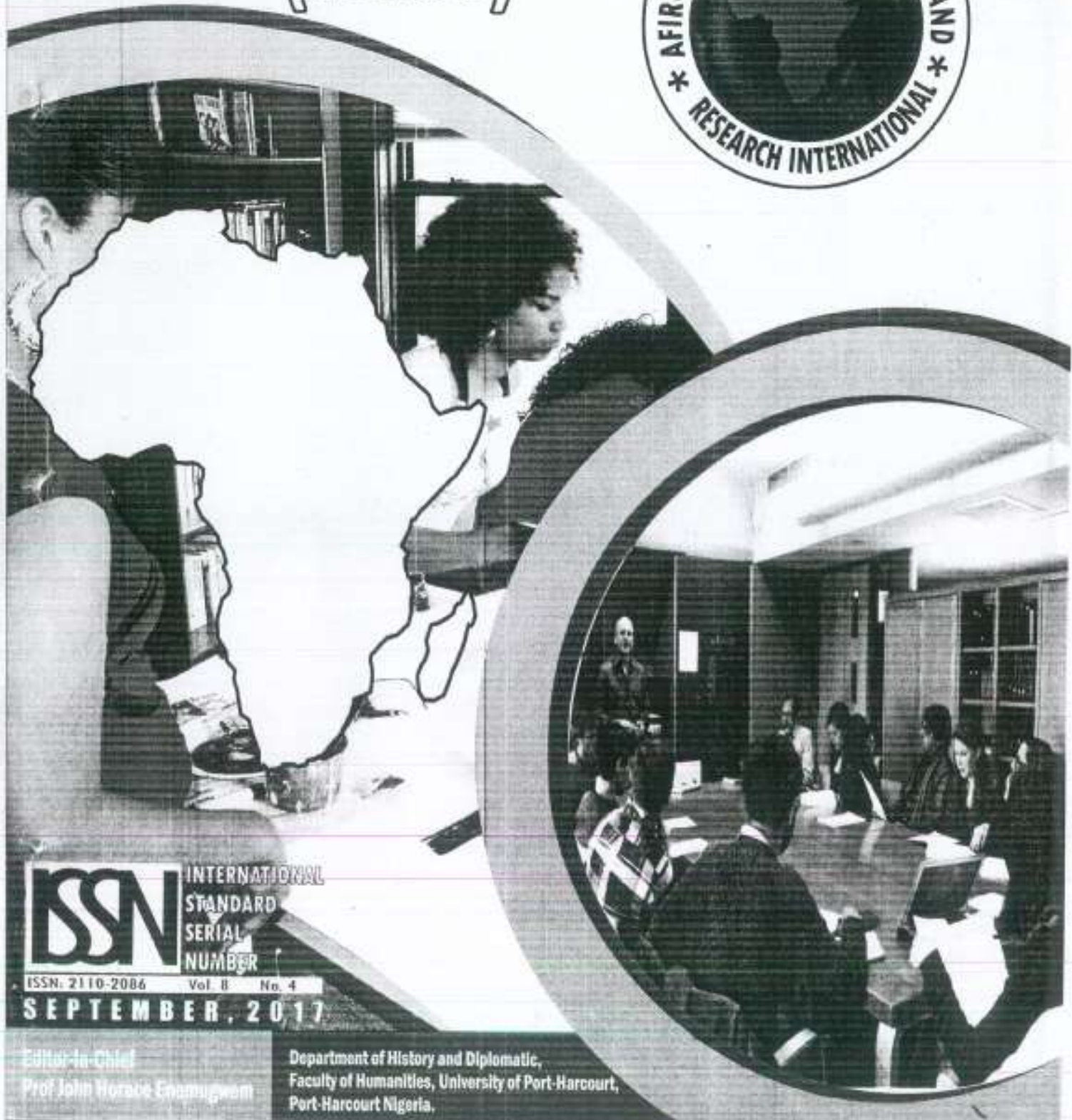


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***Smoke and Stench of Oil, our Eternal Pains: A Critical Perspective on Sophia Obi's Tears in a Basket***

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**ABSTRACT**

*Globalization which is of inestimable value has become something no writer worth his or her salt will ever ignore. Currently, Africa writers like their counterparts in developing or third world countries have placed more premium on freedom and justice, ecology and environmental issues, individual human rights and the unending search for the meaning and place of self in a grievously fragmented and tortuous socio-political and bastardized world. A new and inevitable sensibility seems to have engulfed the entire world: developed, developing and underdeveloped countries of the world. There is a new wave of revival aimed at putting an end to political corruption, class and economic marginalization, deliberate attempts to underdevelop certain regions despite their monumental contributions to the economic growth of the nation among other things. These are issues which when over looked could lead to an extreme disruption of world peace and harmony. Nigerian writers in tune with the prevailing concern of literary artists all over the world are devoting their energy, especially in recent times to the exploration, of the basic problems confronting humanity, anywhere in the globalized village called world. This article, therefore, is our genuine attempt to*



*show that Nigerian writers since 1980 have been parts of the world writers collective projection of images in words and deeds deliberately out to reveal our concept of a decent and harmonious society free from all forms of evils and the chaos of life. It is intended to make Nigerian leaders to remember that if the goose that lays the golden egg is destroyed, even the exploiters will be destroyed. Above all it is intended to make our leaders act right in order for the led to follow suit. Sophia Obi's Tears in a Basket, a journey in poetry will serve as our major reference point.*

**Keywords:** *Smoke and stench, eternal pains, tears in a basket, freedom and justice*

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### **Introduction**

Tears in a Basket, Sophia Obi's median text in the literary world is a perfect work of a wordsmith intended to cause anger, an expression of pains and frustration of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is a provocative realistic portrayal of the people's predicament in the hands of the powerful overlords that have ruled Nigeria since independence in 1960, and the likes in every nook and cranny of this grief ridden world of ours.

In the forty-nine poems that make up this collection, the young and highly embittered poet makes us, the down and out of the society, and the sit-tight power drunk, self-styled leaders laugh at our

collective shame, stupidity and discomformiture, in a world where greed, self and family aggrandizements make us forget or deliberately ignore the fact that our thieving of the people's wealth come to naught for even our highly esteemed "virginity", our highly treasured opulence will be tasted by worms. If our highly priceless body will one day become a very special delicacy for worms, it would be very instructive for us to understand and accept the futility of our defrauding individuals and communities for our selfish ends.

Sophia Obi's indictment of our abdication of our collective responsibility rest on the deliberate and perpetual



exploitations and total destructions of the Niger Delta and Deltans. No one, indeed none seems or wants to call these ancient and modern unrepentant task masters to order. Even the pot-bellied Nigerians power block who in their brazen greed failed to see or pretend not to see the hollowness of their conscious attempts to actualise their perpetuation of the extinction of the South-Eastern zone of Nigeria.

This paper is an attempt to show that Sophia Obi and by extension other writers from Niger Delta through their works create images in words and deeds explicating our concept of reality, and the basterdazation of the human essence. In our exploration of the smoke and stench of oil and the eternal pains that emanate from oil exploration in Niger Delta, it is our sincere desire to screen this concept through ten (10) poems in the collection. These poems are Oloibiri, Tears in a Basket, Swamps of our time, I hate farewells, Tomorrows debris, Riotous ghosts, Baby, The wisdom of poverty and Resolve.

#### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Ngugi (1982) in Homecoming posits that "a writer responds, with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a kind of sensitive needle, he registers with varying degrees of accuracy and success the conflicts and tensions in his changing society" (47). Sophia Obi in response to the write's mandate inundates her readers with a perfect explication of the socio-political and economic issues of her time and society. She registers her annoyance over the way the Niger Deltans have been treated over the years by the various Nigerian leadership. In Oloibiri, she laments the plight of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, thus:

*Desolate like a wealthy aged whore  
Wrapped up in gloomy attire,  
I lay on the altar of a faded glory,  
Oily tears rolling through my veins  
To nourish households in the deserts (13).*

The poet in unequivocal terms informs the world how the oil of the Niger Delta region nourishes the households of the Northern region of the nation. She frowns at the way the leadership of Nigeria uses the oil wealth of the region to develop other regions without developing the Niger Deltans and the region. According to her:

*I quench the thirst  
Of the desert dwellers  
Far and wide, my flow invents  
Elegant monuments gigantic  
To the untutored sight of my people.*

*Bridges and mansions grow out of the dusty lands  
while my children wallow  
In the crude mud peculiar to my swamp. (14)*

It is on record that since 1958 when oil was first discovered in large quantity in Oloibiri in present day Bayelsa state of Nigeria to the present, the various Governments that have ruled this country and the multinational oil companies manning the oil had impoverish the Niger Deltans. Kontein Trinya (2011) in an article entitled "Shadows of Development in the New Poetry of the Niger Delta" cites Chief Onyema Ugochukwu's remark in his forward to the N.D.D.C, while he was a chairman to the commission. According to him, Ugochukwu remarks that:

*Since the 1950's, petroleum operations have caused great devastations to the Niger Delta. These have impacted negatively on the fishing and farming which are no longer productive enough to feed the area. In Ogoni land for instance, food is now imported in an area once known as the food basket of the Niger Delta. Although all major oil explorations and production companies are located in the region, it is the least developed of Nigeria.*

Ugochukwu's postulation above corroborates Sophia Obi's explication of the dilemma of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is highly disturbing



that the people and the region now live "a grey life of despair," carrying "a begging bowl," an aftermath of her generosity which hangs her "on the scale of extinction". It saddens one the more when one in one's restlessness is "awakened by the oily tears of the Ijaw Nation" only to hear:

*The celebration,*

*The joyful uproar that comes,  
With controlling the blessings  
of my God given inheritance.*

It is a truism to say that the Niger Deltans are highly underdeveloped despite their monumental contributions to the development of Nigeria. This is because nothing is being done to improve the life of the people in the region. According to Dudley Seers:

*The questions to ask about a country's development are: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all these three have become less severe, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. (Seers 1997:12).*

A critical analysis of Seers above, the pertinent questions raise visa-via Sophia Obi's lamentation in Oloibiri clearly explains the restiveness of the youths of the region, for "a plan which conveys no target for reducing poverty, unemployment and inequality can hardly be considered a development plan" (12) as Seers (1977) puts it.

In furtherance of her argument that the various leaders of Nigeria since independence had neglected the Niger Delta region, in spite of the fact that it accounts for over 80% of the nations wealth and the region being one of the most backward regions in the world, the poet titles her lamentation Tears in a Basket. In the title poem, Obi graphically expounds their deplorable state thus:

*We are sacrificial leeches,  
Waiting to be squashed*

*Winds of bitter memory slap me silly  
As I cock my ears to the drumbeats  
Of the Niger Delta  
Naked dances and dreams have been dampened.  
By the cold winds of neglect (19).*

Joseph C. Ebegbulem, Dickson Ekpe and Theophilus Oyime Adejumo (2013) "Oil Exploration and Poverty in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Critical Analysis certify Obi's grieving by positing that "it is believed that since the advent of oil exploration some decades ago, the region has become the bread winner of the nation, accounting for over 90% of the nation's export earning since 1975" (279). The poet in three good stanzas: the first, the third, and the last, repeats the refrain:

*We are sacrificial leeches  
Waiting to be squashed. (19)*

to bemoaned how much the people have been destroyed. To be squashed explains what have been melted and is being melted on them by their oppressors. It is very instructive to state that the Niger Delta region is highly underdeveloped in all its ramifications. It is highly regrettable that despite the fact that the region is the food basket of the nation, no real change has taken place since oil was first discovered over 59 years ago. There is no tangible development, no good roads, no electricity and no running water. The underdevelopment is very severe with the youths being the hardest hit. The people live in dire poverty. Hence the issue of militancy in the region.

Obi in "Tears in a Basket" goes into memory lane as everyone in the region daily ask questions about the plight of the people, the highly deprived.

*I flip through the memoirs  
Of our ancestors, tracing our path  
To a quaint communal disorder,  
I am yet to fathom the obtuse grooves  
On the foreheads of our forefathers*



*Who, unceremoniously, gave our fate away  
On a stained platter of gold,  
Now only the deep scars of memory  
Wrapped in cobwebs of pain  
Bind us to mother earth.*

The poet ponders on how their fate was ceded away unceremoniously. Which role did their forefathers play in their being “wrapped in the cobwebs of pains”? She ask sorrowfully. Why did they part with their God given wealth without resistance? Perhaps one could ask, are those who supposed to ensure the recovery of their stolen wealth not sacrificing it further on the altar of self and family aggrandizement? The issue as it were and still is, centres on the excruciating poverty in the land.

Ray Ekpu (2004) in an article. *The ND Conundrum (2)*” verifies Sophia Obi’s position that the Niger Delta region is faced with grinding poverty by describing the region thus:

*The story of the Niger Delta is the story of a paradox,  
grinding poverty in the midst of vulgar opulence. It is  
a case of a man who lives on the bank of a river and  
washed his hand with spittle. It is the case of people  
who live in the farm and die of hunger (10).*

It is highly disturbing that “in the midst of vulgar opulence” as Ekpu pathetically subscribes above:

*Niger Delta, like my mother’s soul  
Grieves for her children who give bountifully  
Yet feed on remnants (18).*

as Obi explicates in “Swamps of our time”. Obi’s lamentation in “Swamps of our time” is indeed a labyrinths of pains. In it the poets discusses how Niger Delta, and Deltans welcome:

*from molar to molar,  
Traitors who danced to the rhythm of  
Her broken heartbeats;*

*with the milk from her breast,  
she moulds dusty earth into mansions,  
while her children peep through tattered huts.*

The poet fulminates the way various Nigerian governments have treated the people of this sub-region. The oil wealth of the region has been used by the various Nigerian leaders for the infrastructural development of other regions to the detriment of the money spinning region. The poet explicates this thus: "with the milk from her breast", i.e the oil, dusty earths, the desert of the Northern Nigeria is turned into mansions while the Niger Deltans peep through their tattered huts to view the developments taking place in other sub-regions.

Douglas Oronto (2005) in "Injustices in Niger Delta", available online, succinctly posits that which helps us to advance our discourse. According to Oronto:

*The Niger Delta region contributes 90% wealth of the economy of the country and there is little or nothing done by the government and the operating companies to show restitution for this huge contribution. The government in the past has always sidelined this region from meaningful development, thereby shying away from the plight of these people". (1).*

Due to the fact that the government of Nigeria premeditatedly shys away from addressing the plights of the people, the poet stirs our emotion by asking:

*O' delta of our beginnings, how has the past left you?  
How is the present treating you?  
What is the future of your ecosystem?*

*Can you turn back the swamps of time?  
Can you chasten the sands of life?  
Can you command the rivers to be still? (18)*

The first three lines of the above quote call for a conscious x-raying of the life of the Deltans. The "delta of our beginnings" talks about the heroic

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outings of the Nana of the Itshkeri, Jaja of Opopo and the Isaac Boro's of the world. Men who dare the Lion's den and the burning fiery furnace to assert their authorities and that of the region. They dared the white man and his weaponry. The way the present treats the region is the nonchalant attitudes of the Nigerian leaders since independence and the actions of the multinational oil companies. The future portends greater evils because if nothing is urgently done, there will be extinction of the ecosystem.

Due to the possible extinction of the region if nothing positive is done, the poet and well meaning Deltans are disturbed by the anger in the spirit world where their forebearers, the Jajas of Opopos and others, epitomizing the Niger Delta region "grieves for her children who give bountifully", being the father Christmas of all and sundry, and "yet feed on remnants" (18). Hence, the refrain "Can you" in the three lines that constitute the fourth stanza of the "Swamps of our time". The rhetorical questions in this stanza are meant to set the mood for the crisis of the moment.

The excruciating pains being experienced by the Niger Deltans made the youths to try to provide answers to the burning issues of their lives. Hence, their militant approach today.

Jill Shackleman (2006), stresses that the World Bank asserts that "the key root cause of conflict is the future of economic development such that many of world poorest countries are locked in a tragic vicious cycle where poverty causes conflict and conflict poverty".

Raymond Otijie (2000) in an article "Causes and Conflicts in the Niger Delta" gives credence to our argument that the people in this region have been greatly impoverished. According to Otijie,

*Conflicts in the Niger Delta particularly, arises as a result of poverty, unemployed, and environmental degradation which are the direct results of oil spillage, gas flaring and other environmental negative practices that have long characterized the activities of the multinational... unless the present administration addresses the developmental needs of the region through job creation, infrastructural advancement...*

*the quest for peace and sustainable development may not be achieved.*

The issue here, remains that the activities of the multinational oil companies, their deliberate attempts, to undermine the rights of the oil producing communities and governments' desire to sustain the status quo compelled the youths within the region to see militancy as the best option towards redeeming their communities. Annkio Briggs (2017) in conversation, Saturday Sun 25, 2017, argues that:

*The North is the reason why we have the Niger Delta crisis. The Fulani is the reason for the Niger Delta Crisis. I will tell you why I say so. More than 80 of the percent private oil wells in Nigeria belong to them since 1968 and since after the war, the Niger Delta resources have been used to develop the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, the North and so many other places...The North brings nothing to the National coffers. A group of 19 states that is bringing nothing and who are the cause of the Niger Delta crisis is no way in any position (44)*

to deny the people the right for sovereignty if nothing could be done to ensure the infrastructural development of the region among others

In "I hate farewells", Obi takes her readers into memory lane on the struggle for the survival of the people of her region. In stanza six of the poem, the poet that appeared "with a bang" as Gabriel Okara puts it in his forward to the collection task her readers to journey into memory on the struggle of the Niger Deltans for survival. In same stanza, the poem, the poet writes:

*Thank you, Papa, for fighting gallantly.  
You fought and conquered for our rebirth  
Thank you, Papa, for planting that mustard seed of love  
May it blossom, but may we never harvest fleets of joy,  
To the detriment of our brothers (29)*



Here, reference is made by the poet to Papa Harold Dappa-Biriye and Isaac Biro's of blessed memory who fought for the common wealth of the Niger Delta Nation that the people could enjoy the beauty of the oil God endowed them with. That they were "eighty-five grey-strands of wisdom, hope / Squinted eyes gazed into the promised Land" (29) is as troubling and painful as the fact that one may not really possess the pledged land. This is because even when one tries to "wash pigments of sorrow" off one's "mind with tears of solace", trying to comfort oneself, there is always the "reminiscence of his presence stashed". (29) This indeed is the graphic display of his absence.

The beauty of this farewell if there is any, is that:

*Papa played his part on this large stage of life.*

*Leaving his perfect footprints on the sands of time.*

It is on record that over forty-two years ago, Adaka Boro, a citizen of Niger Delta region put up fearlessly a spirited battle against the Nigerian state over basic fundamental issues of self-determination. His passion for it was so strong that he raised a rag-tag guerrilla army that was quelled by the Nigerian government. Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Bori in Rivers State origin and others of like mind who fought for better treatment for the Ogoni were hanged by Abacha government for speaking "for the welfare of the Ogoni in particular and the Niger Delta at large.

The poet's fear that few individuals may betray the Niger Delta cause in the last three lines of stanza six of "I hate farewells" as quoted above was re-echoed by Kan Saro-Wiwa (1995) in his piece "Before I am Hanged":

*I repeat that we all stand before history. I and my colleagues are not the only ones on trial... On trials also is the Nigeria nation, its present rulers and all those who assist them. Any nation which can do to the weak and disadvantaged what the Nigerian nation has done to the Ogoni, loses a claim to independence and to freedom from outside influence. I am not one of those who shy away from protesting injustice and oppression, arguing that*

*they are expected of a military regime. The military do not act alone. They are supported by a gang of politicians, lawyers, judges, academics and business men, all of them hiding under the claim that they are only doing their duty, men and women too afraid to wash their pants off their urine. We all stand on trials, my lord, for by our actions we have denigrated our country and jeopardized the future of our children.*

Ken Saro-Wiwa's (1995) summation during his trial before he was hanged explains why much success have not been recorded by the Niger Deltans in their pursuit for resource control. A nation where people go for self aggrandizement, betrayals will always reign supreme. Obi in "Gone too soon" in memory of her father ask "for how long will this memory / remain stuck in the grooves of my brain?" (28). The answer to the pertinent question lies in Ken Saro-Wiwa postulation:

*As we subscribe to the subnormal and accept double standards, as we lie and cheat openly, as we protect injustice and oppression, we empty our classrooms, degrade our hospitals, fill our stomachs with hunger and elect to make ourselves the slaves of those who pursue the truth and honour justice, freedom and hard work.*

*I predict that the scene here will be replayed and replayed and replayed by generation yet unborn. Some have already cast themselves in the role of villains, some tragic victims, some still have a chance to redeem themselves. The choice is for each individual (29).*

The choice, indeed, is for each individual for we are our choices. The likes of Ken Saro-Wiwa are daily killed by the Nigerian nation, though through various devices. This is why the poet explicates in unequivocal terms that



"we have gambled", and still gambles "with pangs of death" / "And only a hollow vacuum is left" (29).

In tune with our postulation above in Ken Saro-Wiwa's lamentations that "the scene will be replayed, and replayed by generations yet unborn". (29), Sophia Obi's "Tomorrow's debris (stop the killing)", "remains a heartless bullet that rips apart our very existence making it a futile exercise every attempt to gather our fragmented bodies. The first stanza reads:

*I pop up my head in the midst of wolves,  
Who wine and dine on the toil  
Of the weak and wasted,*

In this first stanza of the first poem in the collection, Tears in a Basket, the poet graphically expounds the tragic nature of the people of the Niger Delta region. A situation where in the Nigerian nation, wolves who are heartless wine and dine on the toil of the weak, leaves much to be desired. Daily one hears "from among the battered thatches /... the wailing of the thirsty souls/who till and toil/ hunger for love" (12) Lindsay Barret (2009) in "the Niger Delta Conundrum" corroborates the above by stating that "the story of the underdevelopment and neglect of the Niger Delta is well known in the world. The basic theme in all... has been that although almost all of Nigeria's oil and gas resources come from or around the region, the social infrastructural development there is abysmally poor". (46) This is why, it could be stated without the fear of contradiction that Sophia Obi consciously or unconsciously chronicles the time in which she lives from the personality of the Niger Delta.

The hopeless situation of the Niger Delta region could be seen from the fact that "orphans bury their agony/ in their baffled hearts/ their screams, sharp as the missiles" (12) torment them every minute of the day. In addition, the cultists, hoodlums, terrorists and the extremists seem to glory in their bombardments and exploits "beneath the rusty roofs of hatred". While they thrive in this, the "orphans wail their endless agony/ among tomorrow's debris" (12). That tomorrow is already in debris marks the end of innocence.

In "Riotous ghost", sub titled "Ikeja Bomb Blast", the poet who has demonstrated great sensitivity to the issues of her time even in her debunk collection, takes her readers on a mental journey on how Nigerian leaders destroyed, and the act is on going, their perceived enemies. In her first stanza, she incontrovertibly postulates that:

*That chill night  
Like an overfed boa constrictor,  
The canal rippled sluggishly,  
Overfed with the spoils  
Brought by careless powers.*

The poet tasks her readers on visualizing the images of an overfed boa constrictor or any similar snake, a South American kind of a snake that kills her unsuspecting victims by winding herself round her prey and then crushing it with her might. She compares this with the very way the Ejigbo canal rippled sluggishly haven been overfed with the spoils – the bright Generals who were ferried there by careless powers, the military government in power then. The poet bemoaned a situation where leaders who are supposed to care for their citizens destroy same joyfully.

In the second stanza the poet succinctly explains that the willful killings of Nigerian best military personnels cut across religious and ethnic divide. Nigerian leaders whether military or democratic create and perpetuate a cult of power through which they destroy perceived enemies via letter bomb, plane crash, the Ikeja bomb blast, orchestrated road accidents, and armed robbery, staged kidnaps and other devices. The poet laments that at dawn, instead of good tidings, songs and worship akin to the chipping and pipping of the birds marking their dawn in a mango forest, their "churches and mosques/ nodded in one accord, /singing a duet to usher in marked souls at dusk" (16) It is disheartening that the best brains, the highly talented professionals in the military were dispatched to their graves by fiat even when the morning dews of their lives were yet to dry. It is more traumatic that this distortion of our reality, this "garrison blow-out" occurred in January, the first month of the year. The fact that the souls were marked, marks the death of godliness in our climes. A country



that destroys her very best will never be named among the commonwealth of great nations. This is why the narrator even thinks of bargaining his or her "damp soul / on the mournful ghost-line that lingers / across the canals" (16) The narrator's pondering on the need for suicide is the poets way of depicting the mindset of the deprived in the region and Nigeria in general. The poem ends on a very pathetic note when the poet explicates that this misnormal cannot be locked up in the one's compartments of memory because one:

*Still hear groaning of  
parents, siblings and friends  
as death, mowing down  
drags them deeper and  
deeper beyond six feet? (16)*

In "Baby," Sophia Obi realistically announces the hopeless nature of the Niger Delta region. Pessimistically, she posits that the regions hope is dashed forever. The three stanzas poem captures the birth of a child, a baby, "the beauty of creation". Everything about the child demonstrates the beauty of the supreme architect. Anyone who looks at the child's eyes sees the tantalizing "sparkling with desire for a peaceful life" (21).

In the child, one beholds purity and innocence, one whose frank smiles, and toothless gum soothes the minds of the exploited, dumped and grieved, and delights the heart of the Niger Deltans.

The last stanza, which is made up of four lines, sums up the inevitable tragic end of the child. For as one "counts life in the silky strands of her hair," one is reminded of the fact that "the breath of adulthood" which comes as the child begins to experience the harsh realities of life, "leads to untold pangs of death" which makes harvest inevitable.

Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw who as early as the early 60's stood to contest the plights of the Niger Delta did alarm the people of the region about the dilemma of their pathetic state. Boro in his book entitled Twelve - Day Revolution as cited by ken Sar-Wiwa (1989) argues that:

*A Niger Delta State is a clear case as the people  
concerned have a distinct historical silhouette. Such a*

*demand becomes all the more compelling when the area is so viable, yet the people are blatantly denied development and the common necessities of life. If Nigerian government refuses to do something to drastically improve the lot of the people, inevitably a point of no return will be reached; then evil is afoot.*

This is the point where the people of the region are today. Evil is indeed afoot, for they have reached consciously or unconsciously a point of no return. The activities of the various militant groups and the deceptive nature the various governments at the centre have handled his very sensitive matter attest to this inevitable conclusion.

Hence, in "Resolve" the young but highly pained poet drums it hard on Nigerian leaders and the led that the nation has been "sitting on the edge of anxiety, / dangling over a valley / of indecision," which is the thief of time.

The irredeemable nature of the whole thing lies on the fact that attempts to gaze into the mist of tomorrow seems an exercise in futility. Tomorrow is "blurred and shapeless," due to the actions and inactions of men and women who have held power and still hold power in Nigeria. The poet argues that "images spring into the / black void of my eyes / holding no answers for the million questions" (46).

Whoever sincerely ponders on the issue of the Niger Delta region gets disturbed for a life time. There is no rationale for a region that produces the wealth on which the nation thrives to be highly underdeveloped. Leburah Ganago as cited by Allwell A. Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwo (2011) articulates that "it is universally acknowledged that the Niger Delta accounts for over ninety-five percent of the Nigerian economy". Based on the regions contributions to the national economy, one could have believed that the region will be taken care of by the various Nigerian governments. But this is not so because Ganago further posits that "it is equally an open secret that the Niger Delta region is the least developed area of the Nigeria as the oil wealth from the area is carted away by the ruling Cabal ... to develop their own region". Literary artists

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like the Late Ken Saro-Wiwa, Sophia Obi and other well meaning Niger Deltans have been and are still daily "tormented by thoughts of the future" (46), a formless, painful and inescapable future. It is very agonising on the realization that every thing is dizzy.

The Poet's resolve to live each day for what its worth, painting, "Judas in lighter colours" and her feeling that such is "the better to redeem him" is escapist in nature. It signifies the highest degree of hopelessness and helplessness for the fact remains that until the people are bold enough to say no to the injustice nothing tangible will be done to better their lots.

The poet's last three lines of "Resolve", also depict the poets resignation to fate"

*I will be as truthful as I can  
And with your eternal lamp in my hands, Lord,  
my path is forever bright.*

The oil of the region is God's eternal lamp with which the peoples path will forever be bright , and only if it's explorations is used to their own advantage.

The atmosphere today is liken to a Tsunami of seasons. The issue of the Niger Delta is seen as a very destructive high wave caused by a total neglect of a region whose wealth has been used, and the act ongoing, to develop the deserts of Nigeria. The pockets of injustices everywhere have ignited the fire that is about to consumed both the oppressed and the oppressors.

In talking about a way out of the present quairemire, Wole Soyinka's postulation becomes very relevant and unavoidable. According to him in his piece "Between Amnesty and Amnesia":

*The Delta crisis is not the middle-East dilemma, and does not require the high powered serial rituals of negotiations that still characterize the middle East, or indeed the Yugoslavia Scenario in a not so distant past. The matter is straight forward. As MEND statements have periodically emphasized, the Delta crisis is the mere purulent tip of the Nigerian boil, now*

*prodded into a violet eruption in a particular region. Over and over again it has been stressed that nothing but a holistic approach to internal restructuring will save the nation. Not only is this historically inevitable, such an approach provides a context within which the aggrieved oil-producing areas can feel a genuine relatedness to the national question (Between Amnesty and Amnesia).*

Dr. Martin Luther King corroborates our argument by positing that "I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be." Dr. King's exposition above affirms our inter-relatedness. It explicates succinctly that the destiny of a Nigerian or a region, no matter how minute such a Nigerian or region might be, is inextricably tied to the destiny of the Nigerian nation. It is on record that the current spats of violence and quaking violent conflicts in the region are indeed ascribable to the total neglect of the Niger Delta region, the absence of social infrastructural and welfare amenities resulting from forceful repressive approach employed by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Unfolding events for decades demonstrate reliance on forceful repression by the State has not made any impact and will not succeed. This accounts for Rowland E. Worlu's (2005) argument that "the various stakeholders to the conflict, from Federal, State and Local community levels, must agree to negotiate on a neutral platform on the basis for oil exploitation and co-existence as a nation" (395).

President Mohammedu Buhari's use of force or threat to those agitating for Sovereign State of Biafra which is also a warning to other sections of Nigeria asking for the equitable distribution of our resources is uncalled for and a show of lack of the ideals of governance: Buhari in "No Biafra under me" as quoted by Agaju, Daily Sun Tuesday, May 10, 2016 states that "For Nigeria to divide now, it is better for all of us to jump into the sea and get drowned" (12). This emptomises lack of what it takes to manage conflicts and a deliberate attempt to create an unjust society. This



is very much unexpected from a democratic president who must have on inauguration day swore to uphold the unity of the country and to ensure the well being of all and sundry.

The president and his likes should be reminded of Catherine Ponder's admonition to leaders and nations that "you are prosperous to the degree that you are experiencing peace, health and plenty in your world"<sup>(1)</sup> Individuals, groups, powers and regions that daily exploit and denigrate the people of the Niger Delta region and nation and any region or nation for that matter can never experience peace, health and plenty. This because Nigeria as "a co-operative for mutual advantage, ... is marked by conflict as well by an identity of interest" as John Rawls (1972) argues.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is important for us to stress that the main cause of the Niger Delta conflict is the deliberate attempts by the ruling elites or Federal government leaders both past and present to underdeveloped the region economically and infrastructurally despite the fact that the region accounts for over 90% of the nations wealth. The ideal of locking the region in a vicious cycle of poverty by those who hold sway at the Federal level to create conflicts is evil and must be highly condemned. Those who have said no to restructuring and those who have vowed not to see it happen are doing so because it is not in their interest to change anything that simultaneously reduces their power, influence and profit. But whether they like it or not, whether they allow it happen or not, a time is coming, and now it is for the current spats of violence and militancy are clear indications of what our tomorrow will be if the ideal is not done

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