

MODULE 3 MAJOR TRENDS AND TYPES OF NIGERIAN LITERATURE

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UNIT 1 NIGERIAN LITERATURES AND NIGERIAN SOCIETY**CONTENTS**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall examine the concept of social reality in Nigerian literatures. Social realities include those prevalent behavioral and social factors that reveal to a large extent the social make-up of the Nigerian people. One of these strong social realities is religion. Religion is a key factor in the definition of Africa's social development. Other social realities include politics, rites of passage like birth, death, marriage, community relations and cohesion. Most Nigerian literatures focus on these issues and more in order to expose certain facts about Nigeria to her social structure and existence. We shall use Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine (Novel)*, Tanure Ojaide's *The Fate of Vultures (Poetry)* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again (Drama)* in treating the social realities in Nigerian literatures.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- recognize Nigerian literatures treating social realities as themes
- identify political realities in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*
- appreciate traditional religion as social reality in *The Concubine*
- discuss politics, religion and marriage as social realities in Ojaide's poetry
- assess social mores as essential realities in Nigerian literatures.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Religion and politics are two social factors that affect the social structure of any society. They are both linked and are tied to the proper management of the spiritual and spiritual well-being of individuals in a community. Religion is the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life. In the beginning of history, it was the forces of nature which were first so reflected and which in the course of further evolution underwent the most manifold and varied personification among the various peoples. At a still further stage of evolution, all natural and social attributes of the numerous gods are transferred to one Almighty God, who is but a reflection of the abstract man. Within a purely African philosophical context man is a political animal embellished in religious thought system. If we assume that the religion of any population have become co-coordinated to individuals and the various levels of grouping that include them as a result of a process of selection or politics based on perceived relevance to particular goals at particular levels of structural reference, we can expect to find meaning in the existence of the people as some implication of relevance in the particular social context where it has become fixed. So politics and religion are interlinked in the development of every nation and African states are part of these developmental frameworks that shape the social realities of the people and development.

Most Nigerian literatures have elements of religion and politics in them. The reasons are not far-fetched. African states before the advent of colonialism had strong religious and political structures that were strong and made the inversion of colonialism difficult at the early stage. There was resistance because there was a structure on ground. Africans have strong religious and political structures that worked for the people. Chinua Achebe tried to a very large extent to reveal these structures in *Things Fall Apart as a reaction to the insinuations by the Europeans that Africans did not have culture, religion or political structure before colonialism*. And in his subsequent novels, he gradually exposed how colonialism destroyed these structures in Africa. We shall use Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, a novel set in pre-colonial times, to examine the true structure of religion in Nigeria before colonialism while we use Tanure Ojaide's *The Fate of Vultures (Poetry)* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* in examining the political structure of Nigeria after colonialism. Thus, a comparative presentation of Nigerian religion before colonialism and Nigerian politics after colonialism would be thoroughly exemplified for proper understanding of Nigeria's historical experiences and the writers' burden of transmitting these social values for her posterity.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss religion and politics as basic social realities in Nigerian's development as applied in Nigerian literature

3.2 Religion as Social Reality: Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*

Elechi Amadi is a Nigerian educator, novelist and dramatist, writing in English. Amadi has interpreted in such novels as *The Concubine* (1966), *The Great Ponds* (1969), and *The Slave* (1978) the life and values of the traditional village society. His stories often deal with people who try to change their course of life but fail in it. Amadi's early novels, like Chinua Achebe's, are set in his traditional African world, but they deal with timeless societies which are not poisoned by the effects of colonialism, rationalism, or modern change. Amadi's first novel, *The Concubine*, was published in 1966, six years after Nigerian independence.

The story was set in the area near Port Harcourt. It starts out as a depiction of village life, its conflicts, ancient customs, and gods, but then it proceeds into mythological level. Ihuoma is the most desirable woman in Omigwe village and the tragic heroine, whose well-fed look does a great credit to her husband. He dies, but she has won the heart of the hunter Ekwueme. They deny their love so that Ekwueme can marry another woman, to whom he has been betrothed since birth. At the end Amadi reveals that Ihuoma is actually the wife of the Sea-King, the ruling spirit of the sea, but she had assumed the human form.

The first half of the book pays particular attention to the religious institutions of Omokachi village and demonstrates by aid of apposite narrative incidents the central place these institutions occupy in the daily life of the Omokachi villagers. The opening action focuses on the fight between Emenike and Madume over a piece of land. This conflict sets the realistic tone, and maintains it over the new elements that result from and amplify the dispute. Having defined a realistic frame of reference at the social level, Amadi then injects the religious element into it:

Madume was relieved when he heard that Emenike was back home. It was true he was in very bad shape himself, but the possibility of killing a man filled him with fear. The cost of the rites of purification was prohibitive and even after that he would still be a branded man (3)

Here is revealed in a nutshell the religious basis of Omokachi's social organization: it is not the possibility of a court trial that fills Madume with fear but the looming threat of divine chastisement. A man who kills his kinsman has wronged the gods primarily and must seek absolution in purification sacrifices commensurate with his crime.

Emenike's illness after the fight with Madume provides the occasion for ritual intervention, in the course of which the religious fabric is given sharper scrutiny and exposition. Anyika, the central religious personage comes into view, and so too do the attributes of his office: "Anyika the medicine man was sent for... to the villagers he was just a medicine man and a mediator between them and the spirit world" (5-6).

This presentation is then substantiated by the practical exercise of his office, in which he is seen pouring libation and hanging amulets on doors to keep away evil spirits. The exposition is progressive and judicious. The reader is being introduced to the main corners of the stage, and concurrently to the principal actors. Anyika's libation shows man, the gods and the ancestors communing in a spirit of sacred and secular harmony. The gods are not far; they are near. Invisible physically, they fill man and object with their spiritual presence, and partake of human action in ways that are essentially concrete. Amadioha is king of the skies; Ojukwu is the fair, and the other gods have dominion over the Night, the Earth, and the Rivers, elements through which man comes into permanent experience of the divine presence and influence.

The ritual act performed by Anyika is part of a complex structure of religious observation defined by rules and ordinances. When Ihuoma proposes a sacrifice to Amadioha on her sick husband's behalf, the god's priest Nwokekoro answers: "My daughter, that will be on Eke, the usual day for sacrifices" (9). Details of this kind demonstrate a religious order with a solid internal logic and organization. The priests too are men chosen for their integrity:

The next caller was Nwokekoro, the priest of Amadioha the god of thunder and of the skies. He was a short fat man, old but well preserved and had an easy-going disposition. He never seemed to be bothered about anything. He had no wife and no compound of his own. His small house was in his junior brother's compound. He was getting too old for active farming, so his yams were few and he owned very little property. He was friendly with everyone and was highly respected. His office as high priest of the most powerful god lent him great dignity (8)

The gods are brought down from their remove and presented at work among the villagers. Mini Wekwu, for instance, curbs evil both within and between the adjoining villages, thereby promoting good neighbourliness. The gods of Omokachi are deployed in a hierarchic order that points ultimately to the superstructure of Omokachi's religious belief, culminating as it does in Chineke, "the creator of spirits and men" (59).

The review of the village pantheon ends with Amadioha, Omokachi's principal deity, first among "God's associates" (*The Concubine*, 75). Ruler over the skies and surveyor of rain and sunshine, Amadioha is the most feared and the most venerated of all the gods, a deity whose name no man can invoke when guilty. He holds his worshippers in chaste fear through which they acknowledge the god's supreme authority and their own inferior humanity. But the villagers' relationship with Amadioha, as indeed with all the other deities of the local pantheon, is one of concrete communion. Worship at his shrine therefore takes on the nature of a close personal dialogue between god and man, through which complaints are resolved, wishes met, and during which the god reveals

himself to men so that they can better testify to his existence:

After the main rites Nwokekoro built a fire from a glowing orepe brand which one old man had brought along. The cocks were killed according to ancient rites and boiled with the yams. Before any part of the meal was touched, the priest cut off one wing of the chicken and threw it casually to the right side of the temple. The old men were evidently used to this and did not watch his movement... in a matter of seconds a huge grey serpent crawled out from behind the shrine and began to swallow its share of the feast. It showed no fear and the old men bowed their heads in reverence. The god having been fed, the men fell on the remains of the feast (17–18)

This worship scene closes the first half of the novel's action, but no mention has as yet been made of the sea-king, the principal actor in the collective drama of the village. The reader has been made familiar with the sea-king's other divine peers, their powers, and method of retribution: perjury exposes its perpetrator to Amadioha's thunderbolt; anti-social behaviour to Ojukwu's smallpox; and witchcraft to extermination by Mini Wekwu.

This religious activity comes against the background of Emenike's illness, and more especially against that of his marriage with Ihuoma. Emenike dies unexpectedly shortly hereafter, and veers the dialectical significance of structuring unto its main course. A solid religious foundation has already been laid, so that when the sea-king finally appears, he is accepted for the same reasons that the other deities were accepted; that is to say as a living force within the specific socio-religious context of Omokachi.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Assess the implication of religion in determining marriage, conflict and death as applied in Amadi's *The Concubine*

3.3 Social Issues in Nigerian Poetry: Tanure Ojaide's *The Fate of Vultures*

Of the new generation of African poets and their poetry, there are only a few that one would read and return to. Nigeria's Tanure Ojaide belongs to those few. What makes Ojaide's poetry appealing is not only its technical qualities but its cultural integrity. Ojaide is not the type of poet one remembers only by one good work; he is prolific, and his writings are consistently rich and deeply rooted in the Delta region of Nigeria. He has published more than five books of poetry, including *Children of Iroko and Other Poems*, *Labyrinths of the Delta*, *The Eagle's Vision*, *The Endless Song*, and *The Fate of Vultures and Other Poems*. If there is a persistent and unifying theme in most of his works, it is a single-minded detestation of tyrants combined with an obsessive commitment to social justice. His poems resemble what Soyinka, citing the poet Ted Jones, calls "shot-gun" poems - they are meant to be detonated immediately on the complacent bottoms of enemies.

"Shot-gun" poems are aimed at a target - in Ojaide's case "Africa's or Nigeria's malevolent dictators" - and they have a reason.

This consuming theme of rebellion against tyranny and injustice, recurrent in much of his poetry, he has made inimitably his own. In *The fate of vultures*, where we get images stacked with insular density, representing the poet's powerful plea for accountability for public money from politicians who have gone hopelessly out of control, indeed beyond ministrations:

O Aridon, bring back my wealth From rogue-vaults;
blaze an ash-trail to the hands that buried
mountains in their bowels, lifted crates of
mcash into their closets. (*The Fate of
Vultures and Other Poems* 11)

He equates the corrupt, self-gratifying breed of Nigerian politicians with

"vultures," a biological symbol that is both ominous and sinister. But it is a contextually relevant symbol, implying both the disappearance of "life" and the appearance of political "carcass." In a sense, the withering away of classical public service, where the pursuit of the public good is perceived not only as individually wise but selfishly remunerative, has given birth to the stench of that sinister force - private greed. Ojaide is ready to call a "spade a spade," or more aptly, "a vulture a vulture," for he sees little virtue in obfuscating the ignoble scavenger-role of politicians in Nigeria's contemporary body-politic. For when those charged with duties for guarding public patrimony abrogate their responsibilities, then society is forced to take notice. In the above poem, Ojaide demonstrates, like Camus, that good poetic artistry must be inserted in the dramas of history, not as mere picture-postcard documentation but as a mirror of those corrigible frailties of the human condition in the hope of alerting the "movers and shakers" of the Nigerian polity to do something about it.

In Ojaide's works, political concerns abound, but they are handled with the reasoned devotion and care of a seasoned craftsman. The poet obviously demonstrates that he cannot afford the luxury of "art for art's sake," or pretty musings created to serve the genteel lifestyles of a moribund African parasitic class. He uses politics to invigorate his art but is careful not to let his artistry suffer from political bad breath. Ojaide is as much suspicious of politicians in those elevated seats of power as he is of people who feast on resources they did not work for. He believes that "freedom" for Africans carries with it a price which implies hard work, discipline, and commitment to moving society towards desirable social goals. So he sings:

You can tell when one believes freedom is a windfall and
fans himself with flamboyance. The chief and his council, a
flock of flukes gambolling in the veins of fortune. Range
chickens, they consume and scatter.... (*Vultures* 11)

Empty flamboyance, to him, is a sign of lack of sincerity to self and to others. When powerful politicians steal public funds and waste, they violate the public's sacred trust. So, as poet, he is ready to skillfully use poetic license to satirize the corruption under Nigerian presidents

like Shehu Shagari. In a clever play of poetic pun, he contrasts ordinary Nigerians' deprivation of essential things like food - "garri" - and the billions of nairas which went into the building of Abuja with all the attendant corruption in the allocation of contracts. As he puts it:

Shamgari, Shankari, shun garri

staple of the people and toast champagne; Alexius, architect
of wind-razed mansions, a mountain of capital Abuja has
had its dreams! (Vultures 11-12)

Why is it that former head of state Shagari and his cohorts shunned the basic needs of Nigerians - Ojaide's "garri" (such as access to decent food, clean water, shelter, etc.) and wasted the country's oil money on lavish imports (of champagne, Mercedes Benzes, etc.) and on grand, unproductive public schemes nationwide (which Soyinka has humorously ridiculed as "Quadruple A": Ajaokuta steel mill, Abuja, Aluminium, and the Army)

The poet, being an honest skeptic, thinks that political and economic grandstanding has been pursued, in many cases, at the expense of the basic development of Nigerians. The pun with words such as "mountain of capital" - Abuja as a monumental "capital city" being by a mountain and a place where monumental public money was spent shows the poet's shrewd ability to convey multiple meanings through the ambiguity of images. "Alexius" refers perhaps to Alex Ekwueme, then Vice President, who, as an architect, was one of the major contractors who built Abuja.

But what is Abuja really? Could it be the "elephant dreams" of a nation with excess petro-dollars (or petro-nairas) gone sour? Or could it be a centrist concession - a megalopolis designed to assuage the bitter memories of a much villified (but perhaps redeeming) civil war? Abuja is perhaps both - an elusive quest for the "true African soul" of Nigeria. We should concede that Nigeria is a domain of contrasts: black Africa's giant tormented by unresolved puzzles. Large and wealth-endowed, it has a dynamic and resourceful population. However, it suffers from some of the worst symptoms of the "big country syndrome." National cohesion is at best aspirational, and the country strives continuously to transcend the self-limiting, feet-shooting defeatism of ethnicity. An ethos of "cheat or risk being out-cheated" has crystallized since independence, which has made public trust and public good words only in the lexicon of idealists. Lagos - that quintessential mirror of what is

wrong with Nigeria - i.e., squalor and individual disparities in wealth and social status, ethnic disharmony disguised into religious and sectarian tensions, degenerate opportunism reinforced by a self-seeking social ethics, and a rowdy but humorous and open attitude to self-criticism - all these made it necessary, if nothing else, for Nigeria to opt for fresh lease on progressive nationhood. A new capital perhaps serves as a first step. Surely, Abuja - despite all the waste which went into her construction - could serve that real need for unity of a potentially great nation.

In Ojaide's poems, "Where everybody is king," we are confronted with a theme which has larger significance for contemporary Africa. The setting of the poem is Agbarha, and the poet employs the lyrical qualities of traditional Urhobo poetry (the ethnic group from which

he hails) to shed light on some self-defeating attitudes characteristic of some contemporary Africans:

Come to Agbarha where everybody is king
and nobody bows to the other. Who cares to acknowledge
age, since power doesn't come from wisdom? And who
brags about youth when there's no concession to vitality?
You just carry your head high. And do you ask why
where nobody accepts insults doesn't grow beyond its petty
walls? (Vultures 58)

The humor of the poem is in its sarcasm. The Urhobo town of "Agbarha" could be any place in Africa - it is a symbolic place of "larger Africa" written small. The poet, in some sense, laments contemporary African attitudes which show no respect for traditional African authorities and institutions. Foolish pride becomes very self-destructive if it does not make concession to the wisdom of elderly experience and the vitality of youth. The poet is even more pointed in his public indictment of the indolence of some of his people when he states:

When you come to Agbarha mind you, the town of only
kings, there are no blacksmiths, no hunters; you will not
find anybody doing menial jobs that will soil the great
name of a king - nobody ever climbs the oil-palm nor taps
the rubber tree. Everybody is as bloated as a wind-filled
bag. (Vultures 58)

In short, foolish pride - Ojaide's "wind-filled bag" - is no substitute for humility to one's manual trade and hard work. This could, of course, be said for many places in Africa where the culture of consumption has outstripped that of production, resulting in a grave economic and social crisis in the continent. Ojaide sees that some parts of contemporary Africa are "basket cases" precisely because the pre-colonial attitudes of hard work, fending for oneself, and engaging in food production and artisan activities have increasingly been unfortunately displaced by a dangerous craving for consumerism and flamboyance. The role of the state and some external "do-gooders" have not, many times, helped either, by their adverse policies and actions, which have served to tax heavily rural producers to appease politically more vocal urban consumers.

The imagery, the terseness of the message, the humor - all point to Ojaide's view that even dignity has to be earned. What the above poems demonstrate, as indeed most of Ojaide's poetry, is that his artistry is largely informed by a deep and unabashed interest in the events and direction of his society. In this sense, the poet is not ashamed to evoke images from within his own local universe. Corrupt politicians and their religious co-conspirators take carnivorous traits - "hyenas" or "vultures" - or the poet retrieves murderous tyrants such as "Ogiso" from his Urhobo past and transposes their roles to fit modern tyrants. All these are the socio-political realities in Nigeria (Africa).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Comment on the political realities of Nigerian society as portrayed in Ojaide's poetry.

3.4 Nigerian Drama and Social Realities: Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is a satire, because Rotimi, critical of the ills in the Nigerian society, is out to condemn them through the vehicle of laughter and mockery. It is a comic or mild satire because the events characterized the actions of some of the characters in the play which make us laugh. Individuals, institutions and the society as a whole are ridiculed. However, the major object or subject of attack and derision in the play is Lejoka-Brown (the hero). In making fun of his hero, Rotimi is indirectly mocking the Nigerian society as a whole. The playwright lampoons his hero's idea about politics.

In the discussion between Lejoka-Brown and Okonkwo, the former has this to say why he takes to politics: "Are you there...? Politics is the thing, no in Nigeria mate, you want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life? No, no... you want to chop a big slice of the national cake? Na politics" (*Our Husband*, 4). Lejoka-Brown's motive in joining politics is not dictated by his sense of patriotism and service but he sees politics as a means to an end. He is certainly myopic, ideologically barren and too ridiculous to be a leader of the nation. In exposing Lejoka-Brown's motive, Rotimi is subtly indicting the decadent Nigerian political activists. By making jest of Lejoka-Brown, Rotimi is indirectly attacking our greedy, selfish and pleasure seeking leaders in Nigerian society. Hear Lejoka-Brown: "It is a war, politics is war. Ooo I am not taking no chance this time I took things slow and easy and what happened? I lost a bye election to a small crab". (*Our Husband*, p. 7) Certainly, Lejoka-Brown's statement evokes laughter in us. Yet, it goes to show how crude and ruthless he is. If Lejoka-Brown is taken as a symbolic representation of Nigerian leaders, one can then say that the playwright is criticizing Nigerian leader's use of brute force to achieve political ambitions. Lejoka-Brown's surprise and attack campaign strategy elicits the playwright's mockery. Although, Lejoka vigorously explained to his party members the nature of his military strategy, he only succeeded in dramatizing his hollow mentality. He says: "Gentlemen, our election campaign plan must follow a platform of military strategy known as surprise and attack..." (*Our Husband*, p. 50) From Lejoka's campaign plan, he exposes the fact that he is incredibly ridiculous. Rotimi portrays him as a man who fails to understand the difference between a politician and a soldier.

Polygamy – a system of marriage in Nigeria did not escape Rotimi's ridicule. The playwright dramatizes the incessant quarrels and arguments between Sikira and her co-wife Liza, live a dog and cat's life, constantly fighting one another. Sikira and Liza's relationship is that of fear and mutual suspicion. Sikira fears that Liza might overshadow her. Secondly, Sikira thinks that Liza being more educated than herself would make the latter more domineering and overbearing than herself. In order to forestall such a situation, Sikira picks quarrel with Liza at the least provocation. Lejoka-Brown's household is in reality a fictional representation of what actually happens in most polygamous

families. In directing his satire at such a home, Rotimi is indirectly cautioning prospective polygamists of the consequences of such a marriage.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* presents pure Nigerian religious realities before colonial times. We see a society that is enmeshed in religious beliefs about everything around them. Everything within the Nigerian society has religious attachment which determines the way the people react to their environment and to their social cohesion. Nigerian religious rites of passage are a social factor that brings the people together in all their beliefs and practices. This novel exemplifies this social reality. Tanure Ojaide's collection of poetry, *The Fate of Vultures*, examines the state of governance in Nigeria as it affects the Nigeria society. This collection demonstrates the back and forth of Nigeria's history, and locates the solution to the imperatives within the Nigerian society. Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* takes a critical look at the Nigerian family and the distancing effects of politics, the issues of polygamy, the deceits of the political class and the social trauma of political make believe. In these works, we see the social factors that have been the bane and stronghold of the people's social being.

5.0 SUMMARY

The three works studied here in the three genres reveal various aspects of Nigerian social milieu. We see religion, politics, and marriage, among other issues as social realities in Nigerian society. All aspects of traditional religious beliefs are revealed in *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi. We see a people with defined religious beliefs in God, gods and other elemental forces. There are patterned modes of worship. There are natural phenomena which have meaning in the religious lives of the people. In Tanure Ojaide's collection of poetry, *The Fate of Vultures*, and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* we see pictures of the inevitable traumas of the people where politics and other decadences try to outsmart the people's social standing. Here, the social realities are rehashed as the people's ways of lives are exposed. These works have shown to a large extent, how the Nigerian writers have recorded the social realities of the Nigerian people from different dimensions.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the basic reasons for reflecting social realities in Nigerian literature?
2. Explain religion as a social force in Amadi's *The Concubine*.
3. Appreciate Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* as revealing political/marital realities in Nigeria.
4. Assess the treatment of social realities in Tanure Ojaide's *The Fate of Vultures*.
5. Discuss the effectiveness of Nigerian writers in reflecting the Nigerian society in their works.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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Rotimi, Ola (1982). *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Ibadan: Longman.

UNIT 2 NIGERIAN HISTORY AND NIGERIAN LITERATURE 1: MILITARISM**CONTENTS**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will examine the theme of military and other political issues in Nigerian literature. Military politics is one of the unfortunate offshoots of colonialism in Africa and consequently a recurrent theme in the African novel. In African culture, there are people traditionally trained to fight wars in case of external aggression. These trained men are often seen in the time of need. They obey those occupying political or tradition executive powers that they vowed to protect. They do not imagine themselves occupying the political positions as heads of government or heads of their communities. However, when the colonial powers came into being in Africa, they trained Africans in the art of their kind of wars. They exposed Africans to wars by recruiting them into fighting the first and the second world wars. These African military men encountered European soldiers in battle field. They learnt new logistics of military intelligence. We shall study the treatment of these themes in Nigerian literature using some Nigerian literary works as yardsticks.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand military and political themes in Nigerian literature;
- assess the use of military and political themes in Nigerian literature;
- appreciate the use of militarism as theme in Nigerian literature;
- discuss the use of militarism as theme in Nigerian literature; and
- identify Nigerian literatures with military politics as subject matter.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The military rulers who tasted power never wanted to relinquish power. For instance, since Nigeria's independence 48 years ago, the military have served the political arena for over 30 years. The military rulers held on to power with endless promises of democracy. Many Nigerian writers who wrote about militarism have presented them as being corrupt more than the people they are supposed to correct. Most of them developed into dictators like Muammar Ghadaffi of Libya and the late Sani Abacha of Nigeria. Many African countries are still under the grip of militarism because it is either their leaders are military rulers or ex-military. One still sees the same military politics even as the people are hopeful of a democratic government in place.

Many Africans believe that military politics was a reaction to the corrupt practices of the political class. For instance, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* was described as a prophetic work because it was launched almost at the brink of the first military coup d'état in Nigeria. Chinua Achebe believed then that the corruption going among the First Republic politicians in Nigeria might trigger off a possible coup as a corrective measure. However, this dream of correction turned into pure anarchy as the military leaders projected their militarism as tactics in governance. These military rulers siphon the people's economic base and save huge sums of money in foreign accounts. They turn the country's treasury into their personal accounts. The situation seems very pathetic.

The theory of military intervention in politics in Africa and other third world countries is a catalytic post-colonial discourse. In Nigeria, the inability of the political elite to give the young nation the needed creative force to move forward and the employment of political institutions to serve the whims and boisterous accumulative urge of sectional leaders created the chasm that heralded the first military coup in 1966. Thus, in the wake of the first coup d'état and counter-coups in Nigeria (and Africa), the men in uniform had at various times, unimaginatively harped on the same tune as the motivation for their over-throw of legitimate governments, that is, 'the love for country'. Unfortunately, the soldiers have never achieved the litany of objectives that brought them to power. Some of the social decadence that they sought to eliminate includes corruption and outright embezzlement, the quest for genuine federalism, the promise of more inclusive arrangement, political stability, reduction of poverty level, safety and security of life, and better health facility.

The military by nature rules by command and obedience; thus no room for opposition that would have guaranteed checks and balances of any sort, and the gulf they tried to fill, by and large, encouraged unrestricted access to the national resources which they expended so unsparingly, irresponsibly and inefficiently. Thus, the mottled gangsters' circuit show became a centrifugal force which drew the whole military institution from its

lofty ideals of professionalism, national security and loyalty; and the military's longing for stable polity became a chimera in an induced culture of violence which became a nucleus of incoherence with the embezzlement of public funds heightened only by degree as the Nigerian military produced a nest of millionaire and multi-millionaire generals. Thus this economic war of looting waged on Nigeria plundered its resources while the impoverished citizens live in squalor and abject poverty and the purportedly 'redemptive missions' led to 'ruinous mission' as the military grew into a mildew and ominous albatross on the political terrain, emphasizing only its oppressive endowments; the archetypal characterization and role possessed at the early morning of colonial irruption on the continent.

Some theorists and politicians have however carved a specious argument and an Alice-in-Wonderland theory of a northern oligarchy of the Hausa/Fulani, whose nomenclature changes according to the fancy and degree of mystifications and political bruise sustained by lachrymal scholars and political victims. Thus the Kaduna mafia is thought to be the manipulating force behind military rule in Nigeria in a votary of castigated hegemonic philosophy of the caste, Maitama Sule Dan Masani Kano, which nearly lent credence to this myth when he freely uncovered a clandestine enterprise in one of his numerous interviews, stating that: a directive was issued to all the ministers in Sardauna's cabinet, that each time any of them, was on tour they were to ensure that they visit schools and recruited people into the military. The occasion and motivation for this surreptitious gang up, was the bestial treatment meted to political elite in Iraq at the dawn of the country's first coup.

Maitama Sule's confessions, like the legendary confessions of a prodigal acolyte before mother "Idoto" in Okigbo's poem, a necessary ritual for his baptism into statesmanship seems so wild, narrow and arrogant, seeing the ruinous consequence of the perverse vision on Nigerian political and economic epistemological space: one discovers an oppositional algebraic sum that only points at the "narrowness of vision" of some self-seeking and self-opinionated bunch of ethnic chauvinists who laundered themselves to power through their surrogates and thus violently and relentlessly maintained a vertical network of personal and patron-client relations. Thus the military's troublous (mis)adventure in politics drew Nigeria to the fringes with the dubious regimes of Babangida and Abacha (1985-1998) as the worst period of crisis and military dictatorship in the entire post-independence period and as the time tickled away, the juntas and the whole military institution drifted and lost their sense of direction. And second, the greed of the military dragged the nation by degrees, slowly but surely away from the project of nationhood, and thus by the end of almost forty years of military rule, Nigeria was far more fragmented than it was in January 1966, when they first seized power.

Thus, the pains and frustration of military rule equally foregrounded the realities of some post-colonial literary texts in (African) Nigeria, whose grains include anguish, privation, fatalism and cynicism. Who is the Writer? A writer may be protean in nature, depending on the perception and context of his/her conception or cognition. Within general academic province, she/he is an intellectual in a field of knowledge. But significantly, she/he is a member of the society. More specifically, however, the writer in this context as a member of society and like any member of society partakes of the observable

experience(s) of the society. In the universe of this discourse, the writer, unlike other members, is conceived as one who portrays and examines these experiences in a specialized creative manner and with the sole aim of sourcing for relevant materials from the pool of experiences. The selected materials (experiences) he/she interprets, recreates imaginatively, and reflects or refracts, depending on his/her level of consciousness and degree of commitment. The writer is therefore a true artist, always wanting to create works answering the most urgent questions engaging the contemporary mind. One significant feature of the writer in this context is not only his cognition of life but also an aesthetic interpretation and artistic revelation of cultural environment to yield the link between art and life that queries the mode or medium of transmission.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the role of the Nigerian writer in the correction of militarism in Nigeria?

3.2 Militarism as Theme in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

The novel starts out by describing a Cabinet meeting. After the session is closed it turns out that outside the palace there is a crowd of people from the province of Abazon who try to get to meet the President. The people are dissatisfied because, as it later turns out, Sam has caused them to suffer by shutting down water-holes in the province, which are dry as a result of the drought. He refuses to meet the delegation. After this event, Ikem goes to meet the delegation. It turns out that he is in a way one of them, born and raised in Abazon, and has come to be greatly respected by the Abazonians as the famous editor of the National Gazette. When he leaves the Abazonian delegation that day, he is stopped by the traffic police because of some misdemeanour. It is later revealed that he was followed by State Research Council agents who needed proof that Ikem had actually visited the delegation in order to be able to accuse him of treason for siding with the rebellious Abazonians. Sometime after this, Ikem is fired from the National Gazette by orders from the President, who thinks Ikem's writing in the Gazette is too critical of his "administration". The President actually wants Chris to do the firing, but he refuses. After being sacked, Ikem makes a radical speech at the University of Bassa (the capital of Kangan). The speech is purposefully misquoted in the Gazette the next day, giving the impression that Ikem wants the President dead. He's charged of treason and conspiracy, soldiers come to pick him up from his home and shoot him dead, claiming it was an accident.

After this episode, Chris feels he can no longer work under President Sam as Commissioner for Information. He is afraid he is going to wind up like Ikem, and goes into hiding. A while later, he too is charged with treason and becomes a fugitive for real. After a couple of weeks hiding, he decides to travel away from the capital to the province of Abazon. When he reaches the province, it turns out that there has been some kind of a coup d'état and the President has fled the country. Upon hearing this he joins a celebration on the street and meets a drunken policeman. By accident, the man shoots him dead.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Chinua Achebe writes about the problems facing newly independent African states. The prevailing theme and the most visible one of these

problems is the corrupt, dictatorial rule set up in Kangan (Nigeria) and most of the other "new" African states that let down the dreams and hopes that were associated with independence. Although the rulers were no longer European, and although they were a lot closer to the people than their European predecessors, they fairly soon distanced themselves from the people. The first instance of this alienation in the novel is the way Sam deals with the problem of the Abazonian delegation. Instead of going out to meet them by himself, he assigns someone else to do it. The fact that he built himself a luxurious lakeside mansion is another representation of this. There is also the theme of oppressive dictatorial rule. The way Sam deals with Ikem is reminiscent of traditional totalitarian states, especially the Latin American juntas. This is also the case with freedom of speech in Kangan. The paper, apparently the only one in the country, is censored and orders regarding its contents often seem to come straight from the President.

Another theme of the book is described in Ikem's peculiar dilemma. Despite his position as editor of the Gazette, he wants to appear like just another Kangan worker. Therefore he doesn't ride a company car to work, but drives by himself in an old beat-up car. The dilemma is pointed out to him by a taxi driver: by driving himself, he is taking away a job opportunity from some poor Kangan chauffeur. The larger problem here is the position of the black, African elite in the new African countries, where the elite has traditionally been of European origin. There was no elite class in the pre-colonial period in Africa. The novel also deals with the theme of being a been-to, an African who has come back to his country after a longer stay in the West. The main characters are all been-tos and this is reflected in the ways in which they try to position themselves in relation to the "common" Kangers. An example of this is how Chris relates to Emmanuel, a university student leader; and Braimoh, a cab driver.

There is a direct reference to the West in the scene in which Beatrice goes to a party that Sam has organized to impress an American journalist. The journalist wraps the President and the whole Cabinet around her finger, lecturing them about how Kangan should take care of its foreign affairs and debt. She represents the attitudes of the West to the African countries in general and their unequal standing in world politics. According to Walter Rodney the colonial machinery created a military elite that later became military dictators in the post-independence era. A good example is Sam, the military despot in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Critically explain how Sam, the military president, exhibited dictatorial governance in Kangan.

3.3 Militarism as Theme in Okigbo's *Labyrinths*

In 'Lament of the Drums', one of the segments in Okigbo's *Labyrinths*, a song of exile, depicts the parlous state into which Nigeria has fallen. It thematizes the rape of democratic values by the military and their opportunistic civilian collaborators, the perversion of justice, the underdevelopment of the country through the wanton waste of her human and material resources, and the overall degeneration of the land. The elegy ends with:

The wailing is for the Great River:
Her pot-bellied watchers
Despoil her... (p.50)

The river, of course, is the Niger from which the country derives its name. The ellipsis indicates that the destruction of the land shall be a continuous process. As aptly predicted by the poet, the Nigerian Armed Forces that are supposed to protect the land lay siege to it, fall upon its fat like robbers, and strip the people of their laughter. Okigbo brings back the image of the predatory eagles in 'Elegy for Alto' to express the idea of a second conquest, but this time around the usurpation comes from within:

THE EAGLES have come again, The eagles rain down on
us - POLITICIANS are back in giant hidden steps of
howitzers, of detonators, (p. 71).

The neo-colonial African politician - civilian or military - continues with the structures of exploitation and privilege erected by the white conquerors in the colonial period. Although Okigbo hailed and praised the architects of the first military putsch in Nigeria, the Majors' coup-of January 15, 1966, he recognized the danger in the Armed Forces perceiving themselves as politicians and warned the self-acclaimed saviours against the temptation to loot the nation's treasury and thereby commit the mistakes of civilian politicians. He intones:

Alas! the elephant has fallen - Hurrah for thunder - But
already the hunters are talking about pumpkins: If they
share the meat let them remember thunder. The eye that
looks down will surely see the nose; The finger that fits
should be used to pick the nose. Today - for tomorrow,
today becomes yesterday: How many million promises can
ever fill a basket... (p.67)

It is fruitless counting the number of military coups - botched or successful - that have been reported in Nigeria. The same facile explanation of saving the people from themselves and from evils of maladministration and economic mismanagement and returning the country onto the path of true democracy is proffered by the coup plotters. It is sad to note that the promise has so far remained unfulfilled. The intervention of the military in the politics of the nation is a total disaster. The most urgent task that confronts the Nigerian people is how to deliver their country from the death-clutch of its greedy Armed Forces. The joy that attends the poet's homecoming, like the ephemeral euphoria at Independence, is deceptive and ironic. Correctly apprehended, it is the joy of freedom from being. The poet's homecoming is celebrated in terms that suggest the Worship of Death:

Death herself,
the chief celebrant,

in a cloud of incense, paring her finger nails...
 At her feet rolled their heads like cut fruits;
 She bathed her knees in the blood of attendants;
 her smock in entrails of ministrants... (p.55)

The images remind us of the pogrom in which thousands of Igbo people lost their lives in the Northern part of the country and the waste of lives during the Civil War. Nigeria is portrayed as mother-earth that consumes her own children but, unlike earth-mother, the country continually fails to profit from the promise of procreation and regeneration and, therefore, remains a waste land. The picture of a hecatomb and horror is relatively the same for most post-Independence states of Africa. Carnage, a regular feature in modern African history, continues to rage in Algeria, Liberia, Rwanda and Somalia. The continent bleeds and bleeds again from self-inflicted wounds, as if to prove the veracity of Yambo Ouologuem's thesis that she is bound to violence. Her poetry is an unbroken paean to Moloch. The poet's homecoming reminds us of Thomas Carlyle's *Worship of Sorrow*. The current political debacle in Nigeria is a re-enactment in its horrendous detail of the tragic events that led the country to the path of war in the late sixties. The detention of M. K. O. Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, is analogous to the imprisonment of Obafemi Awolowo on treasonable felony charges. 'Both parts of *Silences*', Okigbo wrote in the 'Introduction to *Labyrinths*', 'were inspired by the events of the day. 'Lament of the Silent Sister', by the Western Nigeria Crisis of 1962, and the death of Patrice Lumumba; 'Lament of the Drums' by the imprisonment of Obafemi Awolowo, and the tragic death of his eldest son.' (p. xii)

It is not an exaggeration to assert that Nigeria's season of anomy started barely two years after her attainment of political Independence. Despite the long period of doom, there is still not even a shadow in the horizon of the possibility of relief for the suffering of the people. The flowers of the nation, the minorities, and the multitudes of pariahs - all aliens in their own land, like 'the drums' (the ancestors) - 'sense/ With dog-nose a Babylonian capture' (p.46) and shriek in the agony of despair as they lament daily their predicament and watch their supposed protectors usurp their being, make a mockery of their sacrifice, and stifle their seeds to death. They either embrace revolutionary violence, as Okigbo did, or continue to moan in despair, or go into exile. It is thus clear that the-dream of freedom is still a tantalizing mirage as Nigeria persists in treading the path of thunder.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain how Okigbo captures militarism in his *Labyrinths*

3.4 Militarism as Theme in Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

Again in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, we see attack on the ex-military personnel in Nigeria attempting to go into civilian politics with the same military mentality. The drama is a satire, critical of the ills in the Nigerian society. The major object or subject of attack and derision in the play is Lejoka-Brown. He was ex-military personnel, a veteran who believes so much in his military intelligence in outsmarting everybody. Rotimi

makes fun of Lejoka-Brown because of military madness. The playwright outrightly lampoons his hero's idea about politics with military intelligence. In the discussion between Lejoka-Brown and Okonkwo, the former has this to say why he takes to politics:

“Are you there...? Politics is the thing, no in Nigeria mate, you want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life? No, no... you want to chop a big slice of the national cake? Na politics” (Our Husband, p. 4)

Lejoka-Brown's motive in joining politics is not dictated by his sense of patriotism and service but he sees politics as a means to an end. He is certainly myopic, ideologically barren and too ridiculous to be a leader of the nation. In exposing Lejoka-Brown's motive, Rotimi is subtly indicting the decadent Nigerian political activists. By making jest of Lejoka-Brown, Rotimi is indirectly attacking the greedy, selfish and pleasure seeking leaders in Nigerian society. Hear Lejoka-Brown:

It is a war, politics is war. Ooo I am not taking no chance
this time I took things slow and easy
and what happened? I lost a bye election to a small crab.
(Our Husband, p. 7)

Certainly, Lejoka-Brown's statement evokes laughter in us. Yet, it goes to show how crude and ruthless he is. If Lejoka-Brown is taken as a symbolic representation of Nigerian leaders, one can then say that the playwright is criticizing Nigerian leader's use of brute force to achieve political ambitions especially the ex-military personnel who are occupying political positions in Nigeria. Lejoka-Brown's surprise and attack campaign strategy elicits the playwright's mockery. Although, Lejoka vigorously explained to his party members the nature of his military strategy, he only succeeded in dramatizing his hollow mentality. He says:

Gentlemen, our election campaign plan
must follow a platform of military strategy
known as surprise and attack...
(Our Husband, p. 50)

From Lejoka's campaign plan, he exposes the fact that he is incredibly ridiculous. Rotimi portrays him as a man who fails to understand the difference between a politician and a soldier. And this is the problem of militarism in Nigerian politics. Most of these ex-soldiers in civilian politics still practice the hard-line military tactics on the people to the extent that the people could not distinguish the former military rule from the current democratic dispensation. Olusegun Obasanjo's democratic rule in Nigeria could not be differentiated from his military rule. The same brute, force and anarchy also prevailed. This is the symbolic representation in Lejoka-Brown.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss the way in which Rotimi attacked militarism in Nigerian politics in *Our Husband Has*

Gone Mad Again.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The role of the military in Nigeria has been more of the negative. As seen in the works under study in this unit, they come to correct but end up destroying what they ought to correct. A 'post-colonial' view of Nigerian history is an entirely ugly record because of the ugly military imposition of power. This study enables us to understand what a people have become in the process of a particular form of political and cultural contact. It tells of an important, even crucial, moment in a process of becoming a stable political nation. It acknowledges that colonialism was a fact of history that Nigerians can not dismiss urgently. The military created regimes of trauma. In such regimes, national identity is a mere fabrication, defined by passports and legal instruments merely, a form of identity. In such a situation, history is the account of the post-colonial encounter because there are no longer nations and peoples, and there is nothing to remember or recall. The military reminds us that the experience of colonialism dissolves all identities, erases nationalities, makes destiny irrelevant and even problematic. It is different from the condition created by national histories, even when that history is rife with exile and dispersal. That is why it helps to see that *Anthills of the Savannah* is not about nation-building in the post-colonial era, but about the destiny of particular peoples, a destiny conceived as having a life and purpose of its own. The anthills of the savannah are eternal reminders of the many wild fires of every national history. Their only theme is renewal, a renewal that crashes at the point of hope. The coup predicted in Okigbo's *Labyrinths* forewarns the looming catastrophe associated with military politics which is out to bring respite to the people but ended up being more traumatic than the preceding corrupt government. Lejoka-Brown in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is a typology of the military civilians permeating all evils in the name of democratic dividends.

5.0 SUMMARY

Nigerian literatures with militarism as theme are common in Nigeria because of the long history of military leadership in Nigeria. We see Sam, Chris and Ikem as the residues of western colonial might entrenching western values in various ways in Nigeria. Clearly, of course, both Chris and Ikem, two of the principal thinkers in the *Anthills of the Savannah*, think they are intellectuals engaged in the building of a new and just post-colonial, or more exactly, a post-independence, society. The final issue is not about the future of the state, but the future of the people. In *Labyrinths*, Okigbo expresses the fear that might result from militarism which eventually manifested in the Nigerian civil war. He warns that the progress of a people is determined upon the collective responsibility of the masses in achieving a common goal. The likes of Lejoka-Brown in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* must be flushed out if a true democratic dispensation is to be experienced in Nigeria. Nigerian writers have been in vanguard of expressing the fears associated with militarism in Nigeria as revealed in these works and many more not mentioned here.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer these questions carefully:

1. Explain why Nigerian writers use militarism as themes in their works.
2. What are the effects of military intervention in *Anthills of the Savannah*?
3. Discuss how Okigbo expressed fears about militarism in *Labyrinths*.
4. Lejoka-Brown is a typology of Nigerian military leaders. Explain this as exemplified in Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*.
5. Assess the influence of militarism in Nigeria as reflected in Nigerian literatures.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 NIGERIAN HISTORY AND NIGERIAN LITERATURE 2: WAR

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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 - 3.2 Nigerian Civil War in Nigerian Novel: Okpewho's *The Last Duty*
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- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall examine Nigerian literatures that treated the issue of wars. African countries have had history of wars. We have had Nigerian-Biafran War of 1968-1970. There are many war literatures in Nigeria about Nigerian-Biafran war. They include: Eddie Iroh's *Forty Eight Guns for the General and Toads of War*, Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace*, Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, Achebe's *Girls at War amongst other* numerous titles. We shall examine some novels, poetry and drama treating the theme of war in Nigeria.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand that Nigerian war literature exists;
- appreciate Nigerian writers writing about wars;
- assess any Nigerian literature with war themes;
- recognize Nigerian literatures with war themes; and
- identify Nigerian writers that write about wars.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

A war literature is a literature in which the primary action takes place in a field of armed combat, or in a domestic setting (or home front) where the characters are preoccupied with the preparations for, or recovery from, war. The war literature's main roots lie in the epic poetry of the classical and medieval periods, especially Homer's *The Iliad*, Virgil's *The Aeneid*, the *Old English saga Beowulf*, and different versions of the legends of King Arthur. All of these epics were concerned with preserving the history or mythology of conflicts between different societies,

while providing an accessible narrative that could reinforce the collective memory of a people. Other important influences on the war literature include the tragedies of such dramatists as Euripides, Seneca the Younger, Christopher Marlowe, and Shakespeare. Shakespeare's *Henry V* provided a model for how the history, tactics, and ethics of war could be combined in an essentially fictional framework. Romances and satires in Early Modern Europe--Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, to name two of many--also contained elements of military heroism and folly that influenced the later development of war literatures. In terms of imagery and symbolism, many modern war literatures (especially those espousing an anti-war viewpoint) take their cue from Dante's depiction of Hell in *The Inferno*, John Milton's account of the war in *Heaven in Paradise Lost*, and the Apocalypse as depicted in The Bible's Book of Revelations. All of these works feature realistic depictions of major battles, visceral scenes of wartime horrors and atrocities, and significant insights into the nature of heroism, cowardice, and morality in wartime.

Communal wars are common in Nigeria. Some of these wars are caused by tribal differences while others are caused by certain civil issues like the killing of an Umuofia woman in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the war over land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi in Achebe's *Arrow of God*. Communal wars are common in Africa. In Nigeria, the civil war of 1967 - 1970 influenced many literary works. Apart from memoirs which gave accurate accounts of personal experiences during the war like Soyinka's *The Man Died* amongst other works, there are rich stocks of war literatures in Nigeria in all the genres. There are many war literatures in Nigeria written after the war even presently in 2007 when a young Nigeria, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, wrote *Half of a Yellow Sun, a story of the Nigerian-Biafran war almost 40 years after the war*. Judging by the steady stream of publications on the subject, they still seem to have much to say. For Eddie Iroh, "to stop writing about (the war) would be to stop writing about the history of this nation. You can never write enough about that tragic thing called war" (Feuser: 150).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the relevance of war themes in Nigerian literature.

3.2 Nigerian Civil War in Nigerian Novel: Okpewho's *The Last Duty*

Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* is a war novel that explores the psychological make up of characters in the war drama. In this novel, the Federal and the Secessionist armies are locked in a fierce battle. But the author plays down the drama of external violence and concentrates fully on its deeper human dimensions. We have committed characters giving account of their experiences and roles in the war. We have Chief Toje, a big chief who conspired to the arrest and detention of his greatest business rival Oshevire. He used the opportunity of Oshevire's arrest to attempt sexual exploitation of his wife, Aku. Aku is from the secessionist part of the country and feels unprotected in the course of the war. Chief Toje pretends offering her protection but with the intension of exploiting her. However, Toje's impotence could not allow him achieve his evil intention.

His nephew, Odibo, the cripple often goes on errand for him to Aku's place. Aku, being sexually abused without actualizing it decides to allow Odibo calm her troubled sexual nerves. This single act makes Odibo realize that he is beyond destitution. He begins to challenge Chief Toje and this leads to the most heinous experiences of the war beyond the battlefield. Both men slaughtered each other. Aku is taken over by Major Ali for protection. Oghenovo, Aku's son and the only child narrator in the story is busy expecting the return of his father from prison. All he does is to fight against Onome or anyone who calls his father a thief. At the return of Oshevire after being proved innocent of the charges against him, he decided to do his last duty of restoring his image, home and conscience. This leads to another tragedy which marks the unending trauma of wars.

By adopting the "collective evidence" technical style of narration, we watch without any inhibition, the adventures, the feelings, the hopes, the fears, the emotional burden and the moral state of the characters in their process of formation. Each character's narrative portion and perspective is proportionate to his degree of involvement, and response to the conflicts. By presenting action from many points of view, the writer allows the reader to judge the entire situation himself. The dramatized or pictorial adopted allows Okpewho to give full and free verbal expression to his characters' emotions, even those that will normally be suppressed as a result of public consciousness.

Starting with Major Ali, both the narrative and the plot structures expand gradually as if from an aperture into a wider channel until the climax is reached when the three main characters lose their lives tragically over a woman. The themes also come tumbling in one by one, one linking the other until there is a complex network of themes: the disruption in communal life, the mischievous manipulation of military authorities for the settlement of private scores, the sexual oppression of a destitute and forlorn woman, the abuse of children and the handicapped, the heroic assertion of personal integrity in the face of daunting odds, moral chastity pulverized by destitution, domestic crises, psychological depression, sexual impotence, etc.

In the novel, we see each character contributing his quota to the main issue. The main issue is not the civil war demon that is currently devastating the land as this is only a catalyst for the internal psychological crises plaguing all the major characters. The war only reverberates at the background and remains peripheral to the main plot of the narrative. The writer's emphasis is on the series of individualized "civil" wars that each individual has to confront: the desperate tug-of-war between Chief Toje and his failing manhood, his death-knell struggle with his business rival, Oshevire, the fratricidal war between him and his servant over the beautiful wife of another citizen who has been jailed on trumped up charges, his pursuit of pre-war social and financial privileges, Oshevire's struggle against war time wickedness, Aku's moral battle with destitution and unlawful sexual urges, Major Ali's fight to maintain law and order, etc.

In the novel we see that there is much emphasis on honor, honesty, integrity and fellow feelings. The novel does not celebrate any heroic exploits in battle, but a heroic resolve to be just and compassionate under impossible circumstances.

The series of micro “civil wars” are bitter, more destructive and more physically and spiritually agonizing than the real civil war. There is economy, not only of words and action, but also of details. The tragedy is worked out within the strategic temporal space of a border town. By selecting a small border town as setting, we are offered the sense of an enclosed arena, which allows no intrusion, or escape from this world of tragedy. Okpewho chooses appropriate characters to dramatize the tale, from the peasant to the noble, from the honorable to the villain. The nature of the human problem presented in the narrative is as complex, touching and realistic as the deft technical construction of the work. Okpewho displays an impressive understanding and insight into the deep world of his characters' inner lives. Okpewho explores this grave human situation with responsibility and sympathetic understanding. Each character makes his choice and bears the consequences of his decision. In Okpewho's artistic vision, choices stem from the characters' inner selves; thus he explores the characters' thoughts fully. He focuses his tragic vision on a closely-knit series of events and maintains this vision through a supremely controlled authorial distance as well as a dramatized angle of observation. There is an effective combination of emotional detachment and an incisive display of sympathy and fellow feelings.

Okpewho has helped to make the war alive to us in a new and fresh way. He succeeds very well in deploying techniques to make the reader a collaborator with him and with the characters in creating a conception of the Civil War that leaps out of the text. The novel enlarges our sympathy and opens our eyes to areas of civil war experience we never really knew well. The novel explores the dark places of human nature, the ethical and moral values of both pre-war and during-the-war Nigerian society. One basic tendency in some of the best war novels is that many of the narrators see war in more personal than social terms. They seem to have concentrated on the fate of the innocent individuals who are trapped by a destructive machine whose magnitude they cannot even imagine and whose power they are helpless to oppose. Not even children are immune. The extent to which children are affected by war is driven home by the experience of the little Oghenovov in *The Last Duty*. War is an organism that consumes all who come in contact with it.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

From your reading of *The last Duty*, discuss the effect of war on individual psyche

3.3 Nigerian Civil War Poetry: J.P. Clark's “Casualties”

Clark is most remembered for his poetry, including: *Poems* (1961), a group of forty lyrics that treat heterogeneous themes; *A Reed in the Tide* (1965), occasional poems that focus on the Clark's indigenous African background and his travel experience in America and other places; *Casualties: Poems 1966-68* (1970), which illustrate the horrendous events of the Nigeria-Biafra war; *A Decade of Tongues* (1981), a collection of seventy-four poems, all of which apart from “Epilogue to Casualties” (dedicated to Michael Echeruo) were previously published in earlier volumes; *State of the Union* (1981), which highlights his apprehension concerning the sociopolitical events in

Nigeria as a developing nation; *Mandela and Other Poems* (1988), which deals with the perennial problem of aging and death. Critics have noted three main stages in Clark's poetic career: the apprenticeship stage of trial and experimentation, exemplified by such juvenilia as "Darkness and Light" and "Iddo Bridge"; the imitative stage, in which he appropriates such Western poetic conventions as the couplet measure and the sonnet sequence, exemplified in such lyrics as "To a Fallen Soldier" and "Of Faith"; and the individualized stage, in which he attains the maturity and originality of form of such poems as "Night Rain", "Out of the Tower", and "Song". Throughout his work, certain themes recur: Violence and protest, as in *Casualties*; Institutional corruption, as in *State of the Union*; The beauty of nature and the landscape, as in *A Reed in the Tide*; European colonialism as in, for example, "Ivbie" in the *Poems* collection; The inhumanity of the human race as in *Mandela and Other Poems*. Clark frequently dealt with these themes through a complex interweaving of indigenous African imagery and that of the Western literary tradition.

In the poem, 'Casualties', Clark makes a case for his people- the Ijaws, during the Nigeria-Biafra war. He recalls the scenes of the war, the effects of the war and the horrendous experiences that accompany the war. He tries to explain that though the Ijaws were not present at the scenes of war but that they suffered the same hardship. He actually explained thus:

The casualties are not only
Those who are dead
They are well out of it

The casualties are not only
Those that are wounded
They are well out of it

After explaining the various victims of the war: the dead, the wounded, the deprived and the hopeless, he further explained that the war affected those who may have been outside the war scenes:

The casualties are many
And good number well outside
The scenes of ravage and wreck

He further explained that the other victims are those who are suffering from what they never started, the wandering minstrels (the poets), and the people who could not quench the fire they started among others. He believes that war affects people beyond the scenes of war because its effects run against time, location and race. This poem resulted in one of the longest literary tussles that Nigeria has ever experienced. A young Nigerian writer by then, Odia Ofeimun reacted to J.P. Clark's poem 'Casualties'. He claimed that Clark's poem smacks of lies and poetic insincerity. In his controversial poetry collection, *The Poet Lied*, Odia called Clark a liar. He based his argument on the role of the Ijaws during the Nigerian-Biafran war. They were complacent and many of them like Clark left Lagos for their hometowns in Ijawland until the end of the war. The logical question that arises out

of Ochia's poetry is: should a writer write what he experienced or should he lie about it. J.P.

Clark never took the matter lightly. He took Ochia Ofeimun to court claiming defamation of character and other legal rights. The case lasted for over ten years and was recently resolved as the judge told them to see literature as pure creativity.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

In the controversy surrounding the poem 'Casualties', explain the need for experience in literary creativity.

3.4 Nigerian Civil War Drama: Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists*

This play, written shortly after Soyinka was released from prison, reflects not only his personal mood at the time, but the horrors of the Nigerian civil war of 1966-1970. The ferocity of the fighting between Biafrans and other Nigerians was unprecedented in scale and intensity; and much of the nation was still in shock. Soyinka uses a variety of techniques borrowed from "absurdist" theater. These departures from realism are meant not to create a flight from reality, but to convey the terrors of reality in a more intense way than traditional realism could do. The result is a sometimes obscure but intense and moving work of scathing satire and protest. The raised hut of Iya Agba and Iya Mate is the site of a sort of commentary on the action taking place below.

Mendicants, in this play, are beggars faking a variety of ailments to prey on the sympathies of the public. They function like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, commenting on the action. It is not always clear whether they are insane or simply expressing themselves satirically. "St. Vitus' Dance" is a traditional name for epilepsy. Traditionally it is believed that some people can curse others by looking at them with an "evil eye." The dehumanizing effects of the war are reflected in their gruesome gambling game. Ostriches were traditionally said to hide their heads in the sand. To "bite the dust" is an old expression for "to die." "As" is the mysterious deity of the new ferocious faith which has swept over the nation. This is why the beggars call themselves "Creatures of As."

Si Bero is a traditional herbal healer whose brother Dr. Bero is a modern-educated doctor who has become deeply involved with the terrorist regime ruling the country. "Rem Acu Tetigisti" is nonsense perpetrated by the new government cult and repeated here each time the beggars want to evoke the senseless violence of the government. "Casting pearls before swine" is an expression based on one of Jesus' parables (Matthew 7:6) which implies wasting something valuable on people incapable of appreciating it. The beggars begin to mime the tortures carried out by the sadistic "specialist," Dr. Bero. They speculate about whether Bero will torture his own father, in the play referred to simply as "the old man."

Iya Mate compliments Si Bero as the sort of herbal woman who would not poison men, but discover she has inadvertently gathered a rare and deadly poison. The song

they sing hints at the dangers they are experiencing. A boat full of oil would naturally avoid open flames. Why do you think Si Bero chooses Blindman as her assistant? It is a tradition to insult someone by insulting his mother. Si Bero has nothing particularly in mind by telling the Cripple that his mother is in a bad mood. The beggars' litany of medical treatments quickly deteriorates into gruesome violence: medicine has blended into torture in this play, reflected in the miming that follows. Persistently barking dogs were sometimes silenced by having their vocal chords cut. "The flaming sword" was wielded by an angel at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to bar the way back to Adam and Eve after they had been banished for their sin (Genesis 3:24). An advocate is a lawyer. How do we learn that the Blindman is also faking his handicap?

A holdall is a large suitcase. What do we learn about the relationship between Bero and the beggars? Note how the Blindman tries to soften Bero toward his sister. The beggars claim to have been discharged from the army, but Bero insists they are still under his orders. "Gaol" is the Nigerian/British spelling of "jail." Bero hints at unspeakable crimes for which the beggars were discharged. What does Bero mean by calling all his old patients corpses? What fluid is referring to when he brags of having wetted the earth with something more potent than palm wine? What is Si Bero's reaction to her brother? She believes that the herbal magic she was taught by the old women has preserved his life. "Big Braids" highest officers.

The windy old priest trusts Dr. Bero. What kind of a character is he? A miter is the hat worn by a bishop. He is the first to introduce the subject of cannibalism. Cannibalism is not part of normal modern Nigerian life, but there were instances of it during the civil war as people sought to terrify and insult their enemies in the fiercest way possible. What is Bero's reaction to the priest's statement that his father advocated legalizing cannibalism? In the following conversation with Si Bero the doctor explains the derivation of the divine name "As" from the traditional Christian blessing, "as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, Amen." In its original Christian context, it was intended as a statement of firm faith in God's eternal goodness and justice, but in the new cult it has been emptied of theological content. The phrase has been reduced to its least significant word, and now alludes to a cursed cycle of destruction from which there is no escape. What Dr. Bero is saying is that his father tricked him and others into eating human flesh hoping to shame them into realizing how savage they had become. Instead, it had the effect of liberating them from all moral inhibitions. What was his father's job in the war?

The Old Man is a fierce truth-teller. The beggars, who had pled insanity to escape punishment for their crimes, claim to have been driven mad by his truth-telling. What is the symbolism of the killing and eating of the flea? The cycle referred to suggests to Si Bero that the Old Man has been eaten by his son, and she is horrified. "Surgery" means "doctor's office."

In part two of the play, Aafaa's alphabetical sermon leads to the Blindman's assertion that the epileptic fits of worshippers bring not true freedom, but subjection to a vicious deity. "Circus turn" means "circus act." "Collaborate" is a much more loaded word than "assist," suggesting aiding in crimes. The Old Man has sat silent up to this point, seemingly in shock.

The line "Arise, throw off thy crutches and follow me" is a combination of phrases from the Bible: Jesus saying to his would-be followers "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24) and Mark 2:9 where Jesus defends his right to heal a crippled man by stating "Who is my neighbor" is uttered in Luke 10:29 by a man responding to Jesus' teaching to love your neighbor as you love yourself. "Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk." "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word," is the grateful speech of Simeon who has been preserved long enough to meet the infant Jesus, implying that he can now die content (Luke 2:29). Here it has more sinister implications. Soyinka was raised as a Christian and attended a missionary school as a boy, so he knows his Bible thoroughly.

"Chop" is slang for food. What is the nature of the relationship between Bero and his father? A stationer's is a stationery store. Why does Bero emphasize that the Old Man will get everything he needs? The Old Man revels in his feat of having tricked the leaders into practicing cannibalism. Why does he say he is still needed? A recidivist is one who commits again a crime that he has committed before. Why has Bero brought the Old Man here?

How does Aafaa say he was filled with the spirit that drove him mad? Note how the two old women present themselves as part of a spiritual reality far older and more powerful than that represented by Bero. The Latin quotation which the beggars mangle is "Dulcet et decorum est pro patria mori": "Sweet and proper it is to die for one's country." Just as Biblical passages about love and healing have earlier been given a sinister twist, so now references to patriotism and democracy are made to serve the goals of a degraded dictatorship. The song they sing is "When the Saints Go Marching In," yet another allusion to impending death. Clearly, the Old Man is doomed, but does not want to have died in vain.

Socrates was condemned to execution by drinking a potion made of hemlock berries. In the dialogue between Bero and the Old Man Bero is not so much talking of his father as of the resistance to the regime which his father represents. When he uses the word "you," he means "people like you." What does the new regime offer instead of freedom? The story is told that the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes went about in daylight carrying a lighted lantern. When asked why he did so, he said he was looking for an honest man. Note how the beggars run a variation on this story.

After Bero leaves the stage the beggars discuss the pageantry carried out by governments which conceal their crimes while gaining international acceptance through showy ceremonies. The mock ceremony culminating in cries of "We want Him" is probably meant to remind the audience of the mob's cry for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus (Mark 15:6-15). Blindman's speech is a parody of an ignorant, bigoted European colonizer, pretending not to be interested in the mineral wealth of the colonized nations and maintaining the necessity of imperialism in the face of the winds of change. What sorts of negative stereotypes does he articulate about African cultures?

The speech culminates in a recitation of the formula of the new regime, implying that nothing has changed. The exploitation and oppression of colonialism has now become postcolonial exploitation and oppression. The Old Man's long speech dwells on this theme. A "cat-house" is a house of prostitution. A "poor box" is a box in a church where donations may be put

to aid the poor. An heresiarch is a leading heretic, a disbeliever. The usual expression, "the ends justify the means" is often used to excuse crimes of oppression. If the purpose is worthy, then normally immoral means may be used to achieve it. Here the phrase is mocked by saying "the end shall justify the meanness." John 1:1 says "In the beginning was the Word" which is taken to be both Jesus and God. The new faith began not with God but with its priesthood. What does Afaa mean by saying there is no division in this new religion? Monsieur l'homme sapiens is French for "Mr. Homo Sapiens."

The Old Man's last long speech is a brilliant series of puns in which he shows how debased the new faith is. Ham is forbidden to Muslims, as it is to Jews. An ashram is a Hindu place of spiritual retreat. A kibbutz is an Israeli commune. How many people are trying to kill each other at the end of this play? Who wins?

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss how Soyinka revealed the possible causes of war in *Madmen and Specialists*.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear that wars are not good experiences to humanity. It diminishes human integrity and arouses man's animalistic nature to the extent of destroying feelings and fancy. In *The Last Duty*, we see people fighting each other against the backdrop of immoralities. Many people are victims of the war because of fabricated facts. The civil war in Nigeria provided a lot of traumatic facts in the development of this novel. The poem 'Casualties' by J.P. Clark makes a case for those whom we thought may not be victims of the war. It exposes us to the horrendous effects of the war and the effects on the society. In *Madmen and Specialists* Soyinka reenacts the possible reasons for war as war itself is caused by madmen who never bothers about its after effects.

The three texts under study have given us different views and experiences of the Nigerian-Biafran war. War literatures are records of historical realities. It seems to be a new literary development. It is expected that these new literary development will force writers to become more experimental in motivating character, in fashioning new techniques in the fictional use of history to portray the evil effects of war on ordinary lives, and more war literatures will focus on the common soldier or civilian rather than the general on horseback.

5.0 SUMMARY

War has been an ever-recurring theme in human affairs all through the ages. Myths, legends, epics and other manifestations of oral and written literature bequeath to us traditional stories of war in ages past. Many of the world's notable philosophers, statesmen and writers have had one thing or the other to say about man and his numerous wars. A tragic conflict such as war must give rise to stories because it is an event that is capable of altering the human situation drastically and completely. War is one man-made tragedy, a primitive monster, very ubiquitous and invincible even to modern man and his superior intelligence. Rulers prosecute it while political philosophers rationalize it. Even the law

under certain circumstances justifies it. War has been portrayed variously as a heroic and glorious adventure, as an evil that destroys and kills, and as bringing out the best and the worst in individuals and societies. It has been described as an inevitable manifestation of natural human, aggressive instincts.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions:

1. Explain the major concerns in most Nigerian war literatures.
2. Discuss the war horrendous effects of war in *The Last Duty*
3. What are the major causes of civil wars as revealed in *Madmen and Specialists*?
4. Using J. P. Clark's 'Casualties', explain the categories of war victims.
5. Appreciate the major themes resulting from wars as exemplified in the three texts under study in this unit.

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UNIT 4 NIGERIAN LITERATURES & ENGLISH LANGUAGE 1: LOCAL COLOUR**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
- 3.1 General Overview
- 3.2 Nigerian Literature and Local Colour 1: Transliteration in Okara's *The Voice*
- 3.3 Nigerian Literature and Local Colour 2: Proverbs in Ohaeto's *The Voice of the Night Masquerade*
- 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 way in which the Nigerian writers have been applying the English language in order to accommodate the various linguistic tastes of Nigerians. Nigeria is a complex linguistic setting of over 500 languages. In each of these languages there are writers. English language becomes the main communication tool because of the need to allow the work reach wider audience within and outside the country. However, there have been attempts at indigenizing the English language used in Nigerian literature. One of these ways is the application of local colour tradition. By local colour, we mean the use of Nigerian expressions that capture Nigerian culture and environment although expressed in English language. They include transliteration of Nigerian language in English, the consistent use of proverbs and other forms of lores. We shall examine this using some Nigerian novels, poetry and drama in the exemplifications.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- appreciate the use of local colour in Nigerian literature
- identify local colours in Nigerian literature
- discuss proverbs as consistent local colour in Nigerian literature
- see transliteration as a way of realizing local colour in Nigerian literature
- accept local colours as a way of identifying Nigerian literature.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

In a situation where two or more languages and cultures are in contact, there is bound to be linguistic and cultural interference. This is the situation with Nigerian literature of English expression where important socio-cultural habits and traits are expressed in a foreign language. Many Nigerian writers have appropriated and reconstituted the English language in their text through some linguistic processes which include loan words, loan coinages, loan blends, pidginisation, code switching and the like. This is one way they strive to find a solution to the problem of bilingualism and biculturalism by relying heavily on the domestication of the imported tongue, which is English language. Many of these writers have deviated from the international literary norms {Linguistically}. They have not falsified the tradition they have transformed into the English Language. Rather they have been able to bridge the gap between the local colour variety and the appropriate English language diction suitable to the characters and themes they depict. The linguistic innovations in their works offer outlets for creativity in language and put a new life into the imported language. At this stage of globalization, Nigerian writers cannot afford to deny their works of wide readership; therefore they should consider the appropriation and reconstruction of English as a medium of Nigerian literature.

The place of English in the socio-political and economic activities of Nigeria has been widely discussed. Also, the status of the language as a dominant medium of African literature has been critically commented upon. African literary critics and writers have been arguing for and against the use of the imported language as the prevailing medium of African literature. As such, writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Akachi Ezeigbo among others try to Africanize the English language by adding local words of African origin. They use these local words firstly to express their meaning and for the reader to read and identify with them and secondly to create a unique language of its own, an African version of the English language. Using local words adds life and beauty to the otherwise dull English language and some things that are associated with Africa and the African culture which have no equivalent in English are easily introduced into the English language through their writings.

In a situation where two languages and two cultures are in contact, there will certainly be linguistic and cultural interferences. Such is the case of African literature of English expression where important cultural habits and geo-political phenomena are expressed. Since English is a “global language”, it has been modified and domesticated by writers across the globe. Even the new generation writers have also domesticated the English language in their literary texts. Literature depends primarily on language; it is language put in action, that is, language put into practice. The African writer’s effort in translating his or her multilingual or multicultural postcolonial experiences into literary work is always fraught with problems. Therefore he is often faced with the dilemma of negotiating between the English language in its ancestral place and the English language in the Diaspora.

This quandary has motivated some African writers to advocate a linguistic decolonization of African literature. For instance, Ngugi advocates the need to decolonize African cultures, including the return to writing in vernacular languages. He believes that Africans must use their languages and people as a strength with which they can leap into tomorrow. Osundare also reacts insistently against the continuity of writing African literature in foreign languages. Most Nigerian writers use local colour words because they believe that no foreign language can adequately express native experiences and problems and there are some words that cannot be easily translated in English, thus such words are transliterated into the English language in writing.

There are two major opposing camps that can be isolated in African writer's views on the desirability or otherwise of English as the literary language of the continent. The first camp advocates the abrogation of the use of the language as the prime medium of African literature; Ngugi and Osundare are key members of this exclusive class. On the other hand, the second group calls for the appropriation and reconstitution of English as a medium of African literature. With this, the group believes that the rigid hegemony of the language can be unmasked. This method is an attempt to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own. Consequently, the postcolonial African writer expresses his thoughts through an Africanized version of the almighty English language. According to Chinua Achebe, English is being made to "bear the burden" of the post colonial writer's experience (62). The African writers, for instance, always strive to free themselves from the standard rules of the imported language by using a unique form of the language whose standard version is being interrogated and subverted to be able to express their sense of otherness.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the need for the domestication of English language in Nigerian literature.

3.2 Nigerian Literature and Local Colour 1: Transliteration in Okara's *The Voice*

In Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, there is a high experimentation with language. He tries to recapture Ijaw language in English. Gabriel Okara tries through experimentation to enrich foreign languages by injecting 'black blood' into their rusty joints. Gabriel Okara in an article reprinted from *Dialogue*, Paris in *Transition* magazine in September 1963:

As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion that the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as medium of expression. . . . In order to capture the vivid images of African speech, I had to eschew the habit of expressing my thoughts first in English. It was difficult at first, but I had to learn. I had to study each Ijaw expression I used and to discover the probable situation in which it was used in order to bring out the nearest meaning in English. I found it a fascinating exercise.

Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed with using his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? Why should he see it as his particular mission? We never asked ourselves: how can we enrich our languages?

Gabriel Okara, in *The Voice*, introduces Okolo, a man who dreams of a just and transparent society, is arrested and imprisoned for sharply lashing out at a corrupt regime, and is eventually delivered out of his dilemma by an old, illiterate woman in whose wisdom are personified the values and worth of society. The linguistic experimentation is unique. We see the attempts by Okara to realize his Ijaw tongue in English. We see a lot of linguistic aberrations in terms of semantic realizations. In English, the expressions do not carry much meaning and where there are meanings, they seem absurd, complex and distorted. The attempts at experimenting with language make the novel quite unreadable in terms of English usage. Even the Ijaw readers of the novel who are not familiar with English forms may find the text uninteresting. For instance, the novel started thus: "Some of the town's men said that Okolo's eyes were not good and that his head was not correct." (1) In an attempt at realizing the Ijaw language in the novel, we see such expressions as:

- i. "he has no shadow..."
- ii. "his inside is bad..."
- iii. "his head is not correct..."
- iv. "his eyes were not good..."

These expressions have been termed 'poetic', 'absurd', 'complex' and 'incomprehensible'. The fact remains that Okara tries to create a unique Nigerian novel by realizing his mother tongue using transliteration as linguistic process. The question of whether he achieved his aimed has been the concern of linguists and literary critics. The fact still remains that Okara has attempted a form for the realization of the Nigerian novel through the process of transliteration.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss the effectiveness of transliteration in Okara's *The Voice*.

3.3 Nigerian Literature and Local Colour 2: Proverbs in Ohaeto's *The Voice of the Night Masquerade*

Proverbs picture practically all the details of everyday life of ordinary people and they can refer to practically any situation. Occasionally, among many tribes in Nigeria like the Igbos, proverb is the major vehicle of expression in the art of conversation and is regarded very highly because it serves to arm, to inform, to educate, to instruct and very often to embellish speech. The use of proverb in some Nigerian poetry is very instrumental to the passing across of the message of the poet to the reader. In Achebe's words, "*Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten*" (*Things Fall Apart*, 6). Proverbs have a wide range of subject matter and they are based on every aspect of societal life. It captures the African style of rhetoric; expresses the African affinity of their culture. In the words of Obiechina (1975): *Proverbs are the kernels, which contain the wisdom of the traditional people.*

They are philosophical, moral expositions shrunk to a few words, and they form a mnemonic device in societies in which everything worth knowing and relevant to day-to-day life has to be committed to memory... These proverbs derive from a detailed observation of the behaviour of human beings, animals, plants and natural phenomena, from folklore, beliefs, attitudes, perception, emotions and the entire systems of thought.... (156).

In African literature, the literary and cultural significance of proverbs is the fact that they provide a rich source of imagery and succinct expression on which more elaborate forms are drawn. In its simplest form, a proverb is a saying, which has some moral to teach. These morals could be explicit or implied. The language of a proverb is generally image filled, simple and interesting. Every language has its proverbs, often, the same proverbs occur among several different people. In some cases, similar proverbs come from the same source, but in other cases, they probably have no connection. In Africa, proverbs play prominent roles in communication. Values, beliefs and traditions of a people are often reflected in their proverbs, parables, and incantations, etc. Ezenwa Ohaeto exploited the rich Igbo proverbs in *The Voice of the Night Masquerade*. *It gives his work a local colour quality. He believes that the language of proverbs is more than ordinary words. Some of these words refer to objects, which on their own are symbolic or represent something else. Ohaeto uses proverbs in his collection of poems to give force and dignity to his work.*

Ohaeto's choice of proverbs in his collection of poems reflects the warning, moral as well as philosophical values in the Igbo societies. We could say that proverbs are used to intensify language in order to be effective. Language has been known to serve man's creativity. The Igbos are known to appreciate wisdom, knowledge and understanding in childhood use of proverbs. It is therefore not surprising to see Ohaeto employ extensive use of proverbs in his work. For example:

"What destroys the yams also destroys the cocoyams" (18). This proverb is Ohaeto's way of warning that whatever affects the head of a house also affects the entire house, and so, precautions should be taken when such cases of destruction arises. Another is:

"The bone dog could not eat the fowl wants to eat" {29}.

Ohaeto uses proverbs in his poems as forces for teaching morals and as medium of warning.

His use of proverbs focuses on their positive cultural functions. One of the most significant applications of African orature in the poems is the use of proverbs. Ohaeto's competence in the use of proverbs reflects his possession of cultural wisdom and rhetorical skills.

Ohaeto's poetic vision in *The Voice of the Night Masquerade* is inspired by the indecency, disorderliness and untruthfulness in the society which are caused by the misdemeanor in the family, the deviance on the streets, the abnormalities in public affairs and the incongruities of socio-political activities. His vision is simply art for orderliness, justice and awareness. He takes sides out of his conviction of what is right. *The Voice of the Night Masquerade is a heroic celebration of nature-sun, water, wind, sea- and also a celebration of tradition- spirits*

and masquerades. It however goes beyond mere celebration of ecological changes to satirize man's indecency in the society, injustice in socio-political activities and man's excesses in the society, that is, harmful and thoughtless actions that are socially or morally unacceptable. The proverbs are functional:

The creeper that tells
An elephant halt immediately
Must accompany the elephant
{ 'A call at dusk' 15 }

This warns better on the abnormalities of public affairs and the incongruities of socio-political activities. In explaining this proverb, we see the creeper and the elephant as a minor and a major respectively. Ohaeto's style of proverb use is expressed in a way that is clear and easily understood, vibrant, imaginative, intellectual and full of morals. It is of our time and the picture of our age. It carries the feelings and emotions of modern man. Its realities are present today and will perhaps colour tomorrow.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What are the poetic effects of proverb use in Ohaeto's *The Voice of the Night Masquerade*?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The question of domestication of English in African literature has been a major concern of African writers. Nigerian writers beginning from Amos Tutuola have been experimenting with the English language. Others follow. Even Chinua Achebe who claimed to write in Standard English has one time or another delved into local colour, transliteration and the application of local lores in his writing. This is evident with the use of proverbs, clichés, and oral forms of communication. In almost all his novels, he created a linguistic style which other African writers have towed. Gabriel Okara stands out. His language in *The Voice* was experimental. Ohaeto makes proverbs useful tools in his poetry.

5.0 SUMMARY

The question still remains: must we write in English qualify as African literature? The whole area of literature and audience, and hence of language as a determinant of both the national and class audience did not really figure: the debate has been more about the subject matter and the racial origins and geographic habitation of the writer. English (like French and Portuguese) was assumed to be the natural language of literary and even political mediation between African people in the same nation and between Africa and other nations. In some instances these European languages were seen as having a capacity to unite African peoples against divisive tendencies inherent in the multiplicity of African languages within the same geographic state. Thus, the application of local colours whether through translation/transliteration or through the application of local lores has the singular tendency of making Nigerian (African) literature operate in unique style.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions carefully:

1. What is transliteration? Explain its application in Okara's *The Voice*.
2. Nigerian writers have been attempting domesticating English. Discuss the forms of this domestication.
3. Assess the use of proverbs in Ohaeto's poetry.
4. The question of language in African literature has been in favour of English. Explain the advantage English has over African languages.
5. The use of local colour makes Nigerian literature unique in style. Defend this statement.

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UNIT 5 NIGERIAN LITERATURE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE 2: PIDGIN/SPECIAL ENGLISH

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will study another aspect of Nigerian literature which has to do with the use of pidgin or special English forms. In the process of domestication of English or in the process of creation of literatures that should serve the purpose of reaching the educated and the uneducated, some Nigerian writers have used Pidgin English or Special English forms in their literary works. Ken Saro Wiwa called the English language he used in his novel *Sozaboy*, 'Rotten English'. Some other writers, especially poets, have used Pidgin English completely in their works. We shall examine this special English forms as used in some Nigerian literatures.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- understand the use of Pidgin/Special English forms in Nigerian literature;
- appreciate the creativity in the usage;
- discuss the reasons for such usage in Nigerian literature;
- explain the need for such usage in Nigerian literature; and
- see the usage as domestication of English in Nigerian literature.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

It is a general belief by some Nigerian writers that Pidgin language provides an appropriate medium for the exploitation of oral traditions in literature, for it acts as a bridge between the orality of verbal communication and the formality of the written word. For instance, Nigerian Pidgin poetry is constructed as part of this utilization of oral resources, which has revitalized the literary scene and the poetic tradition. However, the development and

utilization of Pidgin as a language medium in Nigerian poetry owes its manifestation to the reality of its profuse use along the coast and also in the hinterland, where the indigenous Nigerian languages predominate.

All the same, the origin of Nigerian Pidgin has been stated in a pioneering study as "essentially a product of the process of urbanization, while its origins lie historically in the early contacts between Africans and Europeans. The rapidly growing towns of Nigeria have increasingly become the melting pots of the many tribes and races which constitute Nigeria, and Pidgin seems to be today a very widely spoken lingua franca, many town and city dwellers being at least bilingual, in Pidgin and an indigenous language" (Mafeni, 98). Similarly, a later study which examines the origins of Nigerian Pidgin confirms that it "arose from the urgent communication needs of the contact between the visiting Europeans (in the end the English) and their multi-lingual Nigerian hosts. Stabilization of this contact led to the stabilization and expansion of Nigerian Pidgin (NP)" (Elugbe and Omamor, 21). These assertions emphasize the prevalent view discernible in the definition of Pidgin as a "communication system that develops among people who do not share a common language. In early stages of contact, such as the first encounters between British sailors and coastal West Africans or between American soldiers and the Vietnamese, a make-shift system emerges involving a few simple structures - mostly commands - and a limited number of words, drawn almost entirely from the language of the dominant group" (Todd, 3). Although the issues of domination and its appendage, exploitation, provided a political focus in the areas in which Pidgin was a medium of communication, the development of the language was affected by several other socio-cultural factors.

The most prominent socio-cultural factor was the fact that Pidgin was associated with a lower social status, which aided in the social stratification of the people who use it. This feeling of contempt was originally informed by a false sense of racial superiority, which has now been replaced by a misdirected sense of elitist superiority. Pidgin has made a noticeable linguistic advance in spite of the stigma that has often been attached to its use, especially in elitist circles. Although some educationists and other literates still snobbishly and hypocritically condemn the use of Pidgin, claiming that it leads children to make a poor use of the 'Queen's English,' it is true that among the people in the Anglophone region and for quite a sizeable number in the francophone zone, Pidgin is the main linguistic medium of communication. Nevertheless, the existence and development of Pidgin are the result of its own internal dynamics, and this internal dynamism of Nigerian Pidgin particularly has been aided in recent times by the production of works of literature in Pidgin and also by the arguments of critics who have found either merit in such works or possibilities in the language.

Some critics believe that Pidgin is a "practical, viable, flexible language distilled in the alembic of our native sensibility and human experience. This lusty language, which transcends our geographical and political boundaries grows daily before our eyes. It is our natural, unifying weapon against the divisive forces of English. It is believed that the adoption of Pidgin will automatically make the writer national by domesticating his outlook and sensibility and on adopting Pidgin and becoming a real nationalist the Nigerian writer can now speak with the knowledge of an insider (35), although Osofisan takes exception when he argues that "the use of Pidgin cannot automatically make any writer patriotic or progressive; that will depend finally

on other factors, such as the consciousness and purpose of the particular artist" (Osofisan, 43). However, he agrees that Pidgin is a viable language and capable of sustaining works of literature.

It is clearly this capability of Pidgin to sustain works of literature – since it is a language that bridges orality, a language that absorbs several cultural elements as it communicates - which has made it yield creative possibilities for the Nigerian writers. However, a stress on Pidgin poetry in this study does not mean that it is only in poetry that the Pidgin language has been utilized. Although in the works of the popular Onitsha market literature there is no indication of a sustained use of Pidgin as a language of creative communication, Emmanuel Obiechina points out that "some authors make their illiterate or semi-literate characters speak in West African Pidgin English. Sometimes they take pains to explain such idiosyncratic usages in their prefaces" (Obiechina, 86). But the later works that emerged after the literary outburst of the Onitsha market literature indicated artistic dimensions to the use of Pidgin in Nigerian literature.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the importance of Pidgin English in Nigerian literature.

3.2 Pidgin/Special English in Nigerian Novel

Nigerian novelists have been in the lead in terms of experimentation with English language in their works. There are handfuls of Nigerian novels written in either Pidgin English or special English form. In this sub unit, we will use two novels for the study. Interestingly, both of them are war novels written about two decades apart and by an old and a younger writer: Ken Saro Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985) and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005). The English language forms used in both novels seem alike except some syntactic and lexical differences. Ken Saro-Wiwa called the English use in *Sozaboy*, rotten. However, the English used in *Beast of No Nation* has no such tagging but we choose to tag it special English form because there are mixtures of Standard English and Pidgin English in the narration.

1. Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985) [Rotten English]

The plot of Saro-Wiwa's civil war novel, *Sozaboy* (1984) revolves round the young hero whose real name is "Mene". In this novel, the emphasis is not on action, but on character. It is not the events, but the man that makes the events possible. Attracted by fine uniforms, glittering buttons, and the glamorized life of a soldier, Mene yields to his young wife's pressure to join in a war he knows nothing about. He becomes so confused that he ends up fighting unwittingly on both sides of the conflict without noticing any difference between the two. His metamorphosis from an apprentice-driver into a "sozaboy" (soldier-boy) marks a significant phase in the development of his character and life. He undergoes a physical, as well as a spiritual journey and plies the route from innocence to maturity. Because he is constantly on the road and because of his garrulous nature, he sees everything and tells us everything he knows about the two sides of the conflict. The journey motif is symbolically linked

with the quest motif in the story. The quest motif manifests in various ways: the quest for manhood which is also linked with the quest to become a combatant soldier. His perception develops gradually, with each experience, each incident, each encounter, each trip, helping him to gain a clearer insight into the true nature of things. Along the line, he marries a young beautiful city-wise Lagos girl whose beauty, femininity, pragmatism and boldness intoxicate him. To earn and maintain her love, he enlists in the army to become a “sozaboy”: “I will do anything so that this fine girl can be my wife and I can be sleeping with her on one bed every night,” he says (37).

The corrupt recruitment officers into the army extract a large fee from him before enlisting him. As a new recruit, he is very proud of his uniform and his gun. His gun almost becomes an object of worship. He cuddles it, adores it just as he does his wife Agnes. But as he is unable to raise up children by his wife because he has to dash off to war soon after marrying her, he is also not able to fire his gun because the rifle assigned to him is faulty. He does not quite succeed in realizing the three ambitions he sets his youthful heart and energy to accomplish. The war thwarts his plan to become the first licensed driver in his hometown, a task he has committed everything in life to accomplish. His honeymoon with his beautiful bride is also cut short by his enlistment in the army. His efforts, vision, passion and money are wasted as the war claims his wife and his mother- the two people that matter most to him in life. And having joined the army at a great cost, he is unable to experience the fulfillment of an accomplished soldier. He loses all that is dear to him in life in order for him to gain full awareness of himself, his environment, and life generally. Both as a civilian and as a soldier, Mene is not a violent person. He never even fires a shot throughout his stint in the army.

He keeps on asking why the war is being fought, but no one either within or outside the army is able to give him any answer. But at the end he learns when his romantic ideas collide with his painful experiences, that war and military life involve death, suffering and pain. Things, events, actions, people and the war must now be seen in their correct and realistic perspectives. It is bygone to those alluring “sweet dreams”. He sees the meaninglessness and the futility of war in one instant not as preached by pacifist or by a senior adult, but as it really is when all the officers and many of the company boys are butchered in the first air raid. Now every instinct in him tells him to desert. He runs through forests and creeks not minding “Whether tiger or snake or leopard or any dangerous animal is in the forest” (113).

Saro- Wiwa uses the new maturity and insight that Mene has just gained to undercut the glory of war by making him experience hardship, danger, disappointment and bereavement. He gains maturity from the ordeals and stresses he undergoes. With the benefit of experience he tries to redefine war, throwing into the ditch his earlier fanciful notions about warfare. War is a double-edged sword, capable of cutting this way and that way. The tragic death of his mother, wife and the destruction of his house in a bomb blast inflict a permanent injury on his psyche. He discovers that he has given too much of himself to the machinery of war. Mene would have loved to return to the protective arms of his mother and his wife and continue his life. But he realizes that the old life has passed away. The war has ended, but not until it swept away the nature and texture of the pre-war society. The search for his mother and his wife through all the refugee camps

enables him to see at first hand the tragedy occasioned by a war in which he was an enthusiastic participant. He witnesses for himself the sufferings of the civilian population, the loss of life and property and the ruthless annihilation of many communities. One very important theme of this novel is the experience of the common people who are caught up in the war. The war which had promised to build up Mene's personality ends up destroying his dream and hopes: "...war is useless ...uniform and everything is just to cause confusion ... (172). "War is a very bad and stupid game," he concludes (151). Saro-Wiwa has chosen this young hero to make his comments on the Nigerian Civil War and to offer a deep and direct insight into the fate of the common people who were caught in this tragic drama of destruction.

The young loquacious soldier is beyond embarrassment in his chosen idiolect as he strives to communicate in a language he has hardly mastered. But he gets by in a very funny and interesting way. He distorts, concocts, breaks, remolds and transfer words and phrases from British English to Pidgin idiolect without guilt and without sensitivity to the established grammar of the language. He is completely excited by the language he has fashioned to express himself in. There is no doubt that the novel embodies the profound essence of the Nigerian Civil War experience. The author concentrates on the downtrodden, the class of people on which the war and any war for that matter has its most devastating effects. The success of the novel rests on the innovative stylistic and narrative techniques the writer has chosen to objectify the experience he expounds in the text. The narrative captures the shock, confusion, and dehumanization that the war produces in the young, the helpless and defenseless population. The novel shows the personal and social consequences of war in a way that many other novels about war do not. The following extracts should guide our understanding of the language:

- i. "And as I am marching with gun and singing, prouiding, all the people will come and look at me. They will say how I am brave man. Very brave man. Then Agnes will like me. And Zaza cannot make yanga for me again ... And no woman whether Simple Defence or no Simple Defence cannot begin to give me order on the road ... And I will wear uniform!" (Sozaboy pp. 54)
- ii. "Suppose as the soza captain come talk, enemy begin enter Iwoama? Then he will kill all of us plus myself. Then he will enter every place plus Dukana. Then they will carry away my mama plus Agnes and then begin to use Agnes." (Sozaboy pp. 87)
- iii. "[he] will just get a license and [he] will find lorry to drive. Then [he] will get plenty money and my mama and Agnes and myself will be happy". [9]

Here, we notice the use of English in ways that do not define a given standard. The expressions above show pidgin, wrong usage and standard forms. In essence, the language is rotten

2. Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) [Special English]

Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* derives its title from a coinage made famous by Afrobeat King Fela Anikulapo-Kuti in his popular critical song of the same title. This debut novel about children in armed conflict has striking parallels with Fela's song for its social commentary and poignancy. The book is about the egregiousness of allowing the most valuable

asset of our humanity –children- to be sucked into the horrors of war. It is about lost innocence and a children's story replete with horrors and realities of contemporary African politics and the destructive consequences of its unending civil strife.

Just as it began, Iweala's book ends with a whimper, "*And I am saying to her, fine. I am all this thing. I am all this thing, but I am also having mother once, and she is loving me*". What the end does not capture, is the torment and conflicting emotions embedded in this pint sized but powerful book. And neither does the end capture the blood-soaked reality of children caught in the vortex of armed conflict, of which cause they are none the wiser. This book is just as much about lost innocence as it is about failed societies and their decrepit values. Child soldiers, their hellish lives and the mayhem they cause on the African continent is no longer an aberration. Anyone lucky enough to have been shielded from this gory reality needs to pick up this book for some lessons learned- "All we are knowing is that before the war, we are children and now we are not". Using with great dexterity a mix of refined Pidgin English, truncated syntax, and a flourish of nuanced and flowing style befitting of his Harvard pedigree, Iweala entraps the reader, as if one is entranced on a vivid life-sized play, which unfolds in a macabre fashion.

The slanted reportage form, coming as it were from an innocent but transformed child adds vigor and panache to the storytelling. This is clearly a script cleverly written from an insider's perspective or wealth of research, but it is invariably the handiness of Iweala's language that gives this debut work of fiction its powerful enchantment and unquestionable originality. Set in an unstated war ravaged country in West Africa (There are many from Sierra Leone to Liberia) the lead character, a teenage boy Agu (Nigerian?), is conscripted –indeed kidnapped- into the ranks of a guerrilla unit as the drums of war engulfed his homestead. Having lost his father to another set of brigands, and hunted incessantly by that reality, from which he had narrowly escaped, Agu elects to survive by the laws of the jungle and the conventional wisdom of beat them or join them after the rest of his family had been evacuated by the UN. But his youth renders him inescapably susceptible to the machinations and dodgy, yet protective nature of his new commander. This was by itself a recipe for disaster. And so the mis-education of Agu and boys of his kind begins that soon enough, the victim become the oppressor as Agu rehashes the wickedness visited on his father by taking on the wicked ways of war and the seemingly normal tendency to commit remorseless atrocities, if that was indeed the only way to stay alive and survive the vicissitude of a war without norms.

Iweala has certainly drawn from the richness of the homeland of his ancestors in writing this book. Born well after the Biafran war, he must have tapped richly into the residual tales from his family about that gory civil war in which young lads were abducted from their defenseless parents and from refugee camps and deployed as spies (Boys Company) into enemy camps on reconnaissance missions. In reality, however, this work is a poignant reminder of the collective failure of societies to protect children from the scourge of war. It is also about the mindlessness of combatants to win every battle at all cost, even if it means the annihilation of pubescent broods, who in seeking out to kill, become themselves easy targets of friends and foes alike.

Beasts of No Nation is a tug of war, in which the combatants and not just the ganja weed-type militants exist in a restive environment and must contend with the drag between rationality and foolishness, reason against futility and abnormality against spirituality. How else does one contemplate and indeed explain, the transformation of an otherwise loving, bookish boy reared by a Christian mother into a zombie, capable of audacious mayhem and indiscriminate and unprovoked killings, safe for his being drugged or brainwashed. As Agu reveals, “But these things are before the war and I am only remembering them like dream”. The essence of abnormality also comes in different forms and modes to the extent that absurdity becomes real and palpable; “Everyone is looking like one kind of animal, no more human”. Inescapably in such an incoherent setting, it is little wonder that Agu metamorphosed into a killing machine clearly distanced from normality and divorced from reality as well as from his days of innocence. His past in its totality is fleeting; merely a cameo recall of the life he once knew – a fun-filled life of schoolyard friends, loving family, religious and church activities, and in sum, a life of unfettered adolescence. Characteristically cultist, Agu’s life follows a dependency spiral to nothingness, except for the braggadocio and gun-backed confidence. Meanwhile, for fear of ostracization and as much as from lack of a credible alternative, his everyday living becomes gang like, and one in which he must survive by his wits, by the trust and camaraderie of his fellow soldiers and the deceptive altruism of his commander, while seemingly oblivious of his descent into the inhumane and bottomless abyss of war.

Beasts of No Nation may also be symmetric to indigenous rites of passage and coming of age. Bloodletting, but certainly not homicide or brutal murder has in the African context, been a way for a child to claim his manhood. Regrettably, some have stretched this notion to its breaking point as a way of proving that manhood is achieved when man can dominate his environ and those around him either legally or otherwise. Hence killing with impunity as rankling as it might be, has become a new niche that amplifies the cliché that all is fair in war and love. But the reality is that no one argues with a mad man with a loaded gun and there are plenty of guns in the wrong hands including children in many parts of Africa –guns that sustain the profit lines of those who make and trade them.

Agu’s escapism into the throes of war is not incidental nor a matter of rationalized choice. If there was truly a choice, it was not to suffer the fate of his father, who was shot in his presence. Being a boy soldier, however, offered Agu outlets and assurances of food, power, acceptance and perhaps, the guarantee of being alive another day. Soon enough, yielding to the fear of being taunted, he machetes a man to death nonplussed. Later on, he kills a woman and her daughter, as if butchering them were his final induction rite. Perhaps it was his provenance of being a damn good child soldier. Through it all, Agu’s subdued value haunted him unceasingly. Add to this his personal trauma of being a toy boy to those who must satisfy their sexual proclivities and depravity at all cost. Through the seamless strands of roiling guns, blood, sex, hunger and mayhem, Iweala insinuates a twist of serendipity to an already twisted life, when Agu seeks elusive redemption from his very conflicted existence. But hope is furlong and out of reach.

If Agu had a choice it was to live or die. He opted for the former. And given such options, most grown men would probably capitulate and do the same. Unsurprisingly in the face

of such an ironic choice Agu validates his role by asking, “What else can I be doing?” In a true show of survival instinct, he befriends Strika— his dumb, dingbat tormentor, who would not dare offer an answer to the question, “What is it like to be killing somebody?” The bestiality in this book is beyond redemption. Yet it does offer a modicum of redemption by delving into a heinously vexatious subject. What else, beyond mind-warping drugs, psychotic “gun juice” and blatant bestiality will make it impossible for a person, be it child or man to distinguish between his fellow human being and a goat. But like Agu confirms, “I am not knowing what is farmer and what is goat”.

Beast of No Nation is a nerve-racking novel that raises more questions than it attempts to answer or shed light on. When Agu for the umpteenth time asks another contemptuous question, “How can I know what is happening to me?” It becomes stark to the reader that such questions are - their simplicity and rhetorical flourish notwithstanding - unrepentantly gut wrenching. Indeed, how can this be happening to Africa? The answer, like the old song says, is blowing in the wind. Consider the following extracts:

- i. “And I am saying to her, fine. I am all this thing. I am all this thing, but I am also having mother once, and she is loving me”
- ii. “But these things are before the war and I am only remembering them like dream”.
- iii. “Everyone is looking like one kind of animal, no more human”
- iv. “What else can I be doing?” “What is it like to be killing somebody?”
- v. “I am not knowing what is farmer and what is goat”.

Like Sozaboy, there are marked pidgin and standard forms combined. The language here is used as characterization to capture the age, education and experience of the narrator

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Differentiate clearly the Rotten English in Sozaboy from the Special English in *Beast of no Nation*.

3.3 Pidgin/Special English in Nigerian Poetry

Historically, among the pioneer poets of West Africa there were writers who made use of Pidgin even as they created other poems in English. In his collection *Africa Sings* (1952) Dennis Osadebe, a pioneer poet, makes use of Pidgin in one poem entitled "Black Man Trouble." Here, he is much more adventurous than even many contemporary Nigerian poets, as he dramatizes the themes through the use of a character who is lamenting not only the injustice of his race but also his oppression as a colonial subject. This four-stanza poem commences with a general examination of the fate of the black man. The syntax of the Pidgin poem is not taxing, for Osadebe is clearly influenced by the ideas associated with the placement of words in English. However, the artistic element in the poem that is portrayed through the deliberate dissociation of the persona from the issue of the lament in the first stanza contributes to the

arousal of empathy in the reader. The poet indicates that the black person encounters enormous problems ("face big strife") in order to acquire even "some little food" for "him belly" (his stomach). Thus unconsciously the reader agrees with the poet in the subsequent stanzas that his "heart be clean, my word be true," but "why must my feet be in your chain?" and "you must chase me with your cane?" Even the issue of religion is utilized in this poem to demonstrate the unfair treatment of the black persona, who "no get gun," "no get bomb," and "no fit fight no more." The aspect of this hopeless situation which the poet most detests is the hypocritical use of the "cross" to "make me dumb," with the result that he is asked to close his eyes in prayer as the priest's "brudder thief my land away." The poet therefore laments the use of religion to camouflage materialistic aims. The emphatic note on which the poem ends reiterates the poet's thematic objective:

I no fit listen to more lies
 I done see everything;
 Dis tam I open wide my eyes
 And see de tricks you bring;
 You play me fair, I make you glad;
 Play me selfish, I make you sad (17)

There is no doubt that this poem illustrates quite early the blend of serious issues and language experimentation which contradicts some of the recent prevalent views that Pidgin is suited for only comic situations. That erroneous impression must have developed through the popular use of Pidgin in Nigerian newspapers like Lagos Weekend and Lagos Life and on such television programs as "New Masquerade" and "Samanja." Osadebay's poem may appear humorous in some sections, but it captures with telling accuracy the problems of colonialism during that period of Nigerian history.

The achievement of that pioneer poet is extended in the early sixties by Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, whose poem "One Wife for One Man" was given in manuscript form to Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier and was subsequently published in the 1963 edition of *Modern Poetry from Africa*. In this poem, Aig-Imoukhuede adopts a jocular tone to satirize the religious injunction that polygamy is abnormal. The poet does not advocate polygamy, however, and in fact he presents several reasons for questioning the practice. The use of polygamy here as a theme serves the twin function of providing the poet with an issue that is not only traditional but also capable of forming a substantial subject for the interrogation of the cultural-conflict reality. The persona has been inundated by the injunction "One wife for one man" in the churches and law courts, with the result that he is almost deaf or, as he puts it, "my ear nearly cut." In the second stanza he argues that his ancestors "get him wife borku [plenty]," although he agrees that "dat time done pass before white man come" (the time is past). After these seemingly trivial assertions, the persona proceeds to tabulate the reasons of infertility, excessive pride, the lack of home training or formal education, and the issue of producing male children to continue one's lineage as justification for not allowing "one wife for one man." The final stanza ends with the words:

Suppose, self, say na so-so woman your wife dey born
 Suppose your wife sabe book, no'sabe make chop;
 Den, how you go tell man make 'e no' go out
 Sake of dis divorce? Bo, dis culture na waya O!
 Wen one wife be for one man" (Moore and
 Beier, 128-29).

This issue of language development through the absorption of elements from other languages is noticeable in the verse of Mamman Vatsa whose *Tori For Geti Bow Leg adds yet another dimension to Pidgin poetry*, since his work is the product of cultural experience from the northern region of Nigeria. In the forty-one poems of Vatsa's collection he explores diverse themes in such a way that he seems to have combined the attentive perception of social ethos with his own natural flair for light-heartedness. The first poem in this collection, "Our Country Law," sets the scene, as it illustrates the devious ways in which laws are fashioned to restrict womanhood. It must be stated that many of these Pidgin poets consider fundamental and worthy of castigation all issues related to the treatment of women in society. Vatsa's poem, for instance, charges that in most segments of society women are forbidden to smoke or to engage in polygamy. But the basic idea which he makes persuasive is that some of these laws are often circumvented, and he turns those instances of circumvention into metaphors in the poem.

Vatsa also criticizes prevalent attitudes that he deems detrimental to the development of society. In the poem "Woman, You Be Manure" (31) it is the punishing high rate of fertility without commensurate financial weight that merits his displeasure, while in "Wayo Man" (29) he castigates unreliability and dishonesty. As a Pidgin poet, Vatsa is certainly interested in the elimination of social vices and pretentious behaviour, like the other Pidgin poets considered here. In a poem entitled "Yanga" (which means "Useless Pride") he feels that many of those people who behave as if they possess physical power are often deluded and weak, like "chicken/im feda/wey wind/dey blow" (15). The admonition is made more forceful by the image of the chicken with its feathers flattened by the wind. It is in this use of apt imagery that Vatsa makes a striking mark as a Pidgin poet. In the poem "Apartai," which is informed by the obnoxious apartheid policy that existed for so long in South Africa, he extends the issue to incorporate all forms of discrimination. For instance:

Bigi man latrine
 wey smaller man no fit use
 dat na apartai."

Elsewhere we read:

Ten people wey de rule
 ten thousand people
 bicos dem get plenty moni
 an' diffren-diffren colour dat na apartai" (12)

Vatsa artistically laborates upon the subject of discrimination in most human interactions in order to persuade the reader that even the trivial incidents one is likely to ignore are all

appendages to the great discrimination that is transformed into the law of "apartheid." It is through this use of familiar symbols to treat social issues via new perspectives that Vatsa's poetry widens in scope. In his verse Vatsa the military man does not spare the deficiencies of the members of his profession, for the poems "Drink-Drink Soja-Soja" and "O! Soja Jolly Time" criticize the habit of soldiers who drink intoxicating wine excessively. At the same time he shows awareness for some of the unpleasant effects of the profession on low-ranking military personnel, for in the poem "Priva Soja Cry-Cry" he sympathizes with the ordinary soldier who bears the brunt of the labour in the barracks.

It is this awareness of social injustice which makes the poet argue in "Judgment Day" that, in the final analysis, each person, irrespective of his material possessions, is bound to pay for his unjust actions, since on the day of judgment "argument/no go de" (11). The stress on this "day of judgment" is clearly Vatsa's way of drawing attention to the futile nature of such abnormal habits as the acquisition of expensive cars, as he shows in the poem "Obokun Odabo," where a "man no geti room/for sleep/e dey drive/Obokun" (39). In using the name "Obokun," said to be a Yoruba name for an expensive fish but also a term applied to Mercedes-Benz cars, the poet is satirizing an excessive acquisitive mentality, as he does again in the poem "Country Make Me Good." This poem admonishes covetousness, which makes "ya troat long," and at the same time asserts the values associated with farm work - an injunction that is needed in a society which craves finished products without appreciating the labor associated with them.

It is certainly this issue of misplaced values that makes the poet criticize the fact that emotions often overcome the senses in human affairs, as in the title poem "Tori For Geti Bow Leg," in which a man confesses to his wife that if he had listened to his friend, she would not have been his wife. This confession leads to altercations, and Vatsa, in presenting this poem, is stressing the importance of applying a dose of wisdom to emotional issues. Thus, in his criticism he tackles all those characteristics that are foolish, like the modern woman in the poem "Modan Moda" who is unwilling to breastfeed her babies so that she can maintain erect breasts, the unpolished woman in the poem "Ye-Ye Woman" (32), the disrespectful woman in the poem "Gara-Gara" (48), and the women who gossip excessively in "Madam Tok- About" (54). Vatsa does not single out only women for censure, for he also criticizes men, as in the poem "Make-Make-Man," and especially when they engage in profitless activities in order to create false impressions. Such men are among the politicians he castigates in the poem "Promise Wey Boku" for not taking beneficial actions but instead only spouting frivolous speeches, with the result that, before the general public can benefit, "dem/Billi for Killam!" This ironic perception indicates that those who are expected to benefit from parliamentary bills put forward by politicians usually become victims of the ill-conceived ideas of those same politicians. It is clearly this perceptive power in Vatsa's poems that persuaded one critic to state that, as in "Tori For Geti Bow Leg," "Vatsa ever wrote genuinely popular poetry, poetry rooted in the accents, rhythms and feelings of common people, not versified banalities masquerading as simple, accessible 'popular' poetry" (Jeyifo, 291). In Vatsa's Pidgin poetry these feelings of common people range from the political to the social, from the personal to the public, from the mundane to the spiritual, from the psychological to the philosophical.

The pervasive nature of social criticism in Pidgin poetry reaches a high point in Ken Saro-Wiwa's "Dis Nigeria Sef." The tone of this poem emerges quite early, as the poet compares Nigeria to "water wey dey boil." The personification of Nigeria here is a means for examining the country's prevalent social ills, disorganized social services, and dilapidated infrastructures. One poetic device used by the poet is the creation of a dialogue involving the persona and Nigeria. The poet indicates that the country's soldiers, policemen, and nurses do not provide the necessary services associated with their professions, while the citizens lack originality in their religion, language, and acquisition of names. The exasperation of the persona, which emerges at intervals as the poem progresses, becomes part of the poet's technique in the addition of a folkloric dimension, as Nigeria is scolded: "Oh yes, you be foolish yeye man/Look as you dey laugh as I dey talk/You tink say I dey joke?" (39). This abusive tone becomes clearer as a deliberate shock device when Saro-Wiwa adopts a different tone later in the poem: "But I beg you oh, Nigeria/No talk say I dey cuss you/True to God no be say, I no like you" (41). It is this patriotic love which the persona has for his country that is behind the poetic attitude, for the poet perceives the ostentatious nature of the people as responsible for the social anomalies despite the fact that the "rivers and de ocean/full of fish and oder good tings." The final segment of the poem extols the positive qualities of the country in terms of food, and Saro-Wiwa insists that some of the people

na better man
 Dey work from morning till night
 weder soza nurse or police
 or farmer wey dey cut bush plant
 or trader wey dey sell petty petty for market
 or akowe wey dey siddon for him office" (44).

The perception of contraries in terms of the country's positive and negative characteristics takes the poem beyond the level of cataloguing impressions, for this poetic attitude is stressed in the last stanza as "dis I-love-no-love Nigeria" mannerism. This attitude also parallels that of the majority of the people, who are troubled by doubts of patriotism. Thus the poem is both a statement and an injunction, as Saro-Wiwa reflects the syntax and spelling of Pidgin words like soza (soldier), which is influenced by his mother tongue.

The collections of verse published by Mamman Vatsa and Aig- Imoukhuede in the eighties emphasized the progress which Pidgin poetry had made in two decades. But those collections were not the only works of Pidgin verse that the reading public encountered, for such well-known writers as Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tanure Ojaide, and Tunde Fatunde and such lesser-known poets as Pita Okute, A. Ajakaiye, Ogunlowo, Erapi, Udenwa, Ojeifo, Bello, and Osita Ike published Pidgin poems in various anthologies. Both these well-known and lesser-known poets illustrate the basic orality manipulated through the choice and placement of Pidgin words. For instance, Ojaide, whose reputation has been established by the publication of several collections of verse in English - *Labyrinths of the Delta*, *The Endless Song*, *The Eagle's Vision*, *The Fate of Vultures*, *The Blood of Peace* - includes one Pidgin poem in *The Eagle's Vision*.

In this poem, entitled "I Be Somebody" (Ojaide, 69), he employs contrast as a rhetorical and artistic device as he manipulates the orality of the Pidgin language while choosing and placing his words in a manner to enhance the effect of his ideas. The persona in the poem is proud of his abilities to "shine" shoes "like new one from supermarket" and "carry load for head from Lagos go Abuja." In addition, this persona is fertile, for his "children reach Nigerian Army" in their numbers. It is possible to argue that the fertility which this "poor man" asserts as a quality may not be positive considering his limited financial resources. However, what the poet is indicating ironically is that it is unjust and unwise to regard one's compatriots with contempt, especially when the persona is noble and selfless in helping "push your car from gutter for rain."

Although the persona's reward is the splashing of "poto- poto" (watery mud) on his body, the poet still implies that his selfless services are essential.

Tunde Fatunde, has published three poems in Okike, *The Anthill Annual*, and *Voices from the Fringe* in which he exploits the resources of descriptive poetry. For example, in "Woman Dey Suffer," published in Okike, he describes the unpleasant aspects of the experience of women in society. He depicts the woman as receiving little pay despite her hard work at the office, having to return home in the evening to labor for her husband and children, and, in addition to all this responsibility, encountering several religious restrictions on her womanhood. The poet's basic contention is that:

As we get beta woman
Na so we get Yeye Koni-Koni man
Yeye woman dey
Beta Man dey
If dis world good
Na man and woman
Make am good
If dis Obodo Nigeria bad Na woman and
man Make am bad (98)

The poet is advocating equal treatment for all sexes, which is why his conclusion stresses social harmony.

In another poem, "Bad Belle Too Much," published in *The Anthill Annual*, Fatunde again advocates amity and harmony in social interactions. His concern is clearly to highlight the forms of injustice in the society, which is probably why he subjects his themes so seldom to complex philosophical ruminations. In addition, his poems are topical, as in the case of "Denis Obi Don Die," published in *Voices from the Fringe*. The poem is based on a real-life incident in which Denis Obi, a ten-year-old schoolboy, drowns while trying to catch fish in a small river near Sabongida-Ora in Bendel State. The poet attributes the boy's death to social injustice, which denies him parental guidance and financial protection - "Bekos in Papa and Mama/No fit pay in School fees/Na only fifteen naira" (Garuba, 145) - and leads the headmaster to drive him away from school. All the same, it is still possible to read this poem as a metaphor in spite of its topicality, which to some extent militates against Fatunde's utilization of relevant poetic devices. His Pidgin poems are nevertheless faithful to the social and cultural tensions in contemporary Nigerian society.

Other poems in *Voices from the Fringe* present new thematic perspectives for both the creation and the appreciation of Pidgin poetry, as their variety of subjects touch on most aspects of modern reality. The poem "Common Wealth" by A. Ajakaiye takes up the concept of the Commonwealth of Nations, in which a "former colomaster" and several "former colo servants" are expected to assume a unitary view of reality. These Pidgin poets consider such deviant motives fundamental, and there is confirmation in Anthony Ogunlowo's "Dem Dey Kill Dem Sef" in which the poet condemns the violence of soldiers who periodically exterminate their comrades, especially "for dis time/when war no dey" (137). Complementary to this poem is Godwin Erap's "Chopping Freedom", which demonstrates the dishonesty of one of those soldier-leaders who denies his people freedom of expression, freedom to live, and freedom to acquire education in spite of promises to the contrary. This issue of military politics is also prominent in Onuora Udenwa's "Who Send You," a poem in which he challenges the idea of "civilianized Soldiers".

In effect, the use of a persona whose ordinariness is obvious is, in most cases, not intended by the Pidgin poet to create the impression of naivete or simplemindedness. In the articulation of themes, the Pidgin poet, like other Nigerian poets who employ either English or one of the various Nigerian languages, makes use of the parabolic mode associated with the poetic persona in addition to the adoption of proverbial structures, metaphors, symbols, ironies, images, contrasts, refrain, rhythm, alliteration, and onomatopoeia. The language of the poem is mediated, but in this mediation there are varied levels of competence, which is really what determines the success of the works.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss the effectiveness of Pidgin English in Nigerian Poetry.

3.4 Pidgin/Special English in Nigerian Drama

The question of language has continued to confront the Nigerian dramatist. Dapo Adelugba's *Three Dramatists in Search of a Language*, therefore, would make a very interesting reading. From Ola Rotimi to Wale Ogunyemi and Tunde Fatunde among others, different experiments on language have been carried out in their literary creativity. On a broad perspective, a few Nigerian playwrights write in their mother tongue. The reason for this is not far-fetched; the local audience for whom they write could be easily reached. Such writers do not bother much about a national or an international audience. Worthy of mention are certain Yoruba performing artists in the Western part of Nigeria like Afolabi Olabimtan, Kola Akinlade, Adekanmi Oyedele, Adebisi Aromolaran, Adeboye Babalola, Olu Owolabi and others. In the Northern and Eastern parts of the country and among the ethnic minorities, a few others exist but their creative outputs are known only to an audience of their immediate communities for whom they write.

In the South-Eastern part of the country, one of the emerging voices in indigenous playwriting is Sonny Sampson-Akpan. However, aware of the need for a national and, perhaps, an international audience, his plays like *Mfon* and *Asabo Tale* have been translated to English. A good others whose works meet international standards have

had their works translated into English, the nation's lingua franca. Plays of Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola fall within this category.

However, for the Nigerian dramatist, writing in English, the question of language is a different ball-game. While Ola Rotimi has approached the matter entirely from an interpolation of cardinal indigenous Nigerian languages, sometimes representing the six geo-political zones of the country, and sometimes going further to capture the dialects of some unsung minorities in an ingeniously creative manner, Wale Ogunyemi has approached the matter in a purely transliterative manner deploying a medium which Dapo Adelugba has aptly described as "Yorubanglish"—a peculiar "Englishizing" of Yoruba expressions, words and parables. Tunde Fatunde, on his part, approaches the matter employing a special brand of Nigerian English known, simply, as "Pidgeon English"—a corrupt form of English notorious among the low-class of the society. These groups of people are in the majority, population-wise, and the medium is language-friendly to them. It should be noted that out of a population strength of over one hundred and twenty million in Nigeria, only about twenty per cent of this number is literate in the true sense of the word. While Tunde Fatunde's effort in plays like *Oga na Tief Man* and *No Blood, No Sweat* are commendable literary strides, the question of language continues to bog the minds of creative writers.

The adoption of "Pidgeon English" may not be the water-tight solution needed for the problem. This is because there are different varieties of "Pidgeon English". The "Pidgeon English" that is spoken in Nigeria, varies among ethnic groups from the West, East, North and among the ethnic minorities like the Ijaw and the Ibibio of Niger-Delta. With a little effort, anyway, one could pick one or two meanings of the different expressions here and there. Until the Nigerian Government shows more commitment to the advancement and promotion of education, this problem will continue to persist. Another problem with this medium is that since it is employed by academically-inclined people, it is removed from the targeted audience since plays that are written in this medium have never actually been known to have been performed in villages but in school theatre auditoria where the ready audience is already literate.

Adelugba has argued that 'the language barrier is more on the level of ideas than reality.' Elsewhere, in respect of the National Troupe, he says: 'Theatre language is not Yoruba, it is not Hausa, it is not Igbo. It is theatre and that is why the countries that have chosen the dance model have got round their problem. Once we choose the language of movement, sound, expression, then you get round the problem.' All this is true if the medium is not verbal. The moment one begins to deal with the cold texts that constitute a large part of the Nigerian theatre, the question of language becomes all too urgent.

Ogunba, almost 20 years ago, expressed the 'hope that as it (modern African drama) matures in years, it will become even more distinguished and finally achieving a form uniquely African... To do (this) however, the language question will have to be resolved in many parts of the continent.' He was aware then of the problem, underlined by the involvement of those who had chosen an idea which frustrates rather than facilitates communication. Etherton who usually takes the pain to examine every problem critically finally confesses that 'the language used in African drama is a problem for which there is no ready solution.' Yet Nigerian dramatists have

made conscious efforts to relate their works to their perceived audiences. Clark, who had earlier written 'The Legacy of Caliban', believes the writer has to search within his culture. 'The task for an Ijaw', he remarks in 'Aspects of Nigerian Drama', a later essay, 'and I dare say, any Nigerian or African artist writing in a European language like English is one of finding the verbal equivalent for his characters created in their original context.' Rotimi has also stated his own approach to the issue thus: 'English, as you know, is the official medium of communication in Nigeria. Inevitably, I write for audiences who are knowledgeable in this language. However, in handling the English language in my plays, I strive to temper its phraseology to the ears of both the dominant semi-literate as well as the literate groups with ease in assimilation and clarity and identification.'

Any of the plays of Soyinka termed as 'difficult', shedding the language could have evolved from the imagination of a traditional artist. The use of traditional and accessible motifs like myth, ritual, dance and dirge situates them within a context to which Akinwumi Isola reaches in translating *Death as Iku Olokun Esin* which Ojewuyi directed in 1994.

But Soyinka claims he writes 'in the firm belief that there must be at least a hall full of people who are sort of on the same wave length as mine from every stratum of society and there must be at least a thousand people who are able to feel the same way as I do about something. So... I write in the absolute confidence that it must have an audience.' Osofisan, who arguably has written more popular plays than any other Nigerian literary dramatist, once translated *Who's Afraid of Solarin* into Yoruba as *Yeepa! Solaarin Nbo*, with the collaboration of Dotun Ogundeji, a teacher of Yoruba language. There is a coinage, 'Yorubanglish' by Adelugba. 'This is not just Yoruba or English or Yoruba mixed with English but the many-sided attempts to catch the flavour, tones, rhythms, emotional and intellectual content of Yoruba language and thought.' The question of English language as a possible medium for an authentic Nigerian literary drama, a drama which can reach vast audiences is now no longer a serious problem.' Plays have had very wide appeal in spite of the language. But there can be no question that a great number of the people that such plays intend to address have been excluded. Even at the very bare level where Mike now operates in the developmental theatre, vestiges of the language problem remain, and will remain for as long as English is used by only a few influential people in these parts. The origin of this problem, which constitutes for the contemporary theatre a crisis of relevance is, as hinted earlier on, to be found in the nature of education that the pioneers of the Nigerian theatre received.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Pidgin English is not the solution to proper theatre practice in Nigeria. Assess this statement properly.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Some critics argue that Pidgin English is "used for humour as well as for character portrayal" and can also be "employed to explore deeper meanings, to explain the reasons behind a character's actions, and to project and foreground certain themes". There is no doubt that Pidgin has been deployed interestingly in the novels of Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Adaora Lily

Ulasi and in the plays of Soyinka and Ola Rotimi. There are also other works that are written entirely or to a great extent in Pidgin, like Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, Segun Oyekunle's *Kata-kata for Sufferhead*, and Tunde Fatunde's *No More Oil Boom, No Food No Country, Water No Get Enemy, Blood and Sweat, and Oga na Tief-Man*. These works portray the varied dimensions in the use of Pidgin to enhance modern Nigerian literature. However, it is in poetry that this language has been most effectively employed to create a bridge of orality, especially in the attempt to domesticate, develop, and exploit its artistic resources, as we find in the works of Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, Mamman Vatsa, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tunde Fatunde, and Tanure Ojaide amongst others. There is no doubt that the thematic range and artistic qualities of the Pidgin literatures discussed in the foregoing portray both a development and successful experiments. The lyric quality of the poems and the use of irony, metaphor, and imagistic characterization combine to produce innovations which have helped blend the resources of Pidgin to the needs of serious poetry. The essence of these works makes it clear that the language is not an end in itself but a means to an end, thus confirming the view that language is used for the external manipulation of human thoughts [and] for man's understanding of the world in which he lives. The use of Pidgin by these poets is intended to make that manipulation and that understanding artistically better, for it portrays a medium quite close to African orality although the language has not been standardized.

5.0 SUMMARY

These Nigerian Pidgin/Special English writers have established a viable literary tradition, and in their achievement by bridging the gap between oral communication and the written medium. In addition, in their use of language they exploit its resources through the use of a folk poetics and a sensitive deployment of a range of rhetorical styles while synthesizing formal features of poetry and verbal resources to generate a new vigor in the Nigerian literary tradition. Although this study indicates that the strengths of the poets vary and that sometimes their creative works possess flaws, the conclusion is that Pidgin literature is part of the literary traditions that coalesce to make modern Nigerian literature worthy of critical attention.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions carefully:

1. Explain what is meant by domestication of English in Nigerian literature.
2. Discuss the importance of Pidgin in Nigerian poetry.
3. Assess the success of Pidgin English in Nigerian prose fiction.
4. Nigerian dramatists used various language forms in their art. How effective has been their experimentations?
5. Distinguish between Pidgin English and Special English as used in Nigerian literature.

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