

## Rapport Management Strategies in Conflict Situations: A Pragmatic Reading of Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground*

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### Keywords:

Literary pragmatics, conflict discourse, Niger Delta, rapport management, politeness research, Yerima, *Hard Ground*

**Abstract:** The (mis)management of rapport amongst groups in Niger Delta (ND) communities has become a significant issue, which Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* (*HG*) depicts as having the capacity to aid or control the conflicts in the region. Linguistic studies on Yerima's drama from the perspective of pragmatics have tended to use pragmatic acts to identify the discourse value of proverbs and functions of characters' utterances but have not accounted for the politeness strategies utilised for rapport management, especially in conflict situations. This article, drawing on a rapport management model of politeness and aspects of speech act discourse, identifies the face, sociality rights, and interactional goals that characterise the conflict-motivated dialogues sampled in *HG*, and reveals the rapport management (RM) strategies through which these are managed in the text. Three conflict situations can be observed as prompting different RM strategies: cause-effect identification (CEI), militancy support (MSP), and disagreement (DSG) situations. CEI is marked by incriminating (involving eliciting and informing acts) and exonerating (including complimenting and acknowledging acts) strategies; MSP is indexed by strategies of persuasion (realised with face-enhancing/threatening acts), whereas DSG is typified by requesting (featuring explicit head acts and alerters) and blaming strategies (including insulting and threatening, aggravating moves). Generally, the requesting, blaming, and exonerating strategies are largely used by the ND youth in *HG* to probe, threaten, or disagree on specific issues, while the incriminating and persuasion strategies are mainly employed by the women to indict, influence, and predict future actions. The study of RM in the conflict situations depicted in the play sheds light on the often neglected cause of conflicts in contemporary Africa.

### 1. Introduction

In interpersonal relations, individuals or groups normally have different subjective perceptions of communicative situations of (dis)harmony, based on their different social identities or ideological positionings. Rapport management is one of 'the ways in which this (dis)harmony is (mis)managed' (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009: 102). There are many scholarly views on rapport management, including the one offered by Goudy and Potter (1975) – which focuses on dialogue as the basis of rapport management – as well as those by Fowler and Mangione (1990) and Blohm (2007) – which lay emphasis on the acceptance and cooperation amongst participants in an exchange. The

preference in this article is the former approach, which helps to provide insights not only into the goals of social interaction, but also the contextual elements that may constrain certain identities and sociality rights given to participants in interaction.

Poor management of social relations has been identified as one of the factors that have fuelled intra-group conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Ononye 2014). Within this region, for example, different groups exist which employ diverse social identity formations – such as, among others, positioning and self-presentation – in referring to themselves (and other groups) in order to legitimise their motives and ultimately pursue their own interests. One interesting way through which this is achieved is language, which is not only a concrete form of constructing and transmitting different group identities (De Fina 2006: 351), but is also central to the strategies employed in managing such identity differences. Existing linguistic studies on Niger Delta conflicts have hardly paid attention to the communicative strategies utilised for managing relations among groups in conflict, much less considering the representation of conflict in dramatic texts (Adeoti 2007), but have rather unduly focused on both local and international media reports of the conflicts (Ononye 2017; Ononye and Osunbade 2015). Until linguistic studies provide a satisfactory analysis of the nature of social relations and how they are managed within the Niger Delta context, a full understanding of the recurrence of conflict in the region may be difficult. This gap is what has motivated this pragmatic study of the play. Essentially, linguistic studies of Ahmed Yerima's plays are largely tilted towards the exploration of implicit/explicit and speech act use of proverbs in the texts. This article, by contrast, draws on a more recent discursive model of rapport management, which – as the analysis will show – is able to reveal the conflict-induced pragmatic strategies exploited for managing social relations by different participants in Niger Delta conflict. Specifically, it examines the pragmatic strategies and linguistic forms through which aspects of rapport are negotiated in Yerima's play and reveals how discourse participants' faces, sociality rights, and interactional goals are (mis)managed in it. This article contributes to the critical appreciation of Yerima's dramatic work and extends existing work in literary pragmatics.

## **2. Yerima's dramaturgy and the Niger Delta conflict**

Ahmed Yerima was exposed early to a wealth of theatrical traditions. Ranging from classical poetics to twentieth century anti-theatre (during his postgraduate training in Cardiff), literary drama and travelling theatre groups (of post-independence Nigeria) to being a teacher of drama and theatre, Yerima has come to possess a unique blend of literary taste. Hence, in a way that is remarkably different from the radical confrontational politics of most Niger Delta literature, his 'dramaturgy is a composite of theatrical paradigms guided by experimentations and innovations' (Adeoti 2007: 2) aimed at highlighting the conflictual nature of Nigerian history and culture. Generally, his plays mostly capture social experience, with obvious attempts to draw an equilibrium between aesthetics and social reality (Liman 2019).

In dealing with the social realities of Nigerian contemporary society, Yerima has utilised the strategies of adaptation, allegorical representation and verbatim theatre extensively in his work. In terms of adaptation, he uses the succession tradition of Yoruba kingship in *The Silent Gods* (1996) to address the prevailing power play amongst the Nigerian political class and the political crisis associated with the annulment of the 1993 presidential election. For allegorical representation, such plays as *Attahiru* (1999), *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees* (2001), and *Yemoja* (2002) address the socio-cultural and ethnic multiplicities in Nigeria. Many of Yerima's plays can also easily be associated with the style of verbatim theatre, a branch of documentary theatre, which in the 1960s had been used to provide 'a platform for the silent or marginalised' (Anderson and Wilkinson 2007: 4) and is 'giving voice to the point of view of the dispossessed' (Derbyshire and Hodson 2008: 13). Three of Yerima's plays match this genre: *Hard Ground* (2006), *Little Drops* (2009) and *Ipomu* (2011). The plays' treatment of the conflicts in Niger Delta communities corresponds to Uwasomba's (2007) submission that 'art – though not a replacement of real life – is a mediated reflection of life' (58).

The Niger Delta covers about 70,000 kilometres (Rowell, Marriott and Stockman 2005: 9) in the South-South region of Nigeria. Despite its small dimension (with respect to the whole Nigerian territory), it 'harbours over 95 per cent of Nigeria's crude oil and gas resources, accounting for 90 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings' (Ogbogbo 2005: 169) and offers over two million barrels of crude oil daily. While the oil deposits have drawn the world's major oil companies and enormous corporate investment, the intense oil-drilling and refining activities in the area have led to substantial ecological degradation. In corollary, the people's health and supply of food, ranging from fishing to agriculture, have been grossly affected (Kadafa 2012). According to Rowell, Marriott and Stockman (2005: iv), given this state of affairs (including the lack of jobs and infrastructure and industries), the Niger Delta has become synonymous with squalor and mass poverty, which have bred the feeling of utter neglect, relegation and discrimination. Therefore, to address these problems, 'the peoples have embarked on a long and continued struggle for self-determination and to control the resources from their "fatherland"' (Ononye 2017: 168). This struggle, as Ononye and Osunbade (2015: 98) classify it, often bifurcates into:

intellectual articulation (creative writers, musicians and griots, media communicators, radical religious clerics and patriotic politicians who have demonstrated the same resistance through different idioms and semiotics) and physical conflict (involving the gun-wielding category of the advocates) against the injustice perpetuated by the successive Nigerian governments.

Niger Delta literature, which constitutes a great part of the intellectual struggle, draws its inspiration from the environment (Adegoju 2017: 233). For Darah (2008), it is a demonstration of how literature has become an extension of the politics of emancipation and human rights. This corroborates Ngugi wa Thiong'o's idea that 'literature does not develop in a vacuum, it is given impetus, shape, and direction by social, political and economic forces in a particular

society' (wa Thiong'o 1972: xv). Generally, Niger Delta literature has largely focused on the advocacy for environmental safety and justice from what Nixon calls 'environmentally embedded violence that is often difficult ... to reverse' (2011: 7). *Hard Ground* is a significant measure of Yerima's passion for the environment and concern for the way the conflict that has characterised the Niger Delta peoples' struggle is managed. This justifies the focus of this article on Yerima's enactment of how social relations are managed among groups in this region. For data, conflict-motivated dialogues in Yerima's play, *Hard Ground* were sampled, read critically, and subjected to a pragmatics analysis, with insights drawn from the rapport management model of politeness described below. *Hard Ground* was selected principally because it depicts the culture and aftermath of conflict within and amongst Niger Delta communities. Also important is the fact that the text illustrates the playwright's theatrical method of creating awareness and raising people's consciousness on specific issues of the Niger Delta struggle (Derbyshire and Hodson 2008: 13).

The analysis of the rapport management strategies and linguistic forms in the dialogues in *Hard Ground* is anchored in Spencer-Oatey's politeness theory of rapport management. Politeness pragmatics gained ground in the 1970s and 80s through the seminal work of Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), the aim of which was to build upon Grice's (1975) 'Cooperative Principle'. These traditional politeness theories have been criticised for their universalism (Locher and Langlotz 2008: 170). However, current research has broadened the scope of politeness to include such phenomena or concepts as 'impoliteness and rudeness' (e.g. Culpeper 1996; Kienpointer 1997), 'face-negotiation' (e.g. Ting-Toomey 2004), 'face constitution' (e.g. Arundale 2010), 'relational work' (e.g. Locher and Watts 2005), 'rapport management' (e.g. Spencer-Oatey 2000, 2005, 2008), etc. One feature that runs through these more recent approaches is that they pay less attention to rules and instead focus on the appropriateness of constraining the pragmatic strategies or linguistic choices employed by interlocutors in their social relations (Lakoff and Ide 2006).

Rapport management, like most politeness models, essentially hinges on Goffman's notion of face as the positive social value that can be deservedly given or denied a person or group in interaction (1967: 5-10; cf. Brown and Levinson 1987). However, unlike the traditional face theories, which have been faulted for being rule-based and hence concerned with the self, rapport management offers a greater balance between self and other as a way of representing group identities in Niger Delta conflicts from an interpersonal perspective.

Spencer-Oatey (2000) proposes that rapport management entails three main interconnected components, namely, the management of face, the management of sociality rights and obligations, and the management of interactional goals. In terms of face management, 'face' is conceived as 'closely related to a person's sense of identity or self concept: self as an individual (individual identity), self as a group member (group or collective identity) and self in relationship with others (relational identity)' (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 14). For instance, groups in a conflict

have a primary desire for others to evaluate them and their group mission, ideological beliefs or socio-political affiliations positively. Management of face therefore involves being sensitive to peoples' positive social values. Sociality rights and obligations are 'fundamental social entitlements that a person effectively claims for him/herself in his/her interactions with others' (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 21). The management of sociality rights and obligations, therefore, involves the accommodation of the social expectancies people bring to an interaction, ranging from consideration and fairness to behavioural appropriateness. People in distressed conditions, for instance, regard themselves as having a range of sociality rights and obligations in terms of expressing themselves in a particular way, expecting others to grant their expectancies. Three types of behavioural expectancies for self and other have been identified, viz. (a) contractual / legal agreements and requirements (based on societal requirements for equal opportunity), (b) explicit/implicit conceptualisation of roles/positions (based on three key elements: equality/inequality, distance/closeness, and rights and obligations of expectations associated with roles and positions), and (c) behavioural conventions, style and protocol (based on the behavioural expectations associated with norms, styles and protocols of a particular situation) (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 15). Interactional goals, as the third feature that can affect interpersonal rapport, embrace the specific tasks people have when they interact. These bifurcate into 'relational' (relationship-based) goals and 'transactional' (task-focused) goals. According to Spencer-Oatey, the desire to achieve these goals influences peoples' perception of rapport (2008: 17).

Five interrelated domains of language use through which the components of rapport management can be realised in texts have been suggested (Spencer-Oatey 2008): the illocutionary domain (deals with such rapport-threatening or -enhancing speech acts as apologies, requests, orders, complaints, etc.), the discourse domain (involves the discourse content and structure of an interchange, including topic choice and topic management, organisation and sequencing of information, etc.), the participation domain (relates to such procedural aspects as turn-taking, inclusion/exclusion of people present, and the (non-)use of listener responses), the stylistic domain (concerns such stylistic aspects as choice of tone, choice of genre-appropriate terms of address or use of honorifics), and the non-verbal domain (includes gestures, body movements, facial/eye expressions and proxemics). In the analysis of *Hard Ground* below, I examine how these components, with their respective domains of use, are utilised for rapport management in different conflict situations.

### **3. Rapport management strategies in conflict situations in *Hard Ground***

Before the analysis proper, a brief synopsis of Yerima's *Hard Ground* is presented to put the text in the socio-political context earlier described. In the play, the major character, Nimi, has been brought back to his hometown by his parents. Dropped out of school, with the mission of liberating his people from neglect – by the Federal Government of Nigeria, and ecological degradation –

caused by the transnational oil companies' activities in the Niger Delta – Nimi joins forces with the Niger Delta youth activists. Child soldiering with its attendant unbridled brutality becomes the order of the day. There is no moral or religious direction, no legal or parental control anymore. As things grow worse, he is accused of disastrously leading the Don's boys into an ambush by the government forces. By this alleged act, Nimi is condemned to death going by the precedent the Don has set. Hence Nimi takes temporary refuge in his hometown, where his mother devises many strategies to dissuade him from returning to his cause, but he does not yield because of his commitments to his girlfriend, Pikibo, and their unborn child and the Niger Delta struggle. In the end, his parents manage to prevail on him to remain at home through the false news of Pikibo's death, but this rather breeds huge resentment in him. He finally unknowingly stabs his father (who visited him in the guise of the Don to resolve issues) to death to avenge the Don's killing of his would-be wife (Pikibo), unborn child, and uncles. The various scenes and conversational acts in the play provide occasions in which the management of social relations becomes a determining factor in the progression of the conflicts portrayed.

The analysis of *Hard Ground* reveals three broad conflict-motivated situations resulting in rapport management strategies; they include cause-effect identification, militancy support, and disagreement. In these contexts, a wide range of pragmatic strategies are deployed in managing social relations in terms of the face, sociality rights, and interactional goals of the characters.

### 3.1 Rapport management strategies in cause-effect identification

Several instances of cause-effect identification can be discovered in Yerima's play, particularly at the opening, where characters are engaged in uncovering the reasons for or results of specific militant or counter-militant actions. On such occasions, a degree of desperation is observed in the way the characters make their inquiries, and this constrains the rapport strategies used. The most prevalent rapport management strategies through which characters negotiate their interactional goals are incriminating strategies (utilised by characters to draw information or support from other characters in a situation) and exonerating strategies (employed to present information about or emotional responses towards other characters and/or their activities or ideas). These are illustrated by the examples below:

#### Example 1

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| Mama | What useless man sends children to their early deaths, all in the name of his dream state? I say what sort of useless man?   |
| Nimi | A real man, Mama. The one who knows what the children need for the future. A man of God, Mama. A man sent as our Messiah. The Don is good in our part of the country. He feeds and clothes us, he is |

not like some men that we know who stay in Lagos and do nothing about the future of their land and children. (16)

#### Example 2

Inyingifaa	Too many people are involved?
Mama (T <sub>1</sub> )	Like who?
Baba	The Don. There in the creek, the Don is god.
Mama (T <sub>2</sub> )	Thank God here in our house he is nothing. He is not my God. Return the child. This one belongs to the Devil. No wonder his eyes are blood-shot, and his voice bold. No. This one belongs to the Don. (21)

The interactions in Examples 1 and 2 above are held on the heels of an ill-fated raid carried out by the 'Don-influenced' Niger Delta youth activists in which all of them (except Nimi) were ambushed and killed by the government Joint Task Force (JTF). On Nimi's return, therefore, his family folks interrogate him to know who motivated the boys, how they walked into the JTF ambush, who sabotaged the operation, among other worries. These bids are observed to be largely expressed in two different illocutionary patterns, namely, eliciting and informing acts. While the former embraces both direct-interrogative (as seen particularly in Mama's utterances 'What useless man...' in Example 1, and 'Like who?' in T<sub>1</sub> in Example 2) and indirect-interrogative (in Inyingifaa's opening exchange in Example 2: 'Too many people are involved?'), the latter comes as a necessitated chain as represented in Nimi's (Example 1), Baba's and Mama's (Example 2) utterances.

A number of rapport management strategies can be observed in these utterances. First, Mama's direct-interrogative utterances represent incriminating strategies:

'What useless man sends children to their early deaths, all in the name of his dream state? I say what sort of useless man?'

An implicit dissatisfaction is expressed with the rhetorical force of the utterance, which appeals to the listeners' sense of morality (against using children as soldiers, thereby ruining their future) and sociality rights and obligations (of a man going against his duty to protect children). This incriminating strategy is further heightened by other carefully selected linguistic choices; for instance the repetitive negative evaluation (e.g. 'useless man') and degree signal (e.g. 'sort of') – employed to expose the 'well-dreaded' identity of the Don; an initial interrogative marker (e.g. 'what') – used to trigger an imaginary assessment (and potentially allow spectators to provide the referent portrayed) with the alleged act by the useless man; a negative end (e.g. '...their early death') – to demonstrate the result of the act being assessed; and an individualised token (e.g. 'all in the name of his dream') – to play down the communal ideology of the Niger Delta struggle. Clearly, these are powerful linguistic mechanisms deployed to attack the 'sense of worth, dignity and respect' (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 14) that community members (largely the youths) have already built for

the Don and the Niger Delta struggle championed by him. The interactional goal behind the incriminating strategy therefore is to condemn the Don's control of the youths. This strategy provides insights into the kind of rapport existing between activists like the Don and other non-combatant members of the Niger Delta communities. It is against this background that Mama, in one of the many occasions when she is attacking the face of the Don, exclaims her displeasure with the grave penalty given to Nimi for not completing an assignment successfully.

### Example 3

Nimi	A death sentence? On me? I swear I am innocent ... I swear!
Mama	Someone tell the Don or whatever he calls himself, that my son is innocent. I don't know what he worships now, but I brought him up, a Catholic. The Don has already killed my brother, let him save my son. Inyingifaa, you know that my husband will do nothing, but please save my son. (22)

First, Mama's utterances in Example 3 belong to the indirect-interrogative category, with an aim to incriminate. As in the model established in Examples 1 and 2, the same broad implicit pattern of dissatisfaction is apparent, but this is principally achieved in Example 3 through negative evaluations of the Don, his position/activities and/or their effects. These bifurcate into explicit evaluation (e.g. 'the Don or whatever he calls himself') and implicit evaluation (as, for example, an apostate – 'I don't know what he worships now, but I brought him up, a Catholic'; and a killer – 'The Don has already killed my brother...'). The negative evaluation aside, a tactful invitation of characters into the discourse environment (e.g. 'Inyingifaa, you know ... but please save my son') to oppose the Don's activism and join the fight against him, as highlighted in previous examples, is also an incriminating strategy.

Exonerating strategies, on the other hand, are also found in some instances in *Hard Ground*. For example, Nimi's exchange (in Example 1), contrary to Mama's and other elderly characters' positions, underscores the youths' positive attitude towards the Niger Delta cause. Looking at these utterances closely, it is clear he does not only express his (and the other Niger Delta youths') high regard for the Don's leadership, but also their emotional attachment to the struggle. This strong rapport is represented with an overt praise for the Don, which is indicated with one predominant strategy, the expression of regard. This trifurcates into acts complimenting the Don's person (as, for example, 'A real man', 'A man of God', 'A man sent as our Messiah', '...good in our part of the country', and '...not like some men that we know...'), acts complimenting the Don's actions (as 'The one who knows what the children need for the future', one who '...feeds and clothes us...'), and acts acknowledging the Don's supernatural abilities, as in Baba's utterance in Example 2 above ('The Don. There in the creek, the Don is god'), and Nimi's Uncle's T<sub>2</sub> in Example 4 below:

## Example 4

- Nimi                      So, Ngofa died?
- Inyingifaa (T<sub>1</sub>)        Yes, his cousins rescued you, now they want your life as a replacement.
- Nimi                      His cousins? But he never had any. I swear I did not have any hand in his death. He was my friend ... blood brother.
- Inyingifaa (T<sub>2</sub>)        Only the Don can save you now. But now he has put a death sentence on your head. That is why we want to know the truth, something to change his mind about you. (22)

The situation here is the aftermath of the youth activists' failed raid, which resulted in the death penalty of their operation leader, Nimi. The psychological context here is such that the Don has the final decision regarding Nimi's fate. Ascribing the power to save life (e.g. 'Only the Don can save you now') and take life (e.g. 'he has put a death sentence on your head') to the Don, Yerima underlines that in this conflict situation he enjoys the status of a 'god' in the minds of many. However, the varying individual and group-member identities constructed by the Don are, as Lim (1994: 210) would say, subject to change, as contexts and conversational norms change. The following sections will substantiate this point.

### 3.2 Rapport management strategies in militancy support

Militancy support in the text under investigation centres on Nimi, who symbolises those Niger Delta youths leaving their homes to engage in the struggle to liberate their communities. This is enacted in situations in which different groups in the conflict employ different rhetorical means to demonstrate their approval or disapproval of the violence among Niger Delta youths. This is largely shown in the various attempts by these groups to persuade Nimi to carry on fighting or abandon his followership of the Don. Generally, the major rapport management strategies utilised by Nimi and other characters in expressing their support for youth militant activism are persuasion strategies. Consider the nuances of these strategies in the textual samples below:

## Example 5

- Mama (T<sub>1</sub>)             He was grateful when we had you. (Smiles.) It was a wise decision, that is why I call you Wisdom. Now see what you do with your wisdom, sending young boys to die. (Begins to sob.)
- Nimi (T<sub>1</sub>)             (Goes to her.) Mama, no.
- Mama (T<sub>2</sub>)             I don't know you any more. I am afraid of you. You are becoming like your father. I want my son, not an animal. A hero ... my hero, not one set to die in a shallow grave of swampy water. (Gets up and they hug.) You are all I have.

Nimi (T<sub>2</sub>)            Mama, I don't want to be like my father, ever! He is seen as a coward back home. I have had to live out the shame. Son of a coward they would whisper. I bore the humiliation with a sense of pain. Never, Mama. I must go back for Pikibo ... and my son. I must go back and bring them here to you like a true father. (30)

#### Example 6

Tonyeh                To thank him really, Ma. Your son is our new hero.

Mama (T<sub>1</sub>)            My son is my son.

Nimi (T<sub>1</sub>)             Mama see (shows her his new clothes.)

Mama (T<sub>2</sub>)            Who covered my son in the clothes of those who are the suckers of our blood?

Christy (T<sub>1</sub>)          We, Mama. We covered your son in clothes of honour.

Mama (T<sub>3</sub>)            Then you should have left him sober to know the difference. Now that he is drunk, all we hear are the cheers not even the echoes of jeers.

Christy (T<sub>2</sub>)          He knows Mama. We are not here to jeer, but to praise him. As for me, your son covered the shame of my family. He buried my father, and raised the tombstone on his grave. He fought and got back my family land, gave us our home back. We are eternally grateful.

Mama (T<sub>4</sub>)            I thank Olokun, the giver of children. But if you do not leave us alone, my son may need his own tombstone soon. With all these gifts and drinks, all my work is ruined. He may really begin to deceive himself that he is really something special, when he is only a child. My child. Leave us alone please. (Screams.) Leave us now! (41-42)

In Examples 5 and 6, Mama demonstrates that she has no support for her son's militancy. In the first instance, she tries to dissuade Nimi, who has returned home temporarily, from re-joining the militants in the creeks, while in the second she makes a frantic effort to challenge influences that may incite her son to militancy. Two persuasion strategies are observed here by face-enhancing and face-threatening acts. The face-enhancing acts are marked by implicit and explicit representative acts. Specifically, telling Nimi (in the first exchange in Example 5) how grateful his father was when Nimi was born, how wise a decision it was to have given birth to him, and how these circumstantially connect to his name, Wisdom, Mama employs an implicit 'face lifter' as an 'expression of positive feelings or wishes' (Kinjo 1987: 101) towards Nimi. These face-enhancing acts aim at influencing Nimi to give up the violence associated with militancy. In a similar vein, the many attributes used by Tonye and Christy (in Example 6) to describe Nimi's militancy point to several explicit illocutionary foci. These, in Eisenstein and Bodman's (1986) view, involve

elements such as complimenting of person or action (as found in Christy's T<sub>2</sub>: from 'As for me...' to '...gave us our home back'), and expression of appreciation (as also observed in Christy's T<sub>2</sub>: '...We are not here to jeer, but to praise him ... We are eternally grateful', and Tonye's first remark: 'To thank him really, Ma. Your son is our new hero').

Persuasion is also achieved through face-enhancing acts. These include explicit representative acts (e.g. Mama's T<sub>2</sub> in Example 5, and parts of her T<sub>1</sub>, T<sub>2</sub>, T<sub>3</sub>, and T<sub>4</sub> in Example 6) and semantic opposition (e.g. parts of Mama's T<sub>1</sub> and T<sub>2</sub> in Example 5).

*'I don't know you any more. I am afraid of you. You are becoming like your father. I want my son, not an animal. A hero ... my hero, not one set to die in a shallow grave of swampy water. (Gets up and they hug.) You are all I have.'*

In this citation, representative acts are italicised, while those of semantic opposition items are in bold. The illocutionary focus of Mama's first three utterances is an expression of her distrust of Nimi's current position and his insensitivity. In this speech, Mama exposes Nimi's militant disposition, shows her disapproval of his readiness to go back to the creeks, and thus magnifies the distance that has come to exist between them. This message is further reinforced by elements of semantic opposition (bold print). Here, 'a two-part structure is used ... to [contextually] set up an opposition between two apparently unrelated entities' (Ononye 2017: 173). By likening 'my son' to 'an animal', and 'my hero' to 'one set to die in a shallow grave of swampy water', she establishes a positive/negative pair to bring across her message to Nimi and underline the fate that awaits him if he refuses to heed her advice. In fact, on another occasion Mama uses a more explicit face-threatening analogy to convey the foolhardiness of militancy to Nimi:

#### Example 7

Mama	(Chuckles.) You are a bloody fool. (Shakes her head sadly.) Bloody stupid young fool. (Chuckles again. Pause [sic]. Sad.) Those were his very words, until that day when he was snuffed out at his twilight ... the naked truth that we may mourn another one so soon after, Nimi, please! (18)
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Here, Mama's assessment of Nimi's unwise passion for the Niger Delta cause is likened to that of his late uncle who also participated in revolutionary activities, which resulted in his premature death. With all the attacks on Nimi's current position on and disposition to militant activism, and of course its implications on his life and family/mother, he is finally persuaded. His return to the family is symbolised by his mother's emotional embrace at the end of her speech.

### 3.3 Rapport management strategies in disagreement

Yerima's play contains several occasions in which characters fall out over a previous or impending conflict. In such volatile situations, issues such as betrayal, cowardice, infidelity, and negligence are the major triggers and affect social relations. The principal strategies in the play are request strategies (used in seeking explanation or justification for a particular course of action) and blame strategies (used in apportioning blames amongst characters on specific conflict events). They are illustrated by the following examples:

#### Example 8

- Kingsley (T<sub>1</sub>) My God, what is this?
- Nimi (T<sub>1</sub>) Your death, Father, I shall cut off your tongue first, and then hang it for all to see, dripping blood. To teach others a lesson. You ... you traitor! Vulture!
- Kingsley (T<sub>2</sub>) Me? ... Broda! ... What is this in the name of Christ?
- Nimi (T<sub>2</sub>) Tell us who you are? Traitor!
- Kingsley (T<sub>3</sub>) I am not. Broda, this animal will kill me.
- Nimi (T<sub>3</sub>) Confess or I will. I told you every move we made in the camp. Did I not?
- ...
- Kingsley (T<sub>4</sub>) Good night, Broda. I shall wait for you at Amatu's house. I will give you Kokori's message there. (Looks at Nimi.) And to think I risked my life to save this animal. May God forgive you. (He bangs the door after him.)
- Nimi (T<sub>4</sub>) You hear him now? You should have let me finish him. Did I ask you to save me? Traitor! (25-27)

#### Example 9

- Baba (T<sub>1</sub>) Can you remember who they were? Can you describe one of them?
- Mama (T<sub>1</sub>) (Pause.) No. I ...
- Baba (T<sub>2</sub>) Woman!
- Mama (T<sub>2</sub>) I did not look. Now I wish I did not send them out in such a hurry. I just did not feel right about them.
- Baba (T<sub>3</sub>) And you say you are a mother. (Chuckles.) Mother my foot. People came here so early in the day to poison my son, and there you are sitting with your big mouth wide open, screaming you sent them out because your stupid spirit told you to ...
- Mama (T<sub>3</sub>) I did not look ...
- Baba (T<sub>4</sub>) It is obvious you did not ... but if it were for you to follow me around and trail my movements ...

- Mama (T<sub>4</sub>)      What were we discussing, and what are you now talking about? Yes I trail a useless man to his hideout, where he meets his city dog.
- Baba (T<sub>5</sub>)      I warn you! I may forget myself. (Raises up his hand to hit her. FATHER KINGSLEY holds him.)
- Kingsley      Broda, not now, not here!
- Baba (T<sub>6</sub>)      Did you not hear the rubble from her big mouth? Let me teach her a lesson.
- Mama (T<sub>5</sub>)      Come and beat me. Come, look at him. He sends a boy to do his job of defending his people, and sits here with his city dog, tying wrapper all day. (44-45)

Example 8 is a case of suspected betrayal leading to the ambush and massacre of some Niger Delta militants, while the latter has to do with care negligence resulting in an attempted assassination. This reflects other issues such as infidelity and cowardice which generally influence the way the characters manage faces, sociality rights and interactional goals. The two strategies identified earlier are applicable to these examples, too. Looking at the request strategies, for example, one form of requesting head act can be found (as seen in Nimi's (T<sub>2</sub>): 'Tell us who you are? ...' in Example 8, and Baba's (T<sub>1</sub>): 'Can you remember who they were? Can you describe one of them?' in Example 9). Another element, which Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) call 'alerter', is also found in Nimi's accusation (in (T<sub>2</sub>): 'Traitor' in Example 8, and Baba's (T<sub>2</sub>): 'Woman!' in Example 9). These are used by the speakers not only to foreground the seriousness of the occasions, but also to streamline the answers requested from the listeners.

Blame strategies, on the other hand, include a number of elements. The first is the blaming head act as found in Nimi's (T<sub>3</sub>): 'I told you every move we made in the camp...' (in Example 8), and Baba's (T<sub>3</sub>): '...you sent them out because your stupid spirit told you to...' (in Example 9). In the first instance, Nimi believes that Father Kingsley, having learnt from a confession about the youth activists' plans, is likely the traitor. Hence Nimi's (T<sub>3</sub>) insistence becomes the major act used to blame Father Kingsley as the only person that may have given the youths away to the government forces. In the second instance, the blaming head act lies on Baba's disappointment that Mama let the people who purportedly attempted to kill Nimi get away. The blaming head acts in the two instances are reinforced with two kinds of aggravating supportive move, *viz.* an insult and a threat. Examples are Nimi's (T<sub>1</sub>)/(T<sub>2</sub>)/(T<sub>4</sub>) use of 'you traitor, Vulture'; Father Kingsley's (T<sub>3</sub>)/(T<sub>4</sub>) choice of '...animal' (in Example 8); Baba's (T<sub>3</sub>)/(T<sub>4</sub>) addresses to Mama; and Mama's (T<sub>4</sub>)/(T<sub>5</sub>) responses to Baba (in Example 9). The threatening, aggravating moves, although less frequently used than the insulting category, also come into play in Nimi's (T<sub>1</sub>) 'I shall cut off your tongue first, and then hang it for all to see, dripping blood' and his (T<sub>3</sub>) 'I will [kill you]' (in Example 8), and Baba's (T<sub>5</sub>) '...I may forget myself' (in Example 9).

## 4. Conclusion

This article's focus on rapport management strategies in conflict situations was motivated not only by the perceived mismanagement of social relations among Niger Delta community groups, but also by the little attention paid to rapport management in Yerima's plays. Specifically, the paper examined how dramatic participants manage their face, sociality rights, and interactional goals in conflict-motivated situations in *Hard Ground*. The analysis of this play revealed that rapport management strategies were used across three conflict situations involving cause-effect identification, militancy support, and disagreement. The cause-effect identification situation features incriminating strategies (which involve the use of eliciting and informing acts) and exonerating strategies (which include complimenting and acknowledging acts); the militancy support situation is characterised by persuasion strategies (realised through face-enhancing or face-threatening acts), whereas situations of disagreement are marked by requesting strategies (featuring explicit head acts and alerters) and blaming strategies (including insulting and threatening, aggravating moves). Generally, the requesting, blaming, and exonerating strategies are principally used by the Niger Delta youths to probe, threaten, or disagree on specific issues, while strategies of incrimination and persuasion are primarily employed by the women to indict, influence, and predict future actions. Aside from moving politeness research on dramatic texts a step forward, the findings may also have opened up further research on the role and representation of women in Niger Delta conflict situations.

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