

IDENTITY AND THE CONFLICT OF RESOURCE CONTROL IN AHMED YERIMA'S HARD GROUND

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Abstract

This paper looks at the issues of resource identity and resource control struggle in the Niger Delta as reflected in the play Hard Ground by Ahmed Yerima. The paper deepens its look at how inequalities and deprivations have found its way into educational controversies and resource control struggles. The given circumstances of the characters, their knowledge of their situations, their goals, expectations, values and the means of achieving what they want are spelt out, that is why Nimi who is the pivotal agent of the action of the play leaves school and enroll as a child-soldier, sacrificing to save their future which he sees as a constricting horizon and a blind alleys. This paper emphasizes the relationship among the physical environment of the characters, their mind and brain; where whatever pains the characters feel in their environment affect their psychological make-up which is immediately reflected by a corresponding neurological state in the brain that in turn conditions the way they structure their actions. It has been clearly pictured that armed militia and oil installation equipment canalization in the Niger Delta are responses to inequalities and deprivations which the Niger Delta people are subjected to. Therefore, the society should ensure that the issues of human environment and their basic needs are promptly attended to without delay.

Introduction

Identity deals with the manner the individuals, groups of persons or ethnic nationalities answer the question, who are we? It is a combination of how they see themselves and what others perceive them to be. Kath Woodward (2004) makes it clear that "identity is partly

Internal and subjective” on the one hand, and “partly external and dependent on the judgment of others”, on the other (as cited in Haralambus and Holborn 2004, p. 819). Richard Jenkins (2004) states that:

Identities are formed and stabilize in a dialectical relationship between the internal and the external factors which interact to produce identity. On the contrary, how others see us and react to us may contradict and undermine, or support and strengthen our view of ourselves (as cited in Haralambus and Holborn, 2004, p. 826).

Every one that has come of age tries to create an identity to which he could be known and referred to; and in whatever ways a man is known and addressed is the product of the combination of series of identities. Apart from the individual cases, there are also collective identities which go beyond countries and ethnic communities. For an inter-group crisis to occur, the oppositions must have a sense of collective identity about who they are; and who their adversaries are. Each side believes that the fight is between "Us and them" (Kriesberg 2003). Giving this condition, some of these conflicts become intractable, raging destructively for a long time. They fight each other because of the identities they hold about themselves and their opponents.

In the drama under review, the characters are holding strong to resource identity which they cherish most and the anger of losing their rights to this long held identity has brought them into open confrontation with state powers and the multi-nationals within their region. In the faces of alienation the characters feel injured and are strongly willing to sacrifice their individual lives in order to preserve their territorial identity. Woodward declares that “identities are always formed through a combination of individual agency, structural constraint, and interpellation” (2004, p. 819). One of the ways by which the characters develop their identity is what Erving Goffman describes as "the presentation of self in everyday life." where the society in which the characters dwell is likened to a dramatic presentation; where they stage a show for others who are the supposed audience. The actions of the performers are done in a convincing manner so that the observers will know who they are. Just in the same way actors do in the dramatic theatre (as cited in Woodward in Haralambus and Holborn, 2004, p. 820).

Aja Akpuru-Aja in *Basic Concepts of Conflict* (2010) explains that in metalinguistic societies, like we have in Nigeria, “ethnicity finds its way into many issues as control of state power, development plans, educational controversies, resource control struggles, land dispute and many more.” These issues become entangled within the “wider ethno-national conflict,” which makes conflict become complex and lasting. In line with the view of Akpuru-aja therefore, identity conflict the dramatic text under investigation is all about ethnic and national attitudes which is demonstrated in the way the characters’ pursue their “needs and values, that can only come by confronting state powers, competing ethnic rivalries and by destroying oil installation equipment within their domain

Synopsis

Ahmed Yerima’s **Hard Ground** is a seasoned confrontation of the many-sided oppressive elements that reduce the worth of living by power brokers in a multi-ethnic nationality of

Unequal hegemony. Nimi, the play's hero drops out of school to be enlisted in the local armed militia as a child soldier to protest the wildering economic gap between his people in whose land oil is exploited and the dominant/bourgeois class who dominate and control the oil politics. Soon, Nimi is caught in an intricate web of struggle when he gets in the way of a war lord who abducts him alleging him of murdering his boys. Nimi's parents pay a fortune for his release. But the boy is determined to return to the jungle and resume the struggle despite efforts by his parents to restrain him.

While in the jungle, Nimi has also abducted a teenage girl who already is carrying his unborn child and the trauma for separating from his first love frequently registers in his mind with a certain force of alienation. Before his return, he is informed of the girl's demise along with the unborn baby, having ruthlessly been murdered by Don, the war lord, who perceives her as a police informant and a security threat to life in the jungle. Nimi plots revenge not just for the death of his immediate family but for the serial killings in his larger family. So when Baba, Nimi's father, disguises as the Don and comes on a visit (knowing that Nimi would attack him to be relieved of his trauma), he is on appearance murdered by Nimi. Thus there is a form of classical allusion to Sophocles' *King Oedipus* (1988) as the audience once again, views the murderous act of a son done gruesomely against his own biological father.

Poverty as suggested in the play's title (*Hard Ground*) is one motif that sustains the play's rhythm and gives cause to the formation of a local armed militia as a proper response aimed at either repositioning the oil politics or at least, balance the power ratio. The analysis of the play shall then attempt to discourse these perspectives of inequality and the response elicited.

Inequality and the Identity Ratio

In the Niger Delta region where the play is set, issues of inequality especially between the people who feel marginalized and the government have become increasingly a topical issue. The debate is further complicated when the oppressed group are confused about the true identity of the oppressor. In recent time (precisely in the 2000s) government has come under serious critical attack as the perpetrator of the people's suffering given the federal structure of the polity and the politics of revenue management and distribution. But government has repeatedly deflected the accusation to the people themselves who it claims fail to utilize their quota of the allocation to develop their region. These inconsistencies have given rise to a form of escalated fight, often directed to no target in particular but is sustained by the belief that the casualties are only symbolic victims whose sufferings could lead to the identification of the actual cause of the imbalance.

The play's hero has dropped from school not because he has envisaged becoming a child soldier but due to his inability to fund his education. In the setting of the play, the school system is operated either by the government where fees are low for the common people to receive education or by individuals and corporate entities. This latter type is expensive and meant only for the middle working group and the bourgeois class. Both areas offer qualitative training especially at the basic level. Nimi is from the poor class and until the time, he drops from college, has been in the public school. His inability to fund his training in this sector

Reveals the imbalance in the economic structure and the choice of being a child-soldier becomes a costly sacrifice aimed at correcting the anomaly.

There are a number of reasons for the growing economic gap between the people in the area where the resources are exploited and the dominant ethnic groups. Lack of proper education comes top on the list. Nimi's withdrawal from school is employed by Yerima to paint the portraits of young children of school age who are always unable to attend a reasonable level of education due to poverty. Even where efforts have been made by government to create a tuition-free learning, many of the children cannot yet foot the cost of staying in school because they are often used by their parents in the primary occupation as additional productive force to augment the family's upkeep.

Yerima uses Nimi's family as a metaphor for assessing the economic life of the average home of the oppressed group in the Niger Delta. The fact that Nimi's parents are unable to keep him in the public school being the only child in a family of three describes more forcefully the extent of poverty among the people as Nimi puts it:

The school you sent me to be made up of a wasteland and poverty. And even as a child you smell it and you quickly learn that nothing is free, unless you ask for it, and when they refuse to give you, you grab it, and that is what we are doing. Boys first growing up fighting for bean cakes ad puff-puff then, gradually, we were forced to grow to become men overnight. Asking for our rights (p.u)

This confirms the claim of Fanon in the discourse on decolonization in the *Wretched of the Earth* (1964) that the social structure must be change from top to bottom; and that 'the extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded". He summarizes it all when he says that decolonization is a "programme of complete disorder" (p.27). Since the youths hardly become educated, they compete less in the productive sectors requiring skilled training, the result is the forfeiture of gainful employment that otherwise would enhance their condition of living. The loss of school opportunities is a motif which is pursued by other playwrights in the region. Clark in *All for Oil*(2000) shows the efforts the new generations of parents who have been unable to attend school in their youths are making to train their children when we find a woman urging on the man administering punishment on her truant boy in the opening scene of the second part of the play.

It is paradoxical to learn that the Niger Delta area which was perhaps first to establish contacts with the Whiteman in the early phase of imperialism due to the wealth in agricultural produce in the region is now, at the post-colonial period of Nigeria, relegated to the background in respect to education when it should logically be in the forefront. One way to explain this is to admit that although the Whiteman arrived on the shores of his colonies in Africa with education and religion as tools to civilize and imperialize his subjects, many of the people on the coast rejected these institution due to the manner in which some of the ideals were enforced, especially the methods which clashed with local and communal interest as seen in his trade relations where discrepancies were seldom in the interest of the natives. The aversion from education which served as a response to protest imperial exploitation has sadly

Lingered in the area till the present day; being viewed as an aspect that alienates them from the enjoyment of modern infrastructural and developmental programmers.

The second most important natural factor which deepens the inequality can be seen from its geography. According to Isedu and Erhabor (2004), the Niger Delta consists of different ecological areas grouped under a larger river delta in a tropical region including fresh water, swamp forests, coastal bridge barriers, mangroves and low land rain forest. Located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria and rated as the third largest wetland in the world. This is the region with enormous oil treasure but prone to coastal dangers such as frequent rise in sub-terranean waters and high tides. This unfriendly terrain is described by Nimi when he laments:

...He did not create all these sufferings. No. God created a fine life for us, Mama, but a few people say no, we must live a hard life. We are the natives, and they, the well-to-dos. So we have to survive the deadly swamp, the murky water, and the heavy rain forests. The pockets of little villages separated by salty water. The black oil under the ground. One thing we know is that if we die fighting or accepting the way we find ourselves, it is six feet down the hard ground that we go... (p. 13)

Due to the nature of the environment, the people are restricted in occupation. Farming operations are reduced for lack of adequate soil. Trading is also sanctioned by certain factors; the transport system and limited choice of commodities, and unless for those visiting with water vehicles, much of the local population is completely cut off from the outside world. In recent times, government has made argument in favor of the state to show that the terrain in the Niger Delta area has limited much infrastructural and social development in the region.

Oil, the most abundant natural blessing of the area, which attracts both government and oil corporations and which should compensate the relative harsh conditions experienced by the people becomes a growing concern which aggravates the deplorable conditions of the area due to the activities of the oil multi-nationals. The exploration operations in the area often fail to observe environmental precaution leading to pollution which destroys principally the people's aquatic culture; hence increasing their poverty.

Government has not been fair in dealing with the region because of the influence of the dominant ethnic groups and the power of the military oligarchy. Oil is not evenly distributed in Nigeria. Federalism is one effort by the state to address the fears of the marginalized ethnic minorities as contained in the Willink's commission of 1957 (Anyade, 1991). The resource control measures are particular instruments which aim at bridging the gaps created by inequality; but the process has been hijacked by power brokers who claim exclusive ownership of the state power because of their role in achieving Nigeria's sovereignty. The people have complained of lack of federal presence. Although government has responded by the citing of federal institutions in the area, the effort has also been considered to be comparatively low.

The people themselves also come under critical attack for embezzling and looting funds meant to develop the area for personal gratification. The indigenous governments of the region have failed to utilize grants and revenue allotted to them accordingly. Where efforts have been made to empower the people by awarding contract jobs to indigenous firms, the involvements

of these firms have also not been faithful to the jobs. Consequently, projects have suffered, developments delayed and the area impoverished. From the characters' revelation of the situations affirms the conviction that the perception of the people about the lifestyle of those in the bourgeois class underscores the widening inequality:

Alabo: I say with whose money? Ours! He was not doing anyone a favor that was what he was given money for in the first place. I remember him in his long white big car at the palace, performing the rites of philanthropy. Why one man was so blessed, I often asked myself. But was he blessed? He was spending our blessings. The deepest part of hell fire awaits him, I swear. (p. 34)

Corruption in the indigenous governments is increasing to fearful dimension with no adequate state apparatus checkmating it.

The feeling of marginalization sweeps across the region binding the people together against external interference. This has often crippled efforts by federal government to address cases of mismanagement of public fund by indigenous governments as the people perceive it to be undue interference against the autonomy of the state and unwarranted incursion undertaken against a minority group. Consequently, wives of public concern in the Niger Delta are always considered to be sensitive, and require extra caution in dealing with the phenomenon to limit negative reactions; which such involvements may engender. The people have a conviction of protracted period of neglect by the state for too long. For this, there is sheer reluctance in personally and constructively addressing perceived problems. But they look to the government to have answers to their plight and where the state neglects this role, the people resort to aggression and violence to gain attention.

Armed Militia: A Response to Inequality

Inequality has a natural bent toward crisis. A group remains marginalized until they are able to fashion out an appropriate response to their problem. Inequality in the Niger Delta area is beginning to gain wild and varied attention because the people are advancing in the mode of agitation. Shortly after the events of 1914 which eventually led to the formation of a federal character necessitated by the existence of numerous ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, the minority groups have repeatedly expressed fears of domination by the larger tribal groups. This had begun in writing until it gained momentum to become an issue warranting the employment of violence.

Government has responded in different ways. There has been partitioning adjustments leading to the creation of states to accommodate particular interest groups from the onset of the nation's independence history to more recent era in 1996 precisely when another partitioning was done in favor of homogenous minority groups. There have also been the development of fiscal policies debates but these efforts have not been strong enough to address the problem arising from the region of Niger Delta. The groups are protesting in two ways: they are forcefully demanding that the government should further look into the issues that promote inequality against the people of the region, as well as reacting to the negative label of describing them as militants.

Militancy like feminism, is accumulating negative but false connotation due to government and media presentation of the struggle, and their associations instead of discouraging the group are rather helping to advance their cause as they are now driven underground as criminals to continue their nefarious activities of canalization of an oil installations and equipment, and of kidnapping and other violent crimes to attract the attention of the state to bribe them.

In *Hard Ground*, Yerima aptly describes the response of a marginalized group in the Niger Delta area through the use of violence. Nimi who drops out from school because his parents are unable to fund his education finds employment in the jungle as a child soldier in a local armed militia to protest the long period of interiorisation which his generation must break. Although government places a ban in armed militia and child-soldiering, Nimi like many of the youths of his age finds this as a noble engagement. Let us hear Nimi retorts:

Why does Mama cry? There are younger boys and girls than me in the struggle. Children who believe in the cause. First, you listen to what the elders say about the struggle. Even when in primary school you live in pain, and then it sounds right to join the struggle, first as a boy of a group, then as the eye or a spy. By the time you are halfway through primary school, you carry guns for the boys, and by the time you are eleven, in these days of automatic guns, you become an expert. You see people die every day. Either of hunger or just death, so it means nothing to you. It is hard life, Mama. (p. 12)

Although armed militia has legal sanctions and involves a number of unspecific hazards seen in the world of the play, the youths find it attractive for several reasons. They are first educated on the need for the struggle through a detailed seminar in history revealing the nature of the people's past and the trends of survival in the cause of retaining their identity which as a matter of urgency, is facing annihilation, but can be restored by rallying efforts. The lesson on history which Yerima does not treat effectively finds credence in Rotimi's *Akassa You Mi* (2001) where the initiates are drilled in the story of their past with an extensive description of the exploitative tendencies of imperialism to which the people must resist. In all forms of revolutionary consciousness, history plays an important role not only in revealing the people's part but in shaping their social awareness and in directing the course of the present confrontation. Thus, in Femi Olafinsan's *No More The Wasted Breed*, Saluga and Biokun, the play's heroes, who in their generation find it worthwhile to demystify a long deeply-held religious conviction of the infallibility of the gods, derive their strength from the relies found in the interrelationship between the people and their deities.

Yerima incorporates this history in the children's curriculum in the preliminary school age where they are trained to live with the consciousness of the struggle until at a time when they are permitted to carry small arms, then to more sophisticated weapons which make them killers. So, the youths perceive struggle as part of their childhood socialization, and enlistment in the militias is seen as success achieved through determination. From the action of the play, armed militia in the region enjoys generous support from the society as it is seen as the people's representation for a just cause, and can be employed by the indigenous government or power brokers as a force to enforce personal interests. Armed with this support in addition

to the revenue accruing from oil in the black market, militia has developed to the status of a full-fledged institution almost similar to the structure of conventional forces in the civil society.

It is interesting to note from Yeruma's view point that armed militia in the region has an organized structure of administration in terms of hierarchy, personnel management as well as inter-group network and alliance. For example, new recruits are promoted according to years of experience and the possession of special skills, especially those of security and espionage. More importantly is the handsome remuneration which is comparable to wages in oil corporations. Poverty may exist but only for the people in the civil society, those in the jungle have no regrets.

The arms these youths bear with the power of life and death in their hands puts them above the ordinary man on the street. When sighted in the jungle and often in the streets, they are dressed in special uniform similar to the type worn by the conventional soldiers. This also brings glamour to the group. However, much of the benefit which is the lure for young people is the fact that power brokers often resort to them as a form of military force to direct behavior or influence important public policies and opinions for personal gratification as Yerima proclaims through Nimi:

They created us. They gave us the reason to find our place... First we were errand boys, and so we got gum and money. We started to ask questions, they had no answers. We all knew what they looked like before they got into power. We dumped them. They give us while they keep the chunk. Now we listen only to the people. We fight only for ourselves. Our lives are in our pockets. Our songs are for ourselves, not for any hero who feels we smell of poverty... (p. 37)

The play has raised another question of interest which requires examination there have been acrimonious debates as to the source of gaining ammunition by the militia and opinions have pointed in the direction of smuggling enhanced by the location of the fighters in the creeks and coasts where contacts are made with foreign black market oil dealers who in batter, exchange arms for oil. But the real culprit is often ignored. During important decision making processes especially public elections, the youths serve as a form of military force which is primarily employed to influence decision in favor of particular politicians. Since the arms are not withdrawn after the process, the youths who are no longer needed and who do not receive further support from these patrons turn their weapons to other directions.

The militia has also enjoyed wide patronage in the areas of inter-communal clashes as they are employed to represent an aggrieved group against another; this is hinted but not pursued in the play. This is where it has become increasingly difficult to track down the group by the state for they often receive communal protection. It is of interest to note that many of the operations of the militia occur in the jungle close to home of the large part of the population of the marginalized groups; and in traditional societies, the people always relied on the youth force for the settlement of disputes. But with the coming of modern states, the use of native force had been repealed so that these villages now depend on the state machinery like the police for dispute resolution. Since the terrain in most villages is harsh, it has not been an easy task citing stations to arbitrate within the local population. The result has been either absence

of these stations or the presence in very few areas where accessibility becomes a tedious task. To maintain peace in these areas, the people have been forced back to keep and support the militia who serve as peace and defiance force.

The major source of benefit and revenue for the militia has been in the struggle with the oil corporations operating in the region. From Nimi, we get a hint of this confrontation:

I was a little man in trenches, planning the attacks of blocking the oil wells in trenches, finding how well to kidnap the white men, exploiters of our nation state, and making their hearts feel our pains. Little man, me? They dress in fine clothes at weekends in the cities after exploiting our oil, dancing to town in their helicopters and jeeps, to exploit our women and girls. Me, a little man? No more! (p.37)

Although operating under license from the state, the oil corporations are the bodies that have direct contact with the people and are seen as the real enemies due partly to their lifestyle of luxury and partly through their mode of oil exploitation, which often neglect basic environmental ethnics; thus causing the people harm. One simple way of dealing with them has been through seizure of their white personal and receiving huge ransom before their release. The ransom is seen as revenue which accrues from the oil exploited from their ancestral land.

Personnel abduction which has been termed 'kidnap' might have begun in the jungle by the militia as means of deriving revenue and vexed retaliation to avenge the numerous molestations blacks face in Europe and America in the guise of ascertaining their immigration veracity of permit. Abduction has grown to fearful proportion and is making a lucrative business not only in the region but has escalated to other once peaceful parts of the nation. White personnel of high status were predominantly the initial target; but the recent fortification of these personnel through military attachments has caused the group to turn their guns on their own people. They are not the only group in the business; youths from the civil society have equally become part of the crime. Since the crime has escalated with almost the common man on the street as a prospect, the ransom has also dropped; hence mitigating the criminality in the act.

Often, exploration activities cause different forms of pollution which render the environment unfit for human habitation. Unless, the oil corporations are threatened as Yerima shows through Nimi's portrayal. They show reluctance in managing the hazards. Legal suits as well as open military confrontation are response which constrains the firms to compensate the affected communities in the form of fund or other material grants. Sometimes, the money is deliberately paid to the wrong hands to fuel crisis and create tension to distract the people from focusing on the problem so that while the rifts are tearing the people apart, the firms enjoy unobstructed operations.

In order to generate revenue to fund their operation and to maintain their work-force, the militia may threaten to vandalize oil installations. This usually calls for immediate negotiation which eventually yields fund for the group since much of the activity is in the area of the field, the group also engages in black-market trafficking. There are mushroom refineries which produce products for local consumption. The government often comes into their target when oil wells are forcefully closed down with a view to get the state to negotiate. But getting the

Government to pay ransom has not proved an effective option for revenue generation for the group due to the power of the state which transfers the blame to indigenous states by slashing their allocations to get them to deal with the militia in their various areas. This transfer of blame has in recent time brought certain indigenous states against the group and many casualties have been recorded on both sides. The repeated assaults by the state to annihilate the group and the resultant deaths are the nightmarish experience which Nimi describes:

With nightmares at first, the foam of the blood of your dead foes making you sweat at first in the nose, the mouth then your neck even on cold harmattan nights, then soundly as the faces of the dead people multiply, and killing means nothing to you any more, soundly, your eyelids shut to the cries of the world, and you justify in your heart that the people you killed are the enemies of the land, not yours as an individual, and after a while, all you think about are the fiery songs of the people, and the good of the land, and then you sleep like a new-born each time you can catch a wink... I sleep, Mama...we all try to sleep... (p. 12)

Yerima has shown that though the government has had initial negotiations with fighting youths to ascertain the worth of their agitation, resorting to military threats by killing them will instead of controlling the situation escalate to distant areas beyond imagination. The youths are fortified by the horror sights of seeing and experiencing cold blood deaths. As they are killed, they too become killers hardened by the horrors around them. Since these youths receive support by their people and are often used by both indigenous states and corporate organizations in the enforcement of personal interests, a wholesale war against them might be a wrong declaration.

The inclusion of Tingolongo, the masquerade mediating between the people and their deities and the portrait of father Kinsley to whom young Nimi confesses shows the people's affinity with religion. In fact, it is surprising to learn that Nimi goes for confession after every successful attack in the hope that his sins are purged given the tenets of Catholicism. This is an aspect of disorientation which will require efforts to reposition. Then, the affinity with the pagan culture runs across many of the plays in this study and has been consistently employed by the Niger Delta playwrights to show the source of inspiration for these fighters. Where they are at peace with the gods, they achieve victory and where the deities are desecrated they lose the battle.

Another issue which tends to elongate the struggle is the association of the group with negative images and connotations which is another phase in the battle for identity as Yerima argues. Government through its agents, especially the media, has been spreading false messages about the true identity of these fighters. They have been labeled militants, and noted as terrorists by international observers to create distorted pictures of the group and to reduce the worth of the struggle as a noble cause the result is that the group have been driven underground to continue the battle. The argument to justify the labeling has been that the groups are fighting for selfish reasons and would always drop their arms any time they are bribed.

This has been true to an extent when considered that the battle has involved groups coming after groups. The initial fighters, who first employed violence, seem to have receded after negotiations with the government and their descendants suddenly arise to resume the struggle. There are therefore wide speculations that government is declining further bargains because the first group has breached the terms of the agreement.

The Yar dua Amnesty declaration of 2007 was aimed at ending any form of militancy by offering state pardon to voluntary disarmament by these youths. Efforts were subsequently made to empower the surrendering fighters in a number of ways, including taking a part of the population abroad to train in various technical fields according to their areas of interest. Unfortunately the training failed because the youths could not easily adjust to the new environment.

The negative label which was intended to discourage the struggle is driving the youths wild as they are often found perpetrating violence of gruesome killings as we are confronted with in the world of the play when Nimi is accused of killing eighteen persons in one case, and in another, two persons lynched in the shrine thus desecrating the gods. Nimi also loses his wife and the unborn baby who have been murdered by Don who considers the woman a security threat. Killings in the jungle is taken as normal and the youths have grown to live with it. There are also instances of abduction and violation of young women which also are normal with life in the jungle. Nimi for example, rapes Pikibo after abducting her, putting her in the family way. Nimi himself has been abducted but only released after a huge ransom has been paid to the Don Yerima believed that government label based on these crimes which are considered normal in the context in which they are committed is deemed unfair because government forces in isolation outside the barracks indulge in similar acts but have not been labeled accordingly.

The characters in the play are symbolic. All the time Yerima juxtaposes the characters of Nimi and Baba, showing that while Nimi represents the new generation of fighters, Baba symbolizes the old; and while Nimi is brave and gallant, Baba is timid and cowardly, this way; Baba fails Nimi and becomes the antagonist. There have been serial killings in Nimi's family by the Dan, the war lord, to which Nimi must avenge but in dramatic ironic terms, Nimi succeeds in killing Baba his own biological father disguised in the person of the Don and accepts a sacrificial death to forestall peace. This is Yerima's way of dealing decisively with the crisis in the Niger Delta region. The old generation symbolized by Baba must as a matter of fact, accept their failure in confronting the myths in Nigeria's political history as it relates to those of amalgamation and surrender itself as a sacrifice for the cleansing of the Niger Delta region which has suffered serious abuses.

Another thesis which author has put forward is his notion of true federalism as seen in Nimi's comment:

...The President General of our movement had said all the great things about our past heroes, the need for us all to come together, and have one voice, and the best formula for the resource control of the revenue generated from our oil. But the one that sent the government twitching was when he said true federalism was needed to actualize long and lasting peace in Nigeria. He then said that governors should stop eyeing or talking about becoming president of the whole country. (p. 36)

These issues are raised in the dialogue above: resource control, true federalism and indigenous leadership. It is perhaps, strongly suggested that government should take a second look at the formula of resource control and revenue allocation. Efforts should also be made towards ensuring the enforcements of the tenets of a federal structure while indigenous governments are to work hard in the management of revenue allocated to them to maintain the unity of the nation.

Close to the end of the play, the play's hero is cajoled in what seems like a congratulatory visit by the town people and poisoned. Although he survives it, the act reveals the position of a section of the people in the struggle; while some perceives Nimi's effort as serving humanity; others do not believe in his heroism and rather see him as an obstruction to progress. It is likely that Yerima deliberately allows this controversy to present to his readership an open ended debate in the Niger Delta discourse. Thus painting a masquerade of dual and opposite faces of the region's armed militia.

The lingering problem which the play fails to resolve however is the inability of the youths who have taken to arms to precisely identify their true enemy. Their weapons point in several directions: The government which fails to be faithful to the tenets of federalism; the multi-national oil corporation whose activities of exploration expose the people's environment to hazards which often ignore adequate compensation; the indigenous politicians who survive on the ruin of the people's hopes, and the people themselves who have refused to understand the problem and speak in one voice. The difficulty in identifying the enemy and deal decisively with it remains the impediment towards a smooth transition.

Conclusion

Inequalities are the major determining factors of the chances the characters take in life, the culture they create and the identities they construct. The inequalities, deprivation and the social exclusion have therefore induced "self-spirituality" in Nimi, the focal character, who drops out school with the mind of becoming a child-soldier in order to fight for his people, which is a way of salvation that comes through self-discovery and realization. The characters also demonstrate the spirit of "detraditionalization"- the rejection and turning away from traditional models of asking for their rights to get it in hard ways and at all cost. Further, they display "extreme relativism of knowledge," meaning that what the characters believe in comes from their subjective point of view, not from any generally acceptable definite claims, either by scientist or experts .

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