

The Influence of the Mbari Club and Early Nigerian Prose Writers on the Nigerian Literary Dramatists

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Abstract

The study examines the influence of the Mbari club and early Nigerian prose writers on the works of the Nigerian literary dramatists. In addition, the study analyses and documents the impact which this influence has on the works of selected Nigerian literary dramatists over decades.

Keywords: *the Mbari Club, prose, Nigerian, literary, dramatists, theatre, drama*

The emergence of the modern Nigerian writer and Fagunwa's importance as an early modern Nigerian writer

The emergence of the modern Nigerian writer should not be mistaken for the emergence of the Nigerian English literary dramatists. The reason for this is not far-fetched. The modern Nigerian writers started emerging approximately two decades before the Nigerian English literary dramatists came on board and, according to Osofisan, "not surprisingly therefore, the Modern Nigerian writer, who began to emerge from the 1940s onwards, came to the scene with this vocation of enlightened pertinence. We have the proof. For instance, one of the very first among these authors was the pioneering Chief Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa" (1997: 10).

Therefore, we can assume that Fagunwa was a leading exponent of the modern Nigerian writer in the Yoruba language, who, in his lifetime, wrote many novels and other works that were based on Yoruba myths, legends and magical realism. Most of his novels were written in the Yoruba language and many were later translated into English by scholars who were his contemporaries and allies. Some of his novels were used as

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materials adapted for the theatre, through adaptation. In 1968, Wole Soyinka was the first theatre maker to translate one of late Fagunwa's Yoruba popular novels, titled *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*, into English as *The Forest of A Thousand Daemons: A Hunter Saga*. Another Nigerian playwright, Wale Ogunyemi adapted the novel into a stage play, with a different title, *Langbodo*; in addition, he directed the play for Nigeria's entry during FESTAC 1977.

On the 22nd of September, 2008, and on the 23rd of November, 2009, Femi Osofisan staged his adaptation of two of Fagunwa's novels, *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole* and *Ireke Onibudo*, first at the Department of Theatre Arts of the University of Ibadan, at Oduduwa Theatre of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria, and lastly at MUSON Centre, Lagos, for the general audience. The performances of these productions were sponsored by a Nigerian Company in an effort to preserve the rich culture and diversity of Nigeria, and in a bid to keep the works of notable writers, such as Fagunwa, alive.

Consequently, Fagunwa cannot be referred to as one of the Nigerian English literary dramatists who gained popularity between when Nigeria was about to gain independence and the moment independence became a reality. Some of his works, however, served as an inspiration and provided readily available storylines or contents for a good number of theatre makers in the country.

Bamgbose provides an illuminating background to the foregoing when he comments as follows: "Folktales are interesting not only as an aspect of Yoruba folklore, but as a popular form of oral literature. They are important in themselves as stories, but they are probably more importantly as background material which novelists such as Fagunwa and Tutuola have drawn on heavily in their writing" (2004: 547).

D.O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola (another notable Yoruba writer of prose) were neither theatre artists nor dramatists, but were novelists who also tapped into the Yoruba folklore and legends to tell their stories. This assertion is further supported by Whittaker: "Tutuola undoubtedly followed a form of narrative structure first employed by D.O. Fagunwa, in his stories written in Yoruba and published in the 1930's and 1940's" (2001: 6).

The Nigerian writers that emerged after G.O. Fagunwa were Amos Tutuola, Hubert Ogunde, DuroLadipo and Kola Ogunmola and others. Adedeji (1980: 23) writes about UlliBeier, a German scholar, who studied and documented Yoruba arts and culture for many decades.

Many of the plays written and staged in the Yoruba language by the aforementioned Yoruba theatre practitioners in the 1960s, and which were later translated into English by Beier, adapted some familiar story lines in some novels by Fagunwa and Tutuola. Yoruba Plays such as *Lanke Omuti* and *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole* are good examples of this assertion. Notably, one important connection between these plays is, evidently, the usage of Yoruba myth, legend, folklore, proverbs, riddles and other cultural and traditional properties of the Yoruba people.

Contribution of modern Nigerian writers to the development of theatre and drama that addresses social, political, and economic theatrical performance in Nigeria

Generally, the discussion of Nigerian literature and theatre has, over many years, attracted global attention. Such attention is noticeable in the popularity of the country's staged plays at theatres outside Nigeria, reading of play-texts authored by Nigerians outside the shores of the country, both for academic and leisure purposes and most recently, the booming film industry.

Writers in the country such as Ola Rotimi, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Femi Osofisan, J.P Clark, Ben Okri and many others, have achieved world recognition through their various works. The relevance of their works to the socio-political and economic reality of the present day is perhaps the main reasons why theatre practitioners and scholars cannot but be associated with creating or re-inventing new works from their works. Various works by these notable writers, many of whom are masterpieces, are readily available materials for adaptation, appropriation and experimentation for theatre makers and film-makers today.

According to Yerima, the "simple answer here is 'choice'; and the reasons for it are not far-fetched." Yerima further explains that: "Choice in adaptation can be seen as the interest of 'likeness' or even 'fondness' for an older work" (2003: 120).

Stage adaptation of any work transcends "likeness or fondness." There is also the issue of relevance and whether or not the adapted work will serve the purpose of the theatre maker or dramatist who adapted such work. An excerpt published in one of the Nigerian daily newspapers few years ago supports this view:

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The maverick playwright died ten years ago leaving behind a retinue of plays, all which remain relevant to the social, political and economic lives of the Nigerian people. Among these plays is *Langbodo*, the epic drama which the late Chief Wale Ogunyemi, foremost writer and actor adapted from D.O. Fagunwa's book entitled, *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*. (An excerpt titled "Why Wale Ogunyemi still lives on Nigeria's stage-Director of *Langbodo*" from Sun News Papers, Thursday, February 16, 2012)

Another excerpt provides a short historical background on another play adaptation of a novel written by Amos Tutuola. The play is titled *Palmwine Drinkard*. The director, in his 'Directors Note' found in the production programme of the play directed by Tunde Awosanmi (2014) posits:

The *Palmwine Drinkard*: [translated as] *Lanke Omuti* was premiered on the Nigerian stage, precisely the Arts Theatre of the University of Ibadan, in April 1963. It was a product of that versatile actor and renowned practitioner of the Yoruba folk-opera, Kola Ogunmola, who adapted it from Amos Tutuola's novel *The Palmwine Drinkard*. At birth, the drama was not only expressive of a dominant theatrical style which had become a force and a definitive icon of Nigeria's post-colonial- the opera- it joined other Yoruba operatic experiments on the formal stage such as *Oba Koso* and *Obaluaye* to register the adaptive and experimental spirit of the theatre practitioners of the stage. And, of course, Kola Ogunmola's achievement was that his invention helped in pioneering the adaptation of novels to stage (An excerpt from the Director's Note: (Tunde Awosanmi), 16th of April, 2014)

Awosanmi's explanation provides useful information on how long the concept of adaptation of novel to stage has gained popularity in the Nigerian theatre and drama. Awosanmi named Kola Ogunmola, a contemporary theatre practitioner of Hubert Ogunde, who gained prominence during the era of the Yoruba Contemporary Travelling Theatre with his folk-opera performance, one of the pioneering figures who first experiment stage adaptation of Yoruba folkloric story into a staged drama. Hence, Ogunmola can be described as one of the pioneers of the adaptation of novel to the stage scene in Nigeria.

The idea behind Ogunmola's adaptation of *Lanke Omuti* [Yoruba translation of *Palmwine Drinkard*] was not that he lacked the ability to create his own piece; his reason for doing so cannot be dissociated from the fact

that Amos Tutuola's novel "*The Palmwine Drinkard*" is an artistic work that was carefully crafted, and which borrowed greatly from the Yoruba reservoir of history, legendary and folklore, which Ogunmola deemed useful to address some social vices facing his society at the time. Social vices, such as greediness, excessive drinking habit, and love for money, are a few themes in Kola Ogunmola's plays. He wrote other plays such as *Oba Ko So*, *Love for Money* and others, which also tapped into Yoruba oral tradition and folklore.

In conclusion, the contribution of modern Nigerian (prose) writers to the socio-political evolution of drama and theatre performances in Nigeria can particularly be seen in the area of adaptation, since many of their works were not originally created for the stage. Theatre practitioners and dramatists in the country, over the years, have considered many of their works useful in achieving and contributing their own quota to the growth of theatre and drama; such works have thematic pre-occupations applicable to address socio-political and economic challenges facing the country. Many of the works of these icons, especially those who are Yoruba writers, borrow or draw from the Yoruba wealth of legends, proverbs, folklore and other materials which serve as a potent means of sensitizing and educating the general populace concerning issues that threaten their socio-political and economic survival.

The emergence of the Nigerian English literary dramatists (1960 - the year of political independence and literary awakening)

The emergence of the Nigerian English literary dramatists, to some extent, coincides with the country's independence in 1960. The period was a significant one, due to the unfolding political, economic and cultural transition. The period also marked the beginning of the decisive contributions of theatre artists and dramatists through literary writings and performances, the positive growth of Nigeria as a nation. One primary concern of this group of well-trained practitioners and scholars was how to identify means of tackling various post-independence challenges that were facing the country. Their effort was to consolidate the success of Hubert Ogunde's participation in the nationalist struggle. In fact, one may even assert that the work of Ogunde and his theatre company encouraged the appearance of the new crops of theatre and drama practitioners in the country, starting from the 1960s. It can be concluded that the baton of

theatre and drama as a potent expressive channel against the tyrannies of the Nigerian rulers was passed on to those Nigerian English literary dramatists who emerged after Ogunde's time. This assertion is substantiated by Umukoro:

Since then, [after independence was achieved] Nigerian dramatists have been pre-occupied with the crisis of neo-colonialism, seeking for ways to reverse the condition so that Nigeria can become a truly independent country where power is used for the good of the common people. It is, in other words, a search for democracy: government of the people by the people for the people. (1994: 12)

During this epoch in the history of Nigerian theatre and drama, we see a kind of symbolic bridge between Ogunde's protest and political theatre and the literary dramatists who had garnered adequate trainings in theatrical and dramatic creations and performances both at home and abroad.

Credibly, the emergence of Nigerian English literary dramatists at the University of Ibadan (one of Nigeria's premier universities) during this period no doubt marked the take-off of, and opened up the academic channels and contributions towards genuine developments, both artistically and politically. The channels have since proliferated and continue to be a permanent intellectual arena or melting-point for series of positive socio-political and economic debates among many scholars across the country.

Some of these scholars specialized in theatre, drama or literature deemed it fit to discuss and analyse and attempt alerting Nigerians to post-independence problems that usually accompany nations emerging from colonialism and imperialism. Wake states that: "It is obvious, however, that the literary awakening of Africa is directly associated with the political awakening, which can probably be taken to precede it" (1969: 44). Wake's view further associates the literary awakening in Africa to the political atmosphere of the continent, as was the case of Nigeria in 1960. The dawn of the new political era immediately opened the doors, setting the stage for both literary and artistic expressions in the country. The Nigerian playwrights, poets and novelists saw opportunities and avenues to express themselves and to voice various concerns associated with the ripples,

rebounds, complications and effects of the long years of British domination of Nigeria.

Like Hubert Ogunde, the apprehension of post-colonial Nigerian English literary dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande, and others was towards the conspicuous decadence, vices and ills of the Nigerian society, championed by the nation's political class handling the affairs of the country at the time. Their actions and ruling styles were perceived as an offshoot of the British legacy left behind to create disunity among the many tribes and ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The Nigerian English literary dramatists were not alone at the time in this line of thought. Writers of poems and novels such as Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo and Gabriel Okara, to mention but a few, also went ahead after the emancipation of the country in 1960. They wrote on themes and subject-matters of the negative effects of the colonization of Nigeria and the incessant military take overs of mantle of the leadership in the country, warning of the consequences and aftermath of this mode of ruler-ship and likening it to a volcanic reaction by the people against the colonial masters. In relation to the foregoing, Adeoti asserts that: "in the particular case of Nigeria, the utilitarian value of literature is undeniable as it more often than not, yields a greater insight into socio-political events. To this end, Nigerian literature presents a poignant engagement with historical realities in a manner that is rewarding, not only to literary scholarship, but also to the study of politics in the postcolonial state" (2004: 12).

In addition, this set of people who quickly seized and idealized the momentum during this period of post-colonial despair and disenchantment were those Nigerians who had returned from studying abroad and those who had acquired education at the University of Ibadan, particularly those who received training in theatre and drama at the first school of drama in Nigeria, at the University of Ibadan, in 1963. Adedeji states: "The School of Drama was formally opened in October, 1963. This was a feat which coincided with the inauguration of the University of Ibadan as an independent and autonomous institution of higher learning" (1978: 10).

It will be of utmost importance here to add that the themes in the Theatre of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists and The Contemporary Alarinjo Travelling Theatre practitioners are often similar; some themes in

their various works included need for emancipation of Nigeria from British domination and the political turmoil which took place immediately after independence. The Contemporary Alarinjo Travelling Theatre and the Theatre of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists, therefore, inescapably marked and represented a certain epoch and developmental manifestations in the history of theatre and drama in the country.

The practitioners of these two theatrical movements partly found their craftsmanship not only from Western theories and practice, but considerably tapped into the vast Yoruba culture and tradition in the creation of themes in their performances, including themes that addressed social issues and those that merely celebrated Yoruba customs and tradition. And, in addition, the craftsmanship of the plays of The Contemporary Alarinjo Travelling Theatre practitioners such as Hubert Ogunde, DuroLadipo, Kola Ogunmola and others, alongside the Theatre of the Nigerian English Literary Dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, KoleOmosho, Bode Sowande, Zulu Shofola and Wale Ogunyemi and many others cannot be dissociated from western influence.

The creation of the First School of Drama in Nigeria - The University of Ibadan - in 1963

The first school of drama at the University of Ibadan was established in 1963, just three years after the country gained its independence. Ibadan is an old city which was formerly a part of the old western region, but is known today as the capital city of Oyo State, Nigeria. The creation of this university turned out to be a major catalyst and factor in the development of theatre and drama in Nigeria. Adedeji comments:

The English language theatre had been set to struggle for its own existence on the professional level. Aided by the establishment of the first School of Drama at the University of Ibadan in 1963 for the training of professional theatre artists and educators, the foundation was supposedly laid for the boost of the theatre in English. The English language had acquired an aura of prestige and encouraged the building of an elitism which had the means and resources to support a viable theatre. (1980: 16)

Apart from the fact that the Ibadan School of Drama, which today is known as 'The Department of Theatre Arts', University of Ibadan, has trained

numerous theatre practitioners; it has also produced large numbers of notable theatre and drama critics, theatre directors, stage managers, technical directors, costumiers, designers, body make-up artists, film directors, choreographers, television producers, playwrights, script-writers, novelists and others.

The notable theatre icon, Wole Soyinka, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, is a product of the department. The number of notable scholars and theatre practitioners produced by the Department of Theatre Arts is extensive; however, this study focuses only on those of utmost relevance to the study.

Many Nigerian writers, specifically playwrights, received international training at certain times in their careers as theatre scholars and practitioners. Consequently, their contact with the Western theatre and drama of Europe, America, and Asia and many other parts of the world must have, in one way or the other, influenced their theatrical and dramatic works, both in text and performance. Their exposure to the theatre and drama of different epochs and major developments that shaped the history of the world such as the classical theatre of the Greeks and the Romans; the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the invention of the printing press, the exploration of Africa by the Europeans, the 'Industrial Revolution' and the Modern Age among others must have enriched their knowledge about world theatre. Adesokan expands on this matter when he asserts that: "The development of this theatre, [English literary drama] like a good number of other cultural products of modern Nigeria, has been closely linked to the colonial educational system" (1996: 92).

The creation of the school of drama in Nigeria at the University of Ibadan in 1963 also marked the beginning of high level of literary, specifically in theatrical and dramatic, experimentation and exploration by the Nigerians and other foreigners who were residing in the country at the time. The residence of these foreigners in Nigeria was attributed firstly to what appeared to be self-imposed exile, since a huge number of them fled their country to escape the colonial oppression in their countries of birth. A good example of this is the involvement of Ezekiel Mphahlele, a South-African writer who was a founding member of the Mbari Club. Noticeably, the creation of first school of drama at the University of Ibadan has then paved a way to the establishment of other theatre and drama schools in the country. A considerable number of Federal, state and private universities

all over Nigeria today, have a department of theatre, drama, performing arts and creative arts. Apart from the universities that contributed to the development of theatre in Nigeria, other organizations also acted as instigators of development and experimentation. The Mbari Club was one such an organization.

The creation of the Mbari Club

The Mbari Club was a social organization which later became a strong and useful platform for artistic and academic deliberation and training. This club later put the University of Ibadan and Nigeria on the world map as a hub for literary development in Africa. The Mbari Club brought together many Nigerian and foreign playwrights, theatre directors, novelists, poets, theatre designers and others, under the same umbrella for collective reasoning and possible solutions to the various problems facing the continent. One of the major and immediate topics which were the cardinal foci of the Mbari Club at the time was the possible ways of liberating South Africa and other parts of Africa which were still in the hands of dictators and oppressive governments. The Mbari Club contributed immensely to the post-colonial build-up of all forms of arts, but more specifically to theatre and drama (both literarily and in practice), in such a way that they put to use as a viable means of discussing, exposing and informing the larger society of the country about the various ills and vices at the end of colonialism.

The importance of the creation of the Mbari Club (an Igbo word for 'creation') in Ibadan in 1961, and later on in Osogbo in South Western Nigeria with the help of Ulli Beier (a German anthropologist and a teacher at the University of Ibadan at the time) cannot be overestimated, particularly in the area of establishing a creative art forum which inevitably contributed to the artistic development of many Nigerian theatre artists and dramatists.

The Mbari Club was a catalyst in the development of modern African visual and verbal art. The German scholar, Ulli Beier, the South African writer, Ezekiel Mphahlele, and Nigerian scholars such as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, J.P. Clark and Demas Nwoko were the founding members of the first Mbari Club.

In 1962, an additional club was formed by Ulli Beier, Mphahlele and Duro Ladipo (an Osogbo based folk-opera dramatist), to also serve as an artistic and intellectual centre to stimulate the people of Osogbo and its environs. This club was called MbariMbayo (Adepoju 2008: 665).

In an additional account, Wole Ogundele, a renowned lecturer who has taught Nigerian literary drama for many years, in a personal interview at the Department of English and Literary Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria, on 10th June, 2010, gave an enlightening explanation on the formation of the Mbari literary and artistic club; he equally provided some useful insights into what necessitated its creation:

Many young artists at the beginning of the Sixties that is, immediately after the independence of the country, were looking for a platform to exchange their views and share their various talents and so, in 1961, the Mbari Writers and Artists Club was born in Ibadan, founded by the German writer and critic, UlliBeier. He was later joined on invitation by Wole Soyinka, Georgina Beier, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Amos Tutuola, Ezekiel Mphahlele, D. O. Fagunwa, Dennis Williams, Demas Nwoko, UcheOkeke, Frances Ademola and JanheinzJahn (the ethnologist) and many others to mention but a few.

Ogundele also posits that:

The Mbari Club was a large-scale project with various activities including visual arts exhibitions, theatres, creative workshops and a publishing house. The latter played a decisive role in the birth of modern African literature; in addition to the writings of its members and adherents, it published the South African artists and writers such as Dennis Brutus and Alex La Guma. For the visual arts, it presented the pioneers, such as the painters UcheOkeke and Yusuf Grillo, the sculptor and painter Demas Nwoko and the silk-screen artist, Bruce Onobrakpeya. All these great individuals later became well known artistes in their respective vocations in the country and abroad.

Adepoju, commenting on the remarkable achievement of the Mbari Club, states as follows:

The club provided a space for creative interaction, fueled by its library; sponsored exhibitions of artists of African descent from within Africa and

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the Diaspora, as well as non-black artists, and ran the magazine *Black Orpheus*, which Beier had founded in 1957 with the pioneering German Africanist Janheinz Jahn. The club developed a publishing house that published what have become iconic works of modern African literature. It also initiated and hosted performances of seminal African theatrical and musical works. (2008: 665)

The crucial role of the Mbari Club was the creation of a true movement of contemporary African artists whose ultimate aim was to generate a new artistic culture. They reconciled the continent's cultural traditions with the technical language imported by the colonialists. It was this same Mbari Club that served as the arena where art icons met to discuss and proffer solutions to the socio-political and economic problems of the country at the time, and where they got inspiration from, as well as the drive for the struggle for emancipation from postcolonial, socio-political and economic complications that often face newly independent countries, such as Nigeria. In his interview, Ogundele notes that "the club marked the beginning of the awakening of the struggle for a better society by many Nigerian artists of various vocations in the country" (2010).

Some of the impact and influence that has been attributed to both the Mbari Club at Ibadan and the MbariMbayo Club at Osogbo included the flourishing artistic and academic environment which served as a platform for the unification of Nigerians and other nationals, in a bid to find a common resolution to the socio-political and economic challenges facing the country at the time. By inference, the creation, as well as the artistic and academic activities of the Mbari Club and the MbariMbayo Club, also contributed immensely to the beginning of arts as a potent tool capable of dissecting the social ills, economic hardship and political unrest in Nigeria in a bid to surmount them. Rea, in regards to the foregoing, explains that:

Perhaps the most important publishing exercise at this time was the journal *Black Orpheus*. While *The Hom*, a student magazine first edited by J.P. Clark, indicated what was to come, it was *Black Orpheus* that catered for the writers and poets of Ibadan as they came into their full maturity. Edited at first by Ulli Beier, a German ex-patriot, who arrived in Ibadan in the 1950s to teach in the University extramural department, the journal included poems and prose by Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, the South African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele,

AbiolaIrele, Ama Ata Aidoo, D.O.Fagunwa and Chinua Achebe (...).
(2006: 41)

Noticeably, during this period, the association of Wole Soyinka (who later became the co-editor of *Black Orpheus* between 1960 and 1964) and other theatre and drama scholars and practitioners with the Mbari Club and MbariMbayo Club was an enhancement which radically sharpened and informed their forms and contents in creating theatre and drama which was well structured to confront the socio-political and economic problems facing the country.

Characteristics of theatre and drama by the Nigerian English literary dramatists

Unlike Hubert Ogunde's political theatre, which started largely with no definite consideration for stage directions and operatic styles of actors singing their lines and progressing to the point of improvisational acting styles by the actors, scripting of dialogue and culminating into the cinemas, the Nigerian English literary dramatists such as Soyinka, Clark and many others who came later had always adopted and started creating their plays in the western styles of playwriting.

Their plays followed well-developed plots, well-built characters (minor and major), and went ahead to create conflict resolution as the plays climaxed. The costumes and lightings are adapted to support the themes of the plays, while the stage designs were often considered inside the text of the plays, thereby serving as instructions for the directors when staging the play.

The thematic preoccupation and specific subject matters in many of the plays are creatively crafted. One phenomenon about their published play-texts is their geniuses in combining well-known popular traditions of western playwriting techniques such as dramatic theatre and epic theatre as has been seen in some of their works, even though many among them have occasionally denied any deliberate attempt at conforming to any western tradition, techniques and styles of playwriting.

It must be emphasized that some of the thematic preoccupations and subject matters found in traditional Yoruba theatre and drama – such as love, reward of patience, fantasy, jealousy, clash of culture, immoralities, traditions, values, the punishment of evil and compensation of doing good

-, dramatic biographies of favourite Yoruba heroes, as well as some straight-forward didactic pieces can also be found in some dramatic works of Nigerian literary dramatists.

In relation to this, Omofolabo believes that “There is a preponderance of straight dramas in literary theatre, but there are also many great tragedies and comedies. Themes and subject matters are varied and complex. While thematic construct, dramatic structure and performances style are clearly Yoruba, there is still a lot of indebtedness to Western traditions in stylistic and technical means of production” (2004: 626).

Plays such as *Dance of the Forest*, written in 1960, and *Death and King's Horseman*, written in 1975, and many other plays by Wole Soyinka depict themes and subject-matters which are similar to that of traditional Yoruba theatre and drama. *Kunrunmi* (1971) and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971) by Ola Rotimi also depict themes and subject matters which have close resemblance to the many stories told in a typical traditional Alarinjo performances. Various works by Femi Osofisan, such as *Morountodun*, share themes and subject matters which are related to Yoruba oral literature and performance. The reason for this artistic influence on the various works of modern Nigerian playwrights and others is that they find the Yoruba culture and tradition useful as sources which can provide them the needed materials for creating and telling their story. The Nigerian literary dramatists adapt, tap into and use Yoruba oral literature and performances in their various dramatic works to query, question and ask pertinent questions pertaining to the post-independent socio-political and economic situation or condition which has been generally believed to be unfavourable to the Nigeria masses.

Conclusions

The emergence of early modern Nigerian writers such as D.O. Fagunwa and, later on, Amos Tutuola has influenced the works of the modern Nigerian dramatists in terms of adaptation of stories present in the prose narratives of early modern Nigerian writers into full length plays by playwrights and theatre directors such as Soyinka, Rotimi and Osofisan.

In addition, the creation of the Mbari Club marked the beginning of the academic journey of a true movement of contemporary African artists whose ultimate aim was to generate a new artistic culture towards a better

Nigeria and African continent. They reconciled the continent's cultural traditions with the technical language imported by the colonialists. It was this same Mbari Club that served as the arena where art icons met to discuss and proffer solutions to the socio-political and economic problems of the country at the time, and where they got inspiration, as well as the drive for the struggle for emancipation from postcolonial, socio-political and economic complications that often face newly independent countries.

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Director's Note

'TundeAwosanmi's (16th of April, 2014) Director's Note of LankeOmuti (written by Wale Ogunyemi); an adaptation of Palm Wine Drinkard by Amos Tutuola.

Interviews

Interview with Professor WoleOgundele at the Department of English, ObafemiAwolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria (June, 2010)