



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COURSE CODE: ENG 417

COURSE TITLE: Postcolonial African Literature

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**COURSE
GUIDE**

**ENG 417
POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to ENG 417: Postcolonial African Literature. It is a three-credit unit course for 400 level students in the Department of English. It comprises 19 study units subdivided into four modules. The course is meant to acquaint students with the nature of post-colonial African literature and its application to the whole range of the literary output across Africa since the end of the colonisation of the peoples. The course is diachronic even though the subject matters of the writers are not necessarily the same. In this wise, one could safely call the whole period since the 1950s on the African continent postcolonial as many of the peoples of Africa actually got their deliverance from colonial rule mostly from this period onwards. It is also historically known that the colonial period actually ceased from about the middle of the 20th Century. Literatures of the peoples of the world thus got into the post-colonial era since the stated period. Thus, at the end of the course, students would be exposed to literatures that were presented to the public within this diachronic period.

Furthermore, this course aims to engage students in a dialogue on the intercultural encounters inevitable in the reading and analysis of the African literature. The course will prove an exciting journey to and through the thinking and life of the African people as you hear and read the texts of postcolonial African writings. It seeks to show that African literature is not a homogenous whole, rather, it exists where national and ethnic cultures are in reality enormously varied. It also actively connects with issues that are intimately influenced by the socio-cultural and political conditions of Africa. The course will develop as consistently as possible a discussion on the theory and issues that inform and affect African literature.

COURSE AIMS

This course introduces you to the colonial and postcolonial African literature and theory. Generally, the course tackles, probably, one of the most controversial aspects of African literature, namely “post-colonial” writings. In this course, we shall study some of the proponents of postcolonial theory. We will also use a selection of some African texts to examine the nature of the postcolonial as well as what the term “postcolonial” actually means. The importance of postcolonial studies in a globalised world in which ‘more than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism,’ cannot be overestimated (See ‘Introduction’, *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin). The course,

in particular, will use postcolonial theory to engage critically with texts within a postcolonial framework. Basically, at the end of the course, you should:

- be able to define the term ‘postcolonial African literature’
- be able to discuss some of the major proponents of postcolonial theory
- have a critical awareness of the wide-ranging impacts of colonialism and how these have been treated in various periods in different types of text
- have a sound understanding of the main issues in postcolonial African literature today, along with the appropriate critical vocabulary.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As already stated, this course examines the emergence of what has come to be known as ‘Postcolonial African literature’. You are encouraged to take a critical approach to this term, examining different approaches to its literary, cultural, theoretical and political aspects. An examination of the critical responses to colonialism will enable students place postcolonial African literature at the centre of a complex web of ideas and ideology about the nature and role of literature, especially in the African continent. At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- develop the capacity to think critically about postcolonial African literatures in a comparative framework
- develop the capacity to understand how the genres or forms in which writers treat postcolonial issues shape their representation of postcolonial realities and identities
- arrive at an understanding of how the postcolonial situation is represented and interrogated in texts from Africa
- arrive at an understanding of how identities are formed in the context of class, gender, and ethnicity in formerly colonised African nations
- express their understanding of specific literary texts as postcolonial African texts.

WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

To complete the course, you are required to read the study units and other related materials. You will also need to undertake practical exercises for which you need a pen, a notebook and other materials that will be listed in this guide. The exercises are to aid you in understanding what postcolonial African literature encompasses. At the end of the course, you will write a final examination.

COURSE MATERIALS

The major materials you will need for this course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Relevant textbooks, including the ones listed under references/further reading
4. Assignment file
5. Presentation schedule

STUDY UNITS

There are 17 study units in this course, divided as follow:

Module 1 An Overview of Postcolonial Theory

- Unit 1 Postcolonial Theory: A Plethora of Definitions
- Unit 2 Stages of Postcolonial Theory
- Unit 3 Central Tenets of Postcolonial Theory
- Unit 4 Key Terminologies in Postcolonial Theory

Module 2 Major Proponents of Postcolonial Theory

- Unit 1 Edward Said
- Unit 2 Homi Bhabha
- Unit 3 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Module 3 Africa in the Eyes of Europe: Colonial Representations of Africa in Literature

- Unit 1 Literature in the Service of Empire: Colonial Representations of Africa in Literature
- Unit 2 Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

- Unit 3 Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*
Unit 4 Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

Module 4 Postcolonial African Literature

- Unit 1 Overview of African Literature
Unit 2 Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart* as a Postcolonial Text
Unit 3 J.M Coetzee's *Foe* as a Postcolonial Text
Unit 4 Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* as a Postcolonial Text
Unit 5 Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* as A Postcolonial Text
Unit 6 Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* as a Postcolonial Text

TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES

Many books and articles have been recommended in the course. You may wish to purchase them for further reading.

Achebe, Chinua. (1978). "An image of Africa: Racism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*". *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 9, No.1, Special Issue on *Literary Criticism*. (Spring), pp. 1-15.

Achebe, Chinua. (2006). "The Politics of Language". In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin (Eds.). (2nd ed.). London, New York: Routledge.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi.(2008). "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience." *Transition*, No. 99, pp 42-53. Also known as "The http://www.ted.com/speakers/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie.html.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. (2002). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*. London, New York: Routledge. (2nd ed.).

Balogun, Jide. (2011). 'Approaches to Modern Literary Theories'. www.unilorin.edu.ng/publications/balogun/Doc5.pdf.

Bennett, Andrew & Nicholas Royle.(2009). "Racial Difference" and "The Colony". In *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Pearson Longman, (4th ed.).

- Bhabha, Homi K. (2004). "Of Mimicry and Man". *The Location of Culture*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Childs, Peter & R. J. Patrick Williams.(1996). "Introduction: Points of Departure," in *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, Prentice Hall.
- Conrad, Joseph. (1950). *Heart of Darkness* and *The Secret Sharer*. New York: New American Library.
- Culler, Jonathan. (1997). *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- During, Simon. (1999). *The Cultural Studies Reader*. (Ed.). London: Routledge.
- Eagleton, T. (1996). *Literary Theory: An Introduction, Second Edition*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. (1961). "On National Culture" "The So-Called Dependency Complex" and "The Fact of Blackness" in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto Press.
- Hall, Stuart. (1979). "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse".In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.
- Hall, Stuart. (1990). "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Jonathan Rutherford. (Ed.). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Jussawalla, Feroza. (1997). "Kim, Huck and Naipaul: Using the Postcolonial Bildungsroman to (Re) define Postcoloniality" in *Links & Letters* 4, (25-38).
- Lugard, Frederick. (2005). "The Value of British Rule in the Tropics to British Democracy and the Native Races." In *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism* Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair. (Eds). Oxford: Berg.
- Mishra, Vijay & Bob Hodge. (1991). "What is Post (-) colonialism?" in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart Stanton, Gareth, & Maley Willy.(1997). *Postcolonial Criticism*. (Eds). New York: Addison, Wesley, Longman.

Rice, Philip & Waugh Patricia. (1998). *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. (4th ed.). New York: Routledge.

Richter, David H. (1998). *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. (Ed.). Bedford Books: Boston.

Rivkin, Julie & Ryan, Michael. (1998). *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. (Eds). Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell.

Said, Edward. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Senghor, Léopold Sédar. (2005). “Negritude,” in *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*. (Eds). Gaurav Desai & Supriya Nair, Oxford: Berg.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. (2008). ‘Questions of Multiculturalism.’ In D. Lodge & N. Wood *Modern Criticism and Theory*. (Eds). Harlow: Pearson/Longman.

Spurr, David. (1993). “Affirmation” and “Negation.” In *The Rhetoric of Empire*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Thiong'o, Ngugi Wa. (1986). “Decolonising the Mind”. In *The Language of African Literature*.

Tyson, Lois. (2006). *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge

Welleck, Rene & Warren, Austin. (1973). *Theory of Literature*. Middlesex: Penguin Books Limited.

ASSIGNMENT FILE

An assignment file and a marking scheme will be made available to you. In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for the course.

TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

You will need to submit a specified number of Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs). Every unit in this course has a tutor-marked assignment. The total mark for assignments is 30%. However, you need to note that the University currently administers electronic TMAs of 20 items each. It is thus obvious that the whole course material will likely be covered in providing the standard four TMAs. You are advised to go through the whole of your course material in order to do well. Nonetheless, the best three of the four TMAs will be used for your final grading.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them. Nonetheless, this is an estimate.

Unit	Title	Week's Activity	TMA
	Course Guide	1	
Module 1: An Overview of Postcolonial Theory			
1	Postcolonial Theory: A Plethora of Definitions	2	
2	Overview of Postcolonial Theory	3	
3	Central Tenets of Postcolonial Theory	4	
4	Key Terminologies in Postcolonial Theory	5	TMA1
Module 2 Major Proponents of Postcolonial Theory			
1	Edward Said	6	
2	Homi Bhabha	7	
3	Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak	8	TMA2
Module 3 Africa in the Eyes of Europe: Colonial Representations of Africa in Literature			
1	Literature in the Service of Empire: Colonial Representations of Africa in Literature	9	
2	Joseph Conrad's <i>Heart of Darkness</i>	10	
3	Joyce Cary's <i>Mister Johnson</i>	11	
4	Daniel Defoe's <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	12	TMA3
Module 4 Postcolonial African Literature			
1	Overview of African Literature	13	
2	Chinua Achebe <i>Things Fall Apart</i> as a Postcolonial Text	14	

3	J.M Coetzee's <i>Foe</i> as a Postcolonial Text	15	
4	Ayi Kwei Armah's <i>The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born</i> as a Postcolonial Text	16	
5	Ngugi wa Thiong'o's <i>Devil on the Cross</i> as a Postcolonial Text	17	TMA4
6	Ben Okri's <i>The Famished Road</i> as a Postcolonial Text	18	
	REVISION	19	
	EXAMINATION		
	TOTAL	19	

FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination of **ENG 417** will be of three-hour duration. All areas of the course will be examined. Find time to read the study units all over before your examination. The final examination will attract 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have come across in the course. All areas of the course will be assessed. You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will also find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments before the final examination.

COURSE MARKING SCHEME

The total marks accruable to you from this course are broken down as follows:

Assessment	Marks
Assignments	Four assignments of 10% each, out of which the best three are selected to make up 30% of the total marks
Final Examination	70% of the total course marks
Total	100%

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might give you some

reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from your course guide. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it. The contact details of members of the course team are also provided on the credit page of the course material for any clarifications you may need. Follow the following advice carefully:

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment.
2. Organise a study schedule.
3. Note the time you are expected to spend each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on and write your own dates for working on each unit.
4. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please, let your tutor know before it is too late to get help.
5. Turn to Unit 1 and read the Introduction and the Objectives for the unit.
6. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
7. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit, you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
8. Review the objectives for each unit to make sure that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.

9. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
10. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
11. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the Course Objectives (listed in the Course Guide).
12. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up-to-date course information will be continuously available there.

TUTORS AND TUTORIALS

There are eight hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. Every unit in this course has a tutor-marked assignment. The total mark for assignments is 30%. However, you need to note that the University currently administers electronic TMAs of 20 items each. It is thus obvious that the whole course material will likely be covered in providing the standard four TMAs. You are advised to go through the whole of your course material in order to do well in your e-assignments. The best three of the four TMAs will be used for your final grading. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor or any member of the course team if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings
- you have difficulty with the self-assessment exercises
- you have a question or problem with assignment, or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have for a face-to-face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a

question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

SUMMARY

ENG 417 introduces you to a burgeoning field in literary studies known as postcolonial African literature and theory. Literatures from Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent, representative of cultures emerging from colonial rule, are often described as postcolonial. In this course, you will learn the central tenets of postcolonial theory and then proceed to a sampling of literary texts that foreground a number of these issues. As the title suggests, postcolonial African literature implies the literatures produced by formerly colonised nations in Africa. Such literatures are concerned with the way colonial subjects are produced in and by the “Empire”. Postcolonial African literature, therefore, is a tool by which the colonised subjects “write back” to “Empire”, engaging with themes like identity, belonging, exile, place, language, sovereignty and Hybridity. The course will explore the pervasive artistic, psychological and political impact of colonisation through a reading of both literary texts and critical essays.

At the end of the course you should have become an acute reader of literary and cultural texts, with an understanding of the social, political and cultural implications at work in the production of texts; developed a capacity for critical thinking as you will be equipped with the tools to perform critical analysis of literature, culture and history; understood the role that literature plays in the construction of cultural norms, the maintenance of cultural hegemony and the production and contestation of ideologies of the centre. This Course Guide gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study.

We wish you the best as you study the course!

MODULE 1 AN OVERVIEW OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Unit 1	Postcolonial Theory: A Plethora of Definitions
Unit 2	Stages of Postcolonial Theory
Unit 3	Central Tenets of Postcolonial Theory
Unit 4	Key Terminologies in Postcolonial Theory

UNIT 1 POSTCOLONIAL THEORY: A PLETHORA OF DEFINITIONS

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	The Emergence of Postcolonial Theory
3.2	Locating the “Post” in Postcolonial Theory
3.3	Theoretical Postulations of Postcolonialism
3.4	Criticisms against Postcolonial Theory
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
7.0	References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial theory is a diffuse interdisciplinary field influenced by various thinkers such as Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Aizaz Ahmad etc. It is a field of literary criticism which seeks to provide critical reflections about Western imperialism and colonialism. In the late 1970s, this concept was used by some literary critics to describe the emergence of a more critical understanding of the effects of colonisation. In this new context, the idea of the ‘postcolonial’ entailed a rupture with precedent interpretations of colonialism. Related to this critical approach, postcolonial theory has often been defined as a political project designed to promote the contesting of colonial domination and to critique the legacies of colonialism. Postcolonial literature uses the language and literary forms of the colonisers to write about the history and mythology of the colonised. Thus, postcolonial literature is by nature transformative, and often subversive. It presents a hybrid culture, history and literature.

Lois Tyson (2006), in *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Manual*, holds that as a domain within literary studies, postcolonial criticism is both a subject matter and a theoretical framework. As a subject matter, postcolonial criticism analyses literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of colonial contact to the present. Some of these literatures were written by the colonisers. Much more of it was written, and is being written, by colonised and formerly colonised peoples. As a subject matter, any analysis of a postcolonial literary work, regardless of the theoretical framework used, might be called postcolonial criticism. Postcolonial criticism focuses on the literature of cultures that developed in response to British colonial domination. However, as a theoretical framework, postcolonial criticism seeks to understand the operations—politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically—of colonialist and anti-colonialist ideologies. For example, a good deal of postcolonial criticism analyses the ideological forces that, on the one hand, pressed the colonised to internalise the colonisers’ values and, on the other hand, promoted the resistance of colonised peoples against their oppressors, a resistance that is as old as colonialism itself. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a foundational text of postcolonial theory and criticism. In this unit, we are going to attempt a definition as well as locate the signification of the prefix ‘post’ in postcolonial theory and criticism.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Attempt a definition of post-colonialism
- locate the signification of the prefix ‘post’ in postcolonial theory and criticism
- offer a general background to postcolonial theory and criticism
- list some of the criticisms levelled against postcolonial theory and criticism.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Emergence of Postcolonial Theory

In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (1989), Bill Ashcroft *et al* aver that the term ‘postcolonial’ is used to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by the European imperial aggression. This definition covers the world as it was and still is during and after the period of European imperial domination, and includes literatures from Africa, Australia, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka, including the United States of America. The postcolonial theory explains that the imperial centre still manipulates the language and literary mode as a way of subsuming the colonised; giving the impression that the emergent literary efforts of these societies are a “variant” of the “original” and thus inferior. Postcolonial literatures therefore wage war against such assumptions. Ashcroft *et al* (1995:11) further explain that “the idea of “postcolonial literary theory” emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing.” The postcolonial literary discourse thus, is a response to the mono-centrism of the “centre” that serves to relegate the colonized to the “margin”. Postcoloniality challenges the “Universalism” of Western epistemologies, while espousing an alternative.

According to Jide Balogun (2011), post-colonialism as a literary theory, emerged in the late 19th century and thrived throughout the 20th century. Post-colonialism is a literary approach that gives a kind of psychological relief to the people (the colonised) for whom it was born. The focus of the postcolonial critic is to expose the mechanism and the evil effect(s) of that monster called colonialism on the colonised. Colonialism which is the capitalistic and exploitative method by a ‘superior’ nation (coloniser) to lord itself over a less privileged nation (colonised) leads to the impoverishment of the latter. The concept of colonialism has political, economic and cultural implications. Post-colonialism sees literature as an avenue to probe into the history of society by recreating its past experience with the mind of forestalling the repetition of history. The ultimate for the postcolonial critic is to develop a kind of nostalgia about his historical moment that produces a new dawn in his society. Post-colonialism is a dominant feature in African and Caribbean literature as writers in these settings see colonialism as an instrument aimed at reducing them to nonentities. An interesting feature of postcolonial criticism is its attempt, not only to expose the oddities of colonialism but to reveal and discuss what the independent nations make of themselves even after the demise of

colonialism. In another sense, postcolonial denotes a period of recovery after colonialism as well as a signification of its ongoing cultural aftermath.

Emphasising its ideological predilection, Ayo Kehinde (2010) argues that 'postcolonial African novelists use their novels to facilitate the transgression of boundaries and subversion of hegemonic rigidities previously mapped out in precursor literary canonical texts about African and her people.' Awan Ankpa (1993) views the concept in like manner as representing '...those fields of significations in which people who had been colonised by Europe struggle to redefine themselves and their environment in the face of Euro-centricism's epistemological violence.' Thus, seen from the perspective of a counter-discourse, postcolonial literatures become in the words of Kehinde "...veritable weapons used to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power, based on binary oppositions such as 'Us' and 'Them'; 'First world' and 'Third world'; 'White' and 'Black'; 'Coloniser' and 'Colonised'.

According to Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker (2005):

The appearance of postcolonial criticism has overlapped with the debates on postmodernism, though it brings, too, an awareness of power relations between Western and 'Third World' cultures which the more playful and parodic, or aestheticising postmodernism has neglected or been slow to develop. From a postcolonial perspective, Western values and traditions of thought and literature, including versions of postmodernism, are guilty of a repressive ethnocentrism.

For Esiaba Irobi (2010) post-colonialism is:

A reaction to Western imperialist history and intellectual ideology...It seeks to dismantle the epistemologies of intellectual hegemony cultivated by the west via its academics as well as confront the ex-colonised with the options available for their critical redemption via alternative modes of discourse which may be different from those traditions of discourse fashioned by the west.

Phebe Jatau (2014) avers that postcolonial discourse is an encompassing hermeneutic mechanism or discourse. It is an all-embracing phenomenon

whose versatility and diversity can encapsulate the extensiveness and complexity of the Nigerian postcolonial reality. Postcolonial discourse identifies the wide range, variety and nature of postcolonial writing. Jatau further observes that postcolonial theory can be used as an epistemology applied to the Nigerian novel to examine how Nigerian novelists 'talk for themselves' within the context of Nigerian postcolonial reality by offering a re-reading of Nigerian novels especially with regards to their demonstration of difference and their celebration of hybridity and cultural polyvalence. In so doing, the manner in which the colonial contact distorted the hitherto socio-political, economic and cultural patterns of existence in Nigeria leaving the Nigerian, after independence, to grapple with a 'new order' created by the resultant cross-fertilisation of cultures is highlighted. As a field of study, postcolonial discourse is more laden, more polysemic, and more positional than its inventors and users are readily aware of. It is a vast, variegated, even complex phenomenon which is heterogeneous and whose dispute is active and unresolved. It is far from being a unified field.

According to Williams and Chrisman (1994,20), postcolonialism:

is not a homogenous category either across all postcolonial societies or even within a single one. Rather it refers to a typical configuration, which is always in the process of change, never consistent with itself.

Post-colonialism is both a field and a methodology used in several disciplines. It "describes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises" (Moraru 1977). Postcolonial discourse has a mundane, historical sense as well as a more ideologically charged discursive one. It may be used to describe, "the culture affected by the imperial process" as well as "the new cross—cultural criticism, which is characterised primarily by its resistance to colonialist ideology" (O'Brien 1998, DeHay, Internet). Postcolonial discourse rejects the universalist claims of liberal humanist critics that great literature has a timeless universal significance. The suspicion of postcolonial cognition is based on the argument that whenever a universalist signification is attributed to a work, white, Eurocentric nouns and practices are being promoted to an elevated status while all others correspondingly are relegated to subsidiary, marginalised roles. Consequently, cultural, social, regional and national differences in experience and outlook are demoted or disregarded. This skewed politics of power and representation by the West which postcolonial criticism seeks to interrogate has been examined critically by the Palestinian scholar, Edward

Said in his influential works, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) respectively. Known for his anti-colonial stance, Said in both works argues that in order to bolster its claim of superiority, there is a condescending zeal by the West to inferiorise, marginalise and stereotype other history and cultures which it does not understand or which it knows very little about. For him, the West has a limited and over-simplified concept of the 'East' and believes in the supremacy of its values, while relegating the values and cultures of others as 'uncivilised'. Said questions the West's notion of history and authority of knowledge and calls for its re-valuation. Homi Bhabha (1994) in the same mode of thinking posits that colonial ideology rests upon a "Manichaeian structure" that divides the world into dichotomous identity categories of the civil and the barbaric, the "us" and the "them". In his estimation: "the objective of colonialist discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction." In all, postcolonial theory and criticism takes the garb of a counter-canon, a revision of dominant Western postulation about its perceived 'Other'. Boehmer Elleke in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995) concurs to this thinking. For her, the concept emerged as a 'resistance' to imperial domination:

In writings as various as romances, memoirs, adventure tales or the later poetry of Tennyson, the view of the world as directed from the colonial metropolis was consolidated and confirmed. So, it also followed almost automatically, that resistance to imperial domination-especially on the part of those who lacked guns or money- frequently assumed textual form.

Although postcolonial discourse originated from the West, it has gained acceptance in universities in her former colonies because, more readily than many other concepts, it involves former colonies directly and it allows them to talk to and for themselves (Murkherjee, 1996).

3.2 Locating the "Post" in Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires in which case the insertion of the hyphen between "post" and "colonialism" would be vital. It is ideologically an emancipatory concept that makes the colonised interrogate many aspects of the study of literature that they were made to take for granted. Through

their literature, the colonising culture distorts the experience and realities and thus inscribes the inferiority of the colonised people. Putting it more succinctly, Webster (1996) insists that colonialism is not satisfied merely with hiding people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content but by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. For many centuries, the European colonising powers devalued the nation's past, designating its pre-colonial past as a pre-civilized limbo, or even as a historical void. Nation-states were taught to see history, culture and progress as beginning with the arrival of the Europeans.

Postcolonial theory and criticism as a term has obviously become globalised and locating the prefix 'post' in post-colonialism is often problematic. That is to say, a key problem remains in the actual naming. Some critics have argued that the prefix 'post' raises questions similar to those arising from its attachment to the term 'modernism'. Does 'post' signal a break into a phase and consciousness of newly constructed independence and autonomy 'beyond' and 'after' colonialism, or does it imply a continuation and intensification of the system, better understood as neo-colonialism? Despite the polemics surrounding the concept of postcolonialism, it is unarguable that the emergence of the 'Post' in literary and cultural studies in the 20th Century is a significant development that has radically widened the scope of literary theorising, criticism and interpretation. Depending on the context in which it is employed, 'post' connotes both 'a succession' as well as 'a transcending of existing perspectives'. From poststructuralism, postmarxism, postmodernism, to postcolonial criticism, the aim has been to interrogate dominant epistemologies and re-theorise their claims in the light of emerging new knowledge.

3.3 Theoretical Postulations of Postcolonial Theory

As a 'radical' literary construct, at least in its ideological commitment, postcolonial criticism acquires different significations in the context of African and 'Third World' literature. It is an epistemology which seeks to rupture the absolutist claims of Western epistemology, including its representations of Africa and other 'Third World' countries especially in literary, philosophical and cultural discourses. In other words, postcolonial criticism sets out to 'comment on, and criticise colonial hegemony and the process of decolonisation' in former colonised nations. Among the leading postcolonial critics include Homi Bhaba, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie,

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, and J. M. Coetzee etc.

Edward Ako (2004), tracing the transition of Commonwealth Literature into postcolonial literature observes that postcolonial critics deal with problems of migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, caste, class, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, literature, philosophy, and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. Thus, in its engagement with literature postcolonial criticism, especially for the 'Third World', is a politico-literary discourse which in the words of Rehnema Sazzad 'opposes the power-knowledge nexus' constructed by the West and devising in the alternative, fresh ways of approaching old epistemologies. Thus, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) epitomises the postcolonial as a counter-narrative to Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1902) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) respectively. J.M Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), in the same light represents a revision of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). These are Western 'Master Texts' which portray distorted images of Africa and its people. Postcolonial criticism therefore takes as part of its objectives the critique of 'Colonial ethos' reflected in 'Colonialist texts'.

Beyond the claims of counter-balancing the dominant discursive ethos of the West, postcolonial African writers also foreground the political tensions in their emergent independent states. With the failure of political independence to usher in the dividends of democratisation in many African countries, disillusionment has set in and writers in their works reflect these social dissonances manifested in political instability, ethnic identity, inequality, corruption, abuse of power and leadership failure. The effects and aftermaths of colonisation become a fascinating theme of these writers, including the wide socio-economic inequality in society which often results in conflict. In all, postcolonial critics always share a sense of solidarity with the oppressed and marginalised. Postcolonial criticism enables the colonised not only to read their own texts in their own terms but also to re-interpret some European canonical texts from the perspective of their specific historical and geographical location. This translates into two major perspectives explicated by Barry (1995) in these words "...the first step ... is to reclaim one's past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued". Fanon (1961) referred to earlier, shares this position. Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (1998 p. 8) argue that "the effect of the colonizing process over individuals, over culture and society throughout Europe's domain was vast and produced consequences

as complex as they are profound. Characteristically, postcolonial writers evoke or create a precolonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary; which is tainted with the colonial status of their countries. Consequently, postcolonial discourse is preoccupied with "resistance" to the colonizer as expressed in postcolonial texts. Postcolonial discourse is built around the concept of resistance because the colonialist employed military and subsequently political domination as well as cultural repression to control the universe. Under colonial rule, native cultures were repressed while through the school system other imported traditions were encouraged (Ngugi, 1993). Generally, postcolonial writers are of the view that imperial powers should not monopolise the power to define the world. In this context, postcolonialism critiques the imperialist culture of dominance, authority and restructuring of the Orient (Webster, 1996; Barry, 1995). It exposes the hidden motif behind imperialist culture and the civilisation superimposed on the colonised world. Postcolonialists insist the "centre" can be shifted ideologically through imagination and that this shifting can recreate history (Ngugi, 1993). The theory acknowledges the multiplicity of the centres reflected in postcolonial literatures and therefore of cultures from which the world is defined. It also acknowledges the legitimacy of these centres as locations of human imagination. Ngugi (1993: 9) asserts that:

... There could never be only one centre from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the centre. The relevant question was therefore one of how one centre related to other centres.

Postcolonial theory also identifies with the use of multiple languages or with 'moving the centre in the area of language' wherein other languages all over Africa and the world other than European languages could be used as legitimate vehicles of human imagination- a position that Ngugi (1993) refers to as 'the pluralism of language'. The position is that there is no race, which holds for all times the monopoly of beauty, intelligence and knowledge. There is a place for all at the rendezvous of victory, human victory. What is upheld is the marriage of cultures. After all, all dynamic cultures of the world have borrowed from other cultures in a process of mutual fertilisation (Ngugi, 1993). Putting it succinctly, Mukherjee (1996, 6) says that "... Postcolonial literature is presumably free of such centralist undertones; it suggests decentring, plurality, hybridity, a dismantling of authority...." Postcolonial theory thus rewrites the relations between former margins and centres all over the world, highlighting the cross breeding or hybridisation that occurred in the process. It recognises the global village

that the world has become through economic and technological links and the fact that a handful of Western nations still dominate various other nations. Those global economic and political processes invariably give rise to cultural links and by implication explicate the continuing presence of colonialism even after most colonised nations had been granted independence.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Postcolonial discourse is preoccupied with "resistance" to the coloniser as expressed in postcolonial texts. Discuss the validity of this assertion, illustrating your argument with three African novels.

3.4 Criticisms against Postcolonial Theory

You have learnt in this unit that postcolonial theory tilts strongly towards the incorporation of politics into literary theorising. Postcolonial criticism often interrogates the dichotomy between history and fictional representation, 'Otherness' and Hybridity and their relationship to issues of identity. However, as a theoretical construct, postcolonialism provokes both 'critical acclaim' and 'critical bashing' especially among some 'Third World' scholars. For instance, the Nigerian poet, Niyi Osundare, dismisses it as another form of 'imperialism of theory'; the Ghanaian writer, Ama Ata Aidoo, rejects it on the grounds that 'colonialism has not been posted at all'. Aidoo's observation finds elements of validity as events in many African societies show that neo-colonialism in the form of Western multinational conglomerates is very much alive, pauperising and inflicting hardship on the hapless poor. Advancing Aidoo's line of thought cited above, Tyson (2006) states that another debate engaging the attention of postcolonial critics concerns the politics of their own critical agenda. For example, the term postcolonial criticism implies that colonialism is a thing of the past while in reality, it is not. Colonialism is no longer practiced as it was between the late 15th and mid-20th centuries, through the direct, overt administration of governors and educators from the colonising country. But today, through different means, the same kind of political, economic, and cultural subjugation of vulnerable nations occurs at the hands of international corporations from such world powers as the United States, Germany, and Japan. Again, there are fears that postcolonial literature will be "colonised"—that is, interpreted according to European norms and standards—by the cultural Euro-centrism that dominates literary education and literary criticism the world over.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What are the criticisms levelled against postcolonial theory?

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that postcolonial discourse gained prominence since the 1970s but it emerged as a distinct epistemological category only in the 1990s (Barry, 1995). Some would date its rise in the Western academy from the publication of Edward Said's influential critique of European thought in his *Orientalism* (1978). In it, Said exposes Eurocentric universalism which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or Western and the inferiority of what is not. However, Barry (1995, 192) prefers to trace the ancestry of postcolonial discourse to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), "a voicing of cultural resistance to France's African empire". In this book, Fanon argues that the colonised people, in finding a voice and an identity, must first reclaim their past and then erode the colonialist ideology by which the past had been devalued. The growing currency within the academy of the term "postcolonial" was consolidated by the appearance in 1989 of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin. In this unit, you learnt that postcolonial criticism helps us see the connections among all the domains of our experience - the psychological, ideological, social, political, intellectual, and aesthetic - in ways that show us just how inseparable these categories are in our lived experience of ourselves and our world. In addition, postcolonial theory offers us a framework for examining the similarities among all critical theories that deal with human oppression, such as Marxism, feminism and African American theory. Postcolonial criticism defines formerly colonised peoples as any population that has been subjected to the political domination of another population; hence postcolonial critics draw examples from the literary works of African Americans as well as from the literature of aboriginal Australians or the formerly colonised population of India.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we explained that postcolonial theorists and critics analyse the ways in which a literary text, whatever its subject matter, is colonialist or anti-colonialist; that is, the ways in which the text reinforces or resists colonialism's oppressive ideology. For example, in the simplest terms, a text can reinforce colonialist ideology through positive portrayals of the colonisers, negative portrayals of the colonised, or the uncritical representation of the benefits of colonialism for the colonised. Analogously, texts can resist colonialist ideology by depicting the misdeeds

of the colonisers, the suffering of the colonised, or the detrimental effects of colonialism on the colonised. Postcolonial criticism pursues not merely the inclusion of the marginalised literature of colonial peoples into the dominant canon and discourse, it also offers a fundamental critique of the ideology of colonial domination and at the same time seeks to undo the “imaginative geography” of Orientalist thought that produced conceptual as well as economic divides between ‘West and East’, ‘civilised and uncivilised’, ‘First and Third Worlds’. In this respect, postcolonial criticism is in a way activist and adversarial in its basic aims. It is a theory that has brought fresh perspectives to the role of colonial peoples-their wealth, labour, and culture in the development of modern European nation states.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

1. What is the signification in the prefix ‘post’ in Post-colonialism?
2. Outline in details the theoretical postulations of Post-colonialism.’

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UNIT 2 CATEGORIES/STAGES OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Stages of Postcolonial Theory
 - 3.2 Anti-Colonial Revolutionaries
 - 3.3 The Subaltern Studies Group
 - 3.4 Feminist Postcolonial Critics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Nelson Fashina (2009), the postcolonial period marked the second phase of the evolution of African literature. During this period—a decade spanning the late 1950s to the late 1960s—Africana scholars, critics, and writers began the search for meaning, definition, authenticity, validation, and literary identity for African literature. This intellectual search for a philosophy, theory, and existence of African literature was meant to resist and deconstruct earlier European critical views that Africans were incapable of abstract philosophical reasoning and creative thought (Smith 1950; Idowu 1962). Thus, the revolutionary temper of African literature in the second phase of its evolution was in line with Foucault's idea of "revolution" as the "courage of truth" (Foucault 1993, 17). The first attempt was to appropriate the literary enterprise to the service of political and economic liberation of Africa, both from the vestiges of colonial domination and from the corrupt neo-colonial administrations of the newborn African states. Phebe Jatau (2014) holds that postcolonial literature refers to creative writings emanating from colonised countries together with the critical and theoretical writing contingent upon the imaginative works (Webster, 1996). It is the name of a category of literary activity, which sprang up from a new and vibrant political energy within what used to be called "Commonwealth Literary Studies" (Slemon, 1994). As a literary theory or critical approach, according to Ashcroft *et al* (1995), postcolonial theory is an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures and social hierarchies. Postcolonial theory is applied to describe colonial discourses' analysis to determine situations and

experiences of the subaltern groups whether in the first or third world. The theory also interrogates knowledge constructions of the West and calls for a rethinking of the very terms by which this knowledge has been constructed by the West. Postcolonial theory defies grand narratives such as the nation and nationhood, hence deconstructs such narratives because they are problematic. For Sunday Bamgbose (2013), postcolonial literary theory deals with the writings of the margin, paying attention to how literary and cultural elements are manipulated in order to subvert the hegemonic structures of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Postcolonial theory is a body of discourse that responds to colonialism and its aftermath in the Empire. It is a form of race and ethnicity-bound discourse, which counters the 'centre' in order to give the 'margin' its own true voice and identity in the imperial order of things. In the words of Okunoye (2008:79), "The fusion of cultural and literary criticism is most evident in postcolonial discourse." It is a body of thinking that interrogates Western hegemony through the examination of literary and cultural productions. This unit elaborates on the stages of postcolonial theory in African literature.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

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

- discuss the categories/stages of postcolonial theory.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Categories/Stages of Postcolonial Theory

Jatau (2014), citing Leong Yew (Internet) attempts a categorisation of postcolonial theorists and stages. The grouping, according to Yew, is by no means mutually exclusive; meaning that some theorists may find themselves within different categories than they would probably be categorised by some other scholars. It also means that a body of postcolonial writing can belong to more than one of Yew's stages at the same time. The categories/stages include: Anti-colonial Revolutionaries; The Subaltern Studies Group; and Feminist Postcolonial Critics.

3.2 Anti-Colonial Revolutionaries

These are individuals who wrote mostly during the fight for national independence following the breakup of European empires at the end of the Second World War. The term 'anti colonial' refers more specifically to the era in which they wrote and under the shadow of nationalist movements, they were also not revolutionaries in the physical sense of the term. In many cases these individuals were affected by the violence and bloodshed marked by the attempt to gain independence, as in the case of Frantz Fanon and Gandhi.

3.3 The Subaltern Studies Group

Also known as the Subaltern Studies Collective, the group was formed in 1982 to establish new ways of thinking about colonialism and nationalism, especially in issues of history and historiography. History, as it has come to be known, is tied to western modes of narrative. Hence, any act to talk about the past of colonised places becomes unproductively linked to reproducing these narratives. The group seeks ways of navigating through these concerns, emphasising initially on peasant movements and revolts before branching to issues about domination and modernity.

3.4 Feminist Postcolonial Critics

While postcolonialism may provide interesting ways to examining as well as responding to Western centred discourses, emphasising particularly on the notion of the postcolonial subject, there are questions about how inclusive this project might be. "Women" as a category has been treated ambivalently especially in Western feminism. While earlier waves of feminism presumed that there was a struggle against the universal phenomenon of androcentricity, these have come to be criticised colloquially as "white women saving coloured women from coloured men". The combination of feminism and postcolonialism attempts to circumvent these by addressing a number of parallel but sometimes interesting issues; for example it looks at subjectivities created through gender, the role of women in native tradition and the location of male discourses in it as well as problems surrounding the category of the postcolonial woman.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that the revolutionary temper of African literature in the second phase of its evolution was in line with Foucault's idea of "revolution" as the "courage of truth". The first attempt was to appropriate

the literary enterprise to the service of political and economic liberation of Africa, both from the vestiges of colonial domination and from the corrupt neo-colonial administrations of the newborn African states. The categories/stages of postcolonial writing include: Anti-colonial Revolutionaries, the Subaltern Studies Group, and Feminist Postcolonial Critics.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, the various categories of postcolonial writing were given. They include: Anti-colonial Revolutionaries; The Subaltern Studies Group; and Feminist Postcolonial Critics. This grouping, is by no means mutually exclusive; meaning that some theorists may find themselves within different categories than they would probably be categorised by some other scholars. It also means that a body of postcolonial writing can belong to more than one of Yew's stages at the same time.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Attempt a brief categorisation of the stages of postcolonial writing.

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UNIT 3 CENTRAL TENETS OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Central Tenets of Postcolonial Theory/Criticism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

You have learnt that postcolonial literature is that literature produced by formerly colonised nations, including India, Pakistan, the West Indies, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and many others. The theme of such literature deals primarily with the way colonial subjects are produced in and by Empire. Thus, postcolonial literature is a tool by which the colonised subject "writes back" to Empire, engaging with such themes like identity, belonging, exile, place, language, sovereignty, and hybridity. The term postcolonial theory is a reaction to Western imperialist history and intellectual ideology. It is a spirited engagement with the structures of thinking and actions that facilitate the continued subordination, marginalisation and exploitation of the intellectual resources and cultural reserves of the previously colonised peoples of the Western and non-Western worlds. It is also a subtle examination of the many and often conflicting strands that make up the postcolonial situation and identity. It seeks to dismantle the epistemologies of intellectual hegemony cultivated by the West via its academies as well as confront the ex-colonised with the options available for their critical redemption via alternative modes of discourse which may be different and antithetical in structure and content from those traditions of discourse fashioned by the West. This intensity could be seen in the scholarly works of Wole Soyinka, Biodun Jeyifo, Aime Cesaire, Franz Fanon, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Rustom Barucha, Augusto Boal, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, and Henry Louis Gates, etc. In this unit, attempt is made to outline the central tenets of postcolonial theory.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

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

- Outline and discuss the central concerns of postcolonial theory.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Central Tenets of Postcolonial Theory

Colonialism is a powerful, usually destructive historical force that shapes not only the political futures of the countries involved but also the identities of colonised and colonising people. Successful colonialism depends on a process of “othering” the people colonised. That is, the colonised people are seen as dramatically different from and less than the colonisers. Because of this, literature written in colonising cultures often distorts the experiences and realities of colonised people. Literature written by colonised people often includes attempts to articulate more empowered identities and reclaim cultures in the face of colonisation. Postcolonial literary theory attempts to isolate perspectives in literature that grow out of colonial rule and the mindset it creates. On one hand, it can examine the ways in which a colonising society imposes its worldview on the peoples it subjugates, making them objectives of observation and denying them the power to define themselves. The colonisers are the subjects, those who take action and create realities out of the beliefs they hold to be important.

On the other hand, postcolonial literary theory can focus on the experiences of colonised peoples and the disconnection they feel from their own identities. Postcolonialism also focuses on attempts of formerly colonised societies to reassert the identities they wish to claim for themselves, including national identities and cultural identities. When this lens is used to examine the products of colonisation, it focused on reclamation of self-identity.

The aim of postcolonial study then is to restore the history, the dignity, validity, cultural contributions, and global significance of those whose experiences have been represented within a worldview that provided no way to include the “other” except through direct contrast with itself. This type of direct contrast—us/other, western/non-western, civilised/uncivilised, necessarily reduces everything and everyone it encounters. It diminishes not only the complexity of the colonised world, but its legitimacy as well.

Postcolonial critics are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were/are colonised. Postcolonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (western colonisers controlling the colonised. Thus, a postcolonial critic might be interested in works such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* where colonial "...ideology [is] manifest in Crusoe's colonialist attitude toward the land upon which he's shipwrecked and towards the Blackman he 'colonises' and names Friday" (Tyson, 2006). In addition, postcolonial theory might point out that "...despite Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*'s obvious anti-colonialist agenda, the novel points to the colonised population as "the standard of savagery to which Europeans are contrasted". Postcolonial theory also takes the form of literature composed by authors that critique Euro-centric hegemony.

Postcolonial theory also questions the role of the western literary canon and western history as dominant forms of knowledge making. Most times, the authors included in the canon often reinforce colonial hegemonic ideology, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The terms "first-world," "second world," "third world" and "fourth world" nations are critiqued by postcolonial critics because they reinforce the dominant positions of western cultures populating first world status. This critique includes the literary canon and histories written from the perspective of first-world cultures. Thus, for example, a postcolonial critic will question the works included in "the canon" because the canon does not contain works by authors outside western culture.

Generally, postcolonialism questions the effect of empire, raises issues such as racism and exploitation, assesses the position of the colonial or postcolonial subject and offers a counter-narrative to the long tradition of European imperial narratives. In other words, a postcolonial critic examines colonisers/colonised relationship in literature; he also examine if the work is pro/anti colonialist and why? He also finds out if the text reinforces or resists colonialist ideology? In short, the postcolonial critic explores the dynamics of colonisation through literary works.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that postcolonial theory has become enormously popular because of its rejection of the supposedly universalising categories of the Enlightenment. Postcolonial critics are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were/are colonised. Postcolonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics,

religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (western colonisers controlling the colonised).

5.0 SUMMARY

Postcolonial theory is a set of theoretical and critical strategies used to examine the culture, literature, politics, and history, of former colonies. Post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonised countries, or literature written in colonising countries which deals with colonisation or colonised peoples. Thus, a postcolonial critic examines colonisers/colonised relationship in literature; he also examines if the work is pro/anti colonialist and why? He also finds out if the text reinforces or resists colonialist ideology? In short, the postcolonial critic explores the dynamics of colonisation through literary works.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

1. How does Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression?
2. How does a literary text in the Western canon, for instance, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* reinforces colonialist ideology through its representation of colonisation and colonised peoples?

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UNIT 4 KEY TERMINOLOGIES IN POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND CRITICISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Discourse
 - 3.2 Colonialist Discourse
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- 4.0 Conclusion
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial theory, as you have learnt is in its widest sense, an engagement with the experiences of colonialism and its past and present effects. As you have also learnt in the preceding units, postcolonial theory is often structured around an epistemological divide between binary perspectives, associated with Said's study of 'Orientalism' and Bhabha's concept of 'Hybridity' which is associated with his work on 'Third space, Resistance and Mimicry'. Works of postcolonial writers explore the ways of representations, and modes of perception that were used as fundamental weapons of colonial power to keep colonised people subservient to colonial rule. There are some key terminologies that should be understood by students in the study of postcolonial theory and criticism. Such terms are fundamental and as such, this unit attempts to explain some of them.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

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

- explain some of the terminologies associated with postcolonialism

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Discourse

According to Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia (2001), a discourse is a system of statements within which and by which the world can be known. The term is most often linked to Michael Foucault, one of the most important postmodern strategists and thinkers. Rather than referring to ‘speech’ in the traditional sense, Foucault’s notion of discourse is a firmly bounded area of social knowledge. For him, the world is not simply ‘there’ to be talked about, rather it is discourse itself within which the world comes into being. It is also in such a discourse that speakers and hearers, writers and readers, come to an understanding about themselves, their relationship to each other and their place in the world (the construction of subjectivity). It is that complex of signs and practices that organises social existence and social reproduction, which determines how experiences and identities are categorised.

3.2 Colonialist Discourse

Within the framework of postcolonial studies, the notion of ‘colonial discourse’ has become central to postcolonial criticism. Colonial Discourse refers to the writing which runs from about five hundred years, through the days of European mercantile expansion, to the contemporary time. On one hand, the term is used in reference to the literature written in English, but confined to the century of British Colonialism and the decades of anti-or postcolonial activity which followed. On the other hand, Colonialist Discourse also refers to those writings whose preoccupation was the colonial expansion, written by European colonisers about colonised peoples dominated by them. According to Ayo Kehinde, ‘Colonialist Discourse refers to knowledge of Africa constructed by the West to bolster its colonising interests. It prioritises the divide between the West and its others’. It should be noted that Colonialist literature was informed by theories which concerned the superiority of European culture and the rightness of the Empire. Colonial discourse is a kind of discourse that revolves around the phenomenon of colonialism. It is based on colonial relationships. Generally, Colonial discourses reveal aspects of these relationships between a colonial or imperial power, and the communities it colonised. A novel, like Joyce Carry’s *Mister Johnson*, which revolves around a colonised area, typifies a kind of Colonial discourse. Generally, Colonial discourse inspires a deeper understanding of the colonial relationships. These colonial relationships vary widely based on the specific scenario. While some Colonial discourses hinge on the ongoing

colonisation, other types focus on historic colonialism, where the previously colonised areas have since obtained their own independence from a colonial power.

To a large extent, Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism* (1978) initiated Colonial Discourse theory. Said defines 'Colonial Discourse' as its object of study in the book. The idea of 'Colonial Discourse' is related to Foucault's notion of discourse as described by him in his works *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975). However, Said's notion of discourse was not really based on *Discipline and Punish* but on Foucault's analysis of discursive formations proposed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Discourse is an object of knowledge defined by a regime of truth and regulated by relations of force and power. It imposes specific knowledge, produces concepts and determines the role of subjects. With Foucault's idea of discourse in mind, Said defines *Orientalism* as a 'Colonial Discourse' that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and existed in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning science like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern political sciences), and power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, and values). Following Said, 'Colonial Discourse' can be defined as 'an apparatus of Western power that produces knowledge about non-western cultures under colonial control'. Controlling what is known and the way it is known, 'Colonial Discourse' serves to justify Western domination over colonised people. In this sense, the link between power and knowledge is the key to understanding colonial discourse theory. As Foucault writes in *The History of Sexuality: Volume One: An Introduction* (1976), 'it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together'. Taking the power of knowledge into account, most colonial discourse theorists are similarly concerned with the knowledge of power. Until the late nineteenth century, Western representations of power were generally based on a judicial and military model stemming from notions of rule and imposition. From this more traditional perspective, power was assimilated into political control. In the case of colonialism, this model entails several problems. African independence in the 1950s began a rapid process through which many other former Western colonies achieved their political independence. Despite this, these territories remain subject to the political, economic, cultural and social control of Western power. The persistence of this Western supremacy infers that political independence is not equivalent to actual independence. Power cannot be totally characterised by political control. Consequently, many postcolonial theorists are concerned with the

definition of models of power that explain new forces of global control operating in the world. Thus, 'Colonial Discourse' can be defined as a discourse (in Foucault's sense) that produces knowledge about colonised people in order to legitimate colonial domination. This discourse constitutes a particular kind of symbolic power which serves to legitimate a hegemonic and colonialist point of view.

3.3 Hybridity

The term Hybridity has been most recently associated with Homi Bhaba in his piece entitled 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences'. In the said piece, Bhaba stresses the interdependence of coloniser and colonised. He argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the 'Third Space of Enunciation'. Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia write that Bhaba urges us into this space in an effort to open up the notion of an international culture "not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity." In bringing this to the next stage, Bhabha hopes that it is in this space "that we will find those words with which we can speak of 'Ourselves' and 'Others'. And by exploring this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves". This suggests that embracing the hybridised nature of cultures steers us away from the problematic binarisms that have until now framed our notions of culture.

The concept of Hybridity is no doubt foundational in the development of postcolonial studies. The term is generally considered an 'invention' of postcolonial thought, a radical substitute for hegemonic ideas of cultural identity like racial purity and nationality. As an important dimension of postcolonial cultures in Africa, Asia, and the Diaspora in the West, Hybridity has become a master trope across many spheres of cultural research, theory, and criticism and one of the most widely used and criticised concepts in postcolonial theory. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1998), Hybridity, is one of the key terms in postcolonial theory and usually refers to "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zones produced by colonisation". Bhabha explores Hybridity in the context of the postcolonial novel, celebrating it as the resilience of the subaltern and as the contamination of imperial ideology, aesthetics, and identity, by natives who are striking back at imperial domination. Bhaba emphasises hybridity's ability to subvert and reappropriate dominant discourses such as narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the very entry of the formerly excluded subject into

the mainstream discourse. The dominant culture is contaminated by the linguistic and racial differences of the native self. For Bhabha, Hybridity can be seen as a counter narrative, a critique of the canon and its exclusion of other narratives. He further affirms that “The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural Hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation”. It is important to know that Bhabha’s version of Hybridity, imbued with political potential, has attracted virulent attacks especially from materialist critics.

3.4 Mimicry

The term ‘mimicry’ underlines the gap between the norm of civility presented by European Enlightenment and its colonial imitation in distorted form. This notion is based on Foucault’s term that was equally based on Kant’s notion. Homi Bhabha’s term-mimicry-‘is a part of a larger concept of visualising the postcolonial situation as a kind of binary opposition between authority and oppression, authorisation and de-authorisation. He states ahead that all modes of imposition including the demand on the colonised to be like the coloniser results in mimicry. According to Bhabha, the mode of asserting authority over the colonised gave rise to mimicry. He further asserts that mimicry can be taken as a way of eluding control that also gives rise to postcolonial analysis by subverting the colonial master’s authority and hegemony. Leela Gandhi explains the term mimicry in her book, *Postcolonial Theory: An Introduction* (1999) as:

The sly weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience’. The native subject often appears to observe the political and semantic imperatives of colonial discourse. But at the same time, she systematically misrepresents the foundational assumptions of this discourse by articulating it. In effect, mimicry inheres in the necessary and multiple acts of translation which oversee the passage from colonial vocabulary to its anti-colonial usage.

In other words, mimicry ‘inaugurates the process of anti-colonial self-differentiation through the logic of inappropriate appropriation’.

The above submission indicates a little difference in the term mimicry that Homi Bhabha has given. Christopher Bracken (1999) made a perceptive comment on Bhabha’s term-mimicry-in the following words:

Homi Bhabha exposes the ironic, self-defeating structure of colonial discourse in the essay, *Of Mimicry and Man* (1994). He notes that when English administrators dreamed of converting India to Christianity at the end of the 18th century; they did not want their colonial subjects to become too Christian or too English. Their discourse foresaw a colonised mimic who would be almost the same as the colonist but not quite. However, since India's mimicry of the English blurred the boundary between the rulers and ruled, the dream of anglicising Indians threatened to Indianite Englishness- a reversal the colonists found intolerable. Mimicry is therefore a state of ambivalence and undermines the claims of imperial discourse and makes it impossible to isolate the racialised essence of either the colonised or the coloniser.

Bhabha expects that an anxiety of the coloniser has to open a space for the colonised to resist colonial discourse. This anxiety is matched by mimicry, with the colonised adopting and adapting the coloniser's culture. But this mimicry is not slavish imitation and the colonised is not being assimilated into the supposedly dominant or even superior culture. According to Bhabha, mimicry is an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners and ideas. And this exaggeration means that mimicry is repetition with difference, and so it is not evidence of the colonised's servitude. This mimicry is also a form of mockery as Bhabha's postcolonial theory is a comic approach to colonial discourse because it mocks and undermines the ongoing pretensions of colonialism and empire. In short, mimicry is one response to the circulation of stereotypes. The comic quality of mimicry is important because colonial discourse is serious and solemn, with pretensions to educate and improve. Bhabha says that mimicry represents an ironic compromise between two ideas- that things are eternally the same and that there is continual change.

Homi Bhabha finds mimicry as central to colonial discourse. He defines colonial mimicry in the following words: 'colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference. Coloniser discourse expects colonised to be like coloniser or identical. But the

absolute equivalence between the two may fail to highlight the colonial rule and its ideologies. As these ideologies assume that there is structural non-equivalence, a split between superior and inferior that explains one group of people can dominate another. Homi Bhabha argues that ambivalence, mimicry is never quite accurate. It undermines colonialism's grand discourses of humanism, and enlightenment. He states that there is an obvious disjunction between the material effects of colonialism and its discourses of moral and intellectual superiority. He argues further that mimicry does not merely rupture 'the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a partial presence'. According to him, the play between equivalence and excess makes the colonised both reassuringly similar and also terrifying: so mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.

Homi Bhabha suggests that the partiality of presence in colonial discourse leads to a kind of drive to become authentic: authentically British perhaps, although as might be implied, this could always slide into being mere British than the British. So he states further that-the desire to emerge as-authentic through mimicry- through a process of writing and repetition-is the final irony of partial representation. The colonial discourse at once demands both similarity and difference in the figures of the colonised. The mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask. In mimicry, identity is never identical with itself. Bhabha points out that identity normally operates in terms of metaphor, but that in mimicry, it explicitly operates through metonymy: a substitution along a vertical axis in terms of parts for whole, a never ending substitution that cannot reach any point of full presence. Mimicry being a strategy is characteristically visual. Bhabha insists on the visual as the key element in mimicry, making the connections with stereotype absolutely clear. He states that the visibility of the mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. Mimicry is itself a markedly ambivalent phenomenon. Bhabha's idea of mimicry needs to be thought of as a process that mimics no fixed, final, foundational identity. The coloniser has no absolute pre-existence identity which can be mimicked, and the colonised likewise has no real identity which he or she is betraying through mimicry. Bhabha suggests that the structure of mimicry derives from a fundamental but unstable urge on the part of colonial authority. There must be intermediaries or collaborators with whom the colonial power can work in the exercise of its authority and these intermediaries seem a little too similar to the coloniser, undermining ideologies of superiority. A further consequence of mimicry is the undermining of the coloniser's apparently stable original identity. The identity of the coloniser is constantly slipping away, being undermined by effects of writing, joking, sly civility and repetition.

3.5 Otherness

Throughout the history of western culture and thought, there are certain people, concepts, and ideas that are defined as ‘Other’: as monsters, aliens or savages who threaten the values of civilised society, or the stability of the rational human self. Such ‘Others’ have included death, the unconscious and madness, as well as the Oriental, non-western ‘Other’, the foreigner, the homosexual, and the feminine. In the structure of western thought, the ‘Other’ is relegated to a place outside of or exterior to the normal, civilised values of western culture; yet it is in this founding moment of relegation that the sovereignty of the Self or the same is constituted. The challenge that otherness or alterity poses to western thought and culture was developed by Emmanuel Levinas. For Levinas, western philosophy has traditionally defined the *Other* as an object of consciousness for the western subject. However, the theme of ‘*Otherness*’ has also been a central concern in postcolonial studies. In the introduction to *Orientalism*, Edward Said argued that the Orient is one of Europe’s ‘deepest and most recurring images of the ‘Other’. Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of Otherness’. Bhabha’s concept of ‘*Otherness*’ is derived from Jacques Lacan’s ‘other’ and Fanon’s idea of ‘other’ as binary opposition between the White and the Black. The significance of his theory lies in his suggestion that colonial authority is rendered ‘hybrid’ and ‘ambivalent’ in the postcolonial era. In his essay ‘*The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse*’, Bhabha emphasised how the colonial subject is taken as ‘other’ leading to the construction of a stereotype in colonial discourse.

Though the term ‘*Other*’ refers to the colonised subject, it is not a plain term as it is more ambiguous. This is related with a number of approaches to epistemology and cultural identity. The term ‘*Other*’ is used by many theorists like Sartre, Derrida, and Lacan in their writings. According to Homi Bhabha, the other with capital ‘O’ can be compared to the empire (the empirical centre) which makes the colonised subject conscious of one’s identity as somehow other and dependent. This thinking informs Gayatri Spivak’s coinage of the term ‘*othering*’ which means that the empirical centre creates *its* ‘*others*’. That is to say, the colonising ‘other’ gets established when the colonised ‘others’ are treated as subjects. Thus, Homi Bhabha contends that colonial discourse depends on the ideological construction of ‘*otherness*’. He further states that it gives rise to the stereotype. Bhabha evaluates the question of colonisation: that is, how the colonisers came to build their colony and colonised the native people, who are now, termed the ‘other’. By studying this situation he states that the

stereotype image of the colonised is a negative one. In other words, they are considered inferior to the colonisers in colour, race, knowledge and culture.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Colonial discourse is one of the key concepts in postcolonial studies. Michel Foucault explores the relationship between knowledge and power and argues that discourse, as the product of power, prevents the production of certain knowledge and excludes the subversive components that challenge the authority. Edward Said scrutinises the Foucauldian term and applies it to the study of Orientalism. As the ideological form implicitly seen in literary texts, colonial discourse is employed as an instrument of power to oppress the colonial other and silence female and subordinate characters. In this unit, you learnt that the representation of the colonised cultures and societies by the colonialists has been a subject of immense importance to postcolonial critics and writers. Colonialist discourses and writings tend to project the Europeans and the European cultures as normative standards. The colonised alterity is presented as a lack or an abnormality. The British writers and critics, fed upon the Orientalist discourses, project their own race and culture as superior, and portray the African as lesser ‘Other’. The colonial writers write to reinforce the colonialist ideology of superiority, along with the representation of Africa and Africans as stereotypes and marginalised people and culture in their works. Colonialist writings like any imperial discourse privileged the Europe and the European codes, and ideologies while the Africans and their culture were presented as lesser and inferior stereotypes. You also learnt that colonial discourse theory, often attributed to Said, analyses the discourse of colonialism and colonisation and demonstrates the way in which such discourse obscures the underlying political and material aims of colonisation; and which points out the deep ambivalences of that discourse, as well as the way in which it constructs both colonising and colonised subjects.

5.0 SUMMARY

As you have learnt, Edward Said is often considered to be the originator of Colonial Discourse theory, a form of theoretical investigation which was further taken up by Homi K.Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In fact, Said’s major influence has unquestionably been in the area of colonial discourse analysis, which he is regarded as inaugurating, and postcolonial

theory, on which he has had a profound influence. Gayatri Spivak, a leading colonial discourse theorist, notes that ‘the study of colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said’s has ...blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for. It is an important part of the discipline now’. Ashcroft and Ahluwalia on their part hold that colonial discourse theory is that theory which analyses the discourse of colonialism and colonisation; which demonstrates the way in which such discourse obscures the underlying political and material aims of colonisation; and which points out the deep ambivalences of that discourse, as well as the way in which it constructs both colonising and colonised subjects.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Write short notes on the following terms:
 - (a). Colonialist Discourse
 - (b). Mimicry
 - (c). Hybridity

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MODULE 2 MAJOR PROPONENTS OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Unit 1	Edward Said
Unit 2	Homi Bhabha
Unit 3	Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

UNIT 1 EDWARD SAID

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Edward Said is one of the influential scholars the world has ever produced. He remains a key figure in the discourse of postcolonial theory. The field of postcolonial studies would not be what it is today without the work of Said. Similarly, he has played a vital role in bringing the plight of Palestine, his native country before a world audience. Said is one of the most widely known, and controversial, intellectuals in the world today. He is that rare breed of academic critic who is also a vocal public intellectual, having done more than any other person to place the plight of Palestine before a world audience. His importance as a cultural theorist has been established in two areas: his foundational place in the growing school of postcolonial studies, particularly through his book *Orientalism* (1978); and his insistence on the importance of the 'worldliness' or material contexts of the text and the critic in the book *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983). This insistence

placed him, for a time, outside the mainstream of contemporary theory, but has been soundly vindicated as the political and cultural functions of literary writing have been re-confirmed. In this unit, you are going to learn some of his theoretical postulations and his influence on postcolonial studies.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the influence of Edward Said on the development of postcolonial studies
- explain some of his theoretical postulations
- discuss specific literary texts by applying his ideas.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Edward Said: A Background Sketch

According to Ashcroft, Bill and Pal Ahluwalia (2001), Edward Said was born in 1935 and grew up in Cairo, where he went to school at St George's, the American School, and later Victoria College, modelled on the tradition of the elite public schools of Britain. Said's experience in Cairo was that of a lonely and studious boy, whose father was almost obsessive about the need for discipline in work and study, and he found escape in reading novels and listening to concerts of classical music from the BBC every Sunday. Said's memoir *Out of Place* (1999) reveals that during that time he was something of a 'troublemaker', and in 1951, after he was expelled from Victoria College, his parents decided that he had no future in the British system and sent him to Mount Hermon preparatory school in Massachusetts. Although school in America was often a difficult time for Said, he was a brilliant student who spoke several languages and played the piano to performance standard. He graduated from Princeton and then attended Harvard, where he completed his Ph.D, specialising on Joseph Conrad. He subsequently took up a position at Columbia University as an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature. According to Ashcroft (1996), although there was some question in his mind, as a student, whether he should become a concert pianist (he went to Julliard School of music), he decided that he was too cerebral, and thus began a promising academic career.

No other cultural critic has revealed so powerfully how ‘down to earth’ theory really is, for it comes to being in some place, for a particular reason, and with a particular history. This is nowhere truer than in Edward Said’s own theory. For whether he is talking about English literature, about the complexities of texts and how they are formed, about the ways in which the West exerted power over the Oriental world, about the functions of intellectuals in society, or even about music, his own place as an exiled Palestinian intellectual is constantly inflected in his work. Again, for a distinguished academic and American citizen, this identity as a Palestinian is extremely paradoxical and demonstrates just how paradoxical and constructed all identity is, particularly that of people scattered throughout the world away from their homeland. Said’s paradox of identity is indicative of the complex identities of diasporic and postcolonial peoples throughout the world today. Paradoxes linked to this question of identity run throughout his work, but far from being disabling, such paradox is a key to the intellectual force of his writings, locating them firmly in a world in which ideology has material consequences and in which human life does not conform neatly to abstract theory.

3.2 Edward Said and the Palestinian Question

According to Ali (1994), Said was well on the way to establishing a distinguished but unexciting career as a Professor of Comparative Literature when the 1967 Arab-Israeli war broke out. According to him, that moment changed his life. He suddenly found himself in an environment hostile to Arabs, Arab ideas and Arab nations. He was surrounded by an almost universal support for the Israelis, where the Arabs seemed to be ‘getting what they deserved’ and where he, a respected academic, had become an outsider and a target. The 1967 war and its reception in America confronted Said with the paradox of his own position; he could no longer maintain two identities, and the experience began to be reflected everywhere in his work. The significance of this transformation in Edward Said’s life lay in the fact that for the first time he began to construct himself as a Palestinian, consciously articulating the sense of a cultural origin which had been suppressed since his childhood and diverted into his professional career. The poignancy of displacement is captured in his book on Palestine, *After the Last Sky* (1986:16-17) when he says: “Identity—who we are, where we come from, what we are—is difficult to maintain in exile...we are the ‘other’, an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus. Silence and discretion veil the hurt, slow the body searches, and soothe the sting of loss”. The question of identity for Palestinians has always been vexed, because Palestinians have, according to Said (1980:81), been excluded from the state of Israel and consequently

scattered throughout the world. For him, the Zionist slogan “A people without land [the Jews] for a land without people [Palestine]” saw Palestine “as the European imperialist did, as an empty territory paradoxically “filled” with ignoble or perhaps even dispensable natives”. This construction of the place and its inhabitants as a *tabula rasa* demonstrated to Said that the British-and Zionist-promoted occupation of Palestine was a further example of the long history of European colonialism, with the difference that this version emphasised the Messianic flavour of the ‘civilising mission’. It was the colonisation of Palestine which compelled Said to examine the imperial discourse of the West, and to weave his cultural analysis with the text of his own identity.

Politics had a profound effect on Said’s work, for he saw that even literary theory could not be separated from the political realities of the world in which it was written. Ten years after the war he wrote his trilogy *Orientalism* (1978), *The Question of Palestine* (1979) and *Covering Islam* (1981), which located Palestine as a focus of all the issues of textuality and power which had been preoccupying him. The significant thing about Said’s work is that we cannot separate this political concern for the state of Palestine, this concern with his own identity and the identity of Palestinians in general, from the theoretical and literary analysis of texts and the way they are located in the world. We can neither relegate his writings on Palestine to a kind of ‘after-hours’ journalism nor dismiss his theory as merely the professional activity of the Palestinian activist. But neither can we separate the question of Palestine from the history of European imperialism and the contemporary reality of postcolonial resistance of various kinds in various societies. These things are intimately bound up with each other in the concern with worldliness. It is this construction of identity which helps us to understand Edward Said’s place in literary and cultural theory during the last four decades. The facts of an individual’s life are not necessarily crucial to the direction of their theory, and even mentioning them would be scandalous to some theorists. But not so with Edward Said. The conditions of his own life, the text of his identity, are constantly woven into and form the defining context for all his writing. His struggles with his dislocation, his recognition of the empowering potential of exile, his constant engagement with the link between textuality and the world, underlie the major directions of his theory and help to explain his uncertain relationship with contemporary theory.

Whether as critic, political commentator, literary and cultural theorist or New York citizen, Edward Said demonstrates the often paradoxical nature of identity in an increasingly migratory and globalised world. In him, we find a person located in a tangle of cultural and theoretical contradictions:

contradictions between his Westernised persona and political concern for his Palestinian homeland; contradictions between his political voice and professional position; contradictions between the different ways in which he has been read; contradictions in the way he is located in the academy. The intimate connection between Said's identity and his cultural theory, and the paradoxes these reveal, shows us something about the constructedness and complexity of cultural identity itself. Said persistently locates himself as a person who is dislocated, 'exiled' from his homeland. But rather than invent some essential Palestinian cultural reality, he insists that all cultures are changing constantly, that culture and identity themselves are processes. Indeed, his own cultural identity has been enhanced rather than diminished by his choice to locate himself in New York. A Palestinian first and an American second, he has admitted that he could not live anywhere else but in New York. This says something about the international character of New York, but it also says something about the nature of Edward Said, about his obsession with location, his fascination with cultural diversity and heterogeneity, and his advocacy of the intellectual's detachment from political structures. Because he has located himself in what he calls an interstitial space, a space in between a Palestinian colonial past and an American imperial present, he has found himself both empowered and obliged to speak out for Palestine, to be the voice of the marginalised and the dispossessed, and, crucially, to present Palestine to the American people. Edward Said has had a greater effect than perhaps any other intellectual in the formation of the state of Palestine itself. But much more than that, he has had an incomparably greater effect than any other public intellectual in presenting Palestine and the problems of Palestine to the world. Nevertheless, this large body of topical writing on Palestine has receded into the background behind the acclaim for his much-celebrated volumes *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

Ironically, because Said is located in this in-between space, he has been castigated by some critics, in the Arab world and elsewhere, for being overly westernised (Little 1979; Sivan 1985; Wahba 1989; Said 1994). Yet, on the other hand, his defence of Islam in the West has often come under criticism from liberal intellectuals in the Arab world, who criticise the deep conservatism and fundamentalism of Islam itself (Abaza and Stauth 1990). Whether by accident or design, Said finds himself excluded by various opposing partisan camps at the same time. Although actively pro-Palestine in the United States, he has avoided any particular party line in Palestinian politics, and ironically, his work has been banned in Palestine itself.

3.3 Edward Said: Key Ideas

3.3.1 Orientalism

According to Shrikant B. Sawant (2012), if the origin of postcolonial aesthetics lies in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), its theory is found in Edward Said's ground-breaking work *Orientalism* (1978). Said defines 'Orientalism' as "Western style for dominating, restructuring having authority over Orient". The term 'Orientalism' refers to the historical and ideological process whereby false images of and the myths about the Eastern or the "orient" world have been constructed in various Western discourses, including that of imaginative literature. Orientalism which is based on the cultural superiority of the West over the East paved the way for imperialism. Edward Said explores the divisive relationship of the coloniser and the colonised. Ania Loomba says, concerning Said's that "Said argues that the representation of the Orient in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its 'Others'(44). Said's project is to show how knowledge about the non- Europeans was a part of the process of dominating them. Western attitude towards Orientalists is based on ignorance of the Eastern culture and literature. The colonisers imposed their culture, and literature on the colonised people through various means. Said in his works tries to show that the West was wrong to treat the East as inferior both culturally and intellectually. He argues that Western views of the Orient are not based on what is observed to exist in Oriental lands but often results from the West's dream, fantasies and assumptions about what this radically different place contains. The West has misrepresented 'the Orient' as mystic place of exoticism, moral laxity, sexual degeneracy and so forth. Orientalism constructs binary division. The Orient is frequently described in a series of negative terms. Furthering the argument, Leela Gandhi states that "*Orientalism* is the first book in which Said relentlessly unmask the ideological disguises of imperialism" (67). For Loomba, Said's "*Orientalism* can be said to inaugurate a new kind of study of colonialism" (44). In the book, he tried to do away the binary opposition between the West and the East so that one cannot claim the superiority over the other. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) continues and extends the work began in *Orientalism* by documenting the imperial complicities of some major works of the Western literary canon.

3.3.2 Postcolonialism

Postcolonial theory is an area that has developed largely as a result of Edward Said's work. Along with Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak

form what Robert Young has called the ‘Holy Trinity’ of postcolonial theorists. It is worthy to note that the theory of colonial discourse has been largely influential in the development of postcolonialism. Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia (2001) are of the opinion that postcolonial theory investigates, and develops propositions about, the cultural and political impact of European conquest upon colonised societies, and the nature of those societies’ responses. For the duo, the ‘post’ in the term refers to ‘after colonialism began’ rather than ‘after colonialism ended’, because the cultural struggles between imperial and dominated societies continue into the present. As you have learnt in previous units, postcolonial theory is concerned with a range of cultural engagements: the impact of imperial languages upon colonised societies; the effects of European ‘master-discourses’ such as history and philosophy; the nature and consequences of colonial education and the links between Western knowledge and colonial power. In particular, it is concerned with the responses of the colonised: the struggle to control self representation, through the appropriation of dominant languages, discourses and forms of narrative; the struggle over representations of place, history, race and ethnicity; and the struggle to present a local reality to a global audience. Although it has been heavily oriented towards literary theory, since it was prompted by the flourishing of literatures written by colonised peoples in colonial languages (particularly English), postcolonial theory is becoming widely used in historical, political and sociological analyses as its relevance to these disciplines grows.

The concept postcolonialism deals with the effects of colonisation on cultures and societies. However, from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonisation. The study of the controlling power of representation in the colonised societies began in the late 1970s with texts such as Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), and led to the development of what came to be called ‘Colonialist Discourse Theory’. Postcolonialism, in the words of Bressler (1999) is “an approach to literary analysis that concerns itself particularly with literature written in English in formerly colonised countries”. It usually excludes literature that represents either British or American viewpoints, and concentrates on writings from colonised cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America, and other places and societies that were once dominated by European cultural, political and philosophical tradition. Although there is little consensus regarding the proper content, scope and relevance of postcolonial studies as a critical ideology, it has acquired various interpretations. Like deconstruction and other various postmodern approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism is a heterogeneous field of study where even its spelling provides several alternatives. As a historical

period, postcolonialism stands for the post-second World War decolonising phase. Although the colonial country achieved political freedom, the colonial values do not disappear with the independence of a country. According to Bill Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, “The semantic basis of the term ‘post-colonialism’ might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power” but Mukherjee (1996) rightly observes that:

Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically an emancipatory concept particularly for the students of literature outside the Western world, because it makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location (3-4).

Postcolonial theory emerged from the colonised peoples’ frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture, and their fears, hopes and dreams about their future and their own identities. How the colonised respond to changes in the language, curricular matters in education, race differences, and a host of other discourses, including the act of writing become the context and the theories of postcolonialism. The project of postcolonialism is not only applicable to the students of literature alone; indeed, it seeks to emancipate the oppressed, the deprived and the down-trodden all over the world. In essence, postcolonialism is an enterprise which seeks emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race and class.

In all, postcolonial literature is an aftermath of Colonialist Literature, written in order to scrutinise colonial relationship, and sets out to resist colonialist perspectives, in addition to undertake a reshaping of dominant meanings and undercutting themes. In postcolonial writings, there is an attempt, on the part of the colonised, to find words not only to express their voice but to describe their sense of being. Etymologically, postcolonial refers to the period of resistance, when the colonised writer began to write freely against the Empire, giving way to Nationalist Literatures. Emerging after the Second World War, postcolonial literature represented both the literature written in rejection of imperialism, and the beginnings of the process of decolonisation.

3.3.3 Said's Theory of the Worldliness of the Text

Worldliness is not simply a view of the text and the critic, it is the ground on which all Said's cultural analysis and theory has proceeded, according to Ashcroft, Bill and Pal Ahluwalia (2001). For Edward Said, the world from which the text originated, the world with which it was affiliated, was crucial, not only for the business of interpretation but also for its ability to make an impact on its readers. Said shows how the worldliness of the text is embedded in it as a function of its very being. It has a material presence, a cultural and social history, a political and even an economic being as well as a range of implicit connections to other texts. We do not need to dispense with textuality, nor with the centrality of language to show how the embedding of the text in its world, and the network of its affiliations with that world, are crucial to its meaning and its significance, and, indeed, to its very identity as a text. The issues which stand out in Said's writing and which distinguish his critical identity from the colonial discourse theorists are: his concept of secular criticism, by which he means a criticism freed from the restrictions of intellectual specialisation; his advocacy of what he calls amateurism in intellectual life; a need for the intellectual's actual or metaphoric exile from 'home'; and his passionate view of the need for intellectual work to recover its connections with the political realities of the society in which it occurs. This connection with political realities enables the intellectual to 'speak truth to power'. It is the relationship of criticism to the world which underlies Said's exposure of the way in which the 'Orient' has emerged as a discursive construction, and how contemporary 'Islam' continues to evolve as an alien construction of the West, indeed of the way the West continually constructs its others.

For Said, the problem with contemporary criticism is its extreme functionalism, which pays too much attention to the text's formal operations but far too little to its materiality. The result of this is that the text becomes 'a kind of self-consuming artefact; idealised, essentialised, instead of remaining the special kind of cultural object it is with a causation, persistence, durability and social presence quite its own' (1983:148). The materiality of the text refers to various things: the ways, for example, in which the text is a monument, a cultural object sought after, fought over, possessed, rejected, or achieved in time. The text's materiality also includes the range of its authority. This question of worldliness, of the writer's own position in the world, gets to the heart of another paradox central to this consideration of Edward Said's work-how do we read texts? For any text, Said's included, is constructed out of many available discourses, discourses within which writers themselves may be seen as subjects 'in process', and which they may not have had in mind when they

put pen to paper. Worldliness begins by asking one of the most contentious questions in politically oriented theory: who addresses us in the text? And this is a question we must ask of Edward Said's work. We may grant that the 'author' in the text is a textual construction without therefore assuming that nobody speaks to us in the text, which may be the tendency in much contemporary theory. Ultimately, worldliness is concerned with the materiality of the text's origin, for this material being is embedded in the very materiality of the matters of which it speaks: dispossession, injustice, marginality, subjection. While Said agrees that we should resist the assumption that the text is limited to the book, he goes further to say that to treat literature as an inert structure is to miss the important fact that it is an *act* located in the world. To treat the text as merely a structure of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic, say, is to divorce the text, which is a cultural production, a cultural *act*, from the relations of power within which it is produced. For Edward Said, the world from which the text originated, the world with which it was affiliated, was crucial, not only for the business of interpretation but also for its ability to make an impact on its readers. Said shows how the worldliness of the text is embedded in it as a function of its very being. It has a material presence, a cultural and social history, a political and even an economic being as well as a range of implicit connections to other texts. We do not need to dispense with textuality, nor with the centrality of language to show how the embedding of the text in its world, and the network of its affiliations with that world, are crucial to its meaning and its significance, and, indeed, to its very identity as a text.

3.3.4 Said and the Functions of the Critic/Public Intellectual

Ashcroft, Bill and Pal Ahluwalia (2001) are of the opinion that the function of the critic, and, in a broader sense, the public intellectual, has been of abiding interest to Said throughout his career, from *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983) to *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), and to his autobiography *Out of Place* (1999). The intellectual's capacity to say anything relevant in his or her society cannot dispense with the concept of worldliness, for without worldliness the intellectual can have no world from which, and to which, to speak. According to Said, the real problem with critics' ability to make any difference in the world has been the trap of specialisation, a 'cult of professional expertise' which has made their activity marginal to the pressing political concerns of contemporary societies. In response, he propounds a form of criticism called secular criticism, which dispenses with 'priestly' and abstruse specialisation in favour of a breadth of interest and what he calls an amateurism of approach, avoiding the retreat of intellectual work from the actual society in which it occurs. No matter how much intellectuals may believe that their interests

are of 'higher things or ultimate values', the morality of the intellectual's practice begins with its location in the secular world, and is affected by 'where it takes place, whose interests it serves, how it jibes with a consistent and universalist ethic, how it discriminates between power and justice, and what it reveals of one's choices and priorities' (1994:89).

The secular trinity Said espouses-the 'world', the 'text' and the 'critic'- is in direct contrast to the 'theologies' of contemporary theoretical approaches such as post-structuralism which lead to a continually inward-turning professional critical practice. For Said, we have reached a stage, he says, at which specialisation and professionalisation, allied with cultural dogma, barely sublimated ethnocentrism and nationalism, as well as a surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism, have transported the professional and academic critic of literature-the most focused and intensely trained interpreter of texts produced by the culture-into another world altogether. In that relatively untroubled and secluded world, there seems to be no contact with the world of events and societies, which modern history, intellectuals and critics have built (1983:25). By the 1970s, according to Said, criticism had retreated into the labyrinth of 'textuality', the mystical and disinfected subject matter of literary theory. Textuality is the exact antithesis of history, for although it takes place, it does not take place anywhere or any time in particular. Criticism is thus not a science but an act of political and social engagement, which is sometimes paradoxical, sometimes contradictory, but which never solidifies into dogmatic certainty. Criticism for Said is personal, active, entwined with the world, implicated in its processes of representation, and committed to the almost disappearing notion that the intellectual, through the operation of the oppositional, critical spirit, can reveal hypocrisy, uncover the false, and prepare the ground for change. The critic operates within various networks of affiliation just as much as the text. For Said, the 'worldliness' of the critic is just as fundamental as the worldliness of the text.

Whether or not Said is correct in claiming that contemporary critics have abandoned their contemporary constituency (i.e. the modern reader), arguably many readers feel increasingly marginalised by the difficult language of contemporary theory. The ironic consequence of this is that such criticism works in a direction probably quite counter to the preferences of many individual theorists: it continues to affirm and enforce the dominant values of elite European culture, the very purpose for which the study of English literature was invented in the nineteenth century. Criticism which takes no account of the situation of the text in the world is an irrelevant enterprise to formerly colonised peoples, for instance, whose adoption of literary practice has had less to do with the maintenance of

European culture than with the appropriation of an international voice. The need for criticism to return to the world is the desire of postcolonial criticism in general. This ‘secular’ return to the world captures the particular nature of the ambivalent relationship between postcolonial studies and contemporary theory, quite apart from Said’s direct exposure of the constructions of the postcolonial world by the West. For Said, criticism goes beyond specific positions. Criticism that is ‘modified in advance by labels like ‘Marxism’ or ‘liberalism’ or ‘feminism’ or any other ‘ism’ we may assume, is to him an oxymoron. He takes criticism so seriously as to believe that ‘even in the very midst of a battle in which one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism, because there must be critical consciousness if there are to be issues, problems, values, and even lives to be fought for’ (1983:28). Here, we find encapsulated his view of the function of the public intellectual. Ultimately, criticism is important to Said because criticism is the key function of the concerned intellectual. Criticism locates the intellectual in the world, for the ultimate function of such a person is not to advance complex specialised ‘theologies’ but to ‘speak truth to power’, the title of an essay in his book *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994).

4.0 CONCLUSION

Edward Said is one of the influential scholars the world has ever produced. He remains a key figure in the discourse of postcolonial theory. The field of postcolonial studies would not be what it is today without the work of Said. In 1999 the *New York Times*, in its summary of the century’s achievements, declared Edward Said to be ‘one of the most important literary critics alive’. Undoubtedly, Said has crossed the apparent divide between academic scholarship and public recognition. This accolade reflects his impact on the contemporary cultural terrain, as well as demonstrating how relevant the concept of worldliness has become to our consideration of creative and intellectual work. His influence can be discerned in virtually all the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, and well beyond. In particular, the term ‘Orientalism’ is now linked inextricably to his work. Long after its publication in 1978, the book, *Orientalism* remains an important, albeit much debated book. Said remains a controversial figure who is both revered and reviled, but cannot be ignored. His *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) continues and extends the work began in *Orientalism* (1978) by documenting the imperial complicities of some major works of the Western literary canon.

5.0 SUMMARY

As you have learnt, the conditions of Said's own life and the text of his identity are constantly woven into and form the defining context for all his writings. In this unit, you learnt that Said is the author of *Orientalism* as well as a leading exponent of the growing study of postcolonial literatures and cultures. He is also known to have advocated a role for intellectuals in contemporary society. Although *Orientalism* is the book which more than any other has cemented Said's reputation, it is the collection of theoretical essays, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983) that provides the lens through which his work can be read most profitably. It is also the key to appreciating his significance to contemporary cultural theory and criticism.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the impact of Edward Said in the development of postcolonial theory.

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UNIT 2 HOMI BHABHA

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Homi Bhabha: A Bio-Critical Sketch
 - 3.2 Homi Bhabha: Key Ideas
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 - 3.6 Stereotype
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- 4.0 Conclusion
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- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Homi K. Bhabha was born in 1949 in Mumbai, India. He is one of the most important thinkers in the influential movement in cultural theory called postcolonial criticism. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2001) describes Bhabha as a prominent figure in postcolonial studies who has infused thinking about nationality, ethnicity, and politics with poststructuralist theories of identity and indeterminacy. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha uses concepts such as mimicry, interstice, hybridity and liminality all influenced by semiotics and Lacanian psychoanalysis to argue that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent. These concepts describe ways in which colonised peoples have resisted the power of the coloniser, a power that is never as secure as it seems to be. This emphasis illuminates the present situation, in a world marked by a paradoxical combination of violently proclaimed cultural difference and the complexly interconnected networks of globalisation. Instead of seeing colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. The authority of dominant nations and ideas is never as complete as it seems, because it is always marked by anxiety, something that enables the dominated to fight back. So, on the one hand, Bhabha examines colonial history and on the other, he rethinks the present moment, when colonialism seems a thing of the past. Bhabha succeeds in showing colonialism's

histories and cultures that intrude on the present demanding to transform our understandings of cross-cultural relations. Bhabha states that we should see colonialism not only as straightforward oppression, domination, and violence but also as a period of complex and varied cultural contact and interaction. His writings bring resources from literary and cultural theory to the study of colonial archives. In this unit, you are going to study some of the theoretical postulations of Bhabha and why he is considered an important figure in the field of postcolonial studies.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the theoretical postulations of Homi Bhabha
- explain Bhabha's contributions to the development of postcolonial studies.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Homi Bhabha: A Biographical Sketch

Homi Bhabha was born into the Parsi community of Bombay in 1949 and grew up in the shade of Fire-Temple. He is an alumnus of St. Mary's High school, Mazagaon, Mumbai. He received his B. A. from Bombay University and his M.A., D. Phil. from Christ Church, Oxford University. Bhabha's work in postcolonial theory owes much to post-structuralism. He was influenced by the ideas of Jacques Derrida and his deconstruction theory; Jacques Lacan and Lacanian psychoanalysis; and the works of Michel Foucault. In addition to these, he also stated in his interview with W. J. T. Mitchell (in 1995) that Edward Said is the writer who has most influenced his thought. Homi Bhabha is a leading voice in postcolonial studies and is highly influenced by Western poststructuralists' theorists, notably Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Michael Foucault. Like Said and Spivak, Homi Bhabha theorises on postcolonial discourse in his edited books *Nation and Narration* (1990) and the *Location of Culture*. He, a diasporic person like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak has popularized postcolonial theory by giving new terms such as, Hybridity, Mimicry, and The Other etc. to it. His contribution to postcolonial studies is a noteworthy one. Homi Bhabha claims that a salient characteristic of colonial culture is its Hybridity, its -in-betweenness. He is thus the theorist of cultural Hybridity and in-betweenness. By coining the terms mimicry and Hybridity, Bhabha advocates the plurality of postcolonial cultures as they

embrace the European and indigenous traditions. This celebration of Hybridity, according to Bhabha is a positive advantage that allows the postcolonial writers and critics to analyse the West as insiders as well as outsiders. Bhabha's theory of Hybridity thus provides an affirmative answer to Spivak's celebrated question 'can the subaltern speak?' These postcolonial writers have shown that they have not only gained independence but successfully made the colonisers language a vehicle for the creative expression. Bhabha's writings bring resources from literary and cultural theory to the study of, in the first instance, a colonial archive that seems to be a simple expression of the coloniser's domination of the colonised. His close textual analysis finds the hidden gaps and anxieties present in the colonial situation. Bhabha is very much a thinker for the 21st century.

3.2 Homi Bhabha: Key Ideas

According to Shrikant (2012), Bhabha has popularised the terms 'ambivalence', colonial stereotype, 'mimicry' and 'hybridity', etc.

3.3 Ambivalence

The term 'ambivalence' was first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. Adapted into colonial discourse theory by Homi Bhabha, it describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relationship between coloniser and colonised. Ambivalence refers to the co-existence and *interdependence* of two contrary impulses or effects. For Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), ambivalence must be grasped within the terms of heightened *states of conflict* "in which the positive and negative components of an emotional attitude are simultaneously in evidence and inseparable, and where they constitute a non-dialectical opposition which the subject, saying 'yes' and 'no' at the same time, is incapable of transcending". Ambivalence, Bhabha submits, has for too long been overlooked as "one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power" (1994:66). Ambivalence as a broad analytical category for Bhabha is a motif that he takes to be particularly useful within the colonial context, a context which is characterised, as Fanon (1986) emphasised, by the Manichean condition of two mutually-exclusive and opposing sides that know no possibility of integration.

3.4 Mimicry

Mimicry is an important term in postcolonial theory, because it has come to describe the ambivalent relationship between coloniser and colonised. When colonial discourse encourages the colonised subject to ‘mimic’ the coloniser, by adopting the colonisers’ cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of these traits. Rather, it results in a ‘blurred copy’ of the coloniser that can be quite threatening. Bhabha describes mimicry as one of the ‘most effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge’. The British wanted to create a class of Indians who should adopt English opinion, and morals. These figures were just like Fanon’s French educated colonials depicted in *Black Skin, White Masks*. They are ‘mimic men’. They learn to act English but do not look English nor are they accepted as such. As Bhabha describes it, “to be Anglicised is emphatically not to be English”. Mimic men are not slavish. They also have power to menace the colonisers. The use of English language on the part of the colonised is a threat to Orientalist structure of knowledge in which oppositional distinction is made. The mimic men in relation to the colonisers, “almost the same but not quite” is what Bhabha thinks as a source of anti-colonial resistance. Mimicry gives rise to postcolonial analysis by subverting the colonial master’s authority and hegemony. It is a weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience.

3.5 Hybridity

The term ‘Hybridity’ is also associated with the work of Bhabha. His analysis of coloniser/colonised relations stresses the inter-dependence and mutual construction of their subjectivities. ‘Hybridisation’ is a kind of negotiation, both political and cultural, between the coloniser and the colonised. Just like Bhabha, Edward Said also underlined the importance of ‘cultural hybridity’ and it has come to stay. Hybridity, being an integral part of postcolonial discourse, bridges the gap between West and the East. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1998:20), hybridity in postcolonial theory usually refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zones produced by colonisation”. For theorists such as Bhabha therefore, cultural hybridity posits a viable alternative to the ‘exotism of multiculturalism’, and opens the way towards ‘conceptualising a [genuinely] international culture’. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), which is Bhabha’s seminal work, he gives many of the definitions of the notion of Hybridity and many accounts of the diverse aspects of this concept. For Bhabha:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the pure and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but re-implicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory-or, in my mixed metaphor, a negative transparency (159-160).

3.6 Stereotype

According to David Hubbert, one aspect of colonialism that Bhabha reads with particular care is the discourse of stereotypes. Colonialism has been a political and economic relationship, but it has importantly depended on cultural structures for its coherence and justification. Because it is not self-evident that colonial relationships should exist at all, something needs to supply an explanation for colonialism. One explanation has often been the supposed inferiority of the colonised people. Through racist jokes, cinematic images, and other forms of representation, the coloniser circulates stereotypes about the laziness or stupidity of the colonised population. These stereotypes seem to be a stable if false foundation upon which colonialism bases its power, and are something we should perhaps simply dismiss. In the third chapter of Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), entitled 'The Other Question: 'Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism'', he explores the ways stereotypes and discrimination work in terms of a theory of discourse, drawing particularly on Said's work. In this essay Bhabha works to provide what he explicitly calls 'a theory of colonial discourse'. This theory is based on the ambivalence he finds central in the colonial discourses of stereotyping. Bhabha defines how racial stereotype operates thus:

Racist stereotypical discourse, in its colonial moment, inscribes a form of governmentality that is informed by a productive splitting in its constitution of knowledge and exercise of power. Some of its practices recognise the difference of race, culture and history as elaborated by

stereotypical knowledge, racial theories, administrative colonial experience, and on that basis institutionalise a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, discriminatory, vestigial, archaic, 'mythical', and, crucially, are recognised as being so. [...] However, there coexist within the same apparatus of colonial power, modern systems and sciences of government, progressive 'Western' forms of social and economic organisation which provide the manifest justification for the project of colonialism. (83)

The problem with a stereotype seems to be that it fixes individuals or groups in one place, denying their own sense of identity and presuming to understand them on the basis of prior knowledge, usually knowledge that is at best defective. This problem is of course present in colonial discourse. For Bhabha, the colonial discourse wants stereotypes to be fixed, and in turn traditional analyses of colonial stereotypes assume them to be fixed.

3.7 Colonial Discourse

Finally, just like Said, colonial discourse is another key term in Bhabha's theoretical postulations. For Bhabha, colonial discourse is "a form of discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that informs the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchisation" (67). He proposes a definition of colonial discourse as:

....an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject people' through the production of knowledge in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorisation for its strategies by the production of knowledge of coloniser and colonised which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction (70).

4.0 CONCLUSION

As you have learnt in this unit, Homi Bhabha's work transformed the study of colonialism by applying post-structuralist methodologies to colonial texts. He uses the term 'difference' for works of many distinct writers. He explores and extends the relevance of post-structuralism for cultural difference. Bhabha states that the domination of the colonised depends on the assertion of difference: the colonised are inferior to the colonisers. Bhabha also believes that the colonial authority knows that this supposed difference is undermined by the real sameness of the colonised population. So he states that the tension between the illusion of difference and the reality of the sameness leads to anxiety. This anxiety opens a gap in colonial discourse- a gap that can be exploited by the colonised, the oppressed. Bhabha holds that everyone should know where one's identity ends and the rest of the world begins, and it will help to define that world as other, different, inferior and threatening to your identity and interest.

4.0 SUMMARY

As you have learnt in this unit, Homi Bhabha is one of the most important figures in contemporary postcolonial studies. Bhabha's writings and influence on postcolonial theory introduced key concepts such as the stereotype, mimicry, hybridity, the uncanny, the nation and cultural rights etc. In this unit also, you learnt that Bhabha is one of the frontline theorists occupying the front rank of literary and cultural thought. As a leading voice in postcolonial studies, he is highly influenced by Western post-structuralist theorists notably, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault. Bhabha's theory is expounded in his popular books, *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994). As a diasporic person like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, his contribution to postcolonial studies is immense.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain in details the following concepts as coined by Bhabha in the light of postcolonial studies:

1. Hybridity
2. Mimicry
3. Stereotype
4. Colonial Discourse

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UNIT 3 GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Gayatri Spivak is a literary critic and theorist. She is best known for the article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” which is considered a foundational text of postcolonialism. Spivak famously articulated that the subaltern cannot speak. By this, she does mean that they are mute, or unable to tell us their stories, or that they cannot complain about their conditions, or that they cannot protest. They can and do cry out when they are wronged. Rather, she meant that no one listens to their cries, their tales, their complaints or their protestations. According to Spivak, the subaltern are the perpetual, voiceless and unrecoverable ‘Other’ in the hegemonic discourse that is taking place in the centre and which continues to (negatively) impact subaltern lives in the periphery. She is also known for her translation of Jacques Derrida’s classic *Of Grammatology*. This translation brought her to prominence. After this, she carried out a series of historical studies and literary critiques of imperialism and feminism. She has often referred to herself as a “Marxist, Feminist and Deconstructionist.” Her concern has been the tendency of institutional and cultural discourses/ practices to exclude and marginalise the subaltern, especially subaltern women. Giving an insight into her nature, Spivak told an interviewer that: “I am not erudite enough to be interdisciplinary but I can break rules”. (Spivak, 1990:27). Breaking rules of the academy and trespassing disciplinary boundaries have been central to the intellectual projects of Gayatri Spivak, one of the leading literary theorists and cultural critics. She is known not only as a scholar of deconstructive textual analysis of verbal, visual and social texts

but also as a global feminist Marxist. She is widely acknowledged as the conscience of the metropolitan politics of identity. While she is best known as a postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak describes herself as a “Para-disciplinary, ethical philosopher”:

My position is generally a reactive one. I am versed by Marxists as too codec, by feminists as too male-identified, by indigenous theorists as too committed to Western Theory. I am uneasily pleased about this (1990:67).

Spivak is widely cited in a range of disciplines. Her work is nearly evenly split between dense theoretical writing peppered with flashes of compelling insight and published interviews in which she wrestles with many of the same issues in a more personable and immediate manner. Her literary analysis and theoretical writings have invariably dealt with the deconstruction of neo-colonial discourses and a feminist-Marxist approach to postcolonialism, particularly to the schematized forms of representing women in the Third World. She combines Marxism and deconstruction in the name of postcolonial feminism, and at the crossroads of literary studies and philosophy. This unit introduces you to the theoretical impulses of Spivak.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the theoretical postulations of Gayatri Spivak
- explain her contributions to the development of postcolonial studies

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Gayatri Spivak: A Bio-Critical Sketch

Gayatri Chakravorty was born in Calcutta, India, 24 February 1942, to a middle class family. She did her undergraduate in English at the University of Calcutta (1959), graduating with first class honours. She borrowed money to go to the US in the early 1960's for her graduate studies at Cornell. She received her MA in English from Cornell and taught at the University of Iowa while working on her Ph.D. Her dissertation was on Yeats (published as *Myself Must I Remake: The Life and Poetry of W.B. Yeats* [1974]) and was supervised by Paul de Man. Her works encompasses post-structuralist literary criticism, deconstructivist readings

of Marxism, Feminism and Postcolonialism. Her reputation was first made for her translation and preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976) and she has since applied deconstructive strategies to various theoretical engagements and textual analyses: from Feminism, Marxism, and Literary Criticism to most recently, Postcolonialism. She has said that she prefers the teaching environment where ideas are continually in motion and development.

Spivak's most significant contribution to feminism and subaltern studies is her postcolonial exposition of the status of the Indian woman. She asks whether the Indian subaltern woman has a voice, or even a voice consciousness? Can the subaltern speak? Will she be heard? And Spivak comes to conclusion that 'the subaltern cannot speak' Spivak praised Said's 'Orientalism' because it has foregrounded marginality and created the ground for the marginal. In discussing the silence of subaltern as female, Spivak explains that she was not using the term literally to suggest that such women never already talked. It is not so much that subaltern women did not speak, but rather that others did not know how to listen, how to enter into a transaction between speaker and listener. According to Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak because their words cannot be properly interpreted. In other words, the silence of the female as subaltern is as a result of a failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation.

Ramesh Tibile (2012) opines that known for her ample erudition and opaque theoretical texts, Spivak combines abstract philosophical speculation and personal reflection, creating a discourse that is both intimate and obtuse. Far from unconsciously absorbing the influences of other thinkers, she engages herself in a perpetual dialogue with the authors that inform her, reflecting on the inner conflicts and paradoxes inherent in her own theoretical position. Approaching discourses and institutions from the margins is more than a preference for Spivak, as she is often cast as an outsider or marginal figure herself. Spivak being an elite intellectual, the "Third-World woman", a "hyphenated American", and a Bengali exile living in the West, inhabits an identity that is nothing if not heterogeneous. She brings this personal eclecticism into her work. Due to drawing from postcolonial theory, philosophy, literary criticism, and economic theory, her texts are intellectual hybrids. The course of a single essay shifts among disparate disciplines, simultaneously playing texts off one another and weaving them together. She does not only analyse postcolonial entanglements of discursive power; but her texts exemplify and enact these same entanglements. Spivak's international reputation as a postcolonial critic was sealed by the publication in 1990 of *The Postcolonial Critic*, a collection of interviews and dialogues with Spivak, edited by Sarah

Harasym. The publication of this book led the literary critic Sangeeta Ray to acclaim that Spivak has been commodified and marketed as '*the* postcolonial critic in the intellectual marketplace' (Ray 1992: 191).

3.2 Gayatri Spivak: Key Ideas

For ease of understanding, we shall structure Spivak's critical theories into:

- Deconstruction Theory
- Marxism
- Feminism
- Subaltern Theory

3.3 Spivak on Deconstruction Theory

Stephen Morton (2003) writes that Spivak uses deconstruction to problematize the privileged academic postcolonial critic's unknown participation in the exploitation of the Third World. She points towards deconstruction's limitations in conceptualising and sustaining an engagement of hierarchical binary oppositions, the postcolonial critic aiming at substantive social transformation or revolution finds herself with inadequate power to revise dominant power structures. Spivak persistently and persuasively demonstrated that deconstruction is a powerful political and theoretical tool. To plead the political value of deconstruction, she focused on the rhetorical blind spots or grounding mistakes which stabilise conventional notions of truth and reality. She foregrounds the textual elements that shape our understanding of the social world, and thereby questioned the binary opposition between philosophical or literary texts and the so-called real world. According to Spivak, deconstruction in the narrow sense domesticates deconstruction in the general sense. She states further as:

Deconstruction in the general sense, seeing in the self perhaps only a (dis)figuring effect of a radical heterogeneity, puts into question the grounds of the critic's power. Deconstruction in the narrow sense, no more than a chosen literary-critical methodology, locates this signifying or figuring effect in the text's performance and allows the critic authority to disclose the economy of figure and performance. (1998:22)

The above opinion indicates that there are two meanings of the Deconstruction: meaning with narrow sense and with the general sense. It challenges the critic's power and can be called as a literary-critical methodology. She used the concept 'deconstruction' with a specific intellectual and political purpose to focus the reality of the dominant culture

and to escape its stereotyped identifications. Deconstruction came simply to name the last privileged defense of the canon being reduced to a powerful method which would reveal the sameness and the greatness of the major literary texts.

The concept, 'deconstruction', for Spivak, is neither a conservative aesthetic nor a radical politics but an intellectual ethic which enjoins a constant attention to the multiplicity of determination. She is absolutely committed to pinpointing and arresting that multiplicity at the moment in which an enabling analysis becomes possible. According to Spivak, the abiding question is a limit which cannot obscure the value, however provisional, of the rigorous analyses that deconstruction enables. So, to grasp the interest of Spivak's work necessitates going beyond the binary opposition between the First World intellectual production and the Third World physical exploitation.

Applying the strategies of Deconstruction to postcolonialism, Gayatri Spivak seeks to undermine the power of centralised discourses in the interest of cleaning a space for marginalised voices. For her, Deconstruction is not simply the practice of breaking things down. She states that it (Deconstruction) is not the exposure of error but constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced. It means that Spivak does not challenge truths head on, but descends to the level of the cultural and political formations that produce them. From the margins of central discourses, she interrogates the operations that engender them and hold them in place.

Spivak applies the concept Deconstruction to analyse the public-private hierarchy. She tries to explain it in relation with feminist activity. In the interest of the effectiveness of the women's movement, emphasis is placed upon a reversal of the public-private hierarchy. Here she states:

Because in ordinary sexist households, educational institutions or workplaces, the sustaining explanation still remains that the public sector is more important, at once more rational and mysterious, and, generally, more masculine, that the private, the feminist, reversing this hierarchy, must insist that sexuality and the emotions are, in fact, so much more important and threatening that a masculinist sexual politics is obliged, repressively to sustain all public activity. (1998:140)

The above discussion highlights the sex discrimination tradition. Here she applies the term deconstruction to wipe out this fixed construction or structure and bring forth the women to acquire the public sector reversing them. Spivak seems to be feminist-deconstructionist. The opposition is thus not merely reversed; it is displaced. She believes that this practical structure of deconstruction of the opposition between private and the public is implicit in all, and explicit in some, feminist activity. And then feminist activity would articulate or strive toward that fulfilled displacement of public (male) and private (female): an ideal society and a sex-transcendent society. It means that deconstruction teaches one to question all transcendental idealisms.

3.4 Spivak on Marxism

Spivak holds that Karl Marx's Marxism cannot account for the social injustice of capitalism in the terms of its own philosophical system. She traces incalculable moments in Marx's discussion of value which are the conditions of possibility for a future social justice and political transformation. By emphasising how socialism cannot manage without the capital relation, Spivak deconstructs the binary opposition between capitalism and socialism, which has traditionally grounded classic Marxist theories of emancipation. She also points out that the political independence has not led to the economic independence of many 'Third-World' countries due the huge national debt repayments to the 'First-World' banks and the gendered international division of labour.

Spivak also points out how global capitalism operates by employing working class women in developing postcolonial countries. It is not only as these women workers have no effective union representation, or protection against economic exploitation, but their gendered bodies are also disciplined in and through patriarchal social relations. According to Spivak, geographical dispersed conditions of contemporary capitalism are responsible for this situation. Spivak attracts our attention by emphasising how women's productive bodies are site of exploitation under contemporary transnational capitalism. Referring to Marx's concept of value, Spivak states that the worker produces capital, because the worker, the container of labour power, is the source of value. She proceeds ahead and points out that 'by the same token it is possible to suggest to the so-called the 'Third-World' that it produces the wealth and the possibility of the cultural self-representation of the 'First-World' (1990:96). She also insists to apply Marx's labour theory of value to contemporary readings of culture and politics. Spivak reasserts the importance of the economical in critical and cultural theory by emphasising how the exploitation of women

workers in the 'Third-World' provides the wealth and resources for intellectual culture in the 'First-World'. Spivak further points out that the working-class women in the 'Third-World' are the worst victims of the international division of labour. (1998:167).

In fact, Spivak's persistent attempt to deconstruct capitalist system of value determinations is not simply a corrective theoretical reading of Marx, but an urgent call to articulate the cultural, political and economic conditions which silence the 'Third-World' woman in the hope that those oppressive conditions will eventually change (Tibile, 2012).

3.5 Spivak on Feminism

Spivak takes on the feminist struggles in the Third world in their specific culture and material contexts. Her criticism of the Western feminist schools is based on her perception of difference and heterogeneity. Spivak's feminist theory is informed with postcolonial theoretical concerns. In the estimation of Tibile (2012), Spivak's feminism, initially, seems unreadable as her deconstruction. This stems from her conjunction of any essentialism with an emphasis on the crucial importance of examining and re-appropriating the experience of the female body. Spivak speaks about what she can do within literary criticism as a woman. She strongly denies the common definition of 'woman' which rests on the word 'man'. She tries to provide a definition of woman with a deconstructive perspective. She also pleads the necessity of definition which allows to them going and take a stand. She refers Marx and Freud while formulating her assumptions regarding feminism. She opposes these two as they argue in terms of a mode of evidence and demonstration. According to her, they seem to bring forth evidence from the world of man or man's self. She comments that there is the idea of alienation in Marx and the idea of normality and health in Freud. She also refers the concepts of use-value, exchange-value and surplus-value of Marx for analysing the woman. She strongly opposes the concept of "wages" (formed by men) only a mark of value-producing work. She also rejects the deliberation of men for tactfully rejecting women entry into the capitalist economy. Spivak argues the importance of woman's product as:

In terms of the physical, emotional, legal, custodial and sentimental situation of the woman's product, the child, this picture of the human relationship to production, labour and property is incomplete. The possession of a tangible place of production in the womb situates the

woman as an agent in any theory of production.
(1998:106).

According to Spivak, the idea of the womb as a place of production is avoided both in Marx and in Freud. She states that if this is taken into consideration, the notion of penis-envy will be replaced by womb-envy to challenge the male dominancy. She gives the reference of the present situation where woman's entry into the age of computers and the modernisation of women in development imposes us to confront the discontinuities and contradictions in our assumptions about women's freedom to work outside the house and the sustaining virtues of the working class. Spivak refers the remark of Christine Delphy to focus the concept of the 'new feminism' as:

The 'new feminism' is currently developing the thesis that no society, socialist or capitalist is capable of favourably responding to the aspirations of women...If we direct against men the action necessary for women's progress, we condemn the great hopes of women to a dead end.
(Amherst, 1980:128).

According to Spivak, here the lesson of double approach-against sexism and for feminism -is suppressed. She points out the significance of the female body pointing two radical different directions: one is she wishes to stress the clitoris as the site of a radical excess to the cycle of reproduction of production and two is to emphasise that the reproductive power of the womb is absent in any account of production in classical Marxist. Spivak tries to differentiate psychoanalytical feminism from Marxist feminism and states that:

With psychoanalytic feminism, then an invocation of history and politics leads us back to the place of psychoanalysis in colonialism with Marxist feminism, an invocation of the economic text foregrounds the operations of the New Imperialism. (1998:112).

Spivak argues that psychoanalytical feminism reminds history and politics whereas Marxist feminism economics. For her, it seems more important to learn to understand that the world's women do not all relate to the privileging of essence, especially through fiction or literature.

3.6 Spivak on Subaltern Theory

Etymologically, the term ‘subaltern’ is a creation of the British Colonial contact with India. In other words, subaltern means ‘Subordinate’ or ‘inferior’. It is by implication ‘inferior modes of knowledge’. The subaltern historiography seeks to establish the balance of knowledge by demonstrating that the ‘inferior’ is made so through discourses of power and politics. Spivak preferred to use the ‘subaltern’ to encompass a range of different subject positions which are not predefined by dominant political discourses. She states that this term suits as it can accommodate social identities and struggles of women and colonised. According to her, the flexibility of this term is very important as it can include all types of subjects especially of neglected group to bring them into the main stream. Spivak accepted the subaltern movement because she is committed to articulating the lives and histories of such groups in an appropriate and non-exploitive way. She observed the social and political oppressions in postcolonial societies that got place in her writings. Her writings, including translations and textual commentaries provide a powerful counterpoint to the erasure of women, peasants and tribals from the dominant historical and political discourses in India.

Of note is that the term, ‘Subaltern’ was popularised by Spivak’s essay entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1985) where she contends that:

The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundrylists with ‘woman’ as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.

Spivak expands the original definition of subaltern developed by Ranjit Guha and asks to include the struggles and experiences of women from the ‘Third World’. The emphasis on the gendered location of subaltern women expands and complicates the established concept of the subaltern. Spivak objects to Western female dominancy as like male dominancy in the social activities. Asking the question, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ Spivak challenges the gender blindness of earlier postcolonial theories from a feminist standpoint. It also demonstrates how Spivak expanded the definition of the term- Subaltern to include women (avoiding narrow class based definition). Spivak argues that there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak. She concludes further by stating that the subaltern cannot speak because the voice and the agency of subaltern women are so embedded in Hindu Patriarchal codes of moral conduct and the British

Colonial representation of subaltern women as victims of a barbaric Hindu culture that they are impossible to recover. Spivak also states that subaltern as female cannot be heard or read in the male-centred terms of the national independence struggle. According to her, the subaltern cannot speak means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to speak, she is not able to be heard. In other words, their speech acts are not heard or recognised within dominant political systems of representation. Here Spivak would not want to deny the social agency and lived existence of disempowered subaltern women that receive their political and discursive identities within historically determinate systems of political and economic representation (Morton, 2003:67). Spivak's silencing of the 'subaltern' refers to all women in India but we know that women in colonial India cannot be put in one category. The critic, Benita Parry, has criticised Spivak's notion of silent subaltern as:

Since the native woman is constructed within multiple social relationships, and positions as the product of different class, caste and culture and testimony of women's voice on those sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists, and by this to modify Spivak's model of the silent subaltern. (1998:35)

The question of Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' is ambiguous. That is because; we don't know who asks this question, the subaltern or the superior imperialist. According to Benita Parry, Spivak's use of poststructuralist methodologies to describe the historical and political oppression of disempowered women has further contributed to their silencing. (1998:39)

Responding to Spivak's work, Bart Moore-Gilbert states that there are clear historical examples where the resistance of subaltern women to the colonial world is recorded in dominant colonial discourse. (1997:107) In their article, 'Can the Subaltern Vote?', Medevoi, Shankar Raman and Benjamin Comment that Spivak does not offer any perfect political solutions or theoretical formulas for emancipating subaltern women, rather exposes the limited and potentially harmful effects of speaking for such disempowered groups (Medevoi et. al, 1990:133). Furthermore, in an article entitled 'Can the Subaltern Hear?' Colin Wright provoked angry response to Spivak's question, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Eagleton (ed), 2000:34). In all, Spivak's theory of the subaltern is a part of a longer history of left-wing anti-colonial thought that was concerned to challenge the class-caste system in India (Tibile, 2012).

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that Gayatri Spivak is best known for her overtly political use of contemporary cultural and critical theories to challenge the legacy of colonialism on the way we read and think about literature and culture. Spivak's critical interventions encompass a range of theoretical interests, including Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, postcolonial theory and globalisation. Along with other leading contemporary intellectuals such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, Spivak has challenged the disciplinary conventions of literary criticism and academic philosophy by focusing on the cultural texts of those people who are often marginalised by dominant western culture: the new immigrant, the working class, women and the postcolonial subject. By championing the voices and texts of such minority groups, Spivak has also challenged some of the dominant ideas of the contemporary era. Such ideas include, for example, the notion that the western world is more civilised, democratic and developed than the non-western world, or that the present, postcolonial era is more modern and progressive than the earlier historical period of European colonialism in the nineteenth century. Indeed, for Spivak the effects of European colonialism did not simply vanish as many former European colonies achieved national independence in the second half of the twentieth century. It is only few other contemporary intellectuals that have managed to sustain, like Spivak, a sophisticated engagement with contemporary critical and cultural theory, while always grounding that intellectual engagement in urgent political considerations about colonialism, postcolonialism and the contemporary international division of labour between the 'First World' and the 'Third World'.

5.0 SUMMARY

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's writing is a commentary on the first world's practice of imposing its political power over the Third world through indirect strategies. It's highly sophisticated system of production and dissemination of knowledge has strengthened its power through education, mass media and market forces. As you have learnt in this unit, Spivak believes the civilising mission of European colonialism is itself founded on the use of culture as a form of rhetoric. Thus, literature, or the teaching of literature, has been instrumental in the construction and dissemination of colonialism as a ruling idea. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's literary criticism has greatly informed and influenced the practice of reading literary texts in relation to the history of colonialism. In essays such as 'Imperialism and Sexual Difference' (1986), and 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' (1985), Spivak examines how the civilising mission of

imperialism was written and disseminated in and through several classic texts from the English literary tradition, including Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), as well as a historical narrative from the colonial archives. Like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, Spivak repeatedly emphasises that the production and reception of nineteenth-century English literature was bound up with the history of imperialism. Spivak's writing has been described by some as opaque. It has also been suggested that her work puts style ahead of substance.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

Discuss the concept of Subaltern Theory as enunciated by Gayatri Spivak.

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**MODULE 3 AFRICA IN THE EYES OF EUROPE:
COLONIAL
 REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICA IN
LITERATURE**

- Unit 1 Literature in the Service of Empire: Colonial
 Representations of Africa in Literature
- Unit 2 Image of Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*
- Unit 3 Image of Africa in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*
- Unit 4 Image of Africa in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

**UNIT 1 LITERATURE IN THE SERVICE OF EMPIRE:
COLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICA IN
LITERATURE**

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Africa in the Eyes of the West
 - 3.2 The Role of Travel and Adventure Writings in the Negative
 Portrayal of Africa
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

For centuries Africa has been identified and classified as a place where endless poverty, diseases, conflict, and violence exist. Studies have shown that the negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Africa came from different sources including colonial and missionary accounts. The negative characterisation of Africa was mainly caused by the effects of colonialism, which gives a false impression that Africa is isolated from the rest of the world. Hence, it has been called “a dark continent”. Literature has remained a vital tool in shaping and influencing perception and interpretation of African people and people of African ancestry. Studies

reveal that early American and European writers portray Africa as a poverty-stricken, war-ravaged, and disease-ridden continent, which also reinforce other negative stereotypes. Generally, the description of African people and people of African ancestry as uncivilised and ignorant of European ways is a result of colonialists' failure to understand the cultural, social, political, economic and religious ways of Africans. This unit takes an overview of Colonial representations of Africa in cultural productions such as literature.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- explain how Europe perceives Africa
- adduce reasons for this perception and portrayal.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Africa in the Eyes of the West

According to Ogbu Kalu (1978), Africa has witnessed a shell-burst of foreign cultures. Much of her history is so imprisoned within European histories that some historians like H. R Trevor-Roper, surmised that Africa has no history. Some European scholars even went as far as saying that nothing existed in African literary tradition beyond a few trickster stories of the tortoise or the spider. This negative and stereotypical depiction of Africa and its people, especially in the nineteenth-century works by Western writers, originated in the lack of knowledge about Africa by some individuals in the West. To a large extent, these negative narratives can be traced to the beginnings of 'Western Civilisation' itself. For instance, in his book *Histories*, Herodotus (aka the Father of History) related a cautionary tale about what happens in Africa. According to him, five Nasamonians – “enterprising youths of the highest rank” – were off exploring southern Libya. After several days of wandering, they found some fruit trees and started helping themselves. Then, several “men of small stature”, “all of them skilled in magic”, seized and captured them, taking them for inscrutable and dastardly magic-dwarf purposes. In this way, Herodotus suggested that Africa was not only different, but also more threatening, sinister and dangerous than Greece. Regrettably, subsequent generations of

European [writers](#) followed suit, substituting fantasy for fact in a markedly antagonistic ways.

Europeans created an image of Africa that was the perverse opposite of Europe's-its mirror image. Europe's general [superiority](#) would, by comparison with and in contrast to this image, be self-evident. Europe's own idea of itself was thus predicated on its image of Africa (and other 'backward' regions). In fact, from the 17th century onwards, debates over the slave trade, racism, and colonialism helped crystallise these negative narratives in Western discourses. While abolitionists themselves argued that Africa was a place of suffering because the slave trade provoked war, disease, famine and poverty; anti-abolitionists said Africa was so forbidding as to make slavery in foreign countries a positive escape. Either way, Africa was full of 'savagery' and constant war.

Furthermore, the growing discourse on race added a further dimension to these debates, supposedly explaining 'African backwardness' and 'savagery' as biologically-predetermined characteristics. For example, social Darwinists, such as Herbert Spencer, and eugenicists, such as Francis Galton, exerted enormous influence and lent credibility to generalised xenophobia, even though some of these works were nothing more than extended exercises in sophistry and casuistry. Again, colonialism went even further; because of what the Europeans thought they knew about Africa – a land of fantastical beasts and cannibals, slaves, 'backward races' and so on – the colonial powers managed to convince themselves that they were subjugating Africans (and others) for their own good. In other words, European violence was deemed to stop the wars endemic to Africa.

3.2 The Role of Travel and Adventure Writings in the Negative Portrayal of Africa

In furtherance of their Eurocentric disparagement of Africa and its heritage, some Western scholars referred to African art as "primitive" and inferior compared to European "high" art; African political organisations were regarded as mere "tribal" associations; and African medicine men were called "witch doctors." Africa and its traditions were repeatedly measured against Western cultural standards and found wanting. Again, the reading public was mesmerised by romantic accounts of travelers who endured great hardships in the dark and mysterious continent. Indeed, in most explorers' accounts, Africa is simply the backdrop to the heroism or Christian fortitude of the European explorer, and Africans are depicted as weak and pitiable creatures. The most celebrated explorer of the Victorian era was the English missionary Sir David Livingstone who in 1857

published his *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*. Livingstone was regarded as a national hero at home, a saint-like figure who took it upon himself to bring Christianity into the darkest corners of the earth. But although Livingstone viewed Africans with more sympathy than most of his countrymen, he held that Europeans were superior to Africans, and he assumed it was his mission to civilise and educate Africans in Western ways.

By the end of the nineteenth century, European travel to Africa had become more commonplace. The Englishwoman Mary Kingsley, one of the first female explorers, made pioneering trips to West and Central Africa and wrote about her experiences in her travel narratives. In addition to travel writings describing the strange customs and people, in the second half of the century there also appeared a great many novels—most of them romances and adventures—set against the “dark” African landscape. Probably the best known of these is Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), an adventure book for boys that relates a journey into the heart of the continent by a group in search of the legendary wealth said to be concealed in the mines of the novel's title. Other works of fiction set against the backdrop of Africa included Olive Schreiner's novels *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), about a woman living on an isolated ostrich farm in South Africa, and *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), a critique of Cecil John Rhodes's colonialism. In fact, the most famous of all nineteenth-century works of fiction set in Africa is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a novella that was first serialised in 1899 and later published in its entirety in 1902. The book recounts the journey of the sailor Marlow to the heart of the Belgian Congo in search of the mysterious, brilliant agent Kurtz, who he discovers has “gone native,” setting himself up as a god to the Africans, becoming more savage than they are, taking part in bizarre rites, and using violence to obtain ivory. For decades the novella was regarded as a harsh condemnation of imperialism, the first work of fiction to attack the Western attitudes that had been used to justify conquest and colonisation. But in “An Image of Africa”, an influential lecture delivered in 1975, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe called into question this interpretation. Achebe, on the contrary, pointed out what he saw as the essential racism of Conrad's attitude, as the author presents Africans as less than human, childlike, lacking in freewill, and unable to act. Achebe contends that this was the standard approach to Africa in Western fiction. This dehumanised portrayal of Africans was typical of the Western idea of Africa, according to Achebe, and Westerners continue to view Africans in this light.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that the dominant image of Africa projected by European writers in the nineteenth century was that of a place of savagery and chaos. Africa was known as the “Dark Continent,” a land deprived of the light of Western civilisation, education, culture, religion, industry, and progress. The African landscape was like nothing encountered in Europe and early explorers emphasised the differences between the cities or countryside they knew at home and the tropical jungle, arid open spaces, and indigenous flora and fauna of Africa. The people of Africa were characterised by Westerners as lacking in morality and intelligence, being perpetually childlike, demonic, and practicing outlandish, barbaric customs. Because of the overwhelmingly negative reports and portrayals of Africa and Africans, most Westerners regarded colonisation of the African land as their moral duty. It was the “White man's burden,” in Rudyard Kipling's phrase, to dominate Africans until they could be sufficiently civilised to take their place in the world.

5.0 SUMMARY

As you have learnt in this unit, by 1900, almost ninety percent of Africa was under European control, and the myth of the “Dark Continent” and the image of the deprived, depraved African native had taken hold of the Western consciousness. Generally, the bulk of nineteenth-century literary works about Africa were racist and hardly representative of the real Africa.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss in details the role of travel writings in the negative portrayal of Africa.
2. Europeans' depiction of Africa was actually a representation of their deepest fears and the unconscious aspects of themselves that they refused to acknowledge. Discuss.

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UNIT 2 IMAGES OF AFRICA IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Background to *Heart of Darkness*
 - 3.2 Negative Images of Africa in *Heart of Darkness*
 - 3.3 Chinua Achebe's Response to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*
 - 3.4 "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*"-Achebe
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad was born in Poland and became a seaman at the age of 16. He travelled to France and spent a good deal of time in South America. These influences affected his writings in many different ways. Thaís Flores Nogueira Diniz (1996) said that *Heart of Darkness* was serialised in *Blackwood's Magazine* from February to April 1899 and then in *Living Age* from June to August 1900. In 1902 it was published as a book. This period coincided with the "Scramble of Africa", when the British tended to see themselves as superior to other people and Africa as the centre of evil, as a part of the world possessed of demonic darkness or barbarism, represented by slavery, human sacrifice and cannibalism which it was their duty to exorcise. This view came as a result of the myth of the "Dark Continent", according to which Africa demanded imperialisation on moral, religious and scientific grounds. Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness* on the eve of the century that would see the end of the empire that it so significantly critiques. *Heart of Darkness* is based on Conrad's firsthand experience of the Congo region of West Africa. Conrad was sent up the Congo River to an inner station to rescue a company agent (Georges-Antoine Klein) who, unfortunately, died a few days later aboard ship. The story is told in the words of his primary narrator, Charles Marlow, a seaman. On one level, the story is about a voyage into the heart of the Belgian Congo, and on another about the journey into the soul of man. Many critics consider the book a literary bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and a forerunner both of modern literary techniques and approaches to the theme

of the ambiguous nature of truth, evil, and morality. Despite its literary qualities, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has become a source of intense discomfort for many African scholars because of its inglorious depiction of the continent of Africa and Africans. In this unit, you are going to see how Conrad uses imagery and symbols to depict a negative and Eurocentric view of Africa.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the negative portrayal of Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*
- justify whether Conrad's portrayal is a true reflection of Africa or merely an extension of Eurocentric ideas.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Background to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Joseph Teodor Konrad Korseniowski is better known by his pen name, Joseph Conrad. He was born in Poland in the 1850s. At the age of 17, he joined the French Navy and some years later, the British. In the following years, he travelled all over the world as a seaman, visiting and exploring what he considered the most exotic places he had ever been to. In the 1890s, he went on a journey up the River Congo in Africa and this was a turning point in his life. As a writer, Joseph Conrad later drew on this particular experience in the Congo. *Heart of Darkness*, which was first published in the early 1900s, in many instances, reflects what the author saw, felt and thought as a European in Africa during the colonial times. *Heart of Darkness* is both an adventure story set at the centre of a continent represented through breathtaking poetry, as well as a study of the inevitable corruption that comes from the exercise of tyrannical power.

In summary, *Heart of Darkness* deals with Marlow's expedition on board a steamboat into the African jungle in search of an ivory-trader named Mr. Kurtz. His mission is to find and bring him back to civilisation. However, Mr. Kurtz does not want to leave and actually orders an attack on the steamboat when they got close to his station. Mr. Kurtz is worshipped by the Africans and he exploits this. Marlow however manage to bring Mr. Kurtz aboard the steamboat. On the way back to England, Mr. Kurtz died, his last words were "the horror, the horror" and Marlow returns to England without him. In England, Marlow visited Mr. Kurtz' intended wife and gave

her Kurtz old letters. She remembers what a great man Mr. Kurtz was and how much she loved him. She also wanted to know what his last words were, to which Marlow replies “your name”. In the novel, Conrad showed the biases common to his age and time about Africa. An age in which the coloniser’s moral authority was justified and imperial ideology perpetuated. The colonialist mentality that he reveals in the book seems to be perfectly inserted in its age, reflecting the constraints of its time. Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* points to the colonised population as the standard of savagery to which Europeans are contrasted.

3.2 Negative Images of Africa in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*

Conrad based *Heart of Darkness* on his journey to the Belgian Congo in 1890. The protagonist of Conrad’s novel is Charlie Marlow, an Englishman on an expedition along the Congo River, who tells the story of his journey to the African jungle. Here is how he sneeringly describes the topography and geographical spatiality of the Congo:

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage.

As Jerry Olasakinju (2011) opines, the reference to Congo as an “accursed inheritance” in the passage above is a racist slur and belittles the uniqueness of the land even though its River does not appear like the River Thames which Charles Marlow was quite familiar with. Continuing his denigration of Africans, Conrad writes “a continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants”.

Furthermore, Conrad in the novel went on to describe the Congolese people as “savage” whose crudeness could be refined or transformed:

And between whiles I had to look after the
savage who was fireman. He was an

improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam gauge and at the water gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity—and he had filed his teeth, too, *the poor devil*, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge.

In the passage above, Marlow describes Africans as ‘savages’ and ‘niggers’ and portrays African life as mysterious and inhuman. He projects the image of Africa as ‘the other world’, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality.

Elsewhere in the novel, two locales are presented which reflect the 19th century worldview: Europe as the region of light and goodness, and Africa as the region of darkness and evil. In other words, European colonisation was to bring governmental order, cultural and religious enlightenment, and financial prosperity to the “Dark Continent.” And it is in fact this “mission mentality” that Marlow sees as the redemptive quality of colonisation. For him, the conquest of a Third-World country is justified only so far as the colonising power is there for the good of the people. In denigrating the humanity of Africans, Conrad in the dialogue below alleged that Africans were primitive cannibals. Ironically, however, he failed to show any physical evidence that the Africans encountered by Marlow had actually eaten human flesh:

Catch 'im,” he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp white teeth—“catch 'im. Give 'im to us.”
“To you, eh?” I asked; “what would you do with them?” “Eat 'im’!” he said curtly....

It is obvious that Conrad intentionally conjures up these disrespectful images of Africans in his mind. This is much the same idea and belief about Africans prevalent in Europe in his days, which was aptly encouraged by the oppressive colonialism ravaging Africa in those days. The implication of Conrad's wrapped portrayal is that the reading public could ignorantly absorb these unpalatable images of Africans such as presented in the book as being a true reflection of the African.

Again, elsewhere in the novel, Conrad ridicules the Africans as dumb brutes, insinuating that they are unable to speak fluently nor intelligently:

In place of speech they made 'a violent babble of uncouth sounds. They exchanged short grunting phrases' even among themselves. But most of the times they were too busy with their frenzy.

The above is clearly and blatantly a racist portrayal of Africans as bestial. For Conrad, Africans are cannibals, making incomprehensible grunts that served them for speech. Writing about the pervasive negative portrayals, Ayo Kehinde (2003) citing Niyi Osundare (1993) asserts that:

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is full of passages highlighting a complex series of evasions, open-eyed blindness, wilful forgetfulness, lacunae, egoisms, and the like, against Africa and her people. The constant repetition of such words as 'inscrutable', 'incomprehensible' and 'blank' in Conrad's text betrays his subjective portrayal of African culture and people. Although African life is not directly presented in the novel, Africa, as the setting of the action of the novel emerges as the negation of rationality. *Heart of Darkness*, therefore, shows a typical European attitude to Africa, typical especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Unmukh Chowdhury (1986) noted in an article entitled "*Postcolonial Portrayals of Africa: from Heart of Darkness to A Bend in the River*", that throughout the novel we never observe any positive words for Africa or African people. They are essentialised as 'The African'. In the narrative,

they are described in a way that they have no other identity without being savage: 'They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with the complete deathlike indifference of unhappy savages'. In fact, Africans are described in such a way that they do not consider themselves as human beings. The underlying tone is that they consider the white as a superior being than themselves. Conrad portrays African people in such a way that they do not have any hope in their life:

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair.

He further states that the African people are devastated and will be destroyed soon:

They were dying slowly- it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom.

Africans, for Conrad, do not have any culture and identity. Conrad does not only show Africa as a savage place. He also shows that an intellectual civilised person like Mr. Kurtz is been destroyed by the touch of Africa. According to the narrator:

It appears these *niggers* do bury the tusks sometimes-but evidently they couldn't bury this parcel deep enough to save the gifted Mr. Kurtz from his fate...you should have heard him say,-My ivory, 'Oh yes, I heard him-. My intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my... everything belonged to him.

It is important to mention that in the novel no African characters were introduced nor elaborated and discussed thoroughly. Africa is watched and observed from Eurocentric view point that gives Europe a superior position over Africans which Edward Said says is one of the purposes of Orientalism. Africans are depicted in a way that they are the total contrast of European white people as Achebe says in his essay "**An Image of**

Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness. Thus, it is the belief in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifested. For Conrad, Africans are a pre-historic mass of frenzied, howling, incomprehensible barbarians. In all, it could be said that Conrad 'orientalised' Africa as Edward Said theorised in his book *Orientalism*.

3.3 Chinua Achebe's Response to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

As already noted, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is considered one of the great works of English literature. The early responses to the novella praised the novella and called it one of the events of the literary year. However, this changed in 1977 when Chinua Achebe criticised the novella for being racist. As a response to Achebe's critique, Edward Said defended Conrad in 1993. Not surprisingly, many Africans expressed deep reservation to Conrad's book because they feel he used the Third World as a background against which he examined Western values and conduct that the African people are no more than caricatures. As hinted earlier, the strongest and perhaps, most pungent accusations on Conrad's novel was most strongly made by Chinua Achebe in the course of a lecture entitled "An image of Africa: Racism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" delivered at the University of Massachusetts on February 18, 1975. Achebe argued that Conrad sets up Africa "as a foil to Europe, a place of negations . . . in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest". Africa is "the other world", "the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality". Achebe continues:

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked.

Achebe criticised Conrad's comparison of the Congo and the Thames, and also alleged that the contrast made between the two women who loved Kurtz, one African, the other European, is highly prejudiced. Any sympathy expressed for the sufferings of the black African under colonialism, argued Achebe is a sympathy born of a kind of liberalism which whilst

acknowledging distant kinship, repudiates equality. Conrad, continued Achebe, is a "racist"-and great art can only be "on the side of man's deliverance and not his enslavement; for the brotherhood and unity of all mankind and not for the doctrines of Hitler's master races or Conrad's 'rudimentary souls'".

Finally, Achebe concluded his attack on *Heart of Darkness* by describing it as "a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question. It seems to me totally inconceivable that great art or even good art could possibly reside in such unwholesome surroundings".

3.4 “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness’”

-By Chinua Achebe

Achebe, in the famous article “An image of Africa: Racism in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness”, accused Conrad of being a “thoroughgoing racist” for deliberately withholding speech from the African subjects of his story. From every indication, Conrad’s representation of the “dark” continent and its people is very much part of a racist tradition that has existed in Western literature for centuries. This accounted for Achebe’s accusation of racism, since he refused to see the Blackman as an individual in his own right, and because of his use of Africa as a setting-representative of darkness and evil. Achebe’s full response to Conrad’s novel is provided below.

In the fall of 1974 I was walking one day from the English Department at the University of Massachusetts to a parking lot. It was a fine autumn morning such as encouraged friendliness to passing strangers. Brisk youngsters were hurrying in all directions, many of them obviously freshmen in their first flush of enthusiasm. An older man going the same way as I turned and remarked to me how very young they came these days. I agreed. Then he asked me if I was a student too. I said no, I was a teacher. What did I teach? African literature. Now that was funny, he said, because he knew a fellow who taught the same thing, or perhaps it was African history, in a certain Community College not far from here. It always surprised him, he went on to say, because he never had thought of Africa as having that kind of stuff, you know. By this time I was walking much faster. "Oh well," I heard him say finally, behind me: "I guess I have to take your course to find out." A few weeks later I received two very touching

letters from high school children in Yonkers, New York, who -- bless their teacher -- had just read *Things Fall Apart*. One of them was particularly happy to learn about the customs and superstitions of an African tribe.

I propose to draw from these rather trivial encounters rather heavy conclusions which at first sight might seem somewhat out of proportion to them. But only, I hope, at first sight.

The young fellow from Yonkers, perhaps partly on account of his age but I believe also for much deeper and more serious reasons, is obviously unaware that the life of his own tribesmen in Yonkers, New York, is full of odd customs and superstitions and, like everybody else in his culture, imagines that he needs a trip to Africa to encounter those things.

The other person being fully my own age could not be excused on the grounds of his years. Ignorance might be a more likely reason; but here again I believe that something more willful than a mere lack of information was at work. For did not that erudite British historian and Regius Professor at Oxford, Hugh Trevor Roper, also pronounce that African history did not exist?

If there is something in these utterances more than youthful inexperience, more than a lack of factual knowledge, what is it? Quite simply it is the desire -- one might indeed say the need -- in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest.

This need is not new; which should relieve us all of considerable responsibility and perhaps make us even willing to look at this phenomenon dispassionately. I have neither the wish nor the competence to embark on the exercise with the tools of the social and biological sciences but more simply in the manner of a novelist responding to one famous book of European fiction: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which better than any other work that I know displays that Western desire and need which I have just referred to. Of course there are whole libraries of books devoted to the same purpose but most of them are so obvious and so crude that few people worry about them today. Conrad, on the other hand, is undoubtedly one of the great stylists of modern fiction and a good storyteller into the bargain. His contribution therefore falls automatically into a different class -- permanent literature -- read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics. *Heart of Darkness* is indeed so secure today that a leading Conrad scholar has numbered it "among the half-dozen greatest

short novels in the English language." I will return to this critical opinion in due course because it may seriously modify my earlier suppositions about who may or may not be guilty in some of the matters I will now raise.

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as "the other world," the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. The book opens on the River Thames, tranquil, resting, peacefully "at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks." But the actual story will take place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the Thames. The River Congo is quite decidedly not a River Emeritus. It has rendered no service and enjoys no old-age pension. We are told that "Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world."

Is Conrad saying then that these two rivers are very different, one good, and the other bad? Yes, but that is not the real point. It is not the differentness that worries Conrad but the lurking hints of kinship, of common ancestry. For the Thames too "has been one of the dark places of the earth." It conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace. But if it were to visit its primordial relative, the Congo, it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings.

These suggestive echoes comprise Conrad's famed evocation of the African atmosphere in *Heart of Darkness*. In the final consideration his method amounts to no more than a steady, ponderous, fake-ritualistic repetition of two antithetical sentences, one about silence and the other about frenzy. We can inspect samples of this on pages 36 and 37 of the present edition: a) it was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention and b) The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. Of course there is a judicious change of adjective from time to time, so that instead of inscrutable, for example, you might have unspeakable, even plain mysterious, etc., etc.

The eagle-eyed English critic F. R. Leavis drew attention long ago to Conrad's "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery." That insistence must not be dismissed lightly, as many Conrad critics have tended to do, as a mere stylistic flaw; for it raises serious questions of artistic good faith. When a writer while pretending to record scenes, incidents and their impact is in reality engaged in inducing hypnotic stupor in his readers through a bombardment of emotive words and other

forms of trickery much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity. Generally normal readers are well armed to detect and resist such underhand activity. But Conrad chose his subject well -- one which was guaranteed not to put him in conflict with the psychological predisposition of his readers or raise the need for him to contend with their resistance. He chose the role of purveyor of comforting myths.

The most interesting and revealing passages in *Heart of Darkness* are, however, about people. I must crave the indulgence of my reader to quote almost a whole page from about the middle of the stop/when representatives of Europe in a steamer going down the Congo encounter the denizens of Africa.

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly as we struggled round a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us -- who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign -- and no memories.

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there--there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly and the men were....No they were not inhuman. Well, you know that was the worst of it -- this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you, was just the thought of their humanity -- like yours -- the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you -- you so remote from the night of first ages -- could comprehend.

Herein lies the meaning of *Heart of Darkness* and the fascination it holds over the Western mind: "What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity-like yours Ugly."

Having shown us Africa in the mass, Conrad then zeros in, half a page later, on a specific example, giving us one of his rare descriptions of an African who is not just limbs or rolling eyes:

And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity -- and he had filed his teeth too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge.

As everybody knows, Conrad is a romantic on the side. He might not exactly admire savages clapping their hands and stamping their feet but they have at least the merit of being in their place, unlike this dog in a parody of breeches. For Conrad, things being in their place are of the utmost importance.

"Fine fellows-cannibals-in their place," he tells us pointedly. Tragedy begins when things leave their accustomed place, like Europe leaving its safe stronghold between the policeman and the baker to like a peep into the heart of darkness.

Before the story takes us into the Congo basin proper we are given this nice little vignette as an example of things in their place:

Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks -- these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement that was as natural and hue as the surf along their coast. They wanted

no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at.

Towards the end of the story Conrad lavishes a whole page quite unexpectedly on an African woman who has obviously been some kind of mistress to Mr. Kurtz and now presides (if I may be permitted a little liberty) like a formidable mystery over the inexorable imminence of his departure:

She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificentShe stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose.

This Amazon is drawn in considerable detail, albeit of a predictable nature, for two reasons. First, she is in her place and so can win Conrad's special brand of approval and second, she fulfills a structural requirement of the story: a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman who will step forth to end the story:

She came forward all in black with a pale head, floating toward me in the dusk. She was in mourning.... She took both my hands in hers and murmured, "I had heard you were coming."... She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering.

The difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two women is conveyed in too many direct and subtle ways to need elaboration. But perhaps the most significant difference is the one implied in the author's bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other. It is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the "rudimentary souls" of Africa. In place of speech they made "a violent babble of uncouth sounds." They "exchanged short grunting phrases" even among themselves. But most of the time they were too busy with their frenzy. There are two occasions in the book, however, when Conrad departs somewhat from his practice and confers speech, even English speech, on the savages. The first occurs when cannibalism gets the better of them:

Catch 'im," he snapped with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth-"catch 'im. Give 'im to us." "To you,

eh?" I asked; "what would you do with them?" "Eat 'im!" he said curtly. . . .

The other occasion was the famous announcement: "Mistah Kurtz-he dead."

At first sight these instances might be mistaken for unexpected acts of generosity from Conrad. In reality they constitute some of his best assaults. In the case of the cannibals the incomprehensible grunts that had thus far served them for speech suddenly proved inadequate for Conrad's purpose of letting the European glimpse the unspeakable craving in their hearts. Weighing the necessity for consistency in the portrayal of the dumb brutes against the sensational advantages of securing their conviction by clear, unambiguous evidence issuing out of their own mouth Conrad chose the latter. As for the announcement of Mr. Kurtz's death by the "insolent black head in the doorway" what better or more appropriate finis could be written to the horror story of that wayward child of civilization who willfully had given his soul to the powers of darkness and "taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land" than the proclamation of his physical death by the forces he had joined?

It might be contended, of course, that the attitude to the African in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad's but that of his fictional narrator, Marlow, and that far from endorsing it Conrad might indeed be holding it up to irony and criticism. Certainly Conrad appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his history. He has, for example, a narrator behind a narrator. The primary narrator is Marlow but his account is given to us through the filter of a second, shadowy person. But if Conrad's intention is to draw a cordon sanitaire between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator his care seems to me totally wasted because he neglects to hint however subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters. It would not have been beyond Conrad's power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary. Marlow seems to me to enjoy Conrad's complete confidence -- a feeling reinforced by the close similarities between their two careers.

Marlow comes through to us not only as a witness of truth, but one holding those advanced and humane views appropriate to the English liberal tradition which required all Englishmen of decency to be deeply shocked by atrocities in Bulgaria or the Congo of King Leopold of the Belgians or wherever.

Thus Marlow is able to toss out such bleeding-heart sentiments as these:

They were dying slowly-it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest.

The kind of liberalism espoused here by Marlow/Conrad touched all the best minds of the age in England, Europe and America. It took different forms in the minds of different people but almost always managed to sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people. That extraordinary missionary, Albert Schweitzer, who sacrificed brilliant careers in music and theology in Europe for a life of service to Africans in much the same area as Conrad writes about, epitomizes the ambivalence. In a comment which has often been quoted Schweitzer says: "The African is indeed my brother but my junior brother." And so he proceeded to build a hospital appropriate to the needs of junior brothers with standards of hygiene reminiscent of medical practice in the days before the germ theory of disease came into being. Naturally he became a sensation in Europe and America. Pilgrims flocked, and I believe still flock even after he has passed on, to witness the prodigious miracle in Lamberene, on the edge of the primeval forest.

Conrad's liberalism would not take him quite as far as Schweitzer's, though. He would not use the word brother however qualified; the farthest he would go was kinship. When Marlow's African helmsman falls down with a spear in his heart he gives his white master one final disquieting look.

And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory-like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

It is important to note that Conrad, careful as ever with his words, is concerned not so much about distant kinship as about someone laying a claim on it. The black man lays a claim on the white man which is well-nigh intolerable. It is the laying of this claim which frightens and at the same time fascinates Conrad, "... the thought of their humanity-like yours Ugly."

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked. Students of *Heart of Darkness* will often tell you that Conrad is concerned not so much with Africa as with the deterioration of one European mind caused by solitude and sickness. They will point out to you that Conrad is, if anything, less charitable to the Europeans in the story than he is to the natives, that the point of the story is to ridicule Europe's civilizing mission in Africa. A Conrad student informed me in Scotland that Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr. Kurtz.

Which is partly the point. Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind? But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanisation of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanisation, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot. I do not doubt Conrad's great talents. Even *Heart of Darkness* has its memorably good passages and moments:

The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across tile water to bar the way for our return.

Its exploration of the minds of the European characters is often penetrating and full of insight. But all that has been more than fully discussed in the last fifty years. His obvious racism has, however, not been addressed. And it is high time it was!

Conrad was born in 1857, the very year in which the first Anglican missionaries were arriving among my own people in Nigeria. It was certainly not his fault that he lived his life at a time when the reputation of the black man was at a particularly low level. But even after due allowances have been made for all the influences of contemporary prejudice on his sensibility there remains still in Conrad's attitude a residue of antipathy to

black people which his peculiar psychology alone can explain. His own account of his first encounter with a black man is very revealing:

A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards.

Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts. Sometimes his fixation on blackness is equally interesting as when he gives us this brief description:

A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms. . . . as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to wave white arms!

But so unrelenting is Conrad's obsession. As a matter of interest Conrad gives us in A Personal Record what amounts to a companion piece to the buck nigger of Haiti. At the age of sixteen Conrad encountered his first Englishman in Europe. He calls him "my unforgettable Englishman" and describes him in the following manner:

(his) calves exposed to the public gaze...dazzled the beholder by the splendor of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory. . . . The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men. . . illumined his face. . . and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth...his white calves twinkled sturdily.

Irrational love and irrational hate jostling together in the heart of that talented, tormented man. But whereas irrational love may at worst engender foolish acts of indiscretion, irrational hate can endanger the life of the community. Naturally Conrad is a dream for psychoanalytic critics. Perhaps the most detailed study of him in this direction is by Bernard C. Meyer, M.D. In his lengthy book Dr. Meyer follows every conceivable lead (and

sometimes inconceivable ones) to explain Conrad. As an example he gives us long disquisitions on the significance of hair and hair-cutting in Conrad. And yet not even one word is spared for his attitude to black people. Not even the discussion of Conrad's anti-semitism was enough to spark off in Dr. Meyer's mind those other dark and explosive thoughts. This only leads one to surmise that Western psychoanalysts must regard the kind of racism displayed by Conrad absolutely normal despite the profoundly important work done by Frantz Fanon in the psychiatric hospitals of French Algeria.

Whatever Conrad's problems were, you might say he is now safely dead. Quite true. Unfortunately his heart of darkness plagues us still. Which is why an offensive and deplorable book can be described by a serious scholar as "among the half dozen greatest short novels in the English language." And why it is today the most commonly prescribed novel in twentieth-century literature courses in English Departments of American universities.

There are two probable grounds on which what I have said so far may be contested. The first is that it is no concern of fiction to please people about whom it is written. I will go along with that. But I am not talking about pleasing people. I am talking about a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question.

Secondly, I may be challenged on the grounds of actuality. Conrad, after all, did sail down the Congo in 1890 when my own father was still a babe in arms. How could I stand up more than fifty years after his death and purport to contradict him? My answer is that as a sensible man I will not accept just any traveler's tales solely on the grounds that I have not made the journey myself. I will not trust the evidence even off man's very eyes when I suspect them to be as jaundiced as Conrad's. And we also happen to know that Conrad was, in the words of his biographer, Bernard C. Meyer, "notoriously inaccurate in the rendering of his own history."

But more important by far is the abundant testimony about Conrad's savages which we could gather if we were so inclined from other sources and which might lead us to think that these people must have had other occupations besides merging into the evil forest or materializing out of it simply to plague Marlow and his dispirited band. For as it happened, soon after Conrad had written his book an event of far greater consequence was taking place in the art world of Europe. This is how Frank Willett, a British art historian, describes it:

Gauguin had gone to Tahiti, the most extravagant individual act of turning to a non-European culture in the decades immediately before and after 1900, when European artists were avid for new artistic experiences, but it was only about 1904-5 that African art began to make its distinctive impact. One piece is still identifiable; it is a mask that had been given to Maurice Vlaminck in 1905. He records that Derain was 'speechless' and 'stunned' when he saw it, bought it from Vlaminck and in turn showed it to Picasso and Matisse, who were also greatly affected by it. Ambroise Vollard then borrowed it and had it cast in bronze. . . The revolution of twentieth century art was under way!

The mask in question was made by other savages living just north of Conrad's River Congo. They have a name too: the Fang people, and are without a doubt among the world's greatest masters of the sculptured form. The event Frank Willett is referring to marks the beginning of cubism and the infusion of new life into European art, which had run completely out of strength.

The point of all this is to suggest that Conrad's picture of the people of the Congo seems grossly inadequate even at the height of their subjection to the ravages of King Leopold's International Association for the Civilisation of Central Africa.

Travelers with closed minds can tell us little except about themselves. But even those not blinkered, like Conrad with xenophobia, can be astonishingly blind. Let me digress a little here. One of the greatest and most intrepid travelers of all time, Marco Polo, journeyed to the Far East from the Mediterranean in the thirteenth century and spent twenty years in the court of Kublai Khan in China. On his return to Venice he set down in his book entitled *Description of the World* his impressions of the peoples and places and customs he had seen. But there were at least two extraordinary omissions in his account. He said nothing about the art of printing, unknown as yet in Europe but in full flower in China. He either did not notice it at all or if he did, failed to see what use Europe could possibly have for it. Whatever the reason, Europe had to wait another

hundred years for Gutenberg. But even more spectacular was Marco Polo's omission of any reference to the Great Wall of China nearly 4,000 miles long and already more than 1,000 years old at the time of his visit. Again, he may not have seen it; but the Great Wall of China is the only structure built by man which is visible from the moon! Indeed travelers can be blind.

As I said earlier, Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa. If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity it could say with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray -- a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man's jeopardous integrity. Keep away from Africa, or else! Mr. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* should have heeded that warning and the prowling horror in his heart would have kept its place, chained to its lair. But he foolishly exposed himself to the wild irresistible allure of the jungle and lo! The darkness found him out.

In my original conception of this essay, I had thought to conclude it nicely on an appropriately positive note in which I would suggest from my privileged position in African and Western cultures some advantages the West might derive from Africa once it rid its mind of old prejudices and began to look at Africa not through a haze of distortions and cheap mystifications but quite simply as a continent of people -- not angels, but not rudimentary souls either--just people, often highly gifted people and often strikingly successful in their enterprise with life and society. But as I thought more about the stereotype image, about its grip and pervasiveness, about the willful tenacity with which the West holds it to its heart; when I thought of the West's television and cinema and newspapers, about books read in its schools and out of school, of churches preaching to empty pews about the need to send help to the heathen in Africa, I realised that no easy optimism was possible. And there was, in any case, something totally wrong in offering bribes to the West in return for its good opinion of Africa. Ultimately, the abandonment of unwholesome thoughts must be its own and only reward. Although I have used the word willful a few times here to characterise the West's view of Africa, it may well be that what is

happening at this stage is more akin to reflex action than calculated malice. This does not make the situation more but less hopeful.

The Christian Science Monitor, a paper more enlightened than most, once carried an interesting article written by its Education Editor on the serious psychological and learning problems faced by little children who speak one language at home and then go to school where something else is spoken. It was a wide-ranging article taking in Spanish-speaking children in America, the children of migrant Italian workers in Germany, the quadrilingual phenomenon in Malaysia, and so on. And all this while, the article speaks unequivocally about language. But then out of the blue sky comes this:

In London there is an enormous immigration
of children who speak Indian or Nigerian
dialects, or some other native language.

I believe that the introduction of dialects which is technically erroneous in the context is almost a reflex action caused by an instinctive desire of the writer to downgrade the discussion to the level of Africa and India. And this is quite comparable to Conrad's withholding of language from his rudimentary souls. Language is too grand for these chaps; let's give them dialects!

In all this business a lot of violence is inevitably done not only to the image of despised peoples but even to words, the very tools of possible redress. Look at the phrase native language in the Science Monitor excerpt. Surely the only native language possible in London is Cockney English. But our writer means something else -- something appropriate to the sounds Indians and Africans make!

Although the work of redressing which needs to be done may appear too daunting, I believe it is not one day too soon to begin. Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth. But the victims of racist slander who for centuries have had to live with the inhumanity it makes them heir to have always known better than any casual visitor even when he comes loaded with the gifts of a Conrad.

Source: *Massachusetts Review*. 18. 1977. Rpt. in *Heart of Darkness, An Authoritative Text, Background and Sources Criticism*. 1961. 3rd ed. Ed. Robert Kimbrough, London: W. W Norton and Co., 1988, pp.251-261.

4.0 CONCLUSION

As you have learnt in this unit, many African critics consider *Heart of Darkness* a literary bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and a forerunner both of modern literary techniques and approaches to the theme of the ambiguous nature of truth, evil, and morality. However, despite its literary qualities, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* remains a source of intense discomfort for many African scholars because of its inglorious depiction of the continent of Africa and Africans. In the book, Conrad uses repulsive imagery and symbols to portray a negative and Eurocentric view of Africa. In the novel, no African characters are introduced, elaborated and discussed thoroughly. Africa is watched and observed from Eurocentric view point that gives Europe a superior position over Africans. Africans are depicted in a way that they are the total contrast of European white people as Achebe says in his essay reproduced above.

5.0 SUMMARY

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has invited a body of criticism of great complexity. In 1977, Chinua Achebe criticised the novel for being racist. Many Africans expressed deep reservation to Conrad's book because they feel he used the Third World as a background against which he examined Western values and conduct that the African people are no more than caricatures. For Achebe, a novel that depersonalises a portion of the human race should not be considered a great work of art. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad describes Africa as a very mean, rough, underdeveloped and dangerous place, where there are traces of evil or danger lurking, such as a creeping mist and the jungle is so dark green such that it is almost black.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

1. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* represents a racist's view of Africa.
Discuss.
2. Examine the negative imagery and symbols deployed by Conrad in depicting Africa in *Heart of Darkness*.
3. Attempt a brief summary of Achebe's allegations against Conrad in the article "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*".

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UNIT 3 IMAGES OF AFRICA IN JOYCE CARY’S *MISTER JOHNSON*

CONTENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Joyce Cary belongs to liberal consciousness. Although he has all the benevolence of a district administrator, he nevertheless suffers from the colonial consciousness of the coloniser. Thus, he sees Africa as a ‘Dark Continent’ needing light. Cary’s *Mister Johnson* (1969) is a novel that portrays the British imperial mind’s preconceptions of its Nigerian colony. Mr. Johnson and Nigeria are the protagonist and main subject of Cary’s novel. Cary wrote mostly to a European audience that often stereotyped and discriminated against its African colonies. In the novel, Cary’s descriptions and characterisations of Nigeria include stereotypical and prejudiced elements similar to Conrad as discussed in unit two. For instance, Mr. Johnson is ridiculous, foolish, and laughable for his ridiculous and stereotypical attributes. Cary’s descriptions of Mr. Johnson and the African landscape represent a stereotyped picture of an African by a white man. In this unit you are going to learn some of the negative images of Africa as portrayed in Cary’s *Mister Johnson*.

3.2 Negative Images of Africa in Cary’s *Mister Johnson*

The satiric title of the novel itself is an appellation that connotes caricature. Thus, ‘Mr’ is not an adjective for respect but that of denigration. Every characterisation of Mr. Johnson is consistently satiric and every adjective used in qualifying African characters are diminishing and denigrating, for instance, ‘infantile and ‘corrupt’. Fada, the setting of the novel, is described

as “a rubbish heap not better than a rabbit warren”. Johnson says that England is his home and the Queen is his ideal. His naivety is never dispelled. In the novel, Cary’s protagonist, Mister Johnson, is portrayed as a fool, lunatic, or thief. He appears as “a child caught robbing the jam,” a skinned rabbit, “a terror of the world,” and many other such exaggerated and outrageous images. This is how Cary ridiculously describes Mr. Johnson in the first page of the novel:

Johnson is not only a stranger by accent, but by color. He is as black as a stove, almost a pure Negro, with short nose full, soft lips. He is young, perhaps seventeen, and seems half-grown. His neck, legs and arms are much too long and thin for his small body, as narrow as a skinned rabbit’s. He is loose-jointed like a boy, and sits with his knees up to his nose, grinning at Bamu over the stretched white cotton of his trousers. He smiles with the delighted expression of a child looking at a birthday table and says, ‘Oh, you are too pretty- a beautiful girl.

As could be seen in the above characterisation, rarely does Johnson comes across as a humanised character. He is an outcast, who is rejected by a society that does not understand him. He aspires to British image, insisting that his wife Bamu dresses like English women. He describes the novel’s setting, Fada, as bush compared to England. For him, colonisation is necessary for Africa. He is shown spending hours writing the letter “S”, thus “S” becomes a metaphor for his ineffectual nature. Johnson is a compulsive thief who steals not to build a house or make a fortune but to feast people erratically. His love of feasting, drinking and dancing is a distortion of African hospitality.

In the novel, the marriage ceremony by Johnson is an outright abuse of African marital process. In most African culture, the payment of dowry is a test of manhood, to ensure that the man can take care of his wife. But in Johnson’s case, the parents of Bamu, his wife, took every property belonging to him in the name of dowry.

Again, and significantly too, Johnson’s death by execution is symbolic, in that it demonstrates that the British colonial system cannot tolerate anyone or anything “dangerous to the established order of things”. In other words, Johnson’s innovation and zeal must die, while Europe continues in its

prejudice and erroneous preconceptions. Johnson, in the novel, has no capacity for growth or self-knowledge.

3.3 Chinua Achebe's Response to Cary's *Mister Johnson*

As we have studied so far in this unit, Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* is a patronising novel about Africa and Africans. Ironically, Cary cited Joseph Conrad as one of his literary influences. In his book *Home and Exile* (2000), Achebe lashed out at Cary just as he did to Joseph Conrad as discussed in Unit 2 of this module. In his disapproval of the unsavoury Nigerian characters of Cary's novel, Achebe retorted:

Haven't I encountered this crowd before?
Perhaps in *Heart of Darkness*, in the Congo.
But Cary is writing about my home, Nigeria
isn't he?"

Achebe concludes that not only are Cary's representations of African people copies of Conrad's, but Conrad's are "a hand-me-down from earlier times. He raises doubts whether Cary could have thought outside this tradition of "colonial ideology" left over from the days of the slave trade. For Achebe, Cary's novel, *Mister Johnson*, remains a source of frustration, especially in its characterisations. In *Home and Exile* Achebe acknowledges that:

...we can all differ as to the exact point where good writing becomes overwhelmed by racial cliché. But overwhelmed or undermined, literature is always badly served when an author's artistic insight yields place to stereotype and malice. And it becomes doubly offensive when such a work is arrogantly proffered to you as your story (41).

Many African scholars consider Cary as a failed imitator of Conrad and the novel, a "racist-colonialist representation of Africa". As Laura Tenpenny (2011) observes, Cary's Nigerian characters serve "as an implicit justification of the British civilising mission" and the novel's protagonist, Johnson, is the "classic colonial stereotype" and "the botched African product of the imperial civilising mission".

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that Cary's presentation of Africans in the novel *Mister Johnson* is questionable at best and racist at worst. Cary's portrayal of his main character is patronising and filled with racist undertones. For instance, Mr. Johnson is ridiculous, foolish, and laughable for his ridiculous and stereotypical attributes. Cary's descriptions of Mr. Johnson and the African landscape represent a stereotyped picture of an African by a white man.

6.0 SUMMARY

In *Mister Johnson*, Cary's protagonist is portrayed as a fool, lunatic, or thief. He appears as "a child caught robbing the jam," a skinned rabbit, "a terror of the world," and many other such exaggerated and outrageous images. Achebe is of the view that Cary's representations of African people are copies of Joseph Conrad's.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

Mister Johnson is the "classic colonial stereotype". Critically examine the validity of this assertion, drawing instances from the novel.

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UNIT 4 IMAGES OF AFRICA IN DANIEL DEFOE'S ROBINSON CRUSOE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Background to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*
 - 3.2 Negative Images of Africa in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Saeed Yazdani and Mehrnoush Masjedizadeh (2011), centuries of European colonisation had negative effects on all aspects of the lives of the colonized people. The European powers took control of the indigenous people's land and imposed their culture and ideologies on them. Post-colonial literature in these countries has therefore become a veritable weapon used to dismantle the hegemonic boundaries and the determinants that create unequal relations of power, based on binary oppositions. Postcolonial writers use a variety of strategies to challenge the authority and power of the emperors and to correct the misinterpretation of their cultures and history, which were produced based on the colonial attitudes. The postcolonial text, then, seeks to address the ways in which the western literary tradition has marginalized, misrepresented and silenced its other by providing a platform for these dissenting voices. One of the strategies to respond the European domination is rewriting the classical literary works. Postcolonial authors challenge the imperial ideologies inculcated and stabilised through the British canonical texts. They take up the basic assumptions of text, unveil those assumptions, and subvert the text for postcolonial purposes. Daniel Defoe was both a novelist and a journalist. He was an entrepreneur and travelled extensively in Europe. The novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, was published in 1719 when Defoe himself was 60 years old. Defoe wrote at the time when travel literature was at the height of popular fashion. The novel features a British trader as its hero. The Robinson Crusoe story has become a towering figure in literature. When studied in its Colonial context, one sees that British colonialism informs every feature of the text. In this unit, you are going to study some of those Eurocentric biases and stereotypes about Africa portrayed in *Robinson*

Crusoe which most postcolonial African texts like Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* attempt to correct.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the negative portrayal of Africa in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*
- justify whether Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* portrayal is a true reflection of Africa or merely an extension of Eurocentric ideas.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Background to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is about the story of one man's survival on a deserted island. The novel is sometimes referred to as the first English novel. The text created an early script for the European colonial project at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The novel has acquired a "canonical" status and often regarded as the first English novel and Defoe himself "the indisputable father of the English novel". The novel celebrates European colonial power. As Europeans, particularly the British, expanded their territorial and imaginative conquest, *Robinson Crusoe* became synonymous with Empire in its articulation of the troubling space between colonialism and the colony. Although *Robinson Crusoe* is primarily an adventure novel, it nevertheless articulates that basic premise of Western ideology about Africa so evocatively, and so memorably too.

The story of *Robinson Crusoe* has been rendered in different forms and genres such as novel, play, poem, pantomime, film, cartoons and television series. As a result, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is admired by so many people, regardless of age, social class, intellectual level, and culture. *Robinson Crusoe* is a perfect example for the spirit of the time it was written in. The master-slave relationship between Crusoe and Friday shows the view point of Defoe and his contemporary people about the colored people of the colonized countries. This kind of relationship is a symbol of a larger relationship between the white European and the black native people in the time of colonisation. It is because of this theme of racism and slavery that

Robinson Crusoe has turned to a book suitable for being re-written by postcolonial authors.

3.2 Images of Africa in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is a novel where colonial ideology is manifested in Crusoe's colonialist attitude towards the land upon which he's shipwrecked and toward the Blackman he 'colonises' and names Friday. For postcolonial critics, *Robinson Crusoe* is a colonial trope. In Defoe's novel, there are a number of binaries, such as those between colonisers and colonised. Robinson Crusoe makes Friday his slave immediately after he finds him in order to help him in cultivation and other works he achieves on the island as he already feels that he is like a king or emperor. He imposes his language and religion on Friday and teaches him to call him master.

As a colonialist text, Defoe deploys distorted images and symbols in the novel to portray Africa and its people. At one point in *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe refers to Friday's people as "blinded, ignorant pagans". Besides that, he was condescending in the way he speaks to and deals with Friday. For instance, he does not call Friday by a real name. Rather, he referred to him by the day they met. Again, Crusoe insists Friday should call him "master", which by implication means that he is the servant. Crusoe's relationship with Friday comes in several layers. He claims he was civilising Friday by teaching him Christianity, insisting that through his teachings, he has become "a much better scholar in the scripture knowledge". To further buttress his racist thinking, Crusoe subjects Friday to the menial jobs of building shelter and finding food. He is also meant to provide entertainment to Crusoe.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is a novel that has transcended generations and showed the writing world the genre of the travel narrative. You also learnt that the novel depicts some of the seventeenth century racist images of Africa. In addition, you learnt that the novel prompted South Africa's J.M. Coetzee to write a response novel entitled *Foe*, which attempts to create a humanised version of Defoe's distorted portrayal of Africa. No doubt, *Robinson Crusoe*, as James Joyce noted can be clearly considered to be an imperialist and racist novel, with its protagonist becoming the "true symbol of the British conquest".

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you learnt that Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* remains one of the most influential and groundbreaking texts of early fictional writing, opening doors for discussion and critique while at the same time, introducing the writing world to the genre of the island narrative. As an adventure novel, the main theme of *Robinson Crusoe* is the insecurities that came with moving away from personal comfort zones, as well as the desire to be involved in good adventures. But as a postcolonial text, *Robinson Crusoe* helps solidify the stereotypical roles of the late 18th century, as it portrays the life of a middle-aged white man during colonisation, and his black "slave", Friday. The novel also shows how issues of race, gender, exploration, and independence are viewed through the European eyes.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

Justify the assertion that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is a Colonialist text.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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MODULE 4 POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE

- Unit 1 Overview of African Literature
- Unit 2 Chinua Achebe *Things Fall Apart* as a Postcolonial Text
- Unit 3 J.M Coetzee's *Foe* as a Postcolonial Text
- Unit 4 Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* as a Postcolonial Text
- Unit 5 Postcolonial Politics in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*
- Unit 6 Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* as a Postcolonial Text

UNIT 1 OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 African Oral Literature
 - 3.2 Modern/Written African Literature
 - 3.3 The Language Issue in African Literature
 - 3.4 Contemporary Trends in African literature
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Tanure Ojaide (2002), African literature did not start with the coming of Europeans to Africa because a people's literature is as old as the people themselves. Africans, Ojaide submits, had an indigenous literature before Europeans came to colonise the continent and the tradition continues to thrive to this moment. The indigenous literature was (and still is) oral because of the non-literate nature of the traditional culture and society. This unit undertakes a rapid overview and trends in African literature. In this unit, we are going to undertake a rapid overview of African literature.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- trace the origin of African literature
- discuss the various forms of African literature
- list the factors that make African literature unique when compared to Western literature
- list how modern African literature is indebted to the indigenous oral tradition.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 African Oral Literature

Ojaide reckons that African oral literature manifests in the following forms: folktales, folksongs, specific types of songs and chants, myths, legends, epics, proverbs, riddles, and tongue-twisters. There is no clear-cut division of genres of narratives, poetry, and drama as in modern Western literature. It is very integrative in the sense that a good narrative involves poetic songs and chants, with the minstrel wearing a mask and a special costume and performing to the accompaniment of music supplied by drums or other musical instruments. Oral literature, as practiced by Africans, can be described as a multi-media event. This oral/traditional literature is committed to memory and is passed by word of mouth from generation to generation. The reliance on memory makes this literature to continue to evolve with time and so an oral “text” changes with every performance because of factors that include the mood of the performer or minstrel, the place, and time of its performance. As a result of its orality, there is much improvisation and spontaneity in the performance because each rendition is a “text” of its own or a variant. African oral literature was and still is integrated into the daily lives of the people. It was in the songs that men and women sang at home or to farms, fishing, hunting, or while travelling on lonely roads. A woman sang as she weeded her yam or cassava farm; she also sang while pounding her millet, as she lulled her baby to sleep with poetic lullabies. At the same time, a man clearing a farm, planting, or preparing palm oil in the palm oil press sang songs to revive his energy.

Unlike modern Western literature that demands leisure and formal education, traditional African literature is a people’s literature woven into the different stages of the people’s lives with specific songs for birth, naming ceremonies, initiation into different age grades, marriage, and death, among others. The people’s festivals and social gatherings also had

literature performed to the accompaniment of drums or other musical instruments. African oral literature is a very functional literature which catered to the needs of the traditional society. In the communalistic society, literature in various forms helped to maintain a healthy social ethos that bound people together. One of the advantages of traditional African literature is that it is cohesive in bringing people together to share verbal imaginative expressions in the forms of poetry/songs/chants, narratives, and performances in a very live atmosphere. It is a literature which has its own aesthetics. Traditional Africa had no schools as modern Africa has (after interaction with the West). However, there were avenues for teaching young ones about ethics, morality, life, society, the environment, and language and literary skills, which the oral tradition brought about. Usually, at the end of the day's work, parents and elders gathered their young ones by the fireside to tell them stories. Such sessions were a part of the growing process of young boys and girls and they looked forward to these informal fireside "schools" with enthusiasm. They were not only entertained but also learned lessons and how to tell such stories and sing the songs themselves.

3.2 Modern/Written African Literature

Written or modern African literature is relatively young compared to Western literary traditions which date to hundreds of years back. While some forms of writing existed in traditional Africa, writing as we know it today started in the colonial period when colonialists and missionaries built schools to advance their colonial administration and Christianity.

The products of those schools became the writers of modern African literature. Modern African literature blends together both borrowed Western literary and indigenous African oral traditions. Most written African literary works started to emerge from the 1950s. Modern African literature is conditioned by four major factors: traditional oral literature, African history, the African environment, and the influence of Western languages and literary conventions. Oral traditions give modern African literature a cultural identity. Modern African literature adopts many oral traditional forms and tropes. Many writers (poets, novelists, and dramatists) use indigenous folklore such as folktales, myths, legends, epics, folksongs, and proverbs, among so many others. Chinua Achebe, for instance, uses the folktale of the greedy tortoise in *Things Fall Apart*. African writers also adopt oral techniques in the poetry, fiction, and plays. Many poems are modelled on satiric abuse songs, dirges, and praise chants. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, among others, uses a traditional minstrel, the Gicaandi player, to tell the tale in *Devil on the Cross*, and dramatists, including Femi Osofisan, use the traditional storyteller to present the drama. In fact, Abiola Irele

(2001) has described modern African literature as “a written oral literature”. Many critics, including Irele, Jaheinz Jahn, and Emmanuel Obiechina, have emphasised the point of African literature responding to the continent’s history. As Irele puts it, the “historical experience serves as a constant reference for the African imagination” because of colonialism and Europe presenting Africa as the “other” to enforce its “self-affirmation as the unique source of human and spiritual values.” Even later, African writers will respond to the post-Independence experience in their respective nations and societies.

The imperative of history in modern African literature is affirmed by the fact that in many African nations such as Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa, the writers are divided into generations or periods. In Egypt, there are poets of the 70s, 80s, and 90s. In Nigeria, there are Pioneer Poets as well as poets of the Second, Third, and Fourth generations. South Africa has apartheid and post-apartheid writings. The African environment also influences the literature. As will be expected, the fauna and flora assume symbolic significance in the literary works.

Plants such as the iroko, and creatures such as the tortoise, hyena, and eagle are often evoked in the literature for symbolic meaning. One can see the African worldview and sensibility as also products of the environment reflected in the literature.

3.3 The Language Issue in African Literature

The use of a foreign language is important in modern African literature whether it is English, French, or Portuguese. There has been a debate going back to the early part of the 20th century to the present among writers and scholars, including Benedict Wallet Vilakazi of South Africa, Obi Wali of Nigeria, and Ngugi wa Thiongo of Kenya, as to whether a people’s literature could be written in a language other than their own. African writers have made choices and many write in the adopted European languages of their respective countries. Many, like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, domesticate or rather Africanise the English they use to reflect their respective Igbo and Yoruba cultural backgrounds and the worldviews they represent. Ngugi abandoned writing his fiction in English mid-career in the early 1980s to write in Gikuyu or KiSwahili and later have his work translated into English. What is important is that the English used by the African writer is informed by his or her indigenous culture, society, environment, and individual experience. Since literature is a cultural production, it is dynamic and so always evolving (Ojaide, 2002).

3.4 Contemporary Trends in African Literature

African literature continues to change according to the times. This factor of change leads to two important observations about contemporary African literature: the place of women and the influence of globalisation and migration. Men had a head-start in Western education and that translated to more male writers in the past. For a long time, the men expressed the African experience. However, in recent times women now present their own experiences and can be heard. There are so many female writers now across the continent and have established themselves as major voices of contemporary Africa. They express the woman's condition in a predominantly patriarchal continent. At the same time, female writings complement male writings to affirm the African humanity. Migration and globalisation are having a great influence on contemporary African literature. There is a situation at present in which many African writers of note are living in North America and Europe and not in the African continent. There is the argument as to whether those African writers living abroad can represent the African experience or condition. The writers living in the West tend to have more freedom to write about contentious African issues relating to sexuality and politics that the relatively freer Western nations and societies provide them. Also, the African writers living in the West have ample publicity and amenities when compared to their fellow writers at home. While time will tell on what becomes of the African literature produced outside Africa, the phenomenon shows the diversity and the openness to change that the literature has always been subjected to in its postcolonial nature.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit reveals that African literature has its root in oral tradition. Today, however, it is ever-growing and getting more diversified in formal, thematic, and technical explorations. There is much experimentation in forms and techniques across the genres but the contemporary African writer however exposed is still rooted in an Africanity that blends borrowed with indigenous traditions for something uniquely African in a changing world. There is much diversity of themes as writers get bolder in their treatment of subjects. For instance, in more recent African literature there is treatment of sexuality, homosexuality, and other themes that used to be taboo. At the same time, there are explorations of ecological and environmental subjects as never before. As a dynamic medium, African literature will continue to evolve, carrying along the complexities that make the African reality.

5.0 SUMMARY

The origin of modern African literature lie in the indigenous oral traditions of Africa and Western literary traditions brought through colonization. In this unit, you learnt that African literature is ever-growing and getting more diversified in formal, thematic, and technical explorations. There is much experimentation in forms and techniques across the genres but the contemporary African writer however exposed is still rooted in an Africanity that blends borrowed with indigenous traditions for something uniquely African in a changing world. There is much diversity of themes as writers get bolder in their treatment of subjects. For instance, in more recent African literature there is treatment of sexuality, homosexuality, and other themes that used to be taboo. At the same time, there are explorations of ecological and environmental subjects as never before. As a dynamic medium, African literature will continue to evolve, carrying along the complexities that make the African reality.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What factors make African literature unique when compared to Western literature?
2. How is modern African literature indebted to the indigenous oral tradition?

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UNIT 2 ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* AS A POSTCOLONIAL TEXT

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Background to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*
 - 3.2 Achebe as a Postcolonial Writer
 - 3.3 *Things Fall Apart* as a Paradigm of the Postcolonial African Novel
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Early western historians gave distorted history of Africa. They saw Africa as a continent of barbarians and animal-like humans. However postcolonial African literatures are assertive about the African personality, the African identity and universal appeal of the African psyche. Postcolonial critics have often cited Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* as one of the original literary texts about English imperialism. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) for example, Edward Said argues that it is no accident that Defoe's 'prototypical modern realistic novel is about a European who creates a fiefdom for himself on a distant, non-European island' (Said, xiii). Indeed, for Said '*Robinson Crusoe* is virtually unthinkable without the colonising mission that permits him to create a new world of his own in the distant reaches of the African, Pacific, and Atlantic wilderness' (75). The bases of postcolonial African writings can be viewed from two perspectives. The first is to correct the ill-pictures of Africa in literatures written by some Europeans. For instance, Joyce Cary wrote *Mister Johnson*, a denigrating story about eastern Nigeria inspired by racism. It was this novel that prompted the writing of *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe. According to Achebe, *Mister Johnson* contained distorted pictures of the Nigerian society which he tried to correct in *Things Fall Apart*. More so, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is also a 'racist' story about Africa and the African People. The ugly picture about Africa and Africans painted by 19th Century Western writers, made postcolonial African writers to counter these false images and assumptions in their

works. In this unit, you are going to read how Achebe's classic *Things Fall Apart* epitomises the postcolonial spirit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- analyse Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as postcolonial text
- discuss Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a counter-narrative to Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Background to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Chinua Achebe is one of the most well known postcolonial writers. Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* depicts Ibo tribal life before the coming of the British near the end of the nineteenth century. Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, is opposed to change; he desperately tries to hold onto to the traditional values and practices of his Ibo society. But he does so in the midst of an alien European invasion which ultimately results in the disintegration of this traditional African society. Phebe Jatau (2014) opines that Achebe is a forerunner as far as postcolonial writing in Nigeria and Africa is concerned. He questions Eurocentric perspectives in criticism and calls for a specifically African critical position. In his attempt to counteract the linguistic alienation resulting from imperialism, he transforms the imperialists' language, using it in a different way in its new context thereby making it to 'bear the burden' of the postcolonial experience. Like Soyinka, Ngugi and Chinweizu *et al*, he is radical in his concern for decolonisation. But his concern is more with the need to return to African traditional aesthetics and to African forms and not with the inescapable political and cultural legacies of the colonial period and its continuing neo-colonial presence in contemporary Nigeria.

Before writing *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe had become disturbed by the works of European writers which portrayed Africans as noble savages. According to Willene Taylor (1998:28), these European writers believed that colonialism was an agent of enlightenment to primitive peoples without a valid value system or civilisation of their own. Africa was pictured as the *Dark Continent*, inhabited by childlike, superstitious, and fearful people only too ready to welcome, and indeed worship the white man. Achebe was particularly disturbed by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. He felt that

Conrad painted an inaccurate and demeaning picture of the African people. According to Conrad in the book:

You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks....The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us- who could tell?...The thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly.

It is these kinds of images painted by Conrad that fed the whole myth of White superiority. A myth which has lived for centuries and little wonder that Achebe in an essay defended Africa so fervently against what he perceived as Conrad's inaccurate racist assault on Africa. While *Heart of Darkness* was written during a portion of the nineteenth century which was the period of colonialism, *Things Fall Apart* was representative of a postcolonial Africa.

Things Fall Apart describes the coming of the White man and the disintegration of traditional African society as a consequence of the encounter. Set in Eastern Nigeria (Iboland precisely), in a village called Umuofia, between the years 1890 and 1900, the story followed the fate of Okonkwo, the son of a ne'er do well, who was determined not to end up a failure like his father, but wanted to follow tradition and rise in rank within the tribe. But just as the title predicts, Okonkwo's plans for a perfect life goes astray. Change is inevitable, and even the best laid plans go astray. In the turbulent time setting of the novel, Okonkwo was doomed to lose the traditions he so much cherished as his society slowly fell apart.

3.2 Achebe as a Postcolonial Writer

As a postcolonial writer, Achebe's mission in *Things Fall Apart* was to present a composite picture of traditional African society sealed off from any influences of Western Civilisation. Reaffirming the temperament of postcolonial writers, Achebe asserts in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975:44-45) that:

...Here then is an adequate revolution to espouse-to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement.... I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past, with all its imperfection,

was not one long night of savagery from which the first European acting on God's behalf delivered them.

It follows that Achebe uses his novels to re-affirm the authenticity of African culture, maintaining that the 'African people did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans'. As a postcolonial writer, Achebe holds that the African writer in contemporary society should 'help educate his society and reclaim its traduced past heritage'. He argues that encountering Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and such other Colonialist texts made him realise that 'the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how well gifted or well-intentioned'(1975:70). Continuing, Achebe further said:

I was quite certain I was going to try my hand at writing, and one of the things that set me thinking was Joyce Cary's novel set in Nigeria, *Mr. Johnson*, which was praised so much, and it was clear to that this was a most superficial picture of, not only of the country, but even of the Nigerian character and so I thought if this was famous, then perhaps someone ought to try and look at this from the inside. (1972:4).

Achebe also believes that part of the duty of the African writer is to rescue the African past from colonial misrepresentation and biased stereotyping to which it had been subjected. According to Kofi Awoonor (1976: 252) 'Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* seems to have been inspired by a need to respond to what seemed to be Cary's sniggering laugh at Africa, whose image of filed teeth and bones stuck in the nose has scarcely receded in the Europe of Cary's experience'. The Ghanaian writer further surmised that to Achebe, the African world before the arrival of Europe was a well-integrated one, with dignity and honour....As a story of the tragic encounter between Africa and Europe *Things Fall Apart* is an attempt to capture and restate the pristine integrity which has been so traumatically shattered by those confrontations.

3.3 *Things Fall Apart* as a Paradigm of the Postcolonial African Novel

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* recounts the tragedy of Okonkwo, a somewhat self-made man and pride of Umuofia. As a prosperous and determined young man, Okonkwo strives to distance himself from the inglorious lifestyle of his father. Driven by the fear of failure, he attempts single-handedly to stop the encroachment of colonial administration on traditional

authority. Ultimately, he commits suicide upon realising that his community is not as committed as he is in fighting the colonial forces that are rife in Umuofia. Despite the thrust of this new dispensation, Okonkwo remains defiant, even in death. As you have learnt in previous units, postcolonial discourse is an engaging movement of thought or theory that deals partly with the effects of colonisation on the culture and thoughts of the colonised societies. *Things Fall Apart* is contrived along colonial canvass. As Adesina Coker and Oluwole Coker (2008) submit, Chinua Achebe's globally acclaimed classic, *Things Fall Apart* represents the efflorescence of African literature. Coming on the eve of Nigeria's political independence, and of course at a period when most African countries attained nationhood, the novel is an emphatic statement about the African spirit.

It is clear that the arrival of *Things Fall Apart* heralded the much desired confidence and self-determining spirit that the comity of nations expect from Nigeria, an emerging voice in global affairs. Quite expectedly, the nationalism engendered by the debut of the work in African literary firmament is a pointer to its enduring brilliance. As a postcolonial text, Achebe portrays in the novel that Africans (in this case Igbo society), contrary to the negative and prejudiced image portrayed by Joyce Cary and Daniel Defoe, have an orderly socio-political structure and culture which the coming of the white man into Umuofia, is about to alter. Writing about this pre-colonial Igbo society Abiola Irele (2000) notes that:

The novel provided an image of an African society, reconstituted as a living entity and in its historic circumstance: an image of a coherent social structure forming the institutional fabric of a universe of meanings and values.

For Okonkwo, Achebe's central character, who rose to fame and affluence in Umuofia, the novel's setting; every effort must be made to resist the white man's invasion. For him, the coming of the European missionaries poses a serious challenge to both individual and communal essence. This is because the African culture, according to Ademoyo (2005) is deep and philosophically coherent and plausible. This extends to the understanding that the traditional arrangement though not necessarily perfect, is a fine testimony of a pre-colonial rancor-free society. Achebe, as a postcolonial writer, badly feels the loss of this pristine society. This is in tandem with Mark Pizzatto's (2003:3) observation that:

Postcolonial cultures feel the loss of the past communal self-and-its uncanny return-in a more specific way caught between the postmodern lures of global capitalism, the modernist inscription of national identities and the pre-modern heritage of tribal communities.

As a postcolonial text, Achebe made it clear that his primary purpose in the book was to give African readers a realistic depiction of their pre-colonial past, free of the distortions and stereotypes imposed in European accounts. In postcolonial texts, the protagonists are often found to be struggling with questions of identity, experiencing the conflict of living between the old, native world and the invasive forces of hegemony from new, dominant cultures. Okonkwo was no difference. Emmanuel Obiechina (1992:205) summarises this aspect of Okonkwo's character thus:

He is a rash impetuous man in addition to being a strong man. In the end, his character weaknesses and the overwhelming force of the enemy combine to defeat him and the cause for which he struggled.

In contrast to Eurocentric belief that traditional societies like Umuofia had no kings or chiefs, Achebe shows that Africa had a highly democratic and efficient government. This is something the invaders did not see because Western sensibilities insist that each nation must have a leader, at least one person to take charge and prevent anarchy. As a postcolonial writer, Achebe shows that African history is unique and that "History has not treated the whole world the same way, and we would be foolish not to realise how we are in a peculiar situation as Africans. Our history has not been the history of England."

In all *Things Fall Apart*, according to Oladele Taiwo (1985: 58), recreates vividly and with great realism the unity of the tribal groups before the incursion of the white man and the ensuing disintegration. As a postcolonial novelist, Achebe recreates what happened to his people and the values they have lost as a result of colonial encounter. The novel thus sets out to correct the assumption that 'Africa is a historically barren landscape in the eyes of Europeans'. On the contrary, Africa had a past and history of worth.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Achebe's importance as an African writer resides precisely in his capacity to produce a counter-narrative to the colonial epistemology and to reinvigorate African cultures, ultimately contributing to the re-education of

African peoples. In this unit, you have learnt that *Things Fall Apart* epitomises the postcolonial sensibilities in several ways. According to Abiola Irele (2000), it is one single work that can be considered central to the evolving canon of modern African literature. The novel provides an image of an African society, reconstituted as a living entity and in its historic circumstance: an image of a coherent social structure forming the institutional fabric of a universe of meanings and values. In the novel, there is a comprehensive scope of Achebe's depiction of a particularised African community engaged in its own social processes, carried out entirely on its own terms, with all the internal tensions this entailed, challenged the simplified representation that the West offered itself of Africa as a formless area of life, as "an area of darkness" devoid of human significance. In other words, as postcolonial text, the novel's contestation of the colonial enterprise and ideology is not in doubt.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have seen how the temperament of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* delineates it as a strong response to the fictions of empire. In *Things Fall Apart*, the African experience, represented by Igbo ethos of communal living is brought into full focus by Achebe. His redefinition of the terms of the fictional representation of Africa by western writers such as Cary and Defoe establish the novel not only as a modern narrative genre on the African continent, but indeed, an autonomous mode of imaginative life in Africa.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

Critically situate Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as a counter-narrative to Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

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UNIT 3 J.M COETZEE'S *FOE* AS A COUNTER-DISCOURSE TO DANIEL DEFOE'S *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Background to Coetzee's *Foe*
 - 3.2 *Foe* as a Postcolonial Counter-Narrative to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial African literature often aims at the re-working and re-writing of western theoretical concepts and ideas as well as master narratives of colonialism to address contemporary political concerns in the postcolonial world. J.M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* (1986) is one such attempt that attempt to subvert Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Due to the often negative and stereotypical images about Africa that were bandied about in different western media, the 'African writer was faced with the filial duty to correct those erroneous views'. In this unit, you are going to read how Coetzee's novel typifies the postcolonial. Coetzee's novel is a postmodernist and postcolonial retelling Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Coetzee keeps some of the main characters in *Robinson Crusoe*- Crusoe and an African named Friday, but makes two very important additions: the two authors of the novel are Susan Barton, a white woman who is shipwrecked on the island, and Mr. Foe, whose name is an obvious allusion to Daniel Defoe. The two new characters radically change the meanings inscribed in the book. First of all, Coetzee introduces a feminine figure in the man-centered, exclusivist world of *Robinson Crusoe*. Essentially, *Foe* is a story about writing, being and representation, about otherness and difference.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- analyse Coetzee's *Foe* as a postcolonial African novel
- justify whether it is a fitting counter narrative to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Background to Coetzee's *Foe*

Ayo Kehinde (2010) in 'Postcolonial African Literature and Counter-Discourse: J.M Coetzee's Fiction and Reworking of Canonical Works' submits that the critique of canonical texts has been a strong current in postcolonial writings. Coetzee's *Foe* is one such postmodernist/postcolonial attempt to engage in dialectal intertextuality with precursor texts that have presented negative stereotypes of Africa and her people. *Foe* is a parodic inversion of Daniel Defoe's story *Robinson Crusoe*. Although Coetzee surprisingly still advertently retains some of old-age stereotypes about the black world, he is able to create a new kind of novel that implicitly interrogates the form and content of Defoe's acclaimed classic. *Foe* is thus a topological revision of Defoe's text. *Foe*, Kehinde contends, demonstrates an allegorical counter-discursivity as postcolonial discourse. As a postmodern/postcolonial version of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee's *Foe* fills the silence of the precursor text, uncovers the hidden colonialism and oppression in the text. *Foe* also seeks to reject the canonical formulation of the colonial encounter, thereby drawing the reader's attention to the symbiosis between discourse and power.

3.2 *Foe* as a Postcolonial Counter-Narrative to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*

As Kehinde opines, Coetzee's *Foe* is a fictional riposte to Defoe's classic. It answers back to the imperial and colonial culture, which Defoe celebrates in his work. From whichever perspective it is read, Coetzee's *Foe* is self consciously written against the cultural stereotypes and representations commanding the field of postcolonial African literature. Coetzee's *Foe* is a fictional riposte to Defoe's classic. It answers back to the imperial and colonial culture, which Defoe celebrates in his work. From whichever perspective it is read, Coetzee's *Foe* is self consciously written against the

cultural stereotypes and representations commanding the field of postcolonial African literature.

It is a critique of the political structures in Defoe's text, a form of cultural criticism and cultural critique with a view to disentangling African societies from the sovereign codes of cultural organisation which are foregrounded in most existing Euro-American canonical works about Africa and Africans.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1991) is of the view that Coetzee rewrites *Robinson Crusoe* in order to challenge the authority of Crusoe's colonial narrative. This rewriting is accomplished in different ways. First is by substituting a female narrator, Susan Barton, for Defoe's male narrator. As Spivak notes 'Coetzee's focus is on gender and empire, rather than the story of capital [. . .] The narrator of *Foe* is an Englishwoman named Susan Barton, who wants to "father" her story into history, with Mr. Foe's help'. Secondly, one of the most obvious instances of postcolonial rewriting in Coetzee's novel is Susan Barton's attempt to give a voice to Friday. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Robinson carries out the civilising mission of the European imperialist by teaching Friday to speak English. In doing so, Defoe recalls a scene in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, where Prospero's daughter, Miranda, teaches the native character Caliban to speak English. In Coetzee's *Foe*, however, the violence of colonial education, which is effaced in these earlier texts, is foregrounded as Friday is revealed to have had his tongue removed by slave traders. Susan Barton tries to remedy this muteness by finding a 'means of giving voice to Friday'. At first, Barton encourages Friday to 'explain the origin of his loss through a few pictures' and through a process of trial and error, Susan Barton gradually recognises the futility of trying to represent Friday's traumatic experience in pictures. Thirdly, Susan Barton grows impatient with her failure and reluctantly attempts to teach Friday how to write. Interestingly, one of the words that Susan Barton teaches Friday is 'Africa'. By teaching Friday the word Africa, Susan thus attempts to give Friday the language to assert national independence and thereby to challenge Defoe's original colonial narrative. Yet during the course of the writing lesson, Friday proceeds to draw 'walking eyes' on the writing slate handed to him by Susan Barton: 'Friday filled his slate with open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes: walking eyes'. When Susan Barton demands that Friday show her the slate, Friday immediately erases the drawing.

4.0 CONCLUSION

As you have learnt in this unit, Coetzee's *Foe*, to a great extent, provides a counter-text for Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. According to Kehinde, Coetzee's *Foe* is a fictional riposte to Defoe's classic. It answers back to the imperial and colonial culture, which Defoe celebrates in his work. From whichever perspective it is read, Coetzee's *Foe* is self consciously written against the cultural stereotypes and representations commanding the field of postcolonial African literature.

5.0 SUMMARY

Foe is a parodic inversion of Daniel Defoe's story *Robinson Crusoe*. Although Coetzee surprisingly still advertently retains some of old-age stereotypes about the black world, he is able to create a new kind of novel that implicitly interrogates the form and content of Defoe's acclaimed classic. *Foe* is thus a topological revision of Defoe's text. *Foe*, Kehinde contends, demonstrates an allegorical counter-discursivity as postcolonial discourse. As a postmodern/postcolonial version of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee's *Foe* fills the silence of the precursor text, uncovers the hidden colonialism and oppression in the text. *Foe* also seeks to reject the canonical formulation of the colonial encounter, thereby drawing the reader's attention to the symbiosis between discourse and power

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* is an inter-textual revision of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Critically elucidate this assertion.

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UNIT 4 AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN* AS A POSTCOLONIAL TEXT

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Background to Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*
 - 3.2 Ayi Kwei Armah as a Postcolonial Writer
 - 3.3 Postcolonial Disillusionment in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet* (1968) is a novel that questions how one should live upright in an impure society. On publication, the novel had a mixed reception in Africa. While some critics argue that Armah's pessimism about any positive change in post-independence Africa was carried to the extreme, others are of the opinion that the realities on ground did not portray any hope for the better. His emphasis on physical decay, which is indirectly linked to the moral decay in the society makes one see more clearly the depth to which African societies have become corrupt (corrupt like the decayed waste on the road side waiting for vultures and maggot to feed on).

Although some critics reacted with disapproval, one cannot escape the power of the densely metaphorical language employed in the novel, particularly Oyo, the protagonist's wife cruel parable about the Chichidodo bird, which loves to eat maggots but hates the excrement in which the fat maggot are formed. The dominant theme of Armah's novel is the despair and social fragmentation that plague post-independence Africa. Some critics regard it as the bleakest African novel ever written about the disenchantment following Africa's Independence. Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* defies a strait-jacket interpretation; hence critics

have variously described it as a ‘moral fable’, ‘an allegory’, and ‘a dialectical work’. Others regard it as an extremely ‘sick book’, ‘very uncomfortable’ and full of ‘mythic undercurrents’. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Chinua Achebe makes some observations on *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born*, which offer a useful starting point for discussing the novel in this unit. Achebe's major accusations against Armah are that: (1) Armah is not sufficiently local. He argues that Armah writes a universal story instead of exposing and illuminating a peculiar Ghanaian problem. (2) Armah is too influenced by the mannerisms of existentialist thought and writing, and this element tends to clash with the "pretence" that the novel is set in Ghana. In fact, says Achebe, Armah is an alienated writer, and no longer African. (3) Armah's central excremental metaphor is foreign. In other words, Achebe is implying that Africans should not write like this. (4) Armah's subconscious would not allow him to squander his enormous talents on the useless task of writing a modern existentialist tale; hence he unconsciously introduces a few details which seek to convert his novel into a moral fable. Achebe's accusations above can only be seen as a personal one. But the truth remains that the novel is a shit-encrusted tale of corruption and despair which belongs to the tradition of postcolonial African literature that is unflinchingly critical of national politics following independence. In the novel, hope was abating, disillusionment with political independence was beginning to take hold, and people were resigning themselves to the sad realities of poverty and inequality. In Ghana, the novel's locale, the period in question was the 1960s characterised by political corruption and failed expectations on the side of the masses. Armah's use of scatological images in the work meshes well with his chosen message. In all, the novel, among other things, is about political corruption and embezzlement as well as the loss of hope and is heavily suffused with images of rot and filth.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet* as belonging to the tradition of postcolonial African literature
- explain how the author employs scatological images in the novel to advance his thematic concerns.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Background to Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born was published in 1968; eleven years after Ghana got its independence. The author, Ayi Kwei Armah, is often considered to belong to the 'second generation' of African writers. The first generation wrote around the time of independence and was filled with optimism, but things went bad quickly though, as Armah's novel shows. Set during the era of Nkrumah's government, the novel is a tale of a man (identified simply as "the man") who once was involved with and captured by the dreams of independence and of revolution, but who later becomes a small-time bureaucrat struggling to feed his family.

Regrettably, the Man is not even allowed to withdraw into himself. The highest kind of isolation he suffers is that of having to live with his wife, Oyo's contempt and scorn. She hates him for refusing to avail himself of opportunities which could improve their lives materially while Koomson's wife, Estella lives a comfortable life because she has had the good fortune to be married to the shrewd politician who is the very antithesis of the Man. In the Ghanaian society, corruption is all around, and the pressure to take advantage of it comes at him from all sides- his former school mate, now a minister who is making himself rich from schemes and connections; his mother-in-law; his wife and the expectations of his three children. Oyo calls the Man the 'chichidodo', a bird that hates filth but lives on maggots. The chichidodo symbolises the Man's ambiguous position: living on maggots while scorning filth, and therefore condemning his whole family to a life of abject poverty.

In the novel, the scathing portrayal of a corrupt society is made sharper because of the contrast with the optimism that came with independence in Africa. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a politically motivated narrative with powerful imagery to convey the corrupt nature of Ghanaian politicians and citizens under the Kwame Nkrumah government. Armah's rhetoric is sombre as he contrasts the hopes and dreams of Ghanaians from the pre-Independence years, with feelings of disappointment once independence was granted. The novel holds relevance today, not only in Ghana but Africa as a whole. The novel is primarily symbolic as Armah aims to reveal the truths about Ghana and Africa by a different approach.

He seeks, through symbolism, to reveal the deep significance of Ghana's corruption and social disintegration.

Armah shows that it is the conduct of the powerful in society which brings about this problem of alienation of the masses. It is the Koomsons of Ghana (or Africa) who, by their corruption, engenders all the moral bewilderment in the society. Thus, the excrement in Armah's novel is a metaphor which above all implies disgust.

3.2 Ayi Kwei Armah as a Postcolonial Writer

So far, we have established in this unit that Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* offers an acerbic critique of postcolonial African politics as the new rulers in Ghana have failed to live up to the promises they made to their people. As a postcolonial writer, Armah, in the novel decries the society's moral failings and moral indignation. A more careful reading of the novel shows that one object of Armah's most virulent satire is the cheap westernisation which afflicts contemporary African society, and which he exposes at several levels. He tries to show how the society has become morally degenerated. Armah ridicules the vulgar materialism which has beset Ghana as a result of its contact with Europe. Koomson's radio, for instance, booms like thunder, while his sister-in-law, Regina, is specialising as a dressmaker in London. She falls in love with a Jagua and threatens to commit suicide if she is not able to buy one. As would be expected, Koomson, the corrupt politician, will have to divert public funds to meet this new craving just as he did in the case of the scholarship for Regina's course. Armah's argument is that this kind of misplaced priority in the use of public funds adds to the sufferings and disenchantment of the common people. Thus, the theme the erosion of values, the erosion of African identity, is in fact central to the work.

Furthermore, in the novel, we see materialism busy at work, eating away the very fabric of a society that had at the centre of its code "I am my brother's keeper". The material importance of money to the people is stressed, and it is a common Ghanaian practice to offer money in denominations far above the price of what is being paid for. The possession of money in larger denominations gives people the illusion of wealth and power. This accounts for the exultant look on the face of the giver of the cedi: "The eyes had in them the restless happiness of power in search of admiration". The conductor, who is aware of this feeling, takes advantage of it to cheat his passengers. Wealth is universally courted, and rich men are not only important in society, but are almost venerated. These incidents and many others in the novel offer a very graphic picture of how people

worship the rich in society, and wishes themselves to be rich. Generally, Armah, in the novel, expresses the postcolonial Ghanaian society and its failure as a state to fulfill the expectations created by the rhetoric's of the anti-colonial independence movement. Through this novel one is able to feel the situation, mood and pathos in post-independent Ghana.

3.3 Postcolonial Disillusionment in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet*

As a postcolonial African novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* traces the sad move from idealistic and hopeful beginning of a new independent African state, to a corrupt and selfish mess. The novel has a heavy existentialist bent, as the main character (the man), refuses to participate in the corruption around him, and he is hated by everyone for it, including his family members. The work's imagery is effective; the language is rich and evocative; while the society evoked is detailed and believable. The overall impression is that of disillusionment. The novel recounts the despair and nightmare that is political independence for Africa. The great expectations entertained by the people have come nowhere near fulfillment since independence. Development has been illusive and the quality of life has not been much improved. Rather than the dignity and prosperity that Independence was supposed to herald, all the people have as reward for their struggle is social fragmentation, violence, underdevelopment, economic stagnation and elitism. For Armah, in the garb of a postcolonial writer, there is a kind of debilitating paralysis that has seized everybody in the country, making it almost impossible for them to act or resist the system. Thus, in the text, despair is distilled and handed to the reader in large doses of scatological imagery. On almost every page the senses are assailed by what Peter Nazareth (1974) aptly describes as powerful images and visions of corruption, rottenness, disease, castration, vomit, and excrement, as though the rottenness of society is no longer merely a spiritual thing but a physical reality that engulfs everybody.

The description of the cedi and its smell gives us another aspect of Ghanaian society that is been ridiculed in the novel. It is a society thoroughly decayed. Armah suggests that this decay had begun even before the colonial era, and hence it is appropriately regarded as an "ancient rottenness". Strangely, the conductor actually enjoys the smell.

Though he enjoys the smell, subconsciously, the conductor is aware that something is intrinsically wrong; hence his sense of shame. All this is Armah's way of showing his repugnance for a system that exudes such moral filth. Because many people accept the gradual but certain decay and

fragmentation of African society with a complacent nod of the head, Armah decides to shock his readers to the reality of Africa's situation by piling up the images of filth, decay and rust. This is because for the majority of Ghanaians in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, corruption in whatever form, whether it is influencing with money, the allocation of railway trucks, the ownership of fishing vehicles contrary to what is permitted by the constitution, or whether it takes the form of seducing school girls from Achimota or Holy Child-is a norm. The person who insists on morality is seen as eccentric, even insane.

Through the character of Joseph Koomson, Armah shows the postcolonial cum post-independence disillusionment by the way in which African leaders betray their people. It is Koomson rather than 'the man' who is seen to epitomise the moral outlook of the nation. His mind is perennially occupied with money-making scheme. He glories in the trappings of his office with no apparent sense of responsibility toward those to whom he owes it. In essence, the novel provides a very introspective examination of the co-opting of socialism for materialistic, oppressive ends in postcolonial Ghana. For instance, the picture that is painted in the first chapter of the novel is neither pleasant nor optimistic. It is a picture of a nation and its people at the brink of total collapse. The bus, on which the man was riding to work, seems to represent Ghanaian institutions, rusted and decaying. Life is cheap, as the 'crumpled packet of Tuskers' (the cheapest Ghanaian brand) testifies, while Ghanaian industries are too inefficient to make good products as seen in the difficulty in lighting an ordinary cigarette. Armah presents the passengers in the bus as sleep-walkers, while the bus conductor attempts to escape from the reality of a harsh world through the symbolic gesture of closing his eyes. Again, the hopelessness of the national situation is re-enforced by the darkness surrounding the bus. Not only are the people walking corpses, but there is a lack of vision about the national direction as the people have no sense of where they are going. According to the narrator "the passengers shuffled up the centre aisle and began to lower themselves gently down, one after the other, into the darkness of the dawn". For Charles Larson (1978), the emphasis in the first chapter of the novel is not at first on the protagonist (The Man) but on the bus itself, the driver, the conductor and the other passengers (all nameless). He argues that this is so because the novel is not so much "about a person as it is about a society: post-independent Ghana in the days prior to Nkrumah's fall. The Man, then, becomes a representative figure.

4.0 CONCLUSION

As you have read, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a dramatisation of the agony, the futility and the threat of insanity, which are the consequences of holding on to moral ideas in a society where morality is rendered irrelevant, and where considerations of gain have become the sole motive of society. The extensive scatological imagery in the novel not only reflects the widespread corruption and fragmentation of society but, even more significantly, it portrays the helplessness of those caught in this decay. For the majority of people in the novel, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. There is no hope either in the present or in the future. The picture is not just bleak, it is hopeless. Even for Teacher, a character in the novel, the hopelessness of the situation is galling. Asked whether he can discern any hope in the present state of affairs, his answer is categorical:

No. Not anymore, not hope, anyway. I don't feel any hope in me anymore. I can see things, but I don't feel much. When you can see the end of things in their beginnings, there's no more hope, unless you want to pretend, or forget, or get drunk or something. No. I also am one of the dead people, the walking dead. A ghost. I died long ago. So long that not even the old libations of living blood will make me alive again".

According to Zumakpeh Samba (1992), this statement coming from Teacher, one who is both wise and intelligent, besides being close to those in power, sounds indeed like the death-knell for Africa. Even the traditional spirits of Ghana have abandoned her and do not any longer respond to the rites of libation and sacrifice. Ghana seems adrift, with no clear vision of where she is going, but certainly bent on a course of self destruction:

I see a long, long way, he said, and it is full of people, so many people going so far in the distance that I see them all like little bubbles joined together. They are going, just going, and I am going with them. I know I would like to be able to come out and see where we are going, but in the very long lines of people I am only one. It is not at all possible to come out and see where we are going. I am just going.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you learnt that *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* falls within the category of post-independence African novel. This is an era marked by growing disillusionment and decadence. The Ghanaian society is shown to be corrupt and stinking. With a biting satire, Armah treats the betrayal of Africa by the so-called black leaders who took over the mantle of leadership from the European colonisers they purported to have replaced. In the novel, there is a sense in which the physical decay of the Man's world parallels the moral decay in society itself. In the offices of the Railway Corporation, for instance, there are no serious personal attachments, and language itself is reduced to meaningless jargon. No meaningful work is done in the offices and nothing seems to work. The communication system with the other stations breaks down with a frequency that is alarming; especially as its efficient functioning regulates the movements of trains and reduces the risk of accidents. Pencil sharpeners do not work and the office is almost suffocating with hot, stale air. Clerks devise elaborate ways of wasting time, while the senior officers not only come to work as and when they like, but also fail to supervise their subordinates. In the novel, Armah holds little optimism that things may change for the better in the foreseeable future. The fact leading to this is manifest in the corruption and filth that pervades the novel. In the words of the protagonist:

There is no difference....No difference at all between the White men and their apes; the lawyers and the merchants; and now the apes of the apes, our party men.

Even at the end of the novel, following a coup d'état, the Man knows very much that there will not be any bit of change:

In the life of the nation itself, maybe, nothing really new would happen. There would be only be a change of embezzlers and a change of the hunters and the haunted.

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born portrays the political situation in Ghana immediately after independence, a situation of hopelessness and disillusionment. The society is seen as full of corruption and in a state of despair. In all, the novel depicts, as one critic puts it, a society on the verge of collapse and on the brink of suicide.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

Discuss the use of imagery in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

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UNIT 5 NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *DEVIL ON THE CROSS* AS A POSTCOLONIAL TEXT

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Background to Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*
 - 3.2 Ngugi as a Postcolonial Writer
 - 3.3 *Devil on the Cross* and the Postcolonial Condition in Africa
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* (1980) is a novel which unearths the corrupt and oppressive political as well as economic and social systems of Kenya, brought upon them as a result of colonisation. This notion is evident early in the novel with the character Jacinta Wariinga, an unemployed woman who repeatedly doubts her self-worth. According to the gicaandi player in the novel:

Wariinga was convinced that her appearance was the root cause of all her problems. Whenever she looked at herself in the mirror she thought herself very ugly. What she hated most was her blackness, so she would disfigure her body with skin-lightening creams like *Ambi* and *Snowfire*, forgetting the saying: That which is born black will never be white.

At present her body was covered with light and dark spots like the guinea fowl. Her hair was splitting, and it had browned to the colour of moleskin because it had been straightened with red-hot iron combs. Wariinga also hated her teeth. They were a little stained; they were not as white as she would have liked them to be. She often tried to hide them, and she seldom laughed openly. *Devil on the Cross* was written by Ngugi while imprisoned in isolation in a detention camp by imperialist forces. The novel was first written in Gikuyu language before it was translated into English. It was originally written in secret on toilet paper, and the novel represents an artist's exercise of freedom, resistance, and revolution against colonial

oppression. As you have learnt in previous units, some of the subject matters of postcolonial African literature include identity, violation, religion, ethnicity, gender and culture. Stephen Howe in an article entitled ‘Postcolonialism: Empire Strikes Back’ asserts that ‘issues of race, ethnicity and gender have become the central preoccupations of debate, to a considerable degree displacing preoccupation with class and economics’. For Howe, identity and gender questions have contributed significantly to the contemporary upsurge in feminist and multicultural discourses and these issues constitute the bedrock of postcolonial reality. In this unit, you are going to see how in *Devil on the Cross*, the novelist interrogates the issue of gender through the examination of the main character Wariinga, whose name means ‘Woman in Chains’ and who symbolises the victimisation of women through sexist politics. Her story is thus representative of the Kenyan proletariat; and the struggles she faces are illustrative of a postcolonial state.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the postcolonial issues addressed by Ngugi in *Devil on the Cross*
- discuss how Wariinga’s experiences are illustrative of a postcolonial state.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Background to Ngugi’s *Devil on the Cross*

In his analysis of the impact of political independence on the Kenyan people, Ngugi, in *Devil on the Cross* argues that this independence has been usurped by the African elite who took over power from the British but did not attempt to change the political and socio-economic structures of the colonial era. Moreover, this new ruling class has only used its position to gain more power and enrich itself at the expense of peasants and workers. According to Ngugi, the African elite who took over the leadership when Kenya became independent have thus embraced capitalism, and this fact has left the country open to political oppression and economic exploitation by both Western countries and the local leaders. Throughout *Devil on the Cross*, we see how power is concentrated into the hands of a corrupt minority whose strongest desire is to maintain its economic supremacy over the exploited majority, whose aspirations, on the contrary, are to be fulfilled socially, politically, and in the

last resort, economically. Consequently, the novel represents Ngugi's most convincing political commitment to the cause of the Kenyan lower classes.

The main action of *Devil on the Cross* centres round a journey undertaken by a group of six protagonists by a *matatu* taxi to Ilmorog. The protagonists, namely Wariinga, Wangari, Gatuiria, Muturi, Mwireri and Mwaura, gradually discover that they have been mysteriously invited to a 'Devil's Feast' arranged by some corrupt Kenyan elites, in collaboration with their foreign allies to loot and rob the country. In the bus, each tells his own tragic story. The 'Devil's Feast' is a thinly disguised satirical account of capitalist business practices and Western cultural and political dominance in postcolonial Kenya. The 'Devil's Feast', is a sort of conference in which Kenya's elite boasts of their cut-throat achievements. Allegorically, the 'Devil's Feast' attests to the exploitation of peasants and workers by foreign business interests and a greedy indigenous bourgeoisie. The devil's feast in the cave, which is deliberately invested with a religious aura, takes place under the supervision of the police, which in 'third' world countries is an agent of the ruling class.

According to Jude Agho (1992), in the novel, the author continues with his onslaught on the Kenyan national bourgeoisie which has continued to unleash a reign of terror, oppression and deprivation on the masses of the people. Using women's position as a measure of the ills of contemporary Kenya, the novel focuses more emphatically on the particular dilemma of women in a rapidly changing society, and their exploitation in terms of class and sex. Jacinta Wariinga, the heroine of the novel, is both a victim of sex and class exploitation, first as a woman and then as a worker. From her childhood, she nursed the ambition of becoming a mechanical engineer. This was long before the Rich Old Man from Ngorika seduced and impregnated her, thus temporarily making her stall in her ambition. She is later able to complete her junior school certificate course and afterwards a course in typing and shorthand to qualify as a confidential secretary. This brief summary of Wariinga's past life, as revealed through flashbacks and interior monologues in the later parts of the novel, sets the stage for her other troubles at the beginning of the story. With a professional certificate in typing, Jacinta starts to roam the streets of Nairobi for a job. The story is the same everywhere, except she accepts to be her prospective employer's 'sugar girl', she cannot be employed. Even her brief stint at the Champion Construction Company ends when she refuses to be raped by her boss. This also coincides with her ejection from her apartment, making her decide to go back to the New Ilmorog to join her parents. Through Wariinga's

experiences in Nairobi, Ngugi highlights the problem of sex exploitation, which has become prevalent in contemporary Kenya.

Ngugi uses Wariinga's story, common to many young women in Kenya, to critique the political workings of contemporary Kenya faced with what has come to be known as the 'Satan of Capitalism.' Wariinga is the representation of the proletarian class, the workers who work for just enough money to get by. The bourgeoisie is represented by the bosses that Wariinga applies to for jobs, and by Boss Kihara, who gives her a job with conditions. When Wariinga is fired after refusing to sleep with her boss, Ngugi's intention is to present her as an oppressed lower class worker who is dependent on the unfair elites. She has no choice but to work for sleazy bosses because she needs to earn a living, just as Karl Marx wrote that the proletarian class is dependent on the bourgeoisie for earning the bare minimum for survival. Boss Kihara, along with the other bosses that Wariinga meets with for interviews, is an immoral character who takes advantage of those below him. He acts like this despite the fact that he is married with children and is "a member of the committee that runs the 'Church of Heaven'." This sheds a negative light on organised religion and the people that follow it. The novel's title is a parody of the Christian myth of sacrifice and at the same time anticipates poetic justice for the devils of neo-colonialism.

3.2 Ngugi as a Postcolonial Writer

Literally, postcolonial as you have learnt, refers to a society which was previously controlled and exploited by outside, usually European forces but has now gained independence from these forces. In other words, societies which are no longer directly under foreign rule are post-colonial; meaning that the coloniser has vacated the premises. The Kenyan writer, Ngugi, is a self-professed Marxist who was intimately involved in the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. His Marxist beliefs and their clear representations in his novels make most critics examine his works from a Marxist perspective. In his book, *Decolonising the Mind* (1992) Ngugi says that he does not speak of a postcolonial state in Kenya; rather he speaks of a neo-colonial state. This is based in his belief that regardless of the seeming independence of Kenyan society, the presence of the coloniser is still strongly felt. Economically, politically, and socially the coloniser is still influential though no longer dictatorial. The neo-colonial state is transitional; it occurs between the exodus of the coloniser and the true emancipation of the colonised on cultural, economic, and political levels. Among the core issues in Ngugi's work include neo-colonialism, land and the emptiness of

religion as well as its ties and link to both imperialism and colonialism. In the words of Gikandi (2000:289) Ngugi's works 'underscore the complex, ambivalent, and dialectical relationship between texts and contexts... in postcolonial cultures'.

As a postcolonial writer, Ngugi fulfils the task of speaking not only for the women but also for the downtrodden in Kenya. In *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi has done the task of giving them their own voice. He presented their suffering and marginalisation as well as their struggle for their rights. This corroborates Malebogo Kgalemang's (2013) opinion that to locate Ngugi as a postcolonial novelist and historian and a deconstructionist is to simply signify him as an author who "writes back" to both the empire and colonial bible.

3.3 *Devil on the Cross* and the Postcolonial Condition in Africa

In *Devil on the Cross*, the effects of colonisation and the neo-colonial state constitute the source of all conflict in the text. Besides criticising the evils of capitalism in neo-colonial Kenya, *Devil on the Cross*, focuses on the plight of the most wretched victim of African society, the African woman. Ngugi begins the marginalisation, exploitation and humiliation of Kenyan girls through the story of Wariinga, who becomes the victim of the lust of a wealthy old man. The novel opens with devastated and disillusioned Wariinga who is fleeing Nairobi. On the way to find a car to Ilmorog, she faints in the middle of the street and the bus is about to run over her but a stranger saves her. When he enquires about her, she tells him about the common fate of the young girls in modern Kenya. She gives the account of a Kareendi and her exploitation and humiliation, which incidentally was her own story to the stranger.

She begins with her education. According to her, the education of Kareendi is limited and 'before she reaches Form Two, Kareendi has had it. She is pregnant'. A loafer in the village happens to be responsible for it but when she approached this loafer to tell him about the child, he easily denied his any role in her pregnancy:

What! Kareendi, who are you claiming responsible for the pregnancy? Me? How have you worked that out? Go on and pester someone else with your delusions, Kareendi of easy thighs, ten-cent Kareendi. You can cry until your tears have filled oil drums- it will make no difference... Kareendi you can't collect pregnancies wherever you may

and then lay them at my door because one day I happened to tease you!

Wariinga leaves her baby in the care her grandparents to look after; she learns typewriting and shorthand in order to get a job. She leaves for Nairobi to find a job but everywhere, she gets the same answer that jobs are difficult to get but she will get the job after having discussed it at Modern Love Bar and Lodging. She enters another office and was confronted with the same question. It was then she realises that “Modern Love Bar and Lodging has become the main employment bureau for girls and women’s thighs are the tables on which contracts are signed” and “modern problems are resolved with the aid of thighs”. He who wishes to sleep is the one who is anxious to make the bed”. Much later in the novel, she was employed by Mr. Kihara, who afterwards fired her because she refused to yield to his sexual demands. Apart from young women like Wariinga, older ones in the novel like Wangari are not spared this harrowing experience. Thus, Wariinga’s anecdote on the fate of Kareendi, the archetypal Kenyan girl, removes the experience of sexual harassment from employers from a personal to a general level. It is not surprising that it is members of the national bourgeoisie that indulge in this dehumanisation of Kenyan womanhood.

The novel ends as the heroine, Wariinga, has now transformed herself, years after the devil’s feast, to become a student of mechanical engineering, her very first ambition in life. To sustain her new image of the ‘wonder woman’, she is portrayed as an independent, self-reliant lady who depends on odd jobs like typing, working on cars at a mechanic’s garage etc., to sponsor her education. As a step towards preventing her further oppression and exploitation by members of the capitalist class, she joins a local martial arts’ club and perfects the art of judo and karate. Ngugi specifically imbues Wariinga with these values, so that she can serve, according to Jennifer Evans (1987:134), ‘as a radical example of how a woman can resist being pushed or tempted into accepting subservient, degrading or decorative roles’.

As you have learnt, the focus of contemporary postcolonial African fiction and novelists is centered around the class conflicts between the ruling class, whose members are ensconced within the corridors of power and the teeming mass of the African people, who are pauperised by the inanities of the wielders of power, who indulge in pillaging the resources of the nations for the selfish use of members of the ruling class. Ngugi has shown that he is a postcolonial novelist concerned with the oppression, dehumanisation and relegation of peasants and women by the political class in Kenya and

Africa generally. As a novel of post-independence disillusionment, *Devil on the Cross* best illustrates the combative will of the oppressed to battle with and triumph over their oppressors. Ngugi in this novel fulfils the expectation that postcolonial writers should speak on behalf of the marginalised and downtrodden by giving them their own voice. *Devil on the Cross* provides a detailed and exhaustive exploration of life in postcolonial Kenya. At the same time, he criticises the neo-colonial stage of imperialism as well as the capitalist society that emerged in Kenya after independence, looking particularly at the effects that global capitalism has upon people. The novel is thematically concerned with how foreign companies and the corrupt local elite greedily exploit the workers, and peasants of Kenya. Ngugi's criticism of neo-colonial Kenya is not based on hatred, but rather on a reasoned critique of a country exploited and betrayed by a corrupt and parasitical national bourgeoisie.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you learnt that *Devil on the Cross* was secretly written on sheets of toilet paper while Ngugi was detained in prison. It is an insightful interpretation and a scathing critique of Kenyan politics and society during the period of neo-colonialism. Originally written in Ngugi's native Gikuyu language, *Devil on the Cross* contains many of the issues and concerns that are central to Ngugi's views of postcolonial African politics and literature. The novel tells the tragic story of Wariinga, a young woman who emigrated from her small rural town to the city of Nairobi only to be exploited by her boss and later a corrupt businessman. In particular, Ngugi uses Wariinga's story of exploitation and social struggle, common to many young people in contemporary Kenya, to satirise and thus harshly criticise the political and social situation of postcolonial Kenya in the face of the so-called devil of capitalism, which for Ngugi himself is 'the last vicious kick of a dying imperialism'. In the novel, Ngugi's pungent satire is a fierce attack against the postcolonial African elite and new African leaders, that is, the so-called 'local watchdogs', who perpetuate Western domination and thus were nothing but pawns of the white man whose presence on the African continent was no longer endurable. *Devil on the Cross*, despite the fact that it refers to Kenya in particular, depicts situations and problems that are common to almost all postcolonial African countries. In this novel, Ngugi shows that he is fully aware of the social and economic struggle between the exploiters and the exploited, the elite and the masses, which is at the core of the capitalist system, and decides to line up with the masses in their struggle for liberation.

5.0 SUMMARY

Devil on the Cross tells the tragic story of Wariinga, a young Kenyan woman who emigrates from her small rural hometown to urban and modern Nairobi only to be subjected and exploited by a corrupt and greedy capitalist society. Also, the novel follows a symbolic group of characters, including Wariinga, who meet on a bus, each with her own dramatic story about social and economic exploitation in Kenya. The novel focuses on the social and political contradictions of both capitalism and neo-colonialism. It is within these contradictions that the issues of elitism, class struggle and social collectivism are evident. These themes are an important component of Ngugi concern about the breakdown in Kenya's socio-political system. Community divisions, political corruption, and social revolution exist structurally in post-independence Kenya. Along these lines, Ngugi historically documents, through allegorical characters and situations, the abuse of political privilege and power as well as the destructive ascent of the new Kenyan bourgeoisie.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

1. *Devil on the Cross* illustrates the combative will of the oppressed to battle with and triumph over their oppressors. Discuss the validity of this assertion.
2. Discuss the significance of the title *Devil on the Cross*.

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UNIT 6 POSTCOLONIAL POLITICS IN BEN OKRI'S *THE FAMISHED ROAD*

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Background to Okri's *The Famished Road*
 - 3.2 Magical Realism as a Device for Political Criticism in Okri's *The Famished Road*
 - 3.3 Postcolonial Nigerian Politics in Okri's *The Famished Road*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ben Okri is a Nigerian writer who in 1980 left his homeland and moved over to England where he has been living and writing for many years. His border-crossing from Africa to Europe, in many ways, echoes Azaro, the narrator-protagonist of his novel *The Famished Road* (1991). Like the spirit-child who abandons the safety of the spirit world, Okri decided to leave the haven of his family and flee into exile, a world supposedly hostile to him. As if following his character's example, Okri escaped into the First World out of a desire to discover and explore its mysteries. Finally, he made this world of paradoxes his home. From London, the Okri has looked back at his former homeland and narrated it in most of his novels and short stories. As you have learnt in the previous units, postcolonial writers contend that colonialism has an all-pervasive impact on the colonised culture. But with the end of colonialism, African writers' involvement in politics intensified rather than faded, because the betrayal of the hopes inspired by independence provided them with another mission. It is exactly this mission that connects postcolonial African literature to postcolonial African politics. According to Jean-Paul Sartre (1965), "a writer is always a watchdog or a jester, but the primary function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world: a novelist cannot escape engagement in political and social issues".

Thus, for African writers, art has political and social functions. According to C. D. Balzer (1996), postcolonial criticism and postcolonial literature is often driven by the assumption that a postcolonial culture is inevitably

oppressed by the colonial conditions in which it has been produced. Among some of the fundamental postcolonial issues Okri critiqued in *The Famished Road* include the ubiquity of corruption and violence in contemporary Nigeria. He also explored the ongoing cultural confrontation between foreign and indigenous traditions in postcolonial Africa. Beyond this, he also creates a voice for the poorest and most powerless members of African society. It is against this background that in this unit, we shall examine Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* from the trajectory of postcolonial African fiction.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss how Okri deploys magical realism as device for political criticism *The Famished Road*
- analyse the postcolonial politics raised Okri's *The Famished Road*

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Background to Okri's *The Famished Road*

The Famished Road is set in an unnamed Nigerian city. The story is narrated by the protagonist Azaro, a boy of about seven years of age, who lives in the sub-urban ghetto of an African metropolis which is never named in the novel, but which can nevertheless be identified as the city of Lagos. Azaro is an *abiku* child, which means a child born to die in Yoruba cosmology. He is a spirit child and his world consists of both the world of the living and the spirits. Azaro struggles to live in the real world, suffused with bad politics, violence, hunger, and disease. However, his connection with the spirit world is not broken because his parents cannot afford the spiritual ceremony which would break ties with the spirit world. As a result, he also struggles with hallucinations of invisible demons who are out to harm his family and neighbours in the ghetto where they live. Additionally, some of Azaro's spirit friends seek to trick him back to their world against his decision to live. There are many surreal images in *The Famished Road* which juxtapose the spirit and the real, and which also show the relationship and strange coexistence of the two worlds in Azaro's life. He is constantly harassed by his sibling spirits from another world who want him to leave this mortal life and return to the world of spirits, sending many emissaries to bring him back. Azaro stubbornly refuses to leave this life owing to his love for his mother and father.

As the actions of the novel evolve, we learnt that Azaro's father works as a labourer while his mother sells items as a hawker. We also learn how Madame Koto, the owner of a local bar, asks Azaro to visit her establishment, convinced that he will bring good luck and customers to her bar. Meanwhile, Azaro's father prepares to be a boxer after convincing himself and his family that he has a talent to be a pugilist, while two opposing political parties try to bribe or coerce the residents to vote for them. The prolific theoretician and literary critic, Elleke Boehmer (2005), describes *The Famished Road* as an allegory for the post-independent nation of Nigeria, and the book gives insight to a painful and divided national history. She also argues that the language and narration at once alienates and connects the reader to a painful story.

It is important to bear in mind that *The Famished Road* is Okri's third novel and awarded the Booker Prize in 1991. The novel, till date, remains one of his most successful works and has won him a place in the literary hall of fame, international critical acclaim and a large readership.

3.2 Magical Realism as a Device for Political Criticism in Okri's *The Famished Road*

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* is an important work of postcolonial African fiction. The novel represents one of the most significant explorations of literary forms in the canon of postcolonial African literature. That is to say, beyond being a work in the postcolonial genre, it appropriately qualifies as a work of the magic-realism genre, a genre often seen as a sub-category of postcolonial discourse. Magic realism as a genre has created much controversy and debate among critics, with some renouncing the use of the term altogether. When asked about the present situation in Africa, during an interview, the veteran postcolonial African theorist and critic Ngugi wa Thiong'o observes that the socio-political situation in Africa has reached a point where the novelist's imagination must go beyond realism if he/she is to adequately represent it. He suggests that one possible adequate way of depicting the present predicament of Africa is through the fable, the fantastical. In other words, Ngugi's call for the use of what is referred to as magical realism in the depiction of current African situation in literature suggests that this mode is employed out of necessity, thereby confirming the incommensurable role of literature and writers in the socio-political life of Africans. Indeed, Ngugi's response echoes Salman Rushdie's comment on the situation in his native country where he describes magical realism as the special style he needs for the portrayal of contemporary India. In fact, faced with the destruction of Africa by colonialism, African writers had already used poetry, drama, and

fiction to glorify the African past, depict the clash between indigenous and colonial cultures, condemn the European subjugation, and demand the independence of Africa. Even with the official end of colonialism, African writers' involvement in politics has not faded, because the betrayal of the hopes inspired by the independences has provided them with another mission, which, in the words of Frantz Fanon, they "must accomplish or betray". In other words, their use of magical realism is dictated by the kind of issues they address in their respective novels and the vision that provides impetus for their artistic endeavour. The use of magical realism in *The Famished Road* is firmly rooted in politics. Okri's mission in the novel is first and foremost political, and to some degree, rhetorical as well as aesthetic.

Most importantly, the use of magical realism serves as a method for challenging received ideas by making people aware of alternative possibilities. That is to say, the complexities of the current socio-political situations in postcolonial African countries, have forced writers to place their novels between two seemingly contradictory worlds; that is, the real and the imaginary, the ordinary and the fantastic.

According to Issifou Moussa (2012), magical realism is a literary technique which critics have traced to the novelist Garcia Marquez. Magical realism is defined as a literary movement associated with a narrative mode that combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them. *The Longman Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines magical realism as "a type of contemporary narrative in which the magical and the mundane are mixed in an overall context of realistic story-telling." Magical realism, therefore, can be taken as a crossover between ordinary and extraordinary events, realistic and unrealistic events in the representation of real issues.

Postcolonial African writers employ magical realism in their literary works as an effective alternative to the realist mode used in the past. It serves to capture what may seem unbelievable to Western sensibilities but real to indigenous understanding, as well as open the way to a world of limitless possibilities. In fact, in postcolonial Africa, the magnitude of vices like corruption, despotism, dictatorship, and electoral frauds, defies human imagination; even the sacredness of life is violated by the carnage that is the result of the gratuitous violence that characterises socio-political relations. Femi Osofisan agrees with this claim when he admitted in an essay that "the experimental work of West African magical realist writers is an aesthetic response to West Africa's recent experience of civil war, dictatorship, drought, famine, and economic failure". All these misfortunes

require a narrative mode that provides both a powerful condemnation and room to dream again. Magic realism is a break away from the modes that had characterised African literature for decades. The move by African postcolonial writers from literary modes such as social realism and satire to magical realism is the result of both the changes in the socio-political and economic landscape of Africa and the realisation that this mode can play an indispensable role both in the criticism and the representation of this new African reality. The subversive function of magical realism has been emphasised by most critics. According to Christopher Warnes (2009), magical realism is a mode of narration in which the non-or extra-rational-often associated with myth or fantasy- is represented on scrupulously equal terms with the empirical, objective or phenomenal world familiar to realism. Thus, magical realism is a mode of narration that contests the monopolisation of the truth by realism. In other words, it is a mode that subverts the only one notion of reality. Marie Rose Napierkowski, the editor of *BookRags* defines magic realism as “a literary movement associated with a style of writing or technique that incorporates magical or supernatural events into realistic narrative without questioning the improbability of these events.” What these definitions reveal is that magical realism rejects simplistic representations, because even though it seems banal, magical realism is a multipurpose or multifunctional mode that writers appropriate when they address multidimensional issues. It follows that magical realism is a narrative mode that enables writers to undertake multipurpose endeavours in their novels. Magical realism owes its multipurpose and multifunctional abilities to its Hybridity. The fact that it is the result of the fusion of Western ways with indigenous way of seeing equipped its practitioners with limitless possibilities in their artistic endeavours.

Critics trace the origin of magical realism in postcolonial literature to Latin America in the 1940s with the publication of *Men of Maize* in 1949 by Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias and *The Kingdom of this World* also published in 1949 by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. However, it was the publication of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970) that turned magical realism into an international phenomenon. What makes magical realism more convenient for postcolonial African writers is their belief that the fantastic, the supernatural and even the magical should be allowed in our attempt to fully interpret the socio-political situation in postcolonial Africa, because not only do they believe that realism has shown its limits in its representation of the world but also they think that it is foreign to the socio-political milieu it attempts to represent. As Wendy Faris puts it:

For whatever realist texts may say, the fact that realism purports to give an accurate picture of the world based in fidelity to empirical evidence, and that it is a European import, have led to its being experienced by writers in colonised societies as the language of the coloniser. From this perspective, to adopt magical realism with its irreducible elements that question that dominant discourse constitutes a kind of liberating poetics.

Wendy Faris and Lois Zamora (1995) further argue that “in magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinise accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, and motivation”. In *The Famished Road*, Okri employs a form of magical realism infused with his local culture to depict the social and political situations in Nigeria as well as offer an alternative to the realistic interpretation of people’s daily experiences. In fact, in the novel, Okri attacks the political, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual crises in Nigeria. In the novel, Okri’s protagonist, the abiku spirit Azaro, is born at one of the most precarious and chaotic times in the history of Nigeria; a territory on the verge of becoming the modern, decolonised nation-state of Nigeria. According to Azaro, “Our road was changing. Nothing was what seemed any more...I knew we were in the divide between past and future. A new cycle had begun; an old one was being brought to a pitch”. Adnan Mahmutovic (2010) opines that the “road” trope in the novel is predicated on an existential concern with history. The road of history stretches infinitely back into the past and with no end in sight: “there are never really any beginnings or endings”. For Anjali Roy (2000), “the road serves as a symbol of the enlightenment myth of progress viewed from a Yoruba perspective”. The mythical “King of the Road”, who swallowed passengers without offerings has transformed into the modern infrastructure that devours those who work on its creation. Like the mythical ones, the modern roads demand immense sacrifices. Yet, while the modernisation of the country is supposed to bring about progress, Okri insists on the endless repetition of historical injustice: “I recognised the new incarnations of their recurrent clashes, the recurrence of ancient antagonisms, secret histories, festering dreams”. In other words, modernity fails to deliver on the promise of freedom and progress, and puts a new face to the cycles of oppression.

Justifying the use of magical realism in African fiction, Moussa contends that magical realism is not merely a literary mode; rather, it is an aesthetic of necessity. In other words, its use by postcolonial African writers is dictated by the kind of issues they address in their works. Magical realism

is the result of an intentional break away from the modes used in the previous African novels. This departure is informed by the realisation of the current generation of postcolonial African writers that the social, political, and economic situations in Africa have extraordinary origins which require extraordinary narrative techniques such as fantastical or marvellous realism for adequate representations. In other words, their choice of magical realism is informed by their dissatisfaction with social realism, satire, and other forms which have revealed their limits vis-à-vis the postcolonial African crisis. Among the most unique features of magic realism is the careful juxtaposition of “the real” and “the magical”. A careful balance is maintained in magic realism which allows these two opposing worlds to work together within the same text with neither ever becoming dominant over the other. Among the features which define a work as magical realism and sets it apart from other similar works of the surreal or the fantastic include: first, the juxtaposition of two conflicting but autonomously coherent narrative perspectives: the enlightened and rational view of reality, and the acceptance of the supernatural as an everyday occurrence; and secondly, a degree of authorial reticence, an absence of censure or surprise. In other words, judgments of the veracity of events or the authenticity of the world-view are not made.

Ayo Kehinde (2003) avers that Okri’s *The Famished Road* can be read as a magic fiction. It is about the Yoruba myth of Abiku. The novel captures the exploits of the Abiku child-hero, Azaro, with his magical and apocalyptic super reality. The use of the convention of magic realism in the novel is a postcolonial writer’s strategy. Okri probably uses the novel as an anti-imperial tool and a re-working of a historical moment. In the novel, the reader encounters codes and co-texts from different sources, including Plato, Buddhism, the Bible, Gnosticism, Sufism, Freemasonry, Blake, Goethe, Nietzsche, Yeats and, most especially, African cosmologies (myths of reincarnation and recurrence).

Abiku, in Yoruba cosmology, is a child born to die again, come again, and die again in an unbroken cycle. Okri uses the myth of “Abiku” as a metaphor for the multitude of socio-political and economic problems facing the postcolonial nations. As the Abiku child defies any magical power that can make him stay alive, the myriads of problems facing the African continent and by extension, all neo-colonial nations, have defied a lot of solutions. A majority of the nations, despite their political independence, are still encumbered with pains and conflicts. In *The Famished Road*, Okri’s belief in the cyclical theory of history is revealed. As used by the novelist, the myth of Abiku has socio-political and economic connotations. Thus, he is able to adopt the cyclical notion of history to foreground the recurrent ethos in the third-world. The spirit child, Azaro, who keeps on

dying and coming back to his mother, comments on the enduring existential pangs of neo-colonial nations thus:

In not wanting to stay, we caused much pain to mothers. The pain grew heavier with each return. Their anguish became for us an added spiritual weight which quickens the cycle of rebirth. Each new birth was agony for us too, each shock of the raw world. Our cyclical rebellion made us resented by other spirits and ancestors. Disliked in the spirit world and branded among the living, our unwillingness to stay affected all kinds of balance.

In *The Famished Road*, the magical element of the text is something which is neither questioned by the reader nor the characters of the work; it is simply an accepted element of the text. Writing on the political tensions in the novel, Mahmutovic opines that in *The Famished Road*, the violent history of Nigeria brings about identity crises and existential angst. Overwhelming conflicts and changes within the nation's history rupture the characters' lives and lead to an anguished concern with existence and a desire for articulation of singular freedom. For instance, the different characters, such as Azaro, Dad and Mum seem lost on the ever-multiplying roads that seem to lead mostly to misery. This fundamental insecurity or existential *angst* signals to the characters that something is not quite right with their social system, and that it may deprive them of freedom.

3.3 Postcolonial Nigerian Politics in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

In Yoruba cosmology as noted earlier, there is a close relationship between the world of the past (ancestors and god), the present (world of human beings), and the future (the unborn). For the Yoruba, the purpose of life is to maintain links between these worlds through proper observance of rituals. In *The Famished Road* we have this loose bound between past and present of the peoples and the colonised country, Nigeria. As already stated, the protagonist and narrator of the novel is Azaro; an abiku- a spirit child who is reluctant to be born just to die again. Azaro is a restless, continuous wanderer "not knowing where he was headed", as Okri describes him. All through the novel, he is always wandering and reporting the changes in the colonised land, and how people change and become one like the colonisers unknowingly with the purity and ignorance of a child. The people depicted in the novel are day-by-day getting apart from their past and cultural values; family relations get looser and looser and they become more individualistic especially after the intrusion of the white man in their land

with their money and ambition for both political and economic power. Those supporting the party of the rich get richer not knowing they are supporting colonialism. One of them is Madame Koto; a bar owner who gets richer and fatter, literally, with the help of her political party. She is a representative of both coloniality and the break of ties with history. Madame Koto's bar becomes the emblematic site of the historical transformations. From a shabby bar serving old-fashioned wine and pepper soup, it becomes a place with electricity, gramophone, and a centre for political meetings. Azaro and the ghetto population come in conflict with Madame Koto, who acts as a forerunner of the new hybrid politics. They spread rumours of her involvement in "the most terrifying cults in the land," and even her "drinking (of) human blood". To devalue her Party of the Rich, they interpret her as "a fabulous and monstrous creation. It did not matter that some people insisted that it was her political enemies who put out all these stories. The stories distorted our perception of her reality. Slowly, they took her life over, made themselves real, and made her opaque in our eyes".

In the novel, Azaro's father represents the nativity of Africa and tries to get out of poverty by taking to professional boxing. Little Azaro by being in-between the spiritual world and the material world is a representative of the Nigerian suppressed soul yearning for freedom. To really show how Ben Okri's novel constitutes an x-ray of the postcolonial politics in Nigeria, Ayo Kehinde's (2010) analysis is worth quoting in detail. According to the scholar-critic, although *The Famished Road* offers an insight into a pre-independence epoch, it is also very relevant to post-independence Africa, a revelation of the unsavoury intricacies that permeate the social terrain of a developing country as a result of skewed human relationships and the failed promise of the public sphere. The Abiku myth is used as a political metaphor. The exploits and ordeals of the spirit-child, his vacillation between two worlds (terrestrial and extra-terrestrial), unfold in the socio-political, cultural and moral fabrics of the society. The episodic plot of the novel involves a quest motif, involving three characters (Azaro, Black Tyger/Dad, and Jeremiah, the photographer). One of them (Azaro) is recognized at the apex of the identity-search ladder; the other two are significantly subsumed in the first, but their search is single-mindedly political. The pursuit of a humane and just society in the physical realm is uppermost in their consciousness. Azaro's attempt to navigate life towards self-discovery, as encompassed by the road myth, seems to be rough, tortuous and sinuous:

In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road

was once a river it was always hungry. In that land of beginnings, spirits mingled with the unborn. We could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries. There was much feasting, playing, and sorrowing. We feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity. We played because we were free. And we sorrowed much because there were always those amongst us who had just returned from the world of the Living. They had returned inconsolable for all the love they had left behind, all the suffering they hadn't redeemed, all they hadn't understood, and for all that they had barely begun to learn before they were drawn back to the land of origins. There was not one amongst us who looked forward to being born. We disliked the rigours of existence, the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying, and the amazing indifference of the Living in the midst of the simple beauties of the universe. We feared the heartlessness of human beings, all of whom are born blind, few of whom ever learn to see (1991:1).

Through the exploits of Azaro, the reader is able to understand the rigours of existence: 'the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying'. The author describes a political system that has turned into a festering sore. The wide gulf between the rich and the poor is revealed in some people living in clover, while others are condemned to the impecuniousness of the slums, religious perversity, political insincerity on the part of both the Party of the Rich and of the Poor, and other eccentricities. All these impediments discourage Azaro from defining himself permanently within the corporeal reality. In the milieu imaginatively portrayed in this novel, revolutionary nationalist hopes have given way to the disappointments and disillusionment of the corrupt post-independence state that Frantz Fanon foretells in Chapter Three of *The Wretched of the Earth*. The succession of one corrupt regime by another (like the 'coming and going' of the 'Abiku' child) has been a persistent pattern that has defined the politics of almost the entire continent, and one which shows little sign of changing. Dad (Black Tyger), as a result of his abject poverty and unemployment, resolves to become a boxer to earn a living. His status as a boxer and non-conformist pits him against the Party of the Rich, the governing authorities, his landlord, and at times, Madame Koto— the last two being members of the Party of the Rich. Because of Dad's unyielding opposition to the Party, his landlord hikes his rent, which he bemoans in statements tinged with political rage:

Where am I going to find that kind of money every month, eh? That's how they make you commit murder. Do you see how they force a man to become an armed robber?'

He rebuffs his landlord's attempt to coerce him to vote for the Party of the Rich during an election: 'what right has the landlord to bully us, to tell us who to vote for, eh? Is he God? Even God can't tell us who to vote for. Don't be afraid. We may be poor, but we are no slaves'.

In the society portrayed in *The Famished Road*, politicians are presented as embodiments of greed and corruption. Okri is equally concerned with the indifference which most of the exploited members of the society show toward their conditions. The interrelationship and interdependence required of them to change the status quo is, however, lacking. In spite of the fact that Okri paints a bleak social and political picture of this period of Nigeria's history, he leaves everyone in doubt as to the solution to the problems he has portrayed. This confirms Brenda Cooper's (1998) assertion that Okri's novel is elusive with regard to 'the possibility of change'. Okri's ability to recount the impossibility of a stable and acceptable public sphere among the people situates the text within a particular historical period, and this removes it from being a mere magical realist novel and qualifies it as a social realist text. It is when we consider these dissonant and discriminatory human interactions in the novel that the full impact of the social and political decadence really strikes us.

The society depicted in the novel is polarised into the poor, represented by Dad's household and the rich, represented by Dad's landlord and Madame Koto. Okri shows that this society, like most highly stratified societies, is characterised by the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Dad and his neighbours are subject to constant exploitation by the landlord. Even though the roof is leaking, the landlord continues to increase the rent and often threatens to set thugs on them. Only Dad is aware of the social realities and sometimes challenges this domineering figure, while others seem to be less concerned. There are no serious and purposeful social interactions geared towards catalysing a change among the deprived masses. Dad seems to be the only man of conscience struggling to change the society for good. While his family's situation worsens, those of Madame Koto and the landlord improve. Madame Koto in the process is transformed from the kind of woman who helps her needy neighbours. Her metamorphosis is so complete that Azaro says: 'she changed completely from the person I used to know, her big frame which seemed to me full of warmth now seemed full of wickedness. I didn't know why she had

changed'. Madame Koto becomes a stranger to the ghetto dwellers when she comes in contact with the politicians. Through this negative metamorphosis, Okri conjures up, in detail, the abuse of power and national resources by Nigeria's ruling class. Dad, in his uncontrolled outburst declares: 'some people have too much, and their dogs eat better food, while others suffer and keep quiet until the day they die'. His efforts to earn a livelihood afford him an insight into the realities of his society. He awakens to the fact that he, along with other members of his social class, has been condemned to lead a life of hardship and abject poverty from which it is impossible to escape. This situation is even worse on the political front. Political affiliation is deeply polarised in two (The Party of the Rich and The Party of the Poor). Okri uses this polarisation to show the difference between the lifestyle of the members of the Party of the Rich and their supporters and those of The Party of the Poor. For members of the Party of the Rich, wealth and power have become the principal pursuit, and the unavoidable consequence of the situation is a total disregard of any moral or social consideration in the drive to satisfy individual desires. This validates Abubakar Liman's (1999) comment that *The Famished Road* is 'a way of depicting the life of the poor in Nigeria who are caught between the urge to live a better life and the difficulties of a system built on injustice and exploitation of man by man'.

For Okri, Nigeria is metaphorically an Abiku child who comes and goes at will. The corrupt Nigerian society confuses its citizens. Ade has a similar notion, as he avers in the novel that:

Ours too was an abiku nation, a spirit-child, one that keeps being reborn and after each birth comes blood and betrayal, the child of ours will refuse to stay till we have made propitious sacrifice and displayed our serious intent to bear the weight of a unique destiny'.

However, despite all this, Dad is optimistic. He believes that one day:

There will be change ... And when people least expect it; a great transformation is going to take place in the world. Suffering people will know justice and beauty. A wonderful change is coming from far away and people will realise the great meaning of struggle and hope, there will be peace.

Furthermore, the travails of Jeremiah, the photographer, are reflective of the cat-and mouse relationship between the press, writers, and a repressive

regime. Jeremiah's ordeals depict the life of many freedom fighters and writers in Africa who are silenced by the government or politicians for attempting to challenge authority. Many of them have been clandestinely murdered, completely silenced by the government, and those who refuse to be silenced are incarcerated. Once, the photographer had to flee into secrecy for a long time after being assailed by the thugs of the Party of the Rich. When his house is attacked, he disappears. He is also sent away from a relative's house when it comes under surveillance. The genesis of his trouble is the taking of pictures of the riot against the Party of the Rich when poisoned milk was being distributed. He takes pictures of the miserable members, especially Black Tyger's landlord who is left reeling in the mire with his torn clothes. He records moments of triumph by the ghetto dwellers and the burnt van of the Party of the Rich. The Party's humiliation gains so much prominence in the papers that thugs seek Jeremiah out for extermination. He is arrested and released after three days, telling tales of torture and brutality he received at the hands of security agents. For displaying pictures at his home of the Rich Party's disgrace, thugs vandalise it. His actions become legendary, but he can no longer continue his trade without molestation. He now makes only nocturnal appearances and becomes a tramp, leading a vagrant life, begging for food. However, despite being hounded, his courage and uncompromising will to expose the ills of the ruling elite become famous. He continues to take pictures of market women fighting with thugs and those of policemen collecting bribes.

Keyinde concludes that in *The Famished Road*, Okri transmits, analyses, critiques and even transgresses the yearnings of his nation through engagements with myth and historicity and by probing the images and realities of Nigeria's postcolonial experience. From these mytho-cultural experiences and sociological inclinations that have a solid ideological sub-text arise a successful production of a story that narrates the issue of the failed promise of the public sphere in Nigeria. Although the narrative centres on the Abiku myth and is surrounded by almost unending mysteries, the reader is able to obtain a full grasp of political issues in Nigeria. If the continuous disorder and chaos in human life, especially in Nigeria, are anything to go by, there is a need to mythologise experiences and break the barriers of conventional realism. This has made Okri's *The Famished Road*, considering its narrative modes, a 'distinctive combination of the African, and the European, which reflects the collective modes of discourse underlying postmodern parody' (Olatubosun Ogunsanwo 1995:48). Okri uses magic, drawn from the African oral tradition, to make a social statement— all is far from well with Nigeria's public sphere.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Okri is a magical realist who avails himself of the resources of magic realism to express a theme that is typically postcolonial. In this unit, we explained that since Okri's *The Famished Road* won the Booker Prize, the novel has become a classic of African postcolonial fiction. The novel combines brilliant narrative technique of magical realism with a fresh vision to create an essential work of world literature. You also learnt that the narrator, Azaro, is an *abiku*, a spirit child, who in the Yoruba tradition of Nigeria exists between life and death. The life he foresees for himself and the tale he tells is full of sadness and tragedy. The tension between the land of the living, with its violence and political struggles, and the temptations of the carefree kingdom of the spirits propels the plot of the story. As a postcolonial text, Okri shows how the collapse of the dream for a better post-independence future has created an atmosphere of repression and fear in Africa nay Nigeria.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you learnt that Okri is considered one of the foremost African writers of the postcolonial period. You also saw that *The Famished Road* is an important postcolonial work as well as a fitting work of magic realism. For Okri, the postcolonial situation is simply the continuation of colonialism under the guise of independence. As Ayo Kehinde avers of the book, "beyond exhibiting topicality and stylistic innovations, this postcolonial Nigerian fiction offers a sustained exploration of the issue of the failed promise of the public sphere, a much-needed theme in current Nigerian literary discourse". The mixture of the real and the spiritual worlds, in which Okri particularly draws on the myths and beliefs of his African heritage, has often led him to be categorised as a magical realist, a categorisation he nevertheless rejects.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. "Our country is an abiku country. Like the spirit-child, it keeps coming and going. One day it will decide to remain". Discuss the significance of myth in *The Famished Road*.
2. Critically examine the deployment of magical realism as device for political criticism in Okri's *The Famished Road*.

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