

# Chaos in the Ivory Tower: Postcolonial Representations of the Nigerian Academic Elite in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower*

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## Abstract

This work explores Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* (2009) and Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower* (2000) with a view to examining the manner in which Irobi and Bakare represent the Nigerian academic elite in the chaos that hobbles Nigerian public universities and the country in general. Through Louis Althusser's idea of Ideological State Apparatuses, the work analyses how the two playwrights deploy character, setting and other dramatic elements to capture ways in which the Nigerian academic elite, especially those in Nigerian public universities, promote disorder in the polity. The two plays show that some members of the Nigerian academic elite are involved in using undemocratic methods for personal gains and to create anomie in universities and in Nigerian society at large. The work reveals that the academic elite, as represented in the two plays, are not different from the corrupt Nigerian political elite because both are preoccupied with violent and corrupt acts, thereby undermining peace, stability and development in the country. It contends that the two playwrights' representations of the Nigerian academic elite are important not only because they challenge the assumed binary opposition between the Nigerian ruling elite and the Nigerian academic elite, but also because they illuminate the complexity of the recurring chaos in Nigerian universities and the country in general. Consequently, the playwrights invite the Nigerian academic elite to engage in critical self-interrogation, genuine scholarly and community-based activities that are geared towards real national development.

**Keywords:** Academic Elite; Political Elite; Chaos; Ivory Towers; Postcolonial Africa/Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

In postcolonial Africa, the notion that universities are springs of knowledge is often taken as gospel truth. In a way, this idea suggests that universities and other tertiary institutions are vehicles of modernity and socio-economic transformations. According to Ogundele (2008, 181), “the slogan ‘knowledge is power’ in reference to the acquisition of colonial education implies that prior to its coming, there was no knowledge at all on the continent, or that whatever passed for it was worse than useless.” Ogundele also remarks that: “Even now, a burning candle or touch radiating light out [a symbol of Western education] remains a favourite icon on school and university logos across Anglophone West Africa. These institutions are still explicitly seen as sources of knowledge/light that will banish ignorance/darkness from Africa” (181). Ozumba summarises the purposes of universities when he observes that: “The common reason generally adduced is that the university is established to provide tertiary education, to form an alliance between town and gown, or to produce highclass individuals capable of working at the upper strata of the society. These individuals are considered to be quite intelligent and are believed to know everything about something and something about everything” (2018, 1).

If universities are considered as the citadels of knowledge, the academics who work in them are the ‘critical faculties’ in the business of knowledge production. In the contemporary world, defined by the knowledge economy, academics are expected to play pivotal roles in the process of national development owing to the nature of their vocation as intellectuals and producers of knowledge. Because they are saddled with the responsibility of proffering solutions to various existential problems in a society through critical enquiry, the members of the academic elite exercise significant power within the socio-political structure. Thus, they are crucial parts of the ruling class. This implies that members of the academic elite are inexorably linked to the political elite.

In spite of this, academics are not politicians in the orthodox sense because their priority, unlike that of politicians, is not to gain power in order to govern the state. Munene (2006, 187) alludes to the difference between the academic elite and politicians when he remarks that: “While politics is the pursuit and effort to retain power to govern, intellectualism is the art of thinking and raising questions as to what is, seems to be and ought to be in a given geographical environment.” Hence, academics’ loci of power lie in knowledge production, dissemination and application. These involve postulation, disputation, invention and innovation, among others. However, in postcolonial Africa, the academic elite and politicians are collaborators. According to Munene:

Politics and intellectualism are constant partners that are often antagonistic and sometimes friendly. It is the practitioners of both, the politicians and the intellectuals, who get caught up in between the two ideals and often end up at loggerheads with each other as each camp tries to push through its perceived interests. Both camps are driven by the reason of state or nation or community and do not operate outside the conceptual confines of a given geopolitical entity. African politicians and intellectuals found themselves responding to envisioned interests of geopolitical entities called 'States' that were often struggling to become 'nations' and the struggle was two levels, domestic and international, and sometimes it was a combination of both. (2006, 187)

Munene further explains that during colonialism, "African politicians often doubled as the African intellectuals because anti-colonialism was first and foremost an intellectual engagement. It was the need to destroy the intellectual base of colonialism that produced people who challenge the colonialism" (187). While noting that after independence in the 1960s, a separation emerged between African politicians and the African intellectual when the African intellectuals began to interrogate the colonialist postures of the emerging African political elite, Munene observes that some African intellectuals are still in alliance with the imperialist centre, thereby involving in perpetuating neocolonialism in Africa (200-201).

Nyamnjoh and Jua (2002, 2) also remark that "the story of education in Africa since colonial times is replete with gruesome acts of physical, psychological, political, economic, and above all, cultural violence against Africans determined to assert their humanity, their creativity, and their right to equality and difference." They explain that "autocratic regimes have traditionally drawn from universities and co-opted intellectuals to provide the conceptual noises they have needed to justify their excesses, promote a culture of violence and silence, and foster mediocrity" (3). In effect, Nyamnjoh and Jua thus suggest that some African academics are complicit in promoting autocratic political cultures in the continent.

In the particular case of Nigerian academics in Nigerian public universities, it has been observed that some of them often orchestrate and superintend over disorder within and outside the universities to advance their personal status and those of the political elite. In spite of this, popular accounts among many Nigerian academics have tended towards representing the members of Nigeria's academic elite, especially those in public universities, as victims of the arbitrary rule of the political elite, both military and civilian. Some members of the Nigerian academic elite have also attributed decayed infrastructures, erratic academic calendar, falling academic standard and incessant unrest in Nigerian public universities to the failure of the Nigerian political elite to properly fund the universities. For instance, Fawole (2020) ascribes the perennial problems in Nigerian public universities to the

tyrannical attitude of the Nigerian political class. He contends that “punitive salary stoppage and other strong-arm methods have been the veritable means of addressing industrial disputes and disagreements since the early 1970s.” Fawole remarks that “the starvation that comes with it is the potent means for Nigerian governments, military and civilian alike, to deal particularly with protesting university academics. Whenever government policies and actions push the university teachers to strike as the only remaining option, governments characteristically revert to this default setting: salary stoppage!” He further indicts the ruling elite thus:

The main preoccupation of the ruling class elites is to plunder the national patrimony. And whenever they want their usually disastrous offspring to attend universities, they send them abroad, or to private universities at home to be awarded unearned degrees. I say ‘unearned degrees’ not necessarily because their children are unwilling to learn, although it is true that many are not, but because in these poorly staffed and ill-equipped, profit-oriented business enterprises called private universities, degrees can actually be purchased without much academic exertion.

Much like Fawole, Omonigho (2020) asserts that “Nigerian lecturers are the least paid in the world.” She explains that “our academics are poor, hungry and abandoned in Nigeria. Despite the excess workload, the poor work environment and the poor remuneration, Nigerian academics are required to conduct and publish their researches or perish.” Omonigho attributes the predicaments of academics in Nigerian public universities to the failure of successive Nigerian rulers to use their good offices to ameliorate the suffering of the academics and Nigerian workers in general. According to her:

The most senior academic (professor) in a public university in Nigeria earns a maximum net salary of 400,000 naira a month which is the equivalent of about \$1,000. This is for a Professor who has spent so many years in studies and research, has obtained the highest degree, passing knowledge to generations of students. On the other hand, the lowest politician in the country who may not even have a university degree earns as much as 1.5m Naira which is the equivalent of \$4,000 per month. They earn this fat salary for doing nothing tangible, go to work at any time while some of them spend most of their tenure on holidays outside the country spending taxpayers’ money.

While this work acknowledges the validity of Fawole and Omonigho’s ideological perspectives, one gap in their submissions is that they fail to recognise how some academics are involved in exacerbating various crises confronting Nigerian

public universities and the country in general. Apart from the persistent unhealthy rivalries among the members of the academic elite in Nigerian public universities, some are also in alliances with the corrupt members of political elite for selfish interests.

In addition, studies by some social scientists and education administrators such as Olowu and Erero (1994), Aluede et al. (2005) and Oludayo et al. (2014) have shown that Nigerian universities, both private and public, are encumbered by a perplexing culture of chaos. Such scholars have identified corruption, poor infrastructures, sexual harassment, tyranny and violence as problems militating against Nigerian universities. However, sufficient scholarly attention has not been given to dramatic portrayals of the Nigerian academic elite within this perennial chaos in Nigerian public universities despite the fact that some Nigerian playwrights have continued to interrogate the issue in their plays. Apart from the two plays selected for analyses in this study, Ahmed Yerima's *Kaffir's Last Game* (1998), Alex Asigbo's *Once Upon a School* (2001), Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* (2002), Tunde Fatunde's *No More Oil Boom* (2006), Esiaba Irobi's *The Other Side of the Mask* (2009), *Hangmen Also Die* (2011), Fidelis Okoro's *Prof Zemzi's Last Rehearsal* (2008) and Gege Baseran's *Konnudrum* (2009) are some of the many Nigerian dramatic texts that have engaged the disorder plaguing Nigerian public universities. These dramatic texts are responses to various crises of governance in contemporary Nigeria and, as such, they are rich sources of data that require critical analyses. Also, interpreting, through them, the maladies ailing the Nigerian polity yields deeper, fresher and multiple perspectives. It is against this background that the current work derives its relevance. It explicates how two Nigerian playwrights, Esiaba Irobi and Ojo Rasaki Bakare, in their respective plays—*Cemetery Road* (2009) and *Once Upon a Tower* (2000)—deploy dramatic devices to portray the involvement of the Nigerian academic elite in the disorder endemic to Nigerian public universities. As our analyses of the characters of the Nigerian academic elite in the two plays will demonstrate, the binary opposition that Fawole and Omonigho create between the Nigerian academic elite and the Nigerian political elite is illusive because the two classes in fact collaborate, and are united by their use of illegitimate methods to perpetuate their positions of power.

## 2. Louis Althusser's Idea of Ideological State Apparatuses

The notion of State Ideological Apparatuses is useful to the interpretations of chaos and the characters of the Nigerian academic elite as depicted in the plays selected. The concept was first postulated by Louis Althusser (1994), one of the most prominent Marxist philosophers of the twentieth century. Althusser uses it to show the complexity of Karl Marx's analysis of the relations between the economic

base (also known as the infrastructure) and the superstructure. The economic base comprises the forces of production and the relations of production. While the forces of production refer to the materials and instruments of production, the relations of production imply the manner in which the members of a society organise in order to live their lives on these materials and instruments. The superstructure includes political and legal institutions, namely the law, the police, the army, the courts and the government as well as the aspects of ideology or consciousness such as religious, moral, aesthetic, political, philosophical theories and cultural products through which the members of society represent themselves.

While Marx believes that elements of society's superstructure (such as culture, education and arts) are determined, in *the final instance*, by the economic base of the society, he notes that the superstructure is in fact relatively autonomous and is influenced by a multiplicity of other factors. This suggests that even when major changes occur in the economic base, the superstructure can sometimes remain unchanged for a period of time.

Althusser uses Ideological State Apparatuses to show how ideology has always remained more ubiquitous, influential and more "material" than previously acknowledged by Marx. According to Althusser (71), in order to understand how the State functions, it is important to take into account of the distinction between State power and State apparatus. Equally important is another reality that is on the side of the (repressive) State apparatus, which must not be confused with it. Althusser refers to this reality as "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs) (70). Instances of "Ideological State Apparatuses" are religious institutions, educational institutions, family, political parties, trade union, press, radio, television and others (the communications ISA) and literary arts, sports, and films (the cultural ISAs). Althusser further states that "Repressive State Apparatuses" (RSAs)—police, prison, court, army, etc.—function by repression (including physical repression/violence) and, secondarily, through ideology. Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology and, secondarily, through repression (72).

Moreover, while RSAs are more centralised and unified in their service to the ideology of the ruling class, ISAs are less so and are more diverse than RSAs. In spite of this, various forms of ISAs are unified by subscribing to, and reinforcing the ideology of the ruling class. Althusser (72) explains that "if the ISAs 'function' massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, in so far as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, *beneath the ruling ideology*, which is the ideology of 'the ruling class.'" He remarks that it is crucial that the ruling class maintains firm control of the ISAs in order to ensure the effectiveness and the stability of the RSAs. He declares that: "To my knowledge, *no class can*

hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses” (72; italics in the original). However, he recognises that ISAs are the sites of power struggles between the ruling class (or their alliances) and the proletariat.

Althusser also notes that, in contemporary capitalist States, what the ruling class has instituted as its most dominant ISA is the educational institution, which has replaced the Church, the previously dominant ISA (75). This implies that, in a capitalist State, all educational institutions can be categorised as Education ISAs. In contemporary Nigeria, however, religious and educational institutions are equally the most dominant ISAs. Despite the fact that words from “the Temple of God” and those from “the Temple of Knowledge” often reinforce the interests of the ruling class, their purveyors are always held in high esteem. In this respect, religious and educational institutions, in contemporary Nigeria, remain the most important ideological tools through which the members of the ruling class control the people.

Following on from this, it is evident that Althusser’s idea of ISAs is very relevant to the interpretation of the character of the Nigerian academic elite and the never-ending chaos in Nigerian public universities and in the country in general. As our analysis of the selected plays will demonstrate, Nigerian public universities (specifically the academics who work in them) are the dominant purveyors of the ideology of the ruling class in the country. The binary opposition that Fawole, Omonigho and others draw between the Nigerian political elite and the academic elite in Nigerian public universities can thus be seen as illusive because, not only are the members of academic elite active and self-conscious agents of the political elite but they, like the political elite, are also involved in using various undemocratic means, including dictatorship and corruption to promote neocolonial/capitalist interests within universities and throughout Nigeria as a whole. Hence, the current work contends that the manner of representing the members of the academic elite in Nigerian public universities in a homogeneous term as victims of the tyranny and corruption of the political elite negates postcolonial Nigerian realities where diverse elements of the elite, including the academic elite, often form alliances to advance their hegemonic interests.

### 3. Chaos and the Postcolonial Portraits of the Nigerian Academic Elite in Esiaba Irobi’s *Cemetery Road* and Ojo Rasaki Bakare’s *Once Upon A Tower*

Esiaba Irobi’s *Cemetery Road* (2009) won the 2010 Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Literary Prize in the drama category. According to Diala (2014, 149), “*Cemetery Road* was a turning point in Irobi’s career as a dramatist. Hitherto primarily concerned with the failure and inadequacies of the postcolony [...],

in *Cemetery Road*, he [Irobi] began the deployment of postcolonial discourse in his engagement with the travails of the postcolony.” Although the play x-rays the negative effects of imperialism in many African nations, it also depicts the internal leadership crises, including military despotism, in Nigeria and how some Nigerian academics contribute to them.

The temporal setting of *Cemetery Road* is post-independence Nigeria, during a period of military dictatorship. The major events in the play take place in Mazeli’s residence at 13 Cemetery Road, an unnamed public university campus and the Torture Chambers, all three in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria. While the Torture Chambers constitute an RSA domain, the unnamed public university campus belongs to the realm of Educational ISA. Through the unnamed public university setting (the realm of Educational ISA) and the academics who work therein, Irobi challenges the claim that the members of Nigerian academic elite in public universities are collective victims of the Nigerian political elite.

In fact, the playwright, just like Althusser, demonstrates that some Nigerian academics in Nigerian public universities are in accord with the Nigerian political elite in the way they perpetrate corruption and other vices. This is illustrated through the character of K.G.B. Madubunjoala, a Professor of Drama and Head of the Department of Theatre Arts. For instance, Professor Madubunjoala is fond of sexually assaulting Mrs. Fatima Akinola, the departmental Secretary, as well as other female staff members and students. He threatens to relieve Mrs. Fatima Akinola of her job should she refuse to concede to his flirtatious requests. This behaviour of Madubunjoala alludes to the idea that females are endangered in Nigerian public universities. Requests for sex in return for good grades by some high-ranking male academics in Nigerian public universities are common phenomena. That Madubunjoala threatens Mrs. Akinola with dismissal from her job further suggests that Nigerian public universities, like the larger Nigerian society, are still being controlled by the tyrannical, patriarchal hegemony.

Professor Madubunjoala also engages in the destruction of the reputation of his fellow colleagues and junior colleagues. “Every evening, in the Senior Common Room, he and the other Senior lecturer nicknamed “When I was at Harvard” pick up any lecturer’s reputation and begin to smoke it like a stick of cigarette” (66). Madubunjoala also works as a spy for the military regime and makes Dr. Mazeli Anyanwu’s file “disappear” from the departmental office to frustrate Mazeli’s hopes of promotion. Madubunjoala, through such actions, not only condemns and frustrates the transformative efforts of Dr. Mazeli, a radical and anti-establishment intellectual; he also orchestrates his arrest by the members of the Nigerian Secret Security Service. Madubunjoala’s endorsement of the military dictatorship is borne out of his ambition to secure a ministerial or ambassadorial position in the military government. By helping the military

to unjustly arrest his fellow colleague, Madubunjoala underscores Althusser's view that members of the Educational ISA are agents of the ruling class. Madubunjoala's involvement in Mazeli's unjust arrest, detention and torture shows how some Nigerian academics enable autocracy, corruption, assassination and other forms of atrocities in the polity. Osundare (2012) also highlights the involvement of Nigerian academics in military dictatorships and the destruction of education system in Nigeria:

The downturn in our educational system began with the military. The military waged a war against the university. People like us were called 'undue radicals' and pursued and persecuted in all kinds of ways. It came to a height in the time of Buhari and Idiagbon, then went low with Babangida who did his own [that is, wage war against the university] in a very indirect way, then accentuated in the time of Abacha, the University was reduced to nonsense and the kind of ministers of education the military used also helped to destroy the universities. Many of these ministers of education were themselves professors, they helped the military destroy the university system.

Furthermore, in contemporary Nigeria, the agents of Educational ISAs enable the destruction not just of local education, but also the arts and culture. They promote Western aesthetics and cultural values to the detriment of the indigenous arts. For instance, Professor Madubunjoala's mantra and alias "When I Was at Oxford" persistently refers to his period in Oxford. He considers Oxford as a standard that Nigerian academia should aspire to emulate. He denigrates Dr. Mazeli's intellectual investment in community theatre by declaring that "this sort of nonsensical farce can never happen at Cambridge or Oxford" (79). He also berates Dr. Mazeli for teaching his students the relationship between politics and theatre. Madubunjoala orders that Mazeli should stop his rehearsal with the students on the grounds that Mazeli is turning teaching into a subversive activity and indoctrinating his students into his revolutionary whims and caprices (77). In this way, Madubunjoala represents those African intellectuals who, according to Femi Osofisan (1999, 5), are ignorant of African indigenous traditions. Osofisan explains that many African intellectuals "swoon—are made to swoon—in ecstatic delight over cultural products of the West" (5). Apart from signifying his support for the military establishment, Madubunjoala's disapproval of Mazeli's community theatre shows his immersion in the cultural products of the West.

Madubunjoala's hostile attitude towards African community theatre and its epistemological formation also raises another important issue. It shows the poverty of vision and the dogmatic transplantation of Western epistemology that characterise knowledge production in universities in Nigeria and other parts

of Africa. While it is true, as Salami has observed, that “colonialism and other earlier European interventions in Nigeria (Africa) destroyed the indigenous mode of knowledge production in the areas of economy, politics, moral, religion and culture” (2009, 137), postcolonial Nigerian intellectuals, like Madubunjoala, with their immersion in, and obsession with, Western paradigms, continue to act as agents of the Global North in order to undermine the indigenous mode of knowledge production. Madubunjoala represents the neoimperialist Nigerian/African scholars who often exhibit a violent intolerance of indigenous epistemology in their obsession with contributing to the global pool of knowledge in a bid to gain global visibility.

Concerning indigenous knowledge and its importance, Irobi advocates a shift from Western and typographical methods of theorising to non-Western methods, which are based on kinaesthetic/phenomenological and iconographic forms (2010). He asserts that African festivals and oral traditions such as *Ijala*, *Gelede*, *Sankofa*, *Oriki* and others contain their performance theories that African scholars need to explore in order to subvert the hegemony of Western theories. By domesticating theory from an African linguistic perspective, Irobi contends, African scholars will be able to force Western and Africanist scholars to study one or two African languages in order to understand the complex artistic ideas and philosophies that undergird the performances, oratures and literatures of African cultures.

However, Madubunjoala’s quest for global visibility deepens his alienation and blinds him from gaining a deeper understanding of the peculiarity of his environment and its epistemological needs, which are different from those of the West. Apart from indicating that Madubunjoala and other neoimperialist Nigerian/African scholars are mere intellectual puppets to the dictates of the Western academy, their gullible endorsement of Western epistemology also shows how agents of Educational ISAs serve as enablers of neocolonialism in postcolonial Nigeria. Thus, Western culture is made dominant in Africa through the agents of Educational ISA that Madubunjoala represents.

Madubunjoala’s mantra of “When I Was at Oxford”, not only indicates the role he plays in perpetuating the dominance of Western culture, it is also a reflection of his deep cultural and psychological confusion. Here is a Nigerian academic in a Nigerian public university who uses Oxford as his standard, yet he is desperate to take an appointment as Ambassador or Minister from a military regime that is hostile to intellectual and cultural development in the country. Unfortunately, Madubunjoala’s contemptible attitudes fall short of the “superior” Oxford standards he extols the virtues of.

However, the domain of Educational ISAs (especially Nigerian public universities) is not a simplistic arena for the perpetuation of the ideology of the

ruling class. Not all members of the Nigerian academic elite in public universities are in alliances with the ruling class. In indeed, as noted before, Althusser noted that the Ideological State Apparatuses are sites of power struggles between the ruling class (or their alliances) and the proletariat or their supporters. In *Cemetery Road*, Irobi depicts this reality through the character of Dr. Mazeli who, unlike Madubunjoala, is a radical intellectual. Dr. Mazeli exhibits a certain degree of transformative vision and a better understanding of the crises of governance in the postcolony. Mazeli's discerning analyses, through his community theatre, of the internal and external factors hobbling postcolonial Nigeria and Africa exemplify his commitment to the pragmatic intellectual approach that is needed to address the myriad of challenges in the nation. His altercation with Douglas and Hazel—BBC Correspondents, who can be considered as agents of imperialists, sent to Africa to foment coup and further destabilise the continent—shows that there are still few genuinely patriotic academics in Nigerian public universities.

Similarly, it is because of his effort to use his community theatre to raise his students' awareness and liberate them from the yoke of military dictatorship and their local and Western collaborators—represented by Madubunjoala, Lawani (an officer of the Security Services and agent of CIA and MI6), Douglas and Hazel—that Mazeli is arrested and tortured. He is forcibly injected with lethal substances by Colonel Dogon Burra, alias Pinochet, who has trained in the art of torture in Latin America, the Republic of South Africa and Iraq. Mazeli's arrest and torture by the military regime and his eventual killing by Lawani illustrate how authoritarian governments in the African State and their Western allies conspire to brutally silence "radical" intellectuals.

However, beyond having an altruistic ambition to liberate the nation from military despotism, Mazeli's radicalism is engendered by psychological wounds. His father has been killed by three horsemen during a religious crisis in Kano in 1966, when he was eleven years old (58). This has created a kind of trauma in his psyche. The wound of Mazeli's inability to rescue his father from his assailants is repressed in his unconscious. Hence, Mazeli's attempt to assassinate the military President represents a way of playing out the unresolved trauma of his father's death.

At this juncture, it is worthy introducing Ojo Rasaki Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower* (2000). As is the case for many other Nigerian playwrights, Ojo Rasaki Bakare's drama is a response to the prevailing sociopolitical realities in post-independence Nigeria. Bakare wrote *Once Upon a Tower* (2000) to satirise the involvement of Nigerian academics in the widespread corruption, oppression and violence in the polity. Like Irobi, Bakare's concern is to demonstrate how some high-ranking academics in Nigerian public universities exacerbate various problems confronting Nigerian universities as well as the country in general. Bakare believes that these

academics are agents of neocolonial Nigerian rulers who use power for their personal gains. The premiere of *Once Upon a Tower* was sponsored by the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Uyo, Nigeria. The performances took place in the Department's Studio Theatre on the 15th and 16th January, 2001.

Divided into twelve movements and a prologue, *Once Upon a Tower* is set in Mariapinto University, Nigeriana, a barely veiled allusion to Nigeria. Through the elements of song, flashback and characterisation, the play depicts the unhealthy rivalry, treachery, inter-generational conflicts, prostitution and cultism that are common in Nigerian public universities. At the centre of the play's conflict is Professor Kurumbete Ijakadi, "MBBS, PhD, Life Provost, College of Medicine, Mariapinto University, Nigeriana" (Bakare 2000, 16).

Mariapinto University, Nigeriana, the spatial setting of the play, represents an important arena of Educational ISA. Professor Kurumbete and other senior academics in the university constitute the agents of the ruling class. Trained in a European university, Professor Kurumbete is the first Gynaecology scholar and consultant in Nigeriana. However, instead of using his experience and knowledge for the advancement of medical science in the country, Professor Kurumbete deploys various methods, including blackmail, to undermine the career of his junior colleagues and students. For instance, he engineers Dr. Akitikori's dismissal from the university because he rebuffs Kurumbete's attempt to coerce him to alter the examination result in favour of Miss Julie, Kurumbete's girlfriend. The dismissal of Akitikori on spurious grounds underscores Althusser's idea that ISAs can use coercive methods to perpetuate the ideology of the dominant class. Owing to Dr. Akitikori's academic brilliance and diligence, Professor Kurumbete considers him as a threat to his authority in the field of Gynaecology. He ensures that Dr. Akitikori is dismissed as a result of a fictitious rape charge levelled against him by Miss Julie. In a dialogue with Dr. Ugolo, the Head of Department of Gynaecology, Professor Kurumbete expresses his hatred towards Dr. Akitikori:

**Kurumbete:** [...] How is the troublemaker in your department?

**Ugolo:** You mean Akitikori?

**Kurumbete:** Who else?

**Ugolo:** Em...Prof. between you and me, he is not a troublemaker. Just that he is a downright non-conformist. He is too bold and vocal, can die for justice and never want to be cowed. But the young man knows his job.

**Kurumbete:** You are only confirming the fact that he is dangerous. When a bold, just-loving non-conformist also has the advantage of intelligence and professional relevance, then he is too dangerous. Look, that boy is dangerous to my future. He is in my area of specialization,

well-positioned to break my monopoly. He is also dangerous to your future. Brilliant and active, he is a threat to your long stay as the head of department. We have to get him out of the system fast! (30-31)

In the same way as members of the Nigerian political elite, Professor Kurumbete also promotes nepotism, mediocrity and sexual immorality. That he offers Yemi, his stooge and laboratory attendant, admission into the Medical College without the requisite entrance grades is a case in point. Professor Kurumbete also influences Yemi's appointment as a lecturer at the Department of Gynaecology following his graduation so that he would continue to work as a spy for him. By making Yemi a medical lecturer, in spite of his feeble intellect, Professor Kurumbete demonstrates that he does not believe in academic excellence. In addition, his pressuring of Dr. Akitikori to manipulate Miss Julie's exam grades shows his lack of the moral decency.

By collaborating with Ugolo and Julie to blackmail and bring about the dismissal of Akitikori because of his academic brilliance and diligence, Kurumbete shows that he lacks the intellectual capacity and the academic integrity that are needed to promote healthy epistemological rivalries that would enrich medical research in Mariapinto University in particular and in Nigeriana as a whole. Furthermore, his act of stifling his junior colleagues and students in order to maintain his academic monopoly is similar to the manner in which many Nigerian politicians undermine the interest of the masses for their personal hegemonic building. This is clearly captured in his dialogue with Ugolo:

**Ugolo:** Remember the extra-ordinarily brilliant part 4 student, Omowaye Pedro whose genius we hope Akitikori will help to specially develop. Yemi will definitely not be able to offer the kind of stuff a brain like Omowaye needs to blossom.

**Kurumbete:** There you go again. Who tells you I even support the idea of a well enriched special training for Omowaye Pedro? That wizard? Even without any special training, he is already competing with part six students. People like him should be intellectually disempowered if we must own the future. And don't call me evil, I see nothing evil in what I am saying. Self-preservation [...] is the first human instinct. (32)

Also, Professor Chukuma, the Vice-Chancellor of the university is portrayed as being far from noble, given his active involvement in promoting academic mediocrity. Professor Chukuma is in an alliance with members of the political

class in order to promote their capitalist interest. For example, Professor Chukuma's parochial ambition to secure a second term as the Vice-Chancellor leads him to compromise the future of his students by refusing to protest against the embezzlement by Senator Abdul Rahamon Ikeanabi, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education, of the funds of the university's medical facilities. It is, therefore, not surprising that medical doctors trained in Mariapinto University turn out to be killers instead of the healers that they are expected to be.

Professor Chukuma represents an ideological agent of the ruling class who enables a poor education system for the children of the masses with the aim of sustaining the ideology of the ruling class. For instance, Omowaye Pedro, in spite of his talent, ends up as a half-baked medical doctor because of the wrong instruction that Dr. Yemi, Professor Kurumbete's protégée, has given him when he was a medical student at Mariapinto University. He is also able to carry out "dry practicals" (experiments without facilities) owing to the fact that the funds meant for medical facilities have been misappropriated by Professor Chukuma's ally, the Senator. However, Professor Kurumbete, his stooge, Dr. Yemi, and Senator Ikeanabi do eventually reap the fruits of their violent acts. For example, Pedro administers the wrong dosage of ketamine as anaesthesia to Khadija—his girlfriend and Senator Ikeanabi's only daughter—in the process of terminating her pregnancy. This eventually results in Khadija's death, for which Pedro is arrested, prosecuted and sentenced. However, he breaks out of jail and goes to Mariapinto University where he shoots Professor Kurumbete, Dr. Yemi, and Senator Ikeanabi. Pedro also subjects Professor Chukuma, the Vice Chancellor, to humiliation. He holds him hostage and threatens to shoot him dead. Razor, on Pedro's order, also gives Professor Chukuma a heavy slap.

Although condemnable, Pedro's violent reprisal attacks are a consequence of the corruption and atrocities perpetrated by Professors Kurumbete and Chukuma and their allies, Drs Yemi and Ugolo, Miss Julie and Senator Ikeanabi. Ordinarily, had Professors Kurumbete and Chukuma been genuinely committed to knowledge production and provided the right leadership to their students, Pedro would not have become a killer-doctor and thug. Pedro's anger and violent protest against the university establishment, represented by Professors Kurumbete and Chukuma, and their political ally, Senator Ikeanabi, is an act of "speaking back" to the patriarchal hegemonies within and outside the university. His insalubrious acts illustrate how many poorly educated, unemployed and disillusioned youths in contemporary Nigeria respond to their marginalisation by the capitalist political and academic elite.

As is evident from the elucidations above, Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and Bakare's *Once Upon a Tower* indict the members of the Nigerian academic elite as agents of chaos. The university settings in both plays indicate that the academic elite

in the postcolony cannot be exculpated from the acts of violence within these educational institutions. The repressive and destructive actions of Professor Kurumbete in *Once Upon a Tower* and those of Professor Madubunjoala in *Cemetery Road* illustrate the involvement of university dons in the crises of governance in the country. Professors Kurumbete, Madubunjoala and Chukuma are ideological agents of the political elite who not only support the neocolonial ideology of the political class, but also help to sustain it through their various tyrannical attitudes. This suggests that Nigerian public universities in contemporary Nigeria are no different from the larger Nigerian society where members of the political class use direct and symbolic forms of violence to suppress the ordinary people.

In *Cemetery Road*, Irobi uses Pidgin English, elements of abuse and animal imagery to expose as well as lampoon the corruption of the academic elite, thereby challenging their alleged messianic preoccupation, victimhood and innocence of the perennial chaos in Nigerian public universities and the nation. For instance, although Mrs. Akinola speaks good English, she reports Professor Madubunjoala's tyrannical acts to Dr. Mazeli in Pidgin English. Her dialogue with Mazeli goes thus:

- Fatima:** E don happen again. The donkey talk say I go lose my job as the Departmental Secretary.
- Mazeli:** (*bristling*) Who?
- Fatima:** Who else but the Head of Department, Professor Madubunjoala alias When I Was at 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 Mike Tyson hands, I stay on the other side of the table like this (*demonstrate 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 peper, na him the yeye man come take him yeye hand put under my skirt and begin to fondle my Southern Hemisphere.
- Mazeli:** And what did you do?
- Fatima:** (*fiercely*): I slap am for face two times. You hear me so? Two times for him useless face. (Irobi 2009, 64)

The above excerpt, though comical, is more than a mere reportage of Professor Madubunjoala's oppressive acts. By speaking in Pidgin, Mrs. Akinola's is protesting against Professor Madubunjoala's patriarchal sexual assault. That Fatima calls Madubunjoala, an Oxford trained Professor and Head of Department, "The donkey" and "the yeye man" shows her contempt for Madubunjoala. "The donkey"

also signifies that she regards him as a “puppet” to the military establishment. By metaphorically comparing Madubunjoala’s hand to that of the American former professional boxer, Mike Tyson, Fatima implies that Madubunjoala is synonymous with violence and rape. This is because Mike Tyson not only reigned as the undisputed world heavyweight champion; he was also convicted of rape in 1992 and sentenced to six years imprisonment. He was later released on parole after serving three years. Thus, Mike Tyson in Fatima’s statement evokes the intimidation, ferocity, highhandedness and patriarchal violence that characterise the Nigerian universities, as they do the boxing ring. Also, Fatima’s euphemistic reference to her private parts as her “Southern Hemisphere” is expected to make the audience laugh at Madubunjoala’s sexual escapade.

Similarly, Bakare, in *Once Upon a Tower*, creatively deploys songs to satirise the treachery, corruption, highhandedness and violence of Professor Kurumbete. Just like Mrs Fatima’s reportage above, some of the songs in the play are rendered in Pidgin. Its use is a device for subverting the hegemony of the imperialist culture and their local promoters, Professors Kurumbete and Chukuma, that Standard British English represents. Apart from entertaining the reader, the songs also reveal the psychological confusion that attends the lives of the neocolonialist academic elite in contemporary Nigerian universities. For example, an excerpt from “I love My Provost”, one of the songs used in the play, reads:

**Chorus:** I love my provost  
 I no go lie  
 Na inside fear  
 He dey sleep and wake  
 If you good for brain  
 Ego fear your reign  
 Na men like chicken dey be in im friend

**Solo:** E get one man  
 Na baba Kuku  
 Im name na Provost  
 Im beards goatee  
 If you see am for  
 You go answer Ben Johnson  
 Because the man E look like demon. (Bakare 2000, 14)

In the first part of the song, Professor Kurumbete’s anti-intellectual psyche is revealed and ridiculed. Although considered a leading Professor in the field of Gynaecology in Nigeriana, Kurumbete demonstrates a narcissistic tendency that negates his professorial status. This is evident in his constant fear of, and

hatred for, his junior colleagues who exhibit an intellectual prowess that he lacks. As reflected in the first part of the song, his liking for feeble-minded and unproductive academics further illustrates his mediocrity and unbridled sense of self-entitlement. The second part of the song satirises Kurumbete's physical features. It describes him as a short man ("Baba Kuku") with a goatee beard. The song also directly compares him with a demon that makes one take to one's heel when one encounters it. This is underscored through an allusion to Ben Johnson, a Jamaican-born Canadian former sprinter, who won two bronze medals at the 1984 Summer Olympics. As used in the song, "You go answer Ben Johnson" means that one would run for escape if one sees Kurumbete because of his demonic sight. These descriptions, coupled with his hollow intellect, suggest that he is an unpleasant and tyrannical academic.

Apart from songs, Bakare also uses names and acronyms of academic titles as satiric devices to portray the Nigerian academic elite's habituation with violence, power and titles. Ijakadi [meaning combat or warfare], which is Kurumbete's surname, reflects his brawny psyche. As depicted in his name, Professor Kurumbete Ijakadi is always eager to resolve disagreements with his junior colleagues through a combative means. Because he lacks the requisite intellectual capability and moral courage to compete with other lecturers, he resorts to blackmail to keep himself in power as the Provost of the College of Medicine. That he orchestrates Akitikori's dismissal from the university on a false allegation of sexual assault underscores this point. Also, the exhibitionistic manner in which he parades his academic titles and position show that he is a vainglorious individual. An excerpt from the stage direction offers this evidence:

*Light on stage. Professor Kurumbete's office. On his table stands a nametag—  
Professor Kurumbete Ijakadi MBBS, Ph.D, Life Provost, College of Medicine,  
Mariapinta University. (2000:16)*

Kurumbete inscribes his academic titles and position on the nametag not merely to introduce himself to prospective visitors to his office, but to announce to them that he is the dominant force in the College of Medicine, Mariapinto University. His other intention is to use his proclaimed titles and position to intimidate other academics, especially the junior ones. This suggests further that Kurumbete exhibits what Millon et al (2004, 340) describe as "elitist narcissism". Millon et al explain that: "Elitist narcissists revel in displays of power, the exhibitionism of raw self-assertion may also be focused on intellectual ability or the privilege of accumulated wealth [...], they advertise themselves, brag about their achievement (whether substantive or fraudulent), and make everything they have done appear wonderful and impressive" (340). They further note that: "By making excessive

claims about themselves, elitist narcissists expose a great divide between their actual selves and their self-presentation” (340). Just as Madubunjoala deploys his mantra “When I Was at Oxford” to intimidate his colleagues who studied at Nigerian universities and make them feel inferior, Kurumbete publicises his titles and position—“MBBS, Ph.D, Life Provost” as a means of asserting his hegemony in the College. In spite of his proclaimed hegemony, Kurumbete is an unproductive academic. He is a travesty of a genuine scholar. Underscoring the harsh reality of academics like Professors Kurumbete, Chukuma and Madubunjoala in Nigerian universities, Osundare (2012) declares:

The category of people teaching in our universities today, the quality of their education will have to improve. And then our Professors, our Nigerian Professors, and I stress this, our Professors, many of them have stopped reading. Many of them have stopped professing anything. The fashion in Nigeria today is you keep struggling, and struggling, you play all your politics, the day you become Professor, you sit in your chair, so called chair, you sink into it and say “from now on, it is Ija aye, it is Ari ya’ no more writing, no more teaching”. Many of the Professors farm out their lectures to junior colleagues. And then what do they do? They go all over the place looking for political appointments. Many of our professors are fake professors. Many of them should not move near the walls of a university in an ideal situation.

A number of issues emerge from the foregoing analyses of the two plays. First, the members of the academic elite in public universities are entangled in unhealthy rivalries. Second, some members of academic elite are involved in various form of corruption, sexual assaults, result racketeering, blackmail and other forms of violence, thereby promoting chaos within and outside Nigerian universities. Third, in the public universities, some academics act as ideological agents of the corrupt, tyrannical political elite with the aim of facilitating the subjugation of some “nonconformist” academics who often express dissenting views on the draconian policies of the ruling class. These points, as represented in the two plays, negate the notion that members of Nigeria’s academic elite are essentially victims of the ruling/political elite. Rather, they are collaborators in the acts of fomenting chaos within and outside the Nigerian public universities.

#### 4. Conclusion

This work has examined the role of the members of Nigerian academic elite in the chaos in Nigerian public universities and the country in general as represented in Esiaba Irobi’s *Cemetery Road* (2009) and Ojo Rasaki Bakare’s *Once Upon a Tower*

(2000). Through Louis Althusser's insight of Ideological State Apparatuses, the work has demonstrated the ways in which the members of the Nigerian academic elite, especially those in Nigerian public universities, promote chaos in the polity. The two plays show that some members of the Nigerian academic elite use various autocratic methods to promote their personal gains and create chaos in the universities and Nigeria in general. This work has revealed that the Nigerian academic elite are not different from the Nigerian political elite because both classes are involved in various undemocratic acts that undermine peace, stability and development in the universities and the country.

The two playwrights' unflattering depictions of the Nigerian academic elite are significant because they challenge the assumed difference between the Nigerian ruling elite and the Nigerian academic elite as well as elucidate the complexity of the persistent disorder in Nigerian universities and the country in general. The two playwrights' representations of the Nigerian academic elite call for critical self-interrogations, genuine scholarly and community-based actions that are geared towards authentic national development. Thus, the work has reaffirmed the significance of Nigerian literary drama in the interpretation of various crises in contemporary Nigeria. As noted earlier, apart from the two playwrights whose plays are analysed here, various other Nigerian playwrights have produced plays that interrogate the Nigerian predicaments from diverse ideological and aesthetic perspectives. Further exploration of other plays will not only enrich Nigerian literary criticism, it will also contribute to a more complete and nuanced understanding of Nigerian/African socio-political conditions.

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