Creative writing of French expression must have been conceived by a number of people as a mirage regardless of the fact that Ola Balogun, the first Nigerian writer of French expression had his drama *Shango* published by P. J. Oswald in Paris in 1968. This is only six years after the introduction of French into the Nigerian school curriculum. Furthermore, Anthony Biakolo published his novel *L’étonnante enfance d’Inotan* in 1980; he wrote it towards the end of his doctoral work in France.

Mokwenye (1999) divulged his skepticism about the prospects of Nigerian creative writing of French expression. What informed his pessimism in 1999 was its thin corpus apart from restricted readership and unwillingness of Nigerian publishers to publish such materials of doubtful marketability.

Permit me here to define the term Nigerian writers of French expression. The concept “Nigerian writers of French expression” refers to citizens of Nigeria domiciled in Nigeria or partly outside Nigeria, who use French as medium of expression in their creative writings (poems, dramas, novels, short stories etc.), about Nigerians’ life and experiences, primarily for Nigerians and by extension, for others in the international community.

Nigerian literature of French expression presents to the global community the cultural and national consciousness of Nigeria, hence its importance. Take, for example, Biakolo’s *L’étonnante enfance d’Inotan* and Onyemelukwe’s *Uwaoma et le beau monde*, apart from exposing to the world Urhobo and Igbo cultures respectively, their authors seem to propose in the novels interethnic solidarity as a means to achieve peaceful co-existence and progress in the society.
Onyemelukwe (2004) identified a total of twenty-three Nigerian writers in French and thirty-one works of theirs as against six writers and seven creative works of French expression examined by Mokwenye in 1999. They comprise five literary genres namely folktales such as Francis Balogun’s *Olikperebu et autres contes* (1978); Uche Ogike’s *Contes Nigérians* (1979); Emmanuel Adeniyi’s *Contes Nigérians* (1994); poems such as Ada Ugah’s *Rêves interdits* (1983); Ifeoma Onyemelukwe’s *Ma mère, Le combat perpétuel* (1998), Anyaehi’s *French songs and poems* (1999), Martin Bestman’s *Une calebasse d’aubes* (1999); Unimna Angrey’s *Sursauts* (2002); novels such as Anthony Biakolo’s *L’étonnante enfance d’Inotan* (1980); Enoch Ajunwa’s *Destined to survive: Destinée à survive* (1996); Vincent Okeke’s *Le Syndrome 419: Le frère terrible* (2001); Ifeoma Onyemelukwe’s *Uwaoma et le beau monde* (2003) and Femi Ojo-Ade’s *Les paradis terrestres* (2003); short stories such as Julie Agbasiere’s *Le chemin de l’Est* (1996); Tunde Ajiboye’s *Le Témoin* (1998) and Orodiran’s *Le petit villageois* (1998); dramas such as Ola Balogun’s *Shango* (1968), Anyadoh’s *Le sorcier* (1996); Anyaehi’s *L’aurore* (1996); Chukwu’s *Le masque* (1996); Adegbilero’s *Les lauréats: A collection of French plays for schools and colleges* (1996); Anyaehi’s *Révolution en trois pièce* (1998); Lynn Mbuko’s *Chaque chose en son temps* (2001) and Tunde Fatunde’s *La calebasse cassée* (2002).

Concerning creative writing of French expression, Onyemelukwe (2004) was able to identify six literary genres namely one fable, six collections of folktales, three poems, four collections of poems, three short stories, five novels and eight dramas. She, like Mokwenye omitted some works because she did not know about them. Take, for example, Obinna’s *Nigeria: Le silence du tonnerre africain* (1985) (novel), *Acada ou le miel amer* (1998) (playtext), *Soloby* (1999) (playtext) and Tunde Ajiboye’s *Olurounbi ou le prix d’un pari* (2002) (playtext). These bring the number of plays to eleven by 2004. It is important to note that some works of Nigerian literature expressed in autochthonous Nigerian languages, for example, *Réré rún*, a Yoruba play by Oladejo Okediji has been translated into French by Tunde Ajiboye as *Catastrophe au rendez-vous* (2003); *Igbo Oral Literature I: Lullabies, Igbo Oral Literature II: Songs and Games, Igbo Oral Literature III: Riddles* (Gwam, Gwam, Gwam) all published in 2014 have been translated into French by Ifeoma Onyemelukwe as *La littérature orale igbo I: Les berceuses, La
littérature orale igbo II: Les chansons et les jeux, La littérature orale igbo III: Les devinettes, all in her work La littérature orale en Afrique surtout chez les igbo (2014).

Similarly, some Nigerian literary works expressed originally in English and other imported languages have been translated into French equally forming part of Nigerian literature of French expression notably Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart translated into Le monde s’effondre, (1996), Wole Soyinka’s The Lion and the Jewel translated into Le lion et la perle, Gabriel Okala’s The Voice translated as La voix, Raouf Adebisi’s short story, The Queen Elephant’s Tail translated by Ngarsou and Danbaba into La queue de la Reine Éléphante and Ifeoma Onyemelukwe’s short story, The wicked stepmother (2009) translated by Danbaba as La méchante belle-mère (2011).

Onyemelukwe (2004: 98) demonstrated that after the initial decade of silence, Nigerian creative writing of French expression witnessed a progressive increase from 1996 to 2003. It enjoyed a relatively increased readership, better economic and publishing prospects. The factors responsible for increased enrolment in French earlier discussed in this lecture equally acted as catalysts. The Nigerian University Commission (NUC) approved Nigerian Literature in French as a course to be offered in our universities from 2005/2006 academic session. Thus today, a good number of the works by Nigerian writers of French expression constitute study texts for Francophone African literature, Nigerian literature of French Expression and useful corpus de base for writing of projects, theses and dissertations, covering all domains including translation studies.

It becomes clear that Nigerian Literature of French Expression has come to stay and has great prospects despite a couple of challenges. Mokwenye (2011: 12) admits that the Nigerian Literature of French Expression “has recently grown by leaps and bounds.”

**Recent creative writings in French by Nigerians**

Indeed, with increased awareness and interest in French and better prestige enjoyed by French in present-day Nigeria, more Nigerians have joined the camp of Nigerian writers of French expression and together with the later have produced an impressive number of works in diverse literary genres including an autobiography thereby widening the corpus of Nigerian Literature in French. Thus we have such recent works as: Le témoin (new

Notice that to date, to the best of my knowledge, Nigerian creative writers of French expression have produced fifteen (15) theatrical works.

May I remind us that there are several playtexts in French which were not published but have been acted on stage; successful performances before some audience, for example, those by Lynn Mbuko and a couple of French teachers in secondary schools. A lot of them have been represented during interschools’ competitions organised by NAFT (Nigeria’s Association of French teachers). Such representations also belong to the literary genre tagged Theatre.

The word theatre is derived from the Greek “theasthai” which means, “What is watched.” (Le théâtre @www.google.fr.1.) The term drama has a close affinity with theatre and designates action (Le théâtre @www.google.fr.1.) The two terms are used interchangeably today to mean an action interpreted by actors/actresses for the public to look at it and be entertained.

Theatre also refers to the venue, construction or room meant for performance of dramas in front of an audience (Onyemelukwe 2004: 127). Take, for example, in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria scripts are put into action by actors and actresses in “the drama village.” We need recall the classic playwrights, be they tragedians like Racine, Corneille or comedians like Molière. Playtexts like *Phèdre*, *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* were acted on the stage in scenes. A stage may be a permanent structure or a mobile make-shift type. In either case, there is a rigid demarcation of the décor with lighting, curtain etc. for the actors/actresses and the sitting place for the spectators. This typifies classic dramatic representations in the West. I need remind this audience that theatre has existed in Africa
from time immemorial though not in the strict sense of western theatre. African actors then had their oral texts which were put into performance in diverse cultural contexts – funeral dramas, festival dramas and dramas for initiation etc. (see Onyemelukwe, 2014: 14-15).

“Theatre” in its contemporary sense is a complex term, a more encompassing word. When we talk of contemporary theatre many things come into play: (1) playtexts, (2) dramas and (3) home movies/home theatre/home cinema/film.

Playtexts such as Aimé Césaire’s *La tragédie du roi Christophe*, *Une Saison au Congo*, Amadou Koné’s *De la chaire au trône*, Agbota Zinsou’s *La tortue qui chante*, Jean Pliya’s *La secrétaire particulière* are well known works.

Dramas acted in churches, schools, public places, dramas represented for communities by Development communication experts, conscientising the community on problems such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) are all part of Theatre. French dramas diffused by radio or televised are numerous. Worthy of note is “Le concours théâtral interafricain” (InterAfrican Theatrical Competition) organized by Radio France International. There were 125 manuscripts for the first competition, 394 for the third and 576 for the fifth. This InterAfrican Theatrical Competition brought into limelight a lot of Francophone African playwrights such as Jean Pliya who was decorated with Le Grand Prix Littéraire d’Afrique Noire for his *Kondo, Le requin*. It is interesting to recall some of the playtexts whose scenic representations met with great success: Sony Labou Tansi’s *Le parenthèse de sang* (1981), Protais Asseng’s *Trop c’est trop* (1981), Amadou Koné’s *Le respect des morts* (1980).

These francophone playwrights had their theatrical troupes, somewhat recalling that of Sandra Nnaji, Nigeria French Theatre.

In Anglophone West African subregion, one can boast of some organized troupes designed to interpret and dramatise scripts for public entertainment. There are innumerable Home movies in English by renowned Ghanaian actors/actresses (Nadia Bwari, Jackie Appiah, Julliet Ibrahim, Yvonne Nelson, John Dumelo, Majid Michael) and Nigerian actors and actresses (Genevieve Nnaji, Omotola Jolade-Ekeinde, Patience
Concerning French theatre in Nigeria, the story will not be complete if mention is not made of some radio diffused and televised French dramas represented by FLT's like Lynn Mbuko, etc. in the early eighties.

Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, on 23rd August, 2014, we saw for the first time ever in Nigeria in particular and Anglophone West African sub-region in general, the foundation of a theatrical troupe destined to dramatise scripts written in French, shot in various locations to produce home movies/home cinema/film first for the Nigerian public and by extension for francophone audience and the world at large. The troupe is none other than the Nigeria French Theatre founded and headed by Mrs. Sandra Nnaji. Other members of the troupe are Rahama Crowther, Obi Okafor, Oladipo Alabi, Ingrinde Ugorji, Charity Ebonugwu, Bala Waha, Rauf Musa and Ruth Ahenjir.