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## READING YOUTH-: VIOLENCE AND IDEOLOGICAL PROPAGANDA IN SELECTED SOUTHERN NIGERIAN PLAYS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The media's capacity to manipulate information and create stereotypes can negatively affect young audiences who emulate its aggressive behavioral models. The rate of violence and aggression among Niger Delta youths, who form the core of the militant resistance in the area, can be attributed to the influence of socio-cultural factors of corruption, cultural ideologies and narrative myths created by the media. This essay examines the manner certain plays written by Southern Nigerian playwrights serve as media extensions by acting as if they are creative depictions of the marginalized Delta youth's social reality while in actuality these works mediate personal objectives that further engender youth violence. The work analyzes the generative ability of the narrative as an action creating new identities and stereotypes. Youth violence, while being anti-social in nature, appears justified in the reference plays which have psychotic young heroes that glamorize violent agitation as an existentialist strategy. The essay surmises that propagandist literature can become operational when the author deliberately gives prominence to certain details while relegating other necessary facts that shape perception and identity.*

**KEYWORDS:** Youth, Propaganda, Priming, Niger Delta, Militancy, Violence.

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### INTRODUCTION

A recent review of Nigeria's history discloses extensive statistical litany of depressing violent acts committed by youths. As a social group, the youth have borne the brunt of Nigeria's failed leadership and political marginalization since independence. Playwrights who have recounted these acts of violence in their plays have modeled them on real life acts of aggression like armed robbery, kidnapping, and hostage taking, rape, and electioneering hooliganism etc. Most Niger Delta set plays in Nigeria have in most recent times focused on the Niger Delta oil crisis and youth militancy. In framing their themes around the conflict of state mismanagement and local youth resistance these narratives have become trend setting platforms which sensitize the public and also edify youth aggression and violence. The danger of such poetic license is that the message carries real resonance among the Southern Nigerian community especially among youth of fighting age who feel alienated from main stream society and power. Paul de Man traces the denotative quality of language as a conventional entity extending phenomenological construction by marking this quality as a peculiar feature that "gives the language considerable freedom from referential restraint, but it makes it epistemologically highly suspect and volatile, since its use can no longer be said to be determined by considerations of truth and falsehood, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, or pleasure and pain" (10). De Man suggests that the autonomous pragmatics of language revealed through analysis depicts literature as a site where the negative knowledge about the reliability of linguistic utterance is made available.

This study calls attention to the role of the media in handling thematic issues of corruption, language and ideology with critical focus on media managers, including playwrights, as social educators and chronicle auxiliaries. The essay reviews media's depiction of graphic art and literature which appear subsumed by propaganda ideology. Loeber et al outline three important development pathways in antisocial behavior from childhood to adolescence: (a) an early authority conflict pathway, consisting of stubborn behaviors, followed by defiance and authority avoidance (b) a covert pathway, consisting of minor covert behaviors, followed by property damage, followed by moderately serious antisocial behaviors, followed by serious antisocial behavior; and (c) an overt pathway, consisting of aggression followed by physical fighting and finally more varied forms of violence (101). The Niger Delta militancy is a clear case in point as can be gleaned from the way the struggle of youths from that area has been depicted in plays written by Ahmed Yerima, Esiaba Irobi etc., and also in main stream news and entertainment media owned by powerful Niger Delta stakeholders. The male youth body in these narratives is projected as both space and site of psycho-cultural contention against power and legitimacy.

Dill observes that: "one reason people sometimes disbelieve media violence effects is that they mistakenly think that media violence effects must be immediate and severe" (n.p.). Various factors have been articulated by government and non-governmental agencies, as responsible for the high rate of Nigerian youths involved in crime, unemployment, psychological imbalance, aggression and violence but the mediating role of the media and its creative propaganda attribute hasn't been put in proper perspective. It is undeniable that the American entertainment media exerts considerable influence on the Nigerian society, especially its youth, since most Hollywood heroes are idolized by these youths who seek reprieve in the latest cinematic offering and chart topping MTV musical videos. Hawkins et al suggest that "while the etiology of youth violence is complex, many risk factors are well known, including family factors such as parental criminality, child maltreatment and low levels of parental involvement. The predictive power of factors such as poverty, residence in a violent community, and neighborhood is also well established"(136).

Manifestations of depression aggression and violent behavior vary across cultural contexts and are difficult to quantify especially in the Nigerian case. As Dale Terasaki et al note that "...few studies evaluated associations of violent behavior, anger coping styles, and symptoms of depression among African youths. Most studies that evaluated anger expression, violent behavior and depression among college students primarily focused on North American and European population..."(8) Dill et al conclude that environments and cultural background are important determinants of how depression is experienced and expressed. Nigerian playwrights and literary critics appear to have carefully avoided the topic of violence as a landmine of sorts, complacently resorting to history as political weapon instead of overtly specifying strategies to heal the youth's wounded psyche. The peculiar abnormal realities of the Nigerian society have considerably primed the neural modes of the coming-of-age youth. This inquiry analyzes how selected plays as literary extensions of mainstream media purportedly reflect the ostensible reality of the youth while in actuality utilizing fiction to mediate objectives that really increase youth frustration and aggression. As Russell West-Pavlov says "the generative activity of narrative, an activity which spawns stories is not merely active. It is also profoundly dependent

upon the spaces in which those stories can be told”(59). This investigation examines how the media sows the rhetoric of disorder in youth psychology by utilizing the elements of propaganda language to present a glamorous picture for youth to idealize and evolve new cultural myths. This essay comparatively evaluates the operant documented transactional behavior among youths in relation to the revolutionary themes in the media/reference texts which are modeled on social realities.

A.Y. Mohammed points out that:

in the late 1980s and 1990s in Nigeria, discourses on state and society have emerged from the self-proclaimed politically marginalized – “the youth... As such it is a site for particular and localized framings of human agency constituted by various intersecting and contested discourses. Its salience as a theoretical category has been determined by this relation to particular models of social organization incorporated within various theoretical paradigms.(215)

This study examines how selected plays from the Niger Delta region endorse youth aggression and violence as essential paradigms in their narratives. Dill affirms that most media violence effects are more subtle and spread out over extended periods in a youth’s life. Youths’ negative behaviors appear reactionary in nature considering the near-absent social welfare stance of the Nigerian government and the elitist class feeding fat on Nigeria’s oil wealth. Stephen Fawcett observes that “citizens suffer from assaultive violence in a variety of ways: injury and death, fear, compromised school performance and reduced opportunities” (n.p). A review of the reference plays reveals the influence of peer pressure in compounding youth aggression. The initiation feature of youth confraternities is most informative in deciphering some of the factors that help perpetuate violence as a heroic ideal among Southern Nigerian youths. Youths readily idealize the lives of young heroes marketed by the media as stoic introverts who are sexual, alcoholic and drug abusers easily provoked to righteous criminal vengeance.

### **Random vs. Graphic Media Violence**

The graphic depiction of violence in the pages of ideological literature reveals the power of language as an ideological purveyor of aggression which frames new heroic ideals and legitimizes subjective levels of truth. De Man concludes that literature connotes the voiding instead of the avowal of ‘aesthetic categories’. Media language glamorizes violence and makes affixes its imagery on the reader or viewer’s mind through its implied logic that youth violence is unavoidable in a repressive social space. These literary works reference the random violence in the Niger Delta region for the purpose of intensifying the kaleidoscope of the locale and creating a social patchwork of power vacuum. There is no alternate resolution as these literary texts appear to aggravate the militancy quandary by idealizing aggressive youth militants, as philosophical agitators. These youth have been presented as victims cultured by the arcane language of their homicidal society. Caroline Knorr submits that “while experts agree that no one single factor can cause a non-violent person to act aggressively, heavy exposure to violent media can be a risk factor for violent behavior”(n.p.) At the adolescent socially formative stage where imitation of real or fictional characters is constant, exposure to violent reportage and its continued psychological assault activates the linked neural nodes of aggression and primes the youth for violent action.

The plays written by two prominent Nigerian writers, Esiaba Irobi and Ahmed Yerima, illustrate the manipulative properties of the media's artistic engagement with the youth social group. The reference texts embody varying models of mediating how the peculiar linguistic cum behavioral dialectics of this age group are shaped by the dialectics of mass communication and institutional power. The work examines the way youths have appropriated central political instruments through violence and analyses how these youth victims have combated the disorder in their society with their own reactionary disquiet. The desire to wrestle power, in whatever form, is the goal of most youth groups and the reference writers under review serve as mass media auxiliaries of myth making. Manon Van der Water opines that as the ultimate consumers of theatre for young audiences, adolescent youth are easily prone to ideological brain washing than any other social group. She points out that "the former Soviet regime recognized the power of ideological indoctrination through the arts early on and conceptualized, shortly after the October Revolution, a professional theatre for children with the explicit mission to contribute to the aesthetic and ideological education of the future Soviet citizen" (109). This psychological literary quality can be evinced from the characterization approaches of these Niger Delta playwrights and their stylized manner of writing the victim by creating empathy in the reader's mind.

Propaganda can become operational when media/literature deliberately gives prominence to certain detail, stressing its specific importance while relegating other equally necessary facts thus advancing subjective truth and selective reality. The assistance offered by online websites seem to be an extension of the mutual support offered by militant groups and contrasts to each other in times of difficulty and stretch the boundaries of ethical information. A.Y. Mohammed comments that "across Nigeria such modes of youth organization have shared remarkable similar historical and cultural trajectories. The various contemporary urban youth gangs share a number of characteristics in common: they draw upon pre-colonial idioms of organization in which young men are enforcers of community rights..." (223-224). Youth violence in the Nigerian society bears elements of deviance which while being anti-social in nature is justified by Irobi and Yerima who believe that the moral legitimacy of the central government is contentious and the laws challenged by youths are anti-social and discriminatory.

### **Social Valences and the Youth Victim**

Irobi and Yerima's plays periscope youth characters, their moral dilemma and hostile social space. Irobi, in particular highlights his slur of combative social vigilantism through evocative diction, imagery and psychotic characters revealed in stark morbidity, while Yerima's youthful hero is a more optimistic conscience stricken character. Both playwrights' ethical options in creating plausible dramatic characters are strained between multiple stylistic options that conform to post modern temperaments. Their plot techniques, themes and characterization syncretize elements of myths, ritual and traditional poetry. George Orwell avers that "all art is to some extent propaganda"(276). Theatre aids socio-literary apprehension of how a peculiar social group like the youth perceives the world. Visual media like television, film and the internet coalesce with literature as interpretive decoders of the power dynamics of structural-cultural violence. Georg Lukacs argues that "the building of socialism alters the perspective of

every past event. It is a matter not simply of reappraising familiar material but of revaluing the entire scene, as the new perspective throws light on previously neglected phenomenon”(109).

Violence, according to the van Soest and Bryant model not only comprises physical conflict but psychological constructs of hate and idealism. Van Soest and Bryant’s modal levels of individual violence refer to violent acts committed by a person against another. This type of violence, evident in Nigeria’s delta region, is readily identifiable by its physicality while the institutional/structural type of violence defines the layers of harm which are not visible but serve as psychological motivation for individual violence. Institutional violence analyzes ideological practices exhibited through forms of social control. The central government’s deliberate lack of welfare provision for youths and its conscious adoption of combative force as strategy to resolve youth restiveness is a clear manifestation of this category. Structural-culture violence is similar to institutional violence in its acceptance of institutional violence as standard reactionary behavior. It is the reactive mixture of individual and institutional violence. Van Soest and Bryant correlate structural-cultural violence to institutional violence. Institutional violence analyses ideological practices exhibited through forms of social control while structural-cultural violence which is similar to institutional violence manifests in ideologies accepting violence as necessary behavior. It can be adduced from the foregoing that the structural-cultural violence manifesting in youth aggression is complex to identify since it is erroneously interpreted as normal.

Foulkes implies that propaganda possesses a certain explanatory usefulness. The aesthetic manner in which it is woven into the tapestry of narrative should be of concern to behavioral specialists seeking to understand the educational formation of young audiences. Jeanne Klein observes how the commercial culture of the media fails the linguistic standard by appropriating artistic creativity and imaginative interpretation for its selfish purposes without providing useful solutions to life’s pressing problems. According to her “when people parody certain characters in plays, they invite or encourage audiences to join in mocking those personalities” (2). There’s need to understand the role of language as a power dynamic that drives behavior and social relationships.

Youths occupy the lowest rung of the social ladder and have the associated psychological problem of low self-esteem that come with the status thus making their actions emotional based and inarticulate at times. This is primarily one of the reasons youths resort to gang activities as a psychological defense measure. Most Nigerian militant interviewed by the Nigerian Television Authority, after they renounced violence and accepted the 2010 federal government amnesty, confessed they had no hopes or dreams for the future. Media narrative can be seen as a rehearsal for revolution since the process of involves truth and information management attributes that extend youth violence as cultural leitmotif. These plays which have popular appeal in southern Nigeria illustrate the power of language as a psycho-social coding device and semiotic map of hate. The Niger Delta setting has been highlighted as a moral landscape symbolizing the universal realities of marginalized youth living in poverty-prone areas. It is apparent that the violence motif in the selected literature parallels the reality of the region and derives from trado-ritualistic grafts.



Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance and party politics in 1999, youths have increasingly being used as thugs, assassins etc. The economic mismanagement at the central level has been cited by political commentators for the rising incidences of police and military violence. The media's sensational take has extenuated the crisis with its gleeful narratives of 'breaking news' and re-broadcasts of gross news. This reportage cycle has further glamorized violence for youths and legitimized it as a strategic weapon. Globally, parallel allusions could be made to the American Columbine massacre and media reportage which reinterpreted the murderous duo's action as a response to bullying by their high school's athletes who enjoy a privileged status at Columbine High. These media outfits conveniently forgot to mention that a large number of the murdered victims of the duo were non-athletes. In Nigeria, the media hasn't paid much attention to the psychoanalytic precursors of youth militancy. Youths have not only used violence as a means of getting attention but sustaining it. Ime John et al. blame the rising gun violence in various parts of Nigeria on the failings of security agencies and conclude that: "strict laws and penalties to control the spread of SALW have proven ineffective in stemming the rise of gun violence (421).

### Identity and Cognition

Socialization describes the process youths in a society acquire the norms and values of that community. It is an educational process that inculcates requisite characteristics in a citizen through repeated exposure to desired values and the weathering effects of time. Most analysts continue to neglect the role of toy guns and cowboy games in shaping young people's attitude toward gun possession and criminality while growing up in a violent society. The role of cowboy and gangster movies or T.V. wrestling program like World Wrestling Entertainment in glamorizing violence continues to be overlooked by a society wishing to sanitize its gun space. It is pertinent to observe that a research conducted by PBS into the Columbine tragedy identified the enormous inspirational influence of the movie, *Natural Born Killers*, with its plot of child trauma resolution, and the redemptive image it presented to the young murderers. The Media Violence Commission Report avers that "...if one has a vested interest in violent media (e.g. one creates or uses violent media), cognitive dissonance and the need to maintain a positive self-image motivates the denial of media violent effect" (n.p.). The media makes the culture of violence acceptable to the society by giving it visibility, elaborating the ideologies behind its perpetrators' composites and glamorizing the absurdity to the peak of viewership desensitization. The ability of the playwrights under reference to translate their play's imagery to the audience's mind involves their semiotic skill to utilize graphic diction to convey composite images.

In Irobi and Yerima's dramaturgy, violence is a key tragic element that compels the targeted youth to contemplate the play's mirroring of depressive social reality. The shock technique of their fiction formulates the young protagonists as complex characters manifesting frustration against a corrupt society. Violent rebellion is readily advocated in these writers' works as an ideological way to violently relieve tyrannical oppression. In Irobi's *Nwokedi*, the eponymous hero of the play is manipulated by the playwright to fulfill his vision of cultural regeneration. Irobi feels revolution is legitimate since the protagonist has already being mentally and physically brutalized by the oppressive establishment. It should be observed that Irobi's plays, like most media narratives, are open ended and do not resolve the contentious issues presented

in his plays. Youth identity is isolated in the discourse trajectories of these literary artists who advance violence as a logical template for replying oppression in contested spatial sites of political power.

Youth as high violent risk target infers the probability that as members of a unique social group they are most susceptible to violent proclivities. Irobi's heroes uphold typical attitudes of topical Delta youth ideology which has realigned to the scabrous environment. Ahmed Yerima's literature, like Esiaba Irobi's collection, galvanized by Nigeria's civil war and the Niger Delta militancy, reflect the traumatic mindset of ordinary Nigerians caught up in the time capsule between military rule and democracy. The youths, collectively presented as a homogenous protagonist in the plays, depict suicidal psychopaths tethering on the edge of social disaster. The language of Irobi and Yerima's literature is combative and directed at the Niger Delta resource control question and the legitimacy of the youth militancy struggle. This correlated binate trait, according to Kimiebi Ebienfa, exists because the origins of militancy in the Niger Delta have remote and immediate causes. He states that the remote causes consist "environmental degradation, marginalization and underdevelopment in the region, the existence of obnoxious laws such as the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Act of 1978, and the killing of Saro Wiwa. The immediate causes of militancy on the other hand include the militarization of the Niger Delta by the Nigerian state..." (637).

Stone and Cohen while articulating means of testing and practicality of measurement indices for assessing youth violence observe that the international measurement standards are not usually accurate in certain local circumstances because of conflicting factors of politics, economics and cultural institution. Per contra, Amelia van der Merwe and Andrew Dawes propose that violent behavior is likely to develop in multi-problem youth (63). This predilection for youth violence has been massively aided by coming-of-age institutions like confraternities, and peer associations which demand evidence of masculinity and prescribe violent bravura. Van der Merwe and Dawes note that "it is the continuity in the interaction between the child's neural mal-development (and its effects on child temperament behavior and cognition), and contextual risk factors in the child's family and broader environment that supports the maintenance of chronic antisocial behavior" (101). Van der Merwe and Dawes insist that like any other anti-social behavior, violent behavior is influenced by intricate factors impinging on the youth at the individual, family, and community levels with pronounced increased risks rising from lack of adequate buffers. The media's mental siege plays havoc on youth's emotive-intellectual ability associated with this behavior development phase.

### Mythical Narratives

Yerima's *Hard Ground* intensely analyses the political and militant subterfuge in the Niger Delta area due to the economic mismanagement of crude oil resources. His fugitive protagonist, Nimi, is the face of the Niger Delta youth whom Yerima presents as a doomed character. The playwright focuses on youth restiveness, attendant militancy, oil bunkering, and hostage taking, the dangers of god-fatherism and political patronage. Yerima's play is infused with elements of Marxism, expressionism and idealist realism. His hero, Nimi, faces betrayal within his militant group and is a suspect awaiting judgment at the hands of the mysterious god-father, the Don. Yerima's ideology of combative social vigilantism draws a line between subservient

acceptance of doomed fate and tactful resistance against social persecutors. He plays this social circumspection as attempts to reverse the youth's behavioral degeneration. This idiosyncratic slur is highlighted in both playwrights' plays through evocative diction, heightened imagery and an environmental composite verging on the morbid. It is impossible to aptly understand Irobi and Yerima's Niger Delta heroes without penetrating the operant conditions of their environment, age and Freudian scene of unconscious desire. It should be noted that both writers under review won Nigeria's highest literary prize, the NLNG prize, (the American Pulitzer Prize equivalent) because of the academic recognition that their plays most appropriately capture the Niger Delta militancy struggle. Irobi's plays particularly echo Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in suggesting that the audience experience the play as a real event. His reportage sets up a corrupt establishment as a transcendental signified which is confronted by the rebel parable to expose its convoluted moral authority. His drama's young heroes, that challenge this leadership order, manifest different levels of depression and communicate their psychotic experiences in Lacanian metaphors. Yerima rejects surface optimism and creates plays contiguous with social reality. To him these reconfigured youth values and ideals necessitate the redefinition of heroism. Nimi's assassination of the Don at the close of *Hard Ground* is a Marxist statement about imminent mass revolution when peaceful agitations fail to yield tangible benefits.

The social media has made youths more opinionated and aggressive in an increasingly complex world. Huston et al emphasize the exceeding violent content in children cartoons and reality T.V shows. Huston states that just as "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder" so too, apparently, is violence, for the manner in which violence is depicted on the screen and the context in which it occurs may affect youthful viewers' perceptions of these violent acts. Such factors include sanitization, consequences, comedy, justification and legitimation, perceived reality, graphicness and glamorization. As the end result of an internal process whose aggressive action varies in intensity, violence is multifarious, and prone to the complexities of youth's psychological swings. During tense real life situations, the youth most readily refers to his media experience repository for his model response to perceived hostile intent. Violence and aggression easily become culturally imbibed as intrinsic qualities framing power and masculinity as ready weapons of choice for youth. Huston et al single out media's influential ability as "too much television viewing cultivates attitudes and beliefs in the viewer that are more consistent with the world of television programmes than with the real world" (21). This necessitates a discourse to consider if media content and product packaging should be more ethically managed than they are presently. In America, for instance, media critics have complained about media's censorship of the gory sights of America's overseas war on terror and also victims of gun violence whereas in Nigeria such gruesome sights are not shielded from public viewership. This typical case of sanitization equates the arguments of media critics in Nigeria who feel that these Niger Delta narratives sanitize the criminal portions of the reality script and frame a saintly face on the phenomenon. Most Niger Delta youths are emotionally affected by the undignified state of their comrade's remains and will most likely take up arms. Kimiebi Ebiefa in his acquittal of the militants states that:

It is owing to the failure to win concessions through peaceful means that the youths in the Niger Delta have been inexorably driven to militantly protest marginalization, unemployment,



development deficit and inequality. The Kaiama Declaration also gave birth to the Ijaw Youth Council with the motto 'Resource control by any means possible. Thus, the Kaiama Declaration was the harbinger of the contemporary form of violence by the militants who abandoned the non-violent stance of the Ken Saro-Wiwa era and adopted violent measures... The first set of guns was captured from security operatives (637).

Charles Gore and David Pratten examine the collective response of Delta youth associations as interactive frameworks utilizing aggression and violence to challenge and capture institutional power. In Gore and Pratten's view "conflict is assumed to be part of the reproduction of social organization over time as cohorts pass from youth to elderhood, rendering conflict as an integral and situational component of the structures of social organization which engender it" (214). Revolutionary aesthetics is very evident in Yerima and Irobi's plays which publicize the voice of oppressed youth. The plays most often have violent openings, as evident in *Cemetery Road*, and end violently, for instance when Irobi's hero, Mazeli, sprints onstage stormily pursued by two soldiers. *Hard Ground* follows the same threnodic path culminating with the tragic denouement when the hero, Nimi, discovers that the elusive kingpin he assassinated at the play's close is really his supposedly cowardly father, Papa. These plays transpose Artaudian 'cruelty' model into graphic ends by applying their shock qualities as empathetic tools. The media's super arbiter relation to terror is not incidental but an articulated identity which mounting evidences confirm. Terror's fear inducing capacity is activated through direct interface with the young viewer who engages in cognitive observation and simultaneously internalizes negative media stereotypes for later projection. The suggested or stylized violent content also serves to attract and sustain the young viewer's attention as can be adduced by the Zillman and Weaver Study which reports that young audiences are increasingly becoming sadistic and insensitive and showing varying attributes of negative attitude.

It is difficult to isolate and identify the boundaries of art and propaganda in the referenced media narratives because their propaganda ideologies blend into the patchwork of the play's semiotic background. The language is oxymoronic, aggressive and seamlessly exploits the escapist needs of the reader's mentality. As a linguistic determinant, language can sometimes shape social identity through the anarchical semantics that litter the text's diction. Russell West-Pavlov explicates that "the very act of space-creation betrays the debt that narrative owes to the spaces which sustains it" (59). While Ahmed Yerima's narrative is speculative, Esiaba Irobi's language is fatalistic with overt fetish innuendoes. Their dramaturge objectifies the fetish of revolution and promise of leadership. Lyn Pykett surmises that "literary texts...whether one is using literary in the broader or narrower of the senses like other cultural practices are not derived from an otherwise constituted social order, but are themselves major elements in its constitution" (5).

### **The Media Terrorist and the Theatre of Violence**

The rise of the media in information management and interpretation politics has come at a great cost mostly to the peril of youth identity and its corollary jaundiced stereotypes. Each emergent mass media platform has at some historical period negotiated with youth viewership via comic books, literary texts, television and internet, with its yahoo chat room has provided social networks to be exploited and discarded. Blackberry pinging, Facebook hosting, Twitter,

Youtube uploads, and Instagram should be joining the archival procession in the not too distant future. Mass media's quality as a performance agent implies that its real and perceptible powers have the potential to effect cathartic release on the receiver. Media consumption markedly spikes from early to the late teens and just as the negative physical effects of its' over exposure is obesity and other ailments, so too can its cerebral effects on the psyche manifest as emotional instability and identity crisis. The word 'program' used to define media presentations is not an etymological misnomer but an apt power word describing media content's capacity to control viewers' thoughts as they view. Sandra Thomas and Helen Smith acknowledge the difficulty of articulating youth violence prevention strategies since most measures in place focus on the activated antisocial action instead of specifically zapping the root causes of the monster.

The influences of the six big media corporations which dominate America's mainstream media extend to Nigeria's entertainment shores. This global detritus and its concomitant intercultural appurtenances have powerfully affected the Nigerian youth's perception of his socio-political world and profoundly bent his ideological constructions of power, heroism, ethics, identity and social responsibility. To reach the viewer's mentality readily and retain his attention span, the media appropriates stereotypes or word pictures viewers can readily interpret meanings with. This linguistic – identity invention is axiomatic in clips of advertised products bringing joy to families with satisfied screen consumers endorsing the marketed product as aesthetic ideal. Media ownership's interests do not necessarily incline towards public service but serve commercial and selfish aims. Steven Kirsh explains that "media-based context creates memories, reinforces engrained memories, and makes existing memories more readily available for use" (30). The mass media can be conceived as a surrogate mother feeding junk information, which requires little analytical effort, to the juvenile viewer's neurons.

By engaging in myth making and truth management, the media invariably exploits the consumer. The wrestling programs, war movies and terrorist reports broadcast on news channels form the major crust of media items consumed by youth and an appraisal of such program contents suggest they are sensational agents which induce behavior. The media as a socializing mediator inculcates determined standards and values into young people through the gratification route. Its mental machine frames identity formation, emotional complexes of confidence, independence and language development through prime time advertisements preaching gospels of brand loyalty and friendship. The media only stokes the consumptive desires and wants it desires to have continued relevance in perpetuity. As Steven Kirsh observes, "interestingly, Chaplin and John (2007) have recently demonstrated that the developmental apex of materialism corresponds to the development bottom of self-esteem both of which occur during early adolescence. Many researchers believe that in an attempt to compensate for insecurities and a poor sense of self, youth purchase material goods"(89). The glamorization of materialism and violence by the media tends follows a noticeable penchant amongst youths to titillate toward fads given visibility in the media as ideal. Little wonder the three regular items noticeable in novels, movies and musical videos viewed by young people i.e.: money, guns and sex, are the most topical subjects of their discussions, vocabulary slangs and aspirations.

Media aesthetics collapse the margins of virtual fantasy and grim reality by edifying abnormal heroes of nefarious terrorist acts and innocuously encouraging youths to act out the witnessed

violence in real life while being misled by a sense of control. By using fear as a reductionist logic of hate the media regulates viewer ego and moral dogma, paints a propagandist aesthetic actuality and depicts reality as a repository within each individual. Simon Lesser surmises that the artist's capability to permit material from the unconscious to enter into consciousness for the production of attractive products captures the media's grasp of youth's vulnerable psyche. The media works directly on youth ego by presenting aggression as a necessary condition for resolving binary opposites of right and wrong, and pushes viewers to accept media violence and literary narratives as structured responses to institutional aggression. The denuding effect of a terrorist media is overwhelming and is primarily the cause of analysts' insistence on need for ethical standards.

Some parts of Irobi's narrative projects violent acts, for instance in the play's opening scene where the sacrificial cock is decapitated on stage. Yerima's style is more subtle as Mama's character switches off the light upon the Don's entrance to spare the audience the graphic murder act. Both writers are noticeably determined to ensure that the brutality of murder is not lost on the viewer. The concept of violence as advanced from this viewpoint is for emotional release. Violence as an emotional high is a marketed ideology serenading the repressed viewer/victim with limitless freedom of expression in whatever fashion. Inspired by the Brechtian epic aesthetics and Artaudian theatre of cruelty, Irobi blurs the limits between text and reader by working the reader into an active patient engaged in therapeutic session.

The gulf between parents and children as family unit, a regular dysfunctional feature of social media, is noticeable in Irobi's *Nwokedi* and Yerima's *Hard Ground* and aggregates both writers' post-modern subplot which by questioning centralized authority erects their own ideological power structures. The soldier myth narrative explains why the concepts of realism and value are used for propagandist ends in their works. The composite ideologies of Yerima and Irobi as critiques of social inequality can be summed up in the way both writers appropriate literature as effective media tool to sell cultural experience and elevate youth militancy as natural and legitimate.

## CONCLUSION

The image of youth in the media range across the connotative terms: 'reckless', 'ignorant', 'self-centered', 'hyper sexed', 'irresponsible', 'violent' etc. This identity framework is a phenomenon that gradually evolved as the social identity capacity of the media to condition traditional competencies increased. The media normalizes aggression and violence yet turns around to extrapolate the same attributes it has imprinted into youths through sensational programming. The response of youth readers to the plays under review and other media programs with high levels of violence reveals that repeated assault of violent imageries on the youth reduces the initial levels of anxiety, disgust and finally aggression. Media violence is further cauterized by one's stressful environmental realities and shylock media producers who deride society as a calcified stone which their art can merely mirror.

In a meta-analysis of 42 studies involving nearly 5,000 participants, Craig Anderson and Brad Bushman found an appreciable small-to-moderate-strength relationship between violent media

viewership and acts of aggression. The Journal of Pediatrics cites Lindsay A. Robertson et al whose research confirmed that watching excessive amounts of TV as a child or adolescent in which most of the content contains violence – was casually associated with anti-social behavior in early adulthood”(n.p).

This study has attempted to explore how playwrights depict violence. Media managers have consistently failed to grapple how their art further scarifies the already messy picture. Zev Braun of CBS once argued against the Violence Bill by suggesting that since art imitates life and our society is a violent one then the media manager shouldn't be blamed. He says that “regarding aggression, the problem may be less to do with the definition of aggressive, but rather how aggression is measured. Regarding ‘third’ variables, media violence researchers acknowledge that other variables may play a role in aggression”(n.p.). It is obvious that there is a high causation rate between violent themes in media materials and real-time youth aggression and violence. Consumers of violent movies, horror flicks, video games and ideological literature noticeably manifest high levels of aggressive, non-conformist behavior. The examination of reference literatures that serve as media extension magnifying this peculiar behavior shows that rather than proffer diplomatic alternatives, these literatures' character mapping have rather tilted youth ideology towards combative rebellion. The extensive government misuse of legitimate violence has promoted aggression as a youth resistance strategy, and this calls for a redemptive strategy that employs literature and information as tools to engage youths cognitively and promote their welfare. With the vision and skill of the writer and media producer, the literary work and media material can transform the pessimistic attitude of youth to optimism.

The various literatures under review adopt fractured approaches to forge frontiers of hermeneutic skirmish as perceptible in Irobi's plays which are spatially engaging while Yerima's plays comparatively appear more contemplative and meditative. Both writers focus on the marginalized youth with an ideological dogma elevating the Niger Delta society as a conceptual landscape where violence is a semiotic tool for creating meaning. The murders committed at the close of both writers' works indicate the fatalistic determination of the young heroes in permanently estranging themselves from civil society's order. This intellectual suicide equivalent is primarily why the youths in the reference texts facing tyrannical authorities ultimately implode in the absence of counseling, company and social compassion. The qualities of such literature should be diachronic with its promised chances of conflict resolution rather than synchronic with its anarchical postulations.

There is need for media literacy program in Nigeria where youths, media experts, counselors and government officials can interactively explore media effects and the attendant social problems. It is important to have a forum here where youths can voice their discontent and participate proactively in efforts to enhance their welfare. There is need to increase the youth's ability to resist subtle propaganda and its attendant anti-social practices. Writers should evaluate their narratives from the psychological perspective by considering the behavioral repercussions of the young reader ingesting the contents without having formed a formidable social filter. Language, whether it is graphic or metaphoric, is consequential because how a

social narrative is constructed eventually determines its perception and the strategies for addressing it.

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