

The Print Media and the Evolution of Third-Generation Nigerian Poetry

Tunde Olusunle

People and Politics Magazine, Abuja, Nigeria.

Email: babatstone@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Previous literary scholarship and critical allusions to the evolution of Nigerian literature have unanimously acknowledged the emergence of a third generation of Nigerian poetry. This development which gained accentuation between 1980 and 2000, threw up an avalanche of successors to the second-generation poets, notably: Odiya Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, Okinba Launko, Catherine Acholonu and Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie. Despite the visible numerical strength of this new generation of writers; their aggregate prolificity and their gross contribution to our national creative output, adequate seminal attention has not been paid to the role of the print media in the catalysation of this milieu. This study, therefore, situates the third generation of Nigerian poets and their works, within the context that they are bonafide products of the print media. They sprouted and flourished in an era where creative activity, triggered by national socio-economic realities, bloomed without collateral and commensurate outlets for the expression of this creative outburst. They have continued to sustain the richness and robustness of Nigeria's poetic traditions. Their continuing commitment to socio-political engagements has reinforced the enterprise of preceding generations. This study will constitute a veritable reference material on the emerging corpus of critical discourse on the evolution of Nigerian poetry, deriving from the pages of Nigerian newspapers, en route to the 20th century.

Keywords: Print media; Poetry evolution; Third-generation; Creative output; Socio-political realities.

Introduction

This study aims to situate the emergence and evolution of third-generation Nigerian poetry, as a product of the print media, particularly between the two decades spanning 1980 to 2000. There is a convergence of opinion among literary scholars and critics, that this period was characterised by phenomenal poetic productivity, previously not experienced in the developmental process of Nigerian verse. Arising from shared socio-political experiences within this broad dispensation, particularly between January 1984 and May 1999, during which Nigeria and Nigerians were subjugated to all manner of repression, subjugation and inhumanity by serial military regimes, emerging poets found inspiration in these occurrences and created works criticising oppression and denouncing despotism. From the martial regimes of Muhammadu Buhari (January 1, 1984, to August 27, 1985); through Ibrahim Babangida (August 27, 1985, to August 26, 1993) and thenceforth to the rulership of Sani Abacha (November 17, 1993, to June 8, 1998), Nigerians suffered untold hardship and dehumanisation. Commenting on the richness and robustness of poetry of the era, Dunton (2006) notes that:

Creative writing has rarely been as vibrant in Nigeria as it is just now....Amongst the poetry, traditional elegies and eulogies, stand side-by-side with bold spatial experiments. Lacerating broadsides, on Nigeria's current polity, rub shoulders with a strikingly frank exploration of sexuality and with anguished commentaries on the state of the national soul... A story from Maiduguri is followed by a poem on the Liberian Civil War and by a gripping audacious play on the murder of Saro-Wiwa. Nigeria is the powerhouse of African literature... (Back page)

The statistics of the aggregate number of new poets who emerged within the period under study are yet to be computed. What is clear, however, is that the numbers were indeed impressive enough to command the attention of notable literary scholars and historians, across the world, for incisive critical dissection and indeed for conscientious documentation. Otiono (2006, p.20) has noted the exponential growth of the numbers within this dispensation, as against the preceding generation (who) "could be counted with ease." Many poetry anthologies put together as an offshoot of this positive development, attempted to accommodate as many of the new poetic voices as possible. While *Voices*

from the *Fringe* edited by Harry Garuba (1988), attempted to publicise the works of 100 new poets, *Rising Voices: An Anthology of New Poetry from Nigeria*, (1991), edited by David Cook, Olu Obafemi and Wumi Raji, unveiled the works of about 20 poets. *Vultures in the Air* (1995), edited by Zaynab Alkali and Al Imfeld, a 150-page anthology, accorded provenance to the works of upcoming poets from the north of the country. Ilagha (2002, p. xvii) recalls Garuba's proclamation of "the definite arrival of a new generation of promising poets, who were, nonetheless, limited by the pervasive lack of publishing outlets," in his introduction to *Voices from the Fringe*.

Yet, these efforts were inadequate to provide ventilation for the deluge of poetic production and burst of talent from across the country. Nigeria, as Dunton (2006) had earlier posited, maintained its standing and acclaim as the "powerhouse of African Literature." Indeed, with publishing opportunities from multinational publishing outfits almost non-existent, it was the print medium which salvaged the enterprise and poetic talent of a whole generation of new poets. The voices of these writers, would most probably have been asphyxiated in the national economic quagmire of the time. Validating this acute dearth of publishing opportunities for the third-generation of poets, Ilagha, (2002, p. xvii) contends that "Since 1988, a good number of poets represented in the ANA anthology and many others outside it, have had their collections published, most of them through personal financial commitment. Some of these books have received worthwhile critical acclaim..." This study, therefore, serves to fill a yawning gap in the appropriate contextualization of the origins of third-generation poetry in Nigeria. Among other things, it will:

- i. establish the definitive emergence of third generation Nigerian poetry between 1980 and 2000, from the platform of the newspaper,
- ii. verify the thematic pre-occupations of some of these poets, who were collective products of the socio-political distortions which pervaded the polity, particularly during the infamous years of military dictatorship in Nigeria.

Three issues are germane to this discourse, which require illumination, to enable us put this work within proper context. These are: 1. The Periodization of Nigerian poetry, 2. The Origins of the newspaper in Nigeria; and 3. Inter-relationships between the print medium and literature. Attempts at the epochalization of Nigerian literature in general, and the nation's poetry in particular, have yielded a myriad of interesting

perspectives. Jeyifo (2006, pp. 24-25) has posited that the evolution of modern African Literature in a broad sense, has proceeded through about five distinct generations. According to him: the first two generations came into their own in the high tide of decolonization, while the last two generations have been confronted with spectres of arrested decolonization, failing or collapsed states, economic stagnation, widespread autocratic misrule and the delegitimation of the good narratives of emancipation which held that the liberation of African peoples in the modern world, is indissolubly linked to the liberation of all the oppressed peoples of the world.

Onwumere (2010) contends that within the Nigerian context, there are four distinct generations of Nigerian poets: the pre-colonial; colonial; post-colonial and contemporary. His essay, *The Evolution of Nigerian Poetry*, aligns with Jeyifo's proposition of the socio-historical influences of the poetry of the various epochs, while he equally lists notable poets of the various dispensations. According to him, the Christopher Okigbos, the Wole Soyinkas, the Chinua Achebes and the John Pepper Clarks who 'fought' against colonialism and the racist profiling of Africans by the colonial masters constitute the first generation. The second generation engaged with urgent and prevalent post-colonial themes of misrule, corruption and oppression, among others. This is the generation of the Tanure Ojaides, the Odiya Ofeimuns, the Niyi Osundares, the Okinba Launkos (pen name for Femi Osofisan), Funso Aiyejinas, and so on.

The succeeding generation of poets are those, Obafemi (2001, p.14) refers to as the "unequivocal third generation of the (Ogaga) Ifowodos, the (Remi) Rajis, the (Nduka) Otionos, the (Promise) Ekekwes, the (Charles) Bodundes and so on." Elsewhere, Obafemi (2013, p.145) has described the tone of this generation of writers as "a bundle of anger and creative directness, even raw verbiage as an expression of their anger." About half a dozen of this generation of poets, notably Izzia Ahmad, Emma Usman Shehu, Afam Akeh, Uche Nduka, Esiaba Irobi and Kemi Atanda-Ilori, had their maiden individual poetry collections published in 1988, to signpost the berthing of a decisive generation of poets, after the second aeon. Osofisan (2013, pp.145-146), recalls the timing of the arrival of this generation of poets: coincided with the military years, where corruption ("settlement" is what IBB's (Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's) regime called it), was rampant, when selfishness, brutality, kleptomania, became the official religion and virtually all the welfarist programmes

established in the First Republic to take care of the poor and the underprivileged were gradually and callously dismantled. No graduate is sure of employment anymore nowadays as you are aware.

Emenyonu (2008) has identified a generation of poets whose career, trails the enterprise of the third epoch. This is the generation of Vincent Obioma Nwosus, Anne Long Johns, Florence Orabuezes, Dan Mbajiorigus, Robert Egbes and Ken Anierobis. This generation will equally include the Pius Adesanmis, Seyi Adiguns and Sophia Obis. What is clear from these various perspectives on the periodization of Nigerian poetry, is that like all art, Nigerian poetry has been influenced and conditioned by prevailing socio-political circumstances, an inter-relatedness confirmed by Tunde Adeniran (1994, p.49) as follows: in Africa, a continent that has experienced different forms of slavery, feudalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, political and economic disarticulation, prebendalism, distorted dynamics and processes, etc, the writer would be required to demonstrate an awareness of these phenomena and show capacity to react to them by mirroring them effectively to the world, as propelled by his sensibility and sensitivity. This corroborates the recurrent echoes of our history, our socio-political realities and their dynamics which are ever prevalent in our literature.

Also critical to our understanding of the epochalization of Nigerian poetry, are the dates of publication of the works of the various generations of writers. While the "octogenarian" generation of poets had made their published debuts in the 1960s, notably Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962) and *Limits* (1964), and Soyinka's *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), the earliest published second-generation poet, Ofeimun, made his debut almost a decade later in 1971, with *The Poet Lied*. Ojaide's *Children of Iroko* (1973), was also one of the earliest works of that generation. Similarly, the debut works of the third generation of writers, the Ahmads, Irobis, Akehs, Ndukas, Atanda-Iloris and Usman Shehus were all published in 1988. Sesan Ajayi's *A Burst of Fireflies* and Olu Oguibe's *A Gathering Fear* (both released in 1991), were not berthed until after almost two decades, following the second generation. This derived largely from the asphyxiating socio-economic conditions which impacted publishing within the period between the late 1970s and 1980s, and thus evolved new poetry which came off the pages of Nigerian newspapers and which subsequently produced the generation of poets under discussion in this essay.

The Origins of the Newspaper in Nigeria

The very first Nigerian newspaper, *Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Egba Ati Yoruba* (translated as a newspaper for the Egba people and the Yoruba), was established by Reverend Henry Townsend and made its premiere on December 3, 1859. Ajibade (2003, p.2) observes that much as the newspaper focuses on religious discourse as part of the ecumenical proselytization project of the early missionaries, "Townsend broadened the newspaper's coverage to include commercial news as well as political matters of the time." Nationalists would subsequently draw inspiration from the pioneering success of the early missionary newspaper, to establish tabloids, wholly devoted to the nationalist struggle.

Lagos Times and *Gold Coast Colony Advertiser* arrived the newsstands on November 10, 1880, and championed the expression of the earliest nationalist sentiments. The likes of Horatio Jackson and Herbert Macaulay, inspired by the black emancipation gospel of Marcus Garvey, B. W. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Dr. Blyden and Ayikwe Aggrey, deployed the newspaper to advocate and cogitate for an end to colonialism. In subsequent years, the early nationalists were joined in the anti-colonisation crusade by A.Y.S Tinubu, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dennis Osadabey and Anthony Enahoro, among others. Beyond their primary concerns with the politics of the time, many of the early newspapers were purveyors and promoters of culture. Darah (1988, p.9) observes that even indigenous newspapers encouraged interest in literature. This was particularly evident in newspapers like *Anglo African*, *Lagos Observer*, *Lagos Standard* and *Lagos Weekly Record*, which published writings, articulating undercurrents of the politics of the time.

Inter-Relationships between the Print Media and Literature

Literature and the print media enjoy a very robust and congenial relationship. Indeed, literature and the media thrive on mass dissemination and the principle of sharing. Literature needs the media to popularise itself and its ideas, whereas, the media needs literature to enhance expressive possibilities and elevate discourse, in a somewhat symbiotic relationship. Osundare (2013) in an interview cited in Olusunle (2019, p.19), reminds us of a long-existing relationship between the media and literature when he says:

... In 18th century England, when the profession we now call journalism was still in its nondescript infancy, literature and journalism enjoyed a very close relationship. *The Spectator*,

edited by Adison and Steel, was some kind of periodical which focused on London society specifically, but it also thrived on book reviews, publication announcements, literary discourse, and literary gossip... We also remember that the novels of the famous Charles Dickens were first serialized in newspapers before they were eventually published as novels.

Much as there was also a correlation between the media and Nigerian literature as far back as the 18th century which we have earlier alluded to, it was not until the 1980s that the deployment of the Nigerian newspaper for the development of literature, most particularly emerging poetry, became a deliberate project in most Nigerian newspapers. Ogunbiyi (1988, p. x) has advanced that: it was quite clear from the inception of *The Guardian* as a serious daily newspaper in 1983, that sooner or later, the newspaper would have to participate in the effort to help "popularise' our vibrant literature. It was quite clear to the founding fathers that the literary pages of a serious national newspaper had an abiding duty to participate in, initiate and even stir-up debate in the all-important area of literature and culture. In a broad sense, that was a prime objective for starting The Guardian Literary Series, (GLS). Ogunbiyi's thesis above immediately provides a primary theoretical context for this work, which is the Agenda Setting Theory.

Some critical discourse has been carried out on this milieu of newspaper poetry in Nigeria. Osundare (1987, p.11) in his "Bard of the Tabloid Platform: A Personal Experience of Newspaper Poetry in Nigeria," for instance discusses the possibility of creating and sustaining poetry in the newspaper regularly, without compromising relevance, accessibility and aesthetics. Osundare's essay is predicated on his successful experimentation with a regular weekly poetry column in *Sunday Tribune* titled "Songs of the Season," a project which made its debut in 1985. Otiono's "Songs of the Tabloid Platform" (1990), investigates the common thematic engagements and ideological inclinations in selected works in Nigerian newspapers. Bodunde (1996, p.179), in "Poetry of the Newspaper, the Younger Poets in Nigeria and the Search for Artistic Medium," attempts a historicization of poetry in Nigerian newspapers and examines the social and literary phenomena influencing the poems. He sums up that: "The attempt to create and sustain poetry in Nigerian newspapers is an encouraging literary development. This attempt is made with the recognition of the nature of the newspaper medium itself. The

medium easily accommodates materials which are political, social or literary." Okunoye (2005, pp. 64-85), revisits the social engagement aesthetics of Osundare in his poetry collection, *Songs of the Season*, against the backdrop of its evolution from the platform of the newspaper. While these essays have examined Nigerian poetry as popularized by the print media, none of them as yet has situated this development within the context of the instrumentation of the print media in the decisive evolution of a defined and specific generation of poets. The Osundares, Ofeimuns, Ojaides, Launkos, and Aiyejinas were already established national and global poetic voices by the mid-1980s. The generation which succeeded the Osundares evolved from the pages of Nigerian newspapers and constitutes the object of this study.

The Emergence of *The Guardian* and the Evolution of a New Generation of Poets

The Guardian newspaper was established in March 1983 by Alexander Uruemu Ibru. He envisioned a newspaper which would rank among the very best anywhere in the world, a one-stop shop of information, education, enlightenment and entertainment for the reading public. Debo Adesina (2012, p.2), explains that Ibru founded *The Guardian*, intending to make it the best newspaper in Nigeria and one of the best five in the world. According to Adesina: "He (Ibru) hired the best and brightest for this venture and it was not long before the newspaper became the flagship of the Nigerian press." From the inception of the newspaper, therefore, Nigerian academics, scholars, critics and writers across disciplines who were only previously encountered mainly on the pages of textbooks, journals and so on, were involved and incorporated in the conceptualization and development of the editorial content of *The Guardian*.

With names like Stanley Macebuh, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Chinweizu, Femi Osofisan, Sonala Olumhense, Ogunbiyi and Ofeimun, all accomplished literary personages—either as critics or creative writers – so deeply involved in mid-wiving the new publication, it was to be expected that literature and literary development would flourish. Idowu (2003, p.24) records that the Editorial Board of *The Guardian* was a rock-solid assemblage of some of Nigeria's finest literary minds, central to which was Macebuh: Dr. Macebuh who holds a PhD in literary criticism assembled a powerful editorial board which was headed by Dr. Onwuchekwa Jemie, with Dr. Femi Osofisan, Dr. Chinweizu and later Dr.

Yemi Ogunbiyi as members. It was said then that *The Guardian* editorial board was a literary theatre that dissected issues of the day.

As a conscious policy to popularise literature and creativity, *The Guardian* immediately articulated and allocated sections of the publication and specific days of the week for literature and literary works. De Fleur and Dennis (1998, p.272) in explaining the Agenda Setting Theory, opine that “the press (news media in general) select several issues, topics and events from its continuous surveillance of the environment to process and report daily as the news.” The development of a popular appeal for literature from the foregoing discourse as corroborated by De Fleur and Dennis, therefore, was aligned with the agenda-setting enterprise of *The Guardian*. The newspaper devoted prime space, with sustained regularity, three days of the week to literary criticism, creative writing and literature. *The Guardian* literary pages were published on Wednesdays, (which was later changed to Tuesdays), Saturdays and Sundays, such that students, scholars and enthusiasts of Nigeria-literature, were assured of regular vibrant offerings on the pages of *The Guardian*. The midweek edition of the literary section of the newspaper was simply called ‘Arts and Culture,’ sometimes, simply “The Arts” page; the Saturday bouquet was known as “The Guardian Literary Series, GLS and the Sunday diet was The Guardian Literary Supplement.” Abati (2018) tells us:

...I wrote in those days very actively for the Nigerian press - *Daily Sketch*, where I did book reviews almost weekly, and *Nigerian Tribune* where I also wrote reviews and essays. Also in *The Times Literary Supplement* anchored first by Afam Akeh and later by Dapo Adeniyi, and of course, the seminal *Guardian Literary Series*, where literature was promoted and rigorous intellection was allowed.

While the mid-week literary section typically featured theatre reviews, book critiques, conference papers, under-currents from popular art and music, as well as art updates, it was, however, in the “Poet of the Week” column in the Sunday Guardian Literary Supplement, (GLS), that many of the poets who have come to be known as constituting the third generation of Nigerian poets, first came to the public limelight. Names like Toyin Adewale-Gabriel, Amu Nnadi, Nduka Otiono, Ogaga Ifowodo, Chiedu Ezeanah, Olu Oguibe, Nnimmo Bassey and many others, made their poetic debuts on the pages of *The Guardian*. They subsequently featured in other newspapers which adopted the pioneering experiment

at *The Guardian*. Adewale-Gabriel (2016), cited by Olusunle (2019, p. A36), notes:

You know, the newspaper provided us with an audience. In our little way, we became famous, particularly our group of young poets that came up in the eighties and nineties, that third generation of Nigerian poets. Publishing in the newspapers helped us to take ourselves seriously. And if you look at the evolution of the writers of that generation: Afam Akeh, myself, Nike Adesuyi, Funmi Adewole, Ogaga Ifowodo, Sola Osofisan, all that generation were all getting published at that time.

Nnimmo Bassey, who has become one of the most prolific members of this generation, for instance, is published in the Sunday, January 29, 1984 edition of *The Guardian*. His poem, titled "One Day (I Stumble)" re-enacts a usual occurrence during the heydays of military rule, when uniformed law-enforcement officers, took particular delight in inflicting pain on the citizenry with their guns and armaments:

One day
When the anarchist
Proclaimed order
The police occasioned mayhem
And calm people screamed
BLOOD! MURDER!
That day we almost found a story...

The concluding section of the poem speaks about the need to exercise restraint amid provocation since two wrongs do not make a right:

One day
en route to idiocy
I stumbled on genius
And ricocheted from the frontal lobes
of her chest.
That day one madman
One idiot
Said
PEACE (p. 85)

In his fit of anger and rage at the injustice perpetrated by the policemen in the poem, the poet-persona had the urge to rouse others to mass action, which could have degenerated into mayhem. But the poet-persona received an inner, silent “restraining order” to hold his peace. Bassey himself acknowledges the eternal battle his generation of writers had with agents of the state, in his “Author’s Notes’ to his second collection of poetry, *Poems on the Run* (1995, p.6), when he says: “Some of the poems (flamethrowers) were written long before the flames of popular rage leapt on the rafters and the machinery of state terrorism bared its fangs to trigger these unending weeks in the underground.” It is to Bassey’s credit that the initial promise he demonstrated on the pages of Nigerian newspapers, has crystallized into the publication of at least four poetry collections, notably: *Patriots and Cockroaches* (1992); *Poems on the Run* (1995); *Intercepted* (1998) and *We Thought it was oil, but it was Blood* (2002).

The success of the experiment of *The Guardian* with the promotion of the growth and development of literature has thus authenticated the perspective of Serverin and Tankard Jr. (2001, p.219), that “the agenda-setting function of the media refers to the media’s capability, through repeated coverage, of raising the importance of an issue in the public’s mind.” With the relocation of Yemi Ogunbiyi, co-initiator of *The Guardian* Literary Series, to the *Daily Times* in March 1989, literature and literary creativity also witnessed a new lease of life, in the *Daily Times*. Ogunbiyi moved with literary-minded scholars from *The Guardian*, and also head-hunted several others from various universities. Prominent poets of the third generation like Otiono, Obu Udeozo, Chiedu Ezeanah, Ogaga Ifowodo, Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju, Moses Imosemi and several others, made their premiere public appearances on the pages of *Daily Times*. Otiono’s “Midnight Voice” which appears in the *Daily Times* of April 18, 1992, revisits the issues of hunger, dehumanisation and corruption, despite the cacophony of songs and supplications issuing forth, from the chapels of orthodox churches and Pentecostals alike:

Let the choir sing with a babel
 As this long column of faithful
 Reminds one of the SOUL HUNGER
 Dambudzo spoke of....
 Let the choir sing with a babel
 Life now is the rungs of a ladder,
 For every step a fall...

And hour after hour after hour
There's no salvation from starvation
No escape from wish fulfilment
As Lagos is left in the dark
And refugees prowl the refuse heaps
Like cloudbursts of darkness descending
As laughter is hidden in briefcases without briefs
And heads of tears our red eyes apart (p. 16)

The poem seems to peter out on a note of pessimism, but the poet assures that there will be catastrophic consequences on those who inflict others with so much hardship and so much inhumanity. He warns:

I can't see now those coming to worship
how many are zealots, how many harlots?
No Escape From the whips of Faith
No Escape from Fears and Tears of ARMAGEDDON. (p. 16)

Otiono fulfilled the early burst of the promise he exhibited as a poet. He has published three well-received collections of poetry: *Voices in the Rainbow* (1997), *Love in a Time of Nightmares* (2008) and *DisPlace* (2021). *Voices in the Rainbow* was runner-up for the ANA/Cadbury Prize in 1997. He has equally authored a collection of short stories, *The Night Hides with a Knife* (1996), which was the joint winner of the maiden edition of the ANA/Spectrum Prize for fiction. In the acknowledgement page of *Voices in the Rainbow*, Otiono pays tribute to the role of the print media in ventilating his craft: "I also thank ... *The Post Express* literary supplement (PELS), ANA Review, *Quality Magazine*, *Daily Times* arts and reviews pages and *Classique* magazine for introducing some of these poems to the public (p.v)." With more national newspapers, adopting a deliberate editorial policy to allocate ample print space and attention to issues of literature, creative writing and criticism, it became fashionable for the broad spectrum of newspapers, including the regional and provincial to adopt the vogue. This agreed with the Adoption of Innovation Theory because not to doing so was a recipe for consignment to the backwaters of the scale of preference of the discerning reading public. *The Herald*, therefore, was yet another newspaper which provided requisite provenance in the germination of the burst of poetry on the pages of the newspaper in Nigeria. Established by Edict No 3 of 1973, by the

Government of Kwara State of Nigeria, the newspaper, besides its primary function of knowledge dissemination, was officially mandated to serve as an enabler for the development of literature. The edict explicitly requested *The Herald* to “encourage by competition or otherwise, the composition of music and literature of all kinds and maintain depots for the distribution of periodicals, literature and books,” (1973, p.1). If this express mandate did not find appropriate expression in the early years of *The Herald*, the development of literature flourished in the 1980s and 1990s, partly in response to similar developments in other notable newspapers across the country. Importantly, this was enabled by certain personnel changes which engaged erstwhile print media practitioners from *The Guardian* newspaper in particular. Olusunle (2019, p.119) recalls:

...The 1985 relocation of a critical crop of the pioneers of *The Guardian* to *The Herald*. This is with specific reference to Doyin Mahmoud a highly rated sub-editor and Dapo Olorunyomi, a radical scholar-journalist who was part of the transforming developments at *The Guardian*. They heeded the call to return “home” to their state of origin, the old Kwara State as it were, to assist with salvaging *The Herald*.

Upcoming poets like Abdulrasheed Na’Allah, Ayo Oyoze Baje, Gbenga X Adebija, Tejumola Olaniyan, Femi Fatoba, Bili Wumi Raji and Tunde Asaju were some of the more popular poets of that dispensation. Wumi Raji’s “The Man Was Pronounced Guilty” published in the *Sunday Herald* on May 25, 1986, satirizes the wholesale compromise of the nation’s judicial system, under the military regime of the Babangida dispensation, which has been serially alluded to in the discourse. Simulating a dialogue between a Judge and the General and deploying Biblical communicative aesthetics of the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, the poem alludes to the pre-emptive sentencing of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the globally renowned Afrobeat musician, even before his trial, on the orders of the General:

And the general spake unto
 The judge
 “Verily, verily I say unto thee
 A man shall be brought before
 Thy court
 And he shall be jailed by thee.
 And the judge said unto the general

"I heard thee O venerable general
 but what offence shall it be said
 That the man hath committed?
 and the general asked in anger
 What right hath thou to
 speak in my presence?
 How hath thou so ignorant
 That thou knowest not such
 a hardened criminal?
 And the general continued:
 The man is too vocal
 Such people are dangerous to the land
 So he must be prevented from singing
 He is internationally recognised
 So he is an economic saboteur
 The man is a non-conformist
 He needs to be brought back to his senses.
 He champions the cause of the people
 So he must be kept away from the Public (p. 11)

The references to the power of the lyrics of the innocent human rights crusader; his international acclaim; his non-conformism, during the period in question, could only have alluded to Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, who was routinely hounded and jailed by the administration of General Muhammadu Buhari, which administered Nigeria between January 1984 and August 1985 on phantom charges of "money laundering." Schoonmaker (2004) profiles the artiste thus: Fela created Afrobeat, an infectious mix of American funk and jazz with traditional Yoruba and highlife music and used it to rail against the corrupt hypocritical Nigerian government. Repeatedly targeted by police and military for his rebellious, counter-culture lifestyle, he created a political party and seceded from the Nigerian state, renaming his commune, the independent "Kalakuta Republic" (Back Page).

Fela was relentless in his lyrical confrontations with the establishment in his many musical compositions, notably "Authority Stealing," "Army Arrangement," Coffin for Head of State," Beast of No Nation and "ITT." He regularly took on the military headlong, lampooning the institution for nepotism, corruption, oppression and similar repressive tendencies. Raji's "The Man Was Pronounced Guilty,"

was emblematic of the terrorism and bullying which was visited even on the judiciary by the military overlords, in those days of fistic rule. Raji has proceeded to fulfil an artistic promise, as it were. He won a book prize in the "BBC Arts and Africa Poetry Competition" of 1988. He has co-edited *Rising Voices; An Anthology of New Nigerian Poetry* (1991), with David Cook and Olu Obafemi. He has also published *Rolling Dreams* (2002), a collection of poetry, and *Another Life* (2013), a play.

Conclusion

This study has traced the interconnectivity between the evolution of third-generation Nigerian poetry and poets, as mid-wived by the newspaper, particularly between 1983 and 1993. The period so reviewed has generally been referred to as the golden years of the development of contemporary Nigerian poetry, after the pioneering enterprise of the first-generation poets emblemized by the Soyinkas, Okigbos, Clarks and Achebes, and the succeeding generation of the Ofeimuns, Ojaides, Osundares, Osofisans, among others. The third-generation poets variously referred to as "angry poets" and "raged writers", were products of the aggregate distortions in the socio-polity at a period many of them were just starting in life as young graduates, who aspired to genuinely contribute to the growth and development of their own country. Sadly, they found themselves emasculated by shrinking opportunities, arising from the wholesale mismanagement of their beloved fatherland, by the dictatorial rulership of the time. Their collective anger and vexation were transmuted through poems decrying pervading corruption, disregard for rule of law, kleptocracy, mass oppression and repression. Stymied socio-economic conditions implied that the only avenue they could seek self-expression was on the pages of newspapers, with publishing houses reluctant to invest scant resources in "unknown quantities."

While many of the poets demonstrated creative depth, poetic authenticity and socio-political commitment, in their offerings, some of these third-generation writers spewed what Obafemi has described as "raw verbiage." Many writers in this generation were versifiers, who articulated their thoughts without the requisite density of imagery and elegance of expression, which hallmarked the poetry of their predecessors. Ilagha has noted elsewhere, that the works of some members of this generation of quality "have been largely ignored on account of the low poetic quality on offer." Despite these early failings in certain instances, the third-generation of poets have generally fulfilled the

early promise they demonstrated, with many of them becoming published, established and studied poets. Many of them have proceeded to win competitive awards and prizes for poetry at home, on the African continent and across the globe. This further authenticates the genuineness of their craft and their continuing engagement with thematic concerns which affect our collective humanism. By facilitation of the print media, therefore, we have berthed a definitive third generation of Nigerians poets, which has been appropriately admitted in the history of the evolution of Nigerian poetry.

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