

MODULE 1 THE RISE OF WRITTEN NIGERIAN LITERATURE

- Unit 1 The Beginning of Written Literature
- Unit 2 Market Literatures
- Unit 3 Nigerian Nationalist Literature
- Unit 4 Literary Journals in Nigeria
- Unit 5 Pioneer Drama/Theatre

UNIT 1 THE BEGINNING OF WRITTEN LITERATURE**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Nigerian Orature in Nigerian Literature
 - 3.3 Orature in and as Early 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 beginning of written literature in Nigeria. This unit links us with Introduction to Nigerian Literature 1, where we examined all aspects of orality that culminated in the rise of written literature in Nigeria. In the course preceding this we studied the types and the various influences that led to the emergence of Nigerian literature. Nigerian oral tradition carries the Nigerian storytelling tradition with it. It embodies the beliefs and general attitudes to life. They transmit and store the values of their experiences by telling the tales to the younger generations as guide. In this unit, we will look at the beginning of written Nigerian literature in all genres as influenced by the preceding oral traditions. Forms like the folktales, fables, proverbs, clichés and idioms in order to establish the true development of Nigerian literature after the emergence of writing through colonial education.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- recognize orature as part of Nigerian literature;
- establish a link between the orature and written Nigerian literature ;
- accept that oral narratives are in the written Nigerian literature ; and
- explain that early Nigerian literature owe a lot to oral narratives.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

In the colonial period, some Nigerians exposed to English language began to write literatures in English. Nigerian writers in this period wrote both in Western language (notably English) and in traditional Nigerian languages. One interesting thing about these early works is the absorption of the oral arts in them. D.O. Fagunwa pioneered the Yoruba [language novel](#). In 1938, Fagunwa wrote his [Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale](#), the first novel written in the Yoruba language and one of the first to be written in any African language; Wole Soyinka translated the book into English in 1968 as *The Forest of A Thousand Demons*. Fagunwa's later works include *Igbo Olodumare* (*The Forest of God*, 1949), [Ireke Onibudo](#) (1949), [Irinkerindo ninu Igbo Elegbeje](#) (*Expedition to the Mount of Thought*, 1954), and *Adiitu Olodumare* (1961). Again, Fagunwa's novels draw heavily on folktale traditions and idioms, including many supernatural elements. His heroes are usually Yoruba hunters, who interact with kings, sages, and even gods in their quests. Thematically, his novels also explore the divide between the [Christian beliefs of Nigeria's colonizers and the country's traditional](#) religions. Fagunwa remains the most widely-read Yorùbá-language author, and a major influence on such contemporary writers as Amos [Tutuola](#). [Amos Tutuola's The Palm wine Drinkard was also written](#) based on the style of African Orature. In Igbo area, Pita Nwana wrote *Omenuko* which is regarded as the first Igbo epic. The same occurred in the Hausa literature especially the works of Samanja Mazan Fama, and Karo-da-Goma. In all these early written literatures in Nigerian languages, we see the re-enactment of the oral narrative power of Nigerian. We see the mystical and the mundane intermingling in many ways. We see the supernatural forces determining the fate of humans, humans marrying strange beings and other mythical realities. Nigerian Orature is richly drawn from the people's way of living and belief system which form the basis for the moral undertone of oral tales which are evident in the early written literatures. Western education enabled the African people the opportunity to put down their oral narratives into written words.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain how orature metamorphosed into literature in early Nigerian literature.

3.2 Nigerian Orature in Nigerian Literature

Nigerian oral literature, like other forms of popular culture, is not merely a form of entertainment but a medium for commenting on contemporary social and political events. It can also be a significant agent of change capable of storing the people's historical experiences. This is how myths and legends emerged. **Myths** are stories of origin or creation. They are stories about the beginning of a people, a race or a community. Many communities attribute their greatness to their beginning. Legends are records of a community's heroes. They are stories about those who founded a community and how brave they were. Ruth Finnegan (1980) expresses that myths and legend capture the most valued history of a people by tracing how they began and how their beginning affected their situation. It also traces the beginning of traditions, cultural rites, worship and the discovery of food, craft, and other lore. We also have different forms of myths and legends recounted in most African novels set in the rural backgrounds. Myths and

legends are fictional but have traces of reality as each of them has a physical referent in the real world. This referent guides the members of the community in certain observances. Myths and legends help to store or preserve a people's cultural beliefs about nature and their natural habitats. This is one of the sources of truly African novels as one of the earliest novels to have come out of Africa called the palmwine drinkard by Amos Tutuola which is truly an embodiment of African orature in the written form. Myths have often occurred in African novels such as the origin of Ulu in Arrow of God, the exploits of the great Umuofia men in Things Fall Apart, the story of Osu Caste in *No Longer at Ease* etc. It seemed impossible for the early Nigerian writers to extricate themselves from the clutches of Orature.

Folktales are animal stories. They are stories about select animals personified to carry certain human attributes in order to play out a needed role for moral lessons. In folktales, there are heroes and villains. The heroes are human or animals that play the major roles. A common type of Nigerian folktale is also called the "trickster" story, where a small animal uses its wits to survive encounters with larger creatures. Some animal tricksters include Ijàpá or Mbe, a tortoise in Yoruba or Igbo folklore of Nigeria. One interesting thing about the folktale is the manipulation of animals as humans playing out their political, sociological and cultural roles in a fictional community. We have seen the folktale forms occurring in African novels. In folktales, the essence of poetic justice is expressed and this is a recurring feature in some African novels. D.O. Fagunwa's *My Life in a Forest of a Thousand Demons* is purely a written folktale, similar to the form in Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*. The form of the folktale has a great influence on the present form of the Nigerian novels. The folktale form is arranged in a manner that there is a beginning in a distant land with different wrongs being committed by a given animal at the end of which poetic justice occurs. This thematic form is often the structure of most African novels. The effects of oral narratives on the written literatures in Africa are mostly structural and thematic.

There seems to be the impossibility of discussing the African story without a link at the traditional values. These values are stored in the various tales: myths, legend, oral narratives of different sorts, songs and acts. The early African writers attempt in various ways to blend these oral values in the written contexts. It seemed to work. This is because it helps in marking out a true African literary tradition where the written absorbs the unwritten values in the quest for making literatures the totality of the people's rites of passage.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How does the folktale tradition influence the writing of African novels?

3.3 Orature in/as Early Nigerian Literature

Orature occurs in various ways in early Nigerian literatures. Unlike the western literature, African literature contains the oral heritage of the African people. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, we have various oral heritage of the Igbos in the novel. There is the form of drama which manifested in the form of wrestling and the Egwugwu Masquerade group. We also see the belief in the existence of changelings as revealed in Ezinma's search for her iyiuwa. There are sessions where folktales are narrated and various songs are rendered according to the required

circumstance. These are oral narratives manifesting in the written literature. The same occurred in other novels especially in novels set in rural background in Africa. In Achebe's *Arrow of God*, we see the tradition of religious worship, how gods are created and how poetic justice prevails in a community. Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* presents a typical eastern Nigerian village with all their arts: stories, songs and dances. There is the typical exposition of the traditional belief regarding the intermingling of humans and the supernatural forces.

Considering the root of the Nigerian writers first as Nigerians brought up in the Nigerian society and secondly as the fortunate recipients of western education, they cannot avoid expressing their art forms in their new found form of expressing art. The resultant effect is that they represent the Nigerian personality and culture. Some of them who could write in their native languages using English alphabetic forms attempted original works in their first languages as can be seen in Fagunwa and Nwana. Although, English served as the only language that could make their message reach wider audience, the writers try as much as possible to incorporate the oral literary forms in their works. It is not surprising though that the early literatures in Nigeria are mostly works generated from the oral tradition of the people. We see this strongly in the works of Fagunwa, Tutuola, Amadi, Achebe and Soyinka, among others.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain how oral traditions manifested in and as early Nigerian literature

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear that Nigerians has a rich oral tradition. Besides, there are patterned literary forms akin to the western types in Africa. The difference is that African literature then was oral. Western education marked the rise of African literature. There was a smooth transition from orature to literature. Africans did not hear of literature for the first time from the Europeans. The three genres of literature also manifests in African orature in various forms. The epic and legends of Africa have often occurred in the written literature. The other forms like songs, masquerades, rituals, incantations, folktale narration, the application of proverbs and anecdotes amongst other African oral heritage have become a regular form in African novels. All these reflect the influence of the oral tradition in the Nigerian literature. In the beginning, after the encounter with western education, the early Nigerian writers began with the writing of orature as literature. The works of Fagunwa, Tutuola, and Achebe among others reveal a leaning towards the oral art as an expression of a true Nigerian literature. The application of these forms has been tagged 'local colour tradition' by critics of Nigerian literature. They are local colour because they capture the original oral art in its entirety in the written form. We notice today that Nigerian literature is identified mainly by the oral forms and inherent lore. There are elements of orature in most genres of Nigerian literature and the Nigerian literature embodies all the genres as the storyteller uses every means to reach out to his immediate audience.

Orature is African heritage in storytelling, songs and masquerades. It is the most significant ways of transmitting cultural values and belief systems of the people. Orature like literature has several genres. These genres manifest in various forms. African writers imbibe the oral tradition in the writing of literature. Early novels began as a revisit of the African tradition. This is evident in works of the the early Nigerian writers like Faguwa, Tutuola, Achebe and Amadi among others. They reflect the African oral tradition in their works. It is thoroughly evident that Nigerian literature began from the oral literary tradition of the Africans. We have the application Nigerian myths and legends, folktale forms, fable forms, proverbs, idioms, dance, songs, incantations and masquerade forms in African novels. This is because a writer is a product of his environment and reflects that in his works. Western education only prepared the African writer for the task of transmitting his cultural values to a wider audience beyond his immediate environment. Quite often, not surprising though, the Nigerian literature still reflects the Nigerian orature in various forms to reflect a true Nigerian literature.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions carefully:

- 1) Explain the various effects of orature in Nigerian literature.
- 2) How does Nigerian orature manifest in Nigerian literature?
- 3) Explain why orature has been termed 'local colour tradition'.
- 4) Must Nigerian literature be written in Nigerian languages?
- 5) Discuss the link between orature and literature in Nigerian.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Finnegan, Ruth (1980). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Obiechina, Emmanuel (1975). *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taiwo, Oladele (1976). *Culture and the Nigerian Novel*. London: Macmillan.

UNIT 2 MARKET LITERATURES**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Market Literature
 - 3.3 Onitsha Market Literature
 - 3.4 Kano Market Literature
 - 3.5 Transition from Pamphlets into Full Literatures
- 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 critically the way the early educated Nigerians were able to write creatively. Most of them had no university education and it is only those who had the opportunity of attending the then University College Ibadan that really turned their creative sketches into full blown literatures. At that time, pamphlets of all types in all literary genres flourished and were sold to interested members of the public for entertainment. The first set of Nigerians that came in contact with European education was excited about the discovery and attempted several experiments through writing. These group of Nigerians were actually not well educated as most of them had little education, especially the type that allows them write and work as civil servants. They had middle level of education equivalent to the present secondary education. We will study the historical development of pamphlets and how they contributed immensely to the development of Nigerian literature. Most of the writers were civil servants and traders. They were concerned with expressing themselves in pamphlets as means to counselling, guiding or entertaining the people. However, some intellectuals like Cyprian Ekwensi among others started writing through pamphlets. The pamphlets were not really published but were printed without ISBN numbers.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand pamphlets as one of the beginnings of Nigerian literature
- trace the beginning of pamphlets to western education
- appreciate pamphlets as motivation for full literature
- see market literature as the end product of pamphleteering
- explain how pamphlets transited into Nigerian literature
- recognize Onitsha Market Literature & Kano Market Literatures as the most popular in early Nigerian literature.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

A pamphlet is an unbound booklet (that is, without a hard cover or **binding**). It may consist of a **single sheet of paper that is printed on both** sides and folded in half, in thirds, or in fourths (called a leaflet), or it may consist of a few pages that are folded in half and stapled at the crease to make a simple book. In order to count as a pamphlet, **UNESCO requires a publication (other than a periodical) to have 'at least 5 but not more than 48 pages exclusive of the cover pages'**; a longer item is a book. Pamphlets can contain anything from information on kitchen appliances to medical information and religious treatises. Pamphlets are very important in marketing as they are cheap to produce and can be distributed easily to customers. Pamphlets have also long been an important tool of political protest and political campaigning for similar reasons. The storage of individual pamphlets requires special consideration because they can be easily crushed or torn when shelved alongside hardcover books. For this reason, they should either be kept in file folders in a file cabinet, or kept in boxes that have approximately the dimensions of a hardcover book and placed vertically on a shelf. The word pamphlet means a small work issued without covers. Pamphlet coined from 'Pamphilus' was derived from Greek, meaning "loved by all". It has the modern connotation of a tract concerning a contemporary issue. By the end of the seventeenth century the most effective means of persuasion and communication in the world was the pamphlet, which created influential moral and political communities of readers, and thus formed a 'public sphere' of popular, political opinion. In Africa, pamphlets were used for political campaigns and as guides. In Nigeria, the use of pamphlets was popularized through the consistent use of it by market traders. The most popular are the Onitsha and Kano Market Literature which flourished so much before the emergence of regular literatures. They were pamphlets dealing with various issues: some literary, some political, some religious and some pedagogical. Some of them are used as satiric attack on the frailties of man in his society. It is interesting to note however, that *People of the City* regarded as the first African novel per se published in 1945 was written by one of the Onitsha Market pamphleteers called Cyprian Ekwensi.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain thoroughly the major difference between a pamphlet and a book.

3.2 Market Literature

A market literature is a consistent form of writing popularized by traders in a given market place or by people living and working in a given commercial centre. Market literatures are printed as pamphlets. They have no standard form or guiding rules covering the subject matters. Most of the subject matters go from moral to amoral, from sacred to profane, from political to apolitical and from pedagogical to generalities. They are usually written with less commercial intention. The authors have the joy of being read by others and being classified among the circle of writers. The pages are usually very few and written in very simple and transliterated English forms. The language of market literatures is usually entertaining and the lexical selection is usually unconnected but creates fun in the reading. Market literatures are regarded as popular literatures. The Kano Market writers wrote mainly in Hausa with just a handful in

English. The critical question has been: was the popular pamphleteering in Nigeria a success or a failure? The obvious answer is that it was a big success. There are several factors which contributed to the success of these market literatures. In 1946, the colonial government of Nigeria sold their used printing presses and shortly after, the local market places were flooded with romantic novelettes and chapbooks. Many traders in Onitsha bought these discarded machines. Cheap production costs also made it possible for large print runs to be produced. There is the fact that the authors had declared that their main concern was not to make money from their writing but that also meant that the publishers had a free hand to fix cheap prices for the pamphlets.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Differentiate between a market literature and a real literature

3.3 Onitsha Market Literature

Onitsha Market Literature is a term used to designate the popular pamphlets that were sold at the large market in Onitsha, Nigeria, in the middle decades of the 20th century. Written by and intended for the "common" or "uneducated" people, this literature covered a range of genres including fiction, current events, plays, social advice and language study. Starting in the 1960s, European and American scholars began to take an interest in this form of popular literature, especially insofar as it reflected African social conditions. It is not known whether any individual or group of people ever came together, sat down, planned and worked out the details of what they wanted to do in advance before they started publishing and selling pamphlets in the Onitsha market literature series to the public. However, what is known is that, according to Emmanuel Obiechina, the first pamphlets in the series were published in 1947. It could be said that the first publications in the Onitsha market literature were written by Cyprian Ekwensi, who later became a famous Nigerian novelist. The titles of the pamphlets written by Ekwensi were "When love whispers" and a collection of Igbo folktales called "Ikolo the wrestler and other Igbo tales". All these were published in 1947. Another factor which spurred people on to writing the chapbooks was the end of the Second World War. The Nigerian soldiers, who fought in India and the far East, came back with copies of Indian and Victorian drugstore pulp magazines which served as models for the pamphlet literature.

It has been said above that a good number of young people with the minimum educational qualification of standard six found their ways to Onitsha either to trade or to work as apprentices in various trades and professions. It was this group of new literates, school leavers, school teachers, low-level clerks, artisans, provincial correspondents of daily newspapers who now devoted their time to writing the Onitsha market pamphlets. Most of the authors of the Onitsha chapbooks were amateurs rather than professionals. Another group of people who wrote the Onitsha market pamphlets were local printing press owners, booksellers, journalists, railway men, traders, and farmers. Some of the pamphlets were written by grammar school boys who wrote under pseudo names so that their school authorities would not identify and then punish them. Most of the pamphlet authors maintained that financial gain was not their reason for writing the pamphlets. The authors already had full-time employment from which they earned their living and they merely took up writing as part-time and for the joy of it. Consequently, even if they earned little money from their writing, that was regarded as a supplementary family income. A good number of the

authors wrote a preface to the finished work in which they gave biographical details of their lives. Usually such a preface gave the details as to how and why the authors came to be personally involved in pamphlet writing.

The strategic position of the city of Onitsha on the eastern bank of the River Niger also contributed to the success of the market literature. Onitsha is easily accessible from all parts of Nigeria and people come from all parts of the Federation and also from other countries in West Africa either to buy or sell their commodities at Onitsha. The pamphlets were sold in various bookshops in Onitsha as well as in the open markets. Roadside hawkers as well as peripatetic booksellers helped to sell thousands of copies of the pamphlets. Travellers passing through Onitsha boasted of buying copies of the cheap chapbooks to show to their relatives and friends at home. Onitsha town has a large home-based market and many educational institutions. There are thousands of traders in the Onitsha market and also thousands of grammar school boys and girls in Onitsha who bought copies of the pamphlets.

The publication and distribution of the pamphlets coincided with the period when many people were becoming educated in Eastern Nigeria. Even the Onitsha traders who were not educated decided to go to the night schools to learn how to read and write. By so doing, they were able to read the stories by themselves. Some illiterate traders who bought the pamphlets but decided not to go to the night schools, availed themselves of the services of the Onitsha public scribes. These were educated people who had it as their full-time job to read or write letters as well as read stories from books to illiterates and charge them for the service.

There were still other factors which helped the success of the market literature. By the time the first set of pamphlets was published in 1947, public libraries did not exist in Eastern Nigeria. The market booksellers concentrated their efforts in selling prescribed school textbooks and not popular fiction and general trade books. The people had nowhere to go when they wanted to read some light materials. This meant that for many years, Nigerians were suffering from book hunger. Consequently, when the Onitsha market pamphlets were issued, the people were happy and the cheapness of the retail price enabled them to buy the copies in large numbers. As already stated, the 5-year period, 1958 to 1962 may be described as the heyday of the Onitsha market literature pamphlets. During that period, one could easily go to a bookshop and select up to 200 titles. The popularity of the chapbooks quickly spread from Onitsha to Enugu, Aba, Owerri, Port Harcourt, Calabar and other cities and towns in Eastern Nigeria. From the East, it spread to the West, Northern Nigeria and to Lagos, to Camerouns, Ghana and other countries in West Africa. As Onitsha could no longer cope with the popular demand, the printing and production were now contracted to companies based in Aba, Port Harcourt, Yaba in Lagos, Enugu and Owerri. The average Onitsha market pamphlet sold 3000-4000 copies per title. There were two titles which sold over 30,000 copies each

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Trace the historical development of Onitsha Market Literature and the factors responsible for its growth.

3.4 Kano Market Literature

Due to historical peculiarities, the Hausa-Fulani comprising all the tribes that speak Hausa language as a first or second language, were less enthusiastic in the pursuit of western Education right from the colonial periods up to the present time. Consequently, several methods that can appeal to their understanding and comprehension were devised to enlighten them on government policies and programs. This gave rise to a medium of mass communication like Town Criers and Drama Series which became very popular as a result of its acceptability among the generality of the people. In that golden period, monetary consideration was never a factor in gauging the success or otherwise of the actors/actress, it was more or less voluntary. The main objectives were simply to enlighten the public, with strict adherence to the rules and regulations which guard against anything that will torch our sensibilities. This ensured the protection of our cultural norms and values jealously over the years. The thespians were just happy and contented to partake in a venture that will lead to the general understanding of government aims and objectives on several issues.

The many prominent personalities that took part in the drama series of this early phase include the following: Kassimu Yero, Kar-Kuzu, Late Alhaji Buguzun, Dan Hajiya, Dan-Magori, Hajiya Tambaya, Me Ayah, Late Mallam Mamman, Golobo, Samanja Mazan Fama, Late Karo-da-Goma, Barmo and several others too numerous to mention. They used their God given talent effectively in mass mobilization and enlightenment and for that, we are very grateful indeed. What is now known as Kannywood, evolved partly out of the booming Kano Market Literature (KML), which made some of the writers instantly famous. The success recorded, made some exuberant youth to begin the conversion of the content of their 'soyayya' books into films. Subsequently, what started as a small private affair suddenly metamorphosed into a full-blown money spinning venture and the rest is now history.

With the government's inability to cater for its citizens' needs, coupled with the opulent life style of these writers, in addition to endemic poverty; film making readily become a veritable source of employment and instant fame and wealth. This induced mass exodus of all characters from every part of the North and even neighboring countries to Kano, to the ready embrace of the stakeholders in the industry. Many boys and girls in their teens therefore migrated to Kano, leading to the resurgence of divorce cases in many parts of the north.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What are the major thrusts of Kano Market Literature?

3.5 Transition from Pamphlets into Full Literatures

The first book in the Onitsha market literature series was published in 1947. This was quickly followed by other titles some of which were so slim that they numbered less than 20 pages each. In a relatively short time, these chapbooks and novelettes became popular in Eastern Nigeria especially among secondary school boys and girls and among thousands of traders in Onitsha market. From the Eastern Region the popularity spread to the

Cameroon, Ghana and other West African countries. The 5-year period, 1958 to 1962 may be described as the heyday when the total number of books published each year was near the 50 titles mark. The language used in the books was suitable for most of the people in the society because not many of them were educated to primary and secondary school levels. By the time the Biafran war ended in January 1970, the publication and selling of the Onitsha market pamphlets and chapbooks was dying a natural death.

The same period in history also marked the transition from writing novelettes with semi-literate population in mind to writing serious trade-books, both fiction and non-fiction, for highly educated people. By general trade books we mean those books written for the general public, mainly the adult population, and published by a commercial publisher. Such books are written for the non-specialist reading public, such as biography, novels, literature, letters, etc. Incidentally, these are the kind of books which people usually buy for their intrinsic merits, and they read them for their own sake.

Despite the popularity which the Onitsha market literature enjoyed for nearly a generation, by the year 1975, that literary phenomenon had ceased to exist. To many people, especially those who enjoyed comfortable living as a result of this special book trade, the demise came rather too quickly and too unexpectedly. Why was this the case? One obvious answer is that the Biafran war of July 1967 to January 1970 had abruptly halted the progress of the pamphlet business. At the end of the war, when people came back to Onitsha, what they saw was a city which had been systematically destroyed. It was like a ghost town. There was little or nothing left for them to use in starting a new life. This state of affairs led to frustration, hopelessness and despair. People even turned round and started blaming their fellow Onitsha inhabitants for being the cause of their woes. The spirit of comradeship, for which the inhabitants of Onitsha were known, had gone. People did not trust one another anymore. Rather they started being cagey and secretive. The informality and the openness of life in the Onitsha market had gone. People were no longer prepared to tell their fellow traders the truth.

However, there were people who loved the Onitsha market literature so much that they were determined to reactivate their business. Before long, they discovered that they were facing many odds. Their printing presses and other production equipment had either been stolen or destroyed beyond repair. Buying new machines would obviously cost them more money. Moreover, the resumption of the production of new pamphlets was capital-intensive. The cover price for each new title produced would be increased considerably. Some of the well-known pamphlet authors had disappeared from Onitsha, and some even lost their lives. Obiechina stated clearly that one of the famous pamphlet authors, Chike Okonyia, the author of *Tragic, Niger Tales* was killed during the war.

The whole fabric of society and the special characteristics which distinguished Onitsha from other cities in Igbo land had gone. Thousands of people decided to leave Onitsha for good and set up new lines of business in other cities like Enugu, Aba and Port Harcourt. Before the war, some traders were prepared to buy every new pamphlet title published.

After the war, the same traders decided not to purchase the publications any more, partly because they had no money, and partly because the new retail prices were too high for them. Few years after the war, even those who thrived on the pamphleteering business had no alternative than to give up the trade. Consequently, it can be said that by the year 1975, the Onitsha market literature had ceased to exist. The people of Eastern Nigeria had to look elsewhere for their reading materials. The disappearance of this literary genre was a loss not only to the Igbos and to Eastern Nigerians but also to the whole of Nigeria and to some West Africans. The Biafran war had changed the philosophy of life of the Igbo people of Nigeria.

Between 1950 and 1970, a period of 20 years, some classic novels written by Nigerian authors were published. The same period coincided with the time when the Onitsha market literature was in vogue from 1947 to 1975. Some of these novels were *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* by Amos Tutuola (1952); *People of the City*, by Cyprian Ekwensi (1954); *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe (1958), and *One Man One Wife* by Timothy Aluko (1959). These represent what Oyekan Owomoyela called the *First Wave Writers of West Africa*. Their works also represent a transitional period from the novelettes and chapbooks of the Onitsha market literature, to serious fiction written by intellectual authors. One Nigerian novelist who may be said to have spearheaded the transition was C.O.D. Ekwensi. He wrote for the Onitsha market literature as well as serious novels for the more sophisticated readers. As Obiechina has rightly observed, both the pamphlet writers and the intellectual West African writers used their writing as media to provide insights into the contemporary West African life. The pamphlet writers concerned themselves with surface appearances, while the intellectual writers tried to dig deep into underlying causes and explanations.

We have already seen how serious fiction was being published almost side by side with the pamphlets of the Onitsha market literature. Those novels were written by first wave intellectual writers from Nigeria. During the Second wave, we had Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* (1965) and Gabriel Okara's novel, *The oice* (1964). It was during the Second Wave that Chinua Achebe published his two next novels – *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Man of the People*, (1966). Elechi Amadi's novel, *The Concubine*, was published in 1966. Achebe's *A Man of the People dealt with corruption, and ended with violence and a coup*. It was during this Second Wave that some of the novels of the pioneer Igbo women writers were published. The first was *Efuru*, by Flora Nwapa (1966), and *Idu* (1969). The other female novelist, Buchi Emecheta, published her autobiographical novels, *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second Class Citizen*, (1974).

The writers of the Third Wave were young people writing for an African audience and not for the Euro-Americans as was the case with the first Wave authors. These new Third Wave authors sought not only to entertain like the Onitsha chapbooks, but also to edify and instruct, as well as to forge a common cause with ordinary people. Some of the novels of the Third Wave are *One is Enough*, by Flora Nwapa (1981); Kalu Okpi's *The Smugglers* (1978), Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1986) and Abubakar Gimba's *Trail of Sacrifice* (1989).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Explain thoroughly the factors that led to the demise of pamphleteering

4.0 CONCLUSION

No doubt, pamphleteering constitutes a very important aspect of the development of the African novel. From the above excursions into the development of pamphleteering and the emergence of market literatures, Onitsha and Kano, it is clear that they represent one of the first attempts at writing and publishing what is real literature. This development process is not an African thing. Early literature writers in Europe and America started through pamphleteering. American literature began as pamphlets which still represent an important aspect of their literary heritage. The works of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson were mainly in pamphlets and they are one of the most revered documents in American literature today. However, the pamphlets of Africa unlike the revolutionary aspects of Europe and America constitute attempts by the half literate Africans at expressing them in the printed words. It represents a beginning that actually saw literature beyond the ordinariness of the spoken words. It elevated the orality of literature to the status of the printed matter. It brings African novels to the realm of the printed words.

5.0 SUMMARY

Pamphleteering developed to market literature in Nigeria. This is because most of the pamphlets were written by traders and people living in the two most commercial areas in Nigeria: Onitsha and Kano. They are middle educated members of the society that for fun and belongingness to the circle of writers. The quantity of works produced is enormous and represent many aspects of man's developmental needs from the physical to the spiritual. The quality reveals beginners with no clear-cut genres, themes and functionality. The works reveal the budding desire of young half educated Africans who wrote to bring African orality into the print. The market literatures marked a real phase in the development of printing in Africa. Thus, pamphlets led directly to the real publishing of African novels and other genres.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

1. What factors led to the emergence of pamphleteering in Africa?
2. Differentiate critically the thematic differences between Onitsha and Kano Market Literatures
3. Explain the basic contribution of pamphlets to the development of the African novel.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Furniss, George (1996). *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Obiechina, Emmanuel (1971). *Literature for the Masses: An Analytical Study of Popular Pamphleteering in Nigeria*. Enugu, Nigeria: Nwankwo-Ifejika Publishers.

Obiechina, Emmanuel (1975). *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. London: Cambridge University Press.

UNIT 3 NIGERIAN NATIONALIST LITERATURE**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Nationalism and Early Nigerian Literature
 - 3.3 Literatures of Identity and Personality
- 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 the beginning of written literatures from the contributions of Nigerian nationalists. Many African nationalists, that is, those who fought for the independence of their countries were mostly educated Africans who were trained abroad as there were no universities in Africa to produce graduates then. They used everything at their disposal in the fight. They used propaganda, journalism, literature etc. They used literature mainly to sensitize the Africans about their personality and the destruction of inferiority complex. They contributed in the development of African literature. Many of these African writers present the African society, culture and personality in such manners that reveal the totality of African values. The issues of equality, cultural values and social mores are presented in manners that show the placement of attitudes and societal requirements for greatness. The values of leadership are also examined using the African leadership parameters as yardsticks. In Nigeria, most of the nationalists used literature as tools for their nationalistic messages.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand that Nigerian literature was a tool of nationalism;
- explain the need for nationalist literature;
- relate the Nationalist literature to Nigeria's struggle for independence;
- see Nationalist literatures as part of early Nigerian literature; and
- distinguish nationalist literature from negritude literature.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Early Nigerian poetry in English was an anti colonial, mobilisational poetry. It was one of the weapons used by nationalists to fight the British colonial administration in Nigeria and sensitized the people to the injustices of colonialism. This anti colonial poetry movement was West Africa wide. R. E. E. Armattoo, Michael Dei-Anang and Benibengor Blay, all of Ghana; Crispin George of Sierra Leone; and, Roland Tombekai of Liberia, are the prominent names. In Nigeria, the important names are Dennis Osadebay and Nnamdi Azikiwe.

Literary arts were part of the colonial educational structure which had as its basic end, the incorporation of Africans into the orbit of Western Civilization. In the European Colonization of Africa, commerce, Christianity and civilization were a three – legged relay in which Christianity was always either first or second baton (after commerce). Both combined to produce colonialism and the sum total of all three was the imposition of Western civilization on Africa. Of all the contacts with the Europeans, the most decisive of them all is the evolution of the modern Nigerian state as a colonized entity in the late 19th century. Although Africans had been writing in Portuguese as early as 1850 and a few volumes of African writing in English and French had been published, an explosion of African writing in European languages occurred in the mid-twentieth century.

In the 1930s, black intellectuals from French colonies living in Paris initiated a literary movement called Negritude. Negritude emerged out of “a sudden grasp of racial identity and of cultural values and an awareness of the wide discrepancies” (Gerard 39) which existed between the promise of the French system of assimilation and the reality. The movement's founders looked to Africa to rediscover and rehabilitate the African values that had been erased by French cultural superiority. Negritude writers wrote poetry in French in which they presented African traditions and cultures as antithetical, but equal, to European culture. Out of this philosophical/literary movement came the creation of *Presence Africaine* by Alioune Diop in 1947. The journal, according to its founder, was an endeavour “to help define African originality and to hasten its introduction into the modern world” (Owomoyela 39). Other Negritude authors include Leopold Senghor, Aime Cesaire, and Leon Damas.

In the mid-60s, Nigeria replaced French West Africa as the largest producer and consumer of African literature, and literary production in English surpassed that in French. Many Nigerian nationalists, like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Denis Osadebe and Chief Enahoro among others were products of Western Education and they recognized the power of literature in the achievement of their goal for Nigeria’s independence. They constituted the nationalist writers. Their literary motive was akin to that of negritude. They emphasized African culture, personality and value system. They believe that giving attention to everything Africa is one of the basic tools of their agitation. Large numbers of talented writers in Francophone Africa came to occupy important political and diplomatic posts and gave up creative writing.

The vastness in size and population of Nigeria gave it an advantage over smaller countries. In the 1950s, a large readership made up of clerks and small traders and a steadily increasing number of high schools students developed in Nigeria, and this readership enabled the emergence of market literatures. Even Ibadan University College, founded in 1948, produced some of the writers that came to the forefront in the 60s. The encounter with Europe through trade relationships, missionary activities, and colonialism propelled the wave of literacy in Nigeria. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, literary activity in the British colonies was conducted almost entirely in vernacular languages. Missionaries found it more useful to translate the Bible into local languages than to teach English to large number of Africans. This resulted in the production of hymns, morality tales, and other literatures in African languages concerned with propagating Christian values and morals. All these helped in the propagation of nationalism which culminated in the independence of the country.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the importance of Nigerian literature in Nigerian nationalism

3.2 Nationalism and Early Nigerian Literature

Nigerian literature of the early 50s and 60s were more of journalistic and nationalistic. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was a journalist and a nationalist. He, like his peers, wrote poetry and other forms of literature to express his Africanness as a way of killing the inferiority complex always expressed by the Africans. Most of these nationalists suffered much racism in their studies abroad. It was these racial experiences that sparked off their agitation for independence. However, their creative works were not allowed in the curriculum of schools. The same western education curriculum prevailed in the British colonies. The curriculum of western education was largely made up of European texts and authors. Admittedly, at the inception of tertiary education in Nigeria in the 1950s, authors of African origin had not written many texts. But neither literature written in the indigenous African languages, nor the traditional artistic practices were considered of significance enough to merit attention in scholarly investigation of literary experience, presumed when convenient, to be universal. Thus, until the postcolonial agitation for artistic and cultural decolonization impacted on the academia, African literature was like an inconceivable possibility or at best, a shocking novelty. Given the above, it is not surprising that the curriculum of literary studies in Nigeria as it obtained in many parts of colonized Africa was fashioned in the image of metropolitan derivation. Primary texts and authors studied, the critical and theoretical approaches adopted in textual interrogations were largely Euro-American. Where the continent features as subject, it is done with a view to underscore its significance as we see in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Tempest*, Sir H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mine*, etc. *No indigenous poet had presumably emerged to rival Thomas Wyatt, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Alexander Pope, William Blake, and T.S. Eliot among others.*

The indigenous imagination was seen as incapable of producing such epical compositions with the rhetorical grandeur exhibited in *Beowulf* by the Anglo-Saxons or works of arresting suspense and didacticism as exemplified in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. In terms of drama, African ritual performances and festivals, myths, legends and other narratives of the people wherein lie the seedbeds of African drama earned no place in the curriculum fashioned in the main and ab initio from the metropolitan centres. Thus, the historical trajectory of literature in Nigeria shows that it was part of the embracing marginalization of the colonies.

By the 1960s, there was a gradual legitimation of African oral literature as a worthy subject of literary inquiry. Thus, traditional rituals, festivals and indigenous poetic chants became worthy subjects for learning. Nationalism had the conscious drive to put Nigerians on the self appraisal of their personality and culture. These works, mainly poetry, are written in simplified syntax with the aim of communicating ideas. The poems read as discourse projecting the need for understanding and appreciating the black race.

By its very nature, this poetry had a public tone. It was confrontational and defamatory, and was meant to be hurled at the white opponent as a counter to his negative assumptions about African culture. It was also a highly affirmative poetry, often taking Africa as a monolithic entity and singing her praise to the high heavens. This posture must have been justifiable at the time, given the sustained denigration of Africa by whites who were either ignorant of the real situation in Africa or were simply malicious.

Dennis Osadebay was the leading Nigerian poet of the mobilization era. In 1952, he published a book of poems entitled *Africa Sings* which, in many ways, is typical of the mobilisational mode. In the poem "Who Buys My Thoughts", for example, the emphasis is on the throbbing soul of Africa, an Africa that is still hungry, naked and sick, but whose youth are already awake, restless and questioning and who by this very fact are going to make significant achievements in the future. But Osadebay was also a poet with an ambivalent disposition towards the West; for, while he may condemn the West for some of the cruder features of colonialism, he nevertheless sang the white man's praise unabashedly for what he called the benefits of western civilization, namely schools, hospitals and the like.

Perhaps the poem that is most typical of him is "Young Africa's Plea" in which he seeks a synthesis of black and white values especially in the following lines:

Let me play with the Whiteman's ways
Let me work with the Blackman's brains
Let my affairs themselves sort out
Then in sweet rebirth
I'll rise a better man
Not ashamed to face the world.

This consciousness of Africanness elevates the thought-system of the Africans and creates a superior sense of their existence among mankind. Nationalism was seen as a way of asserting their integrity and modified to carry the tones of Anglo Nigerian experiences.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Many Nigerian nationalists believe that our literature should dominate our education. Explain why it should be so.

3.3 Literatures of Identity and Personality

The 50s in Nigeria were also the time when the ferment for freedom was at its highest. India was independent, so it was only a matter of time for West Africa to be free. The Second World War was fought for freedom as they told Africans. They were asked to collect palm kernels for the war effort. They were told that each one would put a nail on Hitler's coffin. Nigerians returning home from the war asked, 'where's the freedom we were told about?' So the two issues were together: the political ferment and the revolution in the classroom. The Nigerian elites were angered to see that they were deceived into fighting a war they never knew how it began. They never knew Hitler and were amazed that a man they never knew and who never offended them turned out to be their enemy. The enlightenment from those ex-servicemen, who actually fought in the battle front with the whites, discovered that they were stronger than their white counterparts at the warfront. The myth about white superiority began to wane in their mind. They began to teach Nigerians at home on their return from the war that the colonial masters were not superior to them. This resulted in the publication of pamphlets and papers on the need for African independence. In Nigeria, many of these ex-servicemen who later joined the Nigerian armed forces began to spread information on the possibility of self governance in the country.

For the elites, the educated Nigerians at the forefront of the battle for self governance, the need to implant the consciousness about the superiority of the black person over the whites began as a necessary independence slogan. They wrote poems, short stories and historical account of their encounters with the whites. They painted gory pictures of racism and instilled in the educated few, the need for their self aggrandizement in the face of all odds. Unfortunately, most of these nationalist works were never in complete books as most of them were products of the immediate necessity or the situation that that gave rise to them.

They were usually published in newspapers like *The West African Pilot* which had the late *Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe* as the editor at the time Nigeria's agitation for independence was at its peak.

In most of these literary works, the nationalists emphasized national unity, identification with the struggle for independence, the elevation of the African personality and the destruction of inferiority complex.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss the factors that led to the realization of African identity and personality during the struggles for independence

4.0 CONCLUSION

Nationalism paved the way for the appreciation of African oral arts. Apart from the significant interests shown in indigenous oral literary and artistic traditions, by independence, the nation had produced writers who were significant in many ways. The literary field 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 in Nigerian culture. These were writers whose mastery of poetic, theatrical and narrative skills were acclaimed beyond the shores of Nigeria. These writers include Gabriel Okara whose collection, *The Fisherman's Invocation*, was and is still regarded as the trailblazer in true poetic expression in Africa. Okara uses indigenous materials in capturing his ideals while painting the metaphors of truth using his environment as proper poetic tool in his craft. His novel, *The Voice*, an experimental work written with the transliteration of Ijaw language into English makes a case for the appreciation of the linguistic beauty in African languages. *The Voice*, apart from its linguistic properties carried more message of nationalism as it examines Nigeria beyond Independence. Independence is a goal but he believes that the success of independence rests with the individuals who must work with clear conscience in order to pilot Nigeria towards worthy ends.

5.0 SUMMARY

The little literary products of the nationalists paved way for the arrival of serious literatures attacking the excesses of colonialism and neocolonial mentalities in Nigeria. The arrival of Chinua Achebe's novels (*Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*) *strengthens the nationalistic themes in Nigerian literatures*. Achebe's novels cleared certain complexities about the African continent and personality. His first novel *Things Fall Apart* was a reaction to the distorted pictures of Africa by the Europeans. More so, Wole Soyinka's plays (*A Dance of the Forests*, *The Strong Breed*, *The Lion and The Jewel*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *The Road*) use the theatre as another avenue for the same nationalistic ventures; even J. P. Clark in his *Ozidi*, *Song of a Goat*, *The Raft*, among other plays elevated the African personality and redirected the Nigerians adrift. On the feminine angle, Nigerian women contributed to the nationalistic consciousness. Writers like Flora Nwapa, Mabel Segun and Zulu Sofola towed the lines of the men in the same nationalistic concern. They rested their art on the need to embrace openness in the society by avoiding sexual segregation. Though many people saw their works as European ideals but others believe that African culture like every other is dynamic and must follow change. Their works fuse elements of the indigenous and Western literary traditions. Although, many of the works of the early nationalists like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dennis Osadebey among others were not really published as books because they

appeared as pamphlets and in newspaper; but some of them have been collected recently in anthologies such as *West African Verse* edited by Donatus Nwoga who categorized their works under pioneer poetry.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

1. Discuss the importance of literature in Nigeria's struggle for independence
2. Nigeria's nationalists were products of western education. How did that aid them in writing literature?
3. What are the major thrusts of nationalist literatures in Nigeria?
4. Relate the concern of Negritude literature with those of Nationalist literature in Nigeria
5. Explain the major factors that led to the emergence of nationalist literatures in Nigeria.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Gerard, Albert (1990). *Contexts of African Literature*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi.

Harrow, Kenneth (1994). *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition*. Portsmouth and London: Heinemann and James Curry.

Owomoyela, Oyekan (1979). *African Literatures: An Introduction*. Waltham, Mass, African Studies Association.

Nwoga, Donatus (1980). (ed.) *West African Verse*. London: Longman. Senanu, K. & Vincent T. (1977). *A Selection of African Verse*. London: Longman.

UNIT 4 LITERARY JOURNALS IN NIGERIA**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 The Horn/The Black Orpheus
 - 3.3 The Mbari Club
 - 3.4 Okike and Other Journals
- 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 emergence of journal literatures in Nigerian premier universities which helped in grooming Nigerian writers. The University of Ibadan, which was the university college affiliated to the University of London, produced the majority of Nigerian writers because of the literary consciousness in the university that resulted from the existence of literary journals on the campus. These journals, which were products of the Nigerian students, started with the advice of the European teachers in the university. The journals were edited by the Nigerian students themselves. We will study the origin of these journals, the effects of the journal in the training of Nigerian writers and the effects in the development of Nigerian literature in all ramifications.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the meaning of journal literatures;
- assess the importance of journal literatures in the development of Nigerian literature;
- discuss journal literatures as Nigerian literatures;
- see the emergence of great Nigerian writers through journal literatures; and
- distinguish journal literatures from other forms of literary expressions.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

In search of a new policy on higher education, the Colonial Office set up the Elliot and Asquith Commissions which recommended the creation of a university college at Ibadan. According to Adewoye (1973), the founding of the college in 1948 “represented the fulfillment of many years of aspiration by Nigerians for the establishment, locally of an institution of higher education.” The British, however, entrenched their cultural hegemony in the new college by specifying that it should have British universities as its model in order to maintain a high academic standard. The college was affiliated with the University of London in what was termed a “special relationship.” This, in practice, forced the University College to adopt the curricula of the said university until 1962 when it became autonomous and came to be known as the University of Ibadan. The residential nature of the college made it possible for it to create intellectual elite in Nigeria. The college was the first institution of higher learning to bring such a large group of talented young men and women from various parts of the country together. Tadena Tamuno wrote that the plan to make the college residential was fully thought-out.

The Asquith Commission favoured the principle of residential universities for a number of reasons: the unsuitability of off-campus accommodation and the necessity to supervise the health of students closely; the widely different backgrounds of the undergraduates and the need to promote unity; the opportunity offered for broadening their outlook through extra-curricula activities. The social climate within the university easily created venues for interaction and mutual edification among the students. This was evident in the growth of campus publications including *The Bug*, *Beacon*, *The Eagle*, *The Sword*, *The Weekly*, *The University Herald*, *The Criterion*, and *The University Voice* which served as the official organ of the students’ union. In the sphere of extra-curricula activities, the Arts Theatre was a major catalyst and it enjoyed the patronage of the small university community. Geoffrey Axworthy of the English department, who was responsible for creating the Drama Unit in the department, also directed plays at the theatre. The experiences of the students in their new environment and the prospects of university education engendered in them an awareness of their status as privileged members of the society with unlimited opportunities in the emergent nation. They were not only fascinated by, but also celebrated their encounter with, the prevailing intellectual attitudes in Europe. Some of the students saw the university campus as a world on its own. Most of the activities that enlivened campus life at Ibadan in those early years originated from students in the humanities.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the factors in the university which led to the establishment of campus journals.

3.2 The Horn/ Black Orpheus

A major development in campus journal was the establishment of *The Horn, a poetry magazine in the Department of English in 1957*. Martin Banham, a young lecturer in the department who was also a fresh graduate of Leeds, suggested the creation of the magazine to John Pepper Clark, then an honours student in the department, who later started and first edited *The Horn*. Banham's proposal was borne out of a desire to experiment with what was obtained at Leeds University, where *Poetry and Audience, a student-run magazine with the same orientation*, was stimulating poetic creation. Interestingly, the official involvement of the English department in this development was minimal because the idea was novel in the university.

W.H. Stevenson, who was part of the department, explained that *The Horn started when John Pepper Clark gathered a committee of three* including Higo Aigboje and John Ekwere and so in January 1957 the first issue of *The Horn* appeared. There were no funds available for such a venture. Martin Banham himself provided enough cash to start it; the English Department provided paper also the printing equipment. But funds had to be raised, and so *The Horn* was sold at two-pence a copy (raised after the third issue to three pence, a price maintained until the end). It could not afford to appear in any but the most modest form which was probably just as well if it were to remain a genuine student magazine. The pioneering role of *The Horn* is often acknowledged but within the few years in which it appeared was due largely to the effort of individuals who were interested in giving impetus to the literary renaissance that it initiated.

After Clark's editorship, it became a rule that only third-year students would edit it. But this never worked. Between January 1957 when its first issue was published and 1964 when it last appeared, *The Horn* only had five editors: J.P. Clark (1957-58), Abiola Irele (1958-60), Dapo Adelugba (1960-62), Omolara Ogundipe (1962-63) and Onyema Iheme (1963-64). Despite its short lifespan, *The Horn* gave exposure to many student-poets and served as a forum for discussing issues related to Nigerian writing. Even though copies of the journal are no longer easily accessible, some poems published in its first three years have been collected in *Nigerian Student Verse*, an anthology edited by Martin Banham. Curiously enough, Clark objected to being represented in the anthology on the grounds that he was not writing "student verse". The few contributions of Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo were also not included in the anthology. They had both left Ibadan and had contributed from Leeds University and Fiditi College respectively. Of the thirteen student-poets: Mac Akpoyoware, Minji Karibo, Pius Oleghe, G.A. Adeyemo, Gordon Umukoro, Yetunde Esan, U. I. Ukwu, R. Opara, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, B. Akobo, A. Higo, J.D. Ekwere and Abiola Irele, whose works constitute the twenty-seven poems that form Martin Banham's anthology, only Frank Aig-Imoukhuede has since published a personal collection - *Pidgin Stew and Other Poems* (1982).

If *The Horn* mainly served the Ibadan student community, *Black Orpheus, another journal started at Ibadan in September 1957, was more ambitious*. It was committed to promoting cultural activity in the entire black world. It was also a brainchild of expatriates - Ulli Beier, a German attached to the extra-mural department of the University, and Janheinz Jahn, his compatriot, who did not reside in Nigeria but showed much

interest in black arts and culture. The special interest of the founders of Black Orpheus in poetry is reflected in its name and the journal made a stronger impact in the society than *The Horn* not only because it had a broader vision and wider circulation but because it also enjoyed the financial support of the Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom and the government of the old Western Region.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What are the major reasons for the establishment of *The Horn* magazine and what is its focus in literature?

3.3 The Mbari Club

The cultural currents stirred by the intellectual elites at Ibadan came to a climax in 1960 with the formation of the Mbari Writers' & Artists' Club, an organization that soon harked a direction for African arts and letters. The Mbari complemented the role of the Black Orpheus in the sense that some of those who formed its nucleus were associated with the journal. The cosmopolitan character of the first Mbari Club is illustrated by some of its founders. These included: Chinua Achebe (Igbo); Frances Ademola, (Ghanaian); Mabel Aig-Imoukhuede (now Segun), (Bini); Ulli Beier, (German-born British citizen); John Pepper Clark, (Ijaw); Mercer Cook, (African-American); the late Chief D.O. Fagunwa, (well-known Yoruba writer); Begun Hendricks, (South African Indian); Vincent Kofi, (Ghanaian); Christopher Okigbo (Igbo); Ezekiel Mphahlele (South African); Demas Nwoko (Igbo) and Wole Soyinka (Yoruba).

The Igbo name Mbari, suggested by Chinua Achebe, has its roots in the Igbo religion where it refers to a house built for, and dedicated to, Ala, *the earth goddess*. It denoted any act of creation in which the light of the gods is reflected in the work of man. The name perhaps bestowed an African essence of the creative enterprise inaugurated at the Mbari centre which was located at the heart of Ibadan. Naturally, the activities of the group led to the formation of similar clubs at Oshogbo and Enugu. Besides the creative ambience it provided for writers, the Mbari centre was also used for art exhibitions, dramatic performances and the training of promising writers. The club became a major cultural institution, strong enough to take over the publication of Black Orpheus in partnership with Longman in 1962. Mbari's success may be seen in the light of its popularization of African writers and their works. Because the club ran a small press, it performed on a large scale what the journal could attempt or only do on a small scale.

The Mbari, for instance, published the first volumes of a number of African poets. Among these were Clark's *Poems* (1962), and Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962) and *Limits* (1964). The club promoted the emergent art of these writers through its encouraging exposure of their works. It is important to note that the writers and artists in the Mbari were not all based in Ibadan. Okigbo, one of the frequent contributors, for example, was teaching at Fiditi College -about twenty miles away from Ibadan. Early Ibadan poetry is conceived here as the totality of the output of the poets, ranging from their

juvenilia in student publications in the fifties, to their poems written just before the civil war, when with the maturation of some poetic voices and the assistance of the Mbari, individual collections had begun to appear. Works published during the period may be seen as unified by certain tendencies, such works being a product of the shared experiences of the writers. At the same time, the works of Achebe, Clark, Soyinka and Okigbo represent both in quantity and enduring merit, the best produced at that period. There is a need to examine the manner in which the syllabus of the English department at Ibadan in its early days in particular influenced the creative expression of her products who, understandably, constitute the majority of our writers even in this contemporary dispensation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Critically assess the role of the Mbari Club in the promotion literature and arts in Nigeria

3.4 Okike and Other Journals

With the establishment of Nigeria's first indigenous university at Nsukka, some of the scholars from Ibadan trooped en masse to the new university. Most of them decided to create a university of excellence by improving on the standard set up at Ibadan as a college of the University of London. University of Nigeria, Nsukka was established in 1960, some years after the graduation of the excellent literary scholars like Achebe, Soyinka, Clark, Segun and Okigbo among others. The Department of English at Nsukka under the headship of Chinua Achebe began the publication of *Okike* which he called "a journal of new writing". He was the Founding Editor for several years before leaving Nsukka. *Okike* was created to cover issues beyond literary works. It covered such areas as creative works, meta-criticism of literature, language and other issues relevant to literary discourse. The other universities which fall into the first generation universities include the University of Ife, Ahmadu Bello University and the University of Lagos also has established literary journals in their departments of English.

Okike became a mouthpiece for several literary scholars within and outside Nigeria. Some prominent African scholars like Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong, Dennis Brutus among many others contributed to this journal. Many prominent scholars and writers in Nigeria began their literary productions from being published in *Okike*. The journal created the opportunity for literary expressions in many forms. Unlike the Ibadan journals which concentrated mainly on poetry and prose, *Okike* gave voice to dramatists because Achebe encouraged the inclusion of plays in the journal. Many known literary critics in Nigeria like Obi Wali, Abiola Irele, and Biodun Jeyifo among others expressed some of their critical discourse in *Okike*. The journal served in various forms to promote literary discourse and later became a reference point in world literature. *Okike* experienced an interregnum when Achebe left Nsukka. *Okike* is now being edited by Prof. Ossie Enekwe. It was and still is a respected journal in the field of literature today. With the multiplication of universities in Nigeria came the multiplicity of literary journals like *Kiabara*, *Kakaki*, *Gong*, *Tablet*, etc. Most of these universities in Maiduguri, Kano, Port Harcourt, Benin, Calabar etc. started various literary journals in the departments of English and Drama which

aided in the development of literary consciousness in Nigeria and Africa at large. However, with time, these journals metamorphosed into pure academic journals with the sole aim of publishing critical works instead of literary works. Although, the students' associations in most departments of English in Nigeria still float literary journals edited by students under the tutelage of a lecturer in the department. These journals now serve the function which *The Horn and The Beacon in Ibadan* served. Some students' clubs like 'The Literary Club', 'Creative Writers' Club' and 'The Creative Discourse Club' among others serve like the then Mbari Club but the issue of inactive sensibility and consciousness have drained the keenness expected in creativity among literary students today. Yet, many young writers emerged from there.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss in details what distinguished Okike from the other literary journals in Nigeria

4.0 CONCLUSION

Early Nigerian writers like Achebe, Clark, Soyinka and Okigbo, for instance, manifested peculiar traits which were best understood in relation to the preference and growth of each of them. Early Clark was representative of the poetry of his era in the sense that some of the best and the worst tendencies in early Ibadan poetry were present in his poems collected in *Poems*. He appeared to have been incapable of refining borrowed methods. His best poems, "Ibadan," "Night Rain" and perhaps "Abiku", were therefore those not stained by technical appropriations from his imitation of the style of Hopkins, Yeats and Eliot. Clark's early poems were generally marked by a nostalgic strain which betrayed his alienation from his people and their culture. If his poem "Ivbie" then made a case for his violated people, "Agbor Dancer" projected his own quest for reunion with the same people and their heritage. Thus, the unnamed dancer merely provided him an occasion for personal reflection. He compensated for his technical dependence by frequently adopting a familiar locale as the setting for his poems.

Clark wrote that their training affected both their understanding and practice of poetic craft in an essay entitled "Another Kind of Poetry" (1966). Apart from the fact that the Ibadan poetry of this period is largely derivative, the medium employed by the poets, especially Okigbo and Soyinka, evinces what, for want of a better label, one may call 'arrogant complexity'. Intended complex effects best confirms the elitist orientation of their art. It is safe to assume that their audience was, in the main, the few university-trained art enthusiasts at Ibadan at that moment who were already furnished with the skill and learning needed to penetrate their work. Okigbo had been termed obscure. He had said that his poetry was not for non-poets. Soyinka's poetry, like Okigbo's, ranks among the most complex literatures in Africa. Chinua Achebe's novel fashioned in line with the style of the British novel reads quite simple because his prose was not poetic; the British writers he read wrote in simplified prose to convey their message.

5.0 SUMMARY

Martin Banham explains in his “introduction” to *Nigerian Student Verse*, that the influence of European literature on Nigerian literature was unwholesome for the growth of Nigerian literature. He explains, “Some of the verse presented here shows only too clearly how deep is the influence of the alien verse of English romanticism upon aspiring Nigerian writers. The more Nigerians can be encouraged to write as Nigerians, about Nigerian themes, for Nigerian audiences, the better for the development of a healthy literature in Nigeria.” Chinweizu and his colleagues clarified this observation in *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*. They highlighted the “failure of craft” in the works of the Ibadan poets, tracing the problem to what they saw as “a divorce from African oral and poetic traditions”. But the truth is that this imitative tendency was a betrayal of the deeper anguish of Nigerian writers at that historical moment. The writers, part of emergent elite incapable of authentic self-expression, were caught in a crisis of identity. It was almost inevitable that they would borrow idioms rooted in European literary traditions to convey African experiences. Wole Soyinka has drawn attention to the fact that a purist outlook on the African imagination was unrealistic. He maintained that it was impossible to kill impulses generated by the contact of Africa with the non-African world, as “individual writers,” in reality, “make their creative emergence from the true and not the wistful untainted backcloth” (“From a common backcloth...” 1963).

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

1. Discuss the foundation of journal literature in the University College Ibadan.
2. What are the major thrusts of *The Horn* and *The Black Orpheus* journals?
3. Assess the influence of *The Mbari Club* in the development of Nigerian literature.
4. There were marked relationship in the style and language of the Nigerian and British writers as discovered in *Nigerian Student Verse*. What led to this unfortunate identity?
5. Distinguish the literature of the early Ibadan writers with that of the contemporary Nigerian writers.
6. Differentiate between *Okike* and the other literary journals in Nigeria.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Aig-Imoukhuede, Frank (1961). *Pidgin Stew and Suffer Head*. Ibadan: Heinemann.
- Aig-Imoukhuede, Mabel. On being a West African Writer. Ibadan 12 June (1961): 11-12.
- Banham, Martin (1961). *Nigerian Student Verse*. Ibadan: U.P. Chinweizu, Jemie, O. & Madubuike I. (1980). *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature Vol. 1. Enugu: Fourth Dimension*.
- Lindfords, Berth (1979). *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures*. London: Heinemann.
- Soyinka, Wole (1967). "From a Common Backcloth: A Reassessment of the African Literary Image." *The American Scholar* 32, 3. 387-396.
- Stevenson, W.H. (1976). "The Horn: what it was and what it did." In *Critical Perspectives on Nigeria Literatures. Berth Lindfords* (ed.) London: Heinemann. 209-233.
- Tamuno, Tekena (1973). *The Formative Years in the University of Ibadan: 1948-73: A History of the First Twenty-Five Years*. Ibadan: UP, --- --- ---. "Mbari -The Missing Link". *Phylon* XXVI, 3 (Fall): 247-254.

UNIT 5 PIONEER DRAMA/THEATRE**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Performance Drama/Theatre
 - 3.3 The Literary drama
 - 3.4 The Emergent New Playwrights
- 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 the emergence of Nigerian theatre/drama. Africa is a rich theatrical environment. All aspects of the people's culture: birth, death, ritual and all rites of passage have theatrical basis. The history of theatre in Nigeria traces back to then hey days before the advent of colonialism. The traditional artist is a complete theatre in practice. In orature, the folktale narrator is regarded as a complete one man theatre. We will study the development of the theatre and the literary drama in Nigeria. We will also take an incursion into the various factors that led the development of the genre in Nigeria over the years.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- trace the origin Nigerian theatre and literary drama;
- discuss the emergence and role of mobile theatres in Nigeria;
- relate the thematic focus of the early theatre practitioners with the present;
- see the early Nigeria theatre as a product of necessity; and
- assess the thematic concern of the early and current dramatists in Nigeria.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 General Overview**

It is difficult to imagine any respectable assessment of contemporary Nigerian art, drama in particular (being more indigenous than other art forms, like the novel) without a consideration of its fountain, and in particular those images, tropes and usages which continue to run through every stage and subsequent development of the drama - from the traditional and trado-modern theatre through the literary theatre

(especially drama of English expression), to the Community theatre, the Cinema and its now ubiquitous successor, the *'Home Video Film'*, sometimes contentiously referred to as "*Nollywood*." It is these archetypal tropes deriving from traditional modes of theatrical expression that also continue to provide the mark of authenticity in contemporary Nigerian drama. This authenticity includes but also transcends the question of language or verbal deployment, to encompass the gamut of theatricality. What we find in contemporary Nigerian drama is a continual projection of the past into the future at every level of theatrical expression.

The emergence of drama in Nigeria through the agency of the numinous is well established. Anthropomorphic representatives of ancestral spirits – egungun in Yoruba, egwugwu in Igbo, masquerade in English – emerge during funeral rites or other rituals around which festivals and myths have been constructed in the indigenous communities. Theatre emerged from the imitation of the egungun display and the appropriation of the ritual motifs for popular cultural ends. Total theatre in the Nigerian contexts is defined in terms of the relative degree of approximation of these motifs of the egungun festival - mask, dance, drumming and singing, drama, audience participation. In contemporary Nigerian theatre output from stage and literary theatre to video film we find a continued quest to represent the cultural nuances of traditional Nigeria in the drama.

A parallel development from about the middle eighties was the rise of English theatre professionalism which had begun to take the theatre of English expression out of the University. Before then, theatre outside the university and school system had been the main preserve of the indigenous language theatre, with the major Nigerian example being the Yoruba Travelling Theatre. By the early 80s some teachers and students of theatre had begun to seek outlet outside the walls of the university. Notable examples were John Pepper Clark who set up his PEC Repertory theatre in Lagos in 1982 and Bode Sowande who retired from the University of Ibadan at a fairly early age to concentrate on his Odu Themes Meridian Productions. The heydays of the rise of professionalism of drama of English expression in Nigerian were in the mid-eighties.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Lagos, a theatre tradition developed featuring well-known English and European musicals, concerts and operas. The actors, concert groups and clientele of the foreign tradition were the new, Westernized elite. The artists featured included Handel and Mozart. Similar concert groups were set up in Ibadan and Abeokuta. Soon, there was a clamour for works based on indigenous Nigerian subject matter, and one D. O. Oyedele is said to have written a play entitled 'King Elejigbo' (1904) in response to the call. The play cannot now be traced, but there are references to it in the Lagos theatre reviews of the period. This theatre tradition did not last beyond the first decade of the twentieth century. Politics was already in the air in Lagos and in other parts of Nigeria, and many of the leading spirits behind the Lagos Theatre Movement, like Herbert Macaulay, soon found politics more attractive than the theatre. For about forty years after the play 'King Elejigbo', there was no notable development, in the Nigerian Theatre until Hubert Ogunde came to the scene in 1944.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the transition from the traditional theatre to the elite theatre in Nigeria

3.2 Performance Drama/Theatre

There was a gradual development of the performance drama or theatre in Nigeria. Alarinjo, the traditional Yoruba theatre so well espoused by Adedeji (“Alarinjo”) is direct ancestor of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre which flourished from the late forties well into the late eighties before its practitioners and their descendants dispersed into television, film and video productions. At its zenith, the Yoruba travelling theatre assemblage had some two hundred different theatre groups criss-crossing the length and breadth of the country Nigeria. The major personages of the Yoruba travelling theatre in its formative years were the acknowledged “father of Nigerian theatre”, Hubert Ogunde, and his contemporaries Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola. They constituted the ‘trinity’ of the indigenous mask idiom in the Nigerian theatre, the defining mark of their vocation being the representation of an irreducible Africanness in language and histrionics. Performances were always preceded by the ‘opening glee’ which comprised traditional drumming, dancing and invocation of the metaphysical realm and pertinent deities. Duro Ladipo’s forte was the ritualised stage in which Yoruba deities such as Sango, Oya and Moremi thundered back to life and electrified stages across the globe. Ladipo was singularly responsible, with the collaboration of transnational culture worker Uli Beier, for bringing the myths of Sango and some other Yoruba deities to the international stage. The theatres of the trio were mutually reinforcing

Hubert Ogunde, who wrote both in English and in Yoruba, more than anyone else, created the awareness of the modern theatre tradition in Nigeria. His was an operatic travelling theatre, and he took his plays to various parts of the country, and also to other West African countries, particularly Ghana and Sierra Leone, for about forty years. Ogunde's plays have religious, social and political themes and titles such as *Garden of Eden*, *Nebuchadnezzar's Feign*, *Herbert Macaulay*, *Journey to Heaven*, *Tiger's Empire*, *Strike and Hunger* and *Yoruba Ronu* (Yoruba rethink). Occasionally, he came into confrontation with the political authorities and had his plays banned. Hubert Ogunde was professionally remarkable in another sense.

Early in his theatre career, he confronted the problem of the frequent resignation and departure of his actresses, especially as soon as they got married and their husbands objected to their wives continuing as actresses because of the stigma attached. Ogunde then solved this problem in a practical way by marrying virtually all his actresses. This stabilized his performing company such that he often had too many actresses and sometimes made some of the women to perform male roles. Ogunde was the first professional theatre man in Nigeria who lived entirely by the art and, indeed, for it.

Ogunde had many followers and imitators, and there is now a flourishing art of the popular theatre. Biodun Jeyifo (1984) listed over a hundred such theatres in Yoruba land alone. They are popular with the masses because they use the local language, and their operatic mode (a balance of speech and music) endears them to the

people. Indeed, the ordinary Nigerian is hardly aware of any other modern theatre form.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Critically assess Hubert Ogunde as “father of Nigerian theatre”

3.3 The Literary Drama

Apart from the popular travelling theatre of Ogunde and his followers, there is also literary drama, largely university-based and elitists. One of the first practitioners of this mode was James Ene Henshaw. He 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 plays were popular in schools and other literate circles in the 1960s and early 1970s, and were the first diet of many budding Nigerian playwrights.

By far, the dominant personality in Nigerian literary drama has been the Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, who has been in active theatre, both inside and outside Nigeria, since the late 1950s. He produced and published many plays. Early in his artistic career, he established the Orisun Theatre Company and the 1960 Masks from which literally flowed a stream of truly remarkable plays. He has a background which includes the University of Leeds and the Royal Court Theatre in London, university jobs in Lagos, Ibadan and Ife and reasonably well-equipped theatres in Ibadan and Ife. Thus, Soyinka was well prepared for an outstanding career as a playwright and theatre-practitioner.

Soyinka has tended to write two types of plays; first, the relatively easily comprehensible play in which he is dealing with a single issue or a limited number of issues in plain language; and second, the more ambitious, full-length play in which he is dealing with a wide array of issues in complex language, often loaded with abstruse imagery and symbolism, and for which he has acquired the reputation of being a difficult writer. The easier plays include *The Lion and the Jewel*, *The Jero Plays*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *A Play of Giants*, while the more abstruse ones include *The Road*, *The Strong Breed*, *Madmen* and *Specialists and Death and the King's Horseman*. In content also, Soyinka has tended to write two types of plays, viz; the political play and the social/metaphysical play. In the political plays, Soyinka exposes the bizarre, insensitive and bestial nature of governance in contemporary Africa. In the social/metaphysical plays, he explores, often in a satirical vein, issues like prejudices, religious hypocrisy, and futurology, or he probes the nature of sacrifices, conflict, the transition from life to death, and the inscrutable supernatural forces which control the universe.

John Pepper Clark is another important playwright. He has published seven plays, namely, *Songs of a Goat*, *The Masquerade*, *The Raft*, *Ozidi*, *The Boat*, *The Return Home*, *Full Circle* and *The Wives' Revolt*. The first four belong to the 1960s, and the

last four to the 1980s. As in his poetry, Clark's setting is the Ijaw Delta environment and his universe is one of storm and tide, of sandbars, boat capsizes and drowning, and the human tragedy enacted therein. The plays, with the exception of *Ozidi* which is Shakespearean in style, have Greek models and seem organized into two sets of trilogies.

Ola Rotimi, who started his writing career in 1966, has been a well-rounded theatre man and a first rate play director. He has published about six plays, namely, *The Gods Are not to Blame*, *Kurunmi*, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*, *If...Tragedy of the Ruled*, and *Holding Talks*. Rotimi's major pre-occupation in his plays is with history conceived as tragedy either in metaphoric or in plain expository terms. *The Gods are not to Blame*, for example, is a Nigerian adaptation of the 'Oedipus theme' in which Rotimi uses the metaphor of communal dispute, self-love and ethnic pride to symbolize the problems that culminated in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70. Thus, it is not the gods who are to blame for Nigeria's national tragedy, but the people themselves who led their nation to disaster through their incautious actions and aggressive self-interest. In *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, the message is even less ambiguous: it is the case of a people who plunge themselves into tragedy either because of the excesses of their leader or the limited vision of the people themselves.

There are several other playwrights in Nigeria who belong to this liberal-conservative ethos, notably Wale Ogunyemi and two women playwrights, Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwueme. Ogunyemi's landscape is similar to that of Ola Rotimi. His *Ijaiye War*, for example, is earlier and uses basically the same material as Rotimi draws on for his *Kurunmi*. Ogunyemi has published many other plays, including *Eshu Elegbara*, and *Obaluaye*.

Zulu Sofola, the first Nigerian woman playwright, has been writing plays for over twenty years. Her titles include *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972), *King Emene* (1974) and *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas*. Her forte is tragedy put in domestic or two ritual setting with human error, insensitivity or crime as the tragic flaw. In *Wedlock of the Gods*, her first play, a girl was bundled off to marriage because her parents needed money from her dowry to pay medical bills for her sick brother. She considers herself as being in bondage for three years the marriage lasted, and then the husband dies. Rather than wait for three months as stipulated by custom or agree to the obnoxious custom of levitation, she becomes pregnant for her former lover. Custom is broken, the consequences are severe - the plot thickens as the tragedy unfolds.

By contrast, Tess Onwueme started writing in the early 1980s. Her plays include *A Hen Too Soon* (1983), *The Broken Calabash* (1984), *The Desert Encroaches* (1985), *The Reign of Wazobia* (1988) and *Legacies* (1989). Unlike Sofola, her vision is not predominantly about the past; rather she moves across temporal and cultural frontiers with relative ease.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Critically assess the thematic focus of most Nigerian playwrights.

3.4 The Emergent New Playwrights

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, a group of young people started expressing unease about the prevailing liberal-conservative ethos in the Nigerian theatre. They were mostly former disciples or admirers of Soyinka, but who were no longer fully satisfied with his vision of society. While still paying respect to his great artistic skill, they suggested that he was not giving the adequate leadership in his plays about what the people ought to do to alleviate their social and political problems. With varying degrees of sophistication, they express their desire to see the theatre in the vanguard of the search for solutions to society's problems and as a propaganda machine designed to achieve this purpose. Some of the prominent names in this socialist alternative are Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Tunde Fatunde, Olu Obafemi, Sam Ukala and Kole Omotoso.

Osofisan has published more than eleven plays, the most important of which are *The Chattering and the Song* (1977), *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* (1978), *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) and *Morountodun* (1982). Bode Sowande's plays include *The Night Before*, *Farewell to Babylon and A Sanctus for Women* (1979). Fatunde has *No More Oil Boom* (1985), *Blood and Sweat* (1985), *No Food, No Country*, (1985) and *Oga Na Tief Man* (1986). Obafemi's publications include three short plays: *Night of the Mystical Beast* (1986), *The New Dawn* (1986), and *Suicide Syndrome* (1988). Omotoso wrote the play *The Curse* (1976).

All these plays in various ways protect the socialist vision of the Nigerian society. At its most competent, for example in Osofisan's plays, the vision is realized through carefully woven plots mediated by limit-credible characters and situations. Some of the playwrights, however, give the impression that their works have been hurriedly put together to catch the moment. Such plays are little more than topical social and political tracts with only a thin veneer of fiction.

This succeeding generations of dramatists of English, for which Femi Osofisan and Bode Sowande remain frontline representatives were not as tired of the gods as they had proclaimed, even if they do seem occasionally wary of their 'inviolability'. Also literary in orientation, their work is however marked by ideological departures, and a toning down of sacred idioms of the numinous in favour of a more secular verbal engagement. The gods continue to appear in the lays of Osofisan, allegedly only as 'metaphor' rather than in their full mystical significance as potent, real or functional personages of the metaphysical world. The distinction between the deployment of the numinous as myth or as metaphor had been subject of scholarly exchange. What is crucial to the current engagement however is the continued appropriation of tropes of the traditional theatre for contemporary dramaturgy in their works.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Most Nigerian playwrights acknowledge Soyinka's influence. Explain why some dramatists towed a new direction

4.0 CONCLUSION

Apart from the traditional folktale narrator and Yoruba Travelling theatre groups at the early state of theatre, theatre in Nigeria was largely university-based and elitist even though the question of authentic representation of indigenous theatre aesthetics was more prominent. The drama of frontline playwrights like Soyinka, John Bekederemo-Clark and Sofola acquitted themselves well in their deep-structure representation of the Nigerian worldview and aesthetics. Soyinka proved also to be consistently master translator of the indigenous ritual stage, with metaphysical confrontation deployed as metaphor for the understanding of life's critical moments in his major works from *Dance of the Forest (1960)* to *Death and the King's Horseman (1975)*. His plays are drawn into the arc of post-coloniality not on account of being post-independence per se but also because of the debates and issues they deliberate set up in opposition to colonial experience and European postulation of epistemological and cultural superiority. Confrontation is usually achieved at two structural levels of drama and dialogue, first by pitching the Yoruba metaphysical world-view in direct confrontation with western/colonial epistemic or ontological systems, and second through telling, reality invoking dialogue.

The late matriarch of the literary stage of English expression in Nigeria, Zulu Sofola, herself a theorist of the African stage, explores the realm of the tragic and ritual as representational idiom in both her *Wedlock of the Gods and King Emene (The tragedy of a Rebellion)*. She is also known for her gender-centred plays. In her work, tragic conflict consists on the one and in a confrontation with temporal and super-temporal powers beyond one's full understanding and grasp, and on the other hand in her immersion in her dual Igbo (Isele Ukwu) and Yoruba traditional heritage.

The other playwrights and theatre practitioners have been in the vanguard of addressing socio-political issues in Nigeria through the theatre. They have been realizing the odds of the Nigerian state in various forms on stage. Unlike, the histrionic concerns of Hubert Ogunde's art, the later dramatists aim more on the correction of political odds, social vices and culture destruction.

5.0 SUMMARY

The Nigerian state has been affecting the Nigerian theatre and drama. What was more difficult to survive was the grip of the Nigerian political economy and its aftermath, which has proved an even greater test for the resilience of the tenets of traditional drama aesthetics. The downturn in the Nigerian economy from about the early eighties had a direct impact on the literary theatre as on various other intellectual sectors. The departments of English and theatre in Nigeria, which had been the nursery of the important dramas, began to suffer severe brain drain and creativity fatigue. Promising playwrights had their attention divided by the sheer need to survive economically and began to turn their creativity into other, occasionally and not so noble, spheres. The commitment of students who were the mainstay of the literary theatre productions (as cast and crew members and as consumers) could no longer be

guaranteed. Many outstanding students could not secure graduate assistantship in university departments where they could have honed their talents. The relative economic security and political stability that produced the great literary works of the first and second generation playwrights had suddenly vanished. Related to this was the problem of dictatorship, the clamp-down on the Nigerian intelligentsia from where came the most vociferous opposition to untoward government policies left the university in droves for either the private sector or the intellectual pastures in Europe, America and even some more favourable climes in Africa such as South Africa where the radical dramatist Kola Omotoso, and more recently the poet and literary critic Harry Garuba reside. Even Soyinka left Nigeria at the height of the draconian experiences. Theatre/dramatic literature in Nigeria is long history of upheavals.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions:

1. Trace the emergence of Nigerian theatre from the time of orature
2. Discuss the role of Yoruba Travelling Theatre in the development of Nigerian Theatre.
3. Carefully assess the influence of Wole Soyinka in Nigerian Theatre practice.
4. What factors led to the emergence of anti-Soyinka playwrights?
5. Highlight the major thematic focus of Nigerian theatre artists/dramatists since the late 80s.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

- Adedeji, Joel (1978). "Alarinjo: Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre," *Theatre in Africa*. Ed. Oyin Ogunba & Abiola Irele. Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 27 – 51.
- Adelugba, Dapo (1978). Wale Ogunyemi, Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi: "Three Dramatists in Search of a Language". *Theatre in Africa*. Ed. Oyin Ogunba & Abiola Irele. Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 201 – 220.
- Clark, John Pepper (1985). "Aspects of Nigerian Drama" in Drama and *Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. (Ed.) Yemi Ogunbiyi. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.
- Jeyifo, Biodun (1984). "The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria". in Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book. (Ed.) Yemi Ogunbiyi. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.
- Osofisan, Femi (1982). "Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos: The Humanistic Dilemma" in Nigerian Theatre." *Okike* 22 (1982): 72 – 81.
- Soyinka, Wole (1982). "Theatre in African Traditional Cultures: Survival Patterns." *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*. 190 – 203.