

The Man Lived

Kabura Zakama

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Dedicated to

Aliyu,

the expression of my innocence

CONTENTS

Dedication

Welcome to my world

PART ONE

Victims of Laziness

The Ink in my Blood

Let Me Be

Mankind

The Gossip

A Bachelor’s Excuse

To Answer the Call

Summon from the Deep

The Man Lived

I Would if I Could

Call of the Fulani Maid

The Struggle

Fulani Eyes

Unity in Love

Thorn in Your Flesh

The Crusader

The Butchers

The Moments are Upon Us

Mother

PART TWO

Little Gombi

Another Beginning

Lagos I

Restoration

Sunset from Ga'anda

Beloved Garkida II

Pride of the Nation

Lagos II

Land of Destiny

PART THREE

Fulani Migration

I Killed a Grasshopper

A Gecko Passed by Me

The Preying Mantis

At the window

The Bug

Apology to a Dead Wasp

Pictures of the Dry Season

PART FOUR

Bootfalls in our Streets

How Can I Die?

The Call of Pain

Death for All

Martial Music and Methods

Come Out!

The Dictator

The Return of the Saint

The Ultimate Deception

Of Pigs, Specialists and Butchers

Vision 2010

Under the Guns of Dictators

Of Adjustments

We Shall Rise with the Sun

Land of My Forefathers

Freedom Fighters

Farida

Applicants

New Generation

My Generation

Welcome to My World

Ever since I began to appreciate poetry, I have always sought to share my stories in simple poems.

Some people think that I am a difficult person, but I am simple. I strive to live an uncluttered life. I have been through difficult times and as I am squeezed in life's presses, I find a few poems squirting from my joys and my sadnesses. These poems attempt to tell the story of survival, the story of a man that has been killed several times. But let it be told that 'the man lived!'

The Man Lived won the 1999 ANA Poetry Prize. I have worked on many of the poems, but they return essentially the same. Since it won the prize, I have made several attempts to get them published, but no publisher was willing to take me on. Now I am happy to share them with you.

Part One is a collection of poems that try to sift meaning from all kinds of situations and relationships. Here, my favourite is *Mother*, a simple short story for my mother and many other mothers.

Part Two records my attempts at telling the experiences I have had with some locations in Nigeria – Gombi, Otukpo, Lagos, Yola, Ga'anda, Abuja, Lokoja and, of course, Garkida.

Part Three is a collection of 'professional' poems. These poems have animal themes and I feel particularly close to *Fulani Migration*, *I Killed a Grasshopper* and *The Preying Mantis*. *The Bug* reminds me of times of endurance and *Pictures of the Dry Season* celebrates my village.

I owe the development of Part Four to Al Imfeld. At a poetry/short story seminar at Maiduguri in 1995, Mr Imfeld challenged us to make our poems relevant to the struggles in Nigeria. With some little fear of the military in government then, I began to write poems that speak of military dictators and corrupt politicians. I am proud of these attempts to record my own protest against corruption and injustice. My favourite here is *Come Out!*, a prophetic rendition that came to pass.

A few of the poems in this collection have appeared somewhere else; *Farida* in the Student Union magazine at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, *Sunset from Ga'anda* and *We Shall Rise with the Sun* in *Vultures in the Air* (Spectrum Books, 1995), *Land of our Forefathers* in *Hotline* magazine, 1995, *Mankind* in *Passport to the New World*, *My Generation* in *25 New Nigerian Poets* edited by Toyin Adewale and published by Ishmael Reed Publishing Company and several others in magazines and newspapers.

I am grateful to A. A. Abodunde and A. O. Awofisayo (Mrs), my teachers at Federal Government College Maiduguri, for introducing me to poetry. I am indebted to Zaynab Alkali, who has given me the greatest encouragement to

be proud of my poems and to put them out for sharing. Many thanks to Idris O. O. Amali, Hyeladzira Balami-Shaffa, Binta Mohammed, Sumaila Umaisha and the rest of the Maiduguri Group for their support. I cannot forget the encouragement of Faith Madaki, Hauwa Abbas, Regina Gundiri and Yerima Tarfa.

My tribe, Safia, Aliyu and Ibrahim, but especially Safia, have endured many hours of my amateur performance as they have been the primary audience as the poems are created.

It is my hope that we meet again to feast on other stories.

Abuja, March 2004

Kabura Zakama

PART ONE

VICTIMS OF LAZINESS

Along the banks
of lonely rivers
I get trapped,

A towering mountain,
a deep valley,
always at home,

Time finds me
sharing my life
in simple poems.

Rejected or cheered,
I see hope
in every trials,

Strive I must
among my kind,
victims of laziness.

THE INK IN MY BLOOD

Take me to the gethsemane of life
Where fleeting pleasures cost too much,
Let me sit under a tattered tree
And sing these songs of toil and pain.

Shall I seek out tents of worship
Holding pious people shrouded in noise?
Shall I sit under sellers of God's grace
And swell the pockets of glory seekers?

Shall I sit by the edge of life's road
And record the sweat of man's labour,
This timeless extravagance of tears,
Of man sucking man's blood?

Shall I peer into my mother's hut,
She, heroine of the trial of virtues?
She speaks not with the tongues of today,
She's shunned by the values of the day!

Shall I cry for love, the cold cruel
Love of ladies fair and vain, as
Changing as their garments of fancy?
I have not the heart!

Lock me up, oh silent muse,
In the closet of my desecration,
Let the ink in my blood flow
For my purification and death!

LET ME BE

Let him not see beyond his nose,
Let stillborn dreams litter his mind,
Let decaying stars shine in his eyes.

Grant him mercy to be unsober,
Tomorrow may just be a night away
But it will not come in his lifetime.

Let him sit on life's spiteful fence,
Let him pursue his wily vocations,
Let him be and let me be!

MANKIND

We are oscillate
between the same heavens,
the same hells,
we are only different souls
in one body,
one experience,
we are one lump of clay
draped in the same troubles,
we are one wisp of spirit
attired in the same eternities.

Mankind,
with all its natures and colours,
is one unending journey
on the same road.

THE GOSSIP

Do not give in friend,
To the untamed hunger
Raging in your bosoms
For morsels of gossip.

Do not sneak upon me
I have lost my balance,
Your victory is counterfeit
Where there is no conflict.

When by unmerciful lips
My life is stretched and spread,
Do not cut away, oh gossip,
Help me instead to a shade.

A BACHELOR'S EXCUSE

a worthy vessel
in which to pour my love
and invest my destiny
I cannot find,
for virtuous hags
have dried my heart
and despised my pocket,
while the innocent
and the emergent
now make their offerings
either false
or full of fears.

TO ANSWER THE CALL

Ask this of the learned,
Enquire at the house of the wise,
What oracle endures unashamed
The violation of its worshippers?
Will our elders embrace slumber
Leaving us in uncharted forests?

Do not ask me to confront angry gods,
I have not tasted the blood of initiation.
Do not send me on peace missions,
I have not tamed my pubertal fires.

Imprison me in the throes of birth,
But let my ears be unshackled
To hear this call of the lonely and
Let it be answered in patterned thoughts.

SUMMON FROM THE DEEP

Your haunt is deep, oh muse,
Deeper than the wells in my soul,
You tease my meagre being
And I know I must strain,
I must strain to cage silence
And unleash it upon s subtle summon.

But I am a witless disciple
Living outside the borders of rigour,
And yes, when you come demanding
I am found both lazy and shirking,
Drawing warmth from laughing fires,
Impotent flames of my higher dreams.

So I wait here, ingrown and stifled,
I feed your hunger with solitary thoughts
Until you ride with my bruised prides
Like a good smile teasing a sad face.

THE MAN LIVED

Sleep engulfed me
In my austere bed,
Scheming and sweating
I made more dreams
As success eluded me.

In my hour of disgrace,
Fear became my companion
And shame became my strength,
To hope and to search
For any rebirth.

Ridicule tortured my steps,
A bruised tribal pride
Engendered my pains
And a love of self
Reinforced my prison walls.

Now I am oblivious
To the conflicts for my honour,
I drain my blood
Into their merciless cups,
For death has given me life.

I WOULD IF I COULD

something of your life
is etched on my heart:

it could be your face
it could be your voice,

it could be your thoughts
echoing in my dripping blood,

it could your destiny
clutching unto me for support,

and now I know
I would if I could.

CALL OF THE FULANI MAID

- *for Binta*

At the edge of the sahara
I meet my Fulani maid
With dances in her eyes
And flowers in her steps.

In her bashful smile
I saw a beckoning path,
'Come with me *Ngainako*¹,
I will be your companion.'

Sure in her wandering spirits
She conquered my fears and
Imprisoned me in her serene gaze,
Taunting in its elusive call.

So far have I ventured,
To follow my Fulani dream
In search of a secret place,
To drown in her milk and honey.

1. A Fulani herdsman

THE STRUGGLE

She conjured a home
on the shifting stages of deception,

he is an abused rubble,
a clay to cajole into gold,

this is a struggle to keep his soul,
for your mercy, oh daughter of eve,
is harder than God's wrath!

FULANI EYES

Her eyes are dark,
Filled with stories,
But she hides her past
Behind weak little smiles.

His heart is brave,
Covered with scars,
But he hides his guilt
Behind a cheerful pen.

Now in a sinless way
They make simple mistakes,
He to clear her eyes,
She to remove her fears?

UNITY IN LOVE

Machetes of gossip
hacked at our honour,
we found strength and pride
in every drop of our blood.

Where can I find shelter
if you crawl into your shell?

I will not run after you
lest I crush your desires,
I will wait here, alone,
and fight this war of fears.

Thus shall life go on
for you and for me,
for you
 to feast on my strifes,
for me
 to clutch at straws.

THORN IN YOUR FLESH

The lights in her pitying eyes
Recede into haunting regrets,
And she sprays her vintage venom.

What itched his peace?

Oh the stab at her pride!
The carelessness of her revenge!
Her restless tongue slashed away
And he buried his heart in blood!

Now she makes the righteous call
That compels the wounded to hide,
And I wrap my soul in ashes.

THE CRUSADER

At the end of her crusade,
She stands tall, steeped in blood,
And he is left to tell the story.

Yet light pulls them further apart,
She, a wife not a sweetheart,
He, a lover not a husband.

THE BUTCHERS

Her claim was low
for the deepest cut,

He trusted at a cost
for the cheapest cut,

She came, looked and left
for the surest cut,

She put strength in her toys
for the best cut.

THE MOMENTS ARE UPON US

The moments are upon us, and
I must catch your free spirit,
So I conceal my intents:
To preserve the untainted memories
Of your play upon my heart.

How I long to unravel, to share,
The mysteries in your smiles!
So I lie awake at night:
To watch the clash of our desires,
The touching of kindred souls.

Yet I have come to your gate
And I must state my quest,
So I throw away my shield:
To hold, I die of fear!
To leave, I die of love!

MOTHER

When silence overtakes the birds
I hear your cradle song,
When darkness magnifies my fears
I make my nest in your purity.

I return mother, I return,
To your tent I'd always come,
I am the son grown on your milk
And the man living on your love.

PART TWO

LITTLE GOMBI

Named for your size
You have shunned growth,
Like a wooden chair
Caked in colourless molds.

You make dull noises
Showing inorganic life...
In a smiling face I came
But you caged me in boredom.

You colluded with fake love
To haunt my days of rest,
But the distant voice of concern
Brought hope to tortured days.

ANOTHER BEGINNING

Time has run fast between us
And we must reply to changes,
You and I,
O prodigious Otukpo,
Have tramped a long weary way.

How wearily you plead then
Through dilapidated structures,
But your generals,
In suburban mansions,
Cannot hear your cries for help.

Like a boy on an errand I came,
As a man with experience I leave,
Play your game,
O flirtuous Otukpo,
Which part of me have you claimed?

The drills have come to an end,
This end is only another beginning,
What comes now
I do not know,
But the scent speaks of better things.

LAGOS I

You search the coastal skies
And stretch the deep atlantis
Enclosing saint and sinner
Into your generous expanse.

Night-crawling guv'nors
Confront fun-seeking glamour girls
In the bright lights of your nights,
All taking more, giving less.

You breed *Area Boys*
And dare-devil crime lords,
While bugs and bulldozers
Ravage your *maroko* for the rich.

Bare-footed, white-clad prophets
Spew out of halleluya houses
And infest your beaches,
While penticostals perform for all.

Eko, you are an alluring harlot,
You trap men between your thighs,
Whoever comes into your embrace
Would not live anywhere else!

RESTORATION

surrounded by leaping princely hills,
this elegant green-sided road
begins to make its approach into Yola,
the sun with its rays now softened
caresses my back with golden warmth,
these hills with rain-polished rocks
shed off the anger of the heat
and protect the side where my love waits.

hurry on, driver of iron chariot,
'ere darkness falls upon us,
I must kiss my love and beauty
before the sun casts off its last smile!

SUNSET FROM GA'ANDA

Perched atop a rickety pick-up van
With his back to the serpentine road,
He left the friendly hills of Ga'anda
Bathed in the golden glows of sunset.

Cared for by Sa'adatu and Ayuba,
Missed by Fartisi, Lare and Murna
And loved by Namchedek, who cried,
He was cheered on and waved away.

The white dust of the dry season road
Enveloped him like a thin garment,
Mocked by the softness of the sunset
His body danced and ached along.

He was spewed unto another van:
The piercing night winds of harmattan,
Joined by the young pale crescent of a moon,
Accompanied him from Gombi to Garkida.

BELOVED GARKIDA II

Scraps will litter your dusty streets
And your native eyes will be dazzled
By the fashions of your scattered people
As they gather for a few days of show.

But now you are a rejected village
Struggling without your decorations,
To fight through mindless teenagers
Ineptly playing adult games.

I patrol your bowels in unspoken pain
And try to exorcise what's part of me,
I reach deep into my sad sighing soul
Afraid that without you I am lost.

Though your brooks are no longer pure
To your famous breasts I return,
Tainted by fame and mammon, I'm bewildered,
Bewildered, but for a while, a little while.

PRIDE OF THE NATION

You beckon to us
In beauty and breadth
As superstructures sprout upon your belly,
Courtesy of *Berger* and *Buoygues*,
Of *Sterling* and *Strabag*.

You are a rest house
For the super rich,
What is loathsome in me, oh Abuja,
That you should exclude me
From your opulence?

From Kubwa and Karu
I shall come
To gaze upon your other-worldly appeal,
Let me go overseas
In my own country!

LAGOS II

Oh town of slums and skyscrapers
Of ancient buses and posh car;

You are a city besieged by armed robbers
And swept by army squads in battle bravado.

Policemen punctuate your streets,
Black in habit and black in heart,
Sucking the blood of your offerings.

No longer the monster in my imagination;
I have fought and conquered your mighty *molues*,
I have looked your *area boys* in the eye,
I have traversed Oshodi at night.

No longer the monster in my imagination,
No longer the dirtiest capital in the world,
Abuja has disciplined your offices,
Adisa has beautified your bridges.

No longer the monster in my imagination,
Yet you retain your ravenous appetite
For village boys to come and be dazzled
By your long-term, die-hard admirers
Who still see you in your old beauty
And tell of the affairs of your past.

LAND OF DESTINY

Along the fertile confluence
You stretch yourself,
Oh so lazily,
Like a shriveled spent whore
Full of greed and spite.

In your lust for good things
You cast aside your own,
The old cry in the streets:
'She has trapped our bread,'
Young maidens rend their manners:
'What honour, who cares?'
Home boys bind their bruises:
'Why labour, who cares?'

Lokoja, you call unto me
And draw blood from my soul,
But I will not dance for you
And I will not hang my harps!

PART THREE

FULANI MIGRATION

He takes his whole clan:
The bulls, proud and forward,
And cows, a harem of them,
The sheep and goats follow
Like shrubs in a forest of beasts,
Then clan dogs and chickens.

Children and feeble old women
And young pregnant wives
Ride the backs of broad cows,
Tall men, slender and weather-beaten,
And boys ripening to men
Constitute the vigilante band.

Through savannahs and forests,
Over hills and drying rivers,
Day and night they migrate,
Following wherever pastures bid,
Caring little for ease and comfort,
Living and moving for their cattle.

I KILLED A GRASSHOPPER

An insolent grasshopper
flew into the embrace
of my bare room,
lost,
frightened
and chirpy!

You invaded my peace, man!
Your wings my executioner's sword!
Your fangs my grave digger's pride!

I struck at it, the hopper,
It lay at my feet
shocked,
unmoving
except for the twitching
of uncomprehending antennae.

I stared at your stupor,
amazed,
sharing in your shock!

Suddenly
it sprang into life,
on the floor!
crying to me
for mercy that I cannot give,
for life that I do not have!
Then it went into a shadow
and died,
the grasshopper, it died!

My kindred,
I have killed you!
My kinsbeing,
You have killed me
by dying such an agonising death!

For my peace,
I shall bury you!
You shall not satisfy
the grizzly hunger
of some shameless lazy lizard!

A GECKO PASSED BY ME

You were hiding under the table
when I invoked the light
and put an end to your evil.

As you slipped into another shadow
you passed by me,
stopping briefly to wink at me,
but your tricks which tormented me
at childhood
are no longer potent in the light,
and your darkness is too small
to frighten me now.

But I did not hear what you said
and my fear followed you,
to resurrect
wherever you may appear
again.

THE PREYING MANTIS

Perhaps you will hear me from your grave,
They say you are a skillful predator,
A slow cunning hunter,
A hunter that kills without haste,
Swaying endlessly on your slender traps!

How were you to know, given your one-thing brain,
That you will never out-trick an omnivore!
How sorrowful that you should fight a chicken
And lose, in broad daylight, oh preyer!
It was my fault and I am ashamed!

AT THE WINDOW

Wave at me carefree bird,
Tell me if you are in flight
To love and homely comfort.

Sing to me, contented bird,
Over the growls in my belly,
But if you chirp of man helping man,
I shall seek to put you on my table!

Go, bird, fly over the elements,
If you find value in this living,
Come back and let us feast on it
Or send my share tied on the moon
As it rises over my world.

THE BUG

A living space I do not begrudge you,
But human kindness is not so simple
And I have no wings to spread about.

You foolish buzzing thing,
I have been wasting in this room
All day, for days,
Without any meals too,
But I do not bug anybody, do I?

I do not harass you
Out of hate or greed,
But for your insolence.

If you mock my silence again,
I shall crush you
With the anger of hunger!

APOLOGY TO A DEAD WASP

Whether you were a mother or a father
I could not tell,
But I had encountered you many times.

Playfully, and with some fear of your sting,
I had shooed you to submission
And you had fled through the window.

But that morning,
That awful morning,
You had stood your ground.

How old your wasplets were,
I did not know,
But you had fallen,
That awful morning,
And I was relieved with a heavy heart.

I am a man now and a father,
I would not wish your children's fate on mine.

PICTURES OF THE DRY SEASON

Cockrow
no longer calls the men of my village
to the oft trodden roads to the farms,

mother earth
has withdrawn her green carpet
and the land is shrouded in brown.

Fulani cattle
non-challantly browse the after harvest,
ignorant of the herald of burning heat
and dry water holes.

Our barns
are now swollen with new crops
and as the farms empty their bellies,
the *burkutu*¹ woman has her day;
each morning finds her pots
abscessed with eager men
who stagger home after at night
belching and singing.

Hardworking men,
now rendered impotent by the season,
are contented
to savour the shades of tired trees
and churn out lengths of *perta*²
and bales of *mamzham*³
to beauty their homesteads
in fresh garments.

Woman, oh African woman!
At the smile of the day
she is sucked into depths of worn-out bushes
in search of nature's fuel,
she returns, fatigued, to tend to her broods
and her kitchen for ten!

When will the sun dance around you?
You are soft, woman, like the African moon
that caresses children at play.
You are soft, mother.

-
1. A local beer brewed from sorghum
 2. A rope woven from grasses
 3. A big woven made made from tall grasses for roofing and fencing

PART FOUR

BOOTFALLS IN OUR STREETS

Garbed in my starched white coat
I cower behind a flimsy mouth guard,
Lest my life becomes a blood stain
And desterilises my tools of trade.

But my patient is sick and dying
In need of transfusions of democracy,
Khakied goons seize her by the throat
Killing her with gunpower and settlements!

I percuss a boom of kwashiokored bellies,
I auscultate a rattle of stick-like limbs,
I hear growling hungers in our bodies
And fierce bootfalls in our streets.

My anaesthetics, they fail me now,
So I emerge from disinfected cubicles,
Without my hypocritic oath, I join the cry:
'When will a batch of hearts break?'

HOW CAN I DIE

You took my leader
 I did not stray,
You took my land
 I did not run,
You took my love
 I did not cry,
You took my food
 I did not starve,
You took my pride
 I did not fall.

How can I die?
How can I die
When you are not through
With killing me!

THE CALL OF THE PEN

Harassed by a band of militiocrats
I take up the call of the pen,
If their deeds of doom I denounce
I shall by army guns be profaned,
If the emergence of hope I herald
I shall by the hungry be hounded.

But I seek neither crown nor glory;
Let them come that slay body only
My flesh surely other dusts must join,
Let them come that draw out blood
To carry my word into immortality,
Let it say, 'he answered the call!'

DEATH FOR ALL

There are green things
with leaves and flowers
of all shapes and sizes,
endowed with chlorophyll and given sunlight,
they, through photosynthesis,
make life for all.

There are things in green,
few and fat-cheeked
in khakis and boots,
blessed with guns and
looting naira and kobo,
they, through phobiasynthesis,
make death for all.

MARTIAL MUSIC AND METHODS

They surround their importances
with mistresses and minstrels
who, plastered in looted naira,
tell us to sing and dance
and forget our sorrows.

But there is no redemption
In their martial music and methods,
So while they feed on our fat,
Our spindly legs can only dance
To the drums in our empty stomachs.

COME OUT!

Come out ye fertile mothers
From your huts of deprivation!
Take your fill of the land,
Give suckle to your offsprings!

Come out ye broken fathers!
Come out proud sons of the land!
Go tend thy fields today,
They reap your sweats no more!

Come out daughters of our land!
Emerge in your forgotten beauty!
Adorn in your apparels of dance!
Let your songs fill our streets!

Spread the wonders abroad,
The grass shall no longer quake!
Gone are the sacred cows
Into their abandoned barracks!

THE DICTATOR

He envied the politicians greed
and came the plunderer's way,
out of a sheltered barrack,
schooled and decorated in drills,
riding the backs of friends.

He emerged
behind the barrel of a gun
to squander and ravage,
to graze on the citizens
he swore to protect.

Then he smiled, gap-toothed,
and promised us daybreak,
but he dribbled us and stepped aside
to usher in a darkness,
a darkness blacker than night.

THE RETURN OF THE SAINT

What settled accounts
In yonder Swiss vaults
That made the man in green
To spread for you the red carpet
Instead of a dirty crate,
I would never know!

Now you return as a saint
With a doctorate to your name,
How my gullible people
Would mistake your coming
For that of a physician,
I would never know!

Are you unrepenting
Or am I unforgiving?
Do you now covet Aso Rock
To encastle your greed or
To atone for your wrongs?
I would never know!

When the endless race starts,
Would you be spraying the sterling
Or would you be giving us rice
To make us forget that yesterday
You promised us only garbage?
I would never know!

THE ULTIMATE DECEPTION

A series of attempts to appease,
A reluctant desire to step aside,
A horde of slain politicians,
 The president had hidden agenda,
 The presidents-to-be had their skeletons,
 Only the multitudes were deceived.

Two-party system, open ballot,
A harvest of party structures,
A contest of friends of a friend,
 Still the president had his reasons,
 The presidents-to-be had their skeletons,
 And the super-rich were deceived.

Paradise was painted in promises
And scores of observers cried
'It was the freest and the fairest!'
 But the general had old grudges,
 The president-elect had hidden skeletons,
 Only the citizens were deceived.

OF PIGS, SPECIALISTS AND BUTCHERS

Dirty pigs infest our gutters

Do not give your pearls to pigs,
Throw not your body at them
Lest they carve you up for dogs,
Share not your fears with hyenas
Lest they turn and devour you.

Cunning specialists litter our programmes

Open not your door to exotic tricks,
These greeky surgeons bearing knives,
Beware of crusaders and activists,
Beware of orgies with harlots,
They fan the fire set upon your house.

Sharp-toothed butchers infest our street

Throw not your body on their knives,
Do not lend your ears to buzzards,
They do not pay their debts,
Do not sell your peace for a promise,
You cannot cast your votes for wolves.

VISION 2010

They are on the same run again,
looking up to you
the image of their past fears.

The same exit scheme
beckons their undying dreams
for a place in our history.

Between now and then,
you give them the same sweets
and new improved nzeribe monsters.

Me, I have nothing to lose,
I am still homeless and sick at 2000,
teach me to catch your vision.

UNDER THE GUNS OF DICTATORS

Brother Jero, I will not follow
in your quest for foreign decorations
and trade mark pills and remedies,
you partook at the state banquets
under the guns of dictators,
and in your flow of ink
I perceive a whiff of deceit,
enough to crush budding blades.

Woe to you conniving socialists!
You fill out your cheeks
under the guns of dictators
and abandon your discipleship
until your sheep's clothing
can longer cover your wolf's body!
When you call to your comrades,
you speak in poisoned fangs.

Tell me, you monger of news,
why do you shun courage
and hide your pernicious mischief
under the guns of dictators?
You keep your conscience
hidden in big brown envelopes
where truth acquires many shades
and demi-gods are created and appeased.

What can the hopes of the peasant do
under the guns of dictators?
While they toil to fill the coffers of generals
(goaded on by frenzied dances of sycophants),
they hope for release from man-made yokes,
for the practitioners of politics will come
to loot with smiles and unfulfilled promises
what was not ravaged by guns and boots.

OF ADJUSTMENTS

Sharp and problematic
years of
structural adjustment programme
removed all
subsidies and privileges.

Some additional parts
of the Nigerian dream were
sliced and pocketed
by a
select and pampered
few,
while our
suffering adjusted parents
were retrenched,
and we joined the
senior applicants parade.

Now we have tribunals that
search and punish
corruption,
and we reckon to shift between
sinners and politicians.

He believes
that when power is devolved
and the nation is given federal character,
we are *TICKled*¹ and *NARECOMed*²,
we might be a
soundly adjusted people.

If we shun
separation and polarisation,
we might
stay and prosper,
all if
some abacha please!

1. TIC = Transition Implementation Committee (Nigeria, 198)

2. NARECOM = National Reconciliation Commission (Nigeria, 198)

WE SHALL RISE WITH THE SUN

I

Over-cooked unyielding promises
have *SAP*ped their stomachs,
pot-bellies tycoons
have clothed them in *TOKUNBO*s,
unlettered men of *Action*
have *MAROKO*ed their dwelling places,
their *NEW BREED* patriots are hindered
by clumsy turnings of a headless *NECK*.

They seek to return to their grassroots
and *Operate to Feed the Nation*, but
their *Green Revolution* turns to brown dreams,
their villages are not *DFRR*led.

Their rural women are promised *Bitter Lies*
as lazy *Ladies*, *First Persons* to sit in *Chairs*,
accumulate swelling ward*ROB*es.

Their *National Cake* is *Privatised*
into the waiting arms of practitioners of lobbying,
while the sword of retrenchment,
sharpened by *Invincible Men of Finance*,
hang over underpaid slavers
abandoned by pascals and rascals.

Men of wealth ride the winds
to seek cure for luxurious headaches,
while the kwashiokored children of the land
are promised *Death for All* by 2000
new *SIN*thetic ailments and *SIN*dromes.

II

Yet the choking merry gist
of the infamous he-goat
and the jerry jarring jingles
of ah-so rock music
is *MAMSER*ed to *Nationally Orientate* and *Agitate* us
to shun the evils of Andrew
who checked out...

Yet the dimpled descendant of Mai Dugu
with wisdom behind dark goggles,
and supported by vain hawkers of words
partaking in the naira share-a-thon at Sheraton,

push away the day of *Naija*'s de-mockery-tisation...

III

We hear their appeals in our hearts;
'oracles of our people,
what paradise do your pens discern?'

We sit here
on the burning sands of time,
entertained and killed
by star-studded
long-playing
khaki-clad
clowns:

'Sons of our mother,' we chorus as one,
'darkness comes
to curtain their acts,

but the sun shall rise
upon us
to celebrate!'

LAND OF OUR FOREFATHERS

Land of our forefathers,
Recount the tales of your braves,
Stories that adorned the evening fires
Of our ancestors long departed,
Tell of the riches that once were yours
And the treasures buried in your belly.

Land of our forefathers,
Your body, battered, bent and brown,
Speaks of trials unknown to me,
It tells of the coming of greed mongers
(From distant lands with superior weapons)
Who ravaged your ebony beauty.

Land of our forefathers,
Tell of the anger in your sacred hills
That crushed our elders of old,
The hunger of your abandoned brooks
That washed away our fishermen
And farmlands that ate up our crops.

Land of our forefathers,
Your suntanned lovers turn their backs,
Your caretakers sit in borrowed palaces,
I cry to you, oh land of my forefathers,
For I am a pregnant young man, though
Vultures wait to devour my dreams.

Land of our forefathers,
Hearken to my tortured petition,
For the inheritors of your dignity, I intercede,
We cannot ask for tears from your plunderers,
We have come for courage and blessings,
Speak to us, oh land of our forefathers!

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

What will you do with this
freedom,
now that you have learnt to
fight?
So much blood floods your
fields,
there is no stop to this flow of
pains.

When you have shed their
blood,
others will come and shed your
blood,
others will come and shed their
blood,
until man is purified of the fear of
himself!

FARIDA

for Farida Mustapha (Late)

My Farida, our Farida,
It was only yesterday
your smiles brightened our corridors
and lightened our swotting emotions,

now we write our examinations
with you.

Our Farida,
what yonder yearnings captured your spirit
on that cloudless morning?

You made your sacrifice and left us
without telling mother where you were going.

Your blood screamed across Zaria,
and still speaks
in the shrinking souls
of those who *tangoed* with the police,

they only washed their hands
in blood.

Oh great Nigerian students,
Forget not the sweetness
of her last smile!

APPLICANTS

Uncertainties
connections and promises
compel us
to wait,
asking and placing
applications.

Certificates we've got,
experiences
(of five years and above)
we lack,
having just *NYSC*
of 365 days!

Now and then
we feed on rumours and truths,
you are there
I am here,
felicitations and prayers,
some tensions, some laughs.

Career plans
or desperations,
endless queues
from yesterday to tomorrow,
we in the middle, today,
applicants all!

NEW GENERATION

alluring embraces
curried kisses
imperial comforts
sacrificed innocence
wealth-washed values
parasitic partnerships
perverted bloodlines
home-grown injuries
solitary kinsmanship

so we run
oh how we run
from the calls of our fathers

fading histories
ancestral boundaries
rust-infested credits
conspiratorial wars
cosmetic friendships
hit-and-run cultures
stock destinations

and so we run
oh how we run
from the calls of our fathers

disdain in the hard hands of elders
fire in the common eye of brothers
mercies of new gods
conjured ailments
chants of clumsy priests
menace of attractive traps
bungling hunters

and so we run
and we may run
perhaps never to meet again

MY GENERATION

Here I am denuded of all plumage
In the middle of my peak virility,
A few years stolen by mean dreams,
A few years left to tease my fate:

Of my generation I am the crystal image,
Sapped skeletons hugging tattered hopes.

We are compelled to survive, never to thrive,
In order to maintain their fat selves
And preserve even the crumbs of our cake
For their kids and the brats after their kind:

Of my generation we are the pampered victims,
Sapped skeletons watched by insatiate vultures.

Born equal but bred to be poor and polite,
We drown noiselessly in committees and commissions,
And when we die, as we surely must die,
We are denied graves even at dumping sites:

Of my generation we are the clear picture,
Sapped skeletons bound by barren dreams.