

sarapa



5

niger delta

march 2010

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Creating unending voices

First a caveat: the story of the delta is tricky. One fraught with a rigmarole of details and bilious emotions, but must still be told nonetheless. We owe it to ourselves, to literature and, most of all, to humanity.

And what is the best way to dispel this ambiguity: to begin by saying that the tale is rather a simple one. The details are numerous, disorganised, recurring. The Delta is the nexus of the Nigerian economy and the fulcrum of our existence. The Niger Delta is a gift as well as a curse, our plague as much as our pride.

The game of Niger Delta is an unfair one to which a whistle should have been blown long ago. Yet, the game continues in all unfairness and savagery; it has indeed become a first-come-first-swerve agendum. There's no gainsaying that the whistle should be blown; but where is the whistle? And who is the Umpire?

Definitely not Saraba. By creating a collage of art forms behind an evocative front cover, we have neither changed the outlook of the Delta nor influenced it. What we have done is to give back. Words in return for crude oil, rich heritage, guns, bad international publicity, political incorrectness, farcical outlook etcetera. We give you an Issue of questions, longing and memory. We give you an Issue, may we say, of hope.

We are no heroes. The heroes of the Niger Delta are slain martyrs, their blood spilled in dark waters. The masses, their livelihood frittered into oily creeks. Ours is to reproduce their echoes and let it resonate through cyberspace. We are giving them back their voices and lending ours too. We are creating unending voices.

E.I & D.A.

Ile-Ife,

March 2010

During my second to last year in secondary school, one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included. I was at home that day when she returned shortly after leaving for the farm. When she got to the house, she knocked on the door and said very coolly, "Zilayefa, bring me my bathing soap and sponge." As I was wondering why she needed them, I saw that her legs were stained black.

"What happened?" I asked.

"And bring my towel too," she said, ignoring my question.

"What happened?" There was more urgency in my voice as I touched her and looked over every part of her body. My heart was pounding against my chest as I tried to imagine what could have happened that left her void of words. My mother never fought, and she did not look like she was injured in any way, but when she was upset, she got very quiet.


"Oil, Zilayefa," she said, and turned away from me, walking towards the river. My mother hardly ever called me Zilayefa; she called me Yellow-Yellow, like everybody else.

"Oil? From where?" I was walking behind her, and then I heard people shouting.

A group of people, painted in the same black as my mother, some covered from head to toe, was marching to see the Amananaowei, the head of the village. I joined them to find out what had happened. It turned out some of them had also lost their farmland that day. They were marching to the Amananaowei's house to report the matter and demand that he take it up with the oil

company. Some were crying; others were talking about compensations.

I left them and ran to my mother's farm. It was the first time I saw what crude oil looked like. I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. It just kept spreading and I wondered if it would stop, how far it would spread. There was also the smell. I can't describe it, but it was strong—so strong it made my head hurt and turned my stomach. I bent over, and retched so hard I became dizzy. I felt like everything had turned to black and was spinning around me. There was so much oil, and we could do nothing with it—viscous oil that would not dry out, black oil that was knee-deep. I stayed there, in a daze, until someone shouted at me, "You no go comot for there? You dey look like na beta tin"! Come on, leave dat place!"

The community took the matter up with the oil company that owned the pipes, but they said they suspected sabotage by the youths and were not going to pay compensation for all the destruction that the burst pipes had caused. And so it was that, in a single day, my mother lost her main source of sustenance. However, I think she had lost that land a long time ago, because each season yielded less than the season before. Not unlike the way she and others in the village had gradually lost, year after year, the creatures of the river to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares, and who knows what else, according to the voices on the radio. 

THE VARIOUS PERSECUTED: (in three parts)

Emmanuel Iduma

A

"The Jews, in the year threescore and ten, about fifty years after the passion of Christ, were destroyed by Titus, and Vespasian his father...to the number of eleven hundred thousand, besides those which Vespasian slew in subduing the country of Galilee."

It is difficult to define us
We have walked this earth
And you know us
So quit asking about Mongrels
and monsters.
You know us.

We knew your father
Your father knew us
and his father before him

So quit looking at us
As though you don't know
about our shea-butter tree
felled by
a renowned specie
of masquerades.

We quit being subdued
Do you?

"Now let us comprehend the persecutions raised by the Romans against the Christians in the primitive age of the Church, during the space of three hundred years."

Of time, space and bestial inclinations
We cannot fully comprehend
It is pulling our feet
and we stand naked now.

Time is a chocolate wrap.

"Whose kinds of punishments, although they were divers, yet the manner of constancy in all these martyrs was one."

Time is a chocolate wrap.

"But he, unmoved as if he had suffered nothing went on cheerfully, under the conduct of the guards, to the stadium."

There is a way to gaze
Upon loss and blood.
If we are let alone
We can condone this loss
And blood
with cheer or glee.
But there is no one
Letting us be
And there are they
Telling us how
They want us to make a sound
as though we could
make no sound.

This is our tragedy.



"This Wickliff, perceiving the true doctrine of Christ's gospel to be adulterated and defiled with so many filthy inventions and dark errors of bishops and monks, after long debating and deliberating with himself (with many secret sighs, and bewailing in his mind the general ignorance of the world), could no longer abide the same, and at the last determined with himself to help and to remedy such things as he saw to be wide, and out of the way."

An individual life is
a makeshift laboratory.
Experiments are rare
but permissible.
It is so with the
Mind too.
Heroes are hypothetical victims.
They come too sudden,
everywhere at once.
We know them,
They are easy to recognize.
We know them.

"Wickliff, albeit he was commanded by the bishops and prelates to keep silence, yet could not so be suppressed, but that through the vehemency of the truth he burst out afterwards much more fiercely."

We know them
They are looking at us.

"It hath been intimated to us by many trustworthy persons that one John Wickliff, rector of Lutterworth, in the diocese of Lincoln, professor of divinity, hath gone to such a pitch of detestable folly, that he feareth not to teach, and publicly preach, or rather to vomit out of the filthy dungeon of his breast, certain erroneous and false propositions and conclusions, savouring even of heretical pravity, tending to weaken and overthrow the status of the whole Church, and even the secular government."

This hatred
Is not too much
We see below irises

We do not smell with noses.
We are yet to be awakened
Our mouth speaks
Not us.

We deny all allegations
On his behalf
He knows too much
to speak so well.

Not us, not him.

“Upon this, John Huss required to have an advocate answer for him, which was plainly and utterly denied him. And the reason that the masters commissioners brought against it was this: that the plain canon doth forbid that any man should be a defender of him who is suspected of heresy.”

The Lord is not your advocate.
Two thieves are hanging on the cross.
Beside you, of course.

B

“In the year 1517 he nailed to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg – which was often used as a kind of bulletin board – ninety-five ‘theses’ or propositions, attaching the whole system of indulgences. To Luther’s own amazement this simple act started the Protestant Reformation, for the response pro and con soon became nationwide.”

Bravery is not Elegance.
You saw the moon
And what did you call it?
The sun?
The light-hearted darkness?
You must be a fool to
think a door is only
a piece of wood.
And we must be fools
to allow you think
in such, should I say,
misinformed way.

We are often amazed
at our own words.



“Henry’s grandson, Louis XIV, seeking to unify and centralize the union, determined to destroy Protestantism in France. In the houses of the Huguenots he quartered soldiers, who treated their hosts with the coarsest brutality...Many of the persecuted Huguenots fled to the Cevennes Mountains in France, where their boy general, Jean Cavelier for those years led them successfully against the best troops of France.”

Some small things are
Hard to defy.
They should have known this.

Today is another day.
Knowledge passes on.

“In 1555, Philip II of Spain became ruler of the Netherlands. He soon became unpopular there because of his tyranny over the nobles, and because of his persecution of Protestants, a policy that had a damaging effect on the flourishing economic life of the country.”

The Witch from Endor
Has spoken:
Cursed are those
Who speak
When they should have
Listened

“The new Queen could not ignore this public challenge to her policies, and summoned Knox to a private interview. On at least five dramatic occasions these two antagonists, the stern reformer and the bewitching Queen, stood face-to-face. Knox expressed his opinion of the queen to some friends: ‘Yf their be not in hir...a proud mynd, a crafty witt, and one indurat bearte against God and his treuth, my judgment faileth me.’ Her opinion of Knox, though on different grounds, was every bit as hostile.”

We could start a war
Right now
If you don't mind
I am as eager as I was
Yesterday.
I am only unsure of
Your current status.

YET ANOTHER FUNERAL

Eromo Egbejule

The whistle is blown hard
It's not another match.
It's signal for another funeral.
It's the beginning

Of the dirge.
We nod in utter grief.
This killer walking among us
Making bones pile on our backs
children die in our arms
Is
Hunger.

Economy is bad,
The C-in-C says
In his consolatory speech.
His emissary's pot-belly in a scuffle
With the podium for space.

Hot rice and spicy stew for refreshment.
Enjoy yourself to the fill
For food (you never know!),
May next come
At your own funeral.

MATTERS NOT

Uche Peter Umez

in memory of Odi

I

matters
not ? decades it might take, the news

will
break with its bitter tang on your tongue:

the
bullet finds in the temple rare release,

the
bullet finds in the heart a deathless song;

pipes
burst, the flesh is charred in fire's orgasm,

tanks
crush stubborn necks in political ism,

matters
not ? when the news comes to us:

drink,
drink on your whiskey of indifference.

II

the
river bears its silent burden of corpses,

suffers
alone, like us, slave to the memories

dark
and tangled as mangrove roots;

the
hopeless find in the sky no green shoots;

the

future looks like rags on the horizon of life,

when
we burn from the sweep of poverty's knife;

matters
not ? beauty is mined from the delta,

ugliness
is grafted to its splintered heart, no iota

of
pity is spared for the swelling fright of death

among
my kin while dollars soil your hearth.

III

matters
not ? your eulogist would say we're beasts:

why
resist this rule of fawning and avarice?

more
gainful to bow than to stand

or
stake one's blood for an ordinary land;

no,
we can't be hoaxed by your leaden sermon,

tickled
in the arms of visions teased by the moon;

we
may suffer doubts in the smithy of rising throes,

as
earth lures us with eternal grave repose;

decades
may mark reparation's birth

as
we enumerate the days with sour teeth;

(yet)
matters not how long ?

my
land steams in mire; she will rise, strong

as
a storm, unbending like the flare


of
oil politics that bodes ash to its slavish heirs. **S**

does it even matter that they stole the moon?



Let this conniption cure
Ailing kidneys of my country,
Let my land's liver endure
The hard knuckles of her gentry.

Let the mute keening
In the lungs of patriots
Survive the length of this evening
Of hope fading in clay chariots -

And let these millions rise
To rid the land of pestilence
Everywhere present in the eyes
Of bastards here and across the fence. 

DEFENDEREMOS

Niran Okewole

(For Ken Saro Wiwa and Nnimmo Bassey)

*esta tierra
este aire
este cielo
son los nuestros
defenderemos
-Fidel Castro*

The delta weeps oil, weeps blood

The real swamp dwellers, the elfs,
wear camouflage uniforms with chevrons
on their sleeves, espousing gunpoint capitalism
at Bakalori, Bori, Brass, Odi,
where pipes turn dreams to nightmares.
(The goose is gassed that lays the golden egg,
you shall be shocked out of your shells.
Shell-shocked, *Shelled*.)

All is not well that ends with
the water in the well,
because the oil well

The delta weeps oil, weeps blood
Fishermen cry on the river bank,
but oil magnates smile all the way
to the bank.
Sclerosed ducts, where are the tears?
The virgin face of motherland is marred with
sebum plugs. She can't talk about the rape.
Blood pipelines defy the aneurysm needle,
burst all over the riverine cortex.

Earth spirits, rigged, holding elections for the land.
The gods are not spared.

Earth-gods cannot solve the riddle of dynamite
Sky-gods choke on flared fumes
River-gods refuse the sacrifice borne on
spilt oil, spilt blood
Bloated corpses defile the face of the goddess.

saro-wiwa



The delta weeps oil, weeps blood

“My tribe is Ogoni.”

“Agony,” writes the recruiting officer. Caucasian.

“I am Andoni.”

Again he scribbles “Agony.”

“We’ll get in touch with you soon.”

Newsflash: Nine Ogoni men hanged
because their oily blood was
part of the witchdoctor’s recipe
for a tyrant’s failing liver.

II

This earth is ours
and the air
and the sky
we will defend them.

Grandpa’s kettles, floating downhill
the soup ladle grew strings and
played Mexican music
(making passes at Octavio Paz)
The teapot spouted heresies
Old man river in a rocking chair
by the fireplace, where the baby jaguar
threatened with extinction plays with
cotton balls. “With these I shall
mutilate every heart that doesn’t care,”
Grandma declares, brandishing knitting needles.

“Mother, they have plucked the eye of
the earth.” Pilgrims all,
but she paid him no heed,
like Time in the painting of Goya,
devouring her children.

defenderemos. defenderemos. **S**

THE VOICE

Lawal Opeyemi

(For Ken Saro Wiwa)

The voice cries out...

We had our fishes
Our toil sufficient on the farms
Palm wine flowed freely
With glee in the evenings.

They came
And with platinum coated tongues
Beguiled us with tales
Of deeply seated riches
Coursing underneath our farms.

Now the land wails with desecration:
Chopper sounds replace cock crowing at dawn,
Barges fight with fishing boats for the rivers,
Oil rigs litter the waterways
And tall storage tanks contest with
Palm trees for the skyline.

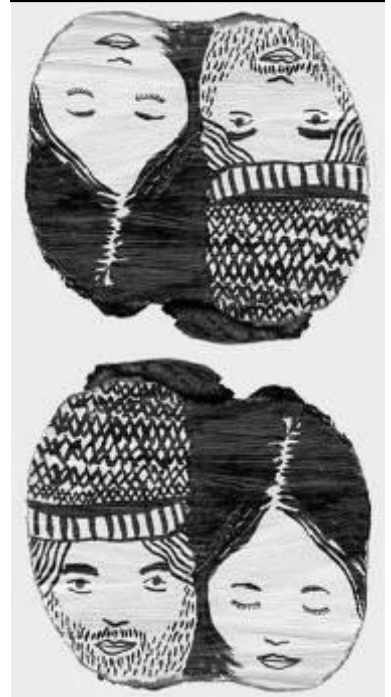
The voice cries out,
Spreads its sordid story,
Pronounces to the whole world
How like thieves in the night
They stole stealthily on us,
Bequeathing us this misery.

The voice cries out,
Stands solidly
Like a solitary flame
In the strong gust of wind.

The junta does not know,
Even if the voice falters
And the flame flickers,
The voice cannot be silenced.

It still cries out,
Rising high
Like the eagle in flight,
As clear as the muezzin's call
To the faithful,
Urging us to trudge on
In the cause. **S**

logs



THE DEATH OF A TOWN CRIER

Ekiko Inyang

A REVIEW OF *INTERVENTIONS I*,
BY WOLE SOYINKA
BOOKCRAFT, IBADAN, 2005

It is as though we are assembled in a town hall, listening to a funeral oration by Wole Soyinka. His friend, Bola Ige, the Attorney-General of your country, has been assassinated!

Nothing can be better replicated in this gathering than the speech delivered by Mark Antony over the death of Julius Caesar. “The murderers are among us,” Soyinka opens his oration. “let no one be in any doubt...” he writes in assurance. Are you? But now, you’re only brought back to that “somber gathering that honours the passage of a hero” in “Ajibola Ige: An Ecomenical Spirit” the first essay in this collection, *Interventions I*.

Bola Ige, your assailants invaded your home just when the country was about to celebrate Christmas and muffled you up to death. Only to attend your funeral and pollute “the register of condolences with the abomination of their names.”

Little would you think of the biography of your country’s watchman of justice. But no! He was “a town crier.” Would you tell me you never did hear his voice, once? Even as he went about “decrying injustice” with a vision of that which was “the harmonizing of diverse communities.” They knew him everywhere, even beyond our lands. You would say, “No wonder, he was inducted into the International Law Commission of the United Nations.” You must’ve seen him once in a synod of the World Council of Churches, a position which he used to battle against “the iniquities of Apartheid South Africa”.

Soyinka rubs his emotions on almost every strain of words written in this essay. But they seem to proceed, you might say, from much thinking. “And still, they killed him,” he writes. “Why?” Soyinka asks you. “Why did they kill this man whose battlefield lay solely in the realms of ideas” he asks you again? But you couldn’t just do anything!

Since his assassination was one which was political, you may not regard him differently from the pie-brain politicians under whose bullets he fell. Did you? Not until now that you are informed that he was a “communicant at the altar of the Arts,” just to “renew himself” from the blind obsession that comes with politics. Since his own politics wasn’t of blood but of reasoning.

After all, it appears that we must accept to bid farewell to the departed. That’s what Soyinka does as he closes this essay: “Farewell. Walk tall among the ancestors,” he tells comrade Ajibola Ige.

As if to stir you into mutiny, as did Antony to the Romans after his oration on the assassination of Caesar, so would Soyinka’s second essay “Dancing on Ige’s Grave.” But to be honest, even if you have the impulse, would you march into the sanctuary of the PDP stalwarts, the ruling party Soyinka accuses of Ige’s death, and tear them to pieces? Avenging the death of your slain minister of Justice? Like the Romans over Brutus’s dagger on Caesar. “I am convinced, beyond any further doubt, that there exists within the ruling party, a nest of murderers.” Don’t you think so? Soyinka incites you with this fact which is strongly supported by the heroic treatment lavished on the prime suspect, a member of PDP. While in prison custody, he contested and outrightly won an election into the highest legislative body of your country.

You are so surprised because it is never said that the “candidate” for once did campaign. How come, you may ask, even as he was “pronounced victorious in the very home town of the victim,” Bola Ige? As you are yet to recover from this political miracle you see the prime suspect Iyiola Omisore together with his psychopathic supporters proceed to dance on the victim’s grave! Only for the president of your country, General Olusegun Obasanjo, to say that, an accused person is presumed innocent until found guilty. Can you swallow that, if you look at the

spirit behind the president's citing of that legal rule and not the rule itself?

You're only reminded of Omisore as one whose history is recorded with violence. Once, he assaulted Bola Ige by removing Ige's hat from his head right in the royal presence of the Ooni of Ife. And afterwards told the whole world that Ige was "very lucky that it wasn't his head," and you didn't do anything about it. Neither did you, Ooni, criticize this impudence in your palace.

Yet, Nigerians, you saw how the PDP went ahead to endorse Omisore as the only qualified person to represent his constituency at the highest law making body of your country. You may ask, "what manner of a genius" is this man? Is it that the party would've collapsed had he not been elected?

After much grief, Soyinka navigates into the culture of electoral fraud in your country through his third essay "Discounting the Electorate" in this same volume.

Some of you were fed bread with a naira note stuck into it. This broke your resistance. You were even mindless about how cheaply you were bought over. For the poor, mostly, were "bribed" and the "die hard antagonists" were brought into "submission" by use of violence. After all, you must've thought, "What does it matter if I trade a vote for a loaf of bread rather than receiving nothing at the end of their tenure?" Forget all they preach about conscience and fill your stomach with what you're offered presently.

Later you would, although INEC would've helped by disqualifying some of these "uncultured" politicians. It only troubles your mind when you

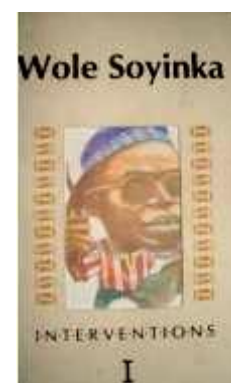
remember that today, Omisore's a lawmaker! He's even the "chairman" of a very important committee in the house. Even Sani Abacha's propagandist, Wade Nas, says in an interview that "any law made with the input of Omisore would have the imprint of blood." Did you hear that? Or is the shame brought upon by Ngige and his godfather Uba in your country, not fresh in your memory? A place where a "mercenary" can stand as a candidate in an election. And INEC, before the eyes of the world would "award certificate" to this candidate who's a cheat? You must've been thinking very little of INEC by now.

Soyinka concludes *Interventions I* with a postscript "Not Yet Judgment Day!"

From Omisore's assault on Ige to the "ambiguous remarks" offered by the Ooni of Ife on the issue and then to the eventual assassination of Ige. Afterwards you're taken down all the way through the "melodrama" and puppet game between one lawyer, Festus Keyamo, and the "alleged fugitive," one Olugbenga Adebayo (alias Fryo). The wife of the slain Attorney General has a "heart attack" in the court over the several dangerous lies told by a witness. And then, she dies a few hours later. Followed by this is the death of the chief prosecutor who slumps in London. Isn't the whole thing becoming mysterious to you? Then as expected, Omisore is acquitted on health grounds and quickly resumes office as a lawmaker. 'Fryo', too, is equally left a freeman. The case file is shoved under the shelf. The matter's ended!

But remember: "a verdict has been pronounced... justice has yet to be served."

S



C

“(Testament) written to Jannekan my own dearest daughter, while I was (unworthily) confined for the Lord's sake, in Prison, at Antwerp, A.D. 1573. (Elizabeth, a Dutch Anabaptist martyr...written just before her execution).”

Last words are the easiest.

It is best that a man
Knows
What else to say.

Like a simple old soul
Without much anyway,
Let us say much
While we can

Tomorrow, they say,
Might be too late.

“Hence, my young lamb, for whose sake I still have and have had great sorrow, seek, when you have attained your understanding, this narrow way, though there is sometimes much danger in it according to the flesh, as we may see and read, if we diligently read and examine the scriptures, that much is said concerning the cross of Christ.”

Let us say much
While we can.

D

“In 1210, council of Paris prohibited the reading of Aristotle or (Averroes') commentaries upon him.”

You have taken the big cyst
to my mind.
I have no pleasure
In the reward of the Wicked
I cannot stop it
None the less.

We should have a choice
of what to make ours.
You deafen us by
making our concern yours.

You deafen us.
For the sake of our children
Take the noise away.

Don't you have
Children of your own?



"It was not till the Cathari became dangerous, in the twelfth century, that heretics began to be punished by death, especially by burning."

Do not make us
A person,
We are more than one.
When you lead one of us
In noisy procession
to the fire,
you lead us all
now and then.

So, this is our plea:
Take us as more than one.

"The use of the Inquisition has justly been held one of the greatest blots of the history of Christianity, its employment of the spy system, of punishment by burning, and of torture for procuring confession being peculiarly irreconcilable with the spirit of Christ."

When you've come
This far,
You should know.

Myself?
I have
Nothing to prove.


DIRGE FOR THE AGONIZED LAND

Lawal Opeyemi

This blood,
It flows through you,
Meanders through your veins,
Spreads superfluous wealth.

You have,
In extending
An arm of fellowship
And consolidating unity,
Nurtured her from your resources,
What have you to show?
Tired teens invoking pleadingly
the river goddess
As they paddle leaking canoes
On polluted waters.

Your bane is your leaders:
Big mouthed potbellied men
With bowler hats and ivory tipped canes,
Those who have
For thirty pieces of silver
Compromised the heritage
Of their people,
Flinging open the door
For the despoilers.

Pay heed:
The young Iroko trees,
They are growing strongly,
Finding their voices and
Pulling resources together,
Striving to make their land
The Utopia it ought to be. 



RAMPAGE SONG

Nwilo Bura-Buri V.

This region has scars of fine laughter
Its creator, a subtle imbecile
Its children, ridiculously poor
Cassava – the rich home grown diet
We eat only at others exit
When we die, bodies feed vultures
Weeping inks our nature

The delta, a devil's perfect banishment
Room for plenty at extinction
Pathway to dreamless castles
If God be from here,
He is an outcast
If his angels eat from here,
He is the gangster we seek.

Our delta, shelter's mirage
Let's dream of homecoming
Of poultries, no more cemeteries
Of poetries for weeping kindness
Of oratories of sad songs gone
This delta, our Niger, hope you find sanity. **S**

what is he thinking?



The **masquerade** is central to Kalabari culture, dance and music. The masquerade transforms men into spirits being born from the water that surrounds our land – the ocean, rivers, creeks and swamps – the water spirits are everywhere and their origins are the stories of dusk like the one below.

One of the leading masquerade societies is from Ekine (becoming a society, group) – Sekiapu / Sekibo. One day many years ago in the days of Elem Kalabari, before oil pollution, before slavery, when the waters were clear with sparkling blue and silver fish – a beautiful young woman named Ekineba (daughter of Ekine) was playing by the river when she was abducted by water spirits and carried away into the mangrove swamps. The spirit mother was angry and ordered her son spirits to return the young woman to her family. Before they did so, they taught Ekineba many different spirit plays. Ekineba performed these plays entertaining the people, drumming, singing and dancing. Their bodies danced like the waves of the ocean spray from whence the people came. The dancing and plays continued but all was not well for Ekineba and the Elem Kalabari. The water spirits became angry because the men did not follow the rituals of the plays and eventually they took Ekineba away for good. The people wept and became very sad as they missed their dancing daughter. The only solution was to make her live forever, so Ekineba became a goddess and a spirit of the Kalabari people and that is how Ekine-Sekiapu was founded and the spirits continue to dance up to today.*

KRAKRAMA RIVER, KALABARI




That was in the old days. Now things are different. The fish are gone, the rivers and creeks polluted with oil waste, the mangroves dried and dead. Development came in the form of oil rigs, pipelines, flow-stations. Leaders from far off places who never knew of Ekineba or the spirits of Kalabari, got rich from the oceans, creeks and land. They were greedy and ignored the laws of trade. They took everything and only gave back poverty and devastation. The spirits became weary, the people became tired and left their homes in search of another life but left behind the protection of the water spirits. Now only the elderly are left to pick the periwinkles from the sandy banks covered with the black sludge of crude oil. Soon the villages and towns may die from oil, die from sadness. Where will the spirits go, what will they do? No one knows. To think of such a time is too fearful a thought because it means it is the end of time. Instead, we ask the spirits to dance for us, to dance long and hard, so that we all may be strong once again.

Yes the spirits *are* everywhere and walk and in the case of the water people, they swim with you. On a quiet early morning when the sun is rising you can sometimes see the outlines of blue tinged mermaids crying tears over the destruction of their home. How do we see the tears in the water? We see them because they are stained with oil.

Idiogbon* kuro wariri, Kalabari – Still our spirit is strong! **S**

* Phonetic spelling used here. Author's version of a mythical story.

From Time's gallery
We watch
The painful dance
Of a drunkard
Staggering painfully
To the staccato
Of Kalashnikovs
And roaring grenades
The spill of blood
Boundless tears
And sad ululations
Reinvigorate excited drummers
Incited to war
By tortured memories
Of wooden homes
Covered by thatches
And palm fronds
All gutted by spilling oil fires
Of spit baths
While communal rivers
Reeking with oil
Are fit only for faeces
Of asphyxiating smoke
That takes over the skies
Laying its dark fangs
Upon the young and the old.

What the drunkard drinks
Rumbles and tumbles
Precariously in his belly
And the more he drinks
The louder the beats
Even tears of the kidnapped
Will mingle with the tears
As the drummers seek
To drink equally
From their pots
From which
The drunkard alone
Seeks to drink. 

"I tell you this, I may be dead but my ideas will not die" Ken Saro-Wiwa 1995

Like in the rest of the Niger Delta, the discovery of oil in Ogoniland in 1958 has been the worst event in Ogoni history. The intervention of Ken Saro Wiwa, in what had become a tragedy for Ogoni people, had a significant impact on a struggle which would lead to the judicial murder of nine Ogoni activists in 1995.

There are approximately 500,000 Ogoni living in some 200 villages spread across 400 square miles of land just north of the River's State capital of Port Harcourt. Like other parts of the Delta region, Ogoniland is criss-crossed with hundreds of miles of pipelines carrying crude oil many of which pass close to homes and farmlands. There are gas flares around these pipelines which have been burning for the past 40 years spouting black dust and fumes day in day out. There are also constant spills because of badly laid and maintained pipelines by the oil companies, this gradually destroys the ecology system. Ecological abuse, the failure of successive Nigerian governments to develop the region and to allocate a fair share of the resources to the people as well as the refusal of multinationals to adequately compensate local people for damage to their landform the backdrop for the continued struggle in the Niger Delta.

The hanging of the Ogoni Nine marks a defining moment in Nigeria's history. It was the moment when the line was crossed, even by the standards of Nigeria's successive military dictatorships. If proof was ever needed of the corrupt and violent nature of Nigerian rulers, this was that moment. In 1992, Shell Petroleum Development Company (a joint venture with Elf and Agip) were responsible for nearly half of Nigeria's oil production. Of the 94 oil fields¹, five were in Ogoniland.

The aim of the Ogoni people's struggle against the dual tyrannies of the Nigerian state and Shell was to achieve an alternative to their existence as part of the Nigerian rentier state. Nigeria's federal and highly militarized system was riddled with corruption and nepotism and had degenerated into a 'cannibalistic vampire state.... a self-consuming predatory regime'² whose loyalties lay firmly with the multinationals, who were given free rein to abuse people and resources in their business of oil.

The Ogoni were adamant that the federal government should no longer be the sole definer of all things Ogoni and that the oil companies should no longer be able to

act with impunity, destroying the ecological system at will. Led by Ken Saro-Wiwa a non-violent movement began to emerge based on direct action and civil disobedience with many similarities to the "Civil Rights" movement led by Martin Luther King. In leading the struggle, Ken Saro Wiwa set himself on a direct collision course with three separate but interlinked opponents: the Nigerian state, Shell and, to a lesser but ultimately more significant extent, the Ogoni élite and the traditional rulers.³

Saro Wiwa was therefore left with only the masses in the struggle for autonomy and self-determination. The first step was to reinvent and create a sense of what it meant to be an Ogoni person, and to build a cohesive and universal Ogoni identity, one that went beyond the divisions created by the six separate Ogoni Kingdoms – Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana, and Tai. Because the Bill of Rights gave emphasis to the Ogoni people as a separate identity from the rest of the Niger Delta and more importantly it made clear their aspirations as a people which included the right to self-determination, resource control and autonomy.

The instruments for achieving change and for creating a new Ogoni identity were to be the Ogoni Bill of Rights and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People [MOSOP], backed up with the mobilization of the Ogoni people. The Bill of Rights was written by Ken Saro Wiwa, and on 26 August 1990 it was signed by 30 prominent Ogoni, including the heads of five of the six clans. The leaders of the Eleme clan declined signing the document and distanced themselves from the Ogoni struggle. In retrospect, the Eleme refusal is an example of the self-interest and some fault lines within MOSOP and the Ogoni struggle, which would lead to the final isolation of Saro Wiwa.

The Ogoni Bill Of Rights outlined Ogoni pre-colonial history and pointed to the huge revenue contributions Ogoni oil had made to Nigeria, for which the Ogoni received nothing in return. The Bill also alluded to the 'genocidal' tendencies of the federal government – tendencies which were leading to the disappearance of Ogoni languages and the extinction of the Ogoni themselves – because they believed that they were at risk of genocide as stated above and obviously their language would also disappear. Finally, the Bill listed seven specific demands of the Nigerian state, which can be summarized as the demand for resource control, political and ethnic autonomy and protection of the




environment from further destruction. Whilst it had been a relatively easy task to persuade the Ogoni élite to sign the Bill of Rights, persuading them to join MOSOP was a different matter. In his book, *When Citizens Revolt*, Ike Okonta explains the complexities of Ogoni inter-clan politics which Saro Wiwa had to negotiate, and describes MOSOP as a 'fragile coalition from the outset'⁴

Nonetheless, the Ogoni Bill of Rights and MOSOP were key to the formation of a new Ogoni identity, which moved the Ogoni from 'an ethnic group-in-itself to an ethnic group-for-itself'.⁵ Saro Wiwa's vision of MOSOP was for an inclusive mass movement, which would include the two marginalized groups – youth and women – who formed the core of his constituency and continue to do so. The National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP) and the Federation of Ogoni Women Associations (FOWA) were both crucial to the movement and to Saro Wiwa's leadership. However the reality was somewhat different. By late 1990, MOSOP had become a movement of the Ogoni elite where even the language spoken was English thus marginalising the mass of Ogoni people and in particular women.

Within a year, the fault lines within Ogoni unity and MOSOP began to show. Ken Saro Wiwa had quickly become 'the man of the people' with the support of the ordinary Ogoni. This caused considerable concern amongst the élite, who saw the support of Saro Wiwa as a threat to their self-interest and power base. Ato Quayson summarizes well the effect of Saro Wiwa's mobilization of the masses on the various interest groups:

*'In launching a mass mobilization drive against a multinational oil company and the state, Saro Wiwa located himself at the vortex of multiple historical processes and interests. At the level of the state, his effect of mobilizing a hitherto quiescent minority around oil and environmental rights was a dangerous signal of a new praxis for other disposed minorities, both in the oil producing regions and in Nigeria more generally. At a more local level, he clashed with traditional and more conservative authorities who could not fully grasp the significance of the revolutionary processes that were being unleashed.'*⁶

After the execution of the Ogoni 9 MOSOP was unable to sustain itself and the struggle. Divisions arose, no doubt there was blame, betrayal but most of all the charismatic leader who was central to the movement had been silenced. 15 years later, 4 farmers from the Niger Delta with Friends of the Earth, Netherlands

have brought a class action suit against Shell International which is taking place at the Hague. The suit is being brought for environmental damage and negligence by the oil company. The struggle for justice continues.... 

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- [4] Okonta p180
- [5] Okonta, p193
- [6] Quayson, p70

FURTHER READING :

Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*
 Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*
 Ahmed Khan, *Nigeria: The Political Economy of Oil*




SUPPOSING

Felix Orisewike Sylvanus

I suppose you might suppose
We are nerds who coil alone, like cobras,
or stretch legs at noonday,
awaiting the nestling moonlight and hand
that you pet our pain with.
Hum and haw in your sore beak
Force-feed us out on a limb; our limb amputated
In the passage of time

We toil and toil
Lost race toiling in lumps of absence
That bought us a new image
Soon, we'll turn to your chase
Maddog, in broad day light
We, who were born with silver spoons
have no greenery
We, layabouts? Like lazybones under a leaden sky
That serves us right
Incentive imaginary, conceived in littered heart
But I doubt you have our kind of head
Though faux pass you now in public

We are no basket of eggs exceeding hatching date
That our life should be a frump beneath the pick
By them that stood upon endemic Delta

Your broad arms fatten in course of our starvation
You were never once available
But we have grown up. We have all grown up
Big children who can read and write
In our mother tongue. Our tongues tied to our fate
Soon shall emanate, when due
When in a fringe of new clothes
We dress exclusively, and march to meet the West. 



A LESSON IN FISHING

Dami Ajayi

It was not a weekend, not a time for a son to be around his fisherman father except that the teacher's strike had extended beyond the Local Council's "worst-case scenario," twenty-eight days and counting.

The son stared into his father's face, trying to decipher his expression. Though the nascence of his mind and his newness to the experience couldn't plunge the dart right, he was certain this was not his father's mien when his mother tended, on the spit, the bounty of his proceeds. He also knew his father liked to whistle when he returned from the weekend fish market, cradling his empty basket in his left and his son's soft knuckle in his right, making it a point of duty to greet every person he encountered as he dangled the coins in his pocket.

The father pulled on his fishingline, half-hoping. But there was no tug, no pull of gravity. So he flicked it out roughly, splattering droplets from the brackish waters.

He cursed in their mother-tongue.

"What's the matter?" his son inquired, his face a canvass of pure innocence.

The father acknowledged his son for a moment, wondering if he should lurch into the story of how the oil companies had ruined the river, murdered aqualife and his livelihood. But he thought the better and adjusted his torn fedora, "The fishes don't want to be caught today."

"Father, auntie said we should not use such words again", scratching his nose and sniffing, he continued, "She beat my seatmate very well when he say it."

The father, more concerned about his loss than his son's words, forgot that his son's seatmate was the child of the adulterous woman who sold local gin to the village men, mostly ex-fishermen who the oil spillage had occasioned their early retirement. It also did not strike him that the seatmate must have picked the vulgar words from the men who sauntered around his mother's rump and prattled about their failed dreams, sometimes, and most of the time, about their conquered fantasies between throat-stinging sniffers.

The father's gaze rested on his empty basket. He knew the sun was coming down; that meant he had been fishing for more than six hours with no fish to show for it. His son basked in the sun, scrutinizing his father's face, trying hard not to imagine what his mother would say to his father if he dare returned without fish or money.



As the sun trailed along the horizon, the man paddled his canoe towards the bank. He tied his canoe to mangrove tree and unceremoniously lifted his son out. They walked, their bare feet steeped in dried leaves making crunchy sounds.

The sounds reminded the boy of eating dried fish and reawakened his hunger. But as he looked up to his father's face, he could imagine his father's response if he told him about his hunger again.

"We are on our way home," his father would say nonchalantly, but the son would still register the concealed snap.

They had strolled into the village's heart with generous view of unclothed kids, half-clothed mothers, straw houses crowned with thatched roofs. The father's palm fell on his son's shoulder. He handed the boy his empty basket and said to him, "Be on your way home."

Before the son would ask where his father was going, the man had left, his footsteps in the direction of his son's seatmate's mother's rump. **S**



His normally amber-white, but now sun-burnt skin flushed in the heat and humidity of the jungle. In the centre of the guerrillas' territory in the hub of the Delta, Edward Nicholas found himself surrounded by muscular young Ijaw men, exhaling fumes from their thick, rolled joints. Their brown eyes scanned him as intently as radar would if sighting an obscure object. He appeared sweaty and flustered, as he trembled in the strange environment. His comrade Konowei had cunningly coerced him into visiting the camp. Konowei paced around Edward, focusing on him passionately.

"You want smoke?" Konowei offered Edward a cigarette from his king-size box of an imported brand. Edward declined the offer.

"Oyinbo wahala plenty," Konowei complained. He took offence at Edward's rejection of the cigarette. He knew that Edward was an addicted smoker.

Edward took a few deep breaths, relieving the tension in his narrow, long face. He could not smoke just now: his focus was on the guerrillas' discussions and he was tired of the nickname oyinbo. He hated being called oyinbo. He had told Konowei his name, yet Konowei kept referring to him as oyinbo when he talked with his friends.

His tanned white skin and reddish short hair brought him much attention. The staccato of pidgin English was intense and Edward became paranoid as he tried but failed to follow their discourse. What were they planning for this oyinbo? Konowei stopped pacing and slumped on the chair, patting Edward on the shoulder, inhaling his tobacco. With a chuckle he exclaimed to his friends, "Pepe done reach!" Konowei's allies all responded gleefully to his comment, shouting their agreement. They liked what he had said. They believed that they would soon be rich. Thanks to the white man in their presence.

In the green, overgrown, now deserted outskirts of the village of Oloibiri, where crumbling buildings decayed and there was a sense that life had departed, Edward sat. He sat amongst these armed strangers who appeared hostile and militant. In their alliance for justice they were geared up physically, mentally and spiritually; they chanted inspirational songs, danced a little; poured ounces of transparent liquor down their throats in the sweltering heat and humidity. They

poured some of their gin onto the ground as a libation, calling out to their deity to protect them. Their shouts of "Egbesu, Egbesu" penetrated the atmosphere. As Edward watched the ritual he knew that he was far away from home in Durham, far away from the Christian religion, far away from energy supplies, far away from his colleagues and co-expatriates, far away from his fiancé.

"Are you out of your mind?" Emily had said

"We all need to be sometimes!" He had retorted.

"Honestly, sometimes Edward you are just too brave and adventurous, and I do not like it! No! not brave, puerile!" She waited for his response and a chance to bargain with him. He continued reading his *Rough Guide to West Africa*.

"I mean, the whole world knows that it is not safe to travel to Africa, but not you. In your childish quests you behave irresponsibly."

"That is a bit broad: 'Africa'." Edward was ready to debate.

"I mean, various places in Africa," Emily snapped back.

"Various places in our country are dangerous too, yet the populace in general are still safe."

"Edward, I'll spell it out. Nigeria is a no-go area, especially for Europeans, or do you think you are one of them?"

"What is that supposed to mean?" He ended the conversation and walked away.

Edward did not listen to his fiancé. Fine, she cared, but she was a nag. Her point was constructive but Edward felt like he was already one of "them", and at heart he agreed with Emily's sarcastic reference. In fact, his family had worked in Africa for generations. His grandfather had spent years in Kenya, where Edward's father had been born. Edward was taken there as a child and educated in an African International school. He was not afraid to go to Nigeria. He was attracted by the high five-figure tax-free salary, paid accommodation, bonuses and the weather. He was driven by adventure and driven away by Emily's obsessive daily intellectual contests.

Now here he was with a group of agitated young men far away from his safe, comfortable, expatriate quarters. Could Emily have been right? Perhaps it was his folly, risking his life for an adventure and a grand salary.



Had he been too greedy? Was this a well deserved consequence of his greed? He sat watching the men indulging in their mega-portions of roasted fish and plantain with hot peppery sauce splattered all over the dish. "He no go chop?" a member had asked Konowei. Konowei looked at him.

"No thanks," he said.

Edward would not eat; he was still calculating Konowei's purpose in bringing him to the camp. His mind was overworked, and this was the source of his fear. When he saw the men acknowledging their god, Egbesu, god of warfare, that frightened him.

With a struggle he pushed Emily's concerns about his safety out of his mind. His father took his first breath of life in the continent, and Edward's childhood school memories were of growing up with young men just like the ones in front of him. However the calculations did not add up, and Edward remained perplexed. Why had Konowei brought him to the camp? Why had Konowei befriended him? So far, Konowei had not asked him for money: instead he was offering him cigarettes and food. Maybe the ransom they would get for the return of Edward would be far larger than the peanuts they could get from him if they asked him for nairas, pounds or dollars, he pondered.

"Listen mate, how long are you keeping me here for?" Edward questioned in an exasperated tone.

"Who is keeping who here and for what?" Konowei replied. "You want to go back to your place? Are you not a free man?"

"I've been here for a few hours now."

"It is important that you are here with us."

"Yes, but for how long?"

"Stop asking that stupid question, you enjoy living in my country, getting good salary, but can't you mix with us?"

Edward blushed; being uncertain and nervous he had sent out the wrong signals.

"Certainly I can integrate. After all, I am with you now."

"Then why do you press me about going home, like a baby?"

"I just wanted to know why we drove all the way here, to this deserted place."

"It is not deserted, can't you see young men all around. Are you afraid? Your memory is short my friend. Was it not you that questioned me about the socio-political climate?" Konowei started to lecture him.

"True, I did." Edward said in a bid to cool the tension between them.

"So you are not really concerned. You want to have the cake and eat it."

"I am...." Edward hesitated.

"You *are* concerned?" Konowei questioned.

"I was about to say, I am a brother. We are one, despite our racial differences". Those that sat around and heard the conversation found Edward very amusing. He noticed that all his remarks were received with smiles and laughter. Soon, however, the attentive, athletic young men relaxed and came closer to Edward, asking many questions. They asked for stories about England and their pupils dilated as the stories were being told. It built his confidence and before long he was extremely relaxed and chatting away whilst gorging himself with the dish of the day.

"I have an African history too."

"Tell me more." Konowei let his inquisitive self appear and became more interested.

The two men regained their original friendship and trust, sharing stories as their lives unfolded before one another. The thoughts of rugged, brutal men that saw Edward as their prey that once entered his mind had disappeared. The diffident stranger that refused their delicacies became very vocal and was eating with them. Preconceptions and misconceptions were being straightened out. Konowei had learned that Edward was ambitious to design roads and contribute to development and, admittedly, be paid a lot for it. He had told Konowei that he had been advised not to go to Nigeria because of the safety risk. And he became philosophical, discussing fear as the biggest hindrance in human development. Konowei was informed that Edward's grandfather served in a mission in Kenya: his intention had been to work there for a short period, to deliver religious education, but eventually he had settled in the country. His religious grandfather had established churches in many districts: in cities and villages. He was not satisfied with the church work alone and set up businesses where locals were employed. Edward said his family were interested in Africa and the rich cultures of the people. Konowei enjoyed sitting there with Edward using the African tradition of oral story-telling. He bonded with Edward and identified with the way Edward had praised his grandfather.

"We in Africa, believe in our ancestors' spirits, and I can see you are a true African: you are your grandfather's son." Konowei said. Then he went on to talk about his own grandfather.

"My grandfather was a typical Ijaw man, humble and truthful. He was a fisherman. A very peaceful fisherman. He was well-loved by the villagers and he was friendly to everyone he met. Whether the visitor was from a neighbouring village, a local clan, a close ethnic community, my grandfather welcomed them with open arms. My grandfather went so far as to welcome people like you to the village. He was very fond of Europeans and was in cultural exchange with them. My grandfather and his European comrades had



learnt from each other. Like you, I too am my grandfather's son: we will be trans-cultural friends."

As twilight set Edward realised he had spent the day in an unusual environment, in a camp of young men that seemed to be on a mission for the betterment of their people. He slept on a retired mattress with wire poking through the wadding in a makeshift home. In the morning it dawned upon him that fear was the real enemy, not the people. The fear of being a foreigner and of being in a strange environment was unnecessary. He was alive and was not held hostage by the armed men. In their generous hospitality they had shared their food with him and had unfolded the stories of their lives. But the question visited him again, what do they want? If they were neither asking for money nor keeping him against his will, why did they request the pleasure of his company amidst their clandestine camp?

Konowei's friends had been fetching water from the river to take a morning shower. They scrubbed themselves with natural loofahs and revived themselves, throwing cold water over their richly-toned black bodies. Edward's water was heated on a charcoal fire as the men anticipated that he would not bath in those conditions. Edward watched these fit Adonis-types of men train: running into distant stretches of the forest for miles and hours on end: lengthy training. He admired their daily morning discipline.

By midday Edward and Konowei had discussed in more detail the foundation of the camp. When Edward had met Konowei they got on very well. Konowei, tall, dark and refined in his introduction could be bold and pushy. He had spotted the white man he wanted to befriend in an upmarket bar. In their first social encounter at the bar they drank heavily and chain-smoked. Konowei with his great sense of humour had appealed to Edward. They had a mutual understanding and were happy to become acquainted. As they knocked back triple brandys Edward became indoctrinated with in depth education in the social consciousness of the region.

Edward attempted to show interest and concern, so he questioned Konowei with his slurred speech. The downing of several spirits had no effect on Konowei, who was prompted to ask Edward if he would like to learn more and see more. Edward's acceptance had got him to the point of being taken to the outskirts of Oloibiri village to spend the night. To where he had bonded with men who were branded bandits. His acceptance had led him into an African adventure. In his adventure he had become acquainted with men who were notorious both nationally and internationally: men who were classified as thieves, bandits, criminals. Edward, , had seen the opposite: he had made friends with disciplined young men, kind men who took care

of his welfare and men who stood up for the rights of their community. Edward had been taught a lesson or two in his adventure; he had learned not to blindly follow negative fixed beliefs. He knew that he should never give way to irrational fears and above all he had learnt the history of the ongoing struggles of these rebellious groups.

Konowei had driven Edward to the camp because Edward had earlier dismissed his personal driver in order to try living at grass-roots level – if only without using a chauffeur for his social evening excursions. Konowei felt dutifully obliged to drop Edward back to his accommodation safely. Edward was relieved to hear that he would soon be back in his familiar expatriate compound, have his bath, make a few phone calls and get back to his own reality. He was just so thankful that he had survived the night in the jungle and returned safely. But not so fast! Going home was easier thought than done!

Edward was about to climb into Konowei's car with his thoughts already on Monday's professional duties, when he had to stop. Konowei had taken a tight grip on his arm. He looked deep into Edward's eyes. The fear that Edward had successfully rejected during the weekend excursion, returned to sting him deep in his heart. Konowei did not want him to get into the car easily: there was a price to pay for this visit into the secret lives of the bold and budding young men, these leaders of tomorrow.

"You were scared initially. Right?" Konowei started. "You asked me how long I would keep you here. In fact you confused me when you said that to me yesterday. When we drank at the bar you showed interest in the lives of ordinary African people. I saw that you had a heart, so I also trusted you. I admit I put pressure on you to come and see the camp and understand us. It was so immediate and without planning but you did accompany me this weekend. The point is you were interested in African people, in the poor people's plight. You have a good heart, man. Don't change."

Edward was beginning to think that it was time to distribute money. It had all been a clever tactic, distinct from the popular forms of begging. Yet, he felt, that it could never be the final piece of the jigsaw. Edward was too smart to think that just cash was what Konowei wanted. But Konowei did not make the situation any easier, he was not giving away any clues. Instead he held Edward's arm tightly as though in desperation. The picture looked ugly, the friends were playing with each other's intelligence and nobody said what they thought. Edward moved back to release himself from Konowei's grip. Konowei felt as though he was losing his friend and needed a more appealing attitude. He side-tracked from what he wanted to ask,



modulating his voice to a jovial tone and said “I would love you to be my brother: you already are my brother, but I mean if you want a beautiful, good woman, take my sister: this girl will not give you the stress of Emily. When I next come to town I would love to introduce you to her, she lives in Port Harcourt.”

Edward had entertained the thought of spending the long hot and lonely nights with female company, but had Emily refused to come and visit him, not even for a weekend. Edward regained composure, staring back into Konowei’s eyes to try and read his mind. He felt Konowei was still hiding something.

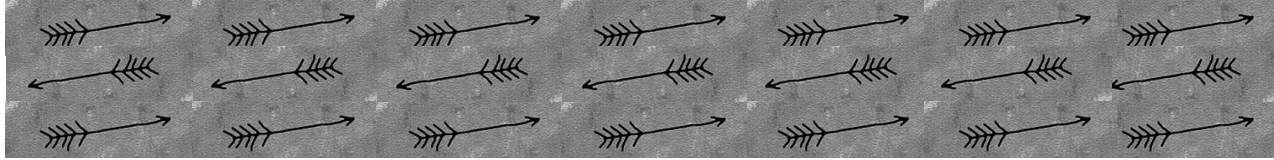
“Time is of the essence, in such a short space I have learnt a great deal.” Edward wanted closure and encouraged Konowei to disclose matters weighing on him.

After much meandering Konowei vehemently exposed the hidden policies of the camp. He briefly lectured about their discipline and their tireless campaigning- giving insight to their declaration that the government ignored. He made it clear of the differences between his group and others with criminal activities. “We campaign for equal rights for the people of the Delta. Some people supply us with arms. However, we are here to protect our community and stand up for their rights. I know you thought I wanted your money but more importantly we need partners, nationally and internationally who feel our cause. I know you have a good heart and you have seen our troubles. I have shown you all and told you the story.” Later, he would be haunted by Konowei’s final words, “Descendant of a missionary, please spread the story. S





we're waiting



WARRIORS OF THE SOUTH

Emeka Iduma

1967 is a very fortunate year in the history of Nigeria. Just seven years after we decided that we were old enough to take care of ourselves, we hit gold. This time it was not blonde-colored neither was it held together by metallic bonds. Black gold became a curse, guise-skinned as wealth, to the common people of Nigeria. While our leaders rejoiced at the blessing of nature to our economy (and their pockets), we wept at the irony of the blessings it promised.

Our black gold chose to have its home in the south; an area of over 20 million people of diverse language and ethnicities. The wealth from their land singlehandedly supports 90% of Nigeria's budget and sustains her economy annually. Their land is so rich that it has attracted Germans, Britons, Filipinos, and Americans to Nigeria. Their lands became populated with lots of expatriates wearing hard hats and cruising customized light farm trucks. Their beautiful ladies became objects for relaxation, and their young men, well, modern slaves that sacrificed their lives at the oil rigs.

As the years progressed, the landlords of this black gold soon discovered that they were being milked without being fed. They only knew the locations of the black gold but never saw the real cash. They began to lose their lands to oil spillage, their atmosphere to gas flaring and their aquatic life to pollution. As though this was not enough, their roads were not tarred, they lacked electricity, they lacked quality education for their children and their hospitals were death havens. At that point they realized that they were minorities. They would have to wait until the trinity – the three ultimate tribes – were fed and satisfied, to see if any leftover would fall for them.

As the years rolled by, they became more impatient. Voices began to rise from the south, demanding for attention. How could they have been forgotten? Then the government noticed the bold and non-aggressive opposition of one of them: a poet who thought he could use the pen as a sword to fight guns and armored vehicles! He stood and fought fearlessly, speaking words that cut right through the conscience of the military Dictator. When he became too noisy for them, they quickly silenced him.

Then they began to rise: young, agile, heavily-built, angry looking guerillas, from the valleys of abandon and misery. They were driven by one mandate; to localize the control of their black gold and demand reparation for the offences committed against them over the years. Their activities have since been on headlines of both national and international media. They have fought fearlessly and undauntedly against their enemies – government officials, foreign companies and the military. With time, they improved their expertise and strategy. Rather than use the pen to fight, like their ancestor, they have taken to the proper sword, matching their weapon with their enemy's.

When the retired Army-General-turned-farmer-turned-President-dictator took radical actions to silence their activities (even using belligerence against non-belligerence), they fortified their garrisons and began to take hostages. They started by 'adult-napping' top government officials and high rank employees of foreign companies and demanding ridiculous ransoms from their families. Even when it got so heated that they lost fellow warriors, they took it as an incentive to wrought more havoc, seemingly proclaiming that it was a do-or-die affair.

For them it was either they possessed complete control of the management of their black gold or not. They initiated an operation to destroy any means of oil production and completely got rid of any person who stood in their way. They told the foreign companies to either leave their land or be ready to die on it; some did die. In one direct hit they succeeded in crippling Nigeria's oil production by a whooping 10%! They were so desperate that they fully intended to ground oil mining and production in Nigeria except their demands were met.




When it began to seem as though they were gaining ground and the support of the other Nigerians, the government came up with a plan: *amnesty*. They promised them full federal pardon amidst several bags of cash, as extra bonuses. The government built them a University, started to tar their roads and began to consider some of their preposterous demands. One of their own was crowned Vice President of the country as an indication that the political lords were serious about making life better for them. It seems, thus, that they succeeded in gaining the attention their fathers desperately desired. It seemed that they were ready to drop their guns and embrace peace.

In the news we are told that these surrendered warriors are going through 'rehabilitation' to make them better citizens of Nigeria. While some of the warriors never accepted the call for peace and are still carrying out hostilities, their brothers are smiling to the bank.

There are questions needed to be asked, relevant now, as always;

Is the amnesty another shrewd ploy by political lords to shut these warriors up? Will the warriors of the south drop their weapons? Are the kidnappings, extortions and vandalisms going to stop? Will Nigeria be free from the political corruption that has arisen from black gold? Who knows how this would end?

These are only questions. 



E

“But when I asked him if he believed in God, he lifted towards me eyes without understanding and said: ‘I have no such military order to believe. If I have an order I will believe.’”

If you wish to give us
what we already have
then do not take
what we do not have
Away.

Let us choose what we
want to have.

You may, for Sanity’s sake,
respect our decision.

“It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy.”

The Pursuit of Happiness
Is the highest misdeed.

If only we can be allowed.

You can make a pact
with the devil.
You only need a good
Negotiator.

How long shall they kill
our Negotiators,
while we stoop beside
and mourn?

You christened us
For our perspirations,
our longstanding devotion.

F

“Why my soul, are you so stupidly concerned with the latest event, the fact that I have been put into a strait-jacket and gagged?”

Even the deadliest falls
Cannot separate
the waters from

the mud.

There is a man
Who sees something
In the distance.

No one but him.

It has no consequence
If there are wide walls
Pad Locked

We are seeing something
In the distance.

"Fighting is for those who are still caught up in the vanity of this world. In my subterranean cell I remain like Moses on the mountain top. I cannot keep my hands stretched upwards. I am too weak for this. I am alone. I have no Aaron or Hur to hold up my arms. But I stretch my heart upwards, and know that thus Israel becomes unconquerable."

What you have seen today
Is only a glimpse
You know there is
Another.
You know we know.

Take it away.
Slowly.
Bathe us with hard sponges

What you do today
Is only a glimpse

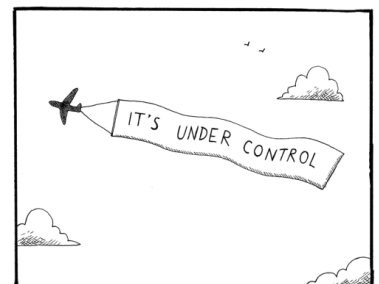
Nothing matters

I ask you
Are you tired of fighting?

Cowardice is punishable
By death.

Fighting is living
On the premise
Of Movement.

Two men to a rifle
When the first man
Is killed,
The second takes the rifle
And starts shooting
Like the fallen before him.



Cowards would be punished
with death.
There is no In Between.

Until fighting has no meaning
No use
Anymore


Not now
Not now

When?
When?

It does not end
Like this.

G

“Moses we si ndi Israel
Unu atula egwu
Guzonu onwe-unu n’ebe a,
Hu nzọputa Jehova:
Nke Ọ gēmere unu ta:
N’ihi na ndi Ijipt ndi
Unu huworo ta,
Unu agagh-ahu kwa
ha ọzọ rue mbe ebighe-ebi

Jehova gēburu unu agha,
Ma unu onwe-unu gāba nkiti.” 

— —

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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

My work pattern was to identify the persecuted across time, and see if the people of the Niger Delta can be found within the 'various lines.' It might be somewhat sing-song, a kind of repetition of thought patterns. But who says we should not (re)create the persecution of these beloved people in a long, perhaps sing-song manner.



SECULAR HISTORY, CONTAYNING THE ACTES AND MONUMENTS OF
THINGS PASSED IN EVERY KYNGES TYME

Adebisi Olusolape

The story of all of unwritten history's misery
is still being written.
So far, the tomes have but one entry,
"Lock them in the hem of Death's garment."

The Ijaw Students Association of the Delta State University was having its annual Jaja of Opobo Memorial Lecture. It had been one hundred and seventeen years since Jaja had died on his way home from forced exile in Saint Vincent. He was born in the same year Bonaparte died in exile on Saint Helena. His exile was a price he paid for breaking a personal rule of his: never trust a white man. Perhaps he was tired, a lifetime of being suspicious of one and all, of intrigues, war both at home and abroad, it was enough to wear out even the sturdiest soul.

Jaja had kept a tight hold on trade in those parts, and as with all middlemen, he resisted any direct contact between the Europeans whom he sold to and the hinterland markets where he procured palm oil. He led a punitive expedition to Ibeno in 1881. Against his order, the people of those villages had traded with a European merchant who had circumvented his barricade. He razed the villages, slaughtering men, women and children, giving his paternal approval when his youngest son decapitated an Ibeno boy. This act earned the prince the right to wear an eagle plume in his cap, a symbol of coming of age in a society that had beat its fishing harpoons into muskets. The Europeans, who were equally violent and unscrupulous in the pursuit of their policy to cut out the middleman, eventually succeeded by trickery in having Jaja removed.

A completely different type of commerce in a darker kind of oil was taking place in the Delta these days, but if one judged by the blood, sweat and tears, things were very much the same. In their resistance to exploitation, neglect and degradation, the people of these parts sought vanguards. The apotheosis of the Jaja of Opobo among the intelligentsia was a symptom of the way things were. This year's lecturer was Dr. Jeremiah Tarila, a brilliant historian who had returned home from a position in Oxford with the aim to, "...participate in the struggle of my people." He cut a fine figure in his white shirt which contrasted delightfully with his brilliantly coloured wrapper. His panama hat which had an eagle plume in the band was cocked at an angle.

Looking at him, one would find it difficult to believe that this was the same man who threw the whole university community into turmoil earlier in the semester. It came out that all the non-Ijaw students who had taken his course failed. Only after it was announced that he had been suspended did the riots which had broken out on campus and which had threatened to engulf the whole state subside. The authorities also ruled that thenceforth, students were to identify themselves only by their matriculation numbers on examination scripts.

His stroll to the lectern a quarter of an hour ago had been marked by great frenzy; it was in marked contrast with the unruffled young man who now stood facing the audience.

"...prior to the coming of the white man, The Ijaw lived in societies which were grouped in to 'houses' based on patrilineage..."

He held the whole hall in rapt attention.

"The trade with the tribes of the hinterland consisted mainly of exchanging sea food and salt for vegetables and tools of iron..." He had begun to warm to his speech and it seemed that a smile played at the corners of his lips.

"...Crowder argues that the Ijaw communities were sparsely populated and so could not find slaves in sufficient quantities to satisfy European demands. I take issue with this theory. I want to use this opportunity to reiterate my stand: the Ijaw as a people would not sell their own. We have never done this. We are not about to start now."

At this, the hall broke in to a protracted round of applause as catcalls and whistles rent the air. Like the skilled demagogue, he homed in for the kill.

"Ladies and gentlemen—"

"Kpao.Kpao.Kpao"



Betty spat three times and the Doctor went down. No one had noticed the two young men who purposefully made their way to the front. As if on a cue, shrieks and screams rent the air even before the echo of the last gunshot died down. Furniture screeched as people strove to dive under the pews of the old church. In the commotion that ensued, Long John Silver ran out through the open doorway to the left of the fallen body which had taken a grotesque posture as blood covered the ground around it in an ever enlarging circle. It had been agreed that they would separate in the aisle that demarcated the first line of pews from the podium, to confuse any pursuers. *Da Capo* would exit through the door on the right which was closer to the car park and start the engine. As he ran round the old church to join his partner, he frantically tried to return the pistol to its place under his arm in the shoulder holster he was wearing. He was sweating profusely and breathing heavily. He slowed down into a quick walk only to begin running again. He felt clammy. He could actually hear his heart beat, and the weight of the gun seemed like it would slow him down so much that he would be caught. His only thought was getting away.

"Steady now," Long John Silver whispered to himself; it would be terrible if he dashed all the hopes he had built up over the past fortnight. So far, he had successfully carved the shape he wanted on his left cheek. He had done the left half of his face first, like he always did when trimming his nails, the left hand first and then the right. He had never been quite able to cut the nails on the fingers of his right hand with the same precision that he did those of his left. His left hand just did not have the dexterity of his right, and he could not afford the coiffed stubble on both sides of his face not being alike to the last detail. If he failed, he would look like a fool and no one would tell him. People were disgusting that way: they would never tell you if something was wrong with the way you looked. One would have walked all the way from the lecture halls to the hostel only to realize that all that while one's fly had been open. He followed the motion of the razor in the mirror and marveled. As a child, he had spent so many frustrating moments in front of the mirror, trying to direct his fingers to the place he wanted on his face and the mirror had always deceived him.

The phone began to ring. That was the ringtone he assigned his mother's calls. He let the tune play all the way to the end. When it started to ring the fourth time, he walked over in annoyance and switched it off. He just did not get this woman. Why couldn't she just let him be? Where had she been when he needed her? Now that he was grown up and had no need for her, she was trying to establish a relationship with him. She

would not stop bugging him with her phone calls. He walked back to the mirror and gave himself a clean shave. What a stupid woman! What a stupid woman! What did she want from him? What did she want? He just could not stand it anymore. He did not want to have anything to do with her. Why couldn't she just understand that? His father never bothered him, he hated them both. But this woman made his life hell, calling him on the phone to whine, "Eniola, why don't you call me? I am your mother..." He had better get out of the room if he didn't want to break something.

The young man was very tall, that combined with his lean frame made him willowy. His easy gait only lent to the impression of a supple sapling that was tossed ever which way. He affected a loud silver chain, which was in stark contrast to his well tailored dark suits. Even on the hottest day, he looked like a banker and he never broke a sweat. The girls loved him silly and he was ever ready with a listening ear and a genial smile.

As he headed for the Faculty of Social Sciences, it occurred to him that he was going to be in class for the lecture a full hour before the scheduled time. However, the thoughts foremost on his mind that afternoon were about his family. He had been born the only child of two bankers. They had had no time for him when he was very young. He lived with his maternal grandmother till she passed away when he was in junior secondary school. After his grandmother's death, his parents had him transferred to an expensive school, far away in Abuja, with first rate boarding facilities. His holidays were spent in the homes of different friends. He grew up never having a family or a home he could call his own. Instead, his parents gave him more money than he ever actually needed. Perhaps that assuaged their feeling of guilt. By the time Eniola gained admission into the University of Lagos to study Economics, he was completely estranged from them. Now that he was back in the same city with his parents, his mother tried to draw him closer. Her overtures only drove him farther away. Unwittingly, he tried to get back at his parents by leading a lifestyle that would scandalize them if they found out. The money they gave him only lent more momentum to his self-destructive tendencies.

Eniola had joined *The Privateers*. That had not been his original intention. He met Franklin at a welcome party organized by the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences for freshmen. Franklin had said he was impressed by Eniola's stature and disposition, and had approached him with a proposal to join a gentlemen's club on campus. Eniola, who had received similar offers from three different social clubs during the course of that semester, played hard to get. But there was



something about Franklin: he had this air of calm reassurance that drew Eniola to him. Franklin came across as intelligent and masterful in a subtle way. Eniola finally accepted the invitation to a party, organized by Franklin's club, *The Brahmins*. Unknown to him, *The Brahmins* was a front for *The Privateers*. The Society existed to look after the interest of its members. Actually, they were involved in gang style supremacy tussles with similar groups. They also terrorized the general populace of the university. *The Privateers* were not a local phenomenon; they had branches in tertiary institutions all over the country. The various branches contracted killings of local enemies to members on other campuses. The rationale was that a stranger could easily slip in, get a job done and disappear.

The party was a screening exercise. All the freshmen at the party were being considered for initiation into the fraternity. The *Grandmaster*, a member of the alumni, and the *Capo* selected five freshmen to initiate into the cult. Eniola on his own part innocently compared the show put on by *The Brahmins* at their party with those of the other clubs. Truly, *The Brahmins'* party had been the most lavish. And he met some of the most beautiful girls he had ever laid eyes on. Some of their alumni, who were public figures, were at the party. That had communicated permanence, a sense of continuity and the promise of solid connections.

The recruiting committee chose him along with four other freshmen. The invitation to join *The Brahmins* was renewed. Eniola accepted the invitation and was excited when he received a letter of acceptance. Information as to the time and venue put the induction for a week later. He was so excited, he thought nothing of the line in the letter which read "... you are urged to treat this missive and the information contained therein with the utmost secrecy." In fact, for the first time in his life, he felt like he was a valuable person. Franklin had become something of a big brother to him, and he believed this would serve to strengthen the bond between them. The time of the induction which had been slated for after midnight gave him no qualms at all.

Something was off. He arrived at the venue, an uncompleted lecture hall, and found that except for two of the freshmen he had met at the party, everyone else was clad in black. That was the first time it struck him how late the hour was. His first instinct had been to run, run as fast as he could, but he doubted that he would get far. Eniola looked around for Franklin, knowing his friend would have an explanation for this. He walked briskly towards his friend, furtively glancing at the fellows who stood in the middle of the hall in some kind of loose formation. He recognized

some of these fellows; he had met them at the party, but they all looked sinister. Franklin was standing slightly apart in the middle of the half moon. Eniola didn't see it coming; he was caught full in the jaw by Franklin's fist. And that was how it started; he was beaten till he hurt all over. He screamed himself hoarse but they gave him no respite. His left eye was swollen shut. His mouth was raw. He had dared not stand up; the pain in his groin was unbearable. He was then inducted into the secret society, having been made to swear an oath of silence. Rechristened Long John Silver, it was thenceforth forbidden to refer to Franklin in any way except as *Da Capo*. They threatened to kill him if he gave away their true nature or even entertained any thoughts of going to the authorities.

THE LIGHT cast by the glowing dials of the watch was enough to illumine the window cut into the face of the watch. It read: 11 Oct 2004. It was 4:23 a.m. The green light was especially bright in the darkness of the room. As he let down his hand, the watch, an 18 karat gold Rolex, slid towards his wrist, clumsily, scratching his skin. That used to annoy him to no end, it didn't anymore. It had been a perfect fit on that fat bastard. The stupid man had not been able to make up his mind how he wanted his arm amputated. The idiot wet himself. His whimpering, so pathetic. Pah! He severed the hand behind the watch, just below the wrist, to make it easy to retrieve the watch. He dropped his machete, pulled the watch off and flung the hand away in fury; the fool screamed, his eyes following his member, he involuntarily made as if to follow it. That was just before the pain forcefully kicked in. He then fell to the floor, rolling and screaming. The boys just burst out laughing. The whole sequence riled him up so much he kicked the man in the mouth, letting the watch drop in the process. That was how the glass got cracked, but the gold of the chain was so exquisitely beautiful; the crack was a blemish he couldn't bear, and for a time he only carried it in his pocket. It was all he had left now, it and Betty. They had taken everything.

What was there to gain in trying to sleep anymore? All night, he kept waking up to catch himself sleeping, like he was on guard duty. He couldn't sleep; the fits were even more enervating than staying awake. It made no sense. His mind wouldn't stop wandering back. It just would not accept that it was over. The more he struggled, the deeper he fell in the abyss.

He had thought about it so much, he wanted to hold his head in his hands. All that held him back was the thought that he was overreacting, like a character in a book. That was alright in fiction, not in real life. Those gestures were so melodramatic. He had nothing to deal



with this. Maybe the gestures were all he had. Sitting up, he fumbled for the pack. In exasperation he turned on his side, using the dials of the watch on his other wrist to cast a light on the floor around him. It was nearly not enough; he had to strain his eyes. There it was! He lit the reefer, stood up and walked outside.

Taking a long, slow drag, pausing with one leg over the barrier, he stepped over the broken fence. The raw aroma stood out against the cold morning air. He hardly was ever aware of the pungent smell anymore, only occasional wafts registered.

Shrubs murmured indistinctly as he headed for the stream. The first time he came here, he knew nothing about the stream. That was a very long time ago. It was a miracle, really, that he could find his way here at all. How old had he been then? Six? Seven? And they made that journey in a car, his father's. He had sat on his mother's lap all the way, next to his father who concentrated on the road like there was no one else in the car. His two aunties sat in the back with Uncle Freddie, Aunt Margaret's husband. The trees seemed to run past. How could they do that? They didn't have legs, or did they? His mother, tired of his trying to lean out of the window, had only said softly, "Abioseh." But she let him be. They finally made it to the house he had just left behind. It was much smaller than their house in Zwedru. The next day, they laid out Granpa, and many people came in to the sitting room to see him. He lay there, sleeping. Even when he had gone up to the huge box with his mother, Granpa just lay there sleeping, and he didn't snore. He used to snore loudly whenever he came to Zwedru, when he slept in the rocking chair on the balcony.

Walking to Zwedru from Monrovia had taken all of twelve days! Everywhere, the jungle had reclaimed the roads. On more than one occasion, the thought of an old drawing depicting Livingstone and his porters hacking their way through the Congo flashed through his mind. On those occasions, he hacked at the undergrowth with more vigour. But those bursts of energy never lasted. He had trudged on, more out of desperation than out of any faith in his plan. What was the point in sleeping night after night in the club? He probably would have frittered away all of the \$300 he got for the AK47. There had been no point to staying on in the capital.

He was familiar with most of the country outside the capital, at least as far as Meyonga. That part of his journey posed no problems. They had spent most of 2002 in those parts, until they had successfully forced that Taylor and his hateful NPFL stooges out office. It was these same parts that he knew from when he had

been taken from his home in October 1992 when he was eight. The second band of rebels found him where the first left him. By that time, he had at least stopped trying to put his mother's head back on her body. He had stopped crying. He had stopped calling out, "mummy," intermittently; he was just starrng, seeing nothing really. They dragged him on to the balcony by his left arm, the blood that soaked his trousers leaving a trail as he had refused to get up. There, they beat him till he passed out. When he came to, he was in a large compound. He later found out that the compound used to be the First Baptist Church Elementary School, Gbanka. The NPFL made it a different kind of school for children like him. They taught them to use an AK47, to crawl stealthily through the brush. In short, they prepared them for the assaults on Monrovia and the fighting that continued until 1996.

Then there had been the Save the Children transit centre, there, he tried to unlearn all the violence. The wounds were too deep to heal; the demons, too powerful to be exorcised. But at least, they taught him to read better and rekindled his love for books. The remedial training had given him hope for a time that he would go to Cuttington University, like his parents. Even if he had been strong enough to forgive the NPFL for what they did to him, the greed and tyranny of Taylor and his National Patriotic Party government had offered no prospects for the future. Perhaps that was why the rhetoric of the LURD got his ear and he had taken up arms again. However, lurking at the back of his mind was a sinister thought, that violence and war were the only trades he knew. He wouldn't accept that, he would try to start afresh.

In Tapeta, he had met a band which was heading for Zwedru. There was nothing left of the house. Indeed, had it not been for some buildings which were inexplicably left untouched and some partly burnt sign posts and, most especially, the baobab tree that had dominated their street and which stood out in his memory, the Government Reservation Area would have been more difficult to find. He spent three days at the UNHCR camp, most of it at the family tracing board, searching for word of his aunties. He went over the boards again and again, searching for something, anything he could call his, anyone whom he knew or who would know him. Nothing, no one, it was as if he was an alien. He felt like he was in a far country, vast plains of emptiness. There were so many people on the roads, in the camps, haggard, hungry, much like him but he felt so alone. He had made his way to Baubli, his grandfather's village. The old house still stood although it was falling to the ground. It was in this village that he learnt that the Ivoirians were being offered \$900 to turn in weapons.



The water was icy cold as it dripped down his face and fell in between his laps. The air moved over his face, stinging his nose. He threw more water as fast as he could. Now his ears were feeling strangely dry, so he swung forward, touching the moist earth with his knees, and placed his ear on the stream and rotated his head so that his face, then his other ear entered the water. Having filled his mouth with water as he returned to an upright position, he began to make brushing motions inside his mouth with his index finger. The drops of water creeping down his spine made him shiver involuntarily. The time was now 5 a.m. One day, he should drop this watch in to a bucket of water and leave it for a while to see if it really was waterproof like the etching on the back claimed. Right now, he had to hurry if he wanted to catch up with Aboubakar. By now, the man would have collected the palm wine he was taking to the city of Guiglo.

Guiglo was closer to Baubli than any of the cities in Liberia. The thought made him think about his Granpa. The old man used to regale him with stories of how farmers from Baubli, since ancient times, carried on trade with regions that were now inside Cote d'Ivoire. Granpa told stories that Granpa's grandfather had told Granpa. His favourite ones were about how they avoided being killed by wild animals. Sometimes they fled for dear life, leaving produce behind and leaving friends to their own devices. They were funny, some of those stories. But some were very scary. Like when great-great grandfather, as a child, had accompanied his own father to the market for the first time and had actually walked on a fallen trunk that turned out to be a python! There were also tales about evil spirits of the forest, battles with head-hunters and slavers.

Granpa had had a pick-up van with which he took his and some of the other farmers' produce across the border. There were no yams, manioc or maize these days, just vegetables and palm wine.

Aboubakar had traded a rifle for a motorcycle, and he hoped he would get a similar deal. There were middlemen, civilians with no military experience, who, nevertheless, went through the disarmament process in Yamoussoukro to exchange guns for the \$900 the authorities were offering. They bartered for guns with youths from Liberia. If he got a motorcycle, he would take it back to Monrovia and try to start a business.


Aboubakar was waiting, he had the engine running. Abioseh suspected that if he hadn't agreed to buy the petrol for their journey, he would have been left behind.

"Come make we go." He said with unconcealed irritation.

"I don wait for you."

Abioseh was uncomfortably sandwiched between the kegs and the man as they rode into the east.

EPILOGUE

Betty had made her way from Yamoussoukro into Burkina Faso, concealed with other light arms in a train compartment ostensibly containing a merchandise of skin lightening soap. From there, she travelled to Benin, this time in a truck carrying bales of cotton to the coast to be exported. She was then sold to a Nigerian car smuggler who doubled as an armed robber. The said smuggler had on winning the American visa lottery disposed of his assets to raise his ticket fare. He sold her to a certain Franklin, whom he had met a few years before at a pub and whom he knew was a student of the University of Lagos. 



Haiti, land of the damned...
[17 Jan 2010]

"in one scene, a US helicopter dropped a half-dozen small cartons into a stadium of starving Haitians, some brandishing machetes as they fought for such manna from heaven."

[http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=3&art_id=nw20100117072056119C181514]
<http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=673524>

"...haiti, an international crime scene..."

"Tsikata explained that the World Bank's assistance of US\$100 million will be channeled through both new initiatives and existing project structures to support the recovery and rebuilding efforts. She also said that the Bank will provide seed money to set up a multi-donor Haiti Reconstruction Fund to act as a magnet for recovery and reconstruction funding from the international community.

With a GNI per capita of a US\$560, Haiti is the poorest nation in the western hemisphere. More than half the population lives on less than one dollar a day and 78 percent on less than two. There is a high infant mortality rate (60 for every 1000 births) and the prevalence of HIV among those between 15-49 is 2.2 percent, according to World Bank estimates.

Since January 2005, the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank arm that provides interest-free credits and grants to the world's poorest countries, has provided a total of US\$308 million for Haiti. In addition, trust funds administered by the World Bank have given more than US\$55 million since 2003. These totals do not include the US\$100 million just announced."

[<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/0,,contentMDK:22440566~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:258554,00.html>]

"...(because) of a packed with the devil..."

"...i slept amongst corpses"

[iol, 15 Jan 2010:

[http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=3&art_id=nw20100115190635305C497258]]

"11 canadadians dead in haiti"

[iol, 17 jan 2010]

"It has been a week for thanking God for protecting us. We are suffering a lot. Praying helps us," said evangelical worshipper Anne Pierre, 64, who lost her home but whose family is safe 'thanks to God.'

So many churches were damaged in Tuesday's quake which wrecked Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, that religious



Haitians sheltering in tent cities were asking Catholic priests to hold masses at their makeshift camps.”
[http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=3&art_id=nw20100117222454966C683444]

“Martin Kimani: I am curious about this use of contrast and opacity to illuminate or arrive at a truth since it prioritises distinguishing, seeking the points of difference, the boundaries between states and things as a way of finding out what is truthful about them...churches are now turned into museums, or tombs or mausoleums of a kind. Often the bodies have been left lying as they were during the fatal moment. The guiding idea is that by maintaining the site and the evidence of murder one is able to resist forgetting which is regarded by the authorities as crucial to preventing future genocide...”

[‘A Lowercase condition of humanity - conversation between Martin Kimani and Clementine Deliss, Chimurenga 14: Everyone Has Their Indian]

“But in referring to a historicized timeline, how would the ‘i/we’ escape from the clutched inference of another? Is witnessing a crime not the same as enacting the crime? Enter a universally accepted norm that ensures that in being, the ‘i/we’ does not harm another nor itself but may offend another or/and itself. Mill’ Social tyranny will definitely cry foul here as surely no utilitarian action would result in any type of offence! But then again, who ever said this life game was fair or that truth was finite?! Siding with him, Woozely’s (1967) take is that yes, this ‘good for me’ norm is nothing more than being a subjugation of information over another . But then again unlike Mill, Woozely refrains from (arrogantly) stating that there are exceptions to the rule in that only those considered to be included in the quest of being, can lament at the injustice of any form of social tyranny. Consequently, the subjugated as well as the subjugator of being suffers from a hungry memory, whose referential points of being lack any kind of imagination or semblance thereof that is more perceptive than being objectified in order to interpret information.”

[liepollo, 14 jan 2010]

“Our hearts and prayers go out to those affected by the earthquake,” said Yvonne Tsikata, World Bank Director for the Caribbean.”

[<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/0,,contentMDK:22440566~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:258554,00.html>]

“Abstract:

International donors have invested billions in Haiti over the past two decades, yet Haiti remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and among the poorest in the world. It is also among the most poorly governed. This paper looks at foreign aid from 1985 to 2006, concluding that international donors greatly misperceived Haiti and what would be necessary to help the country and that Haitians were unable or unwilling to sort out governance issues for their part. The paper offers important lessons for foreign assistance to other fragile or failed states.”

[Terry Buss: unformatted Document Text: A Working Paper by Staff of the NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION February 2006 1100 New York Avenue, N.W. Suite 1090 East Washington, DC 20005 Phone: (202) 347-3190 Fax: (202) 393-0993 Web: www.napawash.org. International Affairs Series Academy International Affairs Working Paper Series Academy International Affairs Working Paper Series cover7x10_final 3/9/06 12:09 PM Page 1]

Repeating islands

[<http://repeatingislands.com/>]

“i shot the leader”

[kudzanai chiurai]

{TBC} 



FEAR – THE ENEMY OF GENDER EQUALITY

Temitayo Olofinlua

Winning Essay, WLP's Youth Essay Contest
Group 2: 18-25 Years

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? ... As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." Marianne Williamson

A woman's fate is determined by men and women who play God. Her first gift is a doll-named-Baby with which she rehearses home maker, wife and mother. She is groomed to be a 'proper woman' — the silent one when the men are talking. All these in preparation for her husband's house; is that not where all 'good' women end? A woman's worth is defined first by her father, then her husband and last by the children she bears. She's more blessed if she bore boys. If it's a girl child, irrespective of her career success, she has to follow her mother's steps. A 'good woman' doesn't break the cycle! That's not all, these 'inequality gods' add spice to her lifespan with other tough stops like the lack of freedom of choice; gender discrimination; rape and assaults of all kind. A woman should not allow these 'inequality gods', be they spiritual, economic, political or social, to script her life and that of her daughters.

I wish I could say the solution to gender equality is education but women are being educated so much so that they reach challenging heights, yet how much has changed is debatable. I wish I could say that it's more opportunities. Yes, let there be 50:50 opportunities in politics for instance and wait for women to bell the 'political' cat. I wish I could say more sexual freedom—free distribution of female condoms; freedom to keep or abort a pregnancy; freedom to marry or choose not to. Wait a minute, do all these translate to equality? I dream of a gender equal society but wake up with questions.

There have been gender conferences; gender equality policies enshrined in constitutions; gender activism by many organizations; gender equality has a prestigious number three seat on the Millennium Development Goals Document—these show that it's acknowledged that gender inequality has to stop but what I would like to ask is how? I am tempted to say that gender equality lies in the sincere intentions of the government and the civil society but that's not sufficient. A woman has to

strive for it, especially through her decisions. The journey is not for the faint-hearted. That's why I think the sole enemy to gender equality is fear.

In Nigeria, women like Margaret Ekpo famous as the first female politician; Funmilayo Kuti, the first woman to drive a car; Grace Alele Williams who obtained her PhD in Mathematics in 1963; Queen Amina of Zaria who ruled Zaria; the Egba women who fought against imposed taxation in 1939 as well as the Ekiti women who stripped to their waist to protest election malpractices in 2009—fought inequality with every drop of blood in their veins. For each of these exemplary women, there is some other woman aware of her rights but is too afraid to act. Education is good; freedom from social structures makes sense; cultural emancipation is liberating; but my question is what happens after these as we still seem far away from our objective?

Every time I want to raise gender questions through my *Facebook* status, it takes me longer. Not that I want to put my question in the best words but because I spend time thinking whose ox would be gored. I fear some friends would 'blacklist' me as that 'trouble making girl' that should just shut up. I fear that a man who would love me for who I am would step back. Hilarious, isn't it? I also fear creating a scene if I raise my voice against the boys who indulge in a bout of teasing or groping at women in the market. I've made scenes because I learnt that fear kills the woman silent in the face of tyranny. If we don't raise a voice, who will?

Fear has held women down for too long. Fear of what people will say. Fear of the unknown, of the society. Fear of not being heard. Fear of not getting another man to marry silences a raped girl. Fear grips not only women; it claws deep in the brains of men too. Men fear that a woman—the one who pees from behind, the weaker sex—would be equal with



them. Fear rules the world and keeps us fixed on a spot though it seems we are moving.

Women may be educated and gender-conscious but the real story at the home front might come to the observer as a shock. We should ask—how is a girl raised? Why is she raised to be another ‘good woman’? Why is a girl not brought up to be fearless? Let’s return to the cradle and answer these questions with sincerity. We should change the way we nurture our future generations so they have liberated minds, thus creating an equal world for all. Mothers should be courageous to raise brave girls comfortable in their skins with strong voices to say NO to inequality.

In Buchi Emecheta’s *Joy of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego the main character laments when she realizes that she has lived for others but herself. To quote her, “God when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage?” In response, that complete woman is you and me—educated or illiterate; rich or poor regardless of nationality. For ‘complete women’ to live in a gender equal world, courage is important.

As a woman, learn that nobody will give you equality.
You just have to decide that you are taking it. Be fearless and then take it!

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http://www.learningpartnership.org_blog/2010_02_fear-enemy-equality



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WEB EXCLUSIVE (MARCH - APRIL 2010) /www.sarabamag.com/

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ON WRITING GOD

Emmanuel Iduma tells what is expected for the next Saraba.

We have created for ourselves the right of misjudgment, of imperfection, and of the failure of our humanity. This right, which is manifest in many forms, is perhaps most manifest in our consideration and interpretation of God.

Is there any right way to write God? For me, it is not 'write about' God. To write about God would be no different from what has been made of God, and religion. But to *write God* would be to ask questions, to make interpretations and concerns, to attempt an interrogation of how we've gotten to where we are.

But where are we exactly? Are we in a train, bound for Jakarta, whose passengers would not see the next stationmaster? Or are we in Jos? In West Bank? In September 11? Where are we exactly?

And how did we get where we are? Did God blindfold us? Did he come in the guise of a saviour, a prophet, a rebel? How did he lead us? Were we standing so aloof and listless to life that we jumped at our opportunity for freedom, for egocentricism? Did he save us from ourselves? Did we think that we'd be damned if he did not lead us? Or did we lead him? Does he even know the way? Is there a way known to us unknown to him? Do we teach him?

And who is God? Have we thought about us, asked ourselves? But we must have told ourselves that God has enemies whom he must be defended from. We must, assume, evidently, that God is powerless, that he needs some protection. We have gone to India, into deep unmentionable jungles to obtain talismans for God's protection.

Again, who is God? How do we define him? Do we define him by our wishes, or expectations, or our defiance? Has he told us who he is? We must surely have had an experience in a burning bush, some voice speaking from the sky, calling us the beloved and

appointed of God, calling us to become what we have become.

Who have we become? Long-bearded bomb-strapping people? White-garment-women-ministry prophets? Life-sentenced preachers? Member-flogging Bishops? Mass followers of (un)organized prayer houses? Muezzins without mosques?

Are there examples in our collective recent past of attempts to defend God, to become his mouthpieces, to even become him?

Are there ways, literary and creative, with which we can express how we feel about God, who he is, and how he has been represented?

We seek these expressions and more; we'd publish the best. We are calling on writers, especially the emerging, to submit works on the theme of God, and religion. We have a bias for literary works (short fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction), but the big secret is that we also seek works in any genre of creative writing that explore the subject. Send us your best! Deadline is April 30, 2010.

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