yet been produced by sociologist and historians it seems more reasonable to accept the view that the common elements of modern African culture stem from patterns imposed by colonialism. According to Le Vine: There is no lack of documentation for the proposition that the colonial period in Africa produced several forms-territorial political culture that survived the transition to independence and that continue to affect the internal and external politics of the post-colonial African States. These trans-territorial cultures are modern rather than traditional in the sense that their participants are mainly the products of the westernized Strata of Africa society. They are elite political cultures involving only a small proportion of Africans, most of whom occupy positions of influenced exchanging the politically unsophisticated African masses. These elite cultures rest upon shared political values, common or similar political experiences, common educational backgrounds, shared nationalist symbols.

At this juncture it is because nationalist sentiment have dominated the ideological aspiration of African peoples in this century certain common values have been shared by writers from Africa during writer to choose a standpoint before the period of nationalist growth from which to interpret the experience. The nationalist experience has provided a raw material for the modern African writer to assess and comment upon the contemporary motion.

Right from the onset, African nationalism tried to utilize literature as a platform of political liberation. Several conference of Negro writers came-up as offshoots of the Pan- African congress which tried to direct all intellectual activity in the service of nationalist cause. As part of the manifesto of the 1956 congress in Paris E.C pan declares:

> To contribute to the revision of the whole series of representations upon which colonialism relies to justify itself, that seems to us, at the moment, to be the most urgent task of the vegro writer (1956:143).

Another delegate, Ben Enwonwu insisted on the need for literature to put itself at the service of nationalism:

> The present generations of African artist therefore have to face their political problems, and try to look at art through politics; the kind of picture that the political aspect of African art shows is one of strife and pity (1976:179).

Several of these congresses ended by passing resolutions laying down principles which were to guide Negro writers among the resolution included the 1957, Rome congress:

> The Negro writers and artists regard it as their essential task and acted mission to bring their cultural activity within the slope of the great movement for liberation of their individual peoples, without losing sight of the solidarity which should unite all individuals and peoples who are struggling for the lineation of colonization and its consequences as well as all those who are fighting throughout the world for progress and liberty (1959:122).

However there has been a turnaround in the pattern of thinking and as a result, recent conferences of African writers have avoided passing prescriptive resolutions, particularly, the idea that negritude should be the nurse of all African writing has been roundly rejected by Anglo-phone writers. Even within the Francophone writers negritude has been discredited. According to Gakwandi:

> African thinkers are beginning to accept that there are wide difference within their traditional cultures and that the motion of an African acceptable that the broad similarities of an African creative material are modern rather than ancient and that it stems from the shared history which is fairly recent (1977:6).

Nationalism is the main driving force behind the political and cultural trends in modern Africa. This is perhaps the overbearing consciousness, the intellectual milieu within which artists create 'Negritude may be losing ground but there is a continual search for another political standpoint from which African intellectuals will be able to interpret their experience; According to the manifesto:

Culture is essentially dynamic in order words it is both rooted in the people and oriented towards the future. We must go back to the sources of our values, not to confine ourselves to them, but rather to draw up a critical inventory in order to get rid of archaic stultifying elements which are still valid bringing them up to date and enriching them with the benefits of the scientific, technical and social revolutions so as to bring them into line with what is modern and universal (1979:124).

From the above resolutions and manifesto, there is no suggestion that they reflect the individual attitudes of writers. What they reflect is the way in which nationalist sentiments and the struggle for political freedom have been at the heart of most Africa's creative instinct. Indeed political preoccupation is a characteristic feature of African literature .the demand

for freedom social justice and equality runs through African literature before and after independence.

African literature continues to acquire distinct characteristics at its developmental transition in different parts of the continent. It is already fashionable, to talk of Nigerian literature, within the body of Nigerian literary scene, one can talk of distinctive colurence

Most critics have found at most convenient to divide African literature into three broad 'traditions' South African, Anglophone African, the diabolism of racialism, in French – speaking African the emphasis has been on asserting African identity and rejecting assimilation, whilst in English- speaking African the primary preoccupation has been portraying tensions which arise from the co-existence of two district ways of life the western and the traditional (1977:7).

The variation of emphasis in treating the same basic problem is a direct result of the different experience of colonialism and white domination which the three separate areas have experienced. Although the term 'protest literature' in general, committed artists have always been made concerned with going beyond the ambience of protest.

In South Africa for example, there is an understandable preoccupation among nom-white writers with the evils of repression police brutality and arbitrary imprisonment which has sometimes led to the kind of 'protest' literature which writers like Ezekiel Mphahlele has often complained about (1966:13).

Early in the century, South African writers in Bantu Language were preoccupied with recreating their past in the way offers writers have been doing from other part of the continent. Later writers such a Peter Abraham and Ezekiel Mphahlele tend to be less preoccupied with the past and are more concerned with the contemporary reality. The present is South Africa, ouches has to do with *apartheid* this is however found to be a major preoccupation of literature for both white and black writers from that region.

We have writers like Alan Paton, Peter Abraham as earlier mentioned and Lewis Akosi in depicting this denial of natural human relationships. All these writers laid bare the unnaturalness of the values imposed by apartheid and insist that love would triumph in the end. Personal love is seen as a gesture which has an exemplary effect upon the community at large. However, as the situation in South Africa became unbearable, some writers began to renounce the theme of love and brotherhood. These writers portrayed the situation sensitively and let it speak for itself. They include, Nadine Gordinar, Dan Jacobson, Ezekiel Mphahlele also belongs to this group. Other writers that adopted pure protest include: Richard Rive and Alex La Guma belong to this category. *A Walk in the Night* (1968) this is an evocation of mood rather than a prescription for action it is perhaps the most poignant distillation of this hostility. In the novel, the black man's harrowing experience and the white man's fears collide with irreconcilable ferocity. The total lack of communication between the two worlds is brought out however, less by statement than by external description, as in this, of two policemen walking towards the coloured protagonist of the novel. Michael Adonis turned towards the pub and saw

the two policeman coining towards him. They came down the pavement in their flat caps, khaki shirts and parts their gun harness shiny with polish, and the holstered pistols heavy at their waists. They had hard, frozen faced as if carved out of pink ice, and hard, dispassionate eyes, hard and bright as pieces of blue glass. They strolled slowly and determinedly side by side, without moving off their course, cutting a path through the stream on the pavement like destroyers at sea (1968:10-11).

The terrifying hardness of the policeman's movements, dress and personage portrays their callosity and ruthlessness. The policemen are symbol of diabolism that haunts Adonis wherever he goes.

Few novelists that emerged from Francophone African have expressed their anger against colonialism. But their anger is usually punctuated by a sense of humour. The hammering satire of Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono has a dual purpose: it exposes the diabolism which is inherent in colonialism while at the same time it uncovers the gullibility of those who voluntarily submit to it. The two novelists usually portray heroes who are discovering painfully the made quay of the foreign values which they have naively accepted (1977:9).

in the words of Gakwandi: Novel writing in English-Speaking Africa,…is principally a post-independence phenomenon, which may help to explain the degree to which the protest element is subdued. The earliest novelists to make their marks on the public were Cyprian Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe both from Nigeria. They started writing in the fifties when independence was already in view in such a situation it was possible to look back with comparative dispassion, over the history of colonization and try to assess its effects without the escapist romanticization of the African past which we find in Camara Laye (1977:9)

The attack on colonialism was mellowed by a strong ambivalence in the writers attitude towards the new value which they shared. The concern of these writers has been primarily with the present, which they have tried to assess by dramatizing a dialog between Western Ideals and the ancestral value of their communities Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1962), and *Arrow of God* (1965) act as the major expositions of this dialogue. Both novels chronicle an interpretation of the first European exploration of Igboland in Eastern Nigeria. In the first novel we see the conflict mainly from the way in which it affect a self-made, ambitions, haughty and reactionary tribal leader: He agitates total war against the strangers but funds himself without the support of his fellow tribesmen, some of whom have already been converted for the doctrines of the strangers. After killing an emissary of the invader he takes the own life. On the other hand the hard of *Arrow of God*, believes in cunning rather than violent confrontation. However the diplomatic integrity becomes the source of his undoing. The son, whom he sends to school as an agent to observe the new religion from inside is converted and commits a scission act that lead to a tragic quarrel within the tribe (1977:10).

In the words of Gakwandi:

Achebe is committed neither to condemnation nor extolling the infiltration. What is significant.. Is that highlights the fact that the West does not simply have to rely on force to plant its values in Africa.

Western values were willingly embraced by many sections of African communities because of inherent weaknesses in traditional cultures (1977:10).

It is also believed that all cultures have something to gain from others because cultures are heartily when organic and adaptable.

Hence, this is the standpoint of any African novelist in English Colonialism cannot be rejected in its entirety. These were much to be gained from the contact with Europe. The level of the gain or loss is still the subject of debate by writers.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session,we introduced you to African prose fiction, its divisions and main preoccupations. The discussion so far leads us to see the African novel as a creative interpretation of history beginning at the time of the colonial occupation of the continent. The most convenient classification of the novel therefore seems to be according to which aspect of the history particular novel depict.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Cesaire, Aime *Presence Africaine Paris*: Heinemann,1956

Equino, O.,*Equino Travels, London*: Heinemann 1967

Jahn, Janheinz *A History of Neo-African literature*London: Faber 1967

Blyden, Edward *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*,London: Editing press 1967.

Mofolo, Thomas *Chaka*. London: Oxford press 1931

Abraham, Peter *Songs of the City*, London: Faber press 1945.

Le Vine, V *Political leadership in Africa*, London:Stanford press 1967

La Gume, Alex *A walk in the Night*, London: Heinemann1968

Achebe, Chinua *Things Fall Apart*, London:Heinemann1967

Achebe, Chinua *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann 1965.

Study Session 2

The Tradition of African Prose Fiction

Introduction

This Study Sessionwill introduce you to the basic tradition that is prevalent specifically in the African novel. For while there is the influence of foreign tradition, alongside it, there is also an indigenous folklore tradition which continues to influence their works.

Learning Outcomes

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

2.1*point out* indigenous as well as foreign traditions in the African

2.1 The Tradition of African Prose Fiction

A writer as always searching for a definite method and style and he stands the risk of being influenced by the styles of antecedent writers as well as by the already developed and tried methods. We can therefore say that African writers are very much in this situation. For while there is the influence of foreign tradition, alongside it, there is also an indigenous folklore tradition which continues to influence their writing.

According to Pius Dada:

> Folklore motifs abound in the African novel, as is evident from the profuse use of African imagery, proverbs, Local customs and practices; beliefs, mystery, magic, witchcraft, actions, adages, Social habits, modes of thought and actions, and traditional heroes songs (1986:28).

When these appear in the African novel, they are usually organically related to the language of the author no matter to what ethics group he belongs and regardless of the European language which he employs as his medium.

Folklore influences the formation of the style and method of most African writers though the extent of the influence many vary from one writer to another. This however, depends on several factors, one of which is the depth of the writer's mastery of his oral tradition. Some writers recreate folklore and adapt it to modern literature. Such writers as Amos Tutuola, Bernard Dadie and Birago Diop, to mention a few, largely employ folklore theme and structure in their works. In the case of Amos Tutuola, he recreates folklore by transforming the Yoruba mythology into modern fiction. The influence of folklore is further pronounced for instance in

Camarra Laye's *The African Child*; Chima Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*; In Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Nguji Wa *The River Between* thonjo's, Bessie Head's *When Rain Cloud Gathers*; Nadine Gordimer's *A Guest of Honour*, Kaleb Yecine's Nedjma; and in a host of other novels by Africans. The importance attached to folklore elements by these writers depends a great deal on their respective outlook and backgrounds. So, we find, for instance, that the emphasis on folklore is more pronounced in Achebe's novel than in the writing of his colleague, Cyprian Ekwensi; it is more prominent in the novels of Ferdinand Oyono than in the novel of Sembene Qusinane. It also has something to do with individual style and taste.

There is the implication that one writer has a better knowledge of his people's folklore than the other, or that at the height of a writers power, he can deal with folklore more effectively than others.

The examples of Chima Achebe, Oyono and Ekwensi will again illustrate the point. In *Burning Grass*, Ekwensi goes into folklore and is even lost in it. We also find a great deal of folklore element in *Things Fall Apart*. In the works of Ekwensi, we discover a lot of folklore characters and motifs. However, in a latter novel, *Jagua Nana*, Ekwensi used folklore motifs minimally. In La Vie De Boy (Houseboy), Oyono employ little or no folklore motifs, whereas in *Chemin De Europe* the folklore motifs are woven into the system of characters where the satiric and the grotesque prevail.

Short stories derived from folklore are usually intended for school children and sometimes adults such stories include Mabel Segun's *My Father's Daughter* Cyprians Ekwensi Samankwe and the High way Robbers; *The Rainmaker and other stories*(1965); *Ikolo the Wrestler and other Ibo tale* (1954) The Twin detectives by Nathaniel Oro. Bernard Dadie's Le Pagre Noir: Coutes Africans (1955) Benjamin Matip's A La belle Etoile, Coutes et Nouvelles d'Afrique (1962). There are series of these litto from Evans African Library: *A girl for Sale and other Stories*, *The Adventures of Moni-Mambore* by Guy Mange, The Rainbow tinted Scarf and other stories by Cyprian Ekwensi; *The Torn Veil and Other Stories* by Phebean Itayomi and Mabel Dore Danguah etc. This writer seems to delve into tradition and pick from an inexhaustible source of knowledge of folklore using the selected elements for new creations.

Bernard Dadie for instance, sees in the character of African tales as in the folklore of other continents an expression of the solidarity of simple workers, their socio-official principles and he funds there reality side by side with care for unreality hence, in a novel like Bernard Dadie's *climbre* (1956), we see traditional dance; we hear the sound of tom-tom expressed the communal Spirit.

As a follow-up, Birago Diop inherits and innovates his folklore He makes perfect use of folklore in his *Contes d'Amadon Konmba* (1947); and also in the *Cequel Les Nonveanx Contes d'Amadon Konmba* (1958) in which he depicts the real life of the people and the beauty of the fantastic characters of their folklore. Most of these characters could develop into realistic characters in a modern novel. When in *Sarzan* he expresses the madness of his hero as a punishment sent by the spirits of the ancestors

against the jealous adaptation and acceptance of European Civilization, Diop underlines the Socio-ethical values and educative role of customs that oppose foreign traditions. He hardly draws any line of demarcation between pots, feathers and spirits associated with the African shrine, and the Catholic saints, candles, and icons in the European churches, for as he asserts in the preface to *Tales of Amedon Konmba* " the tree grows only because its roots go deep into the soil that feeds it"

Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, Sembene Qusmane and Chinua Achebe all have roots of their arts in folklore. But in using folklore, these writers have consciously and objectively developed new form and methods. They show us the limitations, the bad side of traditional setups, the development of a social contradiction and new element of societal relations. They add new elements of drama and irony to their work, this individualizing character as in the conventional Western literature where a hero (the superfluous character) suffers alone and dies alone; and the fate is not directly related to the fate of the people as in most African traditional literature.

The process of folklore adaptation has its peculiar setbacks. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo stands as a monumental epic character who maintains his stand against the powers and customs of Europeans. It is also ideal to say that Meka, In Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal*, is an epic character, who is disillusioned by both the unwillingness of the whites to accept black as equals, and their hypocritical friendship. The Old man distrust the whites and the community are united in their fight against white enslaves. The point is not that these novels have no European elements in them, all that is being said is that the influence minimal and, as far as the use of traditional elements is concerned they are authentic and original African novels. The themes are related to traditional life as the case where a woman who is not pleased with her husband news to her parents, in a tale of Birago Diop, filled *Judgment*, and in Mongo Beti's novel, *Mission to Kala.*

In the case of Sembene Qusmane, he is very skillful in sifting the folklore of the people before utilizing it in his novels. *In God's Bits of Wood* (Les Bonts de Bois De Dieu) and Harmattan, the end of communal moral is compared with the development of a bourgeois passion to cheat and also with a bourgeois egoism. There is the birth of a new progressive, collective fighting in unity for national and social rights. The communal songs, dances the sounds of the tom-tom, all accompany the epic struggle of the characters in Qusmene's *God's Bits of Woods*, which has sifted folklore elements for maximum effect, as in many epic novels of the twentieth century. It points to the growth of historical activities of masses, the emergence of a new revolutionary hero who is united with the collective. This is the type of sifting which is undertaken in Maxim Gorky's novels as well as in the work of Louis Aragon, the French writer, especially in the novels titled *The Communists.* Qusmane also shows in his first novel Le Docker Noir (1956) the development of internal social contradictions in an African society after independence. His hero in the novel is an illiterate worker; his colleague laughs at him, but he remains unperturbed and believes in his god.

The writings of Amos Tutuola best illustrate how folklore can influence a writer's method and style. Tutuola's style and imagination make fresh in his Yoruba folklore in the minds of the people. He recounts tales that were known to us once, but which we have probably forgotten, tales which have had great appeal to many readers in Paris, New York and London because the readers there are not familiar with the tales, which they naturally regard as new and original. He seems less popular in Nigeria his home land, because people have the motion that he is merely repeating to them tales which were well-known to them. But Tutuola remain the bet preserver of Nigeria folklore. What he illustrate more is the richness of the material of African folklore, which he uses "without any consciousness of effect of quaintness, but with the rarest intention of telling a wonderful tale"

Tutuola adopts a narrative style which is characteristics of folklore: the style is not bound to be perfect and the language in which it is written in not bound to confirm to all grammatical rules and syntax. He writes in simple English which is perhaps the best way of transforming a material purely folklore into another language.

Tutuola has been roundly criticized for his bad language and for creating something which is far being artistic, without giving due consideration to the fact that the style has been influenced by folklore. After all, a story-teller does not have to speak in conventional Standard English so long as he has a grasp of the traditional method of story – telling. The beginning of Tutuola's Palm-Wine Drunkard testifies to this statement:

> I was a palm-wine drunkard since I was a boy of ten years of age. I had no other work more than to drink palm-wine in my life. In those days we did not know other money, except cowries, so that everything was very cheap, and my father was the richest man in our town.
>
> My father got eight children and I was the eldest among them, all of the rest were hard workers, but I myself was an expert palm-wine drunkard. I was drinking palm-wine from morning till night and from night till morning… (1952:1)

It is possible to adapt, transform and give a new meaning and a new content to folklore which has a lot to offer the modern African writer. It is possible to employ myths, tales and legends about heroes for writing novels which are historical in nature and one would like to share the view expressed by Emmanuel Obiechima on the importance of oral tradition in contemporary West African Writing for according to him;

It is incorporating the oral tradition of West Africa in their writing that they have largely succeeded in giving an air of authenticity of their writing and established a consciousness which is characteristically West African… the essential reality of the contemporary West African culture is that within it, oral tradition continue to exist side by side with the encroaching literary tradition. Whether in the tale of Amos Tutuola, in the novels of Chima Achebe, in the plays of Soyinka and Clark, or in the poems of Okigbo, we are aware that the writers are drawing elaborately

from West African folklore, traditional symbols and images, and traditional turns of speech, to must their writing with a truly West African folklore, traditional symbols and images and traditional turns of speech, to must their writing with a truly, West African sensibility and flavour… (1967:142-143).

The importance of the European Tradition can be seen in the remarkable attachment of the early francophone African novel to the realistic ideal of the late ninetieth century and early twentieth century French writing.

In literature, borrowing became more discernible as pioneer West African writers used the medium of the writing to explain to the world their and critics of other countries who portrayed them subjectively. In their choice of models many of these writers opted for Reshian which was then in vogue.

The French realistic novel itself was started by a large number of eccentric….., writers and a large number of eccentric….., writers and artists who led a Bohemian' life in the Latin Quarters of Paris and who scoffed both at the ugly mediocrity of the bourgeoisie and at the egoistic pessimism of some of the romantics: and second, the caricature and the painters of the Barbizon school especially (orot and millet), who reacted against violence and unreality of the Romantic school of painting.(1955:116).

The best example of early African writing in this mode was an autobiography novel filled force-bonte, *(Strength is Good)* (1926) by Bacary Diallo, a Senegalese, based on French tradition. The opinion of critics was that a Frenchman wrote this novel for Becary because it was too French. It was, besides, a big success for the French who thus could perpetuate the French colonial thought and policy. The author himself was a soldier in the French army during the First World War. He could not but follow the French tradition: he was a beginner, a learner who had to copy some known method. Despite the artistic weakness of the novel, it remains realistic.

> Commenting on *Force-boute*., David Diop expresses the opinion that the success of the novel undoubtedly transcended the boldest expectations of the author. The success was so great that France, just getting out of war, in which hundred of African soldiers took paid and amongst whom was Becary Diallo….We are irritated not only by the roughness of his style but also by the existent desire to paint an idyllic picture of colonialism and put on a pose of a literary apologist of existing orders. We shall not appear too bold to suggest that some other hand held the pen of our author.
>
> (1975:74)

The point to note here is that Bacary Diallo's novel was based on the French tradition and because this was the first novel by an African realist in French, it was bound to be pro French colonialism. Not only that; it was published in Paris and not in Dakar. So the question of censorship must not be overlooked.

The main reason the novel written by French African writers at that time was influenced by the French tradition is that the Africans themselves had not the experience. The beginners were only able to rely on the tradition of European literature. In an attempt to understand their own civilization, to tell the world something about themselves, about their people their history and their indigenous culture and traditions, African turned antecedents into historical and ethnographical studies.

A from 1900 onwards, the European market was full of the literatures of Africa, India and China countries whole ways of life were unknown to Europe, and which Europeans referred to as exotic. France led the way in such novels about the exotic. France led the way in such novels about the exotic African world.

Note

On the whole, the early works of African writer were historical or ethnographical, designed to explained African culture to the foreign reader. .

Later on, the novel proper was written. At that time, African writers could not avoid the influence of the sketch of colonial novel and the stereotype device of exotic letters. Even those who had started to write about national liberation movements were of themselves affected. It is however significant to note that while protesting against the deregulation of the black man, whilst reacting against the distortion of facts about the African, the African writers consciously or unconsciously depicted reality in their novels. Their work influenced other African writers of the thirties were probably not involved with the cultural movement of the African intelligentsia in Paris.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the influence of folklore on African prose fiction. It argued that folklore motifs abound in the African novel, as is evidence from the profuse use of African imagery, local customs and practices proverbs, mystery, magic, witchcraft, axioms, adages, social habits, modes of thought and actions and traditional heroes' songs. These folkloric example have been manifested in the works of Chima Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thongo, Thomas Mofolo, David Diop and a handful of others. On the whole, the early African writers were historical or ethnographical designed to explain African culture to the foreign readers.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Bernard, Dadies*Presence Africane*, Paris: Heinemann,1959

Birago, Diop: *Tales of Amadou Koumba*, Paris:Heinemann 1947

Banham, Martin: *"The beginnings of a Nigerian Literaturein English"* Heinemann 1962

Tutuola, Amos :*The Palm-wine Drunkard*, London: Faberand Faber, 1952.

Obimeselu, Ben: "The Background of Modern African Literature." Ibadan: No. 63, 1966.

Trawick, B.B:*World Literature*, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1955

Study Session 3

Ideology in the African Prose

Introduction

This Study Session will provideyou with the ideal of ideology as another basis that influence most African novelists. Ideology as we know is the medium through which human consciousness works. As a result, Africa novel is influenced by the various ideologies that are applicable to art, depending on the choice of the writer.

Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:
3.1 *recognize* and *apply* available ideologies to various a selected novel of your choice

3.1 Ideology in African Prose

Ideology A set of conscious and unconscious ideas which influence one's actions, ideals, goals and worldviews.

Ideology is refers to that aspect of the human condition under which people operate as conscious actors. Ideology is the medium through which human consciousness works. Our conception of religion, politics, morality act and science is deeply influenced by our ideology. In other words, being the medium through which we comprehend and interpret reality. Reality itself exists objectively outside our consciousness and independently of any particular individual, but how one sees and interprets it depends in part on one's level of ideological perception and development.

As a result, among the fictional works that expresses a concern over the prevalent chaos in the African world and psyche; three of them are outstanding in their ideological vision, going beyond the ambience disillusionment that is popularly expressed they are: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977); Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973) and Ayi Kwe Arman's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) In the word of Ime Ikiddeh:

> *Petals of Blood* is an overtly political novel with an unequivocal political message. Organized in the form of an ideological treatise on fiction, the novel represents Ngugi's blueprint for Social transformation resulting from a series of planned revolutionary actions (1986:47).

It should be borne in mind that *Petals of blood* is a realistic fictional creation of the social situation set out in the communist manifesto of Marx and Engels; that is the well known class struggles and workers

solidarity through unions. One is aware of Ngugi's in citation towards the socialist ideals; proposed by Karl Marx. According to Marx, it is the economic arrangement, which moulds men's consciousness in society, just as its further development brings conflict in economic relations into the open resulting in social revolution, of change in the economic foundation, and the transformation of the entire superstructure. Remarkably, Ilsmorog in *Petals of Blood* , lend credence to Marx's didactic for the conflict in economic relations is everywhere dissemble, developing to a point where a revolution, and transformation are imminent.

Even through *Petals of Blood*, (1977) was by far Ngugi's most direct attack on the inequalities and hypocrisy of the post independence era in Kenya, the novel was officially launched by the Kenya government, which sent Vice-President Mwai Kibaki to affirm its commitment to free speech. As in his previous works, many of the events in the novel are based on Social and historical realities. The plot revolves around the murder of four prominent characters–Munira, Abdulla, wanja and Karega–-in the town of Ilmorog in north-central Kenya. The four primary subjects are rounded up and questioned by the police. Ngugi uses this structure to explore the lines of the four protagonists and, by extension, the lives of the people around them.

The four protagonists' are Munira, a school-teacher and headmaster, Abdullai, a shop-keeper and former freedom-fighter karega who is expelled from school and becomes a union organize; and Naija a "bar girl" their lives intersect in the village of Ilmorog just before the development that Ilmorog. This transition from sleepy rural village to dynamic provincial town enable Ngugi to explore the personal and institutional corruption flat leads the characters to their fateful implication in the murders.

In the words of Munira:

> The New Ilmorog of one or two flickering neon-lights; of bars, lodgings groceries, permanent sales, and bottled theng'eta; of robberies, strikes, lockouts, murders; of prowling prostitutes in cheap night clubs; of police stations, police raid, police cells; what brought this Ilmorog from the old one of sleepy children with mucus-infested noses, climbing up and down miriki trees (1977:9)

Through the early part of the novel, the main characters arrive at Umorog seeking to deny or negate personal histories Wanja has come to stay with her aunt, running from the fast city life and the erosion of her self-respect. Karega is a disillusioned student, fleeing the politics of the nations best-known secondary school Siriana; Abdulla, a former guerrilla, has recently at Umorog and set up a small bar and restaurant. As the characters past and present lives are examined in a series of personal flashbacks and conversation in present time Kenya's history from the 1940s to the mid 1970s is surveyed in only vaguely disguised form.

The element o colonial and post independence education are examined on several levels. Munira's education at Siriana is at fist a marvelous eye-

opening experience. As time goes on, however he becomes disillusioned with the elitist school and its underlying racism. He, along with several other student leaders, including the charismatic Chin, are expelled for leading a strike to redness several inequities. When Karega arrives at Umorog, he too recounts the event that led to his own expulsion from Sirians, The issue and actors strongly parallel Munira's experience, thereby suggesting the lack of real change between the colonial and post independence periods. Munira eventually course to disdain polities" and takes a narrow approach to the education of his students. The relevance of education and the ways in which the system has stifled creativity and critical inquiry are at the core of the novels themes of protest.

The following excerpt is culled from *TheStories of the African Novel* ,as The tradition of the African novel , by Pius Dada. (Ibadan: Will, press, 1986) pp. 27-36.

In the character of Abdulla, Ngugi returns to the question of the Man freedom fighters and their disenfranchisement at independence. The young men who took no part in the struggle, who stayed in school or were involved with commerce, came to the fore in the new government of the nation. They became wealthy and turned the system to their advantage, while the peasants who fought in the rebellion went unrewarded for their sacrifice. Most of these who took part in the struggle became part of the growing numbers who had their law and livelihood appropriated by the wealthy minority in the new government. The taking of land and the alienation of its rightful owners re-established in the independence era the practices of the white colonial settlers in the time before Uhuru.

In the character of Wanja, Ngugi examines the plight of a rural young women who attempts to live a productive life and is pushed onto a path of prostitution and degradation. While writing the novel Ngugi had become concerned with the plight of women in Kenya. In Wanja he makes clear flat unchecked power relations between the sexes pose serious impediments to the economic and educational advancement of women. Wanja, once spurned in a love affair with the older, wealthy Kimeria, is left with few options, most of which point to a life of subjugation to and dependence on men.

"Karega embodies the new spirit of an organized workers' movement, fighting to defeat the forces of capitalism. The death of the three capitalist mongrels provides no solution on itself, but it is symptomatic of the trial destruction of their base (1986:53) Karega is guided by a philosophy which revalues the past. In his words, the past out to be preserved like a museum: rather, we can draw from it in today's battlefield the future and the present.; but to worship it.... no. May be I used to do it: but I don't I want to continue worshipping in the temple of a past without tarmac roads without electric cookers a world dominated by slavery to nature

(1977:323).The bulging questions that arise from this discussion of Ngugi are: what is the relevance of ideological commitment in *Petals of Blood?* Does the novel stand higher in achievement than the novels of Arman and Soyinka because of its adherence to Marxist ideology? "It is important to note that all art is, after all, ideological, whether the ideology is openly declared or not, which means that there is a socialist one (1986:54).

In Armah's Two Thousand seasons (1973), we unite to a book set in stark monochrome. Gone is the milling shade of the earlier books: the tinctures

and out that come from a mellow vision. In the novel, we are presented with two colours: black and white. This is not a novel which deals in harmonics of any order but in an overriding central melody. Black clearly stands for the African people that are cold and unambiguous: white for all those forces which have over the centuries crushed and represented them, be they Arab/Muslim or European/Christian. Armah's point is that the effect and much of the technique was the same; both groups are therefore represented by the single colour white, and white of parched sand.

Two Thousand Seasons, tells, first, of the migrate of the Akan people whose lands are encroached upon by the Arab Predators of the north, towards the coastal lands of Onoa, where they then become subject of the influenced of the European slave traders, the "destroyers". This part of the novel is a feeble-history, fold in the style of a griot (traditional musician). After escape from the predators, and the long exodus to the promised land, the new condition of stasis in Anoa promotes growth of the destructive elements, carried from the desert society becomes more and more divided against itself, more fragmented. New kings are tolerated. They completely fail to apprehend that for the people they rule the true way is reciprocity, not the obedience of subjects; these kings consolidate their power and become tyrannical. Their failure leaves them open to all kinds off perversion of the spirit.

Eventually, the kings of Anoa are led into a subservient alliance with the white destroyers from the sea, giving their people into slavery in returns for rum.

According to Ime Ikiddeh:

> *Two Thousand Seasons* his vision is that of a retrievers and preserver of the mangled image of the black man. For that purpose he creates the myth of a harmonious egalitarian pest called "the way" and reconstructs the history of those alien forces which smash up this ideal. The overwhelming action which marks the high point of this novel… is the battle at sea between a group of African slave and their white captors or torturers (1986:38).

In the novel, Armah's ideas are at times ambiguous. The reciprocal way is not defined, and it is not clear to what, precisely, society is to be returned. Faced with the difference in the approach between those followers of the way who fled from the predators in the first part of the novel and those who fight the destroyer with their own weapons in the second part, the reader is led to wonder whether they still pursue the same way that Armah approved of the new approaches is made clear toward the end of the novel: " Why could they not see condemnation of certain groups or classes is clearly permissible if from it there results an access of health and hope for those languishing under such a conosive misunderstanding and mistrust of their own past.

Although a few characters like Koranche, Isanusi and Abena stand out, Armah is not committed to building up individual characters. The molding ethic in line with that of the community it presents is the communalistic or group spirit which is representative of African ideal.

"Most of the numerous names which occur in the novel are representations either of the positive quality of that spirit or of its subversion. Abena reiterates that underlying principle in her reply to a suggestion that she could have saved herself during the sea battle "Saved myself apart from all of us?... There is no self to save apart from all of us; what would I have done with my life, alone, like a beast of prey?" (1986:41)

The book ends on guerrilla campaign, this has much more in common with the small-unit scale of recent terrorist warfare than the drilled, flag-waving nature of earlier colonial conflict indeed what seems to be envisaged is a prolonged civil strife, a sustained campaign to purity national life of undesirable elements, rather than an attack waged on any external foe. Do we now say that Arman is advocating violence within the modern African state? This quotation negates that stance:

> We do not utter praise of arms. The praise of arms is the praise of things, and what shall we call the soul so follow it finds fulfillment in the praising of mere things? It is not things we praise in our utterance, not arms we praise in the use of all things against the white sway of death, for creations life (1973:205).

The emphasis lore as throughout the closing pages is on the necessary effort to rod the culture of its debilitations material dependence on things' –objects valued for their own sake- and on the international community which provide them. The anti-dote is not primarily bloodshed-through certainly the phrasing does not exclude that-but an access of confidence and the creative security that comes from this process is a willful damaging of the image and prestige of those who, by their financial and political influence, inevitably impede this kind of national growth it is in the context that the concluding call to arms has to be seen, as an extend metaphor for the cultivation of self-understanding and the autonomy of social and artistic life.

The last paragraph of the text expresses a glorious future:

> Against this what a vision of creation yet unknown higher, much more profound that east-while creation. What a hearing of the confluence of all the waters of life flowing to overwhelm the ashen desert's blight! What an utterance of the coming together of all the people of our way, the coming together of all people of the way. (1973:206)

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah escapes this Dilemma by writing in semi historical fantasy in which the artist is not yet alienated from society and the educated elite are closer to the heart of their society's way than their fellows, not further away from it. In this struggle against an alien, imposed political structure. Locating himself as narrator, Armah experiences vicariously all the pleasures of certainly however vague his expressed goal-and writers of the destruction of the destroyers as a basically regenerative process in society.

In Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973), we have a fictional transposition of the 1966 massacres that led to the civil war; art ventures out into the public domain and assumes a more subversive role, the musician Ofeyi

plans to undermine both his employer, the cocoa corporation, and its parent, the ruling military industrial "Cartel" by dissemination through advertising Campaign the communist political ideas of a village utopia called Aiyero. The Cartel's response is to arose tribal hatreds against all Aiyero men (This implying that the Federal regime directed hatred at all Igbo, from whom many progressive and activists came) In the ensuring wave of terror and massacre Ofeyi's band is wiped out and its dancer, Iriyese takes Ofeyi on a nightmare trip through a landscape of genocidal slaughter and mutilation, described with graphic, horrifying realism. Ofeyi's ordeal, however, because it is underpinned by Orpheus' search for Eurydice in the underworld finally takes refuge in the seasonal fatalism of myth and the lone private quest of the orphic artist figure. The rescue of the standard bearer and dubious revolutionary figurehead Iriyese is a merely symbols salvage operation, in which the political campaign is dissipated into familiar ritual patterns. According to Ikiddeh:

> Recognition of the vital relationship between the economic base and the superstructure is evidence very early in *Season of Anomy* in which Soyinka focuses on the criminal activities of international monopoly capital: the ruling 'Cartel' which has four long arms represents " the alliance of purse and the gun." a murderous combination of foreign financial interest and a local military Oligarchy. (1986:43).

Here is the Dentist, for instance, delineating the nature of their interests and power:

> But one cannot ignore the real incorrigible enemies who are impervious to education. The kind that hunted us down as soon as who immediately began to such up to them and lick their boots in public!... Bloated ignorant armies hanging unto power until they drop like rotten fruit! A conspiracy of power-besotted exploiters across national boundaries, bargaining with outsiders against us! Lip serve to revolutionary movement to drown the cries of material repression tell me friend, what are they selling? All this haggling and under-the-counter deals, what is the commodity?! (1973:104)

Season of Anomy, is the closest Soyinka has come to revolutionary art. Hence, the novel forces the emergence of a new form of fiction currently gaining ground in African literature – Socialist realism. In this brand of writing the prime focus is to create literature that depicts the larger interests of the masses in their struggle for a just society. In this category we have, Ngugi *Petal of Blood* Sembene Qusmane *God's Bits of Wood,* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons.*

Notably a large part of the novel deals with the brutal exercise of power, particularly with the northern "Massacre of the innocents" prompted by agitation from the South to fee the land of foreign monopoly control, it is also concerned with survival through organized action against the Cartel and its cohorts. "One pocket of instant survival is the "Tabernacle of Hope", an inter-tribal refuge camp run as an interdenominational church in which members most of them mangled and deformed from the massacre, including families that had lost all hope, look after one another in a cleverly concealed sanctuary. But the only hope for the future, not

merely of escaping the present massacre, but of totally freeing the land from the grip of the cartel and its associates, is to be found in the Aiyero group" (1986:45)

Although Soyinka invests this group with the hope of ultimate liberation, he denies it sufficient philosophical and strategic backing to help it towards a clear definition and achievement of its objective.

"Cartel" is essentially a commercial term. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "an agreement or association between two or more business houses for the purpose of regulating output and fixing prices for a given commodity" In *Season of Anomy*, the cartel is portrayed as both political power and an economic colossus; it sits on the nations wealth and controls the production and disposal of those natural resources from which that wealth is derived. Cocoa becomes is mentioned as a result of its former status as the nations major revenue earners. Soyinka makes it clear that in post-independence Africa, politic-making concern. People through into politics not to genuinely serve the nation but to amass wealth unto themselves criminally at the expense of the masses. Cocoa becomes a metaphor for the nation's resources and the human communities who are also "sold" and exploited by the Cartel. The author sees this new arrangement as dealings in human flesh, to him this idea cuts beyond the ambience of national frontiers. The Dentist views the arrangement as:

> A conspiracy of power-besotted exploiters across national boundaries, bargaining with outsiders against us! Lip-service to revolutionary movements to drown the cries of internal repression. Tell me … what are they selling? (1973:104). Soyinka qualifies the Cartels as "alliance of a corrupt military and a rapacious mafia" (1986:148).

According to Soyinka, these set of 'politics' have hijacked the political power and will in post-independence Africa trampled on democratic ideals, and ruled by decrees alone. In the novel, the Cartel is headed by Zaki Amuri, the power welding tyrant of cross-river. His second in command is Chief Batoki, the Western arm of the alliance. Then follows Chief Biga, the Cartel's hatchet man. The military is represented by the anonymous commander in-chief the cartel is not observed at close range: they operate mainly behind the scene. They are best manifested by the bloody trail and tears they leave behind. As Fela Anikulapo Kuti would say; 'They leave sorrow, tears and blood, their regular trade mark', Soyinka vividly depicts them making use of animal images to portray the level to which they have been stripped of their innate human personalities by a cannibalistic blood-lust. In the words of the novelist:

And Batoki sowed a forest of bayonets in the sun laughed through the curses of the people and mocked their tears of frustration. He was endowed with the patience of a lizard and he bridged time with mounds of the dead and the living (1973:139).

As earlier said, Soyinka's approach differs from Ngugi and Armah's ideological vision. Soyikas's intransigence of a collective proletarian leadership. The masses are almost non-existent in Soyinka's novel. The working class community that attempted the project characters in the Novel Ofeyi and the Dentist, entertain socialist views.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we examined the influence of ideology on African prose fiction. Ideology as we have defined refers to that aspect of the human condition under which people operate as conscious actors. It is the medium through which human consciousness works. As seen above, the Soyinka, Ngugi and Armah infused ideological stance into their work, but the degree of application differs in individual novelist, for example, neither Armah nor Soyinka joins Ngugi in overtly expressing a socialist standpoint, even through their works are not lacking in demarcations and slogans.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Armah, A.K *Two Thousand Seasons*, Narobi: Heinemann, 1973

Fanon, Franz *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove press 1966

Raymond, William *Marxism and Literature*, London: Oxford, 1977

Soyinka, Wole*Season on Anomy*, London: Rex Collins, 1973

Ngugi, Wa Throngo *Petals of Blood*, London: Heinemann 1977

Lukacs, GeorgenWriter and critic and other Essays, New York: Grosset and Dunlap's 1971

Eagleton, Terry *Marxism and Literary criticism*, London: Methuen 1976

Maduakor, Obi*Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to His writing*, London: Heinemann 1986

Ikiddeh, Ime "Revolutionary Action in the African Novel in *Studies in the African Fiction*, Asien and Ashaolu (eds) Ibadan University press 1986

Study Session 4

The Archtype African Novel: Chinual Achebe's Things Fall Apart

Introduction

This Study Session will provide students with the knowledge of categorizing African novel according to thematic and stylistic types as would be seen in the two titles mentioned above as archetype or representation.

Learning Outcomes

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

4.1 *categorize* African novels according to thematic types.

4.1 Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe described art as a celebration encompasses the "remembering of blessing or happy events" in his 1990 essay "African Literature as restoration of celebration. Importantly, from his Igbo perspective, this celebration "deliberately sets out to include other experiences- indeed, all significant encounters which man makes in his journey through life, especially new, unaccustomed and thus potentially threatening, encounters" (pp 2-3). For Achebe celebration takes place within a political context. He is committed to comprehending the outcome and legacy "especially for Africa, for black people, for all deprived people" of the bizarre disaster that resulted from "Africa's meeting with Europe" in the period of high imperialism in the late Nineteenth Century.

Tip

Achebe used his works to rewrite the misconceptions perpetuated by the West about African people.

Achebe's life and art encompass the essential duality of human experience as embodied in the saying drawn from Igbo world view that "Wherever something stands, something, stands beside it "the art portrays a continuing effort to reconcile the disparate elements, essentially political, that alter and shape perception, and therefore, reality. Along these lines, Achebe has said:

I had to tell Europe that the arrogance on which she sought to excuse her pillage of Africa, i.e that Africa had a history, a religion, a civilization. We reconstructed this history and civilization and displayed it to challenge the stereotype and the cliche. Actually it was not to Europe alone that I spoke. I spoke also to that part of ourselves that had come to accept Europe's opinion of us (2003:15).

Achebe had the task of reconciling the dualities inherent in the personal experiences. These experiences were shaped by the birth during the colonial period and his exposure and attraction to both African and European culture through education, political institutions, and most especially for the writer, language. A story of Achebe's classic, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), describes-the coming of the white man and the initial disintegration of traditional African society as a consequence of that- is typical of the break down all African society have experienced at one time or another as a result of their exposure to the West and, moreover, individual Africans all over the continent may identity with the scenarist Achebe has depicted. The novel sums up his religions experience, both traditional Igbo and Christian; his experience of language, both Igbo and English; his education both formal and acquired; and his gander as a writer, both authentic and educative.

Achebe decided to be a writer when he encountered Joyce Cary's novel *Mister Johnson* (1939), as a student at University College Ibadan:

> One of the things that probably finally decided me was a novel set in Nigeria by Joyce Cary. I regard him as one of the outstanding British writers of the first part of this century. Now he was in this country as an Administrative Officer during the First World War and he wrote this novel called *Mister Johnson*, which is quite famous, and I feel that its not in spite of this man's ability, in spite of his sympathy and understanding, he could not get under the skin of the African. They just did not communicate. And felt it a good writer could make this mess perhaps we ought to try our hand. (1962:12).

For Achebe, *Minister Johnson* represented the worst kind of portrayal of Africans by Europeans. The portrayal was more disheartening because Cary was working hard to achieve an accurate depiction, unlike his Co-British travelers during the imperial-colonial period who deliberately, often cynically, exploited stereotypes of African and African society. Achebe felt that the record had to be set straight because Cary was a liberal-minded and Sympathetic writer, as well as a colonial administrator.

In Achebe's 1988 published in *Hopes and Impediments*, he writers;

> I was born in Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria of devout Christian parents. The line between Christian and Non-Christian was much more definite in my village 40 years ago that it is today. When I was growing up I remember we tended to book down on the others. We were called in our language "the people of the church" or "the association of God" The others were called… the heather or even "the people of nothing"…" We

> lived at the crossroads of cultures. We still do today… On one arm of the cross we sang hymns and read the Bible night and day. On the other my father's brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to Idols… what I do remember was a fascination for the ritual and the life on the other arm of the crossroads. And I believe two things were in my favour – the curiosity and the little distance imposed between one and it by the accident of any birth. The distance becomes not a separation but a bringing together like the necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take to see a canvas steadily and fully.(1988:23)

Given Achebe's aims as an artist –his duty to the art and the social purposes he intends it to serve his sensibility is essentially Igbo, despite any correspondences. One might identify between his sensibility and that of artists in other places and cultures.

Things Falls Apart (1958) exposes one to the basic elements of the story, which takes places in inland Eastern Nigeria (Iboland), in a village called Umofia, roughly between 1890 and 1900. The novel tells the tragic story of the rise and fall of Okonkwo and the equally tragic story of the disintegration of Igbo culture, symbolized by the agrarian society of Umufia, under the relentless encroachments of British Christian imperialism. Okwonkwo embodies the qualities most valued by his people, if in exaggerated from-energy, a strong sense of purpose and a sense of communal cooperativeness which at the same time is marked by strong individuality. Both Okonkwo and his society are also marked by a degree of rigidity and inflexibility, which ultimately accounts for their destruction.

In depicting the complexities of the psychological makeup of Okonkwo and of the mores of the clan, Achebe is able to show at the same time the civility, dignity, and orderliness of the society and the rigidity that make it impossible for the clan to adapt to the inevitable changes wrought by the more powerful imported culture. *Things Fall Apart* is therefore both an apostrophe to and a lament for the past as well as a fictional evocation of the inevitability for historical change.

Achebe works out the meaning of his story through the life of Okonkwo's life is "dominated" by fear, the fear of failure and weakness" (1958:9)

He has achieved fame and wealth, a household of wives and children, and membership of the highest council of the clan by the strength of his will, his back, and his arms. When the novel begins his fames is at its Zenith, and having survived calamities that would have broken lesser men, he believes he can survive anything. In metaphysical parlance, and in accordance with the beliefs of the clan, Okonkwo success is attributed to his *Chi*. In the concept of the *Chi*., Achebe secure the philosophical basis of the novel and reveals the essential duality of Igbo beliefs. The *Chi*. – "is a personal god or man's deital expression, the ultimate mission brought by man from the creator's house, a deity that makes each man's unique personality or being" (1958). But the Chi, while a dominations force, is also an ambiguous one. The *Chi* can say "yes" and it can say "no", and the success or failure of a person's life is seen in the ways in which the *Chi* responds to his or her actions. Okonkwo's rise to stardom

and imminent fall are seen in the significant way in which he challenges his *Chi* to battle.

Things Fall Apart (1958), is in three parts. The first part establishes a composite picture of traditional life in Iboland before the arrival of the white man. The part of the novel is heavily anthropological but contains the seeds of germination for the latter half of the book where in the conflict is introduced- This first part is not devoid of internal conflicts; both personal and communal, but one that conduct attains according to codes of religious and political beliefs supported by custom. The thirteen chapters of the first part present the Umuofian agricultural year: the planting and harvest the celebrations at the harvest's close, the affairs of prominent citizens and their families, and especially. The life in Okonkwo's compound- the relations between Okonkwo's on Nwoye, and the young hostage Ikemefuna, who is eventually, sacrificed to the gods and murdered by Okonkwo. The passage depicting Ikemefuna's death, what Achebe illustration is another aspect of Okonkwo's rigidity, and we might say that Ikemefuna's death as been put into the story primarily to show its relationship to Okonkwo it is Okonkwo who actually delivers, the death blow which cuts down Ikemekfuna:

> As the man who had cleared his throat drew up and raised his machetes, Okonkwo looked away. He heard the blow. The pot fell and broke in the sand. He heard Ikemefuna cry, "My father, they have killed me!" as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak. (1958:59)

The conclusion to the first part focuses on the crisis in Okonkwo's life, which is brought about by his accidental shooting of a clansman and resulted in his seven-year banishment to his another village. Achebe records the tragedy thus:

> The chums and the dancing began again and reached fever-heat. Darkness was around the corner; and the burial was near. Guns friend the last salute and the carmon rent the sky. And then from the center of the delirious fury came a cry of agony and shouts of horror. It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the center of the dead man's sixteen-year-old-son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart, the confusion that followed was without parallel in the tradition of Umuofia, Violent deaths were frequent but nothing like this had ever happened. (1958:116-117)

The reader is reminded of Achebe's reference to Okonkwo's gun and his inability to fire it properly: "He had an old rusty gun made by a clever blacksmith…. But although Okonkwo was a great man whose powers was universally acknowledged, he was not a hunter" (1958:39). Ironically, Okonkwo, whose greatest fear is that he will be called feminine, has committed a female crime, the accidental murder that acts as a harbinger of his own obsession with manliness. The narrative proceeds:

That night he collected his most valuable belongings into head-loads. His wives wept bitterly and their children wept with them without knowing why. Obierika and a half dozen others friends came to help and to control him. They each man nine or ten strips carrying Okonkwo's yams to store in Obierikas barn. And before the cock crowed Okonkwo and his family were fleeing to his mother land. It was a little village called Mbata, just beyond the borders of Mbaino. As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezendu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red wall, killed his animal and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messenger. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman (1958:117).

The above passage illustrates village unity and a move modified form of Archebe's use of the anthropological. Europeans tend to believe that traditional African societies had no law (probably because they were unwritten) to hold them together. The above example invalidates such conception. Perhaps it has been long since there has been an accidental murder in Umuofia, but immediately one occurs, everyone is aware of what to do. The village acts in unison and purifies itself, by sending Okonkwo away for seven years, cleansing itself with the ritual incineration of Okonkwo's house. It is the communal action which is again so significant the situation which involves everyone and not just Okonkwo. The earth goddess has been vexed and purity must be restored within the clan.

In a major philosophical thrust of the novel, Achebe, shifts his emphasis from the communal, back to the individual, in a symbolic pool into the future:

> Obierika… sat down in his Obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities, He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The earth had decreed that they were an offense on the land must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offense against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the elders, if on finger brought oil it soiled the others (1958:117)

Obierika, who is clearly a man of the future, begins to querry the traditional essence of his society and in showing him doing so, Achebe has symbolically illustrated the adaptation which will ultimately have to come about if Ibo society is not to be totally destroyed by the West. The great chain which has held the society together is beginning to weaken. In Obierika's questions, Achebe has indicated that the man of the future will not be a man of action, but a man of thought" (1978:52)

The second part of (IFA) takes place in Mbata and describes the coming of the Whiteman. Colonial government and the Christian religion establish themselves bringing about major changes. On a personal level,

for example, Nwoye defects to the Christian furthermore; the introduction of a cash economy destabilizes the traditional balance between the acquisitive and spiritual aspects of society. Okonkwo witnesses but is unable to rationalize the inevitable processes of historical transformation.

Part II begins with references to Okonkwo and the gradual alteration that comes over him now that his plans have been thwarted; work no longer had for him the pleasure it used to have, and when there was no work to do he sat in a silent half-sleep. His life had been ruled by a great passion to become one of the Lords of the clan. That has been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken. He had been cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting (1958:121).

Obierika also visits Okonkwo in exile and tell him of the tragedy that struck Abame, a neighboring village that has been annihilated in a fierce battle with the Whiteman. He recounts how the Abame people also landed a counter attack and killed the white man. Months later, a band of white men and black men shot everyone in the Abame market. As one expects Okonkwo refers to Abame people as fools, who had seen warned of the impending catastrophe.

Two-years later when Obierika again visits Okonkwo in exile the missionaries have arrived Umuofia. Shortly thereafter, they advance to Mbata and Okonkwo's oldest son, Nwoye becomes an early covert. Achebe objectively portrays the missionaries and their activities. He does not condemn Christianity nor does he praise it- But he admits that in relation to the traditional animism, the distinctions are overbearing. In Nwoye's reaction to the missionaries:

But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His Name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. I was not the mad logic of the trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it, it was the poetry of the new religion, and something felt in the narrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul-the question of the twins crying is the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the chops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled (1958:137).

When the missionaries requested for a plot of land to build their church, the elders give them the Evil forest, believing that they will be dead in a matter of days let, they prosper and continually gain converts, and when Okonkwo cleans of Nwoye's conversion: "A sudden fury rose within him and he felt a strong desire to take up his machete, go to the church and wipe out the entire vile and miscreant gang" (1958:142) Later, Okonkwo learnt that, the white man had not only brought a religion but also a government" (1958:144). Yes, Okonkwo is unsuccessful in convincing the people of Mbata to kill the missionaries. "This was a womanly clan, he thought" (1958:148)

Okonkwo's exile runs parallel to the final destruction of the clan; Nwoye's conversion is an indication that the only pathway for the future is cultural syncretism.

In the third part- Okonkwo returns to Umuofia, and Achebe brings the novel swiftly to a close. When a python, the embodiment of a sacred spirit, is killed by a Christian convert, the villagers burn the Christian church in a reprisal. The district officer summons Okonkwo and other village elders on the pretext of waiting to find a way to settle the differences between the opposing factions. Instead, he puts them in jail in irons. For Okonkwo there is nothing left to do than to fight. He kill a government messenger, and when he sees that he is not supported by his clansmen, he hangs himself, ironically achieving what he had sought all his life to avoid: an abominable death.

The first paragraph of the novel reveals an irony of a different kind. The dangling body of Okonkwo is merely an "undignified details" (1958:147) to the district officer who is planning to write a book called *The Pacification of the Tribe of the Lower Niger*. In this book, Okonkwo's story will make only an incidental detail.

Things Falls Apart (1958) must be regarded as archetypal for the form and patterns Achebe has given it. If we draw a comparison between the novel and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* it is crystal clear that *Things Fall Apart* is not a story about a character as is Cary's novel. For instance Achebe could never have fitted his novel *Okonkwo* through it could have been given the name of Okonkwo's village if Achebe had thought that the situation did not extend beyond Nigeria. Okonkwo himself does not alter at all throughout the novel. He is the same at the ending as he is at the beginning of the story.

Note

Things Fall Apart, is a novel of situation rather than of individuality and by extension, of character, and this is undoubtedly its major difference from traditional Western genre, which in the twentieth century, at least has emphasized the psychological depiction of character.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we analysed the thematic engagements in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) as an archetypical novel is an account of colonial history told in the language of the colonized: the perspective is African ontology instead of Eurocentric historiography. That ontology has led to a novel that explores the philosophical principles of an African, community unique and autonomous at the outset.

Assessment

Required

References

Achebe, Chinua *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann, 1958

Larson, Charles *The Emergence of African Fiction*, London: Macmillan 1971.

Fanon, Franz *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: grove press 1966.

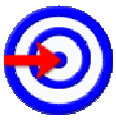
Asein & Ashaolu *Studies in the African Novel*, Ibadan: University press, 1986.

Study Session 5

The Burden of Colonialism: Oyono's Houseboy and the Old Man and the Medal

Introduction

This Study Session will provide you with the insight into a major thematic preoccupation of most African novels: Colonial Injustice. It is a novel about the painful conversion of the willing and faithful servant of colonialism.



Learning Outcomes

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

5.1 *describe* the activities of the colonialists, particularly their hypocritical manipulations of religion for selfish reasons.

5.1 Thematic Preoccupation in Oyono's *Houseboy* and *The Old Man and The Medal*

Each of Oyono's novels has a protagonist who is wrapped in the assimilation dream, who is driven by the desire to become a "Somebody" under the colonial regime. Joseph Toundi Ondoua, the young hero of *Houseboy* (1966) leaves home the day before he is due to undergo the rite of circumcision, hired by the glamour of employment by a white priest. Father Gilbert treats him with a benign species of racism, as a kind of pet animal. After the priest death, Toundi is employed as houseboy by the local commandant (equivalent to a district officer in a British colonial system). Despite Commandant Decazy's overt brutality, Toundi now believes himself well on the way to arrival, a privileged black, maintaining that "the dog of the king is the king of dogs" (1966:20). The position becomes endangered however, when he witnesses Madame Decazy's adultery with another colonial official, the civil engineer Moreau.

Decazy negotiates a frigid reconciliation with the wife after discovering the affairs. Toundi is now in greater danger. Unable from the outset to conceal his absorption in the whites' affairs – to turn a knowing blind eye as the other servants do – he now appears to the Decazy the chief articulator of their sexual guilt before themselves. As Madame's maid, Kalisia, warns him: 'At the residence you are something like…the representative of the rest of us…. While you are still here, they can never forget about it altogether' (1966:116). Worse, Toundi knowledge

endangers the hegemony of the white by exposing the he behind their projection of themselves as the blacks' moral superiors. In caroll Yoder's word, "A society that justifies its presence by the superirify of its own culture cannot afford to be judged by those it oppresses" (1966:147). In the words of Shatto Gakwandi:

> Colonialism employs both naked force as well as an elaborate of its victims… (1977:13)

The boy, Joseph Toundi, starts his houseboy career with naive expectations of advancement from his white over lords, with naïve belief in the whiteman's goodness. He willingly offers devoted service to this matters but the devotion is never rewarded let alone reciprocated. For all that he offers, he gets humiliation, physical assault and ultimately death before he dies, however, he recovers himself and realizes that he has been a victim of great deception and withdraws devotion to his white 'benefactors'. He dies a rebel and through this rebellion, harmless as it is, he reforms his personal integrity… He is glad to die in Spanish Guinea, out of the way of his treacherous masters (1977:13)

Oyono treats with great skill the psychological crust in which the three now find themselves: the Decazy's locked into a part masochistic, part sadistic reception of their shame, and Toundi unable to free himself from identification with their status and their emotions. Finally the whites decide Toundi must be excised from their charge and savagely beaten. Managing to escape from jail, he makes the way to neighboring Spanish (now Equatorial) Guinea, where he dies in the presence of one of his compatriots.

At the beginning Toundi introduces himself as follows:

> My name is Toundi Onodoua. I am the son of Toundi and Zama. When my father baptized me he gave me the name of Joseph. I am Maka by my mother and Ndjem by my father. My ancestors were cannibals. Since the whitemen came we have learnt other men must not be looked upon as animals (1966:9).

We witness here the innocent mind of a child recording 'facts' which it has innocently assimilated. Here, he accepts whatever the white man says without question. He manifests so much belief and devotion to their ideals and 'values'. As a matter of fact, Toundi is tending towards a cynical understanding of his world:

> In Dangan the European quarter and the African quarter are quite separate. But what goes on under those corrugated – iron roofs is known down to the smallest detail inside the mud-walled huts. The eyes that live in the native location strip the white naked. The whites on the other hand go about blind. There was not a soul unaware that the wife of a commandant was deceiving her husband with M.Moreau the prism – director and our greatest terror (1966:71)

At this stage, Toundi is no longer chronicling things that he has been told by someone else. He is here making a staunch observation which shows a

more mature perspective of the intricacies of social relationships within the Dangan community. This common-place observation exposes the ugly thoughts of the colonial social; set-up. Toundi's interaction with the whiteman is a period of learning that yields a greater understanding and a better view of his situation as a member of a pauperized and oppressed community.

Earlier in the novel, Toundi suffers without realizing that he is really suffering. He takes it for granted that he should be physically assaulted kicked, abused, over-laboured and underpaid. He does not react to the injustice meted out to him by his masters. He is a keen observer of the minutest details because they puzzled him. Toundi is made to keep a record of his harrowing experience with pride instead of bitterness. His attitude is a result of bad orientation and brainwashing to which he has been subjected by his master, father Gilbert. A good example of a master and servant relationship is this:

Everything I am I owe to father Gilbert. He is my benefactor and I am very fond of him. He is cheerful and pleasant and when I was small he treated me like a pet animal. He loved to pull my ears and all the time I have been getting my education he has loved to watch my constant amazement at everything.

He presents me to the white who visit the mission as his masterpiece. I am his boy, a boy who can read and write, serve mass, lay a table, sweep out his room and make his bed. I don't earn any money. Now and then he gives me an old shirt or an old pair of trousers. Father Gilbert knew me when I was stark naked, he taught me to read and write… nothing can be more precious that that, even if I have to badly blessed (1966:14-15).

Toundi has been brainwashed to nurture hatred for himself and colour. His Christian orientation has conditioned him to believe that every association with black signals primitively and heathenish. He hopes to live a better and more civilized life through his interaction with the white man:

> Father Gilbert believes it was the Holy Spirit that led me to him. In fact, I just wanted to get close to the white man with hair like the beard on a maize cob who dressed in woman's clothes and gave little back boys sugar lumps (1966:9).

In the words of Gakwandi:

> beneath this curiosity lies an assumption which is inevitable in a child brought up under colonial rule: white men are better people than blacks. This is the assumption which decoys him and many of his country-men into spending their lifetimes trying to turn themselves into Frenchmen. Little do they understand that in so doing they are betraying their own community as well as their humanity. For the sensitive members of the community this situation is a source of great bitterness (1966:15).

It is the wounded pride of Toundi's father when he sees father Gilbert throwing lumps of sugar to African Children that results in his cruelty against the son. Late, the father ingratiates himself before the son and

priest in a desperate attempt at reconciliation but instead the son puts out his tongue at him. The father walks away in anger.

"Ironically, Toundi absconds from his family on the eve of initiation. He chooses to go to Catholic mission for another form of initiation – one in which he is to play the role of a dehumanized pet animal, and later the beast of burden" (1977:15)

At the death of father Gilbert, things changed drastically for Toundi, and since he can no longer return to his community; he had to look for a job within the white community. In the course of the job interview, he had to pretend to be religious and that was why he was able to get the job. His stay at the commandant's house was a great eye- opener to him. He discovers with dismay that white men, were not gods he thought them to be. The commandant's wife promiscuity and flirtation with the prison officer, M. Moreau, Toundi funds it difficult to hide his feelings of moral superiority over the commandant's wife " Because the masters are aware that the servant has begun to find fault with their life they feel he is a threat to their security. It becomes implicitly agreed that he must be rid of (1977:16).

Kalisia's advice to Toundi makes explicit the reason why the white community has to destroy Toundi:

> I was saying though, that because you know all their business, while you are still here, they can never forget about it altogether. And they will never forgive you for that how can they go on strutting about with a Cigarette in their mouth in front of you- when you know. As far as they are concerned you are the one who has told everybody and they can't help feeling you are sitting in judgment on them. But that they can never accept… if I were in your shoes, I'd go right away….I wouldn't even wait for the month's wages (1966:100-101).

Houseboy, is a masterly novel on a number of counts parts of its continuing impact lies in Oyono's satirical depiction of the racism, snobbery and sexual immorality of the whites this is a merciless satire but – given the actual French colonial practice in Cameroon-hardly exaggerated. Long sections of dialogue between the delineating their shallowness and venality. In the words of Gakwandi:

> "*Houseboy*,is among other things novel about childhood, growth and discovery. It is about the various phases of a child's reaction to his social environment. The novel explores the slow but inevitable awakening of the child's mind to the realities of the colonial situation. Throughout we see the society tending to obstruct rather than assist the child's mental development and as a result of the numerous obstacles to his understanding Toundi makes my moral appraisal of his situation until it is too late for him to make any practical remedies. He dies with a deep sense of regret because the entire life has been a waste (1977:19)

The novel is a remarkable experiment in fictional form and a number of structural and stylistic ingenuities which it employs to make its statement are worth noting]. Equally impressive is Oyono's handling of point of

view and of the psychological of his central character. Toundi's flight to Spanish Guinea provides a convenient framing device.

The novel begins with an account by an anonymous Cameroonian of the boy's death and of the discovery of notebooks in which Toundi has recorded his story. The effect of the framing narration is to universalize Toundi's experience: whatever his individual failings- his naivete and his important that his exploitation and maltreatment be seen as characteristics of the colonial regime. The decision to present the bulk of the novel as a first-person account, through the medium of Toundi's discharges, allows Oyono to depict in details the state of consciousness of the would-be assimilate who abandons his own culture in the hope of being privileged by the whites. From the onset, Toundi is given ample evidence that to the whites he is irremediably inferior, am assessment vital to their continuing economic exploitation of colony. He notes that in the first moments of his meeting with Decazy, "After (the commandant) had looked at me a long while, he asked me point-blank if I were a thief" (1966:24). The other servants try their best to persuade Toundi to see his situation objectively. The commandant's cook warns him, "when will you grasp that for the whites, you are only alive to do their work and for no other reason" (1966:100). Yet Toundi remains besotted with his employers, his emphatic identification with them unbroken until too late.

> "Effective presentation of suffering has to avoid cataloguing injustices, physical brutalities and moral rage of the victims. It is the journalistic fact and sociological facts which so often stultify fictional experiments into mere documentary in *Houseboy*, through acute subtlety and stinging humour Oyono has given form to ordinary facts and made a forceful and truthful statement about an important aspect of modern African life. No African novel has portrayed the realities of colonialism so memorably" (1977:21)

In the words of Oyono, his second published novel, The old man and the Medal (1967) was written simultaneously with *Houseboy* (1966), Coming to a halt on one manuscript, he would turn to the other until both were finished. Like *Houseboy*, Oldman uses satire to expose the gulf between colonialist rhetoric and the harsh realities of the regime; as in *Houseboy*, Oyono achieves a gradual darkening of tone as the novel's central character comes to understand the degradation implicit in his position as a colonial subject.

The plot of the novel is somewhat streamlined. Laurent Meka, an old Mvema villager, is informed by the authorities that he will be awarded a medal in recognition of his long standing acquiescence to the whites: he has previously given his ancestral land to the Catholics church and both his sons died in service in World War II. A telling contrast exists between Meka and his ancestors, who fiercely resisted German Colonial rule.

This medal for servitude is to be awarded, ironically, on the French national holiday, 14 July- a day that commemorates liberation in the storming of the Bastile. Much of the novel deals with Meka's preparations for the ceremony and the event itself. All the reception afterward, Meka becomes drunk, falls asleep, and is left alone in the community center. Walking during a massive rainstorm, he panics and

wanders into the European residential area. Under the rule it is an offence for any black to be there at night without a permit, unrecognized by the police and having lost his medal, Meka is arrested verbally and physically abused. Freed the next day by the somewhat embarrassed authorities, he returns to the village and recounts his ordeal. He and the villagers now recognize their status under the colonial regime.

Despite Oyono's continuing preoccupation with the evils and hypocrisy of colonial rule, the whites feature far less prominently as characters here than in *Houseboy*. They are almost entirely absent from the first part of the book, as well as from its final section. Oyono's focus is trained, rather, on the mental processes of the colonial subject, on the way Meka and his community conceptualize their role under colonial rule.

Unlike Toundi, Meka is a mature man, yet he has lived his whole life under a commanding fixed idea his deluded belief that the domination of his land by the colonial power is to be his advantage. In the first section of the novel, Oyono (relatively gently) deflates that belief by satirizing Meka's preoccupation with making himself smack for the ceremony: spending a small fortune on European shoes he cannot comfortably wear and on a ludicrous jacket made by a charlatan tailor. Oyono's satire here is aimed both at Meka's inexperience of the modern world and at the system that exploits this; but ultimately its target is that naivete of Meka's which readers him unable to see that he is being exploited. There is an alternation between, Meka's preparations in his village and preparations made by his brother-in-law Engamba, in a neighboring village to pay a congratulation call on the old man. In this way Oyono shows that the assimilation its delusion is not held by Meka alone: upon learning about the award, Engamba gleefully observes, "I am the brother-in-law of a man with a medal" and isn't the friend of a thief something of a thief himself?" (1967:39).

The middle section of the novel, dealing with the medal-giving ceremony and the reception, is a tour de force of satirical observation from the beginning, when Meka is placed in the center of a whitewash circle like a stage prop, waiting for the arrival of the colonial governor, Oyono precisely delineates both the whites' exploitation of the Old man as symbolic function (demonstrating the rewards of acquiescence) and Meka's misapprehension of his true position According to C.P Dunton:

> In the eyes of his colonial rulers, Meka is not a highly esteemed colleague but a usable fool. He is an old man who has served the French not on account of any exceptional breadth of vision but in accordance with his exceptional tractability. His gullibility is a weakness to be exploited in the interest of the governing elite. When his selflessness is officially acknowledge in the presentation of a medal, that honour is no gesture of friendship but an astute maneuver designed to encourage the others (1986:96).

It is not that the medal has no value theoretically it may release Meka from the restrictions of the *Indigenat* and of the forced-labour levy. But Meka grossly misjudge its deeper significance as a token of his complicity in his own subjugation. Oyono marks this misjudgment by tracing Meka's reflexes and thoughts during the ceremony: believing

himself rising to the clouds when the medal is pinned on his chest and despising the traditional chiefs over whom he believes he now takes precedence. The reception scene is dominated by official speeches, which cruelly reveal the limits the white place on their "friendship" with Meka and the Old man's persistent delusion of grandeur. In between these two satirical scenes, however, Oyono has introduced a belief episode that cuts harshly across the wry comedy.

Watching the ceremony, Meka's wife Kelara, hears a young man criticized the medal as an inadequate reward for the loss of Meka's land and his two sons. A short chapter then focuses on Kelara's assessment of her husband: "is any wife or mother more wretched than I am? I thought I had married a man, a real man…. Instead I married an arse-full of shit. My children, my poor children-sold like the lord who was sold by Judas… He at least did it for money" (1967:99)

Franz Fanon, analyzing colonialist vocabulary in his *The wretched of the Earth*. (1967), notes that "the term the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms… the native knows this, and laughs to himself every time he spots an allusion to the animal world in the others words" (1967:32). Ironically, it is the demeaning effect of Oyono's constant reference to the Mvemas- to Meka's and his wife especially through animal metaphors: they are likened to baboons, chimps, clogs and Camels in several comparisons that runs through the entire novel.

More significant is the emphasis Oyono place on stagnation, on the community's terminal inability to contest colonial rule. The novels ponderous opening sentence sets the tone as Mekas wakes, as he does every morning, with a beam of sunlight falling on his left nostril. The novel closes with Meka insisting, "We can't do anything about what has happened. The whites will always be the whites" and with his recognition-the book's final line- "I'm just an old man now…." (1967:167). This facts is significant, too: with the exception of the youth who criticizes Meka at the ceremony, *The Old man and the Medal* is populated with old men and women, whose ability to transform their environment appears negligible.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we investigated the two novels written by Ferdinand Oyono. *The Old Man and The Medal*, was written simultaneously with *Houseboy*. Like *Houseboy*, the *Old Man* uses satire to expose the gulf between colonialist rhetoric and the harsh realities of the regime.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Oyono, Ferdinand *Houseboy*, London: Heinemann, 1966.*The Old Man and The Medal*, London: Heinemann 1967.

Dunton, Christ. "Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* and"*The Old Man and The Medal*" In Samuel O Asien and Albert Olu Ashaolu, eds *Studies in the African Novel*, Ibadan, Nigeria:Ibadan University press, 1986.

Fanon, Franz*The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1968.

Gakwandi,Shatto *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa*, London: Heinemann, 1977.

Wauthier, Claude *The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa*, London: Heinemann, 1979.

Yoder, Carroll. *White Shadows: A Dialectical View of the French African Novel*, Washington DC: Three Continents press, 1991

Study Session 6

Assimilated Negritude: a Study of Camara Laye's Artistic Vision

Introduction

This Study Session provides an in-depth study of the French-language novelist Camara Laye.

Learning Outcomes

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

6.1 *analyse*Camara Laye's works.

6.1 Assimilation, Negritude and African Prose Fiction

Assimilation' is a term used to describe the French colonial policy in Africa. The policy was aimed at turning Africans into Frenchmen through the process of education. The French educational policy Africa was therefore meant to make the Africans culturally French. In the word of P.C Lloyd, French educational policy lay in the establishment of schools with similar curricular to those of the metropolitan country. Indeed local languages were not taught primary schools. The education Francophone African this embraced French culture, and his loyalty to it far exceeded any parallel felt by his counterpart in British territories. To make this policy attractive to the Africans, the French 'proclaimed that Africans could assimilate French culture and that those who did so would be accepted on terms of full social equality by all Frenchmen (1955:174).

Tip

Policy of assimilation was aimed making French citizens out of Africans..

As W.E.F remarked, the price paid by the African was high: he must cut himself off completely from his fellow-Africans… he must abandon his African speech, dress, customs and religion and way of living, and must assimilate himself completely to the French ways of life. This was precisely what the French wanted and designed. Thus, according to Remi Clignet, 'a large number of African students were sent to France in order to accelerate their adjustment to the norms and values of a modern

society which of course meant their being dislodged from the 'norms and values' of their own indigenous society.

That these Africans assimilated French culture is a certainly, but whether they gained equal social status and recognition with Frenchmen is a different matter. Assimilated was not aimed at elevating the African but at devaluing his culture, and that was why it was thought necessary to strip him of his true cultural identity and put on him a foreign one which he was later to revolt against. The African and his world was vindicated by their discrimination between 'Metropolitan France' the original, undefiled France – and 'France Overseas' which was there only for economic domination behind assimilation. These could not be 'equality' for the African while his humanity and culture were not recognized and the process of Frenchification went on. Furthermore, the principle of equality in political social and economic spheres was not practicalised, since there were 'contradictions' here and there. Thomas Hodgkin has observed that the French principle of equality proved to be self-contradictory with regard to the 'conception of the universality of French civilization, equal political rights, popular participation in the processes of government, the idea of expanding opportunities for higher education, and the fact that 'equality of political rights has limited' values unless accompanied buy an effort to abolish gross inequalities of economic standards and opportunities.

About negritude, Aime Cesaire said:

> to set our own and effective revolution, wee had first to put off our borrowed dresses, those of assimilation and affirm our being, which is our negritude… To be truly ourselves, we ought to embody the negro-African culture in the realities of the twentieth Century. For our negritude to be an effective instrument of liberation… we had to shake off the just and assert it in the international movement of the contemporary world (1967:45).

The tenets of the negritude movement naturally derive from the definitions; especially Senghor's extended definition, of the term negritude. Some of the tenets of negritude are the doctrine of identity, which states that the black people have an integrated separate identity marking them out from other people in the world; the doctrine of innate purify, the doctrine of originality or naturalness as against the artificiality of originality or naturalness as against the artificiality of the Europeans, the doctrine of Beauty as incarnate in the black woman; the doctrine of universal role which presents the black man as the reservoir of world's humanity and assigns to him the role of rejuvenating mankind that has been impoverished by the abstractness and impersonality of the white world. This perhaps, is the essence of that 'Communal warmth, the image-symbol and the cosmic rhythm which instead of dividing and sterilizing, unified and made fertile. (1965:99)

The nature of these doctrines indicates the original conception of negritude as a purely cultural affairs-culture in its physical, spiritual and intellectual dimensions. The political connotations that are often associated often associated with negritude are in the main the result of the historical circumstance in which the movement was founded.

In this wise, the intended result of assimilation has been depicted fictively in a number of francophone African novels portraying the cultural half-caste, as Senghor, expressed it, trapped between two cultures belonging to neither, One of the best examples of this is undoubtedly Mission terminee (*Mission to Kala*) by the Cameroonian novelist, Mongo Beti. The story concerns a student named Jean-Maries Medza, who has just failed the oral part of his baccalaureate exams. Sent up- country to be "backward" village of Kala to retrieve the errant wife of one of his relatives, Medza soon realizes that his French education has failed him in more ways than one. When the villages question him about his education (such as a request to "explain geography") he realizes how thoroughly inadequate his education has been. The oral examination they give him is much more grueling than the one failed at his school.

Other, more than personal matters, such as his naiveté in regard to the sexual patterns of his culture are made blatantly clear to him. By the time he returns to his home, Medza realizes that his real education began only when he arrived in Kala. According to Charles Larson:

The solution would not have been simply a matter of staying in Kala, however, were he was esteemed by the villagers because of then amount of his education- for by the end of his stay in the up-country village, Medza has realized that he is cut off from both cultures. The final picture we see of him is that of the outsider, fated to wander the world looking for an idea which had been at least hinted at during his stay in Kala (1971:169-170)

In the word of Medza himself:

> The tragedy which our nation is suffering today is that of a man left to his own devices in a world which does not belong to him, which he has not made and does not understand. It is the tragedy of man benefit of any intellectual compass, a man walking blindly through the dark in some hostile city like New York. Who will tell him that he can only cross Fifth Avenue by the pedestrian crossings or teach him how to interpret the traffic signs? How will he solve the intricacies of a subway map, or know where to change trains? (1957:46).

This "enclaved" depiction of the African, who has been assimilated and then found it impossible to accept his own traditional culture, has played a part in a number of other significant francophone African works: Benard Dadie's *Climbre* (1956), Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *L'aventure ambique* (1961), and Camara Laye's autobiography, *The African Child* (1953). Several of these African novelist and one or two others (Ferdinand Oyono and Birago Diop) all but ceased writing once independence was attained, implying that there was nothing more to write about other than the colonial experience-which is directly or indirectly the concern of all of these works of the writers mentioned here, only Camara Laye has published an additional work since independence: A dream of Africa (1966), and it is with Laye that the picture of the "assimilated" novelist takes on its most significant twist: the negritude novel. The African cultural values have been so deftly handled in the works of Camara Laye that the reader is almost unaware that they are there. It is this +use of "assimilated anthropology" that is the major

distinction between the Francophone African novelist and the Anglophone African novelist, for the Francophone writer has remained much closer to the French classical tradition, changing the novel in fewer ways than his Anglophone counterpart and as a result has produced a more intellectualized concept of African traditions, values, and life.

6.2 Camara Laye's Artistic Vision

His reputation as one of Africa's foremost – ads well as one of its earliest – French – language novelist is firmly established, but his achievement continues to be the subject of debate. Laye's artistry has never been in doubt, as he is widely recognized as a master craftsman of the word. His destruction as a prose stylist is especially evident in his first novel, L'Enfant noir (1953; the African Child), an autobiographical work whose sensibility to the materiality of Language and whose intense lyricism have contributed to its enduring literary success. What has been at issue, however, is the vision that Laye uses this finely crafted language to express.

The Guardian of the Word (1978), is a translation and adaptation of an epic song as performed to him by the griot Babou Conde. Laye had a deeply religious view of the function of the artist. Just as he interpreted his father's work as a goldsmith as mediating the realms of the sacred and the profane, so he conceived the function of the modern writer as giving concrete expression to religious and spiritual truths.

Laye does not subscribe to the Cleary depiction, associated with nineteenth-century realism, of dry historical, social, or political facts. He believed that such depictions could only rise to the level of art if they were invested, in the tradition of symbolist writing, with religious meaning; if in other words, the facts, events, and situations confirmed to or illustrated a supernatural scheme. Adele king has described Laye's vision of the artist as "a priest giving form to the mystery beyond daily life, expressing the supernatural" (1980:116) to Laye, the natural and social world and our experience of it in dreams and reality, is like a "forest of symbols", a field of hieroglyphics whose necessarily religious meanings wait to be deciphered by the artist-priest. Examples of this decipherment, or projection of the symbolic and the spiritual into the natural and the factual, abound in this work. For instance, the case of the narrator's departing in *The African Child* from his home in rural Kouroussa and neighboring Indicant for urban Conakry and then moving to France. To a secular and realist imagination such a movement through emotionally wrenching, ca be understood and explained as the consequence of a French colonial policy that located few, if any, institutions of educational and economic opportunity in the colonies, and thereby made migration to France of Laye's generation socially justifiable while Laye was aware of such explanations, his religious cast of mind configures his exile in *The African Child* as the expression, individual human terms, of a separation that is superficially geographic and cultural but in essence metaphysical: that of man's estrangement from the roots of his spirituality- from the " ground of his being", in the words of Paul Tillich – in short, from God. Thus, the sociological phenomenon of immigration from a deprived colonial periphery to an

endowed metropolitan counter, well known to colonial and postcolonial subjects is transmitted into the symbol of a higher truth. The logic of exile is no longer immanent, social, and historical, but transcendental, spiritual, and a historical Laye's essentially religious vision of the world has been at the heart of the controversy over his achievement.

"To many 1950s "radical" African readers, it was stupid to focus on spiritual essences, they argued, to present African from the angels of rural, simplicity, carefree innocence, and festivals carried serious practical implications. It mean opting out of raw actualities of history-in this case French colonial rule in Africa-and pandering on the folkloristic colonial stereotypes of eternal African. (2004:414)

Laye, it is true, was as one who colluded in his people's practice bad and dangerous logic and to misconceive the radical, even subversive, character of his creative output.

Camara Laye's first novel, *The African Child* was extolled as a classic upon its publication in 1953. Written as a novel, it is an autobiographical account of Laye's growth and development from childhood to maturity, and his correspondence loss of innocence. The account is divided into two parts; the first, which consists of chapter 1 to 5, is devoted to the narrator's childhood in rural Kouroussa. The second chapter 9 to 12 portrays his adolescent and mature experiences in urban Conakry. Separating the two is a transitional section of three chapters that partakes of both worlds.

The first section could be called an anthology. The events described in it do not follow chronological order. They are not causally linked, unrepeatable event but events but recurring or habitual experiences, the narrator's father's activities as a goldsmith, the narrator's visit to Tindican, the harvesting season, and so on. In this section, existence is repetitive or circular and all human activities-even the most mundane-are integrated into cosmic cycles. An example of such integration occurs in the succeeding chapter, where the crafting of gold is understood by the community not as an ordinary exercise in individual skill but as partaking in primordial act of creation. It is not a singular event, in other words, but the sacred reenactment of an "archetype action", an action consecrated in the beginning by gods, ancestors or heroes" (1953:4). This quality of sacredness associated with the activities described by Laye-harvesting, circumcision, gold smelting-explain the elaborate acts of ritual purification, the incantations and appeals to nature Spirits, that accompany them.

The first part of the novel also emphasize the importance of social bonding. Human interaction in Kouroussa and Tindican, the villages that define the territorial boundaries of the narrator's community, is organic. Relationships are based on shared social consciousness and communal experience. The universe of Laye's childhood is peopled not only by loving and admirable humans but also by a variety of both beneficent and evil spirits that must constantly be counted or kept at bay through religious ceremonies. It is an enchanting and poetic world in which work is holy and humans commune with animals and the sun-drenched natural world.

In the second part of the novel, the narrator is separated from perfect and harmonious universe from his arrival in Conakry until his departure to France. Symbolically, the narrator's departure for Conakry can be interpreted as a fall from the timeless world of grace and mythical experience into the time bound universe of suffering and historical experience. Outside this region and particularly in unbounded space. In his words:

> The great plain where I had lived until now that plain so rich so poor, so sun burnt-yet so familiar and friendly- was giving way to the foothills of the Fouto Djallon…
>
> This country, new to me, too new and too rugged disturbed rather than enchanted one (1953:145)

About Conakry, he observes:

> I walked into town. It was different from Kouroussa… The
>
> Houses were all embowered in flowers and foliage. Many looked submerged in all the greenery, drowned in a frantic proliferation. And
>
> Then I saw the sea… I stood a long time observing its vastness, watching the waters roll in, one after another, to break against the red rocks of the shore (1953:148)

Beyond the ambience of the new and unfamiliar physical landscape, the narrator discovers something hitherto inexperienced: suffering and evil. For the first time in his life he is lonely against his former communalistic lifestyle; the experiences frustration at being unable to go to the school of his choice. Above all, in terms of the symbolic economy of the novel, he discovers in Conakry, in Check's fate, the supreme evil: death.

The narrator's growth into adulthood-like that of Africa to which he stands in a metonymic relationship is a growth into western modernity.

6.3 Assimilated Negritude: *The Radiance of The King*

The Radiance of the King (1954), tells the story of Clarence, a white European who finds himself in Africa and becomes involved in a series of adventures that are as comic as they are nightmarish. After his arrival in the imagmary northern Africa city of Achrame, Clarence is ruined by gambling debts and stays in a run-down in after being thrown out of a hotel. In despair, he seeks an audience with the local king, hoping for a job. On the day of the King's appearance on the esplanade, however, Clarence is unable to get close to him because of the dense crowd. Quite unexpectedly, a beggar offers to help him meet the king. At first incredulous that such a poor clothed individual would even make such a gesture, but desperate for a rib and willing to accept anything, Clarence accepts the offer reluctantly. But his hopes are shattered when the beggar returns with a story of failure. The beggar further suggests, that Clarence travel south with him, as that is the king's destination. Before their departure, Clarence invites two urchins, Noaga and Noaga, whom he has met at the esplanade, and the beggar to accompany him to his inn for a meal. He visit ends in total humiliation for Clarence, who is stripped of

his jacket by the innkeeper because he cannot settle his bill. In the streets of Adrame, on their way south he is accused of stealing the jacket he is wearing, which had in fact been stolen by the two urchins, and is arrested. As a result, he is dragged through an arbitrary trial in a courtroom, just before his sentencing, Clarence manages to flee only to find himself facing the prospect of being caught again. However, a chance encounter with a bare-breasted dancer saves him from recapture, she leads him out of the maze to an area of town where he is reunited with the beggar, Naoga, and Naoga. According to Charles Larson:

Clarence's pilgrimage – until the time he meets the king – is a re-educations as he is slowly stripped of the accretions of Western civilization, its false values, its prejudices and hang – ups, for at first he can only evaluate in terms of his past life. (1971:175).

At first, the results are snap judgments without any attempt to understand the experience behind the African's way of doing things. Noting, for example, that all of the tallest people in the crowd are standing in front, making it difficult for the shorter ones to see the dances that are going on. To Clarence:

> This was really very stupid, the exact opposite to what should have been the case, for these giants in the front row could easily have stood at the front row could easily have stood at the rear and so have given the smaller ones a chance to see. (1954:44)

Clarence must come to realize that what is logical to him, may not be logical for an African. *The Radiance of the King* has often been interpreted as the story "of the lone traveler lost in a strange land, illustrating the eternal nature of the spiritual guest" (1984:152). Its protagonist Clarence is an everyman searching for salvation. That he is European is immaterial to critics like sonial lee, for whom – uprightly so race is not the issue. This identity is important only to the extent that it constitutes "the perfect metaphor for man's unjustified arrogance and complacency" (1984)

Clarence journey –journey being a recurrent motif in traditional oral narrative from Adrame to Aziana is given symbolic meaning. It is not just geographical. With its innumerable physical and psychological hindrances-also features of traditional myths of quest-it is a journey from stark ignorance to truthful redemption. The phases of his quest has been likened to those of the mystic who goes through successive stages "renunciation of reason, then of the senses, to reach the annihilation of the ego in which divine grace, even unity with God, can be achieved " (1954:44). Another dimension to the novel, is that of man attempting to adjust to an alien culture whose customs and ways of thought he must learn to understand.

In *The Radiance of the King*, Laye challenges the humanist optimism of Enlightenment modernity, its triumphalist and, in its colonial phases conquering claims and assumptions of constituting a superior form of civilization, of providing the tools, an rationality and human will, for a life of material fulfillment, unlimited progress, and moral perfection. Laye's strategy in the novelist simple: he pits those claims as embodied

by Clarence-Modern European and therefore symbol of this spirit-against his own experiences of reality and exposes them as incapable of making sense of that experience. In *The Radiance of the King,* Clarence evolves in the opposite direction: he moves from a view of human rationality and enterprises as necessary and sufficient for happiness to a discovery of religious transcendence and providence knowledge of which cannot be acquired as he had confidently believed, by rational procedures of thought and inquiry or by acts of the individual will. Reliance on these beliefs can only lead to frustration.

According to Conteh – Morgan:

> Clarence arrives at this insight painfully. In the early pages of the novel, he emerges as a character confident in his ability to control his destiny. He is looking for a job that will make him independent, and his status as a European in colonial Africa should, he believes, guarantee him rights-no least the right of automatic audience with the local ruler to whom he wishes to convey his request for job (2004:421).

In the African country where Clarence fond himself, dreams and reality are inseparable; nature is intoxicating; characters, such as the beggar and the king, take on multiple, even contradictory, qualities social status, material wealth. And skin colour is poor indexes of human worth. What appears arbitrary and incoherent to Clarence, however, is so only in appearance. For beneath what his rational mind perceives as chaos lies a divine design. Only when he gives up all pretence of being able to make rational sense of his experience and lies prostate and humble, defeated when he diverts himself of his arrogance, to a bare state symbolized by his near nudity-does he discover the plenitude of divine grace.

By making Clarence's salvation coincide with the moment of his total surrender to the values associated with traditional Africa, Laye asserts the superiority of those values and challenges not only the meliorist assumptions of modernity that the world can becomes better through human intervention, but also the vehicle through which they were introduced into Africa, colonial rule. The progress of the mystical pilgrim in the novel is also a statement on cultural nationalism.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the artistic visions of Camara Laye.Instead of recording the conflicts that an African encounters in his exposure to the West Laye, in *The Radiance of the King, has* subverted the usual pattern and presented a European and his difficulty in coming to grips with African. The story goes beyond this however, for it is not confrontation which ends in confusion a tragedy, but a story which begins in chaos and ends in understanding, grace and beauty. The Whiteman may be protagonist.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Camara, Laye *The African Child*, New York: Farrar, 1954*The Radiance of the King* ,London: Collier, 1956.

Conteh-Morgan John "Camara Laye" (1928-1980) in *African Writers*. Brian Cox (Eds), 2004

Ree, Sonia *Camara Laye*, Boston: Twayne, 1984

King, Adele *The Writings of Camara Laye*, London: Heinemann, 1980

Harrow, Kenneth "The margins of Autobiographical Literature of Temoignage: Camara Laye, L'Enfant noir" In his *Thresholds of Clonge in African Literature: the Emergence of a Tradition*. London: Janes Currey, 1994.

Blair, Dorothy, "Camara Laye" In her *African Literature in French*, London: Cambridge Press, 1976

Larson, Charles *The Emergence of African Fiction*, London: Indiana press, 1971

Study Session 7

Colonial Injustice: a Study of Alex La Guma's Creative Works

Introduction

This Study Session will provide students with an insight into the creative works of Alex La Guma, as he examines the nature of political commitment and of its converse, political disengagement; in the South African Apartheid days of colonial mis-rule.

Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:
7.1 *provide* a picture of the apartheid regime in South Africa.
7.2 *relate* La Guma's creative work to the choking scenario of the apartheid regime.

7.1 Analysis of Alex La Guma's Works

The non-white South African writers of the 1950s and 1960s were in a peculiar situation legally designated inferior beings, they lived in an oppressive police state that their works were committed to exposing abroad. Working within a repressive society, the writers had to establish to the outside world the value of their very existence-and this in a country that was culturally as well as politically dominated by white values. South African fiction of the period does not merely reflect the nature of the society, but inevitably criticized it. Even the least politically didactic novel cannot avoid mentioning the social conditions under which non white have lived in South Africa for most of the twentieth century. Merely to described the daily existence of the nonwhite communities of South Africa is to criticize implicitly the policies of the former administrations, which dictated that human beings should live under these despicable conditions, and such a description stands as an indictment of the sensibilities of the white South Africans who until the 1990s lived within and give unflinching support to this system.

Tip

Literary works by non-white South Africans in the 1950s through early 1990s were used to criticize the evils of apartheid.

For Alex La Guma, born into a working-class "coloured" that is, of mixed-race original family in the Cape Province on 20 February 1925, Fiction was a channel for his criticisms of away of life he found unbearable under the influence of his parents, La Guma grew up conscious of the economic as well as political reasons for the development on increasingly separatist policies by the South African government, and of the role of the left-wing labour movement in fighting racist practices.

South African critics hare often complained about the failure of their writers to respond meaningfully to the complex dilemmas of their society. The charge has been made frequently that most South African writers adopt conventional plots which either illustrate the arbitrary nature of the police system and usually end in petty gestures of defiance in the name of the universal brotherhood of man or some other admirable moral sentiment. While African literature suffers from the return again and again to the same old theme of apartheid, we should acknowledge the existence of a few writers who have heated this theme with sufficient originality to make a universally valid statement about the human condition. According to Arthir Gakwandi:

Few works have treated this theme with the same freshness which we find in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*. What distinguishes this short novel is that while avoiding being a sermon of despair it also avoids advocating sentimental solution to the problems that it portrays. Without pathos, it creates a powerful impression of that rhythm of violence which characterizes South African Life (1977:22)

A Walk in the Night, describe with lavish atmospheric details the event of one night in the lives of four men who live in a decaying slum area, District six in Cape Town. Each think of himself as an individual, but La Guma shows that together they represent the life of a whole district. The first, Michael Adonis loses his job, accidentally murders an old man in a fit of drunken rage, and decides to join a gang of thieves. Willie boy, a "skolly" (a South African term for a young hoodlum) who pride himself on never having worked in his life, is mistakenly identified as the murderer of the Oldman. When he venture into the street after a brawl in an illegal bar, he is spotted by the police, chased, shot, and left to die in the back of the police wagon. Meanwhile, in the same block of flats were the old man was murdered, Franky Lorenzo leans that his wife is going to have a sixth child. His dismay is overcome by his love for his wife and his bitter recognition that children are the riches of the poor.

The fourth figure, young Joe, who lives off what he can find in the sea around the docks, repays Michael casual handout with real friendship. When he realizes that Michael is about to accept an offer to join the gang in a planned robbery, Joe pleads with him to change his mind. When he fails, Joe pleads with him to change his mind. When he fails, Joe runs after Michael in the street to renew his plea: "please, Mike', Joe said. He looked as if he was going to cry. I'm your pal. A man's got a right to look after another man, Jesus, isn't we all people?" (1968:75)

The individual has rights, and these are not just the right to earn a living and the right to walk the streets without harassment, or the marital right Franky Lorenzo shouts about when he discovers he has the responsibility

of another mouth to feed. The individual also has the right to assume responsibility for another fellow human beings.

Police Constable Raalt, who follows Willieboy across the roofs and shoots him in cold blood for the satisfaction of his hunt, is the story's prime example of the individual who has reneged on not only his ordinary human responsibilities, but also, as his prime fellow officer notes, his responsibility to uphold the public image of the whites, Raalt is a parasite on the community that he is suppose to protect, as his extortion of bribes demonstrates. Yet it is not always clear where one's responsibility lies: the person who identifies Willieboy is the murderer claims to the acting in good faith, yet he acts alone and is reproached by his neighbours for cooperating with the police; even the police officer sneers act him. According to Arthir Gakwandi:

> Police constable Raalt is perhaps the most sharply drawn figure in the novel. He is the incarnation of the fears and complexes of the white man in South African. He is a dehumanized instrument of supremacy and terror. (1977:24)

The major walkers in the night are Michael Adonis, Raalt, the white constable who is on patrol duty in Cape Town's District Six and Willieboy, a habitual loiterer and petty criminal who gets killed in the process of hunting for Doughty's murderer. In the process of walking in the night, the lives of these individuals cross each other during the night they meet a wide range of District dwellers. Such as the rustics, bar-tenders, drunkards, loungers, sailors and laborers are in some ways victims of the foul crimes' of their society.

In the words of Doughty, the old drunkard and ex-theatre practitioner, who seems to be speaking for numerous members of his society when he quotes the words from *Hamlet*:

> I am thy fathers spirit, doomed for a certain time to walk the night…and …and for the day confined to fast in fires, till the foul crimes done in my days of natures…nature are burnt and purged away… (1968:28)

This retired actor, Doherty, who has given so much for the love of his country is gradually dying of alcoholism, diabetes and old age, before he is finally given a death blow by Michael Adonis, has once been a famous man. The description of his room gives a bizarre picture:

> The room was hot and airless as a newly opened tomb, and there was an old iron bed against one wall, covered with unwashed bedding, and next to is a backless chair that served as a table on which stood a chipped ashtray full of cigarette butts and burnt matches, and a thick tumbler, sticky with the dregs of heavy red wine. A battered cupboard stood in a corner with cracked, fly spotted mirror over it, and a small stack of dog-eared books gathering dust. (1968:24-5)

And as complement to the deathly air the inhabitant of the room looks like a ghost:

> In the light of the bulb in the ceiling his face looked yellowish blue. The purple-veined, grayish skin had loosened all over it and tagged in blotched, puffy folds. With his sagging lower eyelids, revealing blood-short rims, and the big, bulbous, red-veined nose that had once been aquiline, his face had the expression of a decrepit blood-hound. The heard was almost-bald, and wisps of dirty grey hair clung to the bony, pinkish skull like scrub clinging to eroded rock (1968:24)

Doughty was actually recalling the words spoken by the ghost in *Hamlet*, to all the characters in the novel, all of whom, actually experience the terrors of the South African night, were in a life marked by violent encounters, imprisonments and murders, the people fast in fires of hatred, fear and frustration.

The way the characters: Raalt, Adonis and Willieboy live through the evening shows parallel transfers of aggression. All these individuals are victims of a system that denies them the facility of living in harmony with their fellow human being and their frustrations find release in terrible acts of violence against weaker members of the society. Their failure to see themselves as integral members of any lining community is their plight to which the novel suggests no solution which signals a sense of doom that pervades the novel? According to Gakwandi:

> The background against which the events are narrated suggests an atmosphere that is hostile to the well-being of man….The tenement of the coloured community in Cape Town are the main scene of action and it is the physical disintegration of the buildings, the filth and dampness… the physical violence and decay of the whole area becomes the objective correlative of moral and social disintegration of South African Society (1977:24).

As Michael Adonis walks through the street: He turned down another street, away from the artificial glare of Hanover, between stretches of damp, battered houses with their broken-ribs of front-railings; cracked walls, and high tenements that rose like the left-overs of a bombed area in the twilight; vacant hots and weed-grown patches where houses had once stood; and deep doorways resembling the entrances to deserted castles. There were children playing in the street, darting among the over-flowing dustbins and shooting at each other with wooden guns. In same of the door ways people sat or stood, murmuring idly in the fast-fading light like wasted ghosts in a plague-ridden city (1968:21)

This description recalls the harsh and desolate world of La Guma… the cumulative images of violence, sickness and war are used to emphasize the material discomfort and harshness of the environment in which the people live. The sights, the sounds and the smells are used to give a powerful impression of the conditions in which the people live; (1977:25)

A Walk in the Night, is an evocation of mood rather than a prescription for action. No political conclusion is drawn in the novel; one is simply left with the picture of a society in which those responsible for the maintenance of land and order are the most irresponsibly violent people in the community. After reading about how Raalt shoots Willieboy,

simply because he fits the description of the murderer, who was wearing a yellow shirt, one may have a nightmare vision of police vans. The squalor of living conditions for the nonwhites and the dehumanization of the white police officers by their own power say enough about the state of South Africa without La Guma openly drawing conclusions.

The interest of La Guma lies in showing the interdependence between rights and responsibilities in a functioning human community, as well as the way that the humane political system denies individuals sense of responsibility along with their rights; (2004:404) if he does draw a conclusion, it is made manifest in Joe's words: "A man's got a right to look after another man"

7.2 The Stone Country

The Stone Country (1967) delves into the world of the prison, the country of stone, from the inside, and finds it a microcosm of South African society. Those prison guards who are while bullies enforce the law of power that protects them, and those who are coloured men are caught in the dilemma of waiting more power and respect than their skin colour entitles them to in their society. Below the guards are the cell bosses, the "big men" whose power is measured by their strength and by their ability to bully and terrify; but their power is nothing compared with that of the guards, and men among their own henchmen there may be a man awaiting the right moment to strike. Around the cell bosses are the toadies and supporters who give them their power. And the rest, rank on rank are the ordinary inmates: the powerless, the sufferers, the underdogs.

This picture reflects the nature of South African society as portrayed by La Guma elsewhere. The white guards might be any Whiteman- and in La Guma's fiction most whites are police. The coloured guards and the cell bosses are two sides of the same coin: the tough guy who survives in the city, as in the prison, by knowing how to obtain power and how to wield it. Yusef the Turk, a variation on this theme, is the knowing crook, the wheeler-dealer whose power lies less in muscle than in his instinct for the moment when a challenge must be made and in his knack for the timing necessary to win a physical confrontation. Outside the prison, beyond the criminal life, he stands for the shopkeeper and ardent exploiter.

Into this prison, as into all walks of South African life, comes the intruder, the one who does not fit, and the one who queries. George Adams is no less a stranger in the streets, to the people of his everyday life-landlady and nonpolitical friends- than he is in the enclave society of the prison. Let his alien nature, his failure to take the place assigned to him among the downtrodden, breaks the whole pattern. His questioning of the system leads to a challenge to the cell boss's supremacy by Yusef the Turk and ultimately, through indirectly, to the death of the cell boss at the hands of one of his own followers.

A startling incident in which the prison cat plays with a captive mouse and diverts the attention of the guards from their duty posts, is central to the novel. While this may be overstated artistically it may be novel it demonstrates that concern with the helpless victim which is represented

in many South African novels. The mouse, in its desperate bid for liberty, acts alone. The passage is startling.

The three guard were watching, with fascination the punishment of the mouse, chuckling, as if they felt a natural association with the feline sadism (1967:124)

The parallel here is not just between the mouse and the prisoners who are planning a jail break (the byplay between cat and mouse distracts to change hands), but also between the mouse and all the people oppressed by those with the physical power to dominate: the ordinary prisoner under cell bosses and guards; the ordinary man in the street under gang bosses, police, and a vicious social system. It is important, too, that like the mouse, the men are prisoners but not convicts. They are being held awaiting trial. The "punishment" of the mouse is for no crime but that of existence, and this obviously throws the scope of reference beyond the prison, beyond even the section for those awaiting trial, to the life of all nonwhites in South Africa.

The macrocosmic "stone country", South Africa: beleaguered taking shelter behind her stone walls from a critical world, and in the process creating a society of prisoners and jailers, a nation of the condemned.

In the Fog of the Season's End (1972) examine the nature of political commitment and of its converse, political disengagement. It seeks to understand why are man is prepared to sacrifice himself and his family in the service of resistance, while another, living in identical circumstances, is able to stand aloof, tolerating injustice and discrimination. The various responses possible towards totalitarian regime ranging from martyrdom at one end to apolitical hedonism at the other, constitute the thematic structure of the novel.

The novel prescribes action by showing it working at the most basic level. Set in the coloured areas of Cape Town between Thursday morning and the dawn of the following Monday, the novel tells of the subterfuge of its hero Benkes, who works full-time for an underground movement, and the events of a few days during which his controller, Elias Tekwane, is arrested and one of his recruits, Isaac, leaves the country to be trained as a guerilla fighter.

The novel explores the injustices of ordinary life to a far smaller extent than does *A Walk in the Night* partly, this is because Beukes is so quick to point them out when he encounters them, and partly it is because his own hunted life is abnormal. Instead, this novel focuses on the lot of the active worker: the loneliness, the fear, and the rewarding knowledge that one is doing something useful. A series of flashbacks dealing with Beuke's own life and the lives of his colleagues fills in our sense of the narrow margin between hope and fear in which most people must live in the police state for political activists, danger is closer than for most other people. A routine police check can find them with their passes out of order, and the leaflets hidden in a case may mean a death sentence it. They are discovered. In a nerve-racking episode, Beukes smuggles such illegal documents:

> Beukes stood for a moment on the sidewalk outside the house and watched the street. Where the evicted old woman had sat

> amid her, belongings, there was only an empty cardboard box toppled into the gutter. Satisfied that there was nothing unusual about the surroundings, he walked down the street, taking his time casually carrying the case stuffed full of handbills. Endangered life was crowded between the armed overthrow of the government could be death. But with his everyday brown suit, the anonymous hang of the shoulders, he was just somebody going somewhere (1972:61)

Under this tension-filled atmosphere, when the security police may be only moments away and any life may end at the hands of the police torturers, those who continue in the movement must have a very special kind of grim courage. Beuke's intolerance with Arthir Bennelt's Cowardice and subordination to his wife springs from a full knowledge of the risks he himself is running all the time and from the memories of his own life and child. He dare not visit his children for fear that he might implicate them. According to Robert Green:

> The encounter between the Bennelts' and Beukes begins La Guma's definition of political resistance and establish a pattern, to which the rest of the novel will adhere, a pattern of brief episodes and hurried elliptical, guarded conversations. An individual decision to support or to subvert the regime is always seen in the context of his personal circumstances: the strength of his own feelings and also the nature of his wife's character (1986:245)

The fiction of La Guma, then, orders a view of politics that is highly concrete and pragmatic. The standpoint taken towards a repressive government by the individual is, it seems a matter of emotion more than judgment; feeling more than celebration, personal circumstance more than intellectual conditioning.

In the Fog of the Season's End, could not be said as portraying a "normal" world, and indeed one of the points both novels make, in quite dissimilar ways, is that for non-whites in South Africa "normally" is being threatened constantly by the violence of the state. Benkes in keenly aware of how the fantasy of the gangster or spy movie has invaded the arrays of normalcy "Life, in the words of Beukes:

> Had becomes mysterious rides, messages left in obscure places, veiled telephone conversations. The torture chambers and the third degree had been transferred from celluloid strips in segregated cinemas to the real world which still hung on to its outward visible signs of peace: the shoppers innocently crowding the sidewalks, the racing results, the Saturday night parties, the act of love…
>
> Beukes remembered the electrode burns on the hands of prisoners. Behind the picture of normality the cobwebs and grime of a spider reality lay hidden (1972:25) Thus, for non-whites the shopping, sport, gambling, sex- is intermittently interrupted and shoved aside by terror and random fortune. The essence of the novel is to lay-bare to expose the "hidden", as private life is thrust to the margin by the state's constant

> infringements. As a result " we find in La Guma' novel Beuke's "personal" concerns-memories of school and childhood, of courtship; fear for the safely of his wife and child are displaced to the novel's periphery. Normal life is only lived in brief snatches of reminiscence, and in the consolation of dreams. So much attention must be paid to the need to survive that "private life" for the Black or Coloured has become a dangerous luxury (1986:242).

Among the characters, Beukes meets Isaac as the novel develops. Isaac's sense of powerlessness under a system that enforces his inferiority finds release in his drawings of fantastic weaponry. When the police come for him, he leaves behind a paper covered with stretches of guns, ranging from a submachine gun adapted from the drawing of the drawing of a rifle to "a weapon which looked like a cross between an old time blunderbuss and a ray-gun" (1972:117). The escape from the police means the end of his life as a fighter. His real knowledge of weapons is far more practically oriented than his drawings suggest:

> Isaac had taken a keen interest in regular and irregular warfare. He had read history books and the smuggled handbooks on guerilla fighting; he had examined pictures and drawings of small arms of every sort. Theoretically he knew much about magnums and about Uzi submachine guns manufactured in Israel… and he longed like a lover for the time when he would be able to turn from theory to practical. (1972:119)

Elias Tekwane, too, is drawn by an interest in weaponry into reassessing the possible relations between white and blacks in South Africa. He has discovered, through boyhood reading, that not so many years ago the whites, too, fought with spears and shields, and he has concluded that the whites power can be conquered. The vision of the Zulu warriors of old strengthens his spirit while the police torture his body:

> The ghosts waited for him on some far horizon no words came, only the screening of many crows circling the battlefield. Wahlula amakos! Thou hast conquered the kings! The far figures moved along the far horizon. He! Uya kuhlaselapi Na? Yes, where wilt thou now wage war? Far, far, his ancestors gathered on the misty horizon, their spears sparkling like diamonds in the exploding sun (1972:175).

However, unlike the lonely individuals of La Guma's earlier fiction, Tekwane works for a cause – and for a people. The switch from Tekwane to Beukes expresses the nature of revolutionary collaboration. The short term defeat (Tekwane's death) ensures the longer-term triumph, that is, the escape of the three recruits. This is the novel's double structure, expressing the dialectic of martyrdom Tekwane's brutal death being counter pointed with Beukes survival and success (1986) lastly, black politics in South Africa as the novel depicts it, is rather about risk, trust and above all relentless courage.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we examined the nature of Alex La Guma's work. His work examine the nature of political commitment and its converse, political disengagement it seems to understand why one man is prepared to sacrifice himself and his family in the service of resistance, while another, living in identical circumstances is able to stand aside, tolerating injustice.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

La Guma Alex*In the Fog of the Seasons*' End, London: Heinemann, 1972

A Walk in the Night, Ibadan; Mbari 1962.

The Stone Country, Berlin: Seven seas, 1967.

Green, Robert" Alex La Guma's "*In the Fog of the Season's End*" in *Studies in African Fiction*. Ibadan: Univ. Press 1986.

Linfors, Bernth*Black African Literature in English*, New York: Africana 1986

Coetzee, J.M"Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writers" In Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts, 1971.

Study Session 8

A Vision of Society: The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will examine Ayi Kwei Armah visionary thrusts, as it is related to Africa and her interaction with various groups of visitors.

Learning Outcomes

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

8.1 *present* the relationships of Armah's fictional work to the predicaments of African countries.

8.1 Social Criticism in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah

Hint

From the beginning of his career as a novelist, Armah has been preoccupied with social reformation.

Unlike his contemporary, such as Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o who started off their careers as novelists the metrically preoccupied with conflict of cultures, which appropriately belongs to the first phase writers. Ayi Kwei Armah, from the outset, has posed as a social critic with a well defined mission. His first novel *The Beautiful Ones Has Not Yet Born* which by far the bleakest picture yet painted by a novel about the sourness of African independence. So overbearing is the sense of decay which is created in the novel that the death-cycle of life becomes the reflecting medium in which everything is observed. The vision of the Armah came dangerous close to the edge of despair. According to Gakwandi:

> We are presented with a world in which the savage pipes of history have exploded and everything is polluted. The senses of the reader are vigorously assaulted to the point of being numbed by the persistent imagery of decay, putrefaction and death.
>
> We meet a child, its nose overflowing with mucus and its mother sucking it with her mouth, we meet a young woman, her body disfigured by creases of a prematurely tired skin… streets are littered with rubbish that overflows from dustbins onto the pavements, banisters on building stairs are coated

> with vast accumulation of dirt, and lavatory walls are streaked with organic brown matters about the level of the adult anus; Everybody is described as sweating coughing, spitting…The sounds, the smells the sight and the thought of the people all mingle into a single rhythm of decay and death (1977:87) .

The novel centers on an unnamed railway worker who worries that his refusal to participate in the general climate of bribery and corruption is denying his loved ones the comforts enjoyed by others, particularly by the family of his old friend Koomson, who is now wealthy, influential, and thoroughly corrupt. In his distress the man is comforted by his friend Teacher. His wife Oyo, learns to appreciate his stand against corruption when a terrified Koomson has to beg the couple's help to flee the country because of a coup d'etat.

Armah has chosen as his main character a man who is inseparable from his community. Although he rejects the moral values of those who try to advance by corrupt means, he does not reject his fellow workers. Like them, he is isolated in his present situation, enduring life from payday to payday, unable to escape because his wife and children look to him for financial support. Yet the man is alienated from the rest of the society by his refusal to compromise with the pervading corruption. As a result, he becomes a social misfit who is seen as deliberately depriving his family of the money that they would like to spend on the beautiful, good, and expensive things of life. After refusing a bribe the man is struck by his own abnormality, and his steadfast honesty begins to seem a crime:

> The man was left alone with thoughts of the easy slide and how everything said there was something miserable, something unspeakably dishonest about a man who refused to take and to give what everyone around was busy taking and giving: something that was criminal, for who but a criminal could ever be left with such a feeling of loneliness? (1968:31).

The man is like caveman broken loose, who goes out and sees the light, and returns to tell his fellow cavemen of the light, and is regarded being mad. The effect of the novel is achieved through a gradual build up of detailed symbolic descriptions of isolated objects and situations so that each description in someway reflects an aspect of the decaying process with which the world of the novel is clustered. By a skillful selection of incidents and objects, within relatively few pages the author has established a social and physical world which is completely encased in dirt, and threatened by death. The people have no names and places remain unspecified. The man becomes the Everyman of folk literature. Later in the novel things begins to become more particular and characters are more individualized.

In this novel, one can hardly escape the power of the densely metaphorical language, particularly Oyo's cruel parable about the Chichidodo bird, which loves to feed on maggots but detests the excrement in which the fat maggots are found (1968:44). While images of dirt and decay are the most obvious and most important images in the novel, connecting the physical and moral decay of urban Ghana, they are not the only important ones. Images of light are also significant: the

"gleam" of the rich life remerges in other images of light as when the man, driven from home by Oyo's complaints, walk alone in the dark. The darkness becomes a symbol of ordinary life, and the light of the lamps represents, like the gleam, the easy life of wealth and power that most Ghanaians are striving to reach.

The Central idea in the Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968) is the cycle of change, from birth through decay to death. This cycle takes many forms. The man cannot think of food without thinking also of the processes of digestion, regurgitation, or excretion. Everything is part of a relentless degenerative movement, and only in a rare moments of hope are we shown that the movement is in fact a cycle and that out of the ancient, decayed matter comes new life.

The man is aware that decay is inevitable, but in a natural world it happens slowly. He fears that even his own desire to remain separate from the cycle, uncontaminated by the decay around him, is an attempt to deny a natural process. Yet when the natural process becomes unnatural in its haste, it seems right to resist it so the man resist the corruption of his times, although by doing so he refuses the luxurious sustenance of his own naturally decayed self to his children, those seeds those sole excuses for all the corrupt acts performed "for the children" (1968:144).

The socio-political situation in African today, more than ever before, vindicates the apocalyptic vision of African creative writers as projected through their "heroes", especially those like Armah who see the future of Africa as one of destruction and extinction as long as corruption and the divisive factors continue to take root and spread unchecked. It Armah is guilty of perjorism, he deserves credit for being very realistic also. One may sample this realistic assessment of the events in his society from the following passage, taken from a scene after following passage, taken from a scene after the coup: (1986:125).

In the life the nation itself, may be nothing really new would happen. New men could take into their hands the new power to steal the nations riches and to use it for their own satisfaction… new people would use the country's power to get rid of men and women who talked a language that did not flatter than… for those who had come directly against the old power, there would be much happiness. But for the nation itself there would only be a change of embezzlers and a change of the hunters and the hunted (1968:190-91).

Armah's political commitment is to analysis rather than to action in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The novel diagnoses the sickness of society and offers a prognosis that is not entirely pessimistic. Most of the political discussion is found in the dialogue between the man and his friend Teacher in the sixth and seventh chapters, were the effects of the war the movement for independence and Nkrumah's role in it, and the present situation of both men are milled over; but the whole novel reveals Arman's political interest. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a moral fable, but the moral is a political one, and the author is committed to a political stance. *Fragment* (1970), presents the plights of Baako, a western educated Ghanaian who returns from abroad without the wealth his family anticipates and without any desire to take up the social position they expect him to assume. Baako's refusal to supply his family with the

vicarious experience of success that they crave distresses his mother, Efua, and his sister, Araba. Baako is consoled by his Puerto Rican psychiatrist, Juana, but during her absence abroad he is persuade by the unanimity of criticisms of his stance that he is morally and socially aberrant, and he has a nervous breakdown.

Fragments builds on many of the ideas found in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, and on some of its imagery. This second novel focuses on an intellectual rather than a worker; whereas Armah's first novel was concerned only with the struggle to make a living without succumbing to moral contamination, *Fragments* also look at the spiritual aspirations of the main character. The two central metaphors of the novel, the cargo cult (a cult in Melanesia in which believers expect the arrival by airplane of spirits bearing goods for them) and the Mammy water (a myth about love and loneliness), involve communication between the spirit world and the mundane world. In *Fragments* the human spirit enters upon the cycle of life, which in The Beautiful Ones is limited to physical birth, death, and rebirth for objects in the material world. Death is welcomed by Baako's grandmother as a rebirth into a spirit existence; she seas herself as traveling a "Circular way" (1970:5).

The narrative in *Fragments* is brought into focus through Baako's blind grandmother, Naana, through Juana, and through Baako himself. Naana's way of apprehending this world is a traditional one, against which Baako's vicious, can be measured. The novel opens with her expressing her concern for the completion of the proper ritual to create a circle of security that will bring her grandson home from a journey away from Ghana, which she sees as akin to death.

Baako's particularly dissuaded by the discovery of the need for connections in order to secure a jog. Equally sickening to him is the lack of the sense of responsibility and the consequent gross inefficiency in the civil service, as typified by Ghana vision. Baako finds that the sterile old motions of work constitute a major obstacle to his creativity laments at the grab-a-graft mentality in public corporations, and is shocked by the characteristic disorder manifested during the fatal stampede off the queue at the ferry landing. He watches with displeasure the over all hopelessness of the chaotic situation in various spheres of life combine to afflict Baako's mind to the point of insanity; As a result, he has to resign his appointment at the Ghanaian national television corporation in spite of Juana's attempt to dissuade him by envisioning that- "they'll think you're Crazy" (1970:219)

Efua, Araba, and friends demand that Baako prone his status as a "been-to" (that is, a Ghanaian who has "been-to" the west for education and has therefore attained a higher social standing) with demonstrations of power and wealth. Baako finds it the most difficult to disappoint his mother. Although Efua eventually in a process of "soul-cleaning" realizes that her expectations were unfounded and unfair, a curse rather than a prayer, they stay in Baako's mind. When he begins to feel guilty, he hears echoes of his mother's demands.

On the altar of Mammon, Baako becomes one of many sacrificial victims in the novel. The novel, *Fragments*, deals explicitly with the issues of vision, Consciousness, and understanding. Baako is conscious of a need

to see his own world clearly and to understand it. The need is so great that he once received medical treatment in the United states for the so-called overexpansion of his consciousness-some may see it as clarify of vision, others call it hypermania. Anxiety, which causes this condition, has left in Baako "desperation…so deep it was beginning to be indistinguishable from hope" (1970:149). His condition is partly alleviated when he finds in Juana a friend who can share his loneliness, but in her absence his despair returns.

Working as a scriptwriter, Baako communicates his vision to viewers with visual images, but he himself is still grouping to understand what he sees. He cannot see some of the things that are clear to Naana in spite of her blindness. She sees that life is part of a cycle. She knows too that an overly rigorous quest meaning in life can be destructive. Her loss of eyesight offers a welcome release from the attempt to understand what she sees in this world, in her blindness her vision is turned toward the next. Retreating from the living world she has found knowledge that yet escapes Baako, but in the process she has given up the quest for worldly understanding and for that greater understanding that lies beyond. Baako, still trying to understand what he sees around him, may yet win that great understanding and peace against despair. Naana is prepared to leave this fragmented world and enter again on the wholeness of the cycle, but Baako is still trying to make a whole of this world. Naana seems to have said it all early in the novel:

> If I should see things which all around me think they do not see, why will I in my foolishness shout against all the strength of their unseeing eyes? The witches saw things denied to others; beyond that they talked of what it was they had seen, and were destroyed… If I see things unseen by those who have eyes, why should my wisest speech not be silence? (1970:3).

Though Naana is specifically referring to her vision that her grandson Baako will return from abroad, her words portray her as a wise and an experienced visionary, fully conscious of her predicament in a "blind" society. Baako is like his grandmother: a visionary, with a mission he aspires to accomplish. But he lacks the wisdom of his grandmother, he bees things differently from the way others see them, but cannot bring himself to make silence his wisest speech. And like the witches who were too articulate about what they had seen, Baako is "destroyed? (1986:129).

Why Are We So Blest? (1972), examines the fate of an African intellectual, Modin Dofu, who returns (as Armah himself did in 1963) from the United State of America to contribute his own quota to the revolutionary zeal in the fictional state of Congheria. Despite his intentions, his education has separated him from the people he wants to work with and for, and he brings about his own destruction in the form of a predatory white girlfriend from the United States of Aimee Reitsch. The couple is observed on their arrival in Africa by Solo Nkonam, an erstwhile revolutionary who has succumbed to despair although Solo's own anxieties colour his analysis of Modin's fate, he is rightly dubious about whether Modin's return to Africa, while a step in the right direction, will lead to a successful outcome.

Importantly, the entire story and structure of *Why Are We So Blest?*Hinges on the chauvinistic editorial in the Sunday Times, written for Thanks-giving Day, the Fourth of July, with the title, "*Why Are We So Blest?*" Mike the fascist reads with style part of the editorial:

> The myth of paradise finds its full meaning here, in the new Word paradise is a state of grace, and grace is space- the distance that separates the holy from the merely human, the sacred from the profane, separates and protects. That distance that removes the motion of the Greek athlete, effortlessly perfect, from the awkward stumbling of humblest humans, that distance that marks off the pedigree race horse from labouring hybrids-that distance is grace. And that is the distance between the American commonwealth and the remnant of the world. It is the measure of our blessedness (1972:88-89).

In the words of Ashaolu "The New World represents "the perfect symmetry of the Olympic Ideal, the unsullied wholeness of that Christian Eden ignorant of the fall from Grace" While the Americans regard themselves as the "Blest" they see the rest of the world as the "Damned" Modin's vision of life, his utterances and actions, and his relationship with other characters in the novel are all made to reflect this metaphor of the blest and the Damned. By coming to Harvard from Ghana, Modin has attained an eminence which sets him above the Ghanaian masses, and invariably alienates him from them. Mike the fascist emphatically asserts that Modin as a scholarship student in Havard rightly belongs to the society of the blest and not in the "communal dirt" of his home country" (1986:130-131).

Modin is painfully aware that his education has separated him from his people. His life is a kind of cultural suicide. The bureaucrats of the people's Union of Congheria scoff at Modin's desire for a heroic death. They ignore the power of hope that Solo recognizes in Modin and thereby destroy it. "Modin had hoped that he, like Prometheus in Greek myth, might descend from Olympus with Forbidden gift from heavens, but like Prometheus he is punished for the attempt, daily tormented by Aimee and finally mutilated and left to bleed to death. His death is no sacrifice for the people, like Eleshin Oba in Soyinka's play, *Death and the Kings Horseman*, but a wasted life" (2004:55).

Modin's suicidal attraction to Aimee leads him into a situation in which-as in all of his sexual encounters with white women-he becomes the object of primitive fears: a mixture of racial hatred and sexual jealousy that explodes into violence. In a sense, Aimee, rather than the revolution has becomes Modin's instrument of destruction, his chosen method of suicide. According to Ashaolu:

The agonizing death of Modin on his way to start a revolution raise the question of the futility of the African intellectual's attempt to bring about a change in his society. Solo sounds like the authorial voice when he says in retrospection: I wonder if I could have freed myself from the consuming hope that there were things in the world I could change (1986:132).

Like Baako and Naana, Modin has vision, but he is even more fatally attracted by the shiny things than is the main character of Armah's earlier novels, because in Modin's case, the shiny things take human form. Solo laments Modin's blind attraction to Aimee's gleam: "He was not blind. He saw. These notes are not she scribbling of a feeble mind. His soul was not mediocre. Was it then her exterior glow that drew him? What an assault, this luster, what a multitude of images impinging on our souls, diverting every fluid energy every force of life to these shiny artifacts of death" (1972:207).

In the character of Modin and Solo, Armah itemizes and analyses the plethora of problems confronting the African writer, especially the African absorbed into the Western world, "trying to escape death, eager to shed privilege, not knowing how deep the destruction has eaten into himself, hoping to achieve a healing juncture with his destroyed people" (1972:232). His training turns to a calculated and monitored apprenticeship for becoming a collaborator in the destruction of his people.

On the last note, Armah in *Why Are We So Blest?*Is more preoccupied with the role of the intellectual particularly the artist, in African society. The artist is in one sense the most important member of society, but is also the one who sees and feels the most. The novel stands as fitting transition from Armah's social criticism through an examination of the predicament of the would-be reformer to his castigation of the predators and destroyers for crippling Africa in the next novel: *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), recounts, first, of the migration of the Akan people, whose lands are encroached upon by the Arab "Predators" of the north, toward the coastal lands of Anoa, where they then becomes subject to the influence of the European slave traders, the "destroyers" this part of the novel is a feeble-history, told in the style of a griot (traditional musician) in the first person plural.

The second part of the novel is also told in the first person plural, but since it concerns the exploits of a particular band of individuals, the effect is to locate the letter within this group. Now only a small group preserves the spirit of the way, and they oppose the mass of their people who have succumbed to the appeal of false roads. The novel is partly historical fiction, partly wish fulfillment, and partly a parable for the modern day. The slave who release themselves from bondage and return home to destroy their destroyers offer a new positive image for intellectual like Solo and Modin. They are significantly named for the artists, fighters, and thinkers of modern Africa. *Two Thousand seasons*, is deliberately set in past era in which it is possible to be educated by the people, but the novel clearly advocates revolution in the present day.

According to Ashaolu:

> The primary mission of Armah in this work is the reconstruction of history, long distorted by the jaundiced intrusion, contamination and imposition of alien pre-colonial African world-view. Africa is presented in both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Healers* as a victim of external forces ineffectively resisted because of internal disunity and distrust among Africans. The restoration of Africa to its past glory of

> the pre-colonial days, the regaining of the way", will depend on the proper grasp of the past which is the foundation of the present chaos and disarray(1989:133).

In this novel, Armah traces the current political social and economic decay in Africa to a distant past when pure homogeneous African communities were first invaded by the Arabs, the predator who, at first posed as needy mendicants, but later imposed themselves on their unsuspecting hospitable hosts and benefactors. "Through force and cunning methods the Arabs succeeded in conquering the Africans with the aid of " Zombis" and "askar is" While a majority succumbed to the pressures from the invaders from beyond the Sahara a significant minority opted for emigration; (1986). Thus, their journey away from their original abode became a pilgrimage in search of a heaven that would eventually lead them back to "the way" of the old. But after the epic-like journey lasting several seasons, they arrived at what at first appeared to them as the Promised Land. The callous acts of Arab predators which at that time appeared only in "remembrance" was substituted by the more monstrous while destroyers from the sea. Working in collusion with the kings and chiefs, and bribing them with gift like mirror, alcohol and other worthless glittering trinkets, the "white maggots" succeeded in enslaving the Black, with more devastating death from their bullets than the Africans ever had to face from the Arabs in moments of attack; (1986:134).

However, a band of Africans booked for enslavement abroad outwit their white slavers and successfully carry-out a mutiny that annihilated the slavers and liberated the enslaved. With the return of this band of emancipated Africans, now adequately armed with the impounded weapons of the slavers, the task left to be accomplished is the total destruction of all the enemies of African on the African soil. Like dedicated freedom fighters, they took sweet revenge on the destroyers and their collaborator who were bent on exploiting Africans to prop up their imperialistic rule; (1986:134).

Armah does not spare the local kings and chiefs in his castigation to him, they are the whiteman's stooges and agents of destruction. They are the guilty ones because they failed to lead the people on the paths of honour. To the "The whites, like the Arabs and their agents, are presented by Armah as "killers who from the Sea came holding death of the body in their right, the mind's annihilation in their left shrieking tables of a white god and a son misconceived exemplar of their proffered, senseless suffering" (1973:3). Armah sees Christianity or Islamism as a "myth" an invented table that "a child would laugh at" (1973:3).

In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah escapes any form of dilemma by writing a semi historical fantasy in which the artist is not yet alienated from society and the educated elite are closer to the heart of society's way than their fellows, not further away from it. In this context there is no bar to revolutionary struggle against an alien there is no bar to revolutionary struggle against an alien, imposed political structure. Locating himself as narrator, Armah experiences vicariously all the goal-and writes of the destruction of the destroyers as a basically regenerative process in

society. The novel ends on hopeful notes that, united African people will definitely destroy the white destroyers who have contaminated them.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we explained that Armah's criticism of man and his world may be distasteful to some especially in his earlier novel. The fact remains that Armah's vision of the Ghanaian society, and of the world in general, is one that decries any form of corruption and associated evils, social justice, man's inhumanity to man, and the exploitation of the Blackman

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Ayi Kwei, Armah *The Beautiful Once Are Not Yet Born*, London: Heinemann, 1969

"*Fragments*, London: Heinemann, 1974" *Why Are We So Blest?* London: Heinemann, 1979. "*Two Thousand Seasons*, London: Heinemann, 1979.

Ashaolu, A.O"The novels of Ayi Kwei Armah" in *Studies in the African Novel*, Asien (Eds). University of Ibadan. Press

Wright, Derek (ed). *Critical Perspectives on Ayi K. Armah*, Washington: Three Continents Press, 1992.

Izevbaye, D.S"Ayi Kwei Armah and the "1" of theBeholder" In Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungesan (Eds) *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*. Zaria: ABU, Press, 1975.

Study Session 9

The Novel in East Africa: The Example of Ngugi Wa Thiongo

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will explore the background and nature of the East African novels; and importantly the form and the different approaches adopted by the novelists' in this region of Africa.

Learning Outcomes

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

9.1 *explain* the nature and form of East African novel as depicted in the works of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o.

9.2 *analyse* the nature, form and individual novelists' approaches to the thematic thrusts of East African writings.

9.1 East African Novel

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o belongs to a small majority group which shames a world view that is substantially different from that of the majority of their compatriots. These writers' witnessed the complicated process by which a nation toils out of the emasculating shackles of colonial rule. In the motion of these writers, the process that led to independence has been frustratingly lagging and the rewards fallen short of the original expectation. According to Gakwandi Shatto:

> What the writer has witnessed is not the transformation of society, but rather the creation of a minority culture of which he is part. He probably has mixed feelings for being part of a privileged minority… Most recently, the writer has witnessed the emergence of new minority cultures in the form of military elites, political elites and business elites. The threat posed by the antagonism between these groups and has been the subject of much recent fiction.(1986:155).

The East African novel is by and large preoccupied with the threat to the continuation of that shared life in which individuals could live in relative seemly. This threat assumes different forms for different writers, but the shadow it casts over the society is so menacing that no East African novelist has been able to ignore it (1986:56).

9.2 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

Born on 5 January, 1938 at Limuru, in Kiambu District in Central Kenya. His writings from1960s to the late 1970s, Ngugi reflected on his early education with some bitterness. In his fictional interpretation of history, Ngugi has been involved in the search for ways of combating the force of disintegration that have been unleashed by unhappy circumstances of history. Ngugi in his novel projects into the future because of implied faith in the ability of a people to transform their history. These ideals are skillfully woven into the fabrics of Ngugi works.

The River Between (1965), the novel focuses on the events set in the 1930s and 1940s in rural Kenya tat centers on the conflict between Christian and Traditional beliefs. The events are set among Gikuju people, Kamero and Makuju, which are divided by the Honia River, The people of Kameno follow the dictates of their provided by their creator, Murungu. A set of prophets accompanied their ancestors and guided the people in their ways. Makuju led by the convert and cleric Joshua, became a cynosure for Christian toractices. Ngugi's main character in the novel, Waiyaki, is portray the image of a charismatic young man, from Kameno's lineage of prophets, who is sent to the mission school to learn the ways of the colonialists in other to understand and resist their fake claims to the land. As a result, Waiyaki becomes a person of two districts world and must find chart for himself and his people a creative path between them (2004:541).

In *The River Between*, Waiyaki is moved to action by dramatic events during his late adolescence. Although he is one of the best students at the mission secondary school at Siriana, he comes home to take part in the initiation into adulthood of Rika, or his age-group. The young women of the ridge are also undergoing initiation at the same time. Among them, in direct defiance of her father stands for, is Muthoni, the daughter of the Cleric Joshua. When her wound does not heal and she dies of infections, the rift between the Christian and followers of the traditional religion becomes all but irreparable. Church members are forbidden to undergo initiation or to allow their relatives to circumcised students are not allowed in the mission schools. On the contrary, the non-Christians renounce the church and its schools and start their own institutions. One of the most brilliant, Waiyaki is chooses to head the local school. Despite his intelligence and leadership qualities, Waiyaki is divided by indecision and a tragic sense of the divisions within his society. He is haunted by Muthoru's dying visions of uniting her Christian beliefs with the Gikuyu Worldview. Furthermore, "Waiyaki fears that the schism between Christian and the followers of Murungu will cause a chaos that will ultimately ruin the society and lead to the loss of its land and identify to the white sellers and their government. (2004:342). This phobia is played out against the development of a militant antigovernment anti-Christian movement known as the Kiama. Once Waiyaki falls in love with Nyambura, Muthoni's sister and Joshua's daughter, the stage is set for a confrontation between the Warrong Gikuyu constituencies.

Amidst the mounting crisis, Waiyaki finds himself directed to the voices of the past, which visit him in prophetic fashion. He comes to realize that

he was the saviour forefold long ago by the great seers of his lineage. In this regard Waiyaki personifies a protagonist Ngugi rises in varying contexts in most of his novels: the character who is torn between culture who strives for a syntheses between the things brought by the west and the things indigenous to Kenya. In Ngugi's first two novels, this protagonist ends up broken and defeated.

With the publication of *Weep Not Child*, (1964), Ngugi appeared on the African literary scene as the first prominent novelist from East Africa. Ngugi appearance marked the belated beginnings of the novel in East African at a time when the West African novel was already well established. In this novel was already well established. In this novel, Ngugi again uses historical events as the context of his story. Njoroge comes from a polygamous family in Central Kenya. His father Ngotho, is the farm manager for a white settler named Howlands. The political crisis that resulted in the Emergency of the 1950s has severe consequences for Ngotho and his family.

Njoroge is a Bright student who advances steadily and triumphantly through the education system. From the beginning, Ngoroje's progress at school is set against the major issue that occupies his father and brothers, the land. Earlier in the novel, they recount the origin myth, whereby Murunugu gave the land to the first man and woman, Gikuyu and Munbi. The also recall the prophecy of Mugo wa Kibriro who foresaid the arrival of the whites. Ngoroge's fathers recalled serving the British during the East African campaign of Wolrd War I, during which he built roads and cleared forests for the infrastructure of the war.

The war ended. We were all tired. We came home worn out but very ready for whatever the British might give us as a reward. But more than this, we wanted to go back to the soil and court it to yield, to create, not to destroy. But Ng'o! The land was gone my father and many others had been moved from our ancestral lands (1964:29).

As a result, Ngotho became a *Muhoi*, a tenant living on someone's else land and paying rent in labour, crops, or money. One of Ngoroge's brothers, Boro, had fought in World War II and come home bitter over his experiences and the death of his brother Nwangi in the War.

The novelists' young protagonist finds himself in a romantic relationship that bridges a bitter gap among Gikuyu people. Mwihaki, whom Ngoroge has known since early childhood, is a beautiful young woman who has always loved him. Coincidentally, she is the daughter of Jacobo, the wealthy man who owns the land Ngotho lives on and who collaborates with the colonial forces, as a "chief" during the emergency. As events spiral down to their tragic conclusion. Boro, who has joined the Maumau insurgents kill Jacobo. When his father, Ngotho hears this he knows his son was the killer, and he offers himself to the authorities by confessing to the murder. As a result Ngotho dies from torture by the authorities, represented by his old employer, Howlands, Boro seeks out the white settler and kills him as well. In the end, Ngoroge is brutally torture by the authorities, expelled from Siriana Secondary school for supposed Maumau, activities and soon dismissed from the only employment he could find to support the family, working as a clerk at an Indian shop.

Weep Not Child is a portrait of a society under siege, caused by the loss of land, livelihood, pride and the subsequent militant. In the world of Robert Cancel:

> Ngugi explores in *Weep Not Child*. The interior fears and thoughts of at least four major characters. The development of several voices creates a textured, nuanced presentation of a crucial period during which so many people underwent profound changes in an escalating, violent clash of cultures" (2004:543).

A Grain of Wheat (1967) written during Ngugi's time at leads University, is widely considered to be his most success novel. The novel deals more directly with directly with the events of the war. But while the liberation struggle is successful the attainment of independence brings to the society the rather disquieting knowledge of it own weaknesses. The general tone of *A Grain of Wheat* is one of bitterness and anger. The painful memories of Maumau violence still overhang the Kikuyu villages as the attainment of independence fails to bring the desired social dreams.

In the novel, there are no fewer than eight major characters and the narrative voice shifts among them. Earlier, Ngugi centers on the inability of neigbours and relatives to interact. Mugo, the reclusive "here" of the struggle, suffers from depression and a lack of resolve in the conduct of his life. He refuses to be a speaker at the Uhuru celebration and wants only to be left alone. The celebrations of Uhuru break up in confusion and disappointment. Everything in the revolves around this major event, the celebration of independence and therefore, understandably, the celebration of this event becomes the symbolic focus of the peoples aspirations and social dreams.

> "All celebrations are symbolic because they enable participants to express unequal and varied emotions through a common and often simple gesture" (1977:109)

Far from being an occasion for jubilation the ceremony opens-up the unpleasant realities which the community has so far been unwilling to face. Thus, Ngugi deliberately structures the novel around this momentous event in the history in order to highlight the illusions which tend to be fostered by the euphoric atmosphere of independence.

The second section of the novel recounts the events that brought the characters to their present states of mind. The narrative describes Mugo's involuntary assumption of the status of a hero of the struggle. A private person who was abused by his relatives after being orphaned, Mugo wants only to till his land. As the struggle reaches its early period of confrontation, he is pulled into action by Kihika, (the guerrilla general), who imagines a certain closeness to their relationship. "Mugo's reticence and Sombe nature are mistaken for strength and quiet resolve as Kihika confides his numerous plans' (2004:545). Believing be will be pulled into something he wants no part of something he fears will endanger his life and those of his neigbours, Mugo informs on Kihika.

Kihika is depicted as a politically active young man who from the onset is obsessed with a messianic vision of leading his people out of colonial emasculation. As a result, he has carefully read and annotated a Bible,

selecting and unbound struggle in a just cause. The little of the novel comes from several passages that connote the of sacrifice in the renewal of life, and underlined sections from Kihika's Bible are the epigraphs to two parts of the novel. Many of the character and events in the novel are taken from the struggles of the land and Freedom Army. Of the principal characters, Kihika recalls the best known Mau Mau leaders, Dedan Kimathi, who led similarly daring and triumphant raids on the colonial forces and who was also betrayed captured, and hanged by the government. Ngugi keeps the characters of the novel in parallel to many historical figures, such as Harry Thinku, Chief Waiyaki and Jomo Kenyalta. The massacre at Rira closely relates to the events at Hola Camp, where the beating deaths of inmates made news all over the would and contributed to accelerating negotiation for independence. The names Mugo, Gikonyo, and Mumbi are linked to the historical and mythological figures Mugo Wa Kibiro, the seer, the Gikuyu and Mumbi, the primal ancestors.

These evocations come into focus on the third section of the book, when Uhuru day arrives and the planned events takes some surprising turns. *A Grain of Wheat* comes to being a historical novel. Its plot owes almost everything to the violent events of the Maumau movement. In many ways the novel is a defense of that movement. It is a creative interpretation of national history in a favourable light. It celebrates national heroes who fought for a national cause although it does so without idealizing them. In a different way it fulfils the same function as the autobiographical accounts of the ex- Maumau fighters. *A petal of Blood (1977) was* perhaps Ngugi most direct attack on the inequalities and hypocrisy of the post independence era in Kenya. The plot revolves around the murder of three prominent men – Chui, Kimeria, and Mzigo-in the town of Umorog in north-central Kenya, the four primary suspects are rounded up and questioned by the lives of the four protagonists and, by extension, the lives of the people around them. Following the structural device in *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi navigates the action back and forth in time, with the characters' shifting perspectives weaving a stark and dispirited vision of post-colonial life.

The four protagonists are Munira, a school-teacher and headmasters; Abdulla, a shop-keeper and former freedom fighter; Karega, who is expelled from school and becomes a union organizer; and Wanja, a "bar girl"

The lives of these characters intersect in the village of Ulmorog just before the developments that lead to the construction and growth of New Umorog. This transition from sleepy rural village to dynamic provincial town enables Ngugi to explore the personal and institutional corruption that leads the characters to their fateful implication in the murders.

Throughout the early part of the novel, the main characters arrive at Umorog seeking to deny or negate personal histories. Wanja has come to stay with her aunt, running from the fast city life and the erosion of her self-respects. Karega is a disillusioned student, fleeing the politics of the nation's best-known secondary school, Siriana, he and other student leaders have been expelled for what the school authorities, shying away from any kind of social activism and striving for a false sense of

academic neutrality, labeled as "political" activities Abdullah, a wary former guerilla, has recently arrived Umorog and set up a small bar and restaurant.

As the characters' lives are examined in a series of flashbacks and conversations in present time, Kenya's history from the 1940s to the mid 1970s is surveyed in only vaguely disguised from. The elements of colonial and post independence education are examined on several levels. At first, Munira's education at Siriana is an eye opening marvelous experience. However as time goes by, he becomes disillusioned with the elitist school and its committed racism. He alongside chin with several other students are expelled for spear-heading on strike to address several inequalities. At the arrival of Karego at Umorog he too recounts the event that led to his own expulsion from Siriana. The issues and gladiators strongly parallel Munira's experience, thereby suggesting the lack of real change between the colonial and post independence realities. Munira eventually comes to hate "politics" and takes a narrow approach to the education of his students. The essence of education and the ways in which the system has stifled creativity and critical inquiry are at the core of the novel's theme of protest.

Ngugi through the character of Abdulla, returns to the question of the Maumau Freedom fighters and their disenfranchisement at independence. "The young men who took no part in the struggle, who stayed in school or were involved with commerce, came to the fore in the new government of the nation. They became wealthy and turned the system to their advantage, while the peasants who fought in the rebellion went unrewarded for their sacrifice (2004:549). Most of who took part in the struggle became part of the growing numbers who had their land and livelihood appropriated by the wealthy minority in the new government. According to Robert Cancel:

> The staking of land and the alienation of its rightful owners reestablished in the independence era the practices of the white colonial suffers in the time before Uhuru (2004:549).

Abdulla was among the active fighters who participated in the movement. He vividly describes that participation during the long march that the group of villagers makes from Umorog to the capital to present their desperate, 'drought-spawned' grievances to the government. Hobbling on his one leg and inspiring the walkers, spends the periods of rest discussing the struggle and summoning patriotic zeal by chanting the songs of that era.

In the character of Waiya, Ngugi X-rays the plight of a rural young woman who attempts to live a productive life and is circumstantially pushed onto a path of prostitution. Ngugi had become concerned with the predicaments of women while writing the novel. In the words of Robert Cancel:

> In Wanja he makes clear that unchecked power relations between the sexes pose serious impediments to the economic and educational advancements of women, Wanja, once spurned in a love affairs with the older, wealthy Kimeria is

> left with few options, most of which point to a life of Subjugation to and dependence on men (2004:549).

Karega, the student-activist turned unionist another figure in an evolving set of characters that began with Waiyaki in *The River Between*. After his expulsion from Siriana, his life becomes shattered. Karega takes up several odd jobs that young dropouts must take in order to survive. "Inevitably they are reduced to working as hustlers and vendors on the road side, trying to sell curious or food to passing tourists and eventually turning to crime" (2004:549).

Part of the condemnation of postcolonial Kenya is tied to its dependence on foreign capital in the form investment and tourism. Karega finally finds out the pursuit that will give focus to his talents and energy, as he is caught up in the struggle of workers in the developing industries of New Umorog. The situation here depicts the picture of a shoe factory in Ngugi hometown in Limuru, where the management of the factory depends largely on low-paid workers for their profits.

9.2.1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Writings in Gikuyu

Ngugi also published a Gikuyu novel after his release from detention. His earlier experimentation with the local laying that his message reaches the peasants: and as a result he was determined that his succeeding novel would be in Gikuyu. Ngugi also chose to infuse several of the commonly known images of his culture's oral tradition when he terms "orator" in the depiction of this strongly allegorical plot.

Caitaani Mutharaba-ini (1980) Devil on the Cross) the novel was written while Ngugi was in detention, where he used the familiar trick of the imprisoned writer: Scribbling on toilet paper and hiding his work from the guards.

Unfortunately most of his works was confiscated. As a result, Ngugi had to reach out with his local dialect and convert it into a literary language. He had to device new imagery and translate the vocabulary of contemporary European concepts" (2004). The story focuses on a grotesque gathering in rural Kenya, in which "thieves and robbers" come together to contest the title of the greatest criminal. As time progresses, several people are initiated into the activities and their development form the core of the novel.

Ngugi uses the device of exploring individual histories. He construct several venue in which stories can be shared among characters. The most effective tableau is set on a Matatu, or small bus that carries the protagonists to the contest." (2004) in the public transportation, which is meant for pleasant and workers rather than the wealth, Ngugi discovered a dynamic metaphor. "As the passengers pass the time telling their stories, class and economic conditions are reflected in both the personal visions and the activities of the Matatu driver and several of the wheeler-dealers on the bus.

Note

Ngugi wa Thiong' o focused on the colonialists's exploitation of Africans and African resources to further their cause while depriving Africans people their benefits of their labour.

9.3 A Survey of the Works of Meja Nwangi

This section will expose you to the background and nature of the East African novels; as portrayed through the viewpoint of the second generation of Kenya Creative writers in English – in the person of Meja Nwangi.

9.3.1Nwangi's Thematic

Preoccupation As a member of the second generation of Kenyan creative writers in English, Meja Nwangi began his prolific writing career in the 1970s, a decade after Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Grace Ogot had started publishing their works. Meja Nwangi has confirmed his accomplishment as one of Kenya's most prolific writers publishing eleven novels in seventeen years in addition to writing short stories and children books.

In the words of Roger Kurtz. "If there is a single writer whose work represents the entire range of Kenyan narrative fiction in the mid 1990s, it is Nwangi. Practically all Kenyan in deed, one might even say African-writing shares a general thematic preoccupation with the interaction of tradition and modernity in African society. African writers have examined this interaction from a number of angles: the disintegration of traditional ways of life after the arrival of Europeans in the colonial era; the disequilibrium caused by European formal education; the torment of the "been-to upon re-entering African society after studying or working in other West; the influence of missionaries and in the postcolonial setting, the development of a new African political and economic elite and the dilemmas of life in the modern African city" (2004"511)

Note

Meja Nwangi's thematic preoccupation s include the conflict between African and Western traditions; the discussion of socio-political ills in modern African society; the influence of missionaries in post colonial Africa and the integration into Africa of returning Africans.

As a matter of fact, Nwangi has treated the above mentioned preoccupations; but appropriately one might divide his work into three major categories. The first entails his Mau Mau novels. The armed resistance to British colonialism in Kenya, which came to be referred to as the Mau Mau revolt and reached its height in the 1950s, was a formative experience for many Kenyans, especially those from the Kikuyis ethic group to which Nwangi belong" (2004).

Born in Manjuki, in Kenya's Central Province on 27 December 1948.like other Kikuju writers, he found material for his early novels in the Mau Mau experience, which led to the writings of *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) and *Taste of Death* (1975). The thrillers that he began to write in the late

1970s and 1980s form a second category of texts that has put him at the heart of a raging debate among Kenya literary critics over the merits of popular literature. The third category of his writing consists of novel set in the city. Nwangi urban trilogy – *Kill Me Quick Going Down River Road* (1976) and The Cockroach Dance (1979) – is completing and innovative as it deals with what is arguably the most pressing contemporary social problem in Kenya: the effects of the rapid urbanization that the country has experienced since independence in 1963.

9.3.2 Nwangi's Development as a Writer

When Nwangi was entering his twenties and beginning to publish, in the 1970s, was time of disillusionment with the unfulfilled hopes of independence in East Africa and a period of crisis for Nairobi, Kenya's capital. What might appropriately be described as a genre of "disillusionment literature" emerged that criticized the new African political and economic elite, which appeared to have betrayed the populace by utilizing education and positions of privilege for person rather than collective gain. The term neocolonialism was coined to describe a situation in which only a few of the faces in the power structure changed, leaving unjust colonial structures firmly in place. The disillusioned intellectual- typically someone who had once been optimistic about the potential for national development and the intellectual's role in that process, only to become embittered by neocolonial realities-surfaced as an important character in Kenyan writing! (2004).

In quest for fortune, Nwangi moved to Nairobi to continue his education: to his amazement, the city population quickly outgrew the capacity of its infrastructure. As it is history rapid growth has characterized Nairobi, after independence the growth got maximized and reached unpredicted heights, with regard to the restriction on African immigration to the city were dropped. By the early 1970s housing, employment, and transportation facilities were under more strain than ever. Slums, always a feature of Nairobi's geography, were growing at alarming rates. In this wise , one would have expected the government to be sensitive to the plights of the people; but it responded with a number of repressive measures which reminds one of the colonial-era tactics, thereby lending credence to charges that Kenya's social system was neocolonial.

Noting from history, Nairobi had been specially designed for the European as a result, the colonial government put in place almost without alteration the South African model of racial segregation in housing and business. Pass laws were issued to restrict immigration for example and vagrancy acts allowed the government to return unwanted immigration to the countryside; (2004).

Moreso, the influence of film on Nwangi's writing cannot be overemphasized. As a child in Nanyuki, he attended the open-air films offered by the mobile movie theatres not surprisingly two of Nwangi's novels have been associated with films *Carcass for Hounds* was made into *Cry Freedom*, and *The Bush trackers* (1979).

9.3.3 The Mau Mau Novels

Given its historical and social significance, the Mau Mau experience had a powerful impact on the literary imaginations of Kenyan, and particular Gikuyu, writers. Nwangi experienced what is known as "The Emergency" as a child, living in the environment of incessant conflict. Both the promises of political independence and the troubled time of political independence and the troubled time leading up to that point were central to his consciousness.

Although, *Carcase for Hounds*wad the first novel that Nwangi wrote, it was the second to be published and the second to be filmed. It is characterized with Mau Mau struggles as in *Taste of Death*. The two feature fast-paced action and snappy dialogue. Each uses an omniscient narrator who presents the perspectives of both the Mau Mau combatants and the white government forces antagonizing them. Both personalize the conflict by setting up an individual Mau Mau leader against an opposing colonial military commander.

9.3.4 Writing about the Urban Downtrodden

One of the harrowing most significant social phenomenon in postcolonial Kenya could be termed as urbanization. Although East African is by global standards relatively under urbanized, the rate of urban growth in the region's major city, has exhibited the accompanying problems! The disparities of segregation by class and race during the colonial era remained in the postcolonial years. According to Robert Kurtz:

The most obvious signs of these problems were the impoverished shanty-towns and slums- Mathare Valley being the most infamous through not the largest- that filled the marginal spaces within and between the more affluent suburbs and the modern downtown (2004:515).

Before the appearance of Nwangi's *Kill Me Quick* (1973), a class of Kenyan authors published novels relating to city lifestyle, which subsequently became a predominant theme in Kenyan writing, hence, Nwangi was neither the first nor the only writer to treat the urban setting in depth, but his urban novels remain the most interesting examples of the urban genre from Kenya. Nwangi's urban novels offer a riveting detail of the constant tussle for survival that marks life in Nanrobi's poverty-Stricken sectors. *Kill Me Quick*, *Going Down River Road*, and *The Cockroach Dance* re-create landscapes of squalor-stricken back alleys and sticking abode; with its associated malaise – inadequate housing and jobs, nonexistent waste-removal services, corrupt official alcoholism, thievery, and juvenile delinquency (2004).

The settings of these novels transform many of Nwangi narrative lapses into artistic strengths. The individualism that bores in popular fiction and the Mau Mau novels is no longer a cliché but a fitting response to the tough urban setting. "The inconsistency of tone and perspectives is less problematic because city life itself is inconsistent. The portrayal of women, deeply problematic in his popular novels, becomes less objectionable if not yet laudable. Women are portrayed as sex objects, but then everyone and everything is objectified and prostituted in this dehumanized urban setting. Nwangi's tales demonstrate the disruption of

traditional structures, including family roles and gender relations the urban social milieu (2004:515).

Kill Me Quick (1973)

This novel addresses the malaise of street children. Nwangi wrote this novel after leaving secondary school and finding out that he and his friends could not get paid jobs.

This novel, *Kill Me Quick* puts Nwangi on the East African literacy map. There is also element of autobiographical quests in the novel as it tries to chronicle his experiences from childhood. *Kill Me Quick* is a first person narrative in the picaresque tradition. Its protagonists, the adolescent school dropouts Meja and Maina, whose names play the Swahili phonetic rendering of "major" and "minor" represent one of the pressing social problems in Nairobi: the growing number of orphaned or destitute boys land beginning in the late 1980s, girls as well who roam Nairobi's streets, surviving through hand outs and their wits. *Kill Me Quick* recounts the progressive effects of delinquency as it lead to involvement with street gauds and more heinous crimes; in the end Mania is convicted of murder and is likely to hang, while Meja languishes in jail. *Kill Me Quick* won Nwangi the 1974 Kenyatta award for Literature a significant achievement for a first novel.

Going Down River Road (1976)

In this novel, Nwangi re-creates Nairobi's backyard, the peripheral areas such as East Leigh and Malthare valley mostly inhabited by the 'disenfranchised and powerless as well as the River Road area where Nairobi's inexpensive bars are located. The novel again established Nwangi's literacy reputation, winning him the Kenyatta Award for a second time in 1977. *Going Down River Road* is ultimately more successful than *Kill Me Quick*. The protagonist, Ben- a socially marginal character Ben, a construction worker on a new addition to Nairobi's growing skyline, the twenty four-story, ironically named Development House.

Ben has just moved in with Wini, a prostitute and secretary with a son simply known as Baby, When the novel opens. The tone of the novel is pronounced in the novel's memorable opening lines:

> Baby should not have drunk coffee. He urinated all of it during the mighty and now the smell lay thick and throat-catching, overcoming even the perfume of his mother's bed across the room. In the bed Ben lay with the boy's mother curled in his large arms, warm and soft and fast asleep. But Ben was not asleep anymore. The pungent baby Urine stink had awakened him long before his usual waking up time (1976:2).

When Wini dumps them both for a wealthy white man, Ben in a moment of compassion that be occasionally regrets continue to care for baby. "Evicted from Wini's East Leigh apartment, they take the downwardly mobile step of moving in with Ben's work buddy, Ocholla, in a shanty town shack along the Nairobi known for its Somali and Ethiopian refugee

populations at least had solid buildings, but the Nairobi River Slum houses an even more destitute population. According to Robert Kurtz:

> The impoverished residents of this type of illegal settlement are in no position to consider the impossible tasks of acquiring building permits or meeting construction cotes whey they set up their shacks. The inhabitants are at the mercy of city council extortionists who provide no basic service and burn down the tenants' shacks whey they cannot pay "tax" money. (2004:516).

According to Nwangi life is not as bad as it could be in Nairobi Valley. Perhaps the lowest rung on the Nairobi social ladder is represented by Mathare Valley, "the only place in the city where they may keep chickens or perish" (1976:100). Nwangi also portrays Nairobi to be replete with seeming contradictions. Development House, for example, is located on Haile Selassie Avenue at the edge of the financial and business districts and next to the site of a new eight-hundred-bed tourist hotel. "Workers like Ben and Ocholla, who are among the labourer constructing the building, live in Nairobi's poorest areas; apart from their temporary, low-paying jobs they are unlikely to benefit from development House. Nwangi uses the construction of the building to structure the novel's action" (2004:517).*Going Down River Road* (1976), ends on an ambivalent but predominantly somber note. Nwangi maintains tentative but fragile hope for the future, as Ben convinces Baby to return to school after a bout of delinquency. At this juncture, development House has been completed and workers are out of a job; but another gigantic construction is about to begin. Ocholla's large, hungry family has unexpectedly joined him for their rural home, where crops have failed and life is hard. Ocholla tells Ben that he and Baby will have to move out. They argue, but as Ocholla runs out of a bar and heads down River Road Ben chases him as the novel closes: "Ocholla!" Ben hollers hoarsely. "Wait for me; don't leave me here alone. Buddy!" (1976:215).

In *The Cockroach Dance* (1979) Nwangi tries to create a buddy story, this time featuring Dusman Gonzaga and Toto, two roommates in Dacca House. In many ways, this novel is a perfected remark of *Going Down River Road*. Dusman tries to convince himself that this unsightly address on smelly, undesirable Grojan Road is only temporary, but when thieves take the wheels from his broken-down Triumph Herald Car, Dusman's last symbol of freedom and possible escape is destroyed. It must be borne in mind that Grogan road is literally and symbolitically adjacent to River Road. The excremental ambience the bars and brothels, the thieves and Cockroaches that operate with equal Impunity, the streets filled with drunks, beggars and surviviors-creates a landscape similar to those in Nwangi's earlier urban novels. Importantly, some of the key images reappear. Compare Dusman's discovery of "a hungry cockroach gnawing at the plastic nozzle of a can of the most reputable insect decimator on the market" (1979:189) to Ben's explanation that "You cannot kill them… You find them playing with the insecticide container, trying to eat the plastic lid' (1976:20).

In *The Cockroach Dance*, Nwangi is as creative as ever, and his humour is as tasking as his sensory descriptions Dusman is relatively fortunate for

a resident of Grogan Road; He at least has an education and a job. Unfortunately, he belongs to that class of young Nairobians who are overqualified and underemployed; (1979:518). He exhibits his frustrations with his dead-end job through fantasies about the parking meters on the dirty kitchen table for the roaches that came in hordes to forage for crumbs. He had invented special ones with split-second electronic timing devices for the mice and rats out of the garbage cars" (1979:3). Dusman even invents meters for the vagrants and beggars of down-town Nairobi.

As the novel progresses, cockroaches emerge as the predominant metaphor for Nairobi's depraved populations. The Cockroach Dance is, in effect, chronicles how Dusman disposition toward these "milling masses" who "sweaty sticky, black pitch" (1979:57). The position is at first reactionary: "Give them a job, force them to work or take them out and let the army use them as dummies for target practice" (1979:58). However, there was a twist in his antics as a weak of sick leave gives Dusman and its living conditions. Slowly but surely, he begins to identify with the masses, beginning with "the faceless ones" who reside at Dacca House. Dusman becomes obsessed with Cockroaches, to the point of ordering them in a restaurant.

By the end of the novel, Dusman becomes a tentative revolutionary, who comes to the conclusion that "the wretched of the earth" like tenacious cockroaches that survive despite the odds, "will in the long run prize something out of the tight claws of the not so wretched" (1979:157). Dusman leads the Decca House tenants, the faceless ones that he once despised, in a rent strike that is unresolved as the novel ends.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the basic ideals in the work of Ngugi, as always: the negative effects of exploitation on the colonized, the alienation of people from their land and the fruits of their labour, the importance of cultural activity in the liberation process and specific examples of how greed, betrayal and racism characterize the history of the imperial impulse.

Wealso examined some novels of Meja Nwamgi. We affirmed that Nwangi affords us in his various treatments of the theme of friendship and interpersonal relationships valuable insights into the complex nature of human relationships. It was also emphasised that by focusing on individuals set in situations which bring out the best or worst in them, he enables us to come to a better understanding of their plights, their weaknesses and strengths.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o *Weep Not, Child*, London: Heinemann, 1964.

"*The River Between*, London: Heinemann, 1964

"*A Grain of Wheat*, London: Heinemann, 1967

"*Petals of Blood*, London: Heinemann, 1977

"*Caitaani Mutharaba-ini*, Nairobi, Kenya, Heinemann,1980.

"*Writers in Politics*. London: Heinemann, 1981

"*Decolonizing the Mind*: The Politics of Language in *African Literature Nairobi*, Kenya:Heinemann,1986

Cancel, Robert"Literary Criticism as social Philippic and personal Exorcism:

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o Critical writings" In *World LiteratureToday* 59 (Winter 1985).

Killam, G.D *An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi*, London: Heinemann,1980

Brian, Cox "Ngugi Wa Thiong'o" in *African Writers*, London: Macmillan, 2004

Nwangi, Meja *Kill Me Quick*, Nairobi: Heinemann,1973

"*Carcase for Hounds*, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1974

"*Going Down River Road*, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1976

"*The Cockroach Dance*, Nairobi: Longman, 1979.

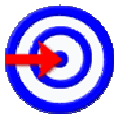
Ebele, Eko *"The Novels of Meja Nwangi"* In Samuel Osmo Asien and Albert Ashaolu, eds, *Studies in The African Novel*, Ibadan, Nigeria Ibadan University press, 1986.

Study Session 10

Thematic Thrusts in Wole Soyinka's Interpreters and Chinua Achebe's a Man of the People

Introduction

This Study Session aims at introducing you to the major thrusts and thematic affiliations in the works of two West African prolific novelists' (Soyinka and Achebe).Particularly, how their works reflected the realities of the periods and the transitory nature of the themes.



Learning Outcomes

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

10.1 *unite* in Soyinka's *Interpreters* and Achebe's *A Man of People.*

10.1 The Context of Soyinka and Achebe's Novels

The independence of many African countries and the change in the social political atmosphere of these countries has had discernible influence on fictional themes. It has removed, or at least distanced, the common enemy, colonialism, which has been the object of incessant attack, and has made clearer the limited validity of eulogies of the past. A new type of novel which seeks to interpret the present in terms of the human characteristics of an African Community without reference to the past has emerged. (1986). The present has brought new problems which cannot simply be explained in terms of an external enemy and from which it is impossible to escape the creation of romantic or heroic past. In the words of Achebe:

Most of Africa is today politically free; there are thirty-Six independent African states managing their own affairs-Sometimes very badly. A new situation has thus arisen. One of the writer's main functions has always been to expose and attack injustice. Should we keep at the old theme of racial injustice (sore as it is still) when new injustices have sprouted all around us? I think not (1966:138).

Achebe and Soyinka offer sharp insights into the problems and dilemmas of the new political order in Africa. They both capture vividly the decadence and sterility of the contemporary social and political set-up in many African Countries.

Tip

The social and political issues in postcolonial Nigeria form the crux of thematic thrusts in the novels of Soyinka and Achebe.

The Interpreters (1965), focuses on five recently returned university graduates of the generation of Nigerian independence and their corporate revolt against brazen government corruption, press dishonesty, and academic hypocrisy a revolt however, that is soon harmlessly deflected into so many private self-gratifying quests and elitist cults of sensibility.

The interpreters are all educated Nigerians in their late twenties: intellectuals, who for the most part, have been tutored overseas (and consequently referred to as "been-to's"), cosmopolites. They are Sagoe, a newspaper reporter, Sekoni, an engineer, Egbo, a civil servant in the Foreign office, Bandele, a teacher at Ibadan University, Kola, an artist, who also teaches at the University; and Lasunwon a lawyer, the least important of then group. According to Shalto Gakwandi:

> They are united by youthful energy, intellectual vigour and a cynical disapproval of the moral emptiness of their society. They also share a common interest in art and a desire to change the world around them. Through different media they all seek the power to transform. Kola uses the canvas, Sagoe the newspaper and Bandele the teaching profession. (1977:67)

Sekoni a scientist who intends to transform the world through technology, but is frustrated by vested interests. Egbo seeks to dominate men and to use them as material to model the kind of world he would like them to live in- although he is evidently uncertain about what kind of world he wants to create. Sekoni later turns to carving and achieves self-realization by creating a masterpiece, 'The Wrestler, which Kola refers to as one of those once-in-a-life co-ordinations of experience and record. However, this kind of impact has limitations. It is escapist in nature simply because, Art becomes a consolation and the act of creating compensates the artist's frustrated desire to change the world: he has power to order. The other 'interpreters' who cannot express themselves through art, find ways to associate themselves through art, find ways to associate themselves with Kola's pantheon, since it expresses their anxieties and enables them to have an understanding of their social situation and their destines, and becomes united to their limitations.

As the story begins, these sit characters and Sagoe's girl friend, Dehinwa, are drinking in a club in Lagos but almost immediately, there is a flashback relating an earlier incident with several of the same characters riding in a Canoe on a river at the site where Egbo's parents had drowned a number of years before. Egbo's obsession with the destructive aspects of water will be apparent throughout much of the novel, taking on the associations of rejuvenation fertility, and the life force, becoming the most important motif within the story, often used almost ritualistically.

Soyinka makes incessant use of flashback in *The Interpreters*. The use of Flashbacks and the juxtaposition and overlapping of several different

time levels is apparent in almost every chapter of the novel, though at the beginning this is much more confusing because the reader does not have enough information to piece together many of the incidents.

During the Carve trip, when the ride changes, Egbo suggests that they turn and go with the tide. The phrase has clearly satirical overtones which Kola catches immediately and says 'like apostates' The word apostasy has already been used, by Kola to describe the failure of the 'Interpreters' to translate their desire for change into positive action Egbo resents this situation more than anyone else this is as a result of his interest in power move than anyone else, and perhaps also partly because as a civil servant he leads a more restricted life than the others. But as he notifies them, they are all part of the system.

The kind of language Egbo uses to describe politicians reveals his dislike for them. He desires to be liberated from bearing the burdens of fools' (1965: 13) Later, during the same conversation he says Sagoe looks as a blank 'as a politician at a press conference. This contempt for politicians is shared by the rest of the group. In the words of Maduakaor, the interpreters are "apostates" in the sense that they are unfaithful to their own social convictions: they lack the moral courage to live up to the image of the ideal society they envision. They recognize in it, leading "pith to hollow reeds" as Egbo puts it. They recognize the need for change, but they are unwilling to try to bring it about. "Too busy" Egbo said in self mockery:

> Although I've never discovered during what and this is what I constantly ask-doing what beyond propping up the hearts and blubber men in fact doing what? Don't you ever fool that yon whole life might be sheer creek-surface bearing the burden of fools, mere passage a more reflecting medium or occasional sheet mass controlled by ferments beyond you? (1965:13).

The Interpreters suffer from an oppressive sense of alienation and rootlessness. They are alienated from both the academic and civil service arms of the establishment, and at the end of the novel they are alienated from themselves. Sekoni is the victim of the hostility of the system towards genuine intellectual integrity. His death is a ritual sacrifice to the demigods of the system on behalf on the interpreters. There have been several comments on the psychological defenses the interpreters erected for themselves against the psychic disintegration that ruined Sekoni: Egbo retreats to the loneliness of the rocks, and Sagoe maker verbal excursions into the philosophy of "Viodancy" a pun on the idle activities of the intellectual.

Another theme links Simi, the seductive sex goddess by association to the interpreters. In spite of her overpowering physical charms, she is a tragic figure; her clamming eyes emit an aura of sadness (1965:257) self fulfilment for her can only come through sexual consummation. Art for the interpreters becomes a means of escape from emptiness of their "creek surface" existence; each is to some measure an artist. Egbo is a mystic poet, and both he and Bandele are connected with the major artistic creations in the book Kola's canvas and Sekonis "Wrestler". Sagoe the Journalist is also an essayist and we learn from Kola that "Sagoe has a sort of seventh sense, a kind of creative antenna with which

he pursues his vocation (1965:288). Kola and Sekoni have at last attained self-fulfillment through art; the other interpreters achieve a sense of vicarious fulfillment in the masterly creations of these two major artists.

Soyinka used the term "interpreters" in a broad sense. Interpretation is for him, the act of evaluating experience. The reader is himself a major interpreter as are the religious mystic, Lazarus, and his unworthy acolyte, Noah. However, the major interpreters in the book are the introspective skeptical intellectuals Egbo, Kola Sekoni Bandele and Sagoe.

In the words of Obi Maduakor! Kola is a dedicated artist conscious of his limitations and unsparing in his self-criticism. He is a modest appraiser of his own abilities, for he is indeed gifted. He is at the centre of the novel within the context of the theme of creation? (1986:93). Kola the artist evaluates for the reader the mood of the interpreters towards the close of the novel:

And Kola, who tried to see all, who tried to clarify the pieces within the accommodating habit of time, felt much later, in a well-ordered and tranquil moment, that it was a moment of frustration that what was lacking that might was the power to take out events one by one, to space them in intervening stand stills to the period of creation (1963:244).

Sekoni's physical exist in the novel as a result of a fatal automobile accident with a lorry. The others are deeply affected in a number of ways, and the connecting threat of the remaining portion of the novel leads up to an exhibition of Sekoni's scriptures as a memorial for him. Although Sekoni's physical presence is brief, his shadow dominates the novel because Sekoni has reincarnated himself in the lasting artistic monument he leaves behind. "The Wrestler" is the symbol of what his life has been all along-struggle. The arrested energy within him is expressed in two instances powerful creations: the experimental power station of Ijioha and "The Wrestler".

Bandele's unyielding moral sensibility gathers a lot of storm throughout the novel. Sekoni's death and Lazarus' storm of his resurrection from death bring home Bandele the reality of death. Of his visit to Lazarus church, Bandele said:

> I would not have been curious to hear Lazarus if Sekoni had not recently died. Deep inside me, I suppose that was why I came (1965:181) Towards the end of the novel, Bandele becomes the voice of religion and of moral conscience, replacing Sekoni, who is dead, and Lazarus, whom the interpreters distrust. Because he is their equal Bandele's opinion carries far greater weight among his colleagues than Lazarus testimony. "Bandele's new role is strongly emphasized toward the end of the novel. "Bandele sat like a timeless image brooding over lesser beings" (1965:244). According to Maduakor, He is almost a god among men, a Jupiter hurbing a verbal hammer of reprimand against those who have offended against the moral law. (1966:95) Bandele's uncompromising moral principles give meaning to his life: he has at least something to time for: his conscience.

On Kola's Canvas Bandele should represent Orisa-Nla, the supreme Deity.

The Interpreters main subject seems to be art itself-seen either as an opiate or as a dangerously desensitizing influence the five artist-intellectuals concerned only with registering the "significance" of fugitive thief instead of helping him, cause his death through their collective indifference; unable to alter their society, Kola and his friends merely "interpret" it unlike Soyinka's sterility, In Achebe's *A Man of The People*, at least we know that there are potential elements of regeneration. We know there are patriotic politicians who have been silenced and we see some- young-idealist trying to change the situation. *The Interpreters* on the other hand the intellectuals are the most decadent group in society. The national university is the place where anstocratic social gatherings are arranged while the rest of the nation is starving. Nor are these parties simply a reflection of the relative affluence of the university community. They reflect completely foreign values and are organized in a style that is foreign to Nigeria. The values of this community reflected at social gatherings show the university to be a foreign body far removed from the interests of the society in which it is situated (1966).

CHINUA ACHEBE'S *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE*

This novel, which is set in the postcolonial period in an unnamed independent African Country. The quality of the leadership and the response of the people to that leadership are the central theme. There is neither collective will in the people no responsible leadership. Moreover, a collective voice at the village level, through which agreement is articulated. *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, no longer exists. To Achebe, the Consequences of the loss of predictable political power in a village are one thing, at the national level, they are quite different. This is the theme to which Achebe turns in this novel.

Chief Nanga the "man of the people" – and his colleague senior ministers of government, and their rivals in other political parties have produced what Achebe describes as a "fat dripping, gummy, eat-and-let-eat regime."

The novel depicts an atmosphere of material acquisitive unrestrained by traditional religious concerns in the midst of political corruption, where there no national voice but only (we inter) a confusion of competing village voices. The novel is a first-person retrospective narrative by Odili. At first wholly cynical about the political leadership of the country, Odili, a schoolteachers in his own village keeps a scornful distance from any political activity. Odili had once placed his faith in university trained public-minded leaders who believed that through their education and actions they would develop an economically viable and politically stable unified nation in the postcolonial period. But political opportunists, whom Nanga is a prominent example, have ensured that high-minded discredited in order to increase their personal fortunes at the expense of the public purse.

Odili himself, a man who judges others, is the most hypocritical. Although he has moral objections to Nanga's political conduct he finds himself shouting 'Hear! Hear!!" to the latter's spacious remarks at Anata

Grammar School, then adds aside like: ' I like to think that I meant it to be sarcastic' (!966:10), or: This time I clearly meant my tongue to be in my cheeks. As soon as Odili is offered a holiday in the Minister's house he becomes reconciled to or is willing to forget Nanga's political views. The fact is that Odili is all the time courting favours from Chief Nanga but he does not want to acknowledge it. He is always rationalizing motives and most of actions are insincere. In his works:

I must say that I was immediately taken with the idea of the common people's convention. Apart from everything else it would add a second string to my when I came to deal with Nanga. But right now I was anxious not to appear to max and his friends as the easily impressed type. I suppose I wanted to erase whatever impression was left to Max's unfortunate. If intentional presentation of me as a kind of portable jellyfish. So I made what intended to be a little spirited skeptical speech. (1966:78).

Odili is caught between his principles, his desire see things running well in the country on the one hand, and his vanity and selfishness on the other. This situation is no doubt partly due to the kind of education he has had, which has distanced him from the reality of his society. Max tries to make him see this reality. But Max too finds himself in a dilemma which leads him into hypocrisy. He is trying to rid the country of corruption and the yoke of foreign capitalism but finds that he has to accept money from a communist country. (1977:80)

Odili sole motive is to win a scholarship for study abroad and to abandon his country. But Nanga, his former teacher at the same school, pays a visit, remembers Odili, and offers him assistance in obtaining the coveted scholarship. Odili is swept away by Nanga's charisma and for a time sits at the feet of the politician master under Nanga's sway Odili re-examines some of his attitude towards the uses of political power and begins to question the reactions between political idealism and the practical application of political beliefs. However, Odili amicable relationship with Nanga comes to an end when Nanga steals Odili's mistress, Elsie. The enmity between the two characters that results moves the novel into its second part.

Odili plans to seduce Edna Nganga's "Parlour wife" to avenge his manhood. He joins new political party, the Common people's convention party, founded by his friends Max Kumalo. Initially Edua is the primary focus and polities are a secondary concern, but gradually as he engages in election struggle, his motives gradually shift. 'He probes more deeply into the political reality in relation to his own motives and into the possibility of creating a just system of government within the heterogeneous groupings of ethnics interests that make up the nation' (2004:28)

Though the story of Josiah, a village trader, Achebe examines the erosion of communal values in the novel. Josiah is so corrupt that early in the novel he steals a blind beggar's walking stick. The villagers scorn him, and a boycott ruins his store. Here, Collective communal will is asserted to connect a wrong because, in the words of a proverb, "Josiah has taken away enough for the owner to notice" Josiah reappears at a critical juncture in Odili's campaigns against Nanga. Odili appears at Nanga's

election raly in the village in order to denounce the latter's corruption, Josiah, who is now acting as a supporter of Nanga, denounces Odili. As a result, Odili is beaten up by Nanga's bodyguards and he is in the hospital when civil order breaks down completely political leaders are assassinated, fighting breaks out between the bodyguards of various contending political groups, and the prime minister appoints a new cabinet finally, thuggery and anarchy becomes the order of the day which resulted in the intervention of military who in turn takes over the government.

Recounting the fall of the regime, Odili's father says: Koko (a political leader) had taken enough for the owner to see." But for Odili this is not Satisfactory:

> My father's words struck me because they were the very same words the villagers of Anata had spoken of Josiah the abominated trader. Only in their case the words had meaning. The owner was the village and the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless (1966:166)

The books preposition that mere anarchy has replaced the laws of the village-stems from the growing tension in the far relationship between Odili and Nanga, Nanga is an engaging and credible character: this is what makes his apostasy so terrifying. Achebe leaves the novel open-ended: an impasse in the political system has been reached and military intervention is not a viable solution to the problems of political leadership.

In the words of Killam. "the novel is about more that public political life in a post independence state/ it is also about Odili's self-analysis within the public political context. Fresh out of university Odili sought to become "a full member of the privilege class whose symbol was the car" (1966:122)

A man of the People completes a tetralogy of novel that reveals the changes wrought in Nigerian life during the twentieth century. Against a background of changing and involving social and political realities, Achebe reveals his concern with individual humanity and with the responses of his characters to the social problems in which they become in which they become enmeshed. His interest is in failure for out of his characters responses to failure new possibilities arise. 'this is why *A Man of the People* is open-ended. At the close of the novel Odili begins to have a sense of what needs to be clone. Odili's discoveries allow for the possibility that a new political attitude will emerge' (2004:29)

A man of the people is regarded asa prophetic novel. Its publication in January 1966 coincided with the first military takeover in Nigeria. The worsening political situation in Nigeria led to the persecution of the Igbo people, most notably in Northern Nigeria, where a series of heartless massacres took place. The Eastern Region declared itself an independent state, Biafra, in 1967, and shortly after a thirsty-month civil war began.

Study Session Summary

Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the thematic thrusts of the novels of Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, Soyinka's *The Interpreters'* main subject seems to be art itself their antics and dispositions are dominated with sterility. In Achebe's *A Man of the People*, we noted that, there are potential elements of regeneration. We know there are patriotic politicians who have been silenced and we see some young idealists trying to change the situation.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Achebe, Chima *A Man of the People*, London: Heinemann, 1966

"The Black Writer's Burden, Presence Africaine, vol.31, page 138:1966.

Soyinka, Wole*The Interpreters*, London: Andne Deutsch, Heinemann 1965.

Maduakor, Obi*Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to His Writing*. New York: Garland press, 1986.

Moore, Gerald *Wole Soyinka*, London: Evans, 1971.

Osundare, Niyi"Words of Iron, sentences of thunder: Soyinka's prose style" In African literature Today 13 (1983).

Wright Derek"Wole Soyinka" in *African writers* C. Brian edited, Macmillan, 2004

Kellam, G.DChinua Achebe" in *African Writers* C. Brian Cox edited, Macmillan, 2004.

Study Session 11

North African Novels

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will briefly examine North African novels. For a very long time, North African Literary works has been inaccessible due to language barrier and this had since deprived this region of Africa its rich authentic background. However, efforts by interested scholars in the Arabic language have yielded positive results as some of the gifted writers from the region have been show–cased.

Learning Outcomes

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

11,1*analyse* novels from North African based on their climatic and stylistic pre-occupations.

11.1Mohammed Dib's Literary Works

Mohammed Dib is believed the greatest indigenous North African writer in the French Language, yet public awareness of his work falls far short of its significance. He was burn in Tlemcen in western Algeria on 21 July 1920. Among his earliest Novels are: *La Grande Maison* (1952; the big horse), L'Incendie (1952; The fire) and *Le Métier a Tisser* (1957; The Loom) form a trilogy set in Colonist Algeria that depicts the gradual increase of radical political awareness. These early work are far from being the most personal. Their relatively limpid and largely descriptive style, together with their subject matter (The childhood and adolescence of a youth of humble background), has made them popular in school textbooks and in ideologically based literary studies.

The odyssey of the young hero Omar, serves as a useful means in all three Novels for showing urban squalor, the first pleasant uprising in the country side, and the political apprenticeship of the new industrial labour class. A closer reading shows that Dib was already fascinated by the power of words, a fascination that came to haunt him increasingly as his writing matured

La Grande Maison and *L'Incendie* complement each other, since first describes extreme poverty in the cities and the second deals with one of the earliest violent protests in the rural areas historically the Algerian resolution was essentially a peasant phenomenon, just as colonialism was christened by extensive landed estates.

In *La Grande Maison*, Omar's mother, a widow named Aini, is driven to various expedients, including smuggling, to feed for cholera. Omar

discovers that unofficial racial and class apartheid of two sections of the same city largely unaware of each other. Influenced more by how this school master and a communist named Hamid Sarai (who reappears in L'Incendie) behave by what they say in lesson, Omar begins asking political question.

L'Incendie, too, uses the child to record the injustice of the word, but a closer reading shows that she realism sought is not realism at since the abuse of colonization are describes exclusively in highly metaphorical and highly poetic-peasant language, which Hamid Sarai himself take as little as possible, but he listen to the peasant even when what they say does not seem to be but in reality is political the Novel is essentially an illustration of the way in which peasant speech, normally least attended by politicization (largely an urban phenomenon), become politicized of its own accord.

Qui se souvient de la mer (Who Remember the Sea) was published in 1962. The Novel depicts the Algerian conflict with the choice of fantasy over realism to suggest the horror of the war.

Who Remember the Sea as the story of a quest and an initiation the narrator's pursuit of the in attainable woman he loves through cities that are juxtaposed and superimposed but always hostile leads him progressively to shed his self accept his transfer to the "Other side." An ideological reader would be satisfied to interpret this journey as a metaphor for the recruitment of the narrator into the resistance.

The reader is invited to dig deeper by the next work, *course sur la rive sauvage* (1964,

Course on the savage shore). Perhaps Dib's most obscure novel, it depicts the other side in terms of a "savage shore, on which one finds himself after agreeing to lose everything, including one's self. On the shore only the uncontrollable laughter of Helle- the hero's guide in the perilous search for Radia-echoes 'from one end of the world to the other.''

In another novel, *La Danse du roi* (1968, the kings dance), Rodwan and Arfia are further resistance fighters. Their interconnected accounts lead to a stunned realization that the new city prefers to forget the violence that has brought it into being and to expose the heroes to mocking as they act out mad take of derring-do.

Rodwan and Arfia are subject to radiance because nether has reconvened from the deaths he has caused and because neither is capable of love which cannot be dissociated from death. Their interwoven account strives in vain to conquer a huge unspeakable souse of guilt. At the and of the novel, all that is left is the mockery of the ludicrous exhibition suddenly played out in front of item; beyond the exhibition there is only emptiness-the same emptiness that harks behind all speech, behind the act of writing, and derive ultimately from loss. The terrible mockery arising from the impossibilities of expressing the reality of war through the medium of woods is a challenge already encountered in *who remember the seas.* The king parodied in the closing spectacle is also the cleric arriving too late at the banquet (if one actually took place) given by the rich citizen Chadly.

In Dieu en Barbaries (1970: God in Barbary) and in Le Maitre De Chasse (1973, The Huntmaster), The characters in their quests for identity come up with answers that are as hollow as they are contradictory. Dieu en Barbie centers in a retrospectively prophetic manner, on the loneliness of Kamal Waed, a political leader who sincerely seeks his country's good but is able to achieve this only by eclipsing its memory and very identify. Much closer, paradoxically, to that reality is French aid worker Jean-Marie Aymard, who has joined the Meadicants of God in their search for a true (and nonreligious) identity, an identity predating civilization, including even splendid Roman ruins to which a poverty striker peasant woman, riding through on her donkey, pays absolutely no attention.

Kamal seeks symbolitically to find out who paid for the education that enabled him to obtain the high position he now occupies. The answer is as laughable as the one given to the hero of *Cours sur la rive sauvage;* this novel too, ends on "his big shrill laugh which echoed and re-echoed in the lonely night".

In *Le Maitre de Chasse*, the mendicants of God have gone to seek an answer in the poorest and most remote village far from all "civilization". The mission ends in strategy when the army sent by Kamal to put down the resulting disorder opens fire. But the violence is without purpose, because the mendicants of God fails to find the answer they seek. Indeed, it is doubtful whether any answer can be given in words. The village people, at with the stony ground on which they live, have refused the assistance this band of city folk has come to bring them, and ultimately the answer the mendicants receive is no anwer at all. It boils down to the word *nothing*, as Tijani, one of the Mendicants, find out:

> *Nothing*. That fills me with joy. An answer that boils down to the word "nothing" who could ask for more? I'm happy with that ; I want nothing else. Its now the turn of the pupil of the daytime, dilated on these mountains, to speak. It's the turn of the wind and light sweeping their emptiness. It's the turn of the afternoon-an afternoon that wont do any longer. (1973:73).

Importantly, these two novels question modernity in a particular anguished manner; first and foremost to be questioned is the modernity of an Algeria in the throes of an identity crisis.

Dib's entire work can be read as the successive peeling off of all the superimposed masks of literature as pretense, right up to the discovery of a verso side, of a world this side of madness that this story-reality might constitute. A common thread running throughout Dib's work could be this mockery, the very essence of the text's literary thusion of words' constant loss of reality.

11.2 Yusuf Idris' Literary Works

Born in a small Egyptian village, al-Bayrum on 19 May 1927; Yusuf Idris put the short story as a new and destructive literary genre on the cultural map of Egypt and the Arab World. Yusuf was the most influential and prolific of the Arab writers who started their careers in the 1950s, amid the euphoria of independence.

Idris first novel, *Quissat hubb* (Love Story) appeared in 1956, followed by Al-Haram (1959; The Sin) Al-Ayb (1962; Shame) Rijal wa thiran (1964; Men and Oxen), and Al-Bayda (1970; The white woman) His first novel, *Quissat Hubb*, can be read as a story of the political prisoner to whom Farahat outlines his social utopia in the furt story. The protagonist of *Quissat Hubb*, Hamzah, does not continue himself to dreams or Utopia projects but works for a just and independent Egypt. The novel is the story of Hamzah's hiding, his growing dependence on fawziyyah, and their falling in love. But it is also the story of Egypt and able new type of liberating love that it crave. Idris demonstrates how the emergence of this new healthy love is inseparable from the struggle for the country's independence changing outmoded attitudes about class and gender and the discovery of the collective potential of the people.

Idris begins the novel from Hamzah's perspective and gradually moves toward a more balanced polyphonic narrative that reflects the process of transformation. The narrative device of hiding from the police reverses the power relations that were established in the camp. Curtails Hamzah's unlimited power, and enables the heroine to have more control over the process of mutual development. The happy ending and optimistic tone of *Quissat Hubby*, which Idris wrote while imprisoned for his political views, are in clear contrast to the following three novels written after his release.

In Al-Haram (1959: The Sim), which is set in the country side and deals with one of the more complex themes in his work, sex, to demonstrate how relating individual experience involves telling the collective narrative of the oppressed. The story of the unfortunate sin of a poor peasant woman is delicately. Constructed through a combination of first and third-person narratives that allows Idris to elaborate the social and psychological elements of the action. It is a complex study of the individual's psychology and the collective psyche of rural Egypt in which the interplay of class, gended, and power is aptly expressed. In the words of Sarby Hafez:

> It also constitutes a major step in Idris' quest to define the nature of the Egyptian concepts of sex, sin, and shame. (2004:360)

In Egyptian society, sex is regarded as 'ayb (shame) and Haram (sin) and hence because taboo, but the Islamic Egyptian concept of sin, Idris maintains, is radically different from its Judeo Christian counterpart and is coded in highly complex social modes. This difference is graphically depicted in the structure of the novel. The plot appears to focus on the sin of an individual woman, Azizah, but beneath this simple story Idris exposes the social nature of the individual conscience.

The stark difference between the order of the narrative and that of the story, in which the telling of Azizah's sin, her pregnancy, and the birth and killing of her baby is delayed to chapter 14, reveals how the social aspects of the Egyptian concept of *Haram* take priority over individual ones. Delaying the story of the individual's sin allows Idris to elaborate on the reactions of the various groups and centers of power in the village after the discovery of the murdered newborn.

In the first thirteen chapters, Idris presents the villagers responses to sin in order to show the social nature of the individual's sense of guilt and how these collective responses constitute the specificity of the concept of *haram* that infiltrates every aspect of social life.

"The last three chapters, which follow the telling of Azizah's tale, interweave the perspective of the individual with that of society and reveal the hidden dynamic of *haram* and how it is tinged with hypocrisy. (2004:360) her act is strongly condemned in public but intensely desired in secret, collectively rejected but individually craved.

In *Al-Ayb* (1962: shame), Idris continues to explore the paradoxical nature of the social-sexual code by bringing a bureaucracy and its structured groups into the equation and moving the action from the village to the city. Through the story of an innocent, idealistic, and naïve young woman, Sana , who goes to work in a highly corrupt, governmental licensing office, Idris lays-bare the dynamics of the interaction between the concepts of ayb and haram. In addition to the themes of innocence and corruption, the novel deals with the intrusion of women into a world that has been the exclusive preserve of men. With the arrival of Sana, both the fragile coexistence of conflicting codes of morality and old group dynamics are severely threatened.

All the men in the office are contaminated by bribery and corruption. They retain their sanity by making a distinction between their public word of evil and their private world of honour and morality. Idris posits the solidarity of the group and its elaborate justification of its conduct against the vulnerability of the isolated individual, armed only with moral values that have no exchange value.

In the words of Sarby Hafiz:

> The obstinate individual's refusal to participate in the fraudulent activity of the group turns the small office into a living hell (2004:361)

One of the remarkable textual strategies in this novel is the manipulation of social and geography space around she heroine and the group. The conflict between the two comes to a head when Sana' faces a severe economic crisis as a result of her family responsibilities, the very excuse used buy new for their vices.

The novel is a study of the context and process that lead from innocence to corruption from social and moral good to evil through the stifling of value judgments and the conflicts of economic and social values. As in his other novels, Idris uses the individual to reveal the dynamics of the group; the gloomy end of the novel foreshadows the pervasive corruption that prevailed in the following decades.Idris enduring popularity results primarily from his ability to bring fresh insight into the most familiar situations, characters, and locations.

11.3Nawal al-Saadawi'sLiterary Works

Saadawi, a leading Egyptian feminist, writer, psychiatrist, and political activist is known above all for her sincere and courageous struggle against oppression, both mental and physical, of women. As a result of

her literary and scientific writings against the oppression of women in the Arab world, she was imprisoned in 1981 under president AnwarAl Sadat of Egypt and later released by Husni Mubarak.While al-sadaawi has criticized the government for being only nominally democratic and for playing into also accused militant fundamentalists of invoking the name of God for political ends and for misinterpreting Islam in order to reinforce the patriarchal system. This critism has resulted in her name appearing on a death list issued by extremist Islamic Organizations.

11.3.1Feminist Ideals

Al-Saadawi believes that women's rights and human rights are one and not the same as Egypt's leading feminist: "You cannot separate the liberation of women from the liberation of the land and the economy and the culture and the language" she says (interview by Winokur, P.D-7). She believes that the Arab world has answered to foreign interests for too long and that, until it rediscovers, its independence, Arab women cannot be holly free. In her view; it is the legacy of years western colonialism not Islam, that is the main obstacle to progress in the Arab world: Western influence has hindered rather than benefited the liberation of women in Arab countries.

11.3.2Thematic Preoccupation of al-Saadawi's Fiction

Al-Saadawi's a writer who, we sense has lived through the issues about which she writes. She has talked about the conflict in her life between science and art, that is between her role as a doctor and her role as a writer.

Al-Saadawi is part of a generation of Egyptian women writers concerned with articulating women's voice and challenging the male monopoly on discourse. The strongly patriarchal nature of both Arabic society and it traditional literary establishment has made the emergency of women's discourse extremely difficult.

Al-Saadawi has deliberately chosen to break with the traditions of Arabic letters and adopt a simple yet powerful style to make her work accessible to a wider Arabic-language readership.

The most sticking feature of al-saadawi's works is the Central narrative role she gives to her heroines strategically positing a woman's voice as a direct challenge to the patriarchal thought that seeks to suppress that voice.

More than any other contemporary Egyptian writer, al-saadawi concerns herself with the body. Her novels display the need for her heroines to transcend the body to go beyond its social and physical constraints – in order to gain control of their voice. The female body of al-saadawi's heroines is wounded, bleeding, chained, and shackled. She must retrieve it before she can articulate her new discourse-an alternative truth and a narrative instrument that permits her to vie with the male writer in the process of textual creation.

11.3.3Nawal al-Saadawi's Novels

Women at point Zero (1976) is a story told to al-saadawi, in her capacity as a psychiatrist, by Firdaus, a prostitute, on the eve of her execution for murdering her pimp is a story of a woman's attempts to escape male denomination: by her father, uncle, husband, employer, pimp. The only choice she is given in life is death.

Firdaus' body, which has been violated throughout her young life, is reclaimed symbolically beyond death through her words and voice. Her voice can only be transmitted to another woman in an enclosed prison cell and will release itself only when her imminent death allows her symbolically to transcend the boundaries of society to a world beyond without limitations. The "dangerous and wild truth" she transmits is a challenge to male discourse and rises higher and higher-a voice described by Assia Djebar as one "that does not sigh, that does not complain, that accuses" (1990:386).

Behind the voice of the righteous prostitute in Cairo is the strong voice of al-saadawi, the contemporary Arab writer who is addressing every woman in a society in which sexual oppression is only just beginning to be recognized: I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live nor do I any longer fear to die. I want nothing I fear nothing. Therefore. I am free… This freedom I enjoy fills them with anger. They would like to discover that there is afterall something which I desire, fear, or hope for. Then they can enslave me once more (1976:100)

God Dies By The Nile (1976), is one of al-saadawi's boldest statements against Islam and official religions discourse. She considers it her most significant novel, one that contains a metaphor for the regime of Anwar al-sadat and explores the class dimension of the oppression of women as well as men.

All the centre of this story is Zakeya, an illiterate peasant woman whose two nieces are sexually exploited and victimized by the major in a genre of desire and power that he can win only through the support of the other three important men of the village Sheikh Hamzawi of the mosque, who symbolizes Islam ; Sheikh Zahran, chief of the village guard, who symbolizes law enforcement; and hajj Ismail, the village barber and mediator, who knows all the village sebets. All three power bases operate through a system of corruption in which peasants are systematically exploited and duped into submission.

Zakeya is a formerly religious woman who, with the realization that-for her- Allah is dead, frees herself from the painful ignorance of her life as a poor woman. She understands the source of her oppression and nursery and in her mind has destroyed it. In prison she says. " I know its Allah my child… He's over there, my child. I buried him over there on the bank of the Nile" (1976:138)

Study Session Summary

Summary

This Study Session discussed the novels of three notable North African writers – Mohammed Dib, Yusuf Idris and Nawal Al-Saadawi. Mohammed Dib's work can be read as the successive peeling off all the superimposed masks of literature as pretense. One of the remarkable textual strategies of Yusuf Idris novels is a study of Context and process that lead from innocence to corruption, from social and moral good to evil. In Nawal al-saadawi's novels, she is seen as a writer who is committed to feminist ideals, through activism.

Assessment

Assessment

Required

References

Mohammed, Dib *The Big House*, Paris, Seuil, 1952

"*The Fire, Paris*, Seuil, 1954.

"*The Loom, Paris*, Seuil, 1957

Yusuf Idris *Love Story*, Cairo, 1956

" *The Sin*, Cairo, 1959

Nawal al-saadawi *Women at Point Zero*, London: Zed, 1983

"*God Dies By The Nile*, London: Zed, 1985.

Badran, Margot, (Eds) *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab feminist Writing* – London: Virago, 1990

Dinah, Manisty"Naval Al-saadawi" in *African Writers*, London: Heinemann, 2004.

Zeidan, Joseph *Arab Women Novelists:The Formative Years and Beyond.* Albany: York Press, 1995.

Bibliography

http://www.nou.edu.ng/noun/NOUN_OCL/pdf/pdf2/ENG%20181%20Introduction%20to%20Prose%20Fiction..pdf

http://www.bartleby.com/60/161.html

http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~cpercy/courses/eng6365-walters.htm

http://abbynet.sd34.bc.ca/lkemp/REDBOOK/prosefiction42red.pdf?FCItemID=S03EE60DD

http://erwin-tesol.blogspot.com/2012/11/the-elements-of-prose-fiction_1320.html

http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/download/13065/14148

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/style-blog/wp/2013/03/22/humble-beginnings-of-chinua-achebes-things-fall-apart/

http://www.shmoop.com/things-fall-apart/summary.html

http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/123456789/6281

http://afrrevjo.net/journals/laligens/Vol_2_no_1_art_8_Enighe.pdf

http://afrolegends.com/2010/07/30/le-vieux-negre-et-la-medaille/

http://www.jstor.org/stable/40238741

http://www.enotes.com/topics/interpreters

http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v8/v8i4a19.htm

All web links retrieved September, 2013.