

## **Nigerian Poetry since 1990: History, Disillusionment and Regenerative Praxis**

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### **Abstract**

*A significant attribute of Nigerian Poetry is its protean character. Every decade depending on its historical nuance, has engendered poetic offerings whose tenor and temper differ from the preceding one. Though, Nigerian Poetry is a recreation of one historical continuum, it can be calibrated into different thematics and technical realizations. The 1960s engendered poems that anchored on cultural nationalism and post-independence disillusionment, the poetry of the 1970s reflected on the Nigerian civil war, while the 1980s produced poetry with ideological orientation. The 1990s was the decade that saw the maturation of emergent poets who were born in the 1960s, and had undergone poetic apprenticeship in the Universities in the 1980s. These emergent poets, working on the canvas of history delineated the attendant disillusionment which draconian military dictatorship foisted on the Nigerian polity. The grim disillusionment in the poetry of the 1990s is mitigated by the regenerative trope adopted by the poets as they poeticize hope and imminent national rebirth. However, in spite of the commendable poetic output of that decade, the new poets are seldom given critical attention as critics, teachers and students of Nigerian literature continue to engage older poets. This paper's intervention, even though it does not lose sight of the older poets, is to draw attention to the emergent poets who mapped the historical reality of the 1990s.*

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Nigeria is a country of manifold ironies. One of such ironies is expressed in the vibrancy and unparalleled advancement of its literature in spite of the nation's perennial regression. Nigerian literature since its inception in the 1950s has made so much progress that one often wonders if it was borne by the same Nigeria which inhibits every other aspect of human endeavours. The enviable and admirable progress made by Nigerian literature has yielded enormous dividends by way of awards that have not only elevated the literature, but also put Nigerian writers in good reckoning all over the world.

It is quite correct to say that Nigeria boasts of the most pervasive literature in Africa and probably the Third World. Whether one is thinking in terms of prose, drama or poetry, Nigerian literature has done so much in recreating and representing the African continent. The Nigerian literary landscape throbs with writers, poets, dramatists and novelists. It is possible to say that Nigerian literature is the mainstay of African literature.

Since the 1990s young and emergent Nigerian writers have continued to hold the flag of creative writing aloft. Ever so conscious of the lofty achievements of their sires such as Christopher Okigbo, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, Gabriel Okara, Elechi Amadi, Ola Rotimi, among others these younger writers set out to write in order to be able to measure up to their literary forebears. Nigerian literature inspite of the asphyxiating grip of the hostile milieu has never experienced a lull or a vacuum. The Okigbo - Soyinka - Achebe and Clark generation was closely followed by the Osundare - Ojaide - Osofisan and Iyayi group. However, in between these two groups there is a list which has defied classification. On this list is Eddie Iroh, Chukwuemeka Ike, Buchi Emecheta, I.N.C. Aniebo, Isidore Okpewho, Ola Rotimi and to some extent Kole Omotosho.

The 1990s threw up a new generation of writers who were students to many of the aforementioned writers who also influenced them greatly. The genre of poetry has been the most engaged of the literary forms. So much writing has been taking place in the realm of prose and drama, but the numerical

frequency with which poetry is being produced places it far ahead of the rest. Thus the 1990s saw the emergence of a seemingly endless list of poets.

A kind of roll call: Joe Ushie, Wumi Raji, Ogaga Ifowodo, Maik Nwosu, Remi Raji, Ebi Yeibo, Lola Shoneyin, Nnimmo Bassey, Tade Ipadeola, Ibiwari Ikoriko, Akeem Lasisi, Angela Nwosu, Toyin Adewale, Hope Eghagha, Remi Okeke, Ademola Dasylva, Esiaba Irobi, Olu Oguibe, Sesan Ajayi, Afam Akeh, Uche Nduka, Tunde Olusunle, Isidore Dialla, Chiedu Ezeanah, Izzia Ahmad, and several others. Most of these poets were university undergraduates in the 1980s and 1990s. The period witnessed the emergence of creative writers clubs in many Nigerian university campuses where the then apprentice poets tirelessly honed their skill. There were also campus literary magazines which provided initial publishing outlets for the aspiring poets some of whom were also fortunate to get published on the art pages of newspapers.

Nigerian poetry from the 1990s to date is not markedly different from what came before it. The only outstanding differentiating marker is that the poetry is not ideologically conscious like its predecessor which is well steeped in the Marxist ideology that was the vogue in the 1980s. From 1990 to date is a period of eighteen years which is not really a long time in literary history, but the fecundity of Nigeria's poetic imagination has yielded an enormous corpus of poetry that sometimes it is not easy to believe that the works were produced during such a short period.

Nigerian poetry during the period under focus also suffered several hiccups. The nation's ailing economy led to the collapse of several publishing houses which were hitherto reliable outlets for poetic works. Some of the poets who had publishing opportunities and offers abroad quickly obliged by getting published overseas, but such works have not been available to Nigerian readers at home. The political climate which was dominated by bestial military dictatorship also made writing a dangerous preoccupation. There was a prevailing atmosphere of dread and gloom which foisted a blanket of uncertainty over the land. Yet, it is a credit to the emergent poets

that they wrote in spite of the debilitating conditions. It is also important to state that not all the poetic works actually measure up to acceptable literary standard. Some of the poetry collections stand to be counted as doggerels. Furthermore, the efforts of some of the poets are akin to a flash in the pan as many of them do not have more than one volume to show in spite of being in the poetic vocation for over ten years.

However, in spite of the commendable poetic output of the period under exploration not much criticism has been done on them. Literary scholars and critics have often preferred to exegetize on the older writers while neglecting the emergent ones. In the late 1980s Yemi Ogunbiyi edited two volumes of essays *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature: 1700 to the Present* in which considerable critical attention was given to the emergent writers of that period. Such an effort helped greatly in projecting the young writers at that time. But since the 1990s such an endeavour to critically privilege new writers has been lacking. Also many university teachers of literature have not been alive to introducing their students to new poetic works. Many course outlines for African or Nigerian poetry are replete with poets who wrote in the 1960s, 1970s and a few of the 1980s! The state of literary criticism and scholarship in Nigeria is relatively backward in this regard.

It is also significant to state that some of the older writers have also been writing since the 1990s. Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, and even the novelist Chinua Achebe published *Collected Poems* in 2004, just as the octogenarian Gabriel Okara continue to write and publish poetry. The generation that came on the heels of the aforementioned have also been very productive since the 1990s. Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Odia Ofeimun, Okinba Launko, Ezenwa Ohaeto (late), among others have been quite active producing reputable collections of poetry. However, this paper is not about these older writers. Its attention will be on the emergent and in some cases mature poets who have been on the poetic landscape since the 1990s.

The last eighteen years which is the scope of this essay were spent under two different yet similar dispensations. This

sounds like a paradox that needs explanation. The two dispensations were military and civilian. Military dictatorship held sway between 1984 and 1999 when the baton of political power was handed over to a civilian government which is still the status quo. The difference between the military regime and its civilian successor is only in their dissimilar nomenclature. The two phenomena, in Nigeria are similar in every other sense. In temperament and mood, political and economic conditions, general aura of despondency and disillusionment both dispensations are almost exactly similar. It is a realization of this idea that birthed the earlier submission that there is no marked difference in the poetry of this period and that of the one before it except in the realm of ideological leaning. This lack of difference is because the socio-economic and political conditions have largely remained unchanged.

History has always been the scaffolding of Nigerian poetry. Since the 1990s the poets conscious of the significance of history, have made it even more imperative for them to engage it in their craft. Their appropriation of history is not intended to catalogue it as an assemblage of past events. Rather they vivify history for the people to know how the nation got to this dismal end, and as Achebe succinctly puts it “to know where the rain began to beat us”. The poets of the 1990s reify history by focusing on topical issues which define Nigeria and its people. Nigeria’s outing in history has been quite dismal and even tragic. The twists and turns of the nation’s socio-economic and political trajectory has bequeathed nothing but disillusionment on the land. All the notable poets who have been writing since the 1990s have had to contend with the problem of disillusionment in their poetry. The tension, socio-economic and political, the insensitivity of failed and corrupt leadership, the despair arising from dashed hopes, the perennial retrogression dogging the polity all are giving bold relief in this poetry.

While recreating the nation’s unenviable history and the disillusionment it has fostered, the poets also strive to recreate alternative ethos that can help in reclaiming the initiative for the nation’s wholesomeness. In this lies the regenerative praxis of this poetry. While reading the poets, one discovers that in spite

of their rebuke of Nigeria's prodigality, their anger and disillusionment owing to bankrupt leadership, their poetry evince hope which foregrounds their regenerative temper.

The poetry of Olu Oguibe as encapsulated in his *A Gathering Fear* can possibly be described as the curtain-raiser for contemporary Nigerian poetry, especially for the poets under focus. The volume thematizes and anticipates the topical issues that defined the Nigerian condition in the 1990s. Written with a strong consciousness of the oracular the poems in this volume are gripping in their exploration of the dread and trauma that marked the period of military rule. There is also a section containing poems which exude powerful exilic consciousness. Oguibe's recreation of the Nigerian experience of the period resonates with the dense and tragic gloom which often weigh too heavily in some instances. For example in the poem "I am bound to this land by blood" Oguibe captures with severe intensity the persona's painful experience thus:

I am bound to this land by blood  
That's why my vision is blurred  
I am rooted in its soil  
And its streams flood my veins  
(*A Gathering Fear*, 11,)

The persona's identification with his land is not a romanticized one, rather it is fraught with disappointment and uncertainty of a vision that is blurred. The reason for this is expressed in the following lines from the same poem:

I have cried so often with broken men  
And peered into a million faces blank  
faces without bodies, bodies without faces  
...  
I have heard the wailing of a million  
I have stood in the crowd where men  
Mixed their sweat and wiped blood  
From their brows cursing silently (11)

The condition of the polity is far from salutary. Hence the ideas of “cried”, “broken men”, “wailing of a million”, “blood”, among other markers of suffering which constitute the fright inducing imagery in the poem. Oguibe writes from the point of view of the downtrodden who were at the receiving end of the maniacal military dictatorship that held Nigeria in thralldom for years. In those days hunger, destitution, death, brutality and other forms of bestial treatment were the lot of the people.

The persona’s strong attachment to his root is soon ruptured as a result of the almost unbearable inhuman condition which persists. He is thus uprooted from his fatherland and goes abroad as an exile. This experience which has its pleasures as well as pain induces “A Song from Exile” a poem exuding strong exilic consciousness. The alienated exile bemoans as follows:

I stand at the gates  
Stranger and outsider  
I have journeyed away  
From the sea into the desert  
The charm has crossed rivers  
The tongue is blunt  
The songster has journeyed  
Without his voice  
(*A Gathering Fear*, 59)

The exilic condition of the poet-persona is a pathetic one. He is an outsider which is a condition of alienation. The sojourn and his exilic experience has almost denuded him of his being and preoccupation. His vocation of poetry has been rendered redundant. His inspiration and muse have become inefficacious. This experience adumbrates the condition of millions of Nigerians who fled the horrid experience of the nation to become exiles in other lands.

The same exilic experience powers the nostalgic poem entitled “For You Nigeria” where the poet-persona’s nationalistic posture is foregrounded. He croons as follows:

I sing of you today,  
 Land of my beginning  
 ...  
 I sing of you Nigeria  
 From these shores I sing your name  
 ...  
 I sing of you  
     land of million suns  
     land of forests and of hills  
 ...  
 I sing of you, homeland  
     the head that once stood high  
     the feet that once pounded the earth  
 (*A Gathering Fear*, 88)

The foregoing lines remind one of Senghorian Negritude with all its nostalgic strains and reverberations of romanticism. In spite of the painful experience of the homeland, the poet-persona remembers it with nostalgia. The poet-persona's idea is to also recreate what is beautiful and worth celebrating in Nigeria in order to strike a balance with the sordidness occasioned by the rulers. Thus in exile, far away from the tempestuous nation from which he flees, the poet-persona sings in nostalgic remembrance of the homeland.

Ogaga Ifowodo's *Homeland and Other Poems* is another volume which bears testimony to the spirit and temper of the period under review. This volume encapsulates poems whose themes are as eclectic as the multifarious experience of humanity. The lines throb with happenings beyond the African continent, just as its Pan-African echoes are unmistakably clear. However its preoccupation with the Nigerian condition of socio-economic and political anemia is this paper's thrust. In "Song from underground" the poet recreates Nigeria's harrowing experience under military rule as follows:

And their gaze scanned the vanishing print  
 Of books, professors' roached suits,



the leaking roofs of rabbit hostels,  
streets tramped bare by job-seekers,  
their gaze scanned faces  
grieved darker than the smong of creaking factories  
(*Homeland...*, 27)

Nigeria's military dictatorship dehumanized the people in a number of ways. The excerpt above details the censorship of writings and the harassment of intellectuals by military goons which was the vogue in the era of military rule. The reference to "leaking roofs of rabbit hostels" highlights the deplorable condition of the nation's education sector which years of military misrule left in a quagmire. Then we encounter the imagery of job-seekers' which brings to mind the alarming rate of unemployment, and subsequently the pervasive disillusionment arising from failed industries. Not done yet, the poet graphically recreates more vistas of military rule:

And in drama mimicked by coup-day  
tank parades, street questions asked loudly  
invited the bloodrain of gunmen  
rusty without war, without learning  
learning each time despoliation  
and judgment in the scars of whip wounds.  
(*Homeland...*, 27)

The vivid imagery of armoured tank, the military's display of might was a rampant sight in those years of military rule. Apart from the psychological fear induced by the sight of weapons, the soldiers brutalized and inflicted a lot of harm on the helpless populace. In order to cow an inquisitive people the military unleashed its weaponry on them and what followed was a "blood rain". Ifowodo was a leading students' union activist in his undergraduate days, and was actually credited with leading the famous Anti-SAP riots of May 1989 which the General Babangida led junta quelled with all its military might leading to several deaths. The same strain is heard in another poem entitled

“Red Rain”. Here the human carnage results from power tussle manifested through coups. It deplores soldiers who are:

turning the country battlefield and shooting range:  
at midnight yesterday, thirteen were shot  
a general came on at dawn  
to whip applause for easy crime,  
today, sixty-two were battered to bone  
hugged to their stakes of sand  
for trying the secret of gun powder  
and when the country flowed into street corners,  
anger written on tree leaves  
it rained with generals as rainmakers.  
(*Homeland ...*, 30)

Military dictatorship begets coup after coup. The unsuccessful plotters are usually executed, and in the Nigerian experience scores of coupists were executed between 1986 and 1990. Others were lucky in 1995 and 1997, because they were under incarceration waiting to be executed when death struck their captor, and they were later given reprieve. However, this poem makes the point that so much blood was shed during the military dispensation. Other poems in this volume such as “The soldier has a fine head”, “When I hear martial songs”, “Greed will kill the beast”, etc. satirize the many negative tendencies that were associated with military rule while it lasted.

Tunde Olusunle’s *Fingermarks* also dexterously recreates the Nigerian predicament during the period in focus. The collection is an expose on the visionless and mindless rulers who led the nation to the dismal bend it now finds itself. The lines drip with the unmistakable agony of a nation in the throes of a violated existence. In “Ode to garri” Olusunle veers into the socio-economic turf and laments the problem of hunger and scarcity of food commodities. He writes:

Garri once ducked its grainsome head  
in the backstage of menus  
when rice was bride strutting with pride

before hungry suitors in all the land  
till rice wore sprint shoes  
and raced Johnson –like to a dizzying distance  
(*Fingermarks*, 22)

The foregoing recreates an economic trend of the period. Once garri was considered as a common staple that was cheap and easily affordable by all. However the 1980s marked a period of economic austerity, and the price of garri began to soar almost beyond the reach of the masses. Before this experience, other food items such as rice, beans, bread among others were better patronized over garri by the people. Then the economic downturn set in and those items cherished by the people became scarce commodities and the scramble for garri began, and soon garri also became a not too common food item as the lines below indicate:

But garri was headline news  
today in *The Guardian*  
declared WANTED in the people's markets.  
(*Fingermarks*., 22)

The scarcity of the other food items made the people to turn to garri as a means of survival, and then garri's own scarcity set in. This is a streak in Nigeria's recent economic history.

In the poem "Soweto in my land" Olusunle depicts the daunting struggle put up by Nigerian students against military dictatorship and how the authorities replied with bloody reprisals. The poem's title is an allusion to the bloody killings in Soweto during the Apartheid regime in South Africa. The opening stanza reads:

Neither at Samaru  
Do we savour the flavour  
Nor at Ugbowo  
Ever see the falling crumbs,  
Of our sweat-baked cake  
When the Nebuchahezzars

Chew sumptuous chunks  
And sip wines and champagne.  
(*Fingermarks, 29*)

Samaru and Ugbowo are university centres, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and the University of Benin, Benin-City respectively, which were the bastion of students' anti-military rule struggle in the 1980s and early 1990s. The stanza also describes the acquisitiveness and greed of the ruling class referred to as "the Nebuchadnezzars" who feed fat off the people's sweat. The poem reads on:

But we crave  
A sanitized world,  
An un-SAP ped life,  
Via harmless placards  
In our peaceful throng  
(*Fingermarks, 29*)

The above refers to the students' protest against the infamous Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which the General Babangida regime foisted on the nation. The programme dealt a debilitating economic blow on the masses so the students had to protest that it should be scrapped and below was the military regime's response;

The anti-riot squad arrives  
Brandishing canisters, shield and guns  
Bullets rattle and ricochet  
In daylight macabre massacre  
Some are slain,  
Many maimed  
(*Finger marks, 29*)

The brutal repression of ordinary protests by harmless placard carrying students was a regular preoccupation by successive military regimes. The above excerpt portrays the bloody extent to which the military rulers went in their

subjugation of the populace. Another index of military rule in Nigeria was the abuse or violation of human rights. This is portrayed in the poem entitled “Hew-man rights” which is a pun on ‘human rights’ to mean the “cutting” or “abuse” of the rights of the citizens. The relevant lines read:

Tyranny has bared its fangs anew  
stopping the beat in the mid-throb  
and squeezing peppery juice in our eyes  
hundreds are herded each passing hour  
to the depths of distant gaols  
booted and butted, mercilessly  
(*Fingermarks*, 50)

The foregoing recreates the extent to which the human rights of Nigerians were violated. Physical brutalization, psychological torture, and indiscriminate detention were among the tools of repression the military rulers engaged in the abuse of human rights.

Nnimmo Bassey’s *Intercepted* also recreates the attempt of the military despots to hold the people in thralldom. The volume explores the gross violation of the people’s humanity, the abridgement of their freedom and the repression of their wish and will to good governance. The poems in this volume were inspired by the poet’s experience when he was arrested at the airport and branded an “Intercepted person”. In the opening poem entitled “Hope” the poet writes:

Don’t tell me now how it  
feels  
To see your liberty bowed by boots  
Don’t tell me now How it  
...  
Don’t ask me when we’ll be  
out  
For if we knew then we won’t hope  
Don’t ask me why we  
Hope

It is the only sure thing they cannot jail (*Intercepted, 11*)

Bassegy tends to allay the uncertainty and despondency which reigns in detention by privileging hope, and he succeeds in this bid by making the reader realize that hope is abstract and therefore can neither be trapped, intercepted or jailed. In another poem “Bye-bye Nigeria” Bassegy spins an irony which can be explained thus: he was at the airport waiting to fly to Ghana during which he could have said good bye to Nigeria albeit temporarily, but he was “intercepted” and put in detention where the inmates welcomed him by asking him to sing the chorus:

Bye-bye to Nigeria  
Bye-bye to Nigeria  
Bye-bye to Nigeria (*Intercepted, 23*)

The above chorus was his induction introit in detention, instead of being a farewell to the nation.

In another poem “Smokes, bullets and chains” Bassegy recounts the violence the ruling cabal unleashed on the citizenry during the epoch making moment occasioned by the 12 June 1993 presidential election won by the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola whose mandate was annulled by the military. Part of the poem reads:

Bashorun M.K.O. locked away as locked can be  
Bashed, bombed, the single emblem of June the twelfth  
Bone in their throat claimed ethereal  
But if it is unreal how come it is so real?  
(*Intercepted, 48*)

The lines recall the detention of M.K.O. Abiola who won the 12 June election in 1993 and the repressive measures the ruling cabal unleashed on the people for demanding that Abiola’s mandate should be given to him. The treatment to which Abiola was subjected appears to be unreal, but then the truth is that it was real and it is on record.

The foregoing references to Oguibe, Ifowodo, Olusunle, and Bassegy are representative, though not exhaustive, of the poetry that was written when the military was in the saddle of

Nigeria's government, an episode which ended in May 1999. The next phase of this paper will briefly x-ray a few poetic works that were published in the post-military era to complete the survey. It bears repeating that the issues which defined both periods are the same, there exist only variations in intensity.

Remi Raji's *Webs of Remembrance* anticipates in varied themes and tones much of the preoccupation of post-military rule Nigerian poetry. The holistic thrust of this collection is embedded in the author's note as follows:

A deliberate attempt to move from anguish to hope  
from criminal silence to engaging expression and from  
the recesses of darkness to the broadness of light

Raji's preoccupation in this volume is an engagement of the nation's recent history which can only be catalogued in unsavoury terms. Thus the poems reverberate with the protean tendencies and complexities of the nation's socio-economic and political travails.

In one of the poems entitled "Bound to remember" the poet not only recreates impressions of grief, gloom, anomy, inaction and an intended vengeance, but he also castigates the parasitic political elite. In "this land tickles me" Raji adroitly employs binary oppositions to depict the multifarious possibilities and manifestations of the varied historical experiences of Nigeria, while "The mutineer's song" is a song of defiance powered by the use of parallelism. Another poem "Detainee" is a definition of who or what a detainee is, and in "Notes of an exiled poet" the poet bemoans a battered psyche with a pervasive sense of dread and gloom. He also juxtaposes virtues and vices and in the last stanza, he poeticizes a future triumph of the land. The poem "Farewell to myth 1" is in part a lamentation for Olokun the river goddess and a solidarity verse for the despoiled, exploited, oppressed and suffering people of the Niger Delta. This is probably the only poem identifying with the plight of the region by a non-Niger Deltan. There is also "Male-diction for a Maximum ruler" which celebrates and gloats over the demise of a tyrant.

Hope Eghagha's *Premonition and other Dreams* is another volume that is deserving of attention. Multiplicity of themes and plurality of cadences are the hallmark of the poems as they explore personal and public concerns. While reading the poems, one is constantly confronted with episodes from Nigeria's recent history. The problem of political and structural imbalance, misrule, oppressions, exploitation, failure of leadership, abuse of power among others resonate in such poems like "Powers", "David and Goliath", "the wind of fire", "The Democrats", "The Stilled Storm", etc. this engagement foregrounds the Arnoldian sense of poetry as a criticism of life.

Ademola Dasylva's *Songs of Odamolugbe* is another volume which eloquently recounts Nigeria's recent past and present. A satirical volume, the poems engage the oracular, the choric and other poetics of performance in its evaluation of the Nigerian predicament. Conscious of the poet's role as singer, entertainer, teacher, historian, prophet, and righter, Dasylva takes the reader through the complex and painful labyrinth of Nigeria's history. Angst and a tendency towards combative engagement run through many of the poems in this collection as the reader is taken through the gamut of corruption, economic mismanagement, oppression, political opportunism and other such vistas associated with the Nigerian experience.

Thus far this exegesis has dwelt on the appropriation of history and an exploration of the dismal conditions which constitute the mood of disillusionment. It is now pertinent to explore the regenerative praxis inherent in the poetry. Ifowodo's love song "Nkiru (tomorrow's song)" is suffused with the imagery of regeneration as evidenced in these lines:

Come rest then on the cracking twigs of my arms  
let them burst alive with new leaves,  
let them be home with birds, fruits and flowers  
....  
you will chase famine from my plundered temple  
and nurse to life to match your freshness  
we will fatten to the fullness of your hips  
the frightfully lean shape of our land (*Homeland...*, 69)



The foregoing rekindles the hope for regeneration and refreshing healing after the dehumanization must have ceased. The same poetics of regeneration is thematized in Olusunle's "Cheer Up, brother", a poem dedicated to Niyi Osundare. Olusunle prays as follows:

Let us be soothed by this balm;  
hat our trauma is history replayed;  
.....  
let us be consoled  
that our dreams expressed  
expressed in songs  
will someday blossom  
into dreams fulfilled. (*Fingermarks.., 60*)

The ideas expressed through words like "soothed", "balm", "consoled", "blossom", "fulfilled", all point to the regenerative wish encapsulated in the poem.

The strongest indication of regeneration is probably best realized in Eghagha's collection. Here the regenerative praxis is to be achieved through a votive undertaking which is foregrounded by the sacrifice or carrier motif. This is the poet's prescription for socio-economic and political expiation. A prime example is located in "Into the Valley". The poet's constant focus on this motif underpins the gravitas and weight of society's moral burden on him. In juxtaposition to this is the therapeutic cushioning the poems bequeath to the reader against various manifestations of alienation. This can be illustrated through the utopian poem "A Dream of Dreams" whose five stanzas are interspersed with the following lines of amelioration: "Signs of wretchedness shall be no more", "and justice shall dwell on earth's surface", "there were no more debtors". These poems hold among them words and exhortations that regeneration will come after the present ruination.

The survey is not in any way exhaustive as there are so many texts whose themes coalesce into the notions of history, disillusionment and regeneration. The texts selected for

illustrations are merely representative. There are other strains that can be heard in Nigerian poetry since the 1990s. There is the impressive resonance of female voices heard through the efforts of Toyin Adewale, Lola Shoneyin, Promise Okekwe, Cecilia Kato, Maria Ajima, Anthonia Ekpa, among many others. There has also been a strong presence of poetry from the Niger Delta region detailing and protesting against the exploitation and injustice done to the people; Ebi Yeibo, Nnimmo Bassey, Ibiwari Ikoriko and Ogaga Ifowodo emerge here. The flourishing of several anthologies of poems since the 1990s is also worthy of note. Apart from *25 New Nigerian Poets*, edited by Toyin Adewale and *Camouflage* edited by Nduka Otiono, there have been other anthologies of poems which have helped to give vent to young and unpublished poets.

The various poets have imbibed different styles which confer a level of eclecticism on their works. While some like Oguike, Eghagha and Dasyuva write in the powerful oracular tone, others like Olusunle, Bassey and Okeke tend towards a cosmopolitan sophistication. Some of the poets still model their craft after older ones whose influences are easily decipherable. In all, the poets have been able to come to terms with the Nigerian experience which is its history, the disillusionment occasioned by the experience and then the hope of regeneration which is in the horizon.

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