Sorrow, Blood and Tears: The Leitmotifs in Contemporary Niger Delta Poetry

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Abstract

The vexed issue of the decades of the mindless oil exploitation in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region and the concomitant ecological devastation of the area has received the attention of young poets from the region led by Ibiwari Ikiriko who published his highly influential eco-conscious and oil-centred volume of poetry: Oily Tears of the Delta in 1999. These young Niger Delta poets, such as Sophia Obi, Obari Gomba, Humphrey Ogu and Magnus Abraham Dukumu, just like Ikiriko, adroitly deploy images of sorrow, blood and tears to show the ferocity with which Nigeria's oil boom has ironically turned into a doom for many Niger Deltans. Regrettably, however, critics have not yet closely examined most of these oil-centred volumes of poetry by most of the contemporary Niger Delta poets. This study is, therefore, an attempt in that direction. In particular, it argues that contemporary Niger Delta poets extensively use their poems to highlight the problems posed by mindless oil exploration in the Niger Delta which leaves the land and people in the region highly atrophied, and that this brand of poetry is replete with vivid images of sorrow, blood and tears.

Keywords: Sorrow, blood, tears, leitmotifs, oil exploitation, environmental pollution, contemporary Niger Delta.

Introduction:

The many decades of exploitative oil exploration in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria and the resultant environmental pollution, pauperisation of the members of the oil-bearing communities – whose farms and rivers/seas have been polluted – and the unending violent clashes between the restive youths in the area and government security forces have inevitably led to the emergence of revolutionary writers from the Niger Delta who through their various fictional works (drama, prose-fiction and poetry) detonate with anger over how Nigeria's oil boom has ironically and regrettably become a curse to Niger Deltans, the proverbial goose that lays the golden eggs. As the renowned critic, Chidi Maduka, rightly captures this blooming literary tradition:

> The tragic historical situation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria is gradually producing an enduring Literature dramatizing the horrible condition of human beings in the region, just as the trauma of the civil war generated the Civil War Literature and he denial of rights to women produced Women's Literature. (79)

Maduka's pertinacious view captures the veracity of the popular belief that writers usually write out of the emergent socio-political issues and events in their various societies.

According to Stephen Bernard, what has recently emerged as "Niger Delta Literature" deals mainly with the vexed issue of oil exploration in the Niger Delta Region and the consequent problems of ecological devastation of the area, compounded by the socio-economic exploitation of Niger Deltans. As he articulates the point: "The common denominator in the recent writing from the region is the interrogation of the socio-economic

political, and environmental problems occasioned by the exploration of crude oil in the region" (260).

The slain environmental activist and renowned writer from the Niger Delta, Ken Saro-Wiwa, effectively uses the case of Ogoni, his homeland, to capture how oil exploitation in the Niger Delta has literally turned the once pristine region into a "waste land":

> Oil exploration has turned Ogoni into wasteland: lands, streams, and creeks are totally and continually polluted; the atmosphere has been poisoned, charged as it is with hydrocarbon vapour, methane, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and soot emitted by gas which has been flared twenty four hours a day for thirty three years in very close proximity to human habitation. Acid rain, oil spillages and oil blowouts have devastated Ogoni territory. High pressure oil pipelines crisscross the surface of Ogoni farmland and villages dangerously. (96)

Ibiwari Ikiriko, the celebrated poet from the Niger Delta, who many regard as the inaugurator of Contemporary Niger Delta Poetry, adds a camaraderie voice to Ken Saro-Wiwa's by vehemently asserting that "The oil boom in Nigeria has meant a doom for the Niger Delta. The doom is beginning to burst into blood" ("Foreline" to *Oily Tears of the Delta* 7).

He then seriously further laments that:

> Were this exploitation of oil and gas alone, there would possibly have been no compelling need to mourn this much. But it is everything- landscape to lifescape. Content is being siphoned out of everything. And everything is seared, blighted and atrophied. Meanwhile, nothing, practically, nothing is being done to assist the land and lives recover and

> retain some of their natural contents. The lakes of oil that alternate with rivers, creeks, and seas in the Delta and the eternal fires that light up the skies are rued only because the oil and gas that feed them are lost forever to the exploiters. There is neither a genuine effort, however flimsy, to return part of the bonanza from the oil and gas bazaars to give a face-lift to the land and lives of the Delta. ("Fore-line" to *Oily Tears of the Delta* 6)

In this historic volume of poetry (*Oily Tears of the Delta* 1999), which centres on oil issues in the Niger Delta, Ikiriko sets the ball rolling for younger generations of poets from the region who have followed his footsteps in writing various poems that condemn the mindless oil exploitation in the Niger Delta and the devastation of the environment thereby paupersing the populace, most of whom depend on fishing and farming for their sustenance. Ikiriko's O*ily Tears of the Delta* metaphorically depicts the Niger Delta as an oppressed child starved of the food which he contributed immensely in its cooking. This image of oppression comes out clearly in the picture of a weeping child in the cover page, as well in the lachrymal title of the volume.

This study focuses on the images of sorrow, blood and tears which feature prominently in most of the poems by contemporary poets from the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The term "contemporary" as used here refers to the period from 1999, when Ikiriko published his influential *Oily Tears of the Delta*, to the present (2018). The poets selected for the study are Ibiwari Ikiriko (*Oily Tears of the Delta,* 1999), Sophia Obi (*Tears in a Basket,* 2005), Obari Gomba (*George Bush and other Observations, 2006*), Humphrey Ogu *(Echoes of Neglect,* 2014*)* and Magnus Abraham – Dukumu (*Dreams from the Creeks,* 2015). Because of the limitation of space, only three poems from each of the five volumes have been selected for analysis. The overall objective in this study is to demonstrate that in all the selected poems, the poets dexterously deployed images of sorrow, blood and tears to show that

in the main, as Ikiriko himself put it: " The oil boom in Nigeria has meant a doom for the Niger Delta" (Ikiriko "Foreline" 7).

Although Chinyere Nwahunanya recently edited a collection of essays from various genres that centre on this theme, the present essay specifically focuses on poetry by selected young and mostly unstudied Niger Delta poets who wrote between 1999 and 2018. A few more prefatory remarks: though some scholars have defined Niger Delta from the political perspective to include all the nine oil-producing states (Bell-Gam 132; Naanen and Tolani 23), for the purpose of this study, Niger Delta is restricted to the largely aquatic, core-oil-producing states of Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Akwa-Ibom, Edo and Cross River. Finally, the term: leitmotifs refer to "the frequent repetition within a work, of significant verbal or musical phrase, or set/description, or complex of images" (M.H. Abrams and G.G. Harpharm 229). In this study, the focus will be on the complex images of sorrow, blood and tears in the selected poems.

Exegesis of Selected Poems:

As earlier hinted, an attempt will be made to analyse three poems from each of the afore-mentioned volumes of poetry by Ibiwari Ikiriko, Sophia Obi, Obari Gomba, Humphrey Ogu and Magnus Abraham-Dukumu in order to trace how they project the leitmotifs of sorrow, blood and tears which sum up to the poets' conviction that the Niger Delta region in Nigeria is being grossly and unjustly oppressed even though their land provides the bulk of the oil wealth that drives Nigeria's economy.

If, as has been earlier noted, Ibiwari IKiriko is the inaugurator of contemporary Niger Delta Poetry, it is, therefore, proper that we begin with the analysis of selected poems from his *Oily Tears of the Delta* (1999). Generally, in the volume Ikiriko condemns the mindless exploitation of the land and people of the Niger Delta by the Federal Government of Nigeria and her collaborators. He clearly articulates this position in the preface to the volume:

> Take a look, dear reader, at a map of Nigeria and behold how the giant country sits, suppressing the Delta which serves it the functions of support and sustenance. As it is on the geographical expression, so it is in the political, social and economic expressions. As I write this, there is no road to Bonny, Opobo and Buguma. There is none to Brass, Nembe, Forcados, Escravos and Isaka. Pipelines crisscross the seabed piping, not drinkable water to the population, but siphoning oil and gas to enrich other lands and lives. … ("Foreline" to *Oily Tears* …. 6)

Now, let us see how he further demonstrates this conviction in poems like "Oily Rivers" (20) Olobiri (30) and "Under Pressure" (51). In the two-stanza poem, "Oily Rivers" (20) which is presented from a first-person narrative perspective, the persona conjures a strong image of the oppression of Niger Delta in Nigeria amidst the huge oil wealth which their land generates for the country:

> I come from
> the bottom of
> the amalgam,
> the base Delta,
> where things are made base,
> leesed by
> powered policies
> crude as petroleum
>
> I am of
> the oil Rivers,
> where rivers are
> oily and can
> neither
> quench my thirst

nor
anoint my head. ("Oily Tears"20)

The second stanza adroitly deploys irony to condemn a situation where "the oil Rivers" (present-day Niger Delta with its rich oil-base) gets virtually nothing for its oil-wealth other than environmental pollution. Indeed, the poem raises strong echoes of oppression, sorrow and tears.

The same theme of lamentation over decades of exploitation and neglect of the Niger Delta Region runs through "Oloibiri" (30). It is necessary to recall that the town, Oloibiri, in Bayelsa State, is where oil was first discovered in commercial quantity in Nigeria in 1956. The poet lambasts the successive Nigerian governments for not giving any iota of developmental attention to this historic town which contributed a lot in launching Nigeria into her oil boom in the 70s. A highly satiric poem, "Oloibiri" makes a mockery of a rather hypocritical statement made by a "Nigerian people's parliament participant" on the plight of the town (Oloibiri) and its inhabitants:

"Oloibiri streets
Would have been tarred
With gold if ours
God's own country were"
So submitted one
People's parliament participant.
"Instead the mineral
Is tilted and used
To lubricate sex
And crime and bigity
Everywhere else"
The parliamentarian added. ("Oloibiri"30)

The persona wonders why the oil wealth from the Niger Delta is inhumanly and prodigally wasted on jamborees, rather than being used to cater for the welfare of Niger Deltans whose land produces the wealth.

The next poem: "Under pressure" (51) successfully captures the plight of Niger Deltans who virtually live their lives under pressure because of oil exploration in their land, only for the oil with to be siphoned out of their lands. The poem captures the situation where oil exploration companies and government agents lay oil pipelines all over the Niger Delta and then force the land owners to stay clear from the land. In such situations, bold inscriptions on the seized lands usually read: "Danger!," " keep off!", and "keep clear!"

This, according to the poet, makes the inhabitants to always live under pressure. It will be quite rewarding to quote the poem in full here:

Under pressure
DANGER!
High pressure oil pipe line – keep off!
Don't anchor!
DEATH!
High tension gas pipeline – keep clear!
No fishing!
WARNING!
High pressure pipes – keep away!
No berthing!
Trespassers will be compressed.
Roasted. Melted.
O what a full tide of pressure
Brim they over our land and persons. ("Under Pressure" 51)

The poet practically portrays the Niger Delta area as a "danger zone" and its people as "endangered species"- all because of oil. Notice the extensive use of exclamation marks, the copious images of insecurity

embodied in the capitalised words: "DANGER!" "DEATH!" and "WARNING!", as well as the serious threats, particularly, in the fourth stanza - that "Trespassers will be compressed", "roasted" and "melted"; as if they were wild animals and objects. In sum, the above poems taken from Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* evoke clear images of sorrow, blood and tears over the socio-economic oppression of the people of Niger Delta who ironically produce the bulk of Nigeria's wealth. Not only is the environment devastated, the oil wealth is also siphoned, the area left undeveloped and the natives pauperised and dehumanised.

Sophia Obi's first collection of poems: *Tears in a Basket (2005)* further raises some awareness on the motley problems caused by oil exploitation in the Niger Delta. The lachrymal themes in the poems are creatively captured through the image of an eye shedding tears in the cover page. The poems: "Oloibiri" (13), "Swamps of our Time" (18) and the title poem: "Tears in a basket" (19) are typical of Sophia Obi's obsession with Niger Delta-centred themes in the volume. Let us now briefly discuss these poems in this regard.

Like Ikiriko's poem co-entitled "Oloibiri", Obi's "Olobiri" (13), bemoans the plight of Olobiri town in Bayelsa State where oil was first explored in Nigeria, but is now desolate and abandoned by the Federal Government of Nigeria after it had been sucked dry. As Gabriel Okara, the grandfather of Niger Delta poetry, has rightly observed, in "Oloibiri", Sophia Obi "indicts the multi-national 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" ("Foreword" to *Tears in a Basket* 7). He further writes that "Oloibiri where oil was first discovered in commercial quantity in this country (Nigeria) and exported in 1956, has been abandoned as an old spent lady, when the oil wells went dry" (" Foreword "7, my parenthesis).

The first stanza of the poem clearly evokes an image of a doom. The persona, Oloibiri, ironically exclaims:

At last I am free,

Free from bondage
Yet,
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 reins
To nourish households in the desert. ("Oloibiri"13)

The last two lines clearly suggest that, while the crude oil from the Niger Delta has led to a boom for people in other parts of Nigeria (the desert), it has ironically become a doom for the oil-bearing communities. This lamentation reaches its apogee in stanzas ten and eleven where the personified Niger Delta proclaims that:

…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 dusty lands
while my children wallow
In the crude mud peculiar to my swamp. ("Oloibiri"14)

In Obi's title poem: "Tears in a basket" (19), she metaphorically refers to Niger Deltans as "sacrificial leeches/waiting to be squashed", which evokes strong echoes of their dehumanisation and oppression in Nigeria where they are often regarded as minorities. The persona strongly laments over the decades of neglect of the region by successive Nigerian governments, and finally catalogues the woes being suffered by Niger Deltans using a series of rhetorical questions:

How do we think
When our thoughts are images lost in muddy streams,
Dangling on hooks that mock our existence?
How can we sing
When our folksongs are distorted grunts
Raking up our sorrowing lungs?
Why do we even smile,
When beneath our plastic joy
Painful tears flow freely…? ("Tears in a Basket" 19)

Evidently, this poem raises strong echoes of sorrow, blood and tears over the desecration of the customs and traditions of the people of Niger Delta.

In "Swamps of our time", (11) Sophia Obi successfully captures the high level of environmental pollution caused by oil exploitation in the Niger Delta and yearns for the restoration of the despoiled environment to its former pristine state:

O delta of our beginnings, how far has the past left you?
How is the present treating you?
What is the future of your eco-system?

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

Niger Delta, like my mother's soul
Grieves for her children who give bountifully
Yet feed on remnants. ("Swamps of Our Time"18)

The idea of giving out bountifully and then ironically feeding on remnants aptly captures the situation where the oil money from the Niger Delta area is being used to develop the Federal Capital City, Abuja, and various cities

in other regions in Nigeria, while the Niger Delta is left grossly undeveloped, often because of the flimsy excuse that her "swampy terrain is difficult to develop". In effect, the poet questions why it is not difficult for the oil industries to access the area while laying their network of oil pipes for sucking the oil in the region.

Obari Gomba's maiden collection of poems, *George Bush and other Observations* (2006) is a scintillating pot-pourri of Eleme traditional poems and modern poems that dramatise the socio-political challenges Niger Deltans face in present-day Nigeria. The poems: "Remember Umuechem" (34), "The Spirit of Ogoni" (36) and "The World Has Cotton in its Eyes" (35) are contemporary Niger Delta Poems *par excellence,* for they extensively dwell on the vexed issue of oil exploration in the Niger Delta and its adverse effects on Niger Deltans.

The first one: "Remember Umuechem" (34) flashes the reader's mind back to the tragic massacre of some people of Umuechem, Etche, in Rivers State, some decades ago for protesting against their oppression in the hands of the Federal Government of Nigeria which, in their thinking, take away their oil wealth without bringing them physical development and social welfare. The poet depicts the (then) military government and her security operatives who massacred the innocent villagers as vampires who consciencelessly soiled their hands with the blood of innocent children and women of Umuchem:

> Remember Umuchem
> Umuechem with floating bodies on the river
> Umuechem reduced to rubble
> a thousand and one children in the woods
> a thousand and one women naked in the woods
> a thousand and one corpses under the rubble …. ("Remember Umuechem" 34)

Gomba successfully uses the style of repetition popular in his native Eleme Oral Literature to highlight the ferocity with which the government brutally killed the harmless people of Umuechem. According to the poet, the survivors of the horrendous massacre became:

> … remnants for the vampires feast
> The vampires in their coats of arm
> Drilling crude oil drinking blood. ("Remember Umuechem" 34)

It is necessary to take note of the image of vampire in this poem, which connotes exploitation and dehumanisation of the people of Umuchem, symbolising Niger Deltans:.

> The vampires have opened a chapter in Ogoni
> the vampires in their coats of arm
> a river of red runs and runs through the greens
> to water the Rock.
>
> The Rock feasts on the river of red
> because the phalanx-king lives on the Rock
> because the phalanx-king coats the mouth
> of the globe with oil ….("Remember Umuechem" 36)

In this very revolutionary poem, the poet adroitly deploys the symbols of "vampire" and "The Rock" to refer to the Federal Government of Nigeria, which according to him, has mindlessly turned the rivers in the Niger Delta into "rivers of blood" (symbol of exploitation and violence). He, however, ends the poem with a defiant tone:

> The vampires have opened a chapter in Ogoni
> but they do not hear the song, the never-dying song:

the dead shall rise again, they shall rise
The spirit of Ogoni, the spirit of the people. ("Remember Umuechem" 36)

The spirit of Ogoni; true to Obari Gomba's prophecy, actually later rose in the Niger Delta through the subsequent emergence of the various revolutionary armed groups, like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta MEND, The Niger Delta Voluntary Revolutionary Force and The Avengers, among many others, which used violent means to challenge the forces of their oppression in the Niger Delta.

The poet continues his lamentation over the exploitation of the oil resources and the socio-economic exploitation of the Niger Delta and her various peoples in "The World Has Cotton in its Eyes". Here, Obari Gomba extends his satiric whip to the international community, especially the super-power nations of Britain and The United States of America which hypocritically collude which the various governments in Nigeria to exploit Niger Deltans:

The World has cotton in its eyes
The world has cotton in its ears
The blood of Boro bears witness
And Saro-Wiwa's blood bears witness
The world dances on our skulls
Foul is fair in the politics of oils ("The World Has Cotton …." 38)

In this opening stanza, the poet stylishly invokes the spirit of two famous Niger Delta patriots: Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwa, who were variously killed while fighting for the emancipation of the Niger Deltans. The poet then calls attention to the misery being suffered by Niger Delta children who literally eat dust, while in faraway places like Abuja, Lagos,

London and Washington, the wealth from the Niger Delta is squandered frivolously:

> I weep for the children of Oloibiri and Ogoni
> They eat dust, the children eat dust
> But up there in Abuja and Lagos
> Their oil oils sex and power
> But far away in London and Washington
> Their oil lubricates power and sex. ("The World Has Cotton" 38)

As we now turn attention on Humphrey Ogu's *Echoes of Neglect*, we notice that he also writes about oil exploitation, the socio-economic marginalisation of Niger Deltans and the environmental pollution of the Niger Delta like his contemporaries already discussed in this study. Ogu Strongly believes that the oil in the Niger Delta has unfortunately turned out to be a *demnosa hereditias* (an accursed inheritance) to the members of the oil-bearing communities. This seems to be so because many Niger Deltans currently wallow in abject poverty in the midst of stupendous oil wealth. Let us closely examine poems like: "Crude Oil" (18), "The Despoiled Delta" (24) and "Our pains, Their Gains" (26), which all come under "Part 2", of *Echoes of Neglect* entitled: "Rhythms of Pain".

In "Crude Oil", Ogu ironically perceives crude oil as an unbearable curse to Niger Deltans: the oil is not only "crude"; it is also "rude", "cruel" and "callous", for whereas it "lubricates the engine of the country", it leaves the vehicle of the Delta to cough out phlegm of fumes" (18). Ogu further describes crude oil as cruel because it,

> Contaminates the air, seas and streams
> exterminates the fishes….
> devastates farms and crops
> Leaves landlords and farmers in starvation

Yet overwhelms Abuja with petrodollars . ("Crude Oil"18)

Similarly, in "The Despoiled Delta", Ogu superbly uses apt poetic techniques, like alliteration; well-wrought metaphor and a befitting structure, to capture the systematic and comprehensive destruction of the Niger Delta environment just because of oil. It will indeed be very interesting to quote this beautiful poem in full:

Marginalised
Manacled
And mangled

Minorities murmur, moan and mourn
Cockroaches in the parliament of cocks
Despoiled
Deprived
and drained
daily, the delta deteriorates,
dies in installments. ("Despoiled Delta" 24)

As earlier stated, this poem aptly and beautifully captures the tragic exploitation of the land and people of the Niger Delta, as well as the slow but steady despoliation of the natural environment in the Niger Delta. It conjures vivid images of sorrow and tears over the exploitation of the land and people of the Niger Delta.

Ogu continues his lament over the neglect of his Niger Delta people in "Our pains, Their Gains" (26), whose title clearly shows that, whereas the oil boom (in Nigeria) has been a gain for non-Niger Deltans, it has, conversely, been a doom and a source of pain to Niger Deltans. Take the first two stanzas, for instance:

Though the palm wine they export in barrels
is tapped from the palm tree in our back yard
We only drink the dregs from the broken kegs.

Though the oil that enriches our neighbour's soup
comes from the palm tree in our back yard
our own soup has not a drop of oil. ("Our Pains …."26)

As we can see, the poem successfully uses the apt local images of palmwine and palm oil to show how the oil wealth from the Niger Delta is unjustly denied Niger Deltans, while it ironically enriches people from other lands.

We will now conclude this study by closely examining three poems from Magnus Abraham-Dukumu's *Dreams from the Creeks* (2015). The poems are "Lost Paradise" (16), "Dum dum in my delta" (28) and "Ode to Oloibiri" (40). As we shall soon demonstrate, they all evoke images of sorrow, tears and blood over issues revolving around oil exploitation in the Niger Delta.

"Lost Paradise", as the title adumbrates, laments over the ecological devastation resulting from oil exploration n the Niger Delta. The poet likens the Niger Delta to a paradise which decades of mindless oil exploration has turned into a wasteland. He, therefore, asks rhetorically:

Where is my green field?
Where is the call of shadows?
Where is the semblance of morn?
Where is the beauty of twilight?
What have we done to nature's nest? ("Lost Paradise"16)

Although he gets no answer from any source, he seems to strongly suggest that the Niger Delta environment is continually being devastated, and that absolutely nothing is being done to halt the carnage.

In "Dum dum in my delta", Abraham-Dukumu effectively uses the onomatopoeic title to capture the motley forms of doom oil exploration in the Niger Delta has caused the people: violence, poverty, oppression and environmental pollution. He then wonders aloud:

> Was it not a peaceful Delta I once craved?
> Was it not a calm Delta He in creation paved?
> How then is my peaceful shore changed?
> And to chaos and high palpitations, peace is caged,
> And to our brothers across the shore, war is waged,
> And boundless scores as stars in the sky, engraved. ("Dum dum.…" 28)

The persona concludes the poem on a lachrymal tone: "I weep for my Delta! She is in deep waters" ("Dum dum" 28). The end rhymes capture the steady devastation of the Niger Region.

The lachrymal theme in the preceding poem also dovetails into "Tears from Oloibiri" (35), where the poet effectively deploys the technique of prosopopoeia to comment on the woes of Oloibiri where, as has been earlier mentioned, oil was first struck in commercial quantity in Nigeria. The style here is similar to that of Sophia Obi's "Oloibiri", for the historic town is again portrayed as a used-and-now-abandoned helpless old woman. Take the first paragraph, for instance:

> I am Oloibiri,
> I have lost my essence;
> I breathe a morbid hybrid air,
> Sores and death slyly stare,
> Legions had thronged to drink my milk,
> Now I'm ravished, forlorn, weak and sick. ("Oloibiri" 35)

Ironically, and unfortunately, too, while Oloibiri suffers total neglect, other towns far removed from the environmental despoliations brought about by oil exploitation; receive great developmental attention from the government. As the persona puts it:

> I am Oloibiri,
> I have lost my nurture;
> Daily and yearly, I pine,
> But some wine and dine,
> To neglect, I yearly resign,
> But some wine and dine. ("Oloibiri" 35)

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that contemporary Niger Delta poetry essentially deals with the various problems emanating from oil exploitation in Nigerian's oil-rich, but highly neglected Niger Delta region. As the study has argued, this tradition of Nigerian poetry was inaugurated by Ibiwari Ikiriko through the publication of his influential volume pf poetry: *Oily Tears of the Delta* in 1999. Following his footsteps, younger poets from the Niger Delta region, like Sophia Obi, Obari Gomba, Humphrey Ogu and Magnus Abraham-Dukumu, have also written highly satiric poems through which they highlight oil-related problems in the Niger Delta, such as environmental pollution, high wave of violence and the socio-economic exploitation of Niger Deltans by the Federal Government of Nigeria and her local and international collaborators. Through the images of sorrow, blood and tears which feature prominently in their various poems, Ikiriko and his "disciples" strongly suggest, as Ikiriko himself has written in the foreline to his own collection, that "the oil boom in Nigeria has meant a doom for the Niger Delta" (*Oily Tears.…*7).

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