

Protest and Conflict Resolution in the

## LITERATURE OF THE NIGER DELTA



Edited By CHINYERE NWAHUNANYA, Ph.D.

# FROM BOOM TO DOOM: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the LITERATURE OF THE NIGER DELTA



Map of the Nigeria Showing the Nine Niger Delta States

## Key to Map

-14	
S/No.	State
1.	Abia
2.	Akwa Ibom
3.	Bayelsa
4.	Cross Rivers
5.	Delta
6.	Edo
7.	Imo
8.	Ondo
9.	Rivers State

# FROM BOOM TO DOOM: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the LITERATURE OF THE NIGER DELTA

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## DEDICATION

To

Umar Musa Yar'Adua and Dr. Goodluck Ebelle Jonathan
Who agreed between themselves
That Amnesty was the first step to conflict resolution
And lasting peace in the Niger Delta;

And

To

All the youths who either sacrificially or through ignorance

Lost their lives

In the struggle to make the Niger Delta

A more habitable place for man

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to thank all the scholars (many of whom I have not met for the first time) who believed with me that the Niger Delta has for too long remained the afbatross which Nigerians have to shake off their necks for us to make meaningful progress as a nation, and therefore decided to join me on this journey of self-retrieval. Many accepted to write their chapters at very short notices, some lent me useful material; others drew my attention to writers and materials I was not aware of at the time I started structuring this book, materials which enriched the bibliography, and many offered invaluable advice when this project was still on the drawing board. To this group belong my teacher and mentor who has remained a valued friend, Professor M. J. C. Echeruo; Professor Sam Ukala, Professor G. G. Darah, and Professor Tanure Ojaide. Everybody in this project had to put up with my incessant phone calls, as well as allow me inundate their e-mails with my sometimes impolite inquiries about their not meeting my deadlines. I am particularly grateful to Professors 5.E. Ogude and Charles Nnolim; and Allwell Onukaogu, and Ezechi Onyerionwu who is gradually turning into a bibliophile.

Definitely, some scholars who I had so much faith in disappointed me, due (I imagine) to more important pressures from their job desks, and at the last minute wrote to inform me of their withdrawal. This accounts for a number of the gaps which are inevitably visible in the final work. Even those who knew ab initio that they could not participate doused my disappointment at their rejection of my invitation with their proposals of viable alternatives.

I also wish to apologize to all those who accepted my invitation to contribute essays on the chapters I assigned them, but whose essays we could not use because the peer reviewers (whose verdicts I accepted) did not find them publishable. Together with those who felt I should have invited them but did not, and therefore feel I do not deserve pardon, I just appeal for your pardon, since a book such as this had to be kept within a length that would not constitute a problem for the publisher, and had to be at a standard that would appeal to the intellectual community whom it primarily addresses.

Many of the contributors have had to wait for over 18 months since their papers were confirmed publishable and accepted, and I thank them for their exceptional patience while awaiting the publication of this book. Moreover, except in very few cases where I accepted alterations, the titles of each chapter have remained generally the way I conceived and assigned them. I thank the contributors for obliging my magisterial pose in this regard.

Finally, my wife and our children have had their own share of the pressures and denials arising from a husband's and father's commitment to pulling off a project within a self-imposed deadline. I thank them for accommodating my shortcomings during the period I had to see that this book was not still born.

Two essays in this volume had been previously published. These are those by Professor G. G. Darah, and Aderemi Bamikunle. Darah's essay is reproduced here with the author's permission. We would appreciate any information that would lead us to the estate of the late Aderemi Bamikunle who taught for many years at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria before he died.

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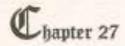
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## SECTION SIX: THE SHORT STORY

Chapter 27 Strident Voices: The Contemporary Short Story in the Niger Delta Clement C. Idegwu



## STRIDENT VOICES; THE CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORY IN THE NIGER DELTA Clement Chukwuka Idegwu

#### Introduction:

...the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. (P. 116).

That was Emperor Hirohito in August 1945. Hirohito, was an emperor, who, when his country, "Japan was involved in World War II refused to leave the capital for safety, saying he wished to share the experience of his subject". (P. 115). The quotation above aptly describes the current state of our nation where majority of her population are highly engrossed in one form of evil or the other. Every minute of the day, in our society, incalculable damage is done that leaves our physique shattered and battered. The human soul is in shreds and needs urgent knitting.

Luke Onyekakayah (2011) gives credence to the fact that we are in shreds thus:

The massive car bomb that ripped through the parking lot of the [Nigeria Police Headquarters in Abuja last Thursday, June 16, 2011 wrecked such havoc because of the porous security at the edifice. The police headquarters is supposed to be a high security area where every movement is monitored and only authorized persons are allowed in. But that wasn't the case at the time of the bombing. The Boko Haram sect, which claimed responsibility of the bombing took advantage of the porous security to perpetrate the act.

Going by the large number of vehicles destroyed (more than 77)... (P. 79).

And that was the Nation's Police Headquarters, the seat of the nation's security. The event of June 16, 2011 and the various acts of kidnapping had been the second self, of the Niger Delta region. Sophia Obi (2006) talks about how desolate we are "like a wealthy aged whore/wrapped up in gloomy attire... lay on the altar of a faded glory, oily tears rolling through my veins to nourish households in the deserts (p. 13). The anguish!

The urgency that the knitting of the human souls requires in the present dispensation in Nigeria explains succinctly more than ever before, the relevance of short stories which are strident voices poised for the full emancipation of man in an end time era. This is why Ngugi (1981) posits that:

Literature results from the conscious acts of men in society. At the level of the individual artist, the very act of writing implies a social relationship: one is writing about somebody for somebody. At the collective level, literature, as a product of men's intellectual and imaginative activity embodies, in words and images, the tensions, conflicts, contradictions at the heart of a community's being and process of becoming. It is a reflection of the aesthetic and imaginative planes of a community's wrestling with

its total environment to produce the basic means of life, food, clothing, shelter, and in the process creating and recreating itself in history. (pp. 5-6)

Truly, the literature of every society is an interpretation of the socio-political and economic state of the people. This is because every writer writes from his repertoire of knowledge drawn from his social milieu – the issues and happenings of his time and society.

Ahmed Yerima in an interview with Adebisi Ademakinwa (2004) gives credence to Ngugi's postulation above when he posits that "happenings in social-political sphere often impose a burden on the writer or literary artist "especially the one who is conscious of the social responsibilities of art and the artist. A practitioner of engaged art finds it difficult not to speak up"(347). (See Nwoga (1978) Ngugi (1982), Albert Camus (2006), and Idegwu (2010). ) These writers affirm that wordsmiths write from the social milieu of their immediate environments in fulfillment of their obligations to their society.

Having established that writers write to depict their societies either trying to frown at socio-political, and economic happenings or applicated issues found worth praising, it becomes very imperative to state that in Nigeria, a metaphor of T. S. Eliot's Wasteland, humans live in an overcrowded theatre, tired, frustrated, and anxiously wanting and waiting for a change which seems elusive. The fact that there is a geometrical progression of the debasing of their human essence rather than the other way round makes reading an uninteresting exercise, something not worth the effort. The mass of humanity seem too busy trying to extricate themselves from insurmountable obstacles to even read books, novels, and all that. The short story which as the name implies is short, about three or four thousand words, the longest being less than ten thousand words, and could be begun and finished within minutes of reading, becomes a very viable instrument for initiating and carrying a conscious attempt at changing an unholy order.

In this chapter, we attempt to show that the contemporary short story writer is a strident voice in the literature of the Niger Delta. Jasper Onuekwusi, Promise Onwudiwe, Nwachukwu- Agbada, Sam Ukala, Camillus Ukah, Toni Kani, Bina Nengi, Isiaka Aliaghan, Ehikhamenor and Simeon Nwachukwu, are the wordsmiths whose short stories would be used for analysis.

## THE SHORT STORY: STRIDENT VOICES IN THE NIGER DELTA

The short story has become a very significant literary genre in the re-engineering of the human world. Jasper A. Onuekwusi, (1994) sees it as "a brief medium for intensive exploration of significant moments and circumstances in the lives of men and women as they interact with themselves and indeed their environment and work out a chosen vision of life". (p. vi).

Short story writers use their craft to explore human actions in all ramifications of life. Short story writers in exercising the mirror theory of art, present various images, different and contradictory, as they are in a class society, show how the privileged exploiter class does everything it could to conserve the status quo while the exploited tries to subvert the status quo. This is why modern short story writers of the Niger Delta deserve our commendation as their burden has been not only to present the various different and contradictory images of our past and present, but to show how the exploited class could successfully subvert the status quo and enthrone an ideal state of life.

Ukala (2005) sees his six short stories in his collection as:

An attempt to expose the skeletons in the various supboards of life especially Nigerian life, which have made true progress impossible and are stinking indices that man is self-hating and self-destructive. In the pursuit of money power and sensuality, he has ruthlessly crushed all in his way, including, sometimes himself. These phenomenon in itself is common. (p. 7."Preface")

Ukala above sees his collection of short stories as his conscious attempt to present the various shades of reality in Nigeria and to correct the abnormalities inherent in human life. Jude, A. Agho (1996) corroborates this by saying that in Africa prose "has been mostly employed by writers to characterize the realities of the African situation. (p..2.) Kunene (1981) amplifies the beauty of prose by stating its social relevance thus:

In its most socially relevant form, therefore, art is the mirror in which the oppressor sees himself truthfully reflected, that is to say, at his ugliest. In his punic the oppressor, by a strange distortion of logic sees the ugliness in the art and not in himself, and instead of removing his own deformities, he breaks the mirror. Yet literature is one of the most reliable mirrors that can ever be trained on society (p. 426).

The short story writer remains a strident voice because of his ability to make the oppressor see himself in his ugliest. It creates a sort of panic in the oppressor. This is why if the oppressed are able to mobilize themselves and consistently and persistently press for a change, they torpedo the status quo with ease especially during the oppressors' movement of panic. Hence, Egejuru (1980) believes that there is no "greater theme than the struggle of a people to liberate themselves," (p. 114) which is the main thrust of short stories that are the strident voices of the Niger Delta.

Idegwu (2008) in his preface to his *The Vale of Tears and Other Stories* gives credence to the postulation above when he says: "this collection of seven short stories is the author's further attempt to look at the folly of injustice, with the intention of making men change for good." (p.xii).

In all, short story writers are the strident voices of the Niger Delta. Nigeria is still in her dark era as a nation. There is great injustice in the land. It is only when the short story is appreciated, read, the message learnt and acted upon that we can hopefully get to the end of the tunnel where there is no darkness, apology to George Orwell. (2000).

## TEARS IN NIGER DELTA

Do you see that woman sitting over there leaning against that post?

Yah... yes... the one with a black scarf and blouse?

Exactly, if I tell you the story of that woman, you'll wonder what kind of world we live in. In fact you'll weep for her. You'd wish she had never been born. (P. 171)

That is Bina Nengi-Bagha in her opening paragraph of "Cross roads". Bina Nengi-Bagha in this short story presents a graphic picture of the reality of the life of most women in the Niger Delta. The author in this story further demonstrates how deplorable the situation is in the Niger Delta thus:

Ha, it's that bad, eh? I have heard of people with tough luck who carry on with life despite everything. You know, while there is life, there is hope.

I believe that, I wish you can give her hope. That is why I want to bother you a little with this story. She's my aunt, my father's older sister.

Sport

She doesn't know how old she is. (P. 171)

The above is the second to the fifth paragraph of "Cross roads". The author's deliberate choice of words is very relevant in our discussion of the degree of deprivation of the Niger Deltans. "I wish you can give her hope", shows how hopeless the situation is, while "she doesn't know how old she is", is the author's deliberate way of talking about how ageless and endemic their misery seems.

Gabriel Okara (2006), in his foreword to Sophia Obi's Tears in a Basket, a collection of poems, remarked in his comment on her poem titled "Oloibiri" thus: "She indicts the multinational oil companies of exploitation and articulates all that is to be said about the life-threatening predicament of the communities in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta." Gabriel Okara and Sophia Obi authenticate Bina Nengi-llagha's postulation above in their exploration of the vagaries of the life of Niger Deltans. That tears that are torrentially shed end in a basket marks the height of disappointment. The author bemoans a situation where we are our undoing. Promise O. Onwudiwe (1992) condemns the idea of wasting talent and the human essence, by those in governance, thus:

I am writing you with the last bit of strength in me...

Now, I do not know when you will receive this letter considering the inconsistency of our postal system. But whenever you receive it, it will still serve the purpose for which it was sent only you would not see my withered body before it is buried. Perhaps it is good dear friend, to spare you the agony of looking at these wrecked bones of mine, which were picked by a good Samaritan after they had languished here for days on end...(p. 11).

Yamanata's plight as described by the author in Yamanata's letter to her friend. Onlyinene is an explanation of the living condition of the mass of humanity in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general. There is no improvement in the life of the people; rather, there is a depletion of their human essence. Onwudiwe attests to the depletion in the people's life as follows:

Only in the fowered her forehead on to her thighs and wept. Uche and Afam held her by the shoulders and consoled her. Tears walked up in their own eyes. Afam knew Yarnanata when he was a child. He could remember her as she was then; tall, graceful, elegant and motherly. Truly, death has no respect for beauty or anything for that matter...

Onyinene sat mournfully on the settee and began to read the diary...(p.12)

Here, the author talks about her being "tall, graceful, elegant and motherly." The author's choice of adjectives is deliberate. "Death" which the author says "has no respect for

Ha, it's that bad, eh? I have heard of people with tough luck who carry on with life despite everything. You know, while there is life, there is hope.

I believe that, I wish you can give her hope. That is why I want to bother you a little with this story. She's my aunt, my father's older sister.

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She doesn't know how old she is. (P. 171)

The above is the second to the fifth paragraph of "Cross roads". The author's deliberate choice of words is very relevant in our discussion of the degree of deprivation of the Niger Deltans. "I wish you can give her hope", shows how hopeless the situation is, while "she doesn't know how old she is", is the author's deliberate way of talking about how ageless and endemic their misery seems.

Gabriel Okara (2006), in his foreword to Sophia Obi's Tears in a Basket, a collection of poems, remarked in his comment on her poem titled "Oloibiri" thus: "She indicts the multinational oil companies of exploitation and articulates all that is to be said about the life-threatening predicament of the communities in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta." Gabriel Okara and Sophia Obi authenticate Bina Nengi-llagha's postulation above in their exploration of the vagaries of the life of Niger Deltans. That tears that are torrentially shed end in a basket marks the height of disappointment. The author bemoans a situation where we are our undoing. Promise O. Onwudiwe (1992) condemns the idea of wasting talent and the human essence, by those in governance, thus:

I am writing you with the last bit of strength in me...

Now, I do not know when you will receive this letter considering the inconsistency of our postal system. But whenever you receive it, it will still serve the purpose for which it was sent only you would not see my withered body before it is buried. Perhaps it is good dear friend, to spare you the agony of looking at these wrecked bones of mine, which were picked by a good Samaritan after they had languished here for days on end...(p. 11).

Yamanata's plight as described by the author in Yamanata's letter to her friend. Onlyinene is an explanation of the living condition of the mass of humanity in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general. There is no improvement in the life of the people; rather, there is a depletion of their human essence. Onwudiwe attests to the depletion in the people's life as follows:

Only in the fowered her forehead on to her thighs and wept. Uche and Afam held her by the shoulders and consoled her. Tears walked up in their own eyes. Afam knew Yarnanata when he was a child. He could remember her as she was then; tall, graceful, elegant and motherly. Truly, death has no respect for beauty or anything for that matter...

Onyinene sat mournfully on the settee and began to read the diary...(p.12)

Here, the author talks about her being "tall, graceful, elegant and motherly." The author's choice of adjectives is deliberate. "Death" which the author says "has no respect for

beauty," does not only talk about physical death or transition to glory, but the lack of, or dearth of the essentials of life. Everywhere appears too cold for comfort. Deltans are like fowls on a close-line repeatedly tossed at the wall of the world by envious fellow human beings who greatly delight in creating the imbalance in human life. The story increases our knowledge of ourselves, the people around us, and makes us to be sympathetic of their plight.

Thompson (1975) affirms the strident nature of the short story in the Niger Delta when he posits that:

Imaginative literature offers us perceptive accounts of human behaviour, and taken in the right way tends to increase our knowledge of ourselves, our awareness of other people, and our sympathies are increased as we come to feel, for example, what it is like to be a coloured person living in a white society or a foreigner among strangers, while others may sense sharply for the first time the grief of loss or the joy of being in love. Quite ephemeral reading matter can be helpful to those growing up when it offers imaginative accounts of how others have met and resolved, for examples difficulties with their peers or their parents.

Indeed, imaginative literature such as the short story does increase our awareness of other people, their pains, shame and hopelessness. There is no way one would read Bina Nengillagha's "Crossroads" or Onuekwusi's "A Fitting Burial for Uche Nwambi" and "A Darling for the Headmaster" for example without being crestfallen with regard to the common tragedy of man. No matter how uncanny one may be, these stories when read anywhere, anytime will make one to be sympathetic. It is at this stage that the revolutionary conscience of the reader is activated. The moment it is activated, a revolution is begun, and until success is achieved, the spirit of the masses works like dynamite, for the will has always been there. Ebong (1989) puts this state of mind succinctly thus:

If indeed the writer is the voice of vision of his own time, if he is "the sensitive needle of his time", if he cherishes the role of shaping the mind and conscience of the man in the society, and if he must continue to be honoured then there is an urgent need to redirect his energy towards shaping the revolutionary conscience of his sudience. The will is there, it only needs to be activated. (p.10)

The shaping of the revolutionary conscience of the masses is what the short story writers particularly those whose works are the main texts of this analysis have done. One is provoked to revolt as one reads them.

Toni Kan in "Broda Sonnie" uses his art to sensitize his readers towards reacting to issues of their time. To him:

"Maybe it... was at the beer parlour that he met the woman he ran away with and broke your mother's heart,".

"Is that why mother is always so sad?" I asked.

"Yes", Auntie Ruth said.

"But it happened so long ago", I said and Auntie Ruth had smiled and stroked my head.

"Sometimes sadness is like a scar. It never goes away." (p. 188).

Toni Kan here looks at the theme of man's inhumanity to man which is the basis of my argument in this section from the feminist perspective. The narrator's mother feels seriously wounded by the man she loves. We can feel the pains with her as we read the story especially when the narrator tells us of his mother's comment:

"When your father left, I thought he was gone for good," she said and flung her Scholl slippers at me where I was, huddled in the corner rubbing my cheeks and crying softly. "I didn't know he infected you with his foolishness."

My mother never spoke about my father except when she was angry, especially when I made her angry and it was always to tell me how I had been infected with his foolishness.

I don't remember my father, my Auntie, Ruth, tells me he left when I was two. (p. 187.)

The above helps us to understand why the narrator's mother feels very bad about her former husband. She had been conditioned by her experiences, hence, brother Sonnia could liken Auntie Ruth's admonition to her mothers' thus:

Like my mother, Auntie Ruth didn't like Sonnie. Every time she saw me with him she'd pull me by the ear into the house and say, "If you lie down in dirt, you get up with fleas. Your mother is trying to give you the best. Don't give her too much trouble, eh". (p. 197)

In the story the narrator has been sensitised to the level that he could show the similarity between his mother's advice and that of Auntie Ruth. This is how our reading of short stories sensitises us and makes us articulate. The importance lies on the fact that it makes us well prepared for the challenges of life for, in the words of Emperor Hirohito (1945), "The enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll on many innocent lives (p. 116).

Jasper Onuekwusi in "A fitting burial for Uncle Nwambi" frowns at a situation where the people are not only selfish, but are unable to resist societal pressure to do the wrong thing. He condemns our refusal to take care of our sick relatives medically when they are alive, only to spend extravagantly when they die. Onuekwusi, frowns at this ill in our society thus:

I reasoned that if we had spent half of the expenditure we were likely to incur for a fitting burial for Uncle Nwambi in giving him medical treatment and food he probably could have survived. If he died after our efforts, we would have been sure that we did our best and that we knew at least what aliment our kinsman died of. (p.6).

The short story as a strident voice remains an effective tool in criticizing governments' positions on sensitive issues, and their effects on the masses of the society. Sam Ukala in "Money, Guns and Justice" satirizes the government in her dispensation of justice.

"You aren't a baby, are you?, Chief Jato countered.

"You want to sleep with me?, Clara sneered as though at shit. She sneered at the chief's bald head and sickly hairs, his deep-sunken, glistening eyes, his cobra cheeks and flat Jaws. She sneered at his belly, which was sitting on his tap like an eleven-month pregnancy. She sneered as though at shit...

Chief Jato burst into laughter...

"Your demand is unreasonable, Chief. You want to exploit my bad situation. You want to exploit me. That's unfair," Clara was heaving.

"Exploit you! Are you an oil well or a gold mine? Just for one night's moonlight play a man offers to pay N50,000 raw cash and you call that exploitation? (p. 74).

Ukala, above, shows the dilemma the "just" find themselves in our society. Oliuwatosin, a mortuary attendant boldly rejects the bribes offered by Chief Jato a human parts dealer or magnet, and denies him access to the mortuary. He was right. He had done things as stipulated by law. Instead of being rewarded he was arrested by the police and the supposed criminal, Chief Jato, and was asked to pay N50,000.00 in order to be released. As if this was not enough, Chief Jato went to threaten and seduced Oliuwatosin's wife. When the woman refused as stated above, he threatened thunderously:

Chief Jato rose, took his briefcase, and rolled to the door. "I can only wish you a peaceful night. Just be warned that it would be unwise of you to run out of the house after my departure. My sixth sense tells me that the hoodlums are already in ambush. And my sixth sense never lies. It would be more decent to allow them plunder you on your floor rather than on the wet weeds outside (p. 74).

That is the nature of our inhuman society. Oluwatosin's wife, Clara, had been threatened by Chief Jato to submission, for "in a moment, of a million thoughts streamed past Clara's mind and her head went giddy as though she had been gripped by a cold, invisible hand in an evil forest" (p. 74).

Can anyone blame her? Who would? Not when Chief Jato stepped out and banged the door. "Excuse me, sir," She cried. "I ... please ..." She crumbled in the floor and wailed" (p. 75).

The author further adds that "at midnight, everywhere was peaceful. The noise of the night had ceased and Clara's nude thigh and arm were resting innocently on the amorphous body of Chief Jato. (p. 75).

That is our Nigerla, a rats' alley. Oliuwatosin, the chief mortuary attendant, is arrested and detained by the police who had been collaborating with the Chief and the hospital management, for failing to allow the Chief buy human parts from the corpses deposited at the government's mortuary. The buying and selling of human parts at the mortuary had been on, unknown to Oliuwatosin. The other attendants, the hospital management, and the police run a cartel. The police demanded N50,000.00 for a bail bond. Chief Jato came at night to dangle the N50,000.00, the exact amount needed for Oliuwatosin's release and ask Clara, Oliuwatosin's wife for sex as a bargain.

"Clara!" Diuwatosin cried out

"Hhnn!" Clara and Chief Jato answered in unison and jumped up at once. Their wrappers slipped away from their nakedness as they noticed Oliuwatosin and his Archbishop's driver. Instinctively, Clara packed several wads of currency notes from under he pillow and tried to clothe herself with them. Chief Jato snatched a pistol form under his own pillow...(p. 75).

The above is a graphic description of the reality of our modern Nigeria. If Clara had refused the Chief's demand, the Chief's thugs would have raped her to death. This is what

Anigala (2008) calls "the subjection to untold hardship and suffering", which "compels the masses to become restive, yet helpless." (p. 158). Oluwatosin, a victim of societal onslaught against the ideal succinctly demonstrates the agony of the helpless thus:

I know why you did it, Clara, I know why, and I forgive you with all my heart. No, I beg for your forgiveness. Yes, for everything. I the troublemaker in our social system, (p. 76).

Imaginel Troublemaker for doing the right thing?

In My Precious Jewel and Other Stories, Clement Idegwu frowns at a situation where the government sponsors various ethnic groups or communities against one another in order to continually enrich themselves and impoverish the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta. He posits that:

The villages within the riverine areas had been fighting one another. They each wanted to control the oil wells in the environs. His father, a Chief, didn't see the need for meaningless wars. He called on the government to stop the secret funding of warring villages. He stressed that the oil producing areas be catered for.

These villages produce the wealth of the country. Provide the desired social

amenities for them. Give their youths good education. Then provide employment for them. They will prefer this to being thugs. This will make their lives more meaningful than the pump actions you give them under the cover of night", he had said (p.79).

The sincere admonition of Ebitime Prekeme Snr's father cost him his life and that of his entire family except Mr. Ebitime Prekeme Snr. who was away when their house was set ablaze. No wonder Ken Saro-Wiwa (1991) of blessed memory could succinctly say, "I am unfortunate to be a Nigerian" (p. 31).

Wordsmiths daily use the short story to mirror the society's socio-political, and economic structure, and to condemn that, which is inimical to the well-being of the masses. It helps them to understand their condition and the need to embark on a revolution.

Makaanem, (2007) authenticates this thus:

Their works mirror the changing Nigerian society and voice the discontent of the exploited class and herald the dawn of a new era. This group of writers and their works expose the socio-political and economic structures of the Nigerian society for the masses to see their relationships and their conditions in it. The revolutionary consciousness of the masses is awakened; the urge for talking action to create new values is injected into the masses. Thus a sense of hope and optimism is deeply planted into the minds of the people. (p. 86).

#### CONCLUSION

I am alone again. This time I am not just alone, I am lonely. Kemi has gone, leaving a heavy heart and an uncertain mind behind. I am uncertain of many possible futures

which lie ahead... separated by distances whose origin we are both oblivious of. Yet, we are on the threshold of a future in which we may not see our way through to the ultimate desires of our hearts. (p. 110).

The above extract from Olu Obafemi's Wheels re-echoes like a thunder bolt that marks the beginning or the end of seasons in a tropical rain forest region, and graphically paints the painful state of life in Nigeria, a society where humans "already choking smoke" get drowsier and tipsier..." (p. 72) with each passing breeze.

This is because, as Agbese (2008), aptly puts it, in Nigeria, categorization

debases true intellectual and other attainments but promotes mediocrity just because mediocrity has pockets bulging with Naira notes. But of course, this is the age of money, not of the intellect. Nigerians judge the importance of a man by the make of his car or SUV, the size of his house, the size of his rings and the size of his bank accounts. (p.8)

Funny enough everything in Nigeria is categorized, even excreta. A mirror has to be put in place and fixed in such a way that the people will not only see their reflections but have their heings reflected anytime, anywhere, even in their very closets, so that they may be forced to see the level of decay in which they have been swimming joyfully. And that which is portable and durable enough for this urgent and highly desired task is the short story. Agbese (2008) describes Soyinka's winning the Nobel Prize in literature as "the ultimate global accolade for people who devote their lives to making the world a better place through literature". (p.7) Agbese moves further to say that Soyinka and follow literary artists "give the world a mirror with which it is forced to view its own image" (p. 7).

G. Darah (2008) citing Professor Onoge states that:

...in class societies more than one image exist for reflection in the mirror. The various classes project different and contradictory images of society and its dynamics. The image projected by the privileged exploiters classes conserves the status quo, while that projected by the exploited classes subverts the status quo... (p. xvii).

And the beauty of contemporary short stories in the Niger Delta is that the various images are reflected. These strident voices not only present the images of the privileged exploiters' class and that of the exploited class, but ensure that it is done in such a way that justice is not only done but seen to have been done. This is why there is an urgent call for the subversion of the status quo.

In conclusion, therefore, it is my humble submission that in a world where men are constantly in and out of track like bees in honey's haunt, where men wrong fellow men with relish, where various governments deliberately create and nourish militants in order to maximize their profits and stay in office, and where men in their want of time to complete their vicious cycle of evil deeds do not find time to read, the contemporary short story remains the strident voice in the Niger Delta that will compel them to see their reflections, objectively evaluate the images they create in it in order to right the wrongs permanently, and bring about the "change we can believe in", apology to Barack Obama.

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