

**THE HAVES, THE HAVE NOTS AND CLASS POLITICS IN ESIABA IROBI'S CEMETERY ROAD AND NWOKEDI**  
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**The Haves, The Have Nots and Class Politics in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and *Nwokedi***

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**Abstract**

Class politics has been an age long reality in most nations of the world. There is a constant struggle for power and relevance between the different social classes. Africa most strikingly has just two major classes; the 'the haves' and the 'have nots'. This research was geared out to understudy the dimension of the relationship between social classes in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and *Nwokedi*. The researcher used the qualitative research method and resorted to the case study approach in the gathering and analysis of his data. The findings show that class relationship, as portrayed in the two plays, is marked by tensions and oppressions as the wealthy and powerful class feed off the rest of society and exploit them perpetually. This obnoxious culture, however, ought to be reversed via a radical approach aimed at unseating the oppressive wealthy class so as to enthrone equality and justice in the social realm. Thus, the two plays represent an attempt to deploy drama as an instrument of highlighting social inequality and oppression and projecting an ideology of reform and social justice.

**Key words: Haves, Have nots, Class Politics**

**Introduction**

'Class' depicts the level of difference between creatures that may or may not be of the same specie. It basically strives to create a sense of level which inadvertently is associated with power and influence. According to R.J. Rummel "A class is defined by the ownership of property. Such ownership vests a person with the power to exclude others from the property and to use it for personal purposes" (n.p). Through history, class has played a major role in the evolution and development of man. Karl Marx as cited in Thomas DeMichele is of the view that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles". Thus, from early

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civilization to modern times, class has played a significant role in the evolution of governments and political system of man. The history of struggles, oppressions and counter oppression struggles has had class at the heart of its foundation. Favored groups in social hierarchy strive to maintain its hold on power and influence while groups being subjugated struggle to break free of social strangleholds that place them at the bottom of the food chain. It is this struggle for power and social control that results in revolutions and reorganization of the social setup. Power, Material ownerships and economic possession have been the major determinants of class. The 'haves' as used here refers to the group of people in society that control the wealth and inadvertently the power and political influence of the society. Throughout history, the 'Haves' have always constituted the minority of societal population. The 'Have nots' are on the other hand those members of society who are not privileged with sufficient material possession and power control of the state. This group is usually at the mercy of the 'haves' who own and manage the means of production. They make policies and create laws that guide the rest of the society. This struggle between the 'Haves' and the 'Have nots' has over time provided inspirational materials for the performance art which thrives basically on imitation.

More so, drama is a social art. Its relevance stems from the imitation and the mimicry of the society around it. Drama interrogates the actions of man and through the use of satire demonstrates the follies of man's pursuit for material gratification and personal aggrandizement. Through the imitation and dramatization of the world around it, drama raises questions and teaches lessons pertinent for the survival of humanity. Thus, Tochukwu Okeke refers to the dramatist as "the gadfly of his society" (112). This is apt considering the fact that drama has been a major tool for voicing concerns and fighting injustice and oppressive governments in history. Drama as a tool for agitation has been exemplified in various countries in Africa. The works of Athol Fugard, Lewis Nkosi, John Kani etc all contributed in fighting the apartheid regime in South Africa. Ngugi Wa Thiongo is widely revered for his boldness in using both drama and prose in voicing out against oppressive regimes in post-colonial Kenya. For Ngugi, the African writer has a tremendous duty to the people, a spiritual duty more of. He insists that the African writer must "actively support and in his writing reflect the struggle of the African working class and its class allies for the total liberation of their labour power"(482). The likes of Wole Soyinka, Bode Sowande, Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, Ahmed Yerima, Emeka Nwabueze, Alex Asigbo, Esiaba Irobi and a host of others have also used drama in their various attempts at tackling socio-political maladies within the Nigerian sphere. More so, these crop of writers have all through their works tried to portray the exploitative tendencies that exist in the relationship between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' . Bode Sowande for example likens the event of modern Africa to Babylon. For him, Africa is in a hostage situation orchestrated by a few corrupt individuals whose insatiable capitalist concupiscence makes them rape the economy repeatedly. For him the solution to the African malady is to burn down the Babylonian stranglehold so that fresh seeds may sprout. Of Sowande, Osy Okagbue writes; "Sowande's embodies a theory of movement that represents progress toward an utopia which, even if elusive as a result of the contradictions in man, is still worth striving for because it is better in every respect than stagnating Babylon" (124). Osofisan on the other hand refuses to stroke the tradition of sacrificing the poor that the

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rich may live. He denounces the hegemonic tendencies of modern capitalism as he thinks it exploitative, sectional and oppressive. Populist artists like the ones mentioned above write in the interest of the people. Such dramatists through their works strive to give voice to the million voiceless and to advocate structural change in which the people will be empowered to affect their lives.

Therefore, the artist writes to affect his society. The revolutionary artist is inspired by the malady of misrule, oppression and economic subjugation of the masses. He writes to instill philosophical rejig among the people. Thus, Alex Asigbo speaking about his writings opines "My writings aim to teach and if in the process of teaching you get entertained, well and good. If you do not, too bad! I cannot be an ostrich on sit on the fence while issues that need my input remain unaddressed" (12). This should be the vocation of every artist who strive to close the gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

More so, the political atmosphere in Nigeria has motivated many artistes. Since independence, the political arena in Nigeria has been rocky and dirty. The gap between the rich and the poor keeps widening due to bad and corrupt political leadership. This has resulted in numerous sociological strife between the masses who are constantly manipulated by the political elite. The high level of selfishness has resulted in an unquenchable thirst to amass more and more wealth. The result is the eventual dispossession of the masses of their share of the democracy dividend. Chinua Achebe in his 1983 essay captures it thus:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example. (1)

In effect, this mission to study 'class relationship' in the works of Esiaba Irobi is spurred by his revolutionary pen style which is very evident in most of his dramatic works. Esiaba is known to be very vociferous with his views about the post-colonial Nigeria which in itself is rife with disillusionment evidenced in the obvious lack of quality leadership. This has formed a core of most of his dramatic expression which most times violently tries to institute a change of the corrupt and disillusioned social order. Isidore Diala captures it thus:

Disillusioned by the cynical exploitation of the Nigerian masses, the corruption of their self-centered leaders, and moreover their will to self-perpetuation in power, Irobi's basic concern as a playwright is the failures of the postcolonial Nigerian state. His temper demonstrably Fanonian, he aims at a popular uprising, a revolution in which the barely educated pauperized masses and the socially disinherited unemployed youths form the core of the revolutionary vanguard. (235)

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As a quintessential African writer, Esiaba interrogates the social realities of African existence within its socio-political setup. In him is an example of a man who is exasperated and frustrated by the comatose leadership system which is prevalent in Nigeria. This work therefore is an inquiry into Esiaba's treatment of social strife between the different social classes in Nigerian society. It has striven to contrast Esiaba's radical solutions with the traditional African communalism

**Definition of Terms**

**Have Nots:** This term is used in this research to qualify all the politically oppressed people, the poor and those who are not within the corridors of political power.

**The Haves:** This term is used in this research to qualify the political class, policy makers and leaders at various levels in society. It encompasses everyone who uses his political position to oppress and intimidate others.

**Theoretical Frame work**

The researcher has deemed it apt to use Dialectical Materialism as the theoretical frame work to support the claims of this research. The theory as used in this research analogy will be better discussed below.

**Dialectical Materialism**

Marxism is a twentieth century socio-political movement that sought to achieve a fair sharing of the economic dividends of societies by demolishing the tenets of capitalism and instituting a classless society. Marxism as a movement is hinged on the writings and professions of two German philosophers known as Karl Marx and Engels. Marx believed that capitalism is the bane of equality amongst men because capitalism empowers a few who own and control the means of production. According to him capitalism encourages division amongst men and promotes the stratification of the society into social classes.

However, at the base of this philosophical movement is dialectical materialism. Dialectics was first used by Hegel in his writings. Marx later borrowed the word and linked it to materialism to show that it is matter that is at the heart of every social philosophy. Marx in his writings sees the economy as the base on which the society is built. Thus this base determines the belief and legal frame work of the society. Dialectical materialism posits that history is made by obvious change in matter. The implication is that matter is at the heart of existence. Therefore, ownership of matter creates a large sense of importance and generates power. In effect, the history of man is a cumulation of struggles for the ownership and control of matter. According to Marx as cited in Henri Chambre and David T. McLellan

In the social production that men carry on, they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and

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political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and intellectual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence; it is on the contrary their social existence which determines their consciousness. (Par. 4)

Therefore, in as much as matter remains in a state of constant flux, struggles and counter struggles for the ownership and control of material means of production will remain a historical reality. It is this struggle for the ownership and control of matter that will result in continued social revolutions.

**Synopsis of *Cemetery Road***

Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* is a dramatic depiction of the socio-economic maladies of post-colonial Nigeria. Mazeli a lecturer of Dramatic Arts is bent on resisting corruption and fighting imperialist journalism that only depicts Africa in bad lights. He is collaborating with two supposed BBC journalists to develop a dramatic narrative of the experiences of the Kudingi people in the hands of the federal government. However, the collaboration turns sour when Mazeli discovers that Douglas is not really interested in the narrative of the Kudingi traumatic experience but is mostly interested in depicting the Kudingi poverty: a typification of the BBC's imagination of Africa. Mazeli pulls out of the job and ceases the tape in which the whole program has been recorded. Douglas involves the Nigerian military and the military takes sides with Douglas and starts to terrorize Mazeli. They send two soldiers to Mazeli's house to retrieve the tape. Upon the whole intimidation Mazeli and Somadina pass through in the hands of the two soldiers, Mazeli refuses to bulge and release the tape. He is angry with the government treatment of the common man as the system seeks to exploit the poor to the benefit of the rich. More so, Mazeli is as well disgusted by Prof. Mmadubunjoala whose whole activity as the head of department smacks of depravity and exploitation of both the staff and students under him. Mazeli confronts him and incites the students to resist him. Prof. Mmadubunjoala is infuriated. He teams up with the military to accuse Mazeli of planning to overthrow the military government. Mazeli is arrested, detained and tortured. However, with the intervention of his bosom friend Lawani who has risen through the ranks to become the president's personal security officer, Mazeli is released. But before the release, the soldiers inject a mixture of cyanide and ethanol into his body to make sure he dies slowly. Mazeli is disillusioned and plans to use the opportunity of his performance before the president in the evening to assassinate the president. Lawani learning of the plan begs him not to go as he was bound to fail and die in the process. Mazeli is resolute. In an attempt to stop him, Lawani puts up a call to stop the show. Mazeli is infuriated and charges at Lawani with the knife with which he was to kill the president. They engage in a struggle and Lawani mistakenly lodges the knife into Mazeli's heart. Mazeli dies. The students learning of Mazeli's death accost Lawani and kill him in a quest to revenge Mazeli.

**Class politics in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road***

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*Cemetery Road* is a demonstration of the liminality of struggle between the two major social classes in Nigeria; the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Esiaba uses the characters of Mazeli, Prof. Mmadubunjoala, Douglas and Hazel, Fatima, Lawani and the military to dramatize the existent struggles that play out at various social levels within the Nigerian life experience. Through Mazeli, Esiaba is able to confront the monsters of greed, corruption and selfishness that bedevil good leadership and living in Nigeria. In doing this, Esiaba creates consciousness among the people who are oppressed at various levels. Esiaba starts the narrative from the end and first presents the reader with Prof. Mmadubunjoala who tries to justify his actions against Mazeli. Prof. Mmadubunjoala is an archetype of a high ranking civil servant in Nigeria who makes life miserable for co-workers. They are civil or public servants who hold positions of leadership in different government ministries. These inadvertently serve as puppets for the government who through them execute their obnoxious practices against the working class. As a result, they become self-serving, greedy, and exploitative and extort both the masses and the state they profess their loyalties to. Unfortunately for Prof. Mmadubunjoala, Mazeli is a non-conventional public servant. He is a radical public servant who questions everything and everyone. He meets a non-conformist in Mazeli who becomes his hubris. Thus his speech during mazeli's Funeral procession:

He was my lecturer. We taught in the same department. I was his H.O.D. His head of department. But he said I had the head of a donkey. Does my head look like that of a donkey? A horse maybe but definitely not like a donkey's. He said that as a scholar I am not productive. That after thirty two years as an academic, I have not written a single play or critical book on Post-modern African theory. That I became a professor with only two papers which I plagiarized from his own work. That I am a flamboyant fern that neither fruits nor flowers. A fossil... He nicknamed me Prince Henry the Navigator and alleged that I fondle the fundamentals of fifteen year old female undergraduates... He called me an intellectual scud missile. An academic spare-part of the political artillery and machinations of the military government. And incited my students against me!.. That was his hubris. (7)

Of truth Mazeli taunts Mmadubunjoala and calls him many of those names. However, this is not without facts of Mmadubunjoala's misdemeanor and exploitation of both the staff and students that are under his jurisdiction. Esiaba gives the reader an insight into some of the amoral depravities of many leaders who take advantage of their positions to exploit their subjects. In the sixth cut, Fatima having seen Mazeli as a special breed who would stand with the oppressed and lend voice to the voiceless runs to him to report the encounter with Prof. Mmadubunjoala. Here is an excerpt from the discussion with Mazeli:

**Fatima:** Dr. Anyanwu...

**Mazeli:** (turning from his work) Yes, Fatima, what is it?

**Fatima:** E don happen again, The donkey talk say I go lose my job as the departmental secretary.

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**Mazeli:** who?

**Fatima:** who else but the Head of Department, Professor Madubunjoala alias When I was in Oxford.

**Mazeli:** Why?

**Fatima:** My brother, na this morning. As I arrive for work, the yeye man call me into him air-conditioned office and tell me to bring your file. I carry the file go givam. Because of him Myke Tyson hands, I stay on the other side of the table like this (demonstrates with a table) and push the file to him. But he say make I draw nearer. So I draw nearer. He ask me, where is Dr. Anyanwu's curriculum vitae. I comot the c.v. givam. As I dey show am the paper, na him the yeye man come take him yeye hand put under my skirt and begin to fondle my southern Hemisphere....(64)

Having reported this immediate encounter to Mazeli, Fatima goes on to narrate Prof. Madubunjoala's escapades with many of the female students to Mazeli. Based on the premise that Prof. Madubunjoala had threatened to sack Fatima if she refuses to give in to his sexual appeal, one would then not fail to conclude that Madubunjoala uses the same antique to sexually exploit some feeble minded female students who lack the strength of will to turn him down. One of such victims is what Fatima reports to Mazeli in the following lines:

... The other day, he call one female undergraduate, that small girl in your class, I think she is a Bini girl, into him air conditioned office, carry the girl put for him ancient knee, commot him scud missile and said to her, you have no need to fear, it doesn't bitem your father also has it. You can touch it! Then the yeye man him head disappear under the girl's skirt. When his head out, he had hair in his mouth. That was when I entered the office. As he saw me, he swallowed the hair and licked his lips, put on his spectacles and pretended to be reading some nonsense newspaper on his table. (66)

Mazeli being a Marxist hero who stands up against oppression, intimidation and extortion confronts Madubunjoala. He not only confronts Madubunjoala, he also builds social consciousness and group cohesion among the students. In effect, he dispels the fear that holds them to ransom and opens their eyes to the strength they command as a group. Together, Mazeli and the students confronted Madubunjoala who has oppressed and extorted them for years. It is this feeling of forlornness, exasperation and desperation that makes Madubunjoala to team up with the military to frame Mazeli and put him off for good.

More so, Esiaba uses the altercation between Mazeli and the BBC correspondents to actually depict the hopeless relationship and lack of trust that exists between the ruler and the ruled in Nigeria. Using the altercation, Esiaba is able to reveal and dramatize the failure of leadership and the plight of the common man in Nigeria. A simple misunderstanding ensues between a citizen and a foreigner. Mazeli (a citizen) is contracted to put up a docu-drama on the experiences of the Kudingi people whom the government massacred and took their land. Mazeli is working on this project with two BBC correspondents; Douglas and Hazel. In the process Mazeli discovers that the project is a smokes screen and that the focus is not on depicting the

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Kudingi trauma but on dramatizing the Kudingi poverty. Mazeli reneges on the contract and protests the continued imagination of Africa as one big slum. Amidst the disagreement, Mazeli recovers the tape of the recordings and goes home insisting that the project must be realigned to meet the initial plans. Douglas goes and reports Mazeli to the military who dispatches two soldiers to recover the tape from Mazeli at all costs. The Soldiers comes to Mazeli's house and terrorize him. This altercation eventually leads to his eventual demise with the soldiers injecting him with a mixture of ethanol and cyanide. The military in all their dealings with Mazeli during the tape saga gives an impression of a government under external siege. They manifest their over dependency on the west as they prioritize the interest of the British nationals over that of a bonafide citizen. This in every ramification denigrates sovereignty of the country and casts strong doubt on the independent statue of Nigeria. The two soldiers from the encounter with Mazeli not only denigrate Nigeria but demonstrate the weakness of the rest of the African countries. The following excerpt will give a better insight:

**First Soldier:** We have come because we do not want any trouble with the British government. If those correspondents were from Cameroun or Congo Brazaville or Burkina Faso, we can kick them out of the country and say, as we kick their asses, 'to hell with you'

He goes on to demonstrate the fear and hopelessness of the African situation which inadvertently results from the failure of leadership.

**Second Soldier:** Look, Dr. Anyanwu. I want you to understand the implications of this case. If the British Government declares war on us because of that tape, remember we have no scud missiles, no B52s, NO EFAs, no single nuclear bomb, not even ordinary gas masks in case they decide to use this country to try out the effects of the nuclear weapon on human beings, like the French did with the atomic bomb in the Sahara desert in 1958.

It is this sense of hopelessness that infuriates Mazeli. He is appalled by the monumental failure of leadership which stares the common man in the face. This lack of cluelessness conditions the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, 'the haves' and 'the have nots'. Rather think and work for the good of the weak members of the society, the government adds salt to injury by continually oppressing and extorting them. It takes away the basic largesse of the common man and pits him perpetually with the inner yearning to revolt, dare the consequences to upturn social order. The consequence is a unity of classes and an unconscious fostering of class consciousness which eventually will lead to class revolt. This revolt therefore will bring about a human and people centered social order. It is this change that pushes Mazeli as he takes upon himself the role of the carrier who must sacrifice that the community may be purged. This heroic sacrifice is encapsulated in the following lines:

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**Mazeli:** Tonight, the sun will go down in blood. But by dawn, a new cock will crow. By tomorrow morning, the future will rise like a phoenix out of the ashes of this meeting. That is the meaning of this ritual. This encounter between North and South. Goodbye.

Though Mazeli does not achieve his goal of unseating the oppressive regime, he demonstrated a resolve to put an end to anarchy, lawlessness and impunity stemming lack of accountability to the masses whose mandate the leader holds. The whole narrative is an expose into the political struggles that exist between the masses and the cult of leadership who inadvertently constitute the 'haves' in most capitalist society. In Africa certainly, politics is a gate way to wealth and like Lawani, many would readily embrace it to escape to the other side of the divide where life seems more seamless.

**Synopsis of *Nwokedi***

*Nwokedi* is a political drama that interrogates leadership and the leadership class in Nigeria. It is time for the Ekpe festival in which the old year must be cleansed in order to usher in the New Year. The process of cleansing is very ritualistic and must involve the killing of a ram by someone whom has been chosen to carry out the task. This sacred task however has fallen on Nwokedi junior as handed down to him by his father. The Ekumeku are Nwokedi's age grade. They are in charge of carrying out the Ekpe sacred ritual with Nwokedi at the head. Nwokedi comes home from Bakalori where he is posted for the National Youth Service corpse. He meets his brother-in-law Arikpo who came to their house to take shelter. Arikpo on the other hand is a serving senator who has been rejected by his people and prohibited from running for another election. His stubbornness and selfishness pushes him into running for the election upon the warnings by his constituency youths. The enraged youths machete him and burn down his house. He escapes and comes to the house of the Nwokedis whose daughter he was married to. Nwokedi Jr, comes back and finds out that his twin sister and her three kids have been killed and used for ritual by Arikpo. He is enraged and vows to use Arikpo for the night's sacrifice in place of a ram. He is also in a brawl with his father as he gave out the father's political office to a member of the Ekumeku. He disowns the father and the father in turn disowns him. When it is time to use blood for the sacrifice, Nwokedi tells the Ekumeku to go and bring Arikpo. Arikpo is brought to the ritual arena. When it is time to kill him, Nwokedi snr. Comes in and falls on Arikpo in a bid salvage him. The matchete rather descends and severs the head of Nwokedi snr. Nwokedi senior becomes the unwary sacrificial lamb whose blood is used to purify the old year in order to make way for the new.

**Class politics in Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi***

Esiaba's plays are known to have thematic and stylistic nexus running through them. The plays are mostly socialist in that they are usually a direct attack on the capitalist forces that afflict society. Just like *Cemetery Road*, Nwokedi tries to pit two social classes against each with one demanding for justice, fairness and equity from the other. There are two distinct social classes in *Nwokedi*:

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- a. The political class (the haves)
- b. The peasant class (the have nots)

Esiaba in Nwokedi raises a more politically vibrant and socially conscious peasant class who know their onions and have the determination and will to demand social justice from the political bourgeoisie. The Ekumeku led by Nwokedi are class conscious group who understand the devilry latent in African capitalism and are ready to stand up to it. They have been stirred in the face by hunger and starvation in the midst of plenty. It has dawned on them that their destinies cannot be salvaged by the ageing politicians who have refused to give up power to more vibrant and economically savvy youth who can turn around the living status quo in the country. This realization is made evident in the words of Ozoemena Nwakamma as he addresses the Ekumeku on the eve that Nwokedi nominates him to spite the father.

**Ozoemena:** Our time has come. And time is not the tick-tock of your wristwatches. Neither is time the rising and setting of the sun. Time is event. Time is decision. Time is action. Time is made when young men flex the muscle of a new resolve and decide to change their fate. Decide to change the world. Change the course of history. Create a new order. That, my generation, is how time is made. And that, Mr. Nwakerendu Nwokedi, is how time trips tyrants. (13)

The revolution is real and is a very violent one. The play opens with Arikpo giving account of what the Ugep youths have done to him. They burnt his house and macheted him in a show of resolve to oust the old order. His crime? Arikpo and his ilk have eaten the destiny of the youths and have patrimonised public welfare. His utter neglect of his primal duty as a senator to represent the interest of the electorates have irked the youths to the point of violence. He itemizes the reasons for the youths' uprising to Mrs. Nwokedi:

**Mrs Nwokedi:** Who burnt your house?

**Arikpo:** The unemployed youths association

**Mrs Nwokedi:** Why?

**Arikpo:** They said I built it with stolen money, political money, corrupt money, the voter's money. They said I didn't perform in my first term of office. That as a senator I should have made laws which would abolish unemployment in this nation...(4)

The Ugep youths seem to have even been milder in their accusation of Arikpo. For Nwokedi, it is a generational crime, rancid and wicked in intent. The political elites have failed the system and the people. They must all pay for it including his father. Nwokedi is vociferous in his accusation of the selfish elites. He spares no one including his father. The generation has betrayed the youths, they have eaten the communion left in their care.

**Nwokedi:** My generation gave you the future to hold in trust for us. You turned it into a handkerchief, used it to wipe the mucus of greed dripping from your wretched nostrils. After that you rumbled it, crumpled our future and squeezed it into your pocket. But your pocket was full of holes. So our future fell out to the ground. And with your leprous feet, you quarried it into dust. Arikpo, that is why this machete must spill your blood today. (73)

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Arikpo and Nwokedi Snr. are symbolic metaphors that Esiaba uses as a replica of Nigerian politicians. The similitude is unarguable as he builds his models from the shadows of real life. According to Charly Boy as cited in Chuks Ohai:

The future of the youths has been stolen by very wicked, vile and insensitive politicians whose sole purpose of governance is to enrich themselves. If the youths can't rise to the challenge, then it's a shame. If we can't pull ourselves together, millions of us will eat sand before the end of the year. (Par

Esiaba deviates from the reality of the Nigerian narrative and defies Soyinka's claims in Bayo Olapuhunda (par.4) that this present generation of Nigerian youths is a wasted generation as they have failed to wrestle power and change the course of woeful narrative of the Nigerian experience. Through Nwokedi and the Ekumeku, Esiaba creates a model, an idealistic paradigm of what the Nigerian youth should struggle to be. In the Ekumemku, Esiaba builds the template of a progressive civil populace who should demand accountability and resist oppression from the capitalist bourgeoisie. The Marxist ideology of the play crescends as Nwokedi and the Ekumeku in readiness for the revolution that is on the buildup demands for their future from Nwokedi Snr. and Arikpo. An attempt to buy out Nwokedi with a fifty thousand Naira cheque hits the brick wall as Esiaba's 'Nwokedi template' defies the popular practice of bribery and sale out that it is obtainable in Nigeria. Rather he makes Nwokedi an altruistic individual who shuns personal gains for communal wellbeing. Nwokedi has an empire built for him by his father, he could have toed the Nigerian way by looking the other way. No, Esiaba's Nwokedi is idealistic and play the role of the carrier who must purge the society of the devilry that bewitches. He is focused and continues to demand his future from the political Aristos;

**Arikpo:** This is a cheque of fifty thousand naira. With it you can buy yourself a future and stop terrorizing people with a machete. And remember, my brother-in-law, I am giving you this money as a token for my life. I hope you understand. Take the cheque.

**Nwokedi:** I want Ezinna

**Nwokedi Snr:** Nwokedi how can you go through life blind folded by day dreams?

**Nwokedi:** (opens his palm) The future

**Arikpo:** How can you see the sun when you are lying in your stomach?

**Nwokedi:** Ezinna, Arikpo.

**Nwokedi Snr.:** Nwokedi, God gave the spider a talent. Look at the ceiling and see what the spider did with it.

**Nwokedi:** I want the future.

**Arikpo:** Look, Nwokedi, I am only being human

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**Nwokedi:** (to Arikpo) whenever a man wants to do something inhuman does he not start by saying, "I am only being human?" (to his father) The African Politician, someone has rightly said, is a man who moves only in one direction.

**Nwokedi Snr:** What direction?

**Nwokedi:** Towards himself.

**Arikpo:** Nwokedi take the cheque!

**Nwokedi:** I want the future. And nothing but the future. Yes, I want the future. And not just my future but the future of my entire generation. We gave you our future to hold in trust for us but you tore it into tatters and left us in rags.

From the excerpt above, it was the obvious that the end would be a tragic one for all involved in squandering the future of Nwokedi and his fellow Nigerian youths. He demanded from his father and Arikpo a journey to yesterday because a certainly failure to procure it would amount in a cleansing, a purge to usher in a new beginning. Esiaba envisions a radical challenge of the Nigerian situation. For him, the only ideal to getting it right is to purge the system of the old blood. He envisions a time when the oppressed shall stand up in Nigerian to confront their oppressors rather than sing their eulogies for crumbs from the collective purse. By intending Arikpo as the ideal sacrifice and eventually severing the head of Nwokedi Snr., Arikpo admonishes a blood cleansing and purging of the old political order as the only redemption for the Nigerian plague.

### **Conclusion**

Esiaba's works are distinct in themselves and have an auteuric approach in treating socio-economic problems. His recommendation in the two plays is simple and direct: purge the system of fascist elements who stifle the growth of the masses. It is therefore evident that the 'have nots' must take decisive and forceful stance against oppression and exploitation so as to free the system from the strangle hold of the "haves". However, from the discussions above, it is evident that it is only one out of the two plays that made a remarkable progress in rejigging the exploitative order. While *Nwokedi* advances a populist revolution, *Cemetery Road* is a one man centered revolution. In *Nwokedi* the revolution is successful because Nwokedi, the hero of the play succeeded in carrying the youths along. He sold them the idea and the people were resolute in rejecting the old order and instituting some bliss of freshness in the system. Thus, without Nwokedi, the revolution could have still continued. However, the contrary is the case in *Cemetery Road* where Mazelli is even hardly understood by the people close to him. His eccentric nature estranged the people around him from being active participants in the revolution. Thus, the revolution meets its end with the death of Mazeli. Therefore, this research sees a mass centered approach as ideal for a sustainable social revolution. The two works in themselves are master pieces on how best to conduct a successful revolution. Thus, one thing is vividly clear; where peaceful change is made impossible, violent revolution becomes inevitable. This is however bound to come when the masses realize the strength in their unity.

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