

MODULE 2 ANTI-COLONIAL NIGERIAN LITERATURE

- Unit 1 Anti-Colonialism and Nigerian Literature
- Unit 2 Types of Anti-Colonial Literature in Nigeria
- Unit 3 Anti-Colonial Literature 1: Poetry
- Unit 4 Anti-Colonial Literature 2: Prose
- Unit 5 Anti-Colonial Literature 3: Drama/Theatre

UNIT 1 ANTI-COLONIALISM AND NIGERIAN LITERATURE**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 The Basis of Anti-Colonial Nigerian Literature
 - 3.3 The Influence of Anti-Colonial Nigerian Literature
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study the effect of colonialism in the development of Nigerian literature. All Nigerian writers are products of western education. It is this western education that armed Nigerian writers with the linguistic tool to write literature in English. Colonialism has positive and negative effects. However, most Nigerian writers attack the negative effects of colonialism. There is the general belief that Africa's woes result from colonial experiences and that the present African leaders are practicing the colonial method of administration. We will study how the Nigerian poets, novelists and dramatists presented colonialism, attacked colonialism and/or praised colonialism

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand colonialism as theme in Nigerian literature
- appreciate the theme of colonialism in Nigerian literature
- identify the Nigerian literature treating colonial themes
- distinguish between anti-colonial and pro-colonial Nigerian Literatures.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Colonialism according to the Advanced Learners Dictionary is an act of settling in a country or territory by migrants from another country, controlled by it (Hornby, 2000:p.196). Colonial rulers were agents in the promotion of Commerce and Christianity. The purposes of colonialism included economic exploitation of the colony's natural resources in any possible way. In colonial Nigeria, British rule dominated the resources, labor, and markets of the colonial territory, and imposed socio-cultural, religious and linguistic structures. According to Irvin Markovitz, "colonialism was only one expression of an ever more encompassing capitalism" (1977:p.58). Colonialism was often based on the ethnocentric belief that the morals and values of the colonizer were superior to those of the colonized. The ideas were propagated through schools and mission houses. British colonial rule in Nigeria was described by Frederick Lugard as 'indirect rule' in which the natives acted in the name of the Governor-General who approved actions of all native officers (Lugard, 1970, p.268). Indirect rule was also described by Temple (1968) as a system of administration which allows European influence to bear on the native indirectly as though he was ruled by their chiefs (30).

European attempt to propagate and integrate their ideas created two enclaves of domination and submission. This perhaps was not deliberate as the dynamics of domination paved way to doldrums. The distance from colonialism to civilization became infinite bringing along with it new patterns and ways of living including corruption, and sometimes near anarchy following the dismantling of the indigenous fabrics of societies. Indigenous administrative machineries were tampered with like all other facets of organic structures. Replacements were neither new nor old as the pot-pouri released the good, the bad and the ugly sides of two cultures. It was in the light of this that warrant chiefs were appointed by British officials on the basis of "make me believe that you can do the job". On the other hand the peoples' rulers were moved to pave way for individuals who gained by the European presence. According to Afigbo (1974, even when the British administration sought to undo the harm believed to have been done to the indigenous society in the era of the warrant chiefs the effort was a failure (11). British rule was corrupt and as such pragmatic. What was pragmatic to the Europeans was seen as an act of corruption by the natives. As a result, age sets, a form of pre-colonial organization was replaced by native executives many of which positions did not have any historical antecedents in the culture of the people.

British colonial rule led to significant changes in Nigerian societies. With colonial rule, initiation into the fullness of a tribe and manhood which was important for good conduct became irrelevant in the burgeoning urban centers of Lagos, Calabar, Lokoja and Benin to mention just a few places. Rites or knowledge of passage from one generation to another was abandoned. Urban people became individuals, with overt ideas that were uncanny to collective efforts or communalism. At the same time the competitive urban environment of the colonial period threw up new challenges where only the fittest survives. Old and traditional rules lost significance. Traditional refuge gave way to individualism. There was apathy. The drift was significant. There is delusion. By 1960, it became normal to find men and women that would otherwise have been protectors of the young, old and members of their societies engaging in various acts inimical to real growth. Communal roles became antiquated as moral consciousness gave way to personal needs. British colonial rule changed old ways. Violence and corruption were enthroned.

The Nigerian writers have been writing to address these issues in various forms. It becomes a commitment and a protest. It becomes a way of redirecting the Nigerian people towards reflecting on the beauty of original Africa before its corruption by the imperialists. These anti-colonial works have been addressing various salient issues that have formed the bane of Nigeria's underdevelopment since the evacuation of the imperialists.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the major characteristics of anti-colonial Nigerian literature

3.2 The Basis of Anti-Colonial Nigerian Literature

The Nigerian writers tell stories to entertain and educate the people in a way they understand. Nigerian literature shows how economic, political, religious and social situations relate to pre-colonial Africa, colonialism, neo-colonial independence, and indigenous situations. Thus, the themes dealt with by Nigerian writers include art, religion, urban-life, tradition and culture, ironies of life, and pre-colonial, colonial, and neo-colonial realities. Just as the common storyteller of old, the contemporary Nigerian writer aims at helping his/her society to change while retaining the best features of authentic Nigerian cultures.

The bases of anti-colonial writings from Nigeria can be viewed from two perspectives. The first is to correct the ill-pictures of Africa in those literatures written by those Europeans who claimed to have written African literatures even when they were never African. The fact is that some literary writers who wrote about Africa during the colonial era were not Africans. For instance, Joyce Cary wrote *Mister Johnson*, a story about eastern Nigeria. It was this novel which prompted the writing of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. According to Achebe, *Mister Johnson contained distorted pictures of the Nigerian society* which he tried to correct in his novel, *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 Africans painted by the western writers, made the early African writers struggle to face the theme of identity and the personality of the African people. To classify Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad as African writers and to call their fictions African fictions becomes a major problem in the polemics of definition of African fiction. Fiction is an imaginative recreation of real life experiences. This means that the subject matters in every fiction must reflect the experiences of the society from which it emanated. One very important fact here, being that every fictional work must show realism not mere fabrication of unrealities purposely designed to distort the history of a people. Chinua Achebe made a proposition that fictional works about Africa written by non Africans tend to rewrite the history and culture of African people in very bad manner and intentions.

The second reason is the need to expose the ugly mode of governance of the imperialists and the effect on the Nigerian people. Early historians gave distorted history of Africa. They saw Africa as a continent of barbarians and animal-like humans with four legs without any form of culture or religion and this historical distortion has often influenced the western judgment of Africa and Africans. So, the imperialists treated their subjects like animals. They used them as beasts of burden, as slaves, as servants, as second-

class humans, as idiots and as cultureless humans. Hence, we do not expect a better literature from non-Africans about Africa since they already have a distorted history about Africa. The anti-colonial Nigerian literatures are assertive about the African personality, the Nigerian identity and universal appeal of the Nigerian psyche.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

With adequate examples, explain the major thematic concern of anti-colonial Nigerian literature

3.3 The Influence of Anti-Colonial Nigerian Literature

Chinua Achebe explained in his collection of essay *Morning Yet on Creation Day that African things are not accepted in the writing literatures*. He said that he was scolded by his teacher for writing a poem about Harmattan, instead of summer, winter or fall. In unit 1 of this course, it was clearly stated that, Nigerian literature owes much to the Nigerian oral tradition. On the sub-unit on the influence of journal literature, we read how the editor of Nigerian Student Verse decried the imitation of western writers by the Nigerian students who contributed in the anthology. He called it an unfortunate development which impairs the positive development of a true Nigerian literature. We see the effect of this negative influence in the works of Okigbo, Soyinka, and some other writers.

Later, however, there is a hinge on traditional oral values of Africans in the later works of these writers. Soyinka turns to the myth of Ogun in his works. He romances freely with the African values and in some cases we see him infusing western values in his African milieu. Many other writers like Okigbo draws his metaphors from his town Ojoto in Anambra State of Nigeria while J.P. Clark writes freely about the Ijaw region of Nigeria, romancing with the sea and marine metaphors. This shift is deliberate because it marks the renaissance of Nigerian literature where Nigerian cultural values and Nigerian milieu are good subject matters for literature.

In their seminal critical volume *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubiike outline three major tendencies discernible in African poetry in English one of which is the Euro-modernist tendency to 'ape' the practices of 20th century European modernist poetry*. They repeatedly name Soyinka's, Clark's, and the early Okigbo's poetry as notorious examples. They believe that the trio never believed in their Africanness hence their leaning towards the style and mode of western literature. They believed that using western literary style, conceit or mode of literature does not improve the existence of a true Nigerian literature.

In contemporary Nigerian literature, there are deliberate attempts to use the Nigerian historical experiences in expressing the literary ideals. This leaning towards everything African in recent literatures from Nigeria marks a deliberate shift away from the western literary pattern thus undermining the use of English to achieve wider readership.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Clearly state the effect of Nigerian cultural milieu in Nigerian literature.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Anti-colonial literature in Nigeria is a protest type of literature revealing the odds of colonialism and the effect of neocolonialism in the country. This theme has been more prevalent since the publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The Nigerian writers treating this theme have often contested all the experiences of Nigerians: economic, socio-cultural, psychological and the political dimensions of colonialism. When Chinua Achebe explains in his essay "The Novelist as a Teacher" that Africans did not hear of culture first from the Europeans, he meant that Africans were really treated as uncultured beings. This makes anti-colonial Nigerian works of literature strive to correct these misconceptions about the African personality and milieu. The question of audience comes in here. Many critics have wondered whom anti-colonial Nigerian literatures are meant for. Is it meant for the Nigerian people who are worried about the experiences of the past or is it meant for the Europeans who should understand that the experiences of Africans (Nigerians) had during the colonial days were not according to Achebe (1975), "one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them". The fact remains that anti-colonial Nigerian writings are meant to teach the Nigerian or European readers about the ugly sides and the effects of imperialism.

5.0 SUMMARY

Anti-colonial themes are common in Nigerian literatures because the experiences are still relevant and the relics of colonialism are around us. More so, the prevalent neo-colonial attitudes of Nigerian political rulers points to a reminder in the experiences of the ugly past. Nigerian writers act as "sensitive needles" in reminding the people and the politicians on the need to shun everything that will take the country back to those experiences of colonial trauma. It is true that the present form of written literature in Nigeria is an offshoot of Western literary style infused in the western education pattern in Nigeria but is it possible to have Nigerian literature in a pure Nigerian form that is without any hinge on the western form of writing? This may seem impossible since the literature writers in Nigeria make use of western style in their craft. However, Nigerian literature, in its basic form, is oral. So, written literature echoes western values but the infusion of the oral artistic forms in Nigerian literature has helped in the indigenization of Nigerian literature in form and style.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

1. Explain the main ideal in anti-colonial Nigerian literature
2. Discuss the anti-colonial themes in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*
3. How does Nigerian literary style contribute in anti-colonialism?
4. What factors have been responsible for the continued production of anti-colonial literatures in Nigeria?
5. Assess the importance of anti-colonial literature in Nigeria

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 TYPES OF ANTI-COLONIAL LITERATURE IN NIGERIA**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Type 1: Anti-Colonialism on Society
 - 3.3 Type 2: Anti-Colonialism on Culture
 - 3.4 Type 3: Anti-Colonialism on Politics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will be looking at the different types of anti-colonial literatures in Nigeria. By types, we mean what they focus on in the treatment of the theme of colonialism. Some anti-colonial Nigerian literatures focus on the effects of colonialism on the Nigerian society, some on the effects of colonialism on Nigerian culture, some on its effect on the political development of the country while some focus on the change in literary form: structure, language and theme, as a way of driving home the points about avoiding colonial mentalities in Nigerian creative writing spheres. We will study various anti-colonial Nigerian literatures as possible explanation of these types of anti-colonial works in all literary genres.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the various types of anti-colonial Nigerian literature;
- appreciate the themes in anti-colonial Nigerian literature;
- discuss the various types of anti-colonial literature in Nigeria; and
- distinguish the types of anti-colonial Nigerian literatures.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 General Overview**

Anti-colonial literature in Nigeria is a vast phenomenon. However, that magnitude is perhaps the least of the difficulties facing the critic in attempting to give a fair view of this ever-growing phenomenon. A more formidable problem arises from the fact that Nigerian writers are writing two different kinds of literature. The first is the social-realistic literary convention that has been familiar to readers and still exists. The second is the kind in which a new language prevails; this is relatively unfamiliar to many – perhaps even most – readers. This is

premised on the awareness that there is always a close relationship between Nigerian literature and its historical context(s). The multiple paths that are followed include a thorough examination of the ideologies and context(s) within which the work was produced, the consideration of the expression of life of disenchantment and pain in the literature. All lead to the unmasking of Nigerian literature as a socially symbolic act, that is, a reflection of the problems of the writer's immediate society, in particular, and the African continent in general.

Many Nigerian writers have been termed anti-colonial because of the manner in which the colonial experiences are attacked. It also exposes the traumatic effects of colonial power on Nigeria's development. Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and a host of other writers from Nigeria have often been described as anti-colonial writers because they have often chronicled the experiences of Nigerians during the colonial days. They write to draw sympathies from the people, especially the non-African consumers of Nigerian literature and to direct Nigerians properly in avoiding the repetition of such experience. One characteristic feature of anti-colonial Nigerian literature is the detailed exposition of the negative experiences of Nigerians during the colonial period and avoiding any positive impact they may have made on the African continent. These writers prefer painting gory pictures of slavery, imposition of taxes and levies, the destruction of African culture and the abuse of their fundamental human rights. Anti-colonial themes occur consistently as protest literatures against the excesses of colonialism.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the major characteristics of anti-colonial Nigerian literature

3.2 Type 1: Anti-Colonialism on Society

Many anti-colonial literatures in Nigeria focused on the effects of colonialism on the social lives of Nigerians. Nigerian society before imperialism is ordered within a cohered society. The rural set up is made up of people with communal laws and ethics. Justice was fearlessly dispensed and leadership is left in the hands of monarchs and most of them through the process of primogeniture that is by inheritance. The northern Nigeria, through the effects of Islam, established a standard form society enmeshed in the rubrics of Sharia laws and living. The monarchs occupied religious and political positions. The southern axis has divided societies. The Yoruba in the south, like the Hausa in the north, also maintained a society with standard laws, mythical practices and political stability. Except the eastern Igbo, which had no established kingship, the role of the select members of the community in the administration of social justice, parliamentary roles and religious affinity is quite commendable. This was the society met by the imperials. For the Hausa north and Yoruba south, the singleton of their monarchy made it easy for the imperials to impose and administer their colonial agenda. The Igbo south was not easily ruled by the imperialists. There was no single political leadership to hinge on. This issue is recalled in Achebe's *Arrow of God*, where the colonial administrator, Captain Winterbottom, tried forcing Ezeulu, the priest of Ulu into performing the role of a Warrant Chief. This was rejected by Ezeulu and was subsequently imprisoned by Winterbottom. The entire society is destabilized with famine and religious riots.

With the increasing effect of colonialism, urbanism became a focus. The Colonial masters were busy developing a new type of settlement for themselves and the educated Africans. The rural setting became undeveloped because attention is paid to the city. The city embodies everything ugly: armed robbery, stealing, prostitution, suicide, manslaughter and other negative vices which the rural areas are not always known for. With the arrival of electricity and other communication gadgets, the city became a haven for the educated and the foreigners. Cyprian Ekwensi *People of the City* published in 1954 was the first book by a Nigerian writer to garner international attention.

Ekwensi tries to examine the urban society in Nigeria during the colonial days in comparison with the rural setting which still has elements of true Nigerian society since at least there are still some aspects of the society under the control of the people with their laws and ethics still being observed. This novel was the first novel, telling the true Nigerian story beyond the earlier mythical and legendary stories of Fagunwa and Tutuola.

In *People of the City*, Ekwensi examined the life of the urban dwellers and the effects of colonialism on the Africans. One fascinating thing about these urban novels is that they try to juxtapose the rural setting with the urban setting in order to assess the rural and the urban lives as it affects the Africans. His most successful novel was *Jagua Nana* (1961) which was about a Pidgin-speaking Nigerian woman who leaves her husband to work as a prostitute in a city and falls in love with a teacher. He also wrote a sequel to this, *Jagua Nana's Daughter*. Most of these urban novels especially Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* and *Jagua Nana's Daughter* explored deeply the negative imports of urbanization on Nigerian society

Chinweizu's *Energy Crisis* (1978) is a collection of poems which introduced the stirring of cultural and artistic sensitivity in an artiste whose roots were beset with problematic responses toward a hollow but endemic frippery of twentieth century western modernism in Nigeria. It left the artiste with the choice of either furthering the prevalent vision of self promotion or joining the bards of ancestral days in elucidating a community aesthetic. One can see this tenuous struggle in *Energy Crisis* which seemed torn between the poet's obsession with self and for his people – his folks – with all their mannerisms and idiosyncrasies as reflected in their social conditions and responses to society. Those poems had come to reflect an artistic awareness and adaptation of his African– contrasted with a powerful but close-minded Western– world to his choice responses to social experience. It saw the articulation of vision which initially had started jaggedly as of a raconteur, who eager of merit, initially betrays a floundering that nevertheless recedes with one bold proclamation after another.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss any Nigerian literature text that attacks the effect of colonialism on Nigerian society.

3.3 Type 2: Anti-Colonialism on Religion/Culture

The traditional African religion is embedded in African culture, so both are intertwined. In their practices, missionaries regarded indigenous names, religion, arts and music as signs of paganism that must be wiped out. Through their teachings and practices, they won converts who formed the nucleus of early Christianity in most urban areas. Even when they preached a gospel of equality in all men they were the new elites within the new society. They trained teachers, catechists, clerks and many that were in the literary professions. With some impact this gesture could not completely change the peoples' perception that authority came from the white man and not from his God. Consequently, imitation of the white man's ways penetrated into the fabrics of the society. In other words, through missionary influences many people began to accept what normally would have appeared bewildering and unacceptable to them. For instance the indigenous setting would never have allowed the sale of land which was held in trust by the elders for the dead, the living and the yet unborn.

The Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) among other missionaries established several stations where the intensities of Christian religion were being administered to the people. One cannot also underestimate the role of the converts in the spread of western influences. Singing songs like "Onward Christian Soldiers marching on to war", they led converts to destroy shrines and all images which they considered were idolatrous. In the same vein indigenous relics and totems were destroyed as a sign of the outward appearances of conversion. We see this also in Achebe's *Arrow of God* where Oduche, Ezeulu's son, tries to imprison the sacred python of *Idemili* as a sign of his new Christian faith. This single act brought lot reactions from the people against their chief priest who should have protected their culture. Even in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, we see how Obi Okonkwo went against his culture by marrying an Osu. His behaviour is a consequence of his Christian background and his western education.

Conversion into Christianity was marked by baptism. In the process of baptism indigenous names that had meaning in the indigenous setting were discarded for Christian or Biblical names like Paul, James, Peter or Andrew. As the people embraced Christianity and early churches began to get fuller, the people ensured that loyalty to customs and beliefs changed. In spite of the efforts of missionaries, Christianity did not suit the everyday life of the people and as such frustration gave vent to mischief. The destruction of indigenous ways of life led to an attitudinal somersault that paved way for corruption and delusion.

Christopher Okigbo's poem 'Fragments out of the Deluge' in *Labyrinths* laments the European imperialist exploitation of the human and material resources of Africa and the colonial conquest. The colonization of the continent is imaged as a deluge that erodes the very foundation of African societies, for the 'gods lie in state', abandoned and unsung (p. 34). The poet represents the possessors of power who rape Africa and violate her gods and goddesses as predatory eagles in whose talons young birds wobble and utter the cry of death. The use of animal images to express the poet's vision of Social Darwinism signifies that Western civilization or industrial capitalism is cannibalistic and its purveyors are savages. The attainment of Independence by African countries does not change

their dependency status. The suffering of the people continues unabated. The dream of Independence fades; another 'big white elephant...' (p.26) appears to continue the mayhem.

James Ene Henshaw wrote several plays including *This is Our Chance*, *Children of the Goddess*, *Medicine for Love*, and *Dinner for Promotion*. These plays are commentaries on social and political life in Nigeria in the years just before and after independence. They treat issues of culture contact and conflict, of the problems of building a coherent nation out of diverse ethnic groups, and of morality in social dealings. The most important of all is that these plays never relented in pointing directly towards the imperialist's direction for whatever has been the basis of all these traumas in culture clash.

The issue of the effects of colonialism on African culture has been of concern to most anti-colonial Nigerian writers. Many people still believe that African culture is dying because of the various ways by which the imperialists imposed certain rules that almost destroyed Nigerian cultural heritage. Chinua Achebe in his artistic creed emphasized that the wrong presentation of African culture in European literatures was responsible for his venturing into creative writing in order to give the correct picture of things.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Using any Nigerian literary drama, discuss the attack on the colonial effect on Nigerian culture and religion

3.4 Type 3: Anti-Colonialism on Politics

Most Nigerian literatures seem to be an attack on the ruling class who are direct descendants of the imperialists. Since independence the question of leadership has been a very sensitive issue in Nigeria. The Nigerian writers have been commenting on the bad administration of the country. In 1966, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, was described as a prophetic novel because it predicted the first ever military coup in Nigeria. It was glaring as at that time that the civilian government in Nigeria was very corrupt and that military intervention was the only option.

Nigerian literature manifests the struggles of a people whose country is undergoing the painful process of transformation from colonial through neo-colonial to wholly self-determining nation. After a bloody fratricidal war (1967-70), immediately followed by an ill-managed oil boom that, in turn, created social and political dislocations that the nation has yet to overcome, it was inevitable that Nigeria's artists would fulfill the pre-colonial definition of the artist as "town crier," to borrow that fine expression from the late poet Christopher Okigbo. They have made Nigerian literature, in its many forms, a social act against the wantonness of the new society.

The tradition of protest poetry in Nigeria began with Okigbo's "Path of Thunder," which marked the first significant step by any Nigerian literary poet to transcend the usual "quarrel with the self" of poetry and the bemoaning, in personal terms, of the griefs and failures of the commonwealth. This poem was a forewarning of the cataclysm that was to envelop Nigeria in the mid-1960s, culminating in the civil war that tragically claimed the life of Okigbo himself. In this poem, Okigbo aims at a direct attack on the imperialists with their imperial political system being practiced by Africans and which has been the bane of wars and unrest in Africa.

In many literary dramas and the theatre, there are anti-colonial themes meant to guide Nigerians and to expose the ugly effects of colonialism on Nigeria's political structure. For instance, in Ola Rotimi's *Ovoranmen Nogbaisi, the British conquest of Benin Kingdom* which led to the ostracizing of Oba Ovoranmen Nogbaisi is re-enacted. The play attacked the imposition of strange laws on the society and the attempts at destroying the primogeniture patterns of Benin monarchy. This also reflects the British attempts at imposing their kind of politics on the Nigerian nation, the major problem which has even led to wars.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Assess the vast anti-colonial political themes in Nigerian literature

4.0 CONCLUSION

Many critics of Nigerian literature consider anti-colonial themes as the most prevalent and consistent in most literatures written within the post-independence era. These writers emphasize that the problem with the country began with British imperialism: new laws, new politics, new people, new education, new religion and new modes of thought. The old values have been thrown out while the alien values are being inculcated on a people who do not even understand why they must tow the line. Nigeria is a country with multifaceted people and culture. This complex nature of the country was not even considered by the imperialists in their attempts at exploiting Africa. This is a major problem. Nigerian writers have been recording history through literatures. They have recorded the past and the immediate traumas of the Nigerian people as a result of colonial experiences. Some critics of Nigerian literature believe that English Language is an imperial language representing colonialism in all its facets. They advocated that Nigerian writers should use their native languages in writing literatures. It looked as if there was no compromise in this direction because the Nigerian or Africa stories must be read beyond Africa; after all, the true picture of things must read by the world that Nigeria's history was an ugly paradigm of imperialist's ideals.

5.0 SUMMARY

Nigerian literature has a tradition of protestation. The literatures written before colonialism harmers on the essence of cultural cohesion but the ones written during and after colonialism are with the undertone of disillusionment. Nigeria as a country never existed before colonialism but the British partitioning of Africa created the country with less consideration on the complex linguistic and cultural make up of the people. It has been cries if woes. With the recent discovery of oil in large quantities, imperialism continues, this time being administered from Scotland Yard and the White House. The Nigerian writers have seen the need for cohesion in the country. They write literatures with a common voice to correct the ills and to fight a common enemy. So, we have many literatures in Nigeria with anti-colonial themes: on the Nigerian society, Nigerian politics, Nigerian religion and Nigeria culture.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions carefully:

1. explain the major concern of anti-colonial literatures
2. discuss any Nigerian literature attacking colonialism
3. using any Nigerian literature of your choice, assess the imposition of British culture on Nigerians
4. Distinguish the anti-colonial themes in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from that of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*
5. From what perspectives do the Nigerian writers attack Christianity as a tool of imperial evil?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 ANTI-COLONIAL NIGERIAN POETRY**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 The Poetry of Okara and Clark
 - 3.3 The Poetry of Okigbo and Soyinka
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will concentrate on the study of anti-colonial poetry. When we talk about anti-colonial poetry in Nigeria, we are referring to a vast collection of poetry dealing with anti-colonial themes in Nigeria. Anti-colonial themes occupy many streams of Nigerian poetry from the pioneer poets through to the journal poetry of the Ibadan school, the Mbari club and the other poetry groups within the colonial and the post-colonial times. Nigerian poetry is a complex phenomenon that began with the imitation of the western models down to the recapturing of the rich Nigerian orature in the poetic process. We will study the poetry of two Nigerian poets who have commented bitterly about the odds and effects of colonialism on Nigeria.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- appreciate anti-colonial poetry in Nigeria;
- understand the major thrusts of anti-colonial poetry in Nigeria;
- assess the anti-colonial themes in Nigerian poetry;
- discuss the factors that led to anti-colonial poetry in Nigeria; and
- comment on the effect of the theme of anti-colonialism in the development of Nigerian literature.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Colonialism did more than corrupt the thinking and sensibilities of the Africans (Nigerians), it filled him/her with abnormal complexes which de-Africanized and alienated him/her from the needs of his/her environment. Colonial education thus dispossessed and put out the control of the Nigerian intellectual, the necessary forces for directing the life and development of his/her society. The European exploiters, oppressors and grabbers use Christianity as a tool to explain the manifest contradictions portrayed in African literature because of the working out of broader historical forces. The relationship between culture and colonialism, explores the relationship between culture and social class. Nigerian literature is understood by putting into its proper historical perspective the crisis of identity and its implications portrayed artistically by them. Culture as the result of economic and political activities as they appear on the ideological and idealist levels is perceived by Nigerian writers. Culture has its basis in a society's level of productive forces and in the character of the dominant mode of production. Culture may be dynamic, but only in the sense of being a continuing record of a society's achievements and an important element in sustaining resistance to foreign domination.

Colonialism, however, denied Nigeria the right to cultural development and self expression and set up a state of siege that it justified with theories about cultural assimilation. Liberation struggle rejects cultural domination by the foreign power by denying the culture of the oppressor. Thus, the tie between a people's identity and the reproduction and maintenance of the social system of a specific set of institutions affects both culture and the people's intimate sense of selfhood. Colonialism by denying to the dominated people their own historical process, necessarily denies their cultural process.

The 1950s was the decade of hope during which most African countries gained independence as anti-imperialist movements triumphed. Nigerian writers born in this decade had an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, yet hopeful mood, which explains the assertive and optimistic nature of the writing of the period. Colonialism had tried to justify its oppression and exploitation by resorting to claims of racial superiority. The new Nigerian writer countered such claims by producing artistic works that showed that Nigeria had its own history, culture, and civilization that were equal if not superior to that of the imperialists. The writers saw their societies, according to Achebe (1975) "put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self abasement imposed on them by colonialism"

The age of independence also witnessed the emergence of social classes and class contradictions- a development that disappointed and shocked many Nigerian writers, who created artistic works expressing disillusionment with postcolonial Nigerian society. At this time, writers therefore saw their role as that of transforming society (and its leaders) by means of moral enlightenment. The works of his period thus subscribed to a liberal humanist ideology that pleaded with the oppressed. The writers of this period intended the pathos and emotive power of their works to instigate the oppressors to initiate a political and

economic reorganization of society in the interest of the oppressed. The despair that pervades these anti-colonial works, which portray the oppressed as trapped and helpless, arises in the writers' perception of the gloomy years ahead after the effects of colonialism.

Nigerian poets were among the most vocal in Africa; attacking all the odds of colonialism. The nationalist poets began the trend in Nigeria which poets like Okara, Okigbo, Clark and Soyinka among others continued in their attempts presenting the odds of the past and need for a newer perception and development of the country.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Comment on the effects of colonialism on the sensibilities of Nigerian elite and/or Nigerian writers.

3.2 The Poetry of Okara and Clark

Gabriel Okara and John Pepper Clark are amongst the earliest anti-colonial poets from Nigeria. With them, Nigerian poetry in English has matured and taken a big leap forward. Gabriel Okara is a very unique writer. He has obviously brought himself up most creditably and his works show a close awareness of English Romantic and nature poetry as well as some modernist traits. An important theme in Okara's poetry is culture contact/culture conflict. It is expressed metaphorically in "The Snows Flakes" in the imagery of "uprooters" whose spades are dented in the process of trying to uproot traditional African culture. In "Piano and Drums", the poet expresses his perplexity and confusion at being caught between conflicting Western and traditional African cultures. And in "The Fisherman's Invocation", the argument is whether the Back (traditional African culture) should be taken along with the Front (the imported Western ways) to form the Child-Front, which is the new projection of our contemporary situation. Thus, although Okara expresses ideas and sentiments which are similar to those of the mobilisational poets, he does so in a totally different manner, cultivating a private tone and using fresh imagery of water, fishes, birds, uprooters and diggers, piano and drums instead of the clichés of his predecessors.

His kind of anti-colonial poetry is mixed in a manner that questions the suitability of western culture in Nigerian terrain. He celebrates Nigerian landscapes: rivers, mountains and forest. His poetry protests imperialists' odds while painting beautiful scenes in his country and at the same time satirizing the ugly trends of colonialism.

John Pepper Clark's poetic landscape is similar to that of Gabriel Okara. Both of them are Ijaw and they use coastal and riverine imagery copiously in their poetry. Clark has published three volumes of poetry, namely, *Poems* (1962), *A Reed in the Tide* (1965), and *Casualties* (1970). One of Clark's achievements as a poet is that he directs our attention to the details of the physical environment, and his poetry has a ring of authenticity. Early poems like "Night Rain", "Streamside Exchange" and "The Year's First Rain" provide ample illustration of this point. He is, in this respect, a great scenic poet and his poems "Ibadan", "Agbor Dancer" and "Ibadan Dawn" provide further proof of his descriptive power. There is also evidence of great sensuality and compassion in his poetry. In the poem "Olokun", there is a play on the senses, especially the sense of

feeling and touching, aroused by the seductive mask of Olokun, the goddess of the sea. And in "Abiku" based on the spirit-child who undergoes a perennial cycle of births and deaths, the poet's posture is one of compassionate appeal to the child to break the vicious cycle. By celebrating African landscapes, by romancing with Nigerian cities and dancers, by appreciating Nigerian culture and religion he totally abhorred imperialism and emphasizes the belief that Nigerian cultural space is better than anyone being imposed on the people through colonial might. His poems are usually symbolic as each of his poems transcends beyond the immediate semantic realizations.

Clark is also a poet of warfare and its dire consequences on the society. The poems in the volume entitled *Casualties* were inspired by the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70. In them, Clark writes of particular events during the war, of friends lost in the war, of remote and immediate causes of the war, of trickery and broken promises, and of the moral and ethnical collapse of the citizenry who are the real casualties of the war. In this collection also, he emphasized the ugly hands of the imperialists in the inferno. He believes that the war a mastermind of the western powers.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the identical anti-colonial themes in Okara and Clark's poetry

3.3 The Poetry of Okigbo and Soyinka

Christopher Okigbo (1932-67) wrote five sequences of poems entitled "Heavensgate", "Limits", "Silences", "Distances" and "Path of Thunder", respectively. They were published at different times between 1962 and 1968 and were later put together in one volume under the title *Labyrinths* in 1971. Okigbo has the reputation of being the most technically accomplished, the most tuneful, and the most eclectic and allusive of Nigerian poets. In the first four of the sequences, Okigbo is the poet of private sensibilities, par excellence, with a persona who has been a prodigal seeking re-entry, being initiated and then taking part fully in the ceremony of cultural and spiritual rejuvenation. Each sequence is a variation on that same theme. In "Path of Thunder", on the other hand, the poet drops his private tone and goes public. He is a town-crier with a message of great importance for the survival of his community. The message is about imminent war and the great destruction that will come in its wake. All of this is worked out in appropriate imagery so that the dancer is referred to variously as thunder, iron-dream, and a 'nebula immense and immeasurable'; the country as the elephant; the combat machines as iron-birds; and the catastrophe itself as the elephant being struck by thunder (i.e. lightning) and falling. Poetry is conceived by Okigbo as ritual, or, as a sacred duty that demands total commitment. It speaks a cultic language that can be understood only by the initiate. This conception of poetry partly accounts for the arcane nature of his poetry.

Even the poetry of life is comprehended by only a tiny percentage of humanity! The poems themselves are conceived as sacrificial offerings to the poet's goddess or Muse in more or less the same manner that man is presented in Christianity as a living sacrifice to God. Okigbo disclosed that the 'new laid egg' and the 'white hen at midterm' in 'Lustra' were actually new poems that he had just written in his official capacity

as the priest of Idoto. He is truly a visionary poet: a poet-prophet. Enhancing the ritual character of his poetry is the use of repetition and variation. One recurrent image or personage takes on diverse identities. 'Mother Idoto', for example, appears variously as a 'water-maid', as a 'white goddess', as a 'lioness', and as a 'white queen'.

The critical reception of Okigbo's poetry has been paradoxical: a mixture of condemnation and praise. The technical strategies that are most celebrated in the poetry, for example, the sacrifice of limpidity of meaning and style in an attempt to perfect form and achieve a rare lyricism, are ironically the most vilified. However recondite the poetry may appear to detractors, it is not bereft of human interest or meaning. 'Lament of the Drums', a song of exile, depicts the parlous state into which Nigeria has fallen. It thematizes the rape of democratic values by the military and their opportunistic civilian collaborators, the perversion of justice, the underdevelopment of the country through the wanton waste of her human and material resources, and the overall degeneration of the land. The neo-colonial African politician- civilian or military- continues with the structures of exploitation and privilege erected by the white conquerors in the colonial period.

Wole Soyinka's poetry is characterized by two related phenomena. First, early in his career, Soyinka adopted Ogun, the Yoruba god of metallurgy (iron), as his personal muse and the inspiration for his poetry. The presence of the god has given focus and coherence to a great deal of his poetry. Second, since Ogun is himself a heroic being, Soyinka has found himself writing, *inter alia*, epic poetry in celebration of his god, unlike most of his contemporaries. Soyinka's poetry is, thus, broadly of two kinds, namely, poems of various life experiences and Ogunnian poems. The poems of the first category include "Telephone Conversation", (an early light hearted response to racial discrimination), some of the poems in *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), and most of the ones in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), (his prison notes when he was detained during the Nigerian Civil War). The poems are a good index to Soyinka's humanity. They are about births and deaths (the most important being his "Abiku" poem) in which he dwells on the inscrutable nature of the spirit of death, about strange coincidences as in "A First Death Day", when a child dies exactly on her first birthday anniversary, about grey seasons as metaphors for rust, ripeness and decay, and about lone figures and the messianic plight of some of them. Many of the poems in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* are even more private in tone because of their genesis. They are the meditations of a man in confinement whose active mind wandered far and wide, about people in similar plight in history, about nature, and about the fragility and transience of life.

The Ogunnian poems include poems about death on the road and about the massacre in northern Nigerian in 1966. They also include the epic poems "Idanre" and "Ogun Abibiman" (1977). All these poems are celebrations in a contemporary context: of the mysteries of Ogun, the god of contraries, who is both destructive and creative and, therefore, whose unlimited resources can be used for good or for ill. The road and massacre poems showed Ogun in his most negative aspects that is, metaphors for man or man's weapons of destruction eating up fellow men.

They are Soyinka's way of commenting on the senseless slaughter and wastage of human life in moments of carelessness, hatred and ethnic intoxication. In "Idanre" and "Ogun Abibiman", however, Soyinka goes beyond the merely negative features of Ogun.

In the former, he seeks a new order that will further split the Ogun godhead and release the creative flint that will be used perpetually for man's benefit. In the latter, he enlists the co-operation of Ogun to commit his unlimited resources to the liberation struggle in South Africa. By celebrating and imbibing the Ogun myth in his works, he directly rejects the western god and their values.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

There are marked cultural/religious themes in the poetry of Okigbo and Soyinka. Discuss this consistent trend

4.0 CONCLUSION

Nigerian poetry, from the onset, has been in the vanguard of protesting against colonial odds in Africa. Even beyond colonialism, they have not failed pointing out those residues of colonialism which have impinged on the proper development of their societies. One way forward is for them to betray the colonial mission in Africa by speaking with the voice of a prodigal rejecting all the odds of imperialism. That is, colonial subservience to the bourgeoisie of Nigeria and the exploitation of the people leads to a psychic split. However, there is a gradual and consequent disappearance of this type of poetry which resulted from the individualistic nature of poetry, the declining attractiveness of anti-colonial themes and the increased emphasis upon the pursuit of sectional interests. In the light of this, there developed the formation of organic intellectuals and writers who are in touch with the masses as opposed to the traditional intellectuals of the ruling class who write from sequestration.

5.0 SUMMARY

The study of Nigerian literature has witnessed tremendous growth since its inception. Literature was a vital component of scholarship in colonial education. However, the point needs to be made that when it started, literary arts was part of the colonial educational structure which had as its basic end, the incorporation of Africans into the orbit of Western Civilization. Both combined to produce colonialism and the sum total of all three was the imposition of Western civilization on Africa. Nonetheless, the increasing call for the de-westernization of African literature expressed has been of a major concern to African writers. Apart from the significant interest shown in indigenous oral literary and artistic traditions, by independence, Nigeria had produced writers who have had the genuine interest of abhorring all the bad sides of colonialism. This theme witnessed expansion in the list of works written by educated Nigerians, whose sources of artistic influence were not only the classical European literature to which they were exposed in the course of their education, but also their indigenous oral and performance resources. These were writers whose mastery of poetic, theatrical and narrative skills were acclaimed beyond the shores of Nigeria. They include Gabriel Okara, Christopher Okigbo, J. P. Clark and Wole Soyinka among others. Their works fuse elements of the indigenous and Western literary traditions. They were able to pin-point the ugly sides of colonialism, the effects of colonialism and the need to help Africa (Nigeria) build a viable society where natural African (Nigerian) laws and ways of life prevail. The poetry has the undertone of protest but with a focus on the avoidance of neo-colonial experiences.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions carefully:

1. Explain the effects of colonial education on Nigerian writers
2. Gabriel Okara's poetry is a comment on the confused Nigerians who are hesitant about which culture to follow. Discuss this theme in his poetry
3. J.P. Clark uses his locale as avenue for commenting on anti-colonial issues. Explain this aspect of his poetry
4. Perceiving the later effects of colonialism in Nigeria, Christopher Okigbo predicted the later story of Nigeria. Comment on Okigbo as poetic prophet
5. By embracing the Ogun myth, Soyinka outrightly discarded the European gods. Discuss the anti-colonial religious themes in Soyinka's poetry.

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UNIT 4 ANTI-COLONIAL NIGERIAN NOVEL**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Anti-Colonial Themes in Achebe's *Arrow of God*
 - 3.3 Anti-Colonial Themes in Iyayi's *Violence*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine anti-colonialism as themes in Nigerian Novels. Most works of Nigerian literature in all genres have the thematic perspective of revealing mostly, the negative import of colonialism. Most elite Nigerians have come to realize that colonialism affected almost every aspect of Nigerian culture and sociology. There are reasons to believe that the educated Nigerians who embraced European values and attitudes have started retracting their colonial mentality and thereby exposing the evils associated with colonialism. Nigerian writers have been at the fore-front of this retraction. They have often exposed the evils of colonialism and have strongly proved that the anomalies in Nigerian politics stems from European indoctrinations. They have often attacked the Nigerian politicians, leaders, intellectuals and other people who practice European ideals against their rich Nigerian values. We shall use Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Festus Iyayi's *Violence* in treating this theme.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

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

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 General Overview**

Nigerian novelists have been at the forefront of satirizing and criticizing colonialism in all facets. Even though Nigerian novels today treat vast themes, one still senses the underlying sarcasm that everything bad that happens to Africa (Nigeria) has an imperialist link. Chinua Achebe set the pace in these anti-colonial sarcasms but other Nigerian writers have

shown disgusts in several ways against colonialism. These themes have been treated in several ways. However, the magnitude is perhaps the least of the difficulties facing the critic in attempting to give a fair view of this troubling theme. A more formidable problem arises from the fact that Nigerian writers are writing two different kinds of anti-colonial fictions. The first is the social-realistic narrative convention that has been familiar to readers and still exists because it attacks the known colonial problems. While the second is the socialist realistic category in which a new language prevails which attacks colonialism by attacking the institutions that emanated from it. Both are prevalent in contemporary Nigerian novels. This is premised on the awareness that there is always a close relationship between Nigerian literature and its historical context(s). The multiple paths that are followed include a thorough examination of the ideologies and context(s) within which the society is built, the consideration of the expression of life of disenchantment and pain in the polity. All lead to the unmasking of the novel as a socially symbolic act, that is, a reflection of the problems of the author's immediate society, in particular, and the Nigerian society in general.

Many Nigerian novelists have been termed anti-colonial because of the manner in which the colonial experiences are attacked in their works. It also exposes the traumatic effects of colonial power on Africa's development. Chinua Achebe and Festus Iyayi have often been described as anti-colonial writers because they have often chronicled the experiences of Nigerians during and after the colonial days. They write to draw sympathy and direct Nigerian properly in avoiding the repetition of colonial experiences or practicing colonial ideologies in their new or nascent polity.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

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

3.2 Anti-Colonial Themes in Achebe's *Arrow of God*

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

Umuaro village is in peace until the arrival of the colonial masters into the hinterlands of Nigeria. Ezeulu saw the whites as people with high wisdom. He sees their religion as something powerful. He decides secretly to send his son Oduche to the church in order to acquire their power. He was challenged by his arch-rival, Nwaka, of Umunneora village. Nwaka, the Chief Priest of Idemili, senses that Ezeulu's decision might affect the efficacy of Ulu. He openly challenges Ezeulu on the matter. The rivalry becomes severe when Oduche imprisoned a python in a box. He was attempting to kill the highly revered

snake which is the symbol of worship of Idemili. More so, Ezeulu's insistence that the land, which was in dispute between Umuaro and Okperi, belonged to Okperi sparked more trouble for him. Although this sincerity on the land issue drew him closer to the colonial administration in charge of the area, Captain Winterbottom, little did he know that it would cause much harm to the village of Umuaro. Captain Winterbottom had no option but to appoint him a Warrant Chief because of his sincerity and integrity. He refused the offer and was held in Winterbottom's custody for three months within which period he could not eat three sacred yams. He expected that his people would come and rescue him from the Whiteman's grip but they never budged. He was really provoked and vowed to make life miserable for them. He was expected to eat the three sacred yams he missed as a result of his arrest but he refused insisting that he would begin his count from the day he was released. Ezeulu's stubbornness led to famine and starvation in Umuaro Village because he refused to name the day for the new yam festival. In all the confusion, he lost his most beloved son, Obika and even went mad in the process. The confused villagers had no option but to go to the Christian god for solace and protection.

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

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

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

3.3 Anti-Colonial Themes in Festus Iyayi's *Violence*

Festus Iyayi has been interested in exposing the after-effect of colonialism on the social and economic well being of Nigerians. Socialist realism as exemplified in *Violence* questions an existing social order and articulates a revolutionary option. Capitalism is an economic system in which the factors of production are concentrated in a few hands resulting in the alienation of property from the direct producers - the workers. Capitalism was the imperialist's tool of discord in Nigeria.

The means of production thus shifted, become the property of the capitalist - the movers of the bourgeois society. The direct result of this is apparently a dichotomy between two classes - the labourer (the worker) who receives his means of subsistence in exchange for his labour-power, and the capitalist who receives the worker's labour and appropriates all the proceeds arising from it. The worker only receives an insignificant portion of the proceeds only for survival. Social crisis is therefore bound to arise as a reaction by the exploited workers who are in the majority.

The worker in the capitalist society is an exploited and alienated worker. He is without capital or investment or ground rent and lives entirely on his labour. He is used "just like a horse needs only receive so as enables him work" He is not considered for leisure as a human

being and rather than fulfill himself in the work, he does deny himself. He does not develop freely a physical and mental energy but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. While at work, the worker feels homeless because the work is not his own. Since he works for someone else, he does not belong to himself but to another person. These conditions are the consequent creation of the capitalist society as portrayed by Iyayi's *Violence*.

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

This explains his argument that capitalist ideals, a result of colonial enculturation, alienates and dehumanizes the Nigerian worker. An indebted Idemudia and his wife cannot pay their debts yet the man works hard but is paid so little - a paltry sum of N5 at the end of the month. Iyayi postulates that there is too much injustice in the system. The Nigerian employer who Queen Obofun represents is constructed as a slave driver who is insensitive to the basic needs of workers. She is ever ready to extort and exploit especially those who lack the guts to say No! And Iyayi calls this violence.

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

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

industrial action. And Iyayi argues that physical violence is a moral option against psychological violence.

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

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

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain how Iyayi attacked colonialism in contemporary Nigerian state.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear from the two novels under study that Festus Iyayi and Chinua Achebe have revealed to a large extent, the negative influences of colonialism on the Nigerian society. They have explained how Nigerians were made slaves in their own country and how customs and

traditions were manipulated to suit the interest of the colonial master and the new bourgeoisie and elite class. African people were given the orientation that they were inferior to the whites. They were told that African religion was fetish while the European religion was the only key to meeting God Almighty. They were taught that African culture and systems of government were impracticable and should be discarded. All these issues and more were attacked in the two novels under study and these are anti-colonial elements.

5.0 SUMMARY

Anti-colonial novels are reactions by Nigerian novelists to the challenges of colonialism. Chinua Achebe stated in his authorial creed that he “would be quite satisfied if his novels especially the ones he set in the past could do no more than teach his readers that their past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery by which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them”. He explained that Africans did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans. His novel *Things Fall Apart* was a direct reaction to Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson* which was a novel filled with ugly pictures about Africa and the African people. Chinua Achebe, Festus Iyayi and most Nigerian writers have been writing anti-colonial novels as a reaction to the ugly presentation of Africa (Nigeria) by European writers. Most Africa’s problems emanate from colonial times and there are evidences of European manipulation of African governments in order to have positive gains while imposing negative vices like war and injustice on the people.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions carefully:

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

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UNIT 5 ANTI-COLONIAL NIGERIAN DRAMA**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 General Overview
- 3.2 Anti-Colonial Themes in Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*
- 3.3 Anti-Colonial Themes in Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study the thematic treatment of anti-colonial themes in Nigerian dramatic literature and theatre. In Nigeria, many writers major in almost all the genres hence the sameness themes in all their works. Wole Soyinka is known more as a dramatist/theater practitioner but he is also a very popular poet and novelist. He is at present the only writer in Nigeria with the longest series of memoirs. Chinua Achebe is best known as a novelist but he also writes good poetry. His collection of poetry, *Beware Soul Brother*, won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize when it came out. John Pepper Clark is known better as a poet but he is also a well respected playwright whose works have been given world acclaim. In all these writers, we see the consistency in the manner with which they treat their themes while the anti-colonial themes are mostly prevalent. We shall use the works of two Nigerian playwrights: Ola Rotimi and Femi Osofisan, to study the anti-colonial themes in Nigerian drama.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- realize that anti-colonial themes run all genres of Nigerian literature;
- appreciate the use of anti-colonial themes in Nigerian drama/theatre;
- understand the dramatic techniques used in projecting anti-colonial themes;
- see the Nigeria playwrights as writers preach for change in society; and
- discuss anti-colonial themes in Nigerian drama/theatre.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 General Overview**

In Nigeria, drama/theatre is a reflection of life. Right from the pre-colonial, pre-literate days, it has been in existence and it is reflected in the people's festivals, rituals, mythology and other forms of social engagements.

It is a medium through which he reaches out to, or better still, courts the supernatural world and certain enigmatic developments or phenomena of life in order to transcend them. However, the African man's contact with the colonial world has eroded some of the importance attached to certain African values. Exposure to education and other seemingly more refined religious practices has diminished, significantly, the importance that was once attached to certain beliefs and notions. Today, the story has changed. Nigerian playwrights in the years before and immediately after independence wrote to correct certain misconceptions about her people. Others wrote to magnify and eulogize those aspects of the Nigerian culture that promote good will and social harmony. So much has been said about the origins and development of dramatic and theatrical activities in the Nigerian society that dwelling on it here would amount to a mere rehash of ideas of some sort.

Ogunbiyi edited a book entitled *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book (1981)* which turned out to be a compendium of essays on dramatic and theatrical activities in certain festivals and rituals among certain Nigerian ethnic sub-sets, Ogunbiyi had argued that it is rather a misnomer or better still, a falsity to refer to "Nigerian drama and theatre" since the theatrical vaunting of the country rests on dramatic and theatrical activities in the many ethnic groupings that constitute the Nigerian nation. The book was also written to correct certain notions about earlier Eurocentric theatre critics, especially in the West, who had written "books" on "Nigerian and African theatre and drama" practices, based on knowledge that were grossly inadequate, thwarted and lacking in hindsight.

Three years earlier, precisely in 1978, two foremost Nigerian theatre and drama critics, Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele, had made a similar and remarkable attempt in their brilliantly edited book, *Theatre in Africa*. Since then, a good number of books have been written and essays have either been published as articles in books and other learned journals, or as project dissertations and theses locked up in many institutions of higher learning across the Nigerian nation. One of such remarkable essays is Dapo Adelugba's "The Development of Drama and Theatre in Nigeria". His disputation was that Nigeria's development in drama and theatre has taken many forms. Dramatic and theatrical activities in Nigeria is, indeed, very robust, vibrant and dynamic. Dapo Adelugba's translation of Bakary Traore's thesis, titled "The Black African Theatre and Its Social Functions" is a worthy testimony to this. Other noteworthy testimonies include Biodun Jeyifo's *The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria*, Onuora Ossie Eneke's *Igbo Masks: The Oneness of Ritual and Theatre*, Ebun Clark's *Hubert Ogunde: The Making of Nigerian Theatre and a host of others*. All these are academic endeavours towards explicating the trend of dramatic and theatrical activities in the Nigerian society.

In the same vein, books have been written on "the masters of contemporary Nigerian dramas" and on their art. It is, however, a sad commentary on the Nigerian literature that efforts of our literary critics have been directional, focusing on the old generation of writers like the Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, and the world acclaimed novelist, Chinua Achebe, even long after the former had won the laureate and the later has been over-exposed internationally. Not even their contemporaries like the chemist novelist, Cyprian Ekwensi and the domestic dramatist, James Ene Henshaw, to mention a few, have enjoyed half the kind of attention which they have commanded.

The argument may be that there is always something new to talk about in their work. However, there has been the consistent attack by the dramatists and theatre practitioners on the bad effects of colonialism on Nigeria. Even the neo-colonial attacks have been hinged on the negative effects of colonialism on Nigeria.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Nigerian drama/theatre has consistently attacked imperialism at various stages of development. Discuss this trend.

3.2 Anti-Colonial Themes in Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*

Ovonramwen Nogbaisi by Ola Rotimi begins with Oba Ovonramwen's tasks of controlling a growing rebellion within his kingdom. There is a confrontation between him and some of his rebellious chiefs and, most importantly, the British and French Governments who were searching for economic domination of many parts of Africa and the rest of the world too. This historical play is divided into three Acts, with a prologue at the beginning and an Epilogue at the end. Act One establishes Ovonramwen's revenge and judgment on his two chiefs (Obaruduagbon and Esasoyen) that both of them must die for killing Uwangué Egiebo, Ovonramwen's Chief Adviser, as a result of the political fall-out for the political soul of the Benin Kingdom. This action is followed by the visit of Itsekiri Traders who come to beg Ovonramwen for shortchanging the Benin people. Uzazakpo (the aged court jester) also admonishes the King to beware of people, especially his Chiefs, and to also seek the loyalty of Ologbosere against the growing hypocrisy of his Chiefs. Ifa priest also warns Ovonramwen to be careful: "Oba Alaiyeluwa, Ifa has sent me to deliver the word – Caution. I have delivered the word. Caution. My lord... Oni of Ife sends you greetings." (16)

This warning is overtaken by the visit of two white men; Hulton and Gallwey who bring a Trade Treaty document to the King to sign and which the king refuses to sign. Hulton is surprised. This Act ends with Ovonramwen instructing Ologbosere, his third-in-command, to lead the Benin army to Agbor to teach the people there some lessons because "the people of Agbor, of late have been getting too hot for our peace".

Act II starts with a dramatic celebration of one of the Benin's traditional festivals, the Ague (igue) festival, and the unceremonious invasion of the Benin Kingdom by white men under the control of Acting Consul-General Phillips. Okavbiogbe, the Chief Policeman of the Benin Empire, warns the white men of the danger inherent in seeing the Oba during the Ague festival and his encounter with Phillips sets the conflict of this play. Phillips goes on to state the intention of the British Monarch: "what then are we in Africa for? What object brings us here? Commerce, gentlemen! Commerce brought us to Africa; commerce determines our actions in Africa!" (32).

Obaseki and Oshodin (Benin chiefs) meet Acting Resident Roupell in Act III of the play and they promise to locate Ovonramwen and give him up. The King, however, gives himself up and Roupell demands that he surrender to the British Authority and after serious persuasion from his Chiefs, Ovonramwen removes the crown on his head and

surrenders to the British Monarch; an act which Roupell confidently and heroically celebrates: “From this day, this land of Benin belongs to her Royal Majesty Queen Victoria!” (54)

The chiefs are tried and seven of them are to die for killing seven white men. Obayuwana (a Benin Chief), however, refuses to be shot, instead he heroically stabs himself and Ovonramwen leaves for Obaseki’s house to re-strategize for the continuation of the war against the white imperialists. Ovonramwen hides and sleeps in the bush with Uzazakpo, the Court Jester who makes things easy for him on their way to Okemue to meet Ologbosere and before they could reach Okemue, Roupell and his soldiers apprehend Ovonramwen and he paradoxically rejoices with the white men on their success in capturing Benin: “Not much. Tell Queen Victoria that at last the big pot of corn has been toppled; now mother hen and her children may rejoice!” (78)

This play is totally anti-colonial. It reveals the destruction of one of the strongest monarchs in Nigeria. It reveals the imperialists invasion of Africa using commerce and Christianity as yardsticks. It reveals the downturn in the history of Nigeria as the political, cultural and religious aspects of the people are infected with colonial intrusions that destroyed the system.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss the Various anti-colonial dramatic elements in Ovonramwen *Nogbaisi*.

3.3 Anti-Colonial Themes in Femi Osofisan’s *Midnight Hotel*

Osofisan is a playwright critical of a Plethora of social vices in contemporary Nigeria. *Midnight Hotel* is a work of satire which concerns corruption and decadent political culture. It questions the credibility of Nigerian law makers and touches on political intolerance and religious charlatans in the society. The prevailing immorality, hypocrisy and flirtatious tendencies of highly placed persons are aspects of the national psyche which he subjects to criticism. All these mannerisms and characteristics are offshoots of colonial education and exposure. Nigerian culture was a morally based on before colonialism. Femi Osofisan is of the view that nepotism, corruption and favoritism have gone deep into the Nigerian political system as a result of the imitation and adaptation of the imperialists system of politics and justice. The point of corruption is driven home when Awero, the only female Member of Parliament decides to take Pastor Suuru to a hotel so that she could “sample” him before he is given a contract since, according to her; male MPS do this to the opposite sex. But when Suuru does not compromise with her she says: “For Christ’s sake, what’s wrong with you? I’m telling you its regular practice in parliament. All the male MPS are doing it even to their own nieces and cousins: every one in our contracts and award committee is taking some member of the opposite sex somewhere or the other before jobs are given out. They call it “sampling” the goods...” (*Midnight Hotel*, 13) In response to Suuru’s question Awero says, “Why not? Once you cooperate and I sample...once you stop making a fool of yourself: and not only Abuja the new capital, I assure you. Depending on you, your company can bag ten, fifteen contracts in a week: our committee has far ranging powers over contracts

from Aladja to Ajaokuta, to Warri to Apapa you name It” (Midnight Hotel, 19). The picture painted reveals that our leaders are politically myopic, ideologically visionless and morally bankrupt. For Osofisan, Nigerian leaders subordinate the common man’s welfare to their selfish, avaricious and hedonistic tendencies. And all these are reflective of the imperialists’ capitalists tendencies. Apart from his attack on the political system and its operators, Osofisan also criticizes political intolerance and victimization of political opponents. Political opponents in Nigeria are perceived as enemies. The government in power victimizes members of the opposition and denies their communities basic amenities. Victimization in Nigeria is forcefully demonstrated in *Midnight Hotel* when the headmaster (Alatise) who also lost the governorship election also lost his school to the winning party. This led to Alatise’s impoverishment and his subsequent search for refuge with his daughter in Lagos, listen to Alatise as he narrates his ugly experience to Awero: “You know, since the new government came in, it’s been hell for me. They took over my school, my land and here I am, jobless, homeless, and hungry.” (Midnight Hotel, 34) Femi Osofisan criticizes and condemns this “winner take all” syndrome, in Nigeria’s political system which negates the democratic principle. For him, winners should be magnanimous in victory, while losers should accept defeat and work in partnership with the winner in order to ensure a harmonious co-existence in the society. Osofisan’s search light in the play is also directed at prostitution, another social malady. Immorality and sexual perversion is another subject of attack because of its effect on our national psyche. Although he is quite critical of prostitution among the women in the society, Osofisan attributes the persistence of prostitution to people’s avarice and desire to get money at all cost. The playwright was unrelenting in his attack on religious leaders’ whom he regards as charlatans and hypocrites.

In *Midnight Hotel*, Osofisan takes a swipe at these religious leader’s clandestine activities, their moral filth, and their deceitful pronouncements which run counter to their divine calling. The character that embodies this negative aspect of the men of God is Pastor Suuru who shamelessly allows himself to be “sampled” in a hotel by Awero. Suuru is also a liar having falsely claimed to have been robbed by armed robbers. Osofisan therefore criticizes religious leaders for their failings and castigates them for misleading their followers. Commercialization of chieftaincy titles in communities did not escape Osofisan’s criticism and derision. In traditional Nigerian societies, chieftaincy titles were conferred on people of proven integrity. It was not for sale as is the case nowadays. Presently, fraudsters and the so-called philanthropists who have money and the wherewithal to “buy” the title are respected. This has resulted in the bastardization and commercialization of traditional institutions in Nigeria. This situation is driven home as Osofisan ‘tells’ how one Jumoh is made an Asiwaju of Ifeko for his humanitarian services. Jumoh sells his belongings to earn that chieftaincy title. What a shame.

Every aspect of Nigerian politics, social malaise, religious bigotry, corruption and all aspects of cultural degradation are all a result of the colonial education, colonial influence and the imitation of the imperialist’s ideals. This work is a satire on the imitation of European values against Nigerian moral culture.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the various behaviours of Nigerians in *Midnight Hotel* that are offshoots of colonial influence.

4.0 CONCLUSION

On the whole, Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* are dramatic works which explored situations and incidents that reveal Nigeria at the grip of colonial mentality. The playwrights in one form or another ridicule Nigeria's politics culture, religious leaders, their leadership styles, and other social vices. Ola Rotimi's play is a historical jab at the imperialists imposition of alien cultures in Nigeria. It attacks the destruction of culture and monarchs. Osofisan's play laughs at and also makes us laugh at the society's failings as a result of neo-colonial assumptions and aspirations. By examining the Nigerian history and attacking Nigerian society, Rotimi and Osofisan are using their artistic creation to bring about social change, a reconstruction of values and the need to go back to Nigerian roots in all ramifications. Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* share a lot of things in common in terms of the way they explored the Nigerian society vis-à-vis the influence and effects of colonialism.

5.0 SUMMARY

There is also a great element of verisimilitude in the two plays as far as the themes of anti-colonialism are concerned. In *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, we see a culture collapsing because of British invasion. The people's culture becomes a bet for the imperialists whose intention was to use commerce and religion as tools for destroying Nigeria. In *Midnight Hotel*, *Suru is a Christian, a cheat and a destroyer of cultural values*. The political leaders are corrupt. The religious leaders are corrupt. The anti-colonial elements are glaring as each play takes both historical and sociological jab at the influences colonialism have on the entire well-being of Nigeria as a nation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions carefully:

1. Explain the major thematic pre-occupation of Nigerian playwrights.
2. Discuss the anti-colonial themes in Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*.
3. Assess the effects of colonialism in modern Nigeria as revealed in Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel*.
4. Identify the key issues that Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* tries to reveal about colonialism and Benin History.
5. It is believed that colonial education is the bane of colonial mentality in Nigeria. How true is this in Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel*.

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