The Other Side of a Polluted Coin: White Expatriates in Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*

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Abstract

This study investigates the portrayal of white expatriates in Christie Waston's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away.* Waston, a British writer, interestingly in her novel, *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*, delves into the onerous task of retelling the Niger Delta travails, unarguably, from the lenses of an outsider patriotic and brave enough to tell her side of the disheartening oil exploitation story. The images of white expatriates in Nigerian literature vis-à-vis Niger Delta concerns are almost stereotyped. These expatriate oil workers are recreated as predators that laid siege over the entire region feeding on the impoverished and vulnerable Niger Delta women. These expatriates, aware of the poverty in the region, prey on the Niger Delta girls who are seeking nothing but love, comfort, survival, and some sense of humanity. Against this backdrop, the study argues that Waston, in her novel, reconstructs the images of the white expatriates obviously in her bid to challenge stereotypes. With the character of Dan, who is everything the male Niger Deltans undoubtedly are not, the paper surmises that Waston succeeds in presenting another side of the expatriate story which begs for further studies and insights regarding the activities of the white expatriates and the Niger Delta women amidst the madness of oil exploitation, pollution, and devastation.

Keywords: Expatriates, pollution, exploitation, stereotype, Niger Delta, women

Introduction

Born in 1976, Christie Watson, a British writer, and a retired nurse was a registered pediatrics nurse for twenty years and she spent most of her career in pediatric intensive care in large NHS hospitals before becoming a resuscitation officer, which involved teaching and clinical work on hospital-wide crash teams. A professor of medical and health humanities at the University of East Anglia, Waston won the Malcolm Bradbury Bursary, which enabled her to take an MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia, from where she graduated in 2009. Only recently, Waston was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa* for her contribution to nursing and the arts by the University of East Anglia. She is the patron of the Royal College of Nursing Foundation. Watson lives in London and writes full-time.

Her major writings include *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, *Where Women are Kings*, *Here I Stand*, *The Language of Kindness: A Nurse's Story*, published 3rd May 2018. Her first novel, *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away.* won the Costa First Novel Award and her second novel, Where Women Are Kings was also published to international critical acclaim. Her works have been translated into twenty-two languages.

The novel, *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, remains one of the best books on the environmental issues, violence, exploitation, and struggle for resource control in the region, at least from the literary lenses of an outside observer. The novel is one of the coming-of-age stories on the Niger Delta travails set in Lagos and the Niger Delta, which takes us on an emotional, psychological, socio-cultural as well as religious, economic, and political journey around the Niger Delta region in the miasma of oil exploitation and exploration. Describing the Niger Delta the writer praises thus: The Niger Delta known as "the Big Heart" is home to proud people with good reason. It is a beautiful land with extraordinary wildlife, an amazing landscape, bustling cosmopolitan towns, and peaceful villages. Port Harcourt and Warri are fast becoming centers of cultural importance, with thriving arts and literature scenes, an abundance of restaurants, and independent theater groups. The Niger Delta is a place of laughter, music, and diversity. But the majority of people who live in the Niger Delta survive on less than one dollar a day. They enjoy none of the enormous wealth generated by the oil-rich land. Many people in the Niger Delta have no access to schools, health care, or clean water. They live with the effect of environmental devastation caused by the continued gas flaring and frequent ecological accidents, which have amounted to more than one and a half million tons of spilled oil: starvation, asthma, chest infections, cancers, and birth deformities. They live with the threat of violence, rape, and death.

Though Christie Waston is not from the Niger Delta region, her love for the Niger Delta inspired by their poverty and suffering of the region prompted her research which culminated in the exciting novel, *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away*, a novel that chronicles the myriads of problems of the region from a multi-faceted dimension and told with such a charm, humour and ease possessed by only genuine and talented writers. It is only a sad irony that the oil in Niger Delta became an albatross and inevitably metamorphosed the Niger Deltans into sacrificial lambs whose blood and environment must be poured and sacrificed on the economic altar to keep the wheel of the economy running and the government, politicians and the rest of the people outside the region well nourished. The pollution, impoverishment, spillage, killing, chaos, brutality, oppression, molestation, exploitation, denial, rape, and abuse of the Niger Delta region are unavoidable realities that Watson chronicles in this charming but agonizing tale of the Niger Delta.

The images of white expatriates in African literature have not always been a favourable one. Available evidence and critical works overtime support a popular opinion that these expatriates are more destructive and evil than any positive impact and blessing they are considered to provide to the host community. Echezona Ifejirika in his study of these expatriate figures in some selected African plays gleaned from different regions of Africa notes that the playwrights

cumulatively depict the expatriates as colonialists, oppressors, imperialists, cannibals, exploiters, slave masters, and dealers (73). Ifejirika attests that:

> The expatriates are depicted as murderers, plunderers and killers who often use menial gifts of medals, gun power, trinkets, bicycles, guns and necklaces as baits to confuse and enslave Africans, particularly their leaders. The white colonialists are able to achieve their destructive objectives based on their superior arms; the types they used against Abame people and other communities in Igbo land. (74)

One of the significant realities of the Niger Delta beyond oil spillage, exploitation, devastation, bastardization, and impoverishment of the region, is the abuse and exploitation of the Niger Delta women by the white oil workers, the expatriates who are hell-bent on not just exploiting the oil but also the other human and pleasurable delights the region offers. The girls and women in Niger Delta are preyed on and destroyed in the same manner akin to the destruction and degradation of their environment. An average Niger Delta girl lives in fear of rape, sexual abuse, and harassment constantly. The girl-child suffers exploitation, abuse, and oppression from all fronts in the region. When they are not coping with the problems of pollution, poverty, and devastation, they are struggling to ward off the lustful attacks from the expatriates and oil workers.

The white expatriates in Agary's *Yellow-Yellow,* one of the Niger Delta literature are lucidly portrayed as chief sources of woes in the Niger Delta region emanating from their exploits, and wantonness which only aggravate the problems of the women in the region. Zilayefa's mother comes in handy in this regard. Amidst the madness of pollution and devastation of the region, Ibinaebi, Laye's mother goes to Port Harcourt in search of survival only to have her future and dreams cut short and thwarted by a Greek sailor, Plato Papadopoulos who exploits her innocence and leaves her with an unwanted pregnancy. Ignatius Chukwumah surmises that Laye is: "… a fruit of a Greek father and an Ijaw mother, a father who absconded without the knowledge of his burgeoning seed in the girl that has warmed his bed throughout his short stay in Port Harcourt" (5). Laye's mother was merely a plaything in the hands of the sailor who used her to warn his bed while his short stay in Port Harcourt lasted. As familiar as this experience is in the region, it is pitiable that Ibinaebi who left in search of survival in Port Harcourt only returned with a pregnancy, a rare kind of pregnancy at that. It was not only her dream that was cut short, rather the poor mother was abandoned to live the rest of her life with the trauma and the psychological pain of waiting for the fateful day she would have to tell Zilayefa the true story of her birth and the origin of her white skin colour.

Further, Laye is to embrace that path of exploitation and her travails are not devoid of the encumbrances of another white expatriate, Sergio. Before Laye leaves her polluted village in search of survival in Port Harcourt, just like her mother did, she encounters Sergio, a male white expatriate. Laye takes Sergio to her secret hideout, cooks him a meal, and shares the story of her

life with him. She even allows him to kiss her. We see Sergio almost exploiting and taking advantage of her during their first meeting to fulfill some amorous desires. Later, as the story progresses, Laye journeys to Port Harcourt in her quest to survive and escape her polluted and impoverished village. Recall that Ibinaebi's encounter with Plato, his sudden disappearance did not only usher physical pain, but deep psychological trauma which thwarted both the dreams of a mother and daughter as Laye's search for her father led her to Sergio, which proved another devastating experience in the hands of the white expatriates in Niger Delta region. Chukwumah supports that: "As it turns out, it (Laye's mother's silence) did very little to wear out the mesmerizing power that Papadopoulos's absence exercises over her daughter. Beginning from the devastating spillage, for which the company refused to compensate her community, Papadopoulos's image of an absent comforting male looms just as large in his absence as if he had been present. In Port Harcourt, the search for her father, once ignited, subconsciously resurfaces during her chance meeting with Sergio" (51). In the city, she meets Sergio again and this time, he exploits her sexually, a relationship that only complicates her life and the paternity of her child she already carries. Aware of the plight of the girl-child in the region, Precious Ona affirms that: "to Agary, the suffering (of the female folk) is in two forms: the women suffer in the hands of the foreign oil expatriate and in the hands of local men who discriminate, subjugate and relegate them to the background" (35). In a similar tangent, Joy Etiowo further confirms the protagonist's character in *Yellow-Yellow* as a "sex object" (137). The critic while interrogating the moral consequences of the situation in the Niger Delta, concludes that the young girls become easy sex prey to the white expatriates. In her words:

> The young girls become easy sex preys to the white oil workers and expatriates. *Yellow-Yellow* (the major character) herself is a function of such social malfunctioning, and, unfortunately, later found herself being also a sex object for self-sustenance. This too, is the story of many young ladies, who, against their inner desires, are forced to subject their bodies to sex exploiters (many of whom are the architects of the economic situation that turned them to such in the first instance). (137)

Beyond fiction, Agary, in an interview chat with Geosi Reads reveals the real-life encounter she had at Bonny Island that triggered her narrative in *Yellow-Yellow.* According to Agary:

> After resisting the pressure to expand the story for over a year, I finally got the inspiration for the novel, quite unexpectedly, on a trip to visit a friend on Bonny Island in Nigeria; it would be my first time on the Island. At the waterside in Port Harcourt, waiting to get a boat to the Island, I saw a young man, hustling like every other young man at the waterside, but he was different. He was mixed Asian. I had never seen that mix in Port Harcourt before, and certainly not at a waterside. The story became clearer when I got to Bonny and saw the number of Asians working as part of the Joint Venture with the Nigeria LNG in Bonny. Other things I witnessed in Bonny also contributed to the story" (NP).

An encounter with a mixed Asian boy hustling for a living along the waterside in Bonny changed everything for Agary. The sight of the mixed Asian boy was not just odd but strange and the sight of many Asians working as part of the Joint Venture with the Nigeria LNG in Bonny bared the reality to Agary and proved the tunic she needed to narrate her side of the Niger-Delta story. These were children fathered by these Asians, who in the course of executing their jobs, happed on the poor and impoverished Niger-Delta girls for sexual pleasure and gratification leaving them with children that bear testimony to the rather illicit relationship. After the Bonny encounter, Agary had a story to tell, the story of children being fathered by white expatriates who they would never know or meet and the fate of these biracial children in the years to come, most importantly, how the society would receive and relate to them. Yellow-Yellow lives as a bitter testament of the activities of the white expatriates in Niger Delta beyond the oil theft and exploitation.

Against this backdrop, Waston offers an entirely significant narrative of the Niger Delta women and the white oil expatriates symbolized in the epitomized relationship between Dan, a white oil worker, and Timi, the protagonist's mother and a Niger-Delta woman which triggered our present study on images of the white expatriate in the novel of Christie Waston.

Critical Analysis

Waston's novel, *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away,* is weaved around the girl-child protagonist, Blessing, an Ijaw girl with a Yoruba father. Raised in Lagos by her mother, Timi, alongside her asthmatic brother, Ezikiel, who was two years older than her, Blessing's early years of growing up were marked by affluence. Blessing and Ezikiel attended the best schools and were filled with high hopes and dreams about the future. Ezikiel, at a very tender age, develops a special fondness for medicine and decides to be a doctor. He grows up with a special fondness for one of his medical books, *Encyclopedia of Tropical Medicine* from where he learns jaw-breaking medical terminologies and preps himself for his future career. Sad enough, this happiness and an affluent lifestyle in Lagos is not destined to last forever and neither were the dreams of Blessing and Ezikiel. A sharp twist of fate twisted not just the life of Blessing but that of her mother and her brother too. After Blessing's mother caught her husband cheating, and since he was not sorry for his actions, she decides to leave him and Lagos for good. Unable to afford the exorbitant rent in Allen Avenue, Timi decides to relocate to her father's house in the village, a rather remote village which is near Warri, in the very heart of Niger Delta.

It is this movement from Lagos to the remote village in the Niger Delta, which is symbolic of a movement from affluence to poverty that revealed the rot, decay, poverty, pollution, and exploitation that are part and parcel of the Niger Delta. Through the unblinking eyes of the twelve years old Blessing, we see beyond the physical abuse of the environment, the psychological, traumatic, and emotional problems accruing from pollution, impoverishment, and devastation of the region on the Niger Deltans, most especially the female folk. Despite Ezekiel's fears and protest against returning to the region, Timi, running away from the disgrace and

memories Lagos holds for her, makes up her mind. She believes it is long overdue to make that unspectacular return to her village after she elopes with her Yoruba husband without fulfillment of the traditional rites of marriage. Like the prodigal daughter she assumes, Timi returns to reunite with her father Alhaji, a Christian turned Muslim and her mother simply identified as Grandma. The life in the village contrasts with the bubbles of affluence Blessing has grown to know in her twelve years of existence in Lagos. The food is different as everything else smacks of poverty and failure. Blessing laments: "…the food tasted strange and my fingers full of parasites, but I felt as though I could not leave any at all. My stomach was angry. I could not stop thinking of the dirt on my hands, the lack of soap, and the pounded yam that did not taste at all like pounded yam…" (16). Back to Ijaw, Timi and her two children were confined in a room that contained nothing but only one mattress without a sheet is meant for the three of them. While describing the room, Blessing recognizes the absence of a pillow, blanket, and mosquito net. Even the tall fan that stood against the wall had not seen electricity for months and Alhaji could not afford a generator: "No electricity! Cold things raced through my mind: fridges, drinks, fans, air-conditioning." (17) That same morning, on a tour to the village, Blessing encounters pollution in its depth. The smell of the water first greeted her nostrils before she saw the river already rendered inactive by pollution. Yet, in sharp contrast, at the other side of the region, the oil workers thrive in good life free of rot, pollution, and nuisance of the region, a life of affluence hinged on the resources of the exploited natives.

Timi, Blessing's mother, after she returns from the city, is exposed to the poverty in the region. Faced with a high scale of unemployment and a gloomy future, she struggles to survive and the struggle means her children will have to make do with the little standard of education she could afford. Later, she manages to secure a job in the highlife Bar where she attends to white expatriates and oil workers. Her experience as a bar attendant availed her with firsthand experience on the wide gulf and socio-economic margin between the natives and the oil workers. She describes this gulf to her children: "…from the table we were sitting at I could see a troop of monkeys travel across the trees. It's like a national park. Honestly, I can't believe that the other side of the wall is another world. One minute you're in the oily swamp, the next, five-star luxury. Cool, air-conditioned, five-star luxury." (61) She hopes that her children get a chance to visit her workplace someday in the hope that they too will be privileged to: "see civilization during the day" (62). Sadly, the meager salary she earns as a bar attendant, despite the many times she toils and serves the oil workers and white expatriates, proves insufficient to cater to the growing needs in her family. Ezikiel and Blessing had to stop school until their mother is able to provide their school fees. Unable to raise the school fees for her two children to be in school at once, Blessing drops out of school, and before Timi could raise the money to send her back, she embraces the job of a birth assistant under her grandmother, a role that was later to redefine her and decided her future in the region.

Christie Watson in *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away,* draws attention to the reality of the female folk in the Niger Delta region. Like earlier hinted, the story of the Niger Delta women, their travails, and

emotional cum psychological trauma in the hands of the white expatriates are stories that still remain largely untold. Due to the alarming poverty in the region, the white oil workers see the Niger Delta women as mere playthings, some sources of distraction to help them cope with the challenges of their jobs. These women are abused, played on, and oftentimes, dumped at will, perhaps to jump into the thighs and waiting arms of another unsuspecting girl or in extreme circumstances, abandoned, once their stay in the region is over. This would not have caused any serious notice if not that many of the expatriates see the girls as some objects to be exploited to satisfy their libidinous and amorous sexual needs. These sexual dalliances, in the long run, end in deep-rooted psychological trauma, pain, and loneliness for the abandoned girls who are asking for nothing to be loved in return for their love. In Waston's novel, this reality of Niger Delta women seems to draw support and significance even from the title of the novel. The novel appears to offer various shades of symbolic and interpretative meanings unearthing the exegesis of Waston's chronicle. One of such perspectives conjectures that the Niger Deltans, especially their women, appear to the expatriates as some weird exotic objects to be admired and used for pleasurable purposes, a sort of hobby to kill time in the midst of exploration, exploitation, and pollution. The women are abandoned afterward, and all that is left to survive in the memories of the white expatriates will be memories of those tiny sunbirds–the Niger Delta women– plucked and tasted in a place very far away– the Niger Delta region, thus, an arguable symbolic implication of the title– *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away.* Little wonder too, Dan has a special interest in the collection of various rare species of birds, the tiny sunbirds inclusive.

From Watson's narratives, the result of Timi's failure to carter for her children propelled her to embrace a pathway familiar to many women in the region. She gets entangled in an affair with a white expatriate, Dan, whom she had met in the Highlife Bar and what started like mere friendship, veered into a supposedly romantic relationship. Blessing describes him: "Dan was surely the whitest man in the world. I could see through the skin of his arms. His veins were the color of the hottest part of a flame. They branched down his hands and forearms, which were poking out from his short-sleeve shirt… I noticed he had no hair on his chest. Even Ezikiel has three chest hairs" (166). As expected, Timi's relationship with Dan suddenly means more money for the family and Timi could afford to pay Blessing's school fees although the money came too late after Blessing had already shunned school in favour of her apprentice job as a birth attendant. Timi's relationship with Dan means the family can now afford a little of the life they missed and desired– A generator, good food, and money. But Ezikiel, as if fully aware of the implication and the foreseeable end of Dan's relationship with his mother, and the unwanted presence of the expatriates in the region, refused to accept the affair. Ezikiel laments: "I wish he was purple. I've never seen anybody that white. He looks like a ghost. Of all the men Mama could have' – he paused– 'she chose a white man to be her boyfriend" (187). Even Grandma, Timi's mother, views Dan with a high degree of skepticism. After her eyes caught Timi and Dan kissing underneath the almond trees in their compound, all she could mutter is: "Big trouble,' she said repeatedly. '*Wahala, wahala, wahala*" (171). Owing to the common experiences with the white expatriates and the Niger Delta women, it is easy for Grandma and the rest of the household,

including Alhaji to wear a pessimistic outlook regarding the foreseeable danger that is bound to accrue from the affair. Ezikiel rebels against Dan the first day he visits and gives him chocolate:

> "You give me chocolate bar? A chocolate bar? Offer to help me find a school, well, instead of that, I'd prefer my countryback, please… 'You people come here'–Ezikiel slammed his fist onto the tabletop, making us all jump– 'and take our women'–he looked at Mama–'and our money. And our jobs.' You pay people to kill us, and you rape our land, then our women! And you give me chocolate bar?" (203)

Amidst the tension and uneasiness created by Ezikiel, it is much surprising that Dan is ready to stomach it all and continues to visit and provide the needed assistance to the family even at the risk of his life. Every visit exposes him to the risk of being kidnapped and brutally killed by any of the different militant groups springing up daily in the region. Popular among them are the Sibeye Boys whom Ezikiel suddenly begins to admire and develop a fondness to their cause. Dan's constant visit to Timi's poor house where he struggles with mosquitoes and insects that are very dangerous to his health begins to give the rest of the family some faint hope that he might actually be different and probably in love with Timi. Every opportunity Dan had, he utilizes it to show love to Timi's family. Once Celestine, Alhaji's second wife, hits on Dan and tries to force him to sleep with her. In the discovery of the act, Dan assumes responsibility, and in the most gentle manner, he ensures Alhaji and Timi are well pleased and placated and that normalcy returns to the fragile relationship he enjoys with the family. Yet, in the midst of the gradual but slow acceptance of Dan coupled with his constant effort to make Timi and her household his family, the scuffle between him and Ezikiel over his mother rather than abating deteriorated and degenerated. After Ezikiel fails his exams and his teacher asked to drop out, he feels demoralized him and his dreams of becoming a medical doctor seem to erode before his eyes. In the spirit of love, Dan offers to find him a new school and carter for his expenses but Ezikiel blatantly rejects his offer. Severally he brutalizes Dan and pushes him violently which he endures for the sake of his love for Timi. Blessing captures one of the moments thus:

> I watched Dan for signs of fear or anger, but all I saw was the smile fixed on his lips. It looked as if Mama had painted it there with her tiny paintbrush. His eyes smiled. I had no idea what Dan was thinking, even though I could see his body through his thin skin. 'I came to visit your mother,' said Dan. 'And you.' He stepped forward. I thought he might give Ezikiel a chocolate bar. My legs shook. My heart fluttered again between beats. It was worse than the chocolate bar. Dan tried to hug Ezikiel. Ezikiel pushed Dan so far backward that he nearly fell into the doorway. He walked back out, hands up, and smiled again. (208-209)

Ezikiel, undeterred and unappeased, stands his ground and defends his actions: 'Because he deserves it.' Ezikiel pushed Dan again, harder, and Dan slid across the floor, almost losing his balance. 'Do you know what kind of man he is?' Ezikiel was screaming then…" (209). Further in the narrative, following Dan's engagement with Timi, Ezikiel continues to curse Dan: "White

gold? That is what you are! That is what they call the oyibos around here! You people take our black gold and we take you. What do you know about our past?' Ezikiel stood up, 'Of course our present?' He was shouting then, with a man's voice. "And what do you know of our future?" (246). In reality, it is clear that Ezikiel's anger is not only triggered by Dan's relationship with his mother and their proposed marriage, rather his anger is exacerbated by his presence and the presence of the likes of him who invaded their region to exploit their oil, their women and their land leaving them with nothing but poverty and pollution. It is easy to argue that Ezikiel considers Dan's relationship with his mother as a double-edged crime– the exploitation and devastation of a region in one hand and on the other, the plundering and exploitation of his mother. This is a crime he is neither to ignore nor forgive. Grandma too voices her innermost feeling on their intended marriage thus: "…oil and water do not mix! You are made of water, you are a part of the Delta, and the river runs through you. That man'–Grandma pointed to Dan– 'is made of oil!" (247). Nonetheless, in a rather dramatic irony and a twist of expectations, Dan continues to prove a point that he is different and worthy of Timi's hand in marriage. It is real love after all. Dan manages to stand out among the bulks of his likes the region is familiar with– insensitive, exploitative, inhumane, and unfeeling bunches of white expatriates. Dan, like a lone star, shines in the hearts of Timi's family. Alhaji realizes from his numerous encounters that Dan was a different brand of a white expatriate– kind, compassionate, humane, and sensitive. He is not insensitive to the plight of Niger Deltans and wishes things were different for them. He shares Alhaji's sentiment with their presence in the region and wishes he could alter things for the people. It did not take much persuasion to have his consent to the wedding.

On his wedding day, Dan shares his excitement with Ezikiel: "This is going to be a good day, really, I'll bet you're as excited as I am. I can't wait to see your mother… I mean it's not every day you get married! I've been awake all night– I hope my eyes stay open, just excitement really, couldn't sleep. Well, I'm sure you kids will have a great day, lots of food, dancing. It'll be really fantastic. Really great!" (256). This chatter coupled with Ezikiel long nurtured sadness towards Dan fuels Ezikiel rage and sets his mind to execute his evil plans on Dan's wedding day. After the church wedding, the couple, against security advice, returns to Alhaji's compound for the reception. Ezikiel, fuming had threatened Dan with Sibeye Boys and before they could make sense of his threat, the Sibeye boys arrived and kidnaped Dan, and scattered the wedding reception. It took Grandma's activism after she led Blessing and other women to protest naked in front of Western Oil Company to shame the Sibeye Boys to release Dan. Ezikiel lost his life after the pipeline he tries to vandalize with the Sibeye Boys caught fire and burned over twenty boys. He died days after the severe burnt and was buried in the compound. Irrespective of Ezikiel's death among other bizarre and dangerous chains of events, Dan had succeeded in weaving his way into the hearts of Timi's family and Grandma confirms this fact when she led the women to protest naked in front of the gate of Western Oil Company, and releasing Dan was top on their demands: "We want Dan freed! We are singing for the deaths that will continue to happen unless we are listened to" (302). The love for Dan is fully captured in the dance between

Celestine, Blessing, and other women while protesting naked at the gate of Western Oil Company. Blessing recounts:

> …I have never seen Celestine dance like that. Her body was water. She looked small and moved easily. It was a complete surprise. I could hear music despite there being none. I could see, from her movements the pain of losing Ezikiel, of losing Dan, of becoming the second wife of Alhaji. Her body spoke to everyone that day….Her dance was infectious. We were all dancing within minutes. It felt good to move freely. I danced out the pain of Ezikiel's death. I danced out my own pain. I danced away Father. I danced for Dan. Dan who was see-through and loved birds. Mama would never find Dan on top of another woman, of that I was sure. She needed him and I needed her. I danced for Dan, and danced and danced. It felt like praying, like flying. (304)

Dan undoubtedly is to Blessing's mother, everything her Father was not, everything even the Niger Delta men will likely not be to the mother. Dan loves Timi and the fear of heartbreak, the cheating that led to her separation from Blessing's father is well dismissed in Blessing's thought. Complimenting the twist of Waston's narrative, Dan after his release, against all odds, made his way back to Alhaji's compound to mourn Ezikiel and pledge his lasting love to Timi and her family. This is against contrarily expectations. With no regard for his safety, uniting with the family he has grown to love and be part of was a priority in his mind: "Mama lifted her head for the first time in weeks. She stood suddenly and ran towards the gate… Dan's body swallowed Mama until they were tightly wrapped into one person…. 'Blessing' he said and held his arms out again as if he expected me to run into them too. I stood still in my mind, but my body ran and hugged him. I had no control over my legs. They were running. Dan hugged me tight; it feels as though he might not ever let me go…" (306).

At this juncture, the study surmises that from the confluent flow of Waston's narrative, the writer obviously takes an entirely different dimension on the stereotyped story of the white expatriates and the Niger Delta women. Dan is not the typical white expatriate we encounter lest say in the fictional world of Kaine Agary in her *Yellow-Yellow* nor the expatriates in other African fiction. Dan is of a different sort and breed. He is honest and it is clear he has no intentions of exploiting Timi. He feels sorry for her like he feels sorry for the exploitation and pollution of the region. He needs Timi not just for some play objects but to replace a dark part of his soul, to blight the sadness in his soul from a failed marriage he previously had. Timi's marriage to him proved the best thing that can ever happen to him which he describes thus: "It was the happiest day of my life," Dan said. My own family. When I asked Timi if she'd write her own vows, less traditional than the obey me sort, she was, well, sort of perplexed. 'Why would I?' She asked. Oh, the joy I felt. A simple thing, a marriage between a man and a woman. So simple really. So beautiful" (308). It is real love, a symbiotic and selfless love that gives as much as it is willing to take. Blessing confesses this further thus:

> Dan cried like I'd never seen a man cry. I wondered how a person's body could contain so much water. Dan produced enough tears to put out Ezikiel's fire. The smell of burning was replaced with water. I thought of Dan having a wife who did not love him, and a father who left. I thought of all those hurts coming out in his loud, saved-up tears. I realized that all the time I thought Dan was saving Mama, it was saving Dan. (310)

Even after his release from the kidnapping den, he still returns to that one place where he plucked peace and submits himself, a demonstration that thrilled Alhaji and won the heart of Grandma and the couple had no choice but to give their unreserved blessing which they sealed once more with a Muslim wedding against the Christian wedding the couple earlier had. Dan, on his part, is unperturbed about the different weddings under the auspices of different religious leaders, if that is the only way he could prove his loyalty and fidelity to the family that has given him so much– the love of his life that will not only heal him but save him from the bitter memories of the unhappy marriage he had years ago. Dan is granted leave to return to London and he does so with the love of his life, Timi. In London, they will certainly live happily ever after. Blessing, at the very last minute in the airport, changes her mind not to travel with them. For the love of the Niger Delta, Grandma, and the women who are in dire need of her service as a birth attendant, after Grandma, she stays back to defend her Delta, her environment, her people. She would someday visit London but will be fast to return to her Delta to suit her and continue to numb and balm her pains.

Conclusion

The title of the novel, *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away,* from a deconstructive perspective, supports that the tiny sunbirds in a very faraway place are symbolic of the Niger Delta women. The title arguably suggests that the Niger Delta women appear as some wild exotic objects to be admired and used for pleasure, a sort of hobby just like the different kinds of birds, including the tiny sunbirds were a source of pleasure and hobby to Dan. Collecting species of birds was Dan's hobby and Blessing, while peeping through the list of the names of the different birds he has collected, picks out the names of the tiny sunbirds which later becomes the title of the novel. The Niger Delta women appear to the expatriates what the birds are to Dan – pleasurable hobbies to ease boredom while still in the region. On return to their home countries, to their wives and loved ones, all that would survive in their minds, years after they are gone, are the lascivious memories of some 'tiny sunbirds' in a faraway place in the Niger Delta. Yet, against this conjectured and stereotyped story of the expatriates, Waston takes entirely a different critical dimension. The reason is not farfetched. Arguably, Waston is a white woman, a British writer who is bent on countering what she probably perceived as a one-sided story between the expatriates and the Niger Delta women. Watson is bent on changing the narrative and proving that the inevitable encounter between the white expatriates and the female folk in Niger Delta could be anything but beautiful, fulfilling, blissful, and romantic capable of a happy ending that is typical of many love stories as it is the case with Dan and Timi in the novel. From the exegesis of Waston's chronicles, the paper surmises and concludes that Watson succeeds in pushing the

conversation forward while soliciting for further discussions on the way we perceive and reckon the activities of the white expatriates in the Niger Delta region if not beyond.

Furthermore, from the activism of Grandma and the other women in the novel, the writer speaks directly to our souls. The Ijaw women are not fools and mere sex objects to the capitalists' men, oil workers, and white expatriates, and given the right exposure, opportunity, and access to good education, they are bound to succeed and excel. This is the enduring lesson the likes of Timi, Celestine, Blessing, and all the memorable women in Waston's *Tiny Sunbirds, Far Away* communicate to the rest of the world from the chronicles of an eyewitness observer of the Niger Delta brouhaha. Further studies are begging to support and lend credence to this Watson's side of the white expatriates and the Niger Delta women's story.

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