

Vision, Themes and Techniques in Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* and Arnold Udoka's *a Long Walk to Dream*: A Comparative Approach

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Abstract

Contemporary Nigerian literature is predominant with representation the exploration of economic, political and social issues bedevilling the nation. Literary scholarship in relation to the growing interest in the Niger Delta of Nigeria is specifically gaining prominence. Creative writers, as the mouthpieces of society, attend virtually to all areas in their quest to depict what they perceive inimical to sustainable nationhood. Consequently, critics have a huge responsibility to bring these creative works to the fore. The intention of this paper is to engage the vision, themes and techniques in Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* and Arnold Udoka's *Long Walk to a Dream* from the perspective of comparative approach. Yerima and Udoka exploit this medium to vividly depict the social, economic and political realities of the time, in order to achieve the much sought-after development of the region. Viewed from the critical lens of post-colonialism, the tenets of post-independence disillusionment, unhomeliness, alienation and exile are applied to the analyses of these texts. This paper dwells on articulation of the needs of the inhabitants of the region, in a literary manner, thus providing reference materials for literary scholarship on the Niger Delta as part of the corpus known as African literature.

Keywords: Nigerian literature; vision, themes and techniques; Ahmed Yerima; Arnold Udoka; Niger Delta

Introduction

Literary artists are influenced by the socio-political and economic events in their socio-political milieu. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1972: xv) opines that "Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society." Apart from the aesthetic pleasure they provide, literary works, especially within the African context,

perform utilitarian functions. Writers often write to question certain anomalies or to extol the virtues prevalent in their societies. Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* and Arnold Udoka's *Long Walk to a Dream* are driven by this social vision of critiquing the subjugation of the Niger Delta region and its inhabitants by neo-colonialists and imperialist oil companies and their indigenous cronies.

Events in the Niger Delta region have generated numerous debates and concerns globally. The people of the region, which produces Nigeria's major export resource (crude oil), have been subjected to different types of social, economic, political and emotional misfortunes. These include land pollution, water pollution, air pollution, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism and militancy. Poets, novelists and dramatists have all tapped from these realities in weaving creative works that depict the appalling situation in the region. Such works of art are socially motivated and they often criticise the government and people, especially the wealthy, whose actions and inaction are responsible for these problems. Playwrights, like Yerima and Udoka, therefore, become the voices of the common people. They use their literary works to sensitise the people in their immediate community and the outside world about the need to protect the rights of citizenry who are daily being subjected to different forms of injustice.

For Yerima and Udoka, drama becomes a veritable tool for this task and they exploit this medium to vividly depict the social, economic and political realities of the time, in order to achieve the much sought-after development of the region.

Textual Analysis of *Hard Ground* and *Long Walk to a Dream*

Both *Hard Ground* and *Long Walk to a Dream* are based on the topical issue of human and environmental degradation because of oil exploration in the Niger Delta. The despoliation of the environment and social inequality serve as the raw materials for these plays. On the one hand, *Hard Ground* centres on the protagonist, Nimi, who is deeply involved in the Niger Delta struggle. On the other hand, *Long Walk to a Dream* centres on the people of Peteke kingdom, the victims of oppression, who struggle to free themselves from the shackles of poverty caused by the oil companies. The people suffer economic and political neglect, unemployment, oil spillage and the wilful destruction of the flora and

fauna of the region. A reading of *Hard Ground* and *Long Walk to a Dream* through the lens of post-colonialism reveals that the texts interrogate the oppressive and subversive factions in the lingering oil-wealth crisis. Essentially, the plays are hinged on environmental degradation, inequality, and mistreatment of the region and its people. All these can be discussed as issues portraying post-independence disillusionment.

Postcolonial Aesthetics in the Texts

Lois Tyson (2006) posits that postcolonial theory offers us a framework for examining the similarities among all critical theories that deal with human oppression. Arnold Udoka's *Long Walk to a Dream* realistically portrays the problems confronting the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Instead of the traditional acts and scenes, the play is divided into five movements. It begins with Odum and Wariboko discussing the problems bedeviling Peteke Kingdom, an oil-producing area. The tenets of post-colonial theory deployed in this analysis are postcolonial disillusionment, the concept of neo-colonialism and othering. Othering denotes the colonisers' or neo-colonisers' treatment of members of the indigenous culture as less human, and it includes all forms of colonial or neo-colonial oppression. Power is a pivotal issue of concern in postcolonial discourse. This study also considers neo-colonial relations between the majorities (in this case, the oil multinationals) within Nigeria and the minorities (described by Spivak as subalterns), that have been subjected to all forms of human and environmental hazards. In this relation, the multinational oil companies are the neo-colonialists and imperialists. They constitute the "Them," the oppressor; while the unemployed youths constitute the "Us." The village heads faced with the task of getting Peteke out of the quagmire of poverty, neglect and deprivation of their social-economic and political rights. Neo-colonialism, in postcolonial discourse, denotes the exploitation of cheap labour available in developing countries, often at the expense of those countries' own businesses, cultural traditions and ecological well-being. From their conversations, we discover that oil exploration in the region by multinational oil capitalists and the government has engendered the economic, social, environmental and political problems of the region. This has snowballed into disillusionment, unemployment and social instability in the region. It also creates the basis for the agitation by the Pogwa Boys – a group of aggrieved, unemployed youths who are also victims of the government's

inability to moderate the activities of the oil companies operating in Peteke.

The youths in *Long Walk to a Dream* and *Hard Ground* are made to live as though they are strangers in their own land. This evokes the somewhat similar concepts of exile, alienation and unhomeliness in postcolonial discourse. The notion of exile in these plays goes beyond the erasure of physical presence from a particular landscape; it implies that the Niger Deltans have become economic and psychological refugees in their land.

Long Walk to a Dream and *Hard Ground* proffer varying strategies of handling the problems of human and environmental degradation in the plays. As the people vent their anger, the question becomes what strategy would they adopt in achieving their aim? Whereas *Hard Ground* proffers an aggressive strategy, *Walk to a Dream* proffers dialogue as panacea for these problems. All over the village, it is said that Nimi is one of the prominent actors in some of the battles that occurred in the creeks. These battles are reported to have been bloody and gruesome, as many youths were killed, including Nimi's partners. Nimi is bent on furthering the cause of the militants. Nimi's action is akin to the notion of nationalism or nativism in postcolonial discourse. Like a nationalist or anti-colonialist who places premium on indigenous culture and ideals, striving to decimate all Western/colonial cultural ideal, Nimi is bent on fighting for and restoring the human dignity of his people. Unlike the anti-colonialist whose missiles are targeted at the colonialist, Nimi's are targeted at neocolonialist and imperialist oil firms and their native collaborators. Like Okonkwo, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Nimi does not want to be like his cowardly father, Baba, who we may also liken to Unoka, Okonkwo's father. Nimi considers Baba a coward because he is not involved in the struggle for the liberation of the region from oppression.

Whereas aggressive agitation is foregrounded in *Hard Ground*, *Long Walk to a Dream* strongly suggests dialogue in negotiating the intractable conflict in the oil-rich Niger Delta region. The youths in *Long Walk to a Dream* begin by confronting their village heads who have been accused of complicity. When they confront the village council about the accusation against them and the decision of the Pogwa Boys to engage in an aggressive fight for the right of the kingdom, the village heads refuse to assent to their cause. In the course of the play, there has been a bomb

blast which left many wounded and others scampering for safety. One of those who escaped is Senator Ibinabo. She then comes into the council meeting to narrate the bomb blast incident to the village heads and the Pogwa boys. After her narration, she initiates a dialogue between the aggrieved youths and the political leader, presumably the President, simply referred to in the play as Your Excellency. The President promises to step into the problems of the kingdom with a view to proffering solutions. After some deliberations, the Pogwa Boys decide to put down their arms and await the government for dialogue.

Thematic Preoccupations of *Hard Ground* and *Long Walk to a Dream*

As explained by Hans Bertens (2001:120), post-colonialism focuses on the cultural displacements and its consequences for personal and communal identities. Postcolonial theory radically questions the systems that support imperialism, whether political or economic. The background of *Hard Ground* and *Long Walk to a Dream* is the social, economic and political neglect of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Although these plays are fiction, the raw materials are facts traceable to contemporary Nigeria. From the plays, we come to terms with the fact that the Niger Delta region has been subjected to abuse, underdevelopment, poverty, privation, penury, and the like.

Consequences of economic, social and political deprivation

The physical environment of the region is endangered because of unguided oil explorations by multinational oil companies, the region suffers from many incidents of oil spillage, water pollution, soil pollution and even air pollution. The result is that the primary means of livelihood of ordinary people in this region (farming and fishing) have been destroyed. The people are then left to suffer untold hardship. For instance, in *Hard Ground*, Nimi complains that poverty has ravaged his region. This situation is caused by men like Chief Tomfort, who is eventually removed by Nimi. To put an end to this socio-political inequality in the region, the youths agitate for resource control and true federalism as panacea for lasting peace in Nigeria. However, instead of seeking dialogue with the concerned authorities, they resort to militancy. As a result of their aggressive and anti-social activities in the creeks, many of them are killed by government security forces. Similarly, the people in *Long Walk to a Dream* experience a long walk to their dream. In

fact, the Pogwa Boys decide to take up arms because they fear that their dreams and aspirations are almost dashed. The aftermath of this deprivation by the government and oil companies is social instability. The Pogwa Boys decide to take up arms; and there are bomb blasts in the kingdom, sending many running for their lives and some others injured.

Environmental despoliation

The plays shares similarities because they focus on the ecological imperialism in the Niger Delta region. Prominent among other issues depicted by both writers is the fact that the environment in this region is on the brink of collapse. Because of the unmediated activities of oil companies, the drilling of crude oil has brought hardship and sufferings to the people of the region. Some of the environmental problems confronting the region are gas flaring, oil spillage, water pollution, bomb explosions and soil pollution. In *Long Walk to a Dream*, during the meeting of the village heads, Sikiri complains thus: "I caught it in the creek last week. My canoe could not go far because of the black oil on the water. As I was waiting, the poor, dead fish floated to me and quickly, I rescued it" (29). Aquatic life is also destroyed because of oil spillage. Boro aptly captures this when he says:

"We are not going out there to fight for oil. We are going out there to fight for our land and its people. Your Majesty, the first reason for this struggle is the environment. The second reason is environment and the third reason is environment! Not cash! Why? If our environment dies" (63).

Aggressive or bloody revolution and dialogue as panaceas for social instability

Violence and death are common phenomena in *Hard Ground*. The conflicts that undergird the thrust of the play revolve around the need to stop the deprivation, neglect and socio-political cum economic inequality experienced by the people in the Niger Delta. Nimi and his colleagues decide to get their demand for political and social rights aggressively. All forms or ideas of dialogue are ignored by the youths. In terms of characterisation, Alabo, unlike other delegates, does not support a bloody revolution as the panacea for injustice and oppression. He is disappointed when Nimi tells him that he is bent on leading a revolution. Alabo is of the opinion that the world does not listen to people with AK47s, rather

the world listens to those who chose dialogue as the path to peace. Also, Father Kingsley is one of those who also believe in dialogue rather than bloody revolution. He expresses his standpoint by sharing his Civil War experiences with Nimi who is bent on championing a bloody revolution. However, Nimi and other youths decide to take up arms in bloody revolution against those whom they consider as enemies of the region. In order to express their angst against the government, Nimi and his boys organise the breaking up of oil pipes. From the raids carried out in the camp of Nimi and his colleagues, many lives are lost. At the end of the play, Baba is killed in his own house by his son, who does not know that he is also the Don. The play ends on this bloody note.

Unlike Yerima's *Hard Ground* which proffers radicalism, aggression and violence as panaceas for the problems in the Niger Delta region, Udoka's *Long Walk to a Dream* strongly promotes dialogue as the panacea for these problems. Udoka uses this play to appeal to the consciousness and consciences of readers to consider dialogue as the most effective, humanistic and viable strategy in resolving the worst human challenges. The Pogwa Boys come together with a view to solving the social and environmental problems of their land, but with an aggressive strategy.

Contrary to the opinions and positions of other members of the Pogwa Boys, Wariboko, the leader promotes dialogue. During the deliberations of the group, Wariboko says: "We cannot approve, accept or prosecute vigilante justice in Peteke kingdom. It will be against our people. After all the bloodshed, if any, this and all that is in it will remain our motherland..."(41). Wariboko is at the vanguard of continuous appeal to the government and oil companies to see to their demands for equity and justice. The village heads are also of the opinion that violent revolution is not a solution to their disturbing circumstances. This is why Pere tells the Pogwa Boys: "My sons, I can see that you are angry. Our consensus as leaders is that through a mature approach and dialogue, we can peacefully resolve our differences with the oil company" (61). Pere insists that it is not ideal to respond to conflict with conflict. He calls on the Pogwa Boys to embrace dialogue instead of engaging in acts that will be detrimental to innocent children and women. The character that initiates the dialogue and negotiation between the government, the oil company and Peteke kingdom is Senator Ibinabo. She connects the village heads and the Pogwa Boys to the President who promises to see to the

end of the suffering of the people. In the end, the Pogwa Boys decide to lay down their arms.

Literary techniques in *Hard Ground* and *Long Walk to a Dream*

Because of the similarities in vision and themes Ahmed Yerima and Arnorld Udoka employ similar techniques, such as suspense, foreshadowing and dramatic irony.

Suspense

From the beginning to the end of both plays, the reader is held in suspense. The plays are full of intrigue, deceptions and betrayals. When Nimi begins his narration at the commencement of *Hard Ground*, he delves into many bloody events which heighten the curiosity of the reader. At some point also, the reader is urged on because there is a stimulation of his interest to know who the actual betrayers are. When the villagers showering encomiums on Nimi poisoned him, suspense is heightened, and the reader desires to know what his end would be. In *Long Walk to a Dream*, suspense is heightened at the scene where there is a bomb blast, with everyone scampering for safety: the reader becomes curious about who dies or survives at the scene. Suspense is explored by the playwrights to sustain the interest of the reader till the end of the play.

Foreshadowing

In order to reduce the tension inherent in the play, the playwrights employ foreshadowing, a dramatic technique which gives the audience or readers hints about some future actions before they happen. Since the reader is prone to be anxious about possible outcomes, the playwrights preempt certain actions before they take place. In *Hard Ground*, the deaths of Pikibo and her son are foreshadowed by Nimi's dream. In the dream, he sees the headless body of Pikibo carrying his son, who is also headless in the dream. When he wakes up from his sleep, he does not understand the meaning of the dream. However, as the play progresses, Pikibo and her son are murdered by Don. The reader, therefore, is given a hint about the imminent death of the two of them. In *Long Walk to a Dream*, the dramatist uses this technique to herald the imminent tragedy which would befall the land if the Pogwa Boys go ahead in staging a violent

protest against the government and oil companies. Odum, the chief priest of Peteke's god, foreshadows this danger, as he says: "These drizzles are an overture to a rainstorm on a dilapidated homestead" (52).

Irony

The background to the events in these plays is ironical. It is absurd that the region which lays the proverbial golden egg for a nation such as Nigeria is subjected to social and economic deprivations and environmental degradation. In *Long Walk to a Dream*, dramatic irony is deployed in Movement Four when the Pogwa Boys march into the meeting of the Council of Village Heads. Because the Pogwa Boys are disguised in their dressing, Etete says: "Who are these? You have come here disguised in clothes of madness. Who are you? Cowards! That is what you are ..." (56). Nimi says the disguised boys "look more to us like bastard daughters from a prostitute vagabond wife" (56). At this point, Wariboko, the Prince and leader of the group, unveils his face. Everyone discovers that it is Wariboko and not a "bastard daughter from a prostitute vagabond" (55). It is ironical that the Prince will be described as a vagabond.

Dramatic irony is the most effectively deployed dramatic technique in *Hard Ground*. The personality of the Don is veiled all through the play until the end when Nimi murders Baba, whom he mistakes as the Don. With the death of the disguised Baba, Nimi and Mama rejoice that their enemy is dead, only to discover that the masked man is Baba. It can be inferred that Baba disguises as Don in order for peace to reign, since his son is bent on killing the Don. Moreover, when Nimi is informed that the police spy who caused him the great loss of his boys has been killed, he jubilates. However, he later gets information that the said spy is Pikibo, his wife.

Symbolism

The mobile telephone is symbolic. The mobile telephone belonging to Senator Ibinabo is used as a medium through which the government and the people of Peteke are connected. Through it the government and the Pogwa Boys are able to come to a compromise. Hence, the mobile telephone is a symbol of dialogue and constructive negotiation, instead of violence.

Setting

The spatial setting helps to foreground the message of the play. For example, the play begins at dawn, at the lobby of a thatched house, with half walls made of mud and a room at the back which serves as a shrine. This description helps the reader to identify the people as rural dwellers who do not live in the luxury of twenty-first century architectural designs. Furthermore, the lapping sound of water on the shore gives emphasis to the fact that the setting is a riverine community, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Moreover, most of the actions take place in the shrine. This connotatively implies that, owing to the level of poverty and environment degradation that have ravaged these communities, the people have decided to seek repose in their deity, as all other human means of getting solutions to their problems have failed. The temporal setting is post-independent Nigeria, when crude oil is the economic mainstay of the nation. Furthermore, it is set in the era of rising militancy, environmental activism and resource control advocacy.

Major characters in *Hard Ground*

Nimi

Nimi is the central character in the play. A young boy of eighteen, he drops out of school because of his desire to fight for his people. Together with other youths of the region, Nimi takes up arms to agitate for resource control and true federalism in the nation. However, as events unfold, he and his colleagues are betrayed. Many of them are killed during a raid in their camp. Although, he is rescued through the efforts of Inyingifaa and Reverend Father Kingsley, Nimi's life is in danger because he is accused of masterminding the death of Don's boys. For this reason, Don is after his life. Nimi is a determined and charismatic character. At the death of the Capon, he takes up the leadership responsibility in the camp. He is almost murdered through poisoning. He survives, but loses his wife and son to the avenger, Don.

Inyingifaa

Inyingifaa is Nimi's uncle. He is into the shipment of guns into the region. He appears to be on the side of peace, but he can be described as a double-faced character, in that he is responsible for the proliferation of

arms amongst the youths. However, he initiates reconciliation between Nimi and his mother and between Nimi and the Reverend Father Kingsley.

Baba

Baba is Nimi's father. He is almost like an exact opposite of his wife, Mama. Baba is phlegmatic and optimistic about situations around him. He is very reflective and proactive in his deeds. Sometimes, he is portrayed as a foolish and an irresponsible character. In fact, it is for the sake of peace and reconciliation that he pretends to be Don so that, after his death, his family could live peacefully, since their arch-enemy has been eliminated. Baba is depicted as a messiah and the tragic hero of the play.

Mama

Mama is the mother of the main character, Nimi. The play begins with her complaining about the state of her son. She is depicted as a very anxious woman. Although, Nimi has been rescued from the militants' camp, yet Mama believes that all is not well with her son. Mama does not align herself with the view of Nimi that he is justified to fight for the freedom and justice of his deprived people. She considers Nimi's messianic vision as barbaric. All she is interested in is the safety of her son, Nimi. When she hears that the Don has decided to kill Nimi, she becomes perplexed and disconcerted, because all her children have died, except Nimi. Hence, she supports the conspiracy to kill Don.

Minor characters

Alabo

Alabo is one of the chiefs who led a delegation to express their gratitude to Nimi for championing the cause of the people for justice and equity. During his visit to Nimi, Alabo expresses his displeasure about the activities of Chief Tomfort, although some other characters mention what Tomfort has contributed to the wellbeing of his people. Alabo, unlike other delegates, does not support a bloody revolution as the panacea for injustice and oppression. He is disappointed when Nimi tells him that he is bent on leading a revolution. Alabo is of the opinion that the world

does not listen to people with AK47s, rather the world listens to those who chose dialogue as the path to peace.

Tonye

Tonye is one of the minor characters in the play. Tonye is also one of the delegates who came to appreciate the efforts of Nimi and his colleagues on their fight against injustice and deprivation. Tonye castigates chief Tomfort for being selfish and extols Nimi for his service and sacrifice to his people. However, we notice that Tonye's delegation is made up of deceitful people. Despite their praises and gifts to Nimi, they end up poisoning him.

Father Kingsley

Father Kingsley is one of the minor characters. He is considered by members of his community as a priest, though we learn later that he is not an ordained priest. Father Kingsley comes to the rescue of Nimi when he was poisoned. Father Kingsley is one of those who also believe in dialogue rather than bloody revolution. He expresses his standpoint by sharing his Civil War experiences with Nimi who is bent on championing a bloody revolution. Father Kingsley stands as an intermediary between the revolutionaries and the ordinary people.

Characterisation in *Long Walk to a Dream*

Major characters

Wariboko

Wariboko is the main character in the play. He is the son of the Amayanabo of Peteke. He is also the leader of the Pogwa Boys. He is concerned about transformation in his society, from the cultural arena to the political arena. That is why at the beginning of the play, when Odum attempts to manipulate the kingship in favour of Wariboko so that his own son (Odum's son) will be the priest of the shrine of Peteke, Wariboko unambiguously tells Odum that he would dissociate himself from any plan to force the kingship on him. Wariboko maintains that the kingship must be allowed to follow its traditional course of rotation among the various canoe houses.

Besides, in relation to the struggle for social justice for the people of Peteke, Wariboko is of the opinion that a non-violent approach is the ideal option. He says, "We cannot approve, accept or prosecute vigilante justice in Peteke kingdom. It will be against our people. After all the bloodshed, if any, this and all that is in it will remain our motherland ..." (41). This shows that he is an antithesis of Teke. Wariboko, the protagonist, is reminiscent of Ken Saro-Wiwa's revolutionary activities. He mobilises the masses to fight for their rights, but does so through non-violent means.

Senator Ibinabo

As a Senator, Ibinabo performs the function of an ideal representative of the people. She is the one who initiates the dialogue between Peteke and the government. It is her effort that leads to the assuaging of the anger of the Pogwa Boys. She assures them of the government's commitment in keeping her part of the promise. Consequently, the youths agree to lay down their arms. Senator Ibinabo facilitates goodwill, reconnection, peace and dialogue in the play.

Odum

Odum is the priest of the shrine of Peteke Kingdom. He is an insincere priest. He wants Wariboko to take advantage of his father's position as King. At the beginning of the play, Odum attempts to manipulate the kingship of Peteke Kingdom in favour of Wariboko. His reason for doing this is selfish. He wants Wariboko to use his father's influence to secure employment with the oil company rather than lead a revolution against deprivation, in favour of the majority. Moreover, he advises Wariboko to take advantage of his birthright and claim the throne after the demise of the king so that Odum's son will be the priest of the shrine of Peteke. Wariboko refuses this advice, maintaining that the kingship of Peteke is traditionally rotational among the Canoe Houses.

Pere

Perewari is the Amayanabo of Peteke Kingdom. He is the father of Wariboko. As the leader of the deprived people of Peteke, he is full of concern and determination to assuage the sufferings of his people. He considers Peteke as sick as Sikiri. He expresses optimism that if treated,

Peteke can get well again. Pere is an advocate of peace and dialogue, rather than violence, as the panacea for progressive emancipation. Although he is persuaded to lead a violent revolution against the oil companies, he refuses. He considers such an act as inimical to the existence of his people. He also disapproves of his son's appeal to violent revolution against the oil companies. In the end, he is able to persuade the chiefs and the youths that dialogue is the right path to peace and progress.

Boro

Boro is a metaphoric reference to Isaac Adaka Boro. Isaac Adaka Boro is an Ijaw nationalist who began the fight against the exploitation of the Niger Delta region. He also began the advocacy for resource control by the region. To achieve this, Adaka Boro formed the first armed militia made up of Ijaw indigenes. The group was known as Niger Delta Volunteer Force. The vision of this armed group was to ensure that the Niger Delta region gets a fair share of the oil proceeds from the region. In this play, Boro is one of the Pogwa boys. Like Isaac Adaka Boro, the fictional Boro is a graduate. However, because of the anomalies experienced by his community, he is unemployed. Boro considers the government and oil companies as enemies of the common people who remain unemployed, and are deprived of the necessities of life. He is depicted as an activist bent on the survival of the people. Unlike some insinuations that the Pogwa Boys are selfishly fighting for oil, Boro makes it clear that they are not fighting for oil. Rather, according to Boro, "the first reason for this struggle is environment. The second reason is environment and the third reason is environment! Not cash! Why? If our environment dies" (63).

Minor characters

Teke

Teke is one of the Pogwa Boys. He is an unemployed graduate from Abari. He is a contrast to Wariboko. Before the arrival of Pere, he is the one who leads the Pogwa Boys, motivating them for the struggle ahead. He is impatient with the ways of the elders, as he considers their thoughts contrary to the plans of the Pogwa Boys. His following comment depicts him as one desperate for bloody action: "My blood is boiling. Can't you

see? The next explosion in my opinion should be ours" (37). He opts for a violent posture, as against the suggestion of Pere's (39). The playwright uses Teke as an antithesis for his panacea, which is non-violence.

Sikiri

Sikiri is one of the minor characters in the play. She is a lunatic. The author uses her to develop the plot of the play in such that from her comments, we get broader pictures of the gloomy situation in Peteke Kingdom. For instance, though a lunatic, she complains about the lack of food and social amenities in Peteke. She also points the attention of Pere to the destruction of aquatic life because of oil spillage in Peteke. Sikiri is a symbolism of Peteke kingdom. This is captured by Pere who likens Sikiri to the sick, ignored, maltreated and despised people of Peteke. He, however, believes that like Sikiri, if treated, Peteke will get well.

Monsignor Ekaikaw

Monsignor Ekaikaw is a minor character in the play. He is a catholic priest. The playwright uses him to advance the quest for justice to the oppressed. This is vividly portrayed in his sermon when he affirms that the people have been condemned to poverty, affliction, extermination and annihilation. Monsignor Ekaikaw is vocal about the fact that the people are victims of indecision and injustice against the land. During his sermon, he presents a long list of commissions set up to look into the problems of his motherland. However, none of these commissions has been able to solve the problems. Thereafter, he gives hope to his congregation that soon justice shall prevail in the land.

Conclusion

Ahmed Yerima and Arnold Udoka can best be described as socio-political realist playwrights. *Hard Ground* and *Long Walk to a Dream* explore contemporary political, economic and social vices in Nigeria. The dramatists use the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as a lunch pad to explore these issues. Although, the Niger Delta region produces the country's major export resource (crude oil), much is left to be desired given the unpalatable realities that the region grapples with. These harsh realities include land pollution, water pollution, air pollution, kidnapping, pipeline vandalisation and militant activities. Ahmed Yerima has

artistically depicted these issues in *Hard Ground* which is an activist play in such that it advocates both human and environmental rights. This social vision is the use of aggressive revolution to bring an end to the economic and social subjugation in the region. However, the social vision of *Long Walk to a Dream* is the use of dialogue in resolving social and political conflicts. These conflicts arose because of oppression of the people, poverty, unemployment, oil spillage, destruction of the flora and fauna of the region, and economic and political deprivation.

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