

Dramatizing Subaltern Speakability: Nationalism and Economic Identity in Ola Rotimi's *Akassa Youmi*

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Abstract

*This paper classifies the condition of subalternism as a major productive location for nationalism and identity politics in the post-colonial world. It is predicated on the subaltern theory which underscores the perspective of the “other” as having no voice because of class, gender, and religion. It draws attention to the question of subaltern speakability in the construction of the drama of the Niger Delta by focusing on Ola Rotimi's *Akassa Youmi*, a drama of the region which has come to be appreciated as drama of nationalism and identity politics. Special attention is drawn to the fact that the play is founded concretely on minority, oppressed and marginalised voices in the postcolonial universe of the Niger Delta. Thus the creation of this drama is galvanized by the dramatists desire to give voice to the marginalised and oppressed people of Nembe. The study further holds the subaltern premise that subordinated people do not experience their circumstances passively but negotiate their position in society thus becoming agents in the making of their own history.*

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Subaltern Origin and Meanings

The term subaltern is a military term for junior officer, it literally means subordinate. The word was said to have been used first by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. He intends the word to mean proletariat within Marxist linguistic parlance. In present usage, it refers to the perspective of persons from regions and groups outside the hegemonic power structure. In

the 1970s the term “subaltern” began to be used as a reference to colonized people in South Asian Subcontinent. This school provided new perspective on the history of the colonized rather than from the perspective of the hegemonic power structure. In India, the colonial experience brought about new sense of identity even during the colonial era. Indians not only rejected British culture, their historians were faced with the task of writing a revisionist history to straighten the colonial historical account which they claimed was not a true version of Indian history. The school of study that emerged in the last three decades is the post-colonial subaltern rewriting of the self. A study in drama using the subaltern theory of identity is the central concern of this study. Homi Bhabha, a foremost theorist in post-colonial thought, highlights the importance of social power relation in his working definition of subaltern groups as “an oppressed minority group whose presence was crucial to the self definition of the majority groups. The subaltern social group was also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power.” ((1996:191). This position of Bhabha was also expressed by Boaventura Sousa Santos when he declared that subaltern can be seen within the context of counter hegemonic practices, movements, resistances, and struggles against particular social exclusion. The subaltern theory takes the perspective of the “other” as one who has had no voice because of race, class or gender. It establishes the fact that norms are established by those in power and imposed on the “other” (par.6). This post-colonial theory is built around the concept of resistance which can carry ideas about human freedom, identity and individuality which may not have been held in the same way, in the colonized culture view of humankind.

Akassa Youmi

This is a play written about the Nembe people of Ijaw extraction in the Niger Delta. The play dramatizes the British

occupation of Nembe with heavy colonial force and the struggle by the Nembe people to regain their lost voice and glory. At the beginning of the play, it is evident that Nembe's status as a sovereign ethnic nation ceased to be as a result of the imposition of the company rule of the Royal Niger Company. Nembe becomes a vassal state answerable to the authority of the Royal Niger Company, a monopolistic mercantile company. Such nationally vexatious issues like the wanton abuse and dislocation of the Nembe culture, the attempt made by the white to cripple the Nembe throne, division of Nembe people between Nembe traditional religion and the Western religion through the christianization of its symbol of spiritual and political authority : the king and the various laws put in place to strangulate the Nembe race socially and economically became ready events for the clamour for a national personality and resistance to the foreign colonial domination. This imposes great pain and anxiety on the human psychic. In fact, Nembe experienced a withering away of its reality. In the *Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon makes the point that to fight for national culture means, in the first place, to fight for liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible (1985:73). If we have chosen to quote from Fanon's celebrated work, it is on account of its direct and clear value of instruction which it leaves for the appreciation of Nembe national struggle in *Akassa Youmi*; a struggle for the recovery of voice and agency, a struggle that translates to subaltern speakability.

Niger delta drama

It is pertinent to attempt a definition of Niger Delta drama in view of the fact that the research is based on a select play of the region for subaltern speakability discourse. No definition given here can be permanent. But we can set the ball rolling from the definition of the literature of the region given by Tanure Ojaide:

Literature of the Niger Delta and Niger Delta Literature will be used interchangeably to mean works of written literature that have been produced by indigenes of the Niger Delta about their region or by others about the region. Niger Delta Literature is a reflection of the experiences of the people and whose content the people can identify with in a shared manner. The literature reflects the locale and is informed by, among others, geographical, socio-cultural, political, and biological factors'' (2011, p.1)

Thus Niger Delta drama can be understood as a drama written about the region by a playwright who is either an indigene or a non indigene of the region. Such a work should, apart from showcasing the Niger Delta setting and its relationships with the outside world, show the people's cultures, portray their socio-political and economic struggles and other experiences. A concrete source of Niger Delta literary inspiration including drama is the ecology of subjugation which the region has been experiencing.

Nationalism in *Akassa Youmi*

Ola Rotimi opened the window of Nembe's glorious past and spirit of nationalism through the character, Crocodile – Without – Shame and his second in command Amazige. The picture of Nationalism and the need for its attainment is vividly highlighted in the circle of the play. It is at that circle that we are informed that Goldie and the Niger Company took over all the trades of Nembe along the Niger Coast protectorate. Crocodile-Without-Shame (C-W-S) and his group of pirates are by the playwright's brilliant plotting, used significantly as instruments for drawing up the differences in Nembe between the past and the present of Nembe for positive action to be taken for the actualization of her self-

determination. Through a system of questions and answers, it is established that the present situation, in which Nembe people obtain licenses before trading in their own areas, is a bad one and differs from tradition, which demands that European traders pay 1 comey to the king of Nembe. By deduction, therefore, an argument is made for the people to fight for their rights.

(Green E. see *Akassa Youmi*, XIII) Crocodile-Without-Shame though a kingpin of the sea pirates is also deliberately positioned through his elegant characterization as a functional example of a revolutionary leader. One responsibility of leadership which is out to secure freedom is to sufficiently educate and conscientize the people, his subjects on the nitty-gritty of the whys and wherefores of the revolution. He gives his followers awareness. A revolution that is to be carried out without awareness of the people is bound to fail. This is the popular position of great revolutionists like Lenin. "Political awareness of the oppressed masses is indispensable for change" (cited in *WheFn the Oil runs Dry*, 2010:30). It is awareness that moves people to freedom. It is the force that wakes up the sleeping giant to slumber no more. The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the wars of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the idea of a common cause, of a national destiny and of a collective history (Fanon: 1985:73). Consciousness, generally speaking, refers to the awareness that a person or a group has both objectively and subjectively through the faculties of reason and reflection. Consciousness is knowledge of self or a person's place in life around him. Lenin takes the point further when he says consciousness or awareness is sinequanon of change. He is of the view that the exploited and the oppressed masses should understand the impossibility of living in old ways or new ways and demand changes that the exploiter should not be able to live and rule in old or new oppressive ways. He further harps on the point that revolution is impossible without change

in the views of the majority of the working class and this change is brought about by the political experience of the masses. (Quoted in *Storms on The Niger* 1981: 23)

The point being made here by Lenin is that political awareness of the oppressed masses is indispensable for change to occur. This aspect of Frantz Fanon and Lenin's doctrine on revolution and freedom through awareness is given significant attention in *Akassa Youmi*. To corroborate this fact, Crocodile-Without – Shame, one of King Koko's fouters, is assigned the task of educating the masses on the reasons why the revolt against the Royal Niger Company is imperative if Nembe must regain its political, cultural and economic identities. Crocodile-Without-Shame is conscious of this instrument of revolution; hence, he asks Amazige, the historian in the group to educate other members of the pirate gang with the background to the laws imposed by the Royal Niger Company on Nembe. Let us read Amazige in his presentation of the Nembe history of the past and the present.

In days gone by or venturing into the waters of our fathers white traders paid 'comey' to the king of Nembe, next Whiteman paid what they called 'trust' this was like a loan-a loan to our own traders, here in Nembe. Nembe traders then went into the up country, bought oil and other goods. The same Nembe traders, our own fathers, brought back these goods and oil to the Whiteman, who then paid our fathers the balance of the 'trust' that was how it worked. The Blackman made his profit, the Whiteman got his oil. The story ends.

C-W-S: Those days are gone by. Now what are the laws that our people break and get shot for?

AMAZIGE: All I know is that since the big Whiteman, Goldie, and his Royal Niger Company took over the lands of trades in the up country, our black traders are forced to pay a lot of money for permission to trade as before, (47).

Crocodile-Without-Shame is a symbol of nationalism. Having adequately conscientised his gang members including the new initiates, he said to them, “any man, any being, black, white or green-any man with respect for himself, and pride for his race, would starve in the dignity of resistance, than belch in the contentment of domination by strangers (48). Crocodile – Without- Shame, the Headman of the sea pirates, is charged with nationalistic dedication and psychological faith in the Nembe dream to resist European domination to reclaim its identity. After raising the consciousness of Posi, Amanaghan and others, he urges them to return to Nembe to inform King Koko that if he (Koko) needs fighters to combine forces against the oppressors, he Crocodile-Without-Shame is ready.

In this Nembe struggle to regain its natural identity, Crocodile- Without -Shame and his sea piracy gang are first to affirmatively declare support for the fight against the oppressors. This began the planting of the mood of revolution in Nembe. (Ojukwu.1969:15) States that, Revolution is a change – a quick change, for the better. Every society is changing all the time. It is changing for the better or for worse; it is either moving forward or moving backward; it cannot stand absolutely still. A Revolution is a forward movement. It is a rapid forward movement which improves a people's standard of living and their material circumstances and purifies and raises their moral tone. It transforms for better, those institutions which are still relevant, and discards those which stand in the way of progress. Olu Obafemi. (1982:119) adds his voice to the concept of revolution and opened a new perspective different from that of Ojukwu. He

says, 'Revolution has to be collective. If any man believes he can do it alone, he is fooling himself. The forces that he is fighting are enormous....' Let us start from history, none of the revolutionaries worked alone. This capturing of the basic characteristics and objectives of revolution appropriately depicts the collective struggle of the Nembe's for the attainment of Nembe national identity.

Rotimi acknowledges that revolution, particularly for an oppressed people, is the foundation of freedom. He is also conscious of the fact that social edification and revolutionary conscientisation are basic for the mobilization of a subjugated people for freedom. All over the world, this is a revolutionary tradition. Leaders educate their followers on the whys and wherefores of freedom. In modern postcolonial time, such education has been expressed in public lectures, news paper comments and writings, paid adverts and sponsored television programmes. Rotimi exhibits a modest postcolonial temper in *Akassa Youmi* by dramatizing the world of the oppressor as he seeks a voice from the oppressed world.

As evident in the dramatic presentation of the Nembe rise against the Whiteman, it is clear that the colonial philosophy and its forceful practice offends the judgment and sensibility of Ozongbai, the great priest of the shrine, mouth piece of Nembe as well as the custodian of the tradition. Hence, moved by his adoration for Nembe survival and demand for the installation of Nembe's right to self-determination, he educates King Koko on the difference between to rule and to lead. The ultimate goal of Ozongbai in the leadership and rulership dialogue he had with Koko is to set Koko into action as the anointed liberator of Nembe. When Koko informs Ozongbai that he has come to submit to the advice of the ancestors Ozongbai charges him. And in their collective voice: I charge you to prepare yourself to be leader, and save the land from sinking further.

In realizing the identity of Nationalism in the play,

Rotimi returns Koko from Christianity to traditional religion an incongruous situation in which whitemen-purveyors of the New Religion – turn out also to be practitioners of the great wickedness visited on the people by the Royal Niger Company (XIII). Oruadiri's assault on Koko is pressurized by the collective discontent and indignation of the community. Crocodile-without-Shame's declaration of support for the freedom dream of Nembe and Ozongbai's constant spiritual backing given to king Koko and the fighters are resounding nationalistic efforts.

Rotimi teaches us in the play with the Koko, C-W-S and Ozongbai tripartite paradigm of leadership that, only men who are inspired, who have charismatic dignity by their great deeds, reasoning and tactics decisively and decidedly win freedom for the oppressed. It is also evident that nothing short of moral certainty and unbending will of a supportive followership can engender the concrete realization of the brighter and greener side of freedom. This is because a people without the consciousness, the philosophy and psychology of freedom cannot earn it if they shout, cry and carry arms for even a thousand years.

The Nembe example of leadership and followership during periods of national crises in *Akassa Youmi* is a positive image; an image creatively designed to achieve Nationalism and national identity for the Nembe race. No people struggling for freedom or identity can achieve it without a good leadership, without good followership, without unity and without placing value on the struggle for change. This is what Rotimi practically demonstrates in his drama on the question of national identity. Koko, Ozongbai and the Women of Nembe are physical embodiments of passionate patriots and personifications of nationalism. Jeyifo speaks of a writer as "a promoter of explicit social, political and moral values crucial to the survival of his or her society (1991: IX). Rotimi has sufficiently demonstrated this in *Akassa Youmi*, as he is

burdened by the collapse of Nembe identity and rights being his maternal home. Hence, he gives dispensation of restorative justice a significant attention to recover the destiny of Nembe. These principal archetypal characters with nationalistic depiction as in the case of Koko who is under psychological impulsion, demonstrate a good deal of awareness of Nembe dilemma which springs from the forceful removal of Nembe's sovereignty for a painful servitude in their land and the consistent domineering influence of the colonialists. The Nembes are impoverished and disoriented socio-economically, culturally and politically. They are therefore fanatical about a return to the old political, cultural, economic and spiritual status quo. Both Rotimi and the characters in the cosmos of the play celebrate the question of Nembe survival, nationalism and subaltern voice. *Akassa Youmi* is a product of a high value aesthetics constructed around the Nembe confrontation with the white government with a radical ideology to regain the lost voice of Nembe.

Ola Rotimi creates an identity drama on Nembe kingdom showcasing the people's understanding of their identity as a collective sentiment. This is because the Nembes felt the cruel impact of colonial subjugation on their psyche. Their quest for the re-installation of political independence and sovereign statehood or autonomy stems from the age long notion of the rhythm of the self, the desire for self-determination which also covers cultural self expression like retention of patterns of religious worship, retention of collective customs and institutions as well as economic freedom. They struggled to break the spell imposed on them by the foreign domination, and to awaken the slumbering splendour of the kingdom and set it once again on its national glory and historic track.

Thus, the ideals of national identity, unity, autonomy and authenticity are resoundingly resonated across the minds and memories of all Nembe. Nembe rise against the

Whiteman, as a matter of fact, is an epic battle between the forces of identity galvanized by nationalism and the search for the recovery of voice and agency on the part of Nembe and colonialism on the part of the Whiteman. Ola Rotimi gives the Nembe cultural pride and identity a regenerative force of antithesis against colonialism, which united and produced the people's voice that mobilized them against British rule. He presents Nembe nationalism and national identity on the political agenda of their struggle as a foremost vector of the movement of history as the national character of Nembe struggle epitomized in *Akassa Youmi* decks itself out to preserve Nembe nationalism and identity.

We need to draw attention to the fact that the cultural component of the Nembe national identity struggle tends to be more obligatory and communally reinforcing at the time of great danger and European persecution. It can be stated here that culture was deployed as an instrument of subaltern speakability. Culture was significant in ensuring the survival of Nembe national persona and nationalism. Crocodile- Without-Shame, in his nationalistic disposition, appeals to the power of collective memory- well attested memories- in the cause of invoking the Nembe glorious historical past that has been buried brutally by the economic politics of the new and alien rulers of Nembe.

Identity is gleaned as a strong current in the history of the post colonial drama of the Niger Delta. In *Akassa Youmi*, it is evident that both history and drama are clinically synthesized in the reinvention of Nembe prized identities dislocated by the sweeping flood of colonialism. Plays like Ambakederemo's *Isaac Boro* (1990). Umukoro *Nana Olotu*,(2001), JP Clark's *All for Oil*(2000) and Ben Binebai's *Drums Of The Delta*(2010) also strongly express political, cultural and economic identities of the Niger Delta. Thus, the assertion of identity in Rotimi's *Akassa Youmi* becomes one of the greatest obsessions of the playwright against colonial

domination in the triumph of culture and revitalization of Nembe nationalism.

Economic Identity

All over the world the things that make a people different from others are culture and language. A people without culture and language which sustain their pride of identity are people adrift or people facing extinction. But as strong as those factors are in determining the cultural sovereignty of a people, they are not more important than the economic factor which can best be described as the crank shaft upon which the fly wheel of a nation rotates. The first thing a nation or a people who wish to be independent think about is economic viability. Economic power keeps culture alive, it is the backer of political power, as technological discoveries cannot be made without economic power.

The economy of a nation is what keeps such a nation alive. Europe during the Trans- Atlantic slave trade which lasted for three hundred years traded in human cargoes because of their economic power. The point must be stressed further that European scramble for and partition of Africa was galvanized by economic reason. In Nigeria, economic viability is a cardinal consideration for the creation of states. This is the same reason that gives a group of people vision to embark on the extreme form of self – determination which is secession. A people intending to break away from a larger group to declare its own sovereignty must first of all be convinced of its economic strength. A nation or a race that takes undue economic advantage over another nation or race places such a nation or race in a perilous state of economic dislocation and marginalization. This sub discourse that is waiting in the wings is based on clash of economic interest between the domineering colonialists and the Nembe people who have become subjects to the alien rule. While the British interest is to maximize profit, Nembe's interest is to gain

economic freedom and identity. The playwright's presentation of the economic struggle of Nembe is a candid reflection of the fundamental vision of a philosophical concept, libertarianism. Roth and Sontag hold in *The Question of Philosophy* that:

Libertarianism places emphasis on the fact that every person is the owner of his own life and that no one is the owner of anyone else's life. That every human being has the right to act in accordance with his own choices, unless those actions infringe on the liberty of other human beings.... It is an emphasis on right where freedom is concerned ... Liberty includes economic activities (1988: 317).

While the economic freedom of the colonialist infringes crushingly on the right of the Nembes, Nembe's resistance to their economic suppression is a practical demonstration of libertarianism. This becomes evident as Rotimi, powers the principal characters in *Akassa Youmi* on whose hand the freedom of Nembe lies with Libertarian sense and sensibility. The background to Nembe clamour for economic identity alongside cultural authenticity and sovereignty is given by Alagoa E.J when he said in a lecture given at the 4th Convention of the Ijaw National Congress at Yenagoa, Bayelsa State titled: *The Ijaw Nation in the New Millennium*

From 1880, the British colonialists began to change the terms of trade by replacing local law enforcement with courts of equity, created by themselves. They also began the conversion of local population to Christianity, and to sign treaties of protection intended to subvert the sovereignty of the Niger Delta peoples. This new tactics led to Wars of resistance. (1999:6).

The case of Nembe presented in *Akassa Youmi* is a devaluation of indigenous culture, political institution and economic deprivation masterminded and perfected by the colonial institution. Obviously, Rotimi explores the process and direction of identity assertion in the drama with the instrumentality of the ideology of revolution against colonialism, the dominant ideology which serves the interest of the powerful social, political and economic interest of the white. By Dahrendorf's philosophical rationalization, the British, who had become powerful, want society to run smoothly so that they can enjoy their privileged positions. One sure way of defending their wealth and power was to put in place law and order favorable to them (see Richard T. Schaefer 2005:207). This runs counter to Nembe interest. Thus, in this battle of survival of the Nembe kingdom, Rotimi draws our attention implicitly to an era of economic history in Europe known as industrial revolution. A kind of scientific revolution itself, a product of the capitalist spirit, when in England in 1811; masked craft workers took extreme measures in resisting it. They mounted night time raids on factories and destroyed some of the new machinery. The resistance of Nembe against the Royal Niger Company of Akassa is a resistance to reclaim Nembe economy, fortune and destiny akin to the England workers.

To properly situate the discourse on economic identity, it is pertinent to state that before colonial incursion to the Niger Delta, Nembe was a prosperous kingdom but the economic advantage of Nembe ceased to be, sequel to the new colonial power and authority which controlled Nembe. Nembe was reduced from sovereignty to vassal hood. The queen of England who offered protection to Nembe signed treaty with their king Igbeta. The point is made by Ola Rotimi's sea piracy characters that the white man controls all the trade and lands down and up the river which was under Nembe in the good days. The brutalities visited on Nembe traders who violate the

laws of the white man are also unbearable. Nembe canoes are drowned and their owners are mercilessly shot to death. The payment of “Comey” and “trust” to Nembe King and traders respectively by the white man when prosperity and nationalism was luminous is stopped. The black man, Amazige said, “... made his profit, the Whiteman got his oil” but when the Whiteman imposed his control on Nembe, Goldie and his Royal Niger Company who have become owners of Nembe land and trade forced black traders to pay a lot of money for permission to trade.

Perhaps, for the purpose clarity, it is imperative to enumerate the draconian trade rules imposed on Nembe which propelled the violent resistance of Nembe nation against colonial domination. We deduce from the exhaustive dialogue between Crocodile – without-Shame and his new initiates, Posi and Amanaghan that Nembe buys license from Goldie’s Royal Niger Company N50, 000 to trade in alcohol. Nembe man must buy another kind of license called spirit license for N100, 000. And for every village that the Nembe man wants to trade at, it is said he must buy another type of license called station license of N10, 000. The implication of this station license is that for each trip you, as a Nembe man, make to Aboh to buy oil, to Onitsha to buy yam and the paddling to Okowe to purchase plantain costs N10, 000 each. We are further informed that on return home, there is a custom station set up by the company that the Nembe trader goes to, to salute and show to The Royal Niger Company men who then inspect all the goods bought. The discovery of alcohol and tobacco on a Nembe trading boat attracts payment of another tax on each article on the boat to the customs officers of the company. The white man’s economic and territorial laws command the Nembe trader to stop again at the last custom post of Akassa and show his/her goods or items bought which attract payment of 20% tax on every item purchased.

Okorio, Alisabo, Posi and Ananaghan, the C-W-S co

pirates who are also members of his audience, denounce the obnoxious trade rules of the white man. Okorio states: “Too many taxes now!” In response, C-W-S says “maybe there are, but you must pay them, all the same since you don’t want to get shot. Alisabo, who is highly sensitised to a point of infuriation, says he will rather die and when C-W-S asked why, the crowd unanimously questioned their fate rhetorically. How can one make profit? What’s the use trading? How can the poor people at home buy things with all those wicked taxes? Igodo who has been properly educated about the hopelessness of Nembe economic destiny in the hands of the colonialists laments:

...Whatever we do, it is the white man who gains. If we agree to pay all those taxes, but, all those crazy licenses, our money all goes to the Whiteman, and we starve. On the other hand if we stop trading and look or as the Nembe traders are doing now, the Whiteman controls everything all the same, and we still starve (P.54).

It is significant to note that the resistant spirit of revolution is being provoked by the gloomy picture of Nembe’s economic position painted by Crocodile-Without-Shame. The rules of the Royal Niger Company generate a national calamity; there is severe hunger and disease in Nembe. Economic survival of Nembe becomes a great emotional impulse in the public life of Nembe. This is the reason why Crocodile- Without – Shame declares his support for war against the enemies to secure Nembe’s sovereignty and economic liberty. Ola Rotimi in his characterization of Crocodile-Without-Shame packaged him as man of dual individuality. He is both a bad man and a good man who is struggling for his personal identity and the collective economic

identity of his race. According to C-W-S, the only legacy left for Nembe people following the institutionalization of wicked laws of trade in Nembe is piracy.

Sambo who had earlier condemned thieving as a solution to the Nembe problem as advocated and appropriated by Crocodile-Without-Shame firmed up on the idea that “on armed revolt lies the hope of Nembe to break away from the brutal manacles of colonial domination for the attainment of a life true to, and befitting of Nembe.

The issue of C-W-S facing up to the fact that meaningful existence can be achieved by them by means of the practice of piracy is another angle to the identity question within the larger circle of economic identity. There is this popular belief that political leaders of society create the conditions for the existence of social problems like armed robbery, prostitution etc. This position has the backing of Femi Osofisan Nigeria's seminal dramatist of the second generation who wrote a play on this claim titled *Once upon Four Robbers*. In the play, Femi Osofisan makes the point that the robbers were forced into robbery because of the harsh economic conditions created by the political leaders of the nation. The play is assigned an open end with a question if the robbers are to be executed or not? Osofisan is not a lone voice in this claim. Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen also Die* (1989) is another dramatic experience that makes a case for terror gangs who were forced into robbery because of economic hardship in spite of obtaining sound professional degrees. In page 45 of the play, they unanimously stress the point that they do what they have to do because they do not have a future. The position of Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan in *Once upon Four Robbers* (1991) and Esiaba Irobi in *Hangmen also Die* is acknowledged and contextually revisited by Eni Kenneth in his drama “A Taste of Violence” performed at the Niger Delta University stage on the 15th of May 2004. The cast of characters like those of *Akassa Youmi* attribute their involvement in robbery to the economic

adversity they experience unbearably in the society. A psycho-analytic examination of the Nembe struggle as we learn from *Crocodile -Without -Shame* shows that Nembe is propelled into struggle for freedom because of the vanishing beautiful past, the sorrows of the present and the fear of the future.

Crocodile -Without-Shame launches a logical argument that his identity as a sea pirate is a legacy of the cruel colonial rule in Nembe. The business of sea piracy in which he has found himself is a way of making life useful for him. He sees his survival in particular and that of Nembe in general as an open possibility. Ola Rotimi, with the C-W-S character in his drama, draws the attention of the world to new economic identities created by colonialism and oppression in the Niger Delta. He has used the character as a figurative representation of the phenomenon of armed robbery whether aquatic or land in the society. His dramatic paradigm of Nembe people finding life and survival in sea piracy finds quintessential parallel in the social history of the economy of the Niger Delta.

The big question that needs to be raised in this work is, why do people in the Niger Delta region and areas like Lagos take part in kidnapping oil workers, seize the running and control of flow stations, vandalize pipelines, take hostage foreign nationals, indulge in illegal bunkering, cease river vessels and even rob their own people especially in the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta. The simple truth available is that they feel they have, for long, been barred from the pleasant comfort of Nigeria's oil economy. They want to create an identity for themselves. They see themselves as economically alienated, suppressed and deprived people. The cannibalistic characteristic of the society which is damnable is created by the leaders of the nation. While the political leaders amass the wealth of the nation, the people at the bottom of the social-strata pushed by the pressures of survival of the fittest resort to these varieties of illegal businesses as ways of sustaining existence.

Rotimi's *Crocodile-Without-Shame* is an embodiment of this spirit that has gradually and systematically institutionalized its existence in the Niger Delta. The callous economic rules imposed on Nembe, the abuse of the culture and the collapse of its economy and sovereignty are key factors in the dislocation of Nembe pride and identity. The war raised by Nembe people under King Koko with the firm support of C-W-S is essentially a war to ensure economic survival for their people, to break the stronghold on trade imposed by the Royal Niger Company and the Niger Coast protectorate and to maintain Nembe's sovereignty and to regain the lost political and economic voice of Nembe. Ola Rotimi's *Akassa Youmi* is a drama powered to phase out institutional discrimination to Nembe and to alter unfavorable social relation by way of restructuring the oppressive social institution imposed on Nembe race by the colonialist to achieve Nembe's pride in its economic wealth.

Crocodile-Without-Shame can be placed as a professional criminal with a sense of organised crime who, with his group makes a career of illegal activities. It is important to carry out a logical definition of who a professional criminal is. According to Sociologist Richard T. Schaefer, (2005:188), a professional criminal is a career criminal, a person who pursues crime as a day-today occupation, developing skills, techniques and enjoying a certain degree of stakes among other criminals. *Crocodiles-Without-Shame* and his gang take to sea piracy as a means of upward mobility and struggle to escape the poverty imposed on them by the colonial rule. The sea piracy, considered a major social problem, caused by institutional oppression, becomes a distinct economic survival identity to C-W-S and his group. The imposing of rules on Nembe by the colonialists generates anomie. Anomie as a term was introduced into sociological literature by Durkheim. According to him, anomie is a period of profound social change and disorder, a time of

economic collapse. People become more aggressive or depressed and the result is higher rates of violent crime... (2005:182). This is a clear case of the Nembe social experience during the reign of the Royal Niger Company. The colonialists maintained their dominance through governance and through terror and violence. Consequently, King Koko, Ozongbai, the women and people of Nembe and C.W.S. raise and use violent force to oppose and dismiss domination. This is a conviction in identity discourse circles that the violence of the oppressor begets the violent defense or attack of the oppressed.

Conclusion

This paper is clear about the subordination of the Nembe people, politically, culturally, economically, psychologically and religiously by the agents of the Royal Niger Company acting on behalf of the British crown. Their struggle to regain their lost identity, find and reclaim their collective voice in Nembe Kingdom, is a struggle by subordinated people finding their voice. *Akassa Youmi*, a dramatic representation of Nembe National experience is a play which documents the historic struggle of the Nembe people for self determination. This is a success story that stands on the side of nationalism and economic identity. The Nembe's fought against their displacement and subaltern status collectively as a necessity that must give the community its true psychology and self-determination. It is evident that both the playwright and the characters he creates in the play are voices of the "other" seeking identity and freedom. The colonialist's firm control of Nembe brings the king and his subjects into subaltern status. This gives Koko the challenge to fight for the recovery of his lost voice. The play is therefore a quintessence of aesthetic oeuvres that dramatizes Subaltern speakability.

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