
From the Theatre Phase to the Media Space: Interrogating the Vocational Odyssey of Yemi Ogunbiyi

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Abstract

This article attempts an examination of the variegated professional career of Yemi Ogunbiyi (YO), one of the most prominent shapers of the contemporary media practice in Nigeria and his contributions to Nigerian theatre scholarship; literary criticism and new journalism in Nigeria. It traces his vocational origins as a theatre scholar and practitioner, through his venture into journalism, as an innovator and seasoned administrator in two of Nigeria's largest newspaper conglomerates in their time, Guardian Newspapers Limited and the Daily Times of Nigeria Plc, and his more recent endeavours in public relations, advertising and publishing. Employing historical-analytic method, this article interrogates the career and enterprise of YO, a scholar, former university teacher, journalist, administrator, public relations doyen and publisher, in order to properly situate his contributions to these professions and to national development.

Keywords: YO, Nigerian theatre scholarship, Media practice, Nigeria, National development

Introduction

It is not unexpected that contemporary engagers of the Yemi Ogunbiyi phenomenon will most readily define him within the context of his most recent endeavours in advertising, public relations and publishing. This will be most fitting for a man who has devoted the better part of the last three decades in the challenging terrains of these variegated, albeit mutually compatible vocations. For the avoidance of doubt, about 25 years ago, Ogunbiyi launched into advertising and public relations, when he

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established Tanus Communications Ltd, to compete in a market hitherto dominated by much older brands in the industry. With pre-existing labels such as Lintas Ltd; Insight Communications Ltd; SO and U Ltd, and similar outfits, already setting the pace in the sector, Ogunbiyi's creation was without doubt, a neophyte. Ogunbiyi's Tanus Communications, which began operations in May 1992, started less than five months after his exit from the Daily Times of Nigeria Plc, where he had functioned as Chief Executive for almost three years. Followers of his media odyssey, which began at the turn of the 1980s with the establishment of *The Guardian*, had, presumably looked forward to the extension and continuation of his career in journalism, the profession which had brought him so much fame and goodwill in the preceding years. His foray into these extensions of the mass media, without doubt, confounded many people.

Not too many remember, however, that Ogunbiyi actually began his illustrious professional career, which has spanned the better part of the past five decades, in the theatre. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Literature in English from the University of Ibadan in 1971; attended the New York University, Brooklyn for graduate studies and received a Master of Arts and Doctorate Degrees, respectively, between 1972 and 1976. His Doctorate thesis, supervised by the American scholar, Richard Schechner, was based on film criticism. He subsequently returned to Nigeria to take up a lectureship appointment at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). As he turned 70, April 13, 2017, however, it becomes germane to interrogate the career and enterprise of this scholar, former university teacher, journalist, administrator, public relations doyen and publisher, to properly situate his contributions to these professions and to national development. This is critical so that salient aspects of these endeavours are not casually subsumed under the canopy of his most recent ventures in the Nigerian business and commercial sector.

The Ife Days

YO's vocational origins are resident in the finest traditions of the academia, his ideological affiliation and scholastic temperament

distinctly of the left-wing Marxian hue, without genuflections. He thus found good company in the Department of Literature of ōUnifeö, (the abbreviation by which the University of Ife was popularly known), with colleagues like the venerated Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, and the younger Biodun Jeyifo, the fiery critic and theorist; Kole Omotosho, the prolific novelist and literary documentarist and the highly respected oral literature scholar, Godini Gabriel Darah.

Ogunbiyi joined Soyinka, Omotosho, Femi Osofisan, Dapo Adelugba, Rasheed Onikoyi, Joel Adedeji and Femi Johnson, on the cast of the film adaptation of *Kongi's Harvest*, written by Soyinka and co-directed by Soyinka and the African American film director, Ossie Davies, during those years preceding the eventual blossoming of a film and television sub-culture in the University of Ife. It was not any surprise therefore, that following the re-configuration of the Department of Literature and the subsequent establishment of the Department of Dramatic Arts in 1977, Ogunbiyi was one of the very first members of the academic staff to be redeployed to the new creation, to join Soyinka. Ahmed Yerima in his keynote address at the Third Edition of the Ife International Film Festival, November 29 to December 2, 2012, notes the foundational role played by YO in the development of a film and television curriculum for the University of Ife:

Film and Television did not come into the Department of Dramatic Arts curriculum until 1978, when the degree programme was startedí The Ife curriculum was greatly inspired by Yemi Ogunbiyi (who) was seconded from the Department of Literature to assist Soyinka in setting up the Department of Dramatic Artsí . Ogunbiyi's background in film gave birth to the course which was titled ōFilm and Televisionö. (1)

Against the backdrop of his endeavours in film and indeed his facial resemblance to the revered African American film actor, Richard Roundtree, who was a household name in the 1970s and

whose stage alias was “Shaft”, Ogunbiyi was equally nicknamed *Shaft* by his numerous contemporaries and friends. He later proved to be the critical shaft of many organisations and initiatives in which he was involved, over time. In 1981, Ogunbiyi released the seminal work: *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. The volume which was edited by him is an assemblage of rigorously researched academic essays by some of the most formidable names in dramatic criticism. These include Soyinka, Jeyifo, Ossie Onuora Enekwe, MJC Echeruo, Ola Rotimi, Dapo Adelugba, Ulli Beier and Eburn Clark. The work remains an invaluable resource material for teachers, students, researchers and enthusiasts alike, in the generational evolution and multicultural dimensions of drama and theatre in Nigeria, as envisioned by YO in the preface to the book.

There he defines his motivation for the volume as one informed by the need to: “readily make available those essays which are not quite accessible to students of African theatre history in our universities and colleges. It would also promote a serious starting point for the much needed re-evaluation of Nigerian drama and theatre (xiii). Side by side with his teaching pre-occupation, YO also teamed up with Jeyifo to co-found *Positive Review*, a journal of society and culture in Black Africa. The journal encapsulated the thoughts and ideals of a generation of left-inclined creative writers and scholars, including Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Odia Ofeimun and other more familiar names at the time. YO rose to the position of Senior Lecturer and Acting Head of the Department of Dramatic Arts, before he joined the Editorial Board of *The Guardian* newspapers on an initial one-year sabbatical, at the inception of the newspaper, in 1983.

A Pioneer at *The Guardian*

Recounting his first meeting with the founder and pioneer publisher of *The Guardian*, Alex Uruemu Ibru, in a December 12, 2011 tribute, YO says:

I recall clearly my first meeting with Mr. Alex Ibru. It was in June of 1983. After months of prodding from Dr. Stanley

Macebuh to join the nascent team at *The Guardian*, I accepted his offer to visit the premises of the organisation at Rutam House. And as was the tradition in those days, Dr. Macebuh took me to see Mr. Ibru first. Coming from Ife, with my heavy dose of latent left wing biases, I was not sure that I wanted to meet Mr. Ibru just yet. The meeting turned out to be brief ..

Ogunbiyi subsequently agreed to join the Editorial Board of *The Guardian*, the intellectual engine room of the organisation. In *The Whole Truth* (2004) a compendium of selected editorials of *The Guardian* from 1983 to 2003, edited by Reuben Abati, Ogunbiyi is listed in the top ten bracket of 72 full time members of the board; visiting members and consultants alike, among some of the most highly regarded names in the media industry. His colleagues included contemporaries from the academia like Macebuh, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Chinweizu, Osofisan, Herbert Ekwe and core media professionals like Sully Abu, Sonala Olumhense and Lade Bonuola. Whereas his primary editorial brief consisted of generating editorial topics, canvassing them at regular sittings of the board, drafting editorials and sustaining regular op-ed contributions to the newspapers, the creatively restless and expansively-minded YO spawned several editorial novelties.

Consistent with his primary commitment to the development of criticism and the growth of creative writing, YO, in response to the challenge and encouragement of Macebuh, initiated the *Guardian Literary Series* (GLS), in conjunction with Osofisan. The objective was to create a public platform for the appreciation of Nigeria's very rich literary tradition. In his foreword to *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the Present*, Volume One (1988), a collection of some of the essays published in the Guardian Literary Series, Macebuh notes that:

The Guardian Literary Series began as an experiment. Creative writing in Nigeria had a long history. But only a few older writers

were sufficiently well-known and this was mainly because most of their major works had been published before the economic slump of the late 1980s. The idea at *The Guardian*, initiated primarily by Yemi Ogunbiyi and Femi Osofisan, was to step in where book publishing companies could not and offer on a weekly basis in our newspaper, a series of critical appraisals of Nigerian writers. (viii)

YO corroborates Macebuh in his preface to the second volume of the publication, *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the Present*, Volume Two (1988), when he affirms that: it was quite clear from the inception of *The Guardian* as a serious daily newspaper in July 1983, that sooner or later, the newspaper would have to participate in the effort to help popularise our vibrant literature. It was clear to the founding fathers that the literary pages of a serious national newspaper, had an abiding duty to participate, initiate and even stir up debate in the all-important area of literature and culture. In a broad sense that was the objective for starting the Guardian Literary Series. (xi)

Giants in literary criticism who contributed to the project included Wole Soyinka, Abiola Irele, Dan Izevbaye, Isidore Okpewho, Biodun Jeyifo, Akinwunmi Isola, Ernest Emenyonu, Sam Asein, Chidi Amuta, Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Catherine Acholonu, Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya and Adebayo Williams. YO equally initiated a series of exclusive interviews with world leaders, which added diversity to the regular buffet of the editorial content of *The Guardian*. He interviewed Presidents, Heads of State and Prime Ministers like: Shimon Peres of Israel; Muammar Gaddafi of Libya; Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso; Julius Nyerere of Tanzania; Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. Reminiscing on his interview with Gaddafi which he undertook with the founder of *The Guardian*, YO recalls that:

By far the most bizarre of our trips was our encounter with Col. Gaddafi. We had arrived on a Saturday for a scheduled Sunday appointment with the "Leader" as he was fondly called in all of Libya. At breakfast the next morning, officials from the President's office came for us, politely chauffeured us to the airport and flew us out without prior knowledge of our destination, to Benghazi, for what we were assured was to be a prompt interview with Col. Gaddafi. With the private jet that flew us neatly parked at a nearby aerodrome, we ended up spending three days in Benghazi, in near seclusion, without our bags or change of clothing. The publisher never accompanied me to another interview!

Upon completion of his one year sabbatical, Ibru brought a lot of pressure to bear in YO and subsequently appointed him Controller, Office of the Publisher in 1985. In a manner of speaking, he became something of the Chief of Staff to the Publisher. Not long after, he was elevated to the Board of Directors as Executive Director, Public Affairs and Marketing from January 1986 to February 1989. In this capacity, he superintended over the Circulation, Transport and Advertisement Departments, the commercial and operational tripod of the newspaper.

Rescue Mission at *The Daily Times*

On March 1, 1989 YOi was appointed Managing Director of the Daily Times of Nigeria Plc, to replace Olusegun Osoba, who had just completed a five year stint on the job. If YO's six year sojourn in *The Guardian* enabled him to learn the ropes of newspaper administration and management, his appointment as Chief Executive of the *Daily Times* was an opportunity to put into practice the aggregate experience garnered and the lessons

learned. It has indeed been argued that there is perhaps no chief executive of the *Daily Times*, after the iconic Alhaji Babatunde Jose, who impacted as much on the organisation, as Yemi Ogunbiyi (YO).

The Daily Times of Nigeria Plc was a humongous conglomerate with almost a dozen diverse subsidiaries, notably: Times Publications Division, TPD, (Publisher of the *Daily Times* and a host of other publications); Nigerpack Ltd; Times Press Ltd; Times Books Ltd; Times Leisure Services Ltd, (organisers of the annual *Miss Nigeria* Beauty Pageant); Naira Investments; Naira Properties Ltd; Pilgrims Books Ltd and Times Journalism Institute, TJI. The organisation equally owned 80% stakes in the London based *West Africa* Magazine, which had a complement of Nigerian and foreign personnel alike. The *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* defines a *Shaft*, among others, as a rotating rod that transmits motion. If YO's longstanding nickname was thought to be just another alias, his exertions at the *Daily Times* gave credence to the appropriateness of the name, as he proved to be the engine room that drove development in the organisation. Niyi Osundare's impressions of the *Times* before the Ogunbiyi era in the *Daily Times* as espoused in *Dialogue With My Country* (2011), was extremely scathing. In his essay entitled: *The Ogunbiyi Phenomenon*, Osundare asserts that:

I stopped reading the *Times* in June 1980 (yes, I am very sure of the date!) I stopped because what before then was the undisputed flagship of Nigerian print journalism had sunk to such an abysmal level of sycophancy and depravity that it soiled even the hands of groundnut sellers whose unpleasant job it was to use its unsold bundles to wrap their ware. Truth rapidly took on a pale, partisan hue. The *Times* became a pamphlet in which the time-serving gladiators and opportunists of the Second Republic daily stroked their afflicted egos. Rational thought and a genuinely national discourse took leave of its

pages. Obituary advertisements took over, bringing in tons of cheap naira, but systematically killing our national dialogue. What used to be a national dialogue became a national insult. (103)

YO took up the gauntlet and resolved to reverse the trend. Recognising the fact that his vision for a radical turnaround of the fortunes of the organisation could only be steered by a very solid human resource base, he began the immediate re-organisation of the manpower content of the organisation. The Daily Times of Nigeria Plc was not without select top-rated professionals and intellectuals in its editorial arm, though. There were household names like Onyema Ugochukwu, the economist-banker turned journalist who was one of the pioneers of contemporary business journalism, and Farouk Umar Mohammed, who had served variously as Editor and General Manager of the *Daily Times*. There were also younger bright minds like Ndu Ughamadu, Segun Ayobolu, Gbenga Ayeni, the late Femi Olatunde, Emeka Nwosu, Emeka Odo, among others. Femi Sonaike, former Head of the Department of Mass Communication at the Ogun State Polytechnic and Kayode Soremekun, an international relations expert, were serving their sabbaticals in various departments in the organisation.

The new chief executive, however, embarked on a massive and cross departmental overhaul of the organisation. Femi Osofisan whose highly popular weekly fiction series, *Tales the Country Told Me*, was hitherto published in *The Guardian*, moved the literary column to the *Daily Times*. Ken Saro Wiwa equally obliged to write for *Sunday Times*, the weekend publication in the stable of the Daily Times Group. YO equally brought with him Chidi Amuta and G. G. Darah, his colleagues at the University of Ife and on the editorial board of *The Guardian*, to help reshape the editorial board of *The Daily Times*. Omar Farouk Ibrahim joined from the Faculty of Social Sciences of Bayero University, Kano, Ngozi Anyaegbunam from the editorial board of *Champion* newspapers and Ayo Olukotun, from the University of Ilorin. The

intellectual complexion of the Editorial Board of the *newö Times* looked very much like the staff list of a serious academic department. Ndaeyo Uko, the columnist; Ejiro Onobrakpeya a highly regarded foreign affairs reporter; Afam Akeh and Dapo Adeniyi, who were both on the Arts desk of *The Guardian* relocated to Ogunbiyø's *Daily Times*. Dapo Aderinola moved over from *The Punch* while Tunde Ipinmisho who was a Senior News Editor in Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, Minna, became Rewrite Editor.

The Rewrite Desk by the way was YO's creation to check the dodgy grammar, atrocious tenses and sloppy constructions that could find their ways into the news pages of the publication. Tunde Kaitell, Sam John, Gboyega Okegbenro, Edwin Baiye and Lanre Adebayo, were some of the journalists who came with him from *The Guardian*. Immediately he completed his post-graduate degree programme at the University of Ibadan, Hakeem Bello joined up in 1991. Editorial content and discourse under YO improved so rapidly and radically within a brief span, such that Osundare, who attended one of the typically lively and intellectually robust editorial board meetings under his watch, had this to say:

I looked around the room, and what caught my gaze was the diversity, the insights, and commitment of many members of the editorial board. Here were men and women whose political and ideological proclivities ranged from the fiery left, to tepid right, with a comfortable territory in the centre, that archetypal space for common grounds and compromise. At the helm of this whole arrangement was Yemi Ogunbiyi, debonair, assured, affirming here, conceding there, smoothing out the jagged edges of a vibrant, vociferous discussion, like the liberal intellectual that he primarily is. Almost instinctively, I asked myself: but how long can all this last? (102)

The overhaul of the aesthetics and visual quality of *The Daily Times* publications, engaged YO's attention as much as the task of infusing the organisation with a new breath of intellectualism. The graphic arts and cartoons department was re-organised and the creative sensibilities of talents like Yomi Ola, Victor Ekpuk, Felix Omorogbe, Kayode Tejumola and Kayode Olagunju, was re-awakened. New logos were articulated for *The Daily Times* and its sister publications, while their cover and inside pages equally had a brand new appeal. For YO, every department, every component of the newspaper production process was very important, which explains why side-by-side with the reinvigoration of the graphic arts section, the photography department was equally rejigged. YO did what was considered unthinkable in the industry, appointing Sunmi Smart-Cole as Photo Consultant to bring contemporary verve into the hitherto uncreative and monotonous photo journalism of the time. He encouraged the recruitment of university and polytechnic graduates as photographers, which was revolutionary and innovative in the industry.

Tumo Ojelabi, a 1984 graduate of dramatic arts from Unife, became the first university degree holder in the history of *The Daily Times*, if not newspapering in Nigeria, to be appointed in the photo section of the organisation. Bayo Ewuosho and Jide Dehinsilu, both graduates of the Yaba College of Technology, were also head-hunted into the photo section, by YO. With the mammoth influx of *foreigners or outsiders*, generically described as 'Ogunbiyi Boys' into the system, disaffection and friction was not unexpected, particularly in a system hitherto peopled by *indigenes* as the newcomers referred to the older staff. But the suave and diplomatic YO ensured there was a fair balance which ensured accommodation and productivity. In *The Leader at 70: How We Have Weathered the Storm: 1926 to 1996* (1996), ed. Sunday Olagunju, YO is credited with the computerisation of the operations of *The Daily Times*: He introduced the computer system and this no doubt quickened the production processes of

the company. The introduction of computer also brought with it improved aesthetic value of the papers (102).

The regular training and re-training of staff, and the improvement of emoluments and welfare packages of the personnel, as motivational strategy, also constituted highlights of the YO era in *The Daily Times*. As would have been expected, his dispensation gave luminous space for the flourish of literary productivity and criticism. Supported by Amuta and Darah, and the younger Akeh and Adeniyi, *Times Review of Ideas and The Arts*, a virtual facsimile of the Guardian Literary Series, was invented. He was an unconventional administrator who loathed protocol, abhorred bureaucratise and its red-tapism. He knew virtually every staff in every department by name, perhaps a fall-out of his years in the classroom. The circumstance of the engagement of this writer as a Staff Writer in 1990 was a case in point.

Recommended to him by a highly-regarded schoolmate of his at the University of Ibadan, he asked to know what I had done as a journalist and why I thought I could add value to his brief at *The Daily Times*. I came prepared and handed him a file with about 30 cuttings I had aggregated as a freelance contributor to *The Guardian* where he left from, the *Daily Times* and *The Herald*, among others. He flipped through the file and saw my contributions to the Guardian Literary Series which he created, among other credits. He looked up from his file and asked if I was the person that goes by the by-line. I answered in the affirmative. I was about tendering my certificates when he sent for the General Manager, Times Publications Division, a position then held in acting capacity by Onyema Ugochukwu. Once Ugochukwu showed up in the MD's holding area in the Agidingbi premises of *The Daily Times*, YO said to him: "Onyema, we have a new staff. Please issue him a letter of employment". The encounter was that brief, the outcome so magically confounding. And so I became a staff of *The Daily Times*.

While on a visit to the Agidingbi offices of the *Times* early in his stewardship, Yemi Ogunbiyi (YO) asked to see the late Imoukhuede Ogunleye. Ogunleye had created a weekly column

entitled *Diary of An Unemployed Graduate*, as a freelance contributor to *The Daily Times*, where he fictionalised the day-to-day schedule and activities of a typical job-hunting university graduate. Over time, the column had caught on and became a much sought-after for many *Times* readers who saw their own daily experiences in the daily regimen of the unemployed graduate. Typically, YO wanted to meet and commend the columnist and encourage him to aspire higher. He was informed that Ogunleye was but a once-in-a-week caller at Agidingbi during which he submitted his column contribution, since he was not on the staff of the organisation. "Get me the General Manager", was Ogunbiyi's response. "GM, employ this Imoukhuede guy. Send him to the features desk. And that was it. That was the quintessential Ogunbiyi. Ogunleye needed no godfather, no mediator. Ogunbiyi read everything published in *Times* publications.

Under YO, at least two publications were completely repackaged and renamed. *Woman's World*, a general purpose women's magazine, which was first published in February 1964, was rebranded into *Poise* magazine and was intended to challenge the hitherto dominant *Classique* magazine. Similarly, *Times International* magazine which was first launched in August 1974, yielded way for *Times Week* magazine in April 1991, to rival *African Concord* and *African Guardian* magazine. Lawal Ogiengbon who joined the *Times* in 1991, recalls the larger-than-life image of the organisation in the public consciousness, a reputation which subsisted and grew under YO. It was a conglomerate then in the real sense of the word. The *Times Publication Division* (TPD) at Agidingbi, Ikeja, Lagos the publishers of *Daily Times*, *Business Times*, *Times International*, (later) *Times Week*, *Sporting Record*, *Lagos Weekend*, *Headlines*, *Evening Times*, among others, was at the heart of the business empire which the late Alhaji Babatunde Jose left behind, following his exit in 1976 (19). Despite the multifaceted innovations brought about by YO, it is worthy of note that he steered the organisation, on the path of economic profitability in

an era where several newspaper organisations were otherwise distressed. Innocent Okoye, quoting Ukoha Kalu, asserts that:

Under Ogunbiyi, the DTN was said to have recorded a princely N10m profit. He was able to achieve the record because he was credited to have enlisted the services of some high profile journalists and a very vibrant and dynamic editorial board, made up of persons of great intellectual depth and versatility, mostly from *The Guardian* stableí .He was said to be on the path of bringing about a re-definition of what the paper was to become, before his term was cut short unceremoniously in December 1991. (14-15)

The value of the Nigerian currency, the naira was much higher at that time; nearly three decades ago, where the average annual budgets of state government was in double-digit millions. For a media organisation to have grossed a huge N10 million in profits at the time was indeed remarkable. By the time he was removed from office on the eve of the New Year 1992, YO had barely spent 33 months in office. But he left indelible footprints on the sand of time which became the benchmarks for his successors. Osundare recalls with a deep sense of nostalgia that:

What Ogunbiyi and his team did was to rescue our country's largest newspaper from the graveyard, give it back its tongue, so it could talk to us againí .By far the most enduring of Ogunbiyi's legacy in the *Times* is the re-inauguration of a vigorous literary and intellectual engagement. Old hands were rejuvenated; new talents sprang up and blossomed. Book reviews assumed a surprising regularity, while *The Times Review of Ideas and the Arts*, became every Saturday's compulsory read. A certain credibility developed around the *Times*,

certain integrity, a reasonable measure of civilised argumentation. (103 ó 104)

Continuing, Osundare hypothesizes on the possible reason for YO's ouster from the *Times*, which was arguably linked to the air of liberal discourse and expansiveness which Ogunbiyi engendered in a hitherto pro-establishment media organisation, while also expressing deep concerns about the future of the new-look *Daily Times*. His words: Now, that music has been stopped mid-tone. All kinds of reasons are being conjectured for the stemming of the *Times* brief renaissance, one of them being that Ogunbiyi's *Times* is not *pro-government* enough. Will the *new men at the helm* lead the *Times* back to that abyss of sycophancy and abasement which kills national discourse by privileging the rulers' fiction over the people's truth? Will the *Times* die again? (104).

YO deployed the few months immediately after his exit from *The Daily Times* to plan his next vocational option. He was already entrenched in the media and journalism by this time and public expectation favoured his rebound perhaps in another publication. It had become fashionable for journalists who broke away from their parent organisations to re-convene and start-up their own news outlets. The example of Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu, Yakubu Mohammed and Dan Agbese who broke out from the erstwhile *Concord* newspapers (Giwa, Ekpu and Mohammed) and Agbese (*New Nigerian*) to establish *Newswatch* in 1985, was still very fresh. The same was the breakaway of Nosa Igiebor, Onome Osifo Whiskey, Dare Babarinsa and Babafemi Ojudu, who also exited *Newswatch* to set up *Tell* magazine in 1991.

Testing New Grounds

His eventual recourse to advertising, public relations, advertising and publishing was something of a surprise to several YO admirers. Almost 25 years down the line, however, he has made such a huge success of the initiative and his organisation has become a reference point in the industry. Within this period, Tanus Communications Ltd has collaborated with several blue-

chip organisations, notably: the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC); West African Portland Cement Company PLC (WAPCO); Union Bank of Nigeria PLC (UBN) and Mainstreet Bank Plc (formerly Afribank Nigeria Plc), in media and public relations. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN); the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC); Dangote Group of Companies; Bank of Industry (BOI); Berger Paints Plc and National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA); also feature in the long list of the organisation's clients.

His Tanus Books Ltd which commenced operations in 2008 can be rightly regarded as a bold attempt to reconnect with his primordial interest, contributing to knowledge. The emphasis, however, has been on the production of school textbooks and instructional materials for the younger generations in primary and secondary schools. Collaborating with educational experts, Tanus Books has produced textbooks for almost a dozen states across the country, notably: Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Rivers, Lagos, Ekiti, Kano, Adamawa and Borno. Tanus Books is equally a partner of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) on textbook production and distribution. In recognition of his longstanding service to educational development, YO was in January 2017 appointed Chairman of the Governing Council of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. This in a manner of speaking re-united him with the university where he first began his career as a university lecturer, over four decades ago. It is an opportunity for him to bring his cumulative experience to bear, in the rejuvenation of the erstwhile model citadel.

Conclusion

Without any doubts, Yemi Ogunbiyi (YO) has had a very well rounded professional career, during which he has virtually traversed the entire gamut of the media and communicative arts, from the stage, through the media and thenceforth to public relations, publishing and advertising in Nigeria and beyond. It is hoped that he would continue to sustain his enterprise in literary intellection, media advancement and legendary scholarship in the same manner of front liners such as Professors Wole Soyinka and

John Pepper Clark Bekederemo, among others, and his contemporaries, Professors Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Biodun Jeyifo, Kole Omotosho, and other members of the clan for the younger generations of Nigerian academics to emulate and benefit from in the quest for national development.

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