

Rhetoric of Violence: A Critical Stylistic Study of Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi*

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Abstract

Violence ruptures peaceful co-existence and communal harmony. However, some literary writers advocate violence as a panacea to addressing socio-economic inequality and leadership failure. This paper deployed critical stylistic tools of nominal groups, processes, equivalence, and contrast to explore the depth of violence in Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi*. Data were drawn from the play, and the analysis was based on Systemic Functional Linguistics. Findings revealed that the choice of material processes bespeaks the violent ideological orientation of the youths, while the mental processes convey the mental agony suffered by the victims of violence. In addition, the use of noun modifications and equivalence provides negative descriptions and invectives that further deepen the macabre tone of violence, which gravitates towards the gruesome murder of the political leaders in the play. In conclusion, the paper explicated the functional significance of the linguistic choices that foreground the playwright's authorial style, thematic focus, and ideological orientations.

Keywords: Stylistics, critical stylistics, processes, naming, equivalence, violence, and ideology

Introduction

African literature has long served as a powerful medium that challenges colonial subjugation, socio-political discontent, harrowing poverty, economic inequality, and youth neglect induced by post-colonial dysfunctional leadership and authoritarian regimes. To address these problems, African literary critics have deployed diverse literary and linguistic canons to engage the writers' thematic preoccupation, authorial styles, and ideological orientations to foster social change in the garb of revolutionary ethos. It has been observed that there is a limited application of Jeffries's critical stylistic tool in African literary studies. For instance, Adekunle and Oke (2021), Onoja (2023), Iyakwari et al. (2024), and

Hamzah (2025) have applied critical stylistic tools to interrogate political disillusionment, revolutionary agenda, and ideological perspective in Femi Osofian's *Morountodun*, Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer*, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, respectively. To date, critical studies employing the tools of Critical Stylistics to analyze Esiaba Irobi's revolutionary plays, particularly *Nwokedi*, are conspicuously absent from the scholarly literature. This research, therefore, aims to address this significant gap.

Of all Esiaba Irobi's plays, *Nwokedi* is widely read and critiqued. This is because it mirrors contemporary Nigeria's socio-economic and political experience. Due to galloping youth unemployment, Nigerian youths have become restless and restive, challenging the present crop of Nigerian leadership. The EndSars demonstration that began in October 2020, with Lagos as a major epicenter, was sparked by police brutality, youth unemployment, social injustice, poor governance, and widespread corruption. Thus, the choice of *Nwokedi*, among other things, is to sensitize the ruling class to address the myriad socio-economic issues bedeviling Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general, before youths deploy rhetoric of violence as espoused by Esiaba Irobi in *Nwokedi* to resolve their grievances. The play, therefore, demonstrates how language functions as a site for ideological struggle in a post-colonial African setting where youths subvert established political hegemony and resist social sufferings and economic backwardness through violent disposition.

Deploying the methodological tools of Critical Stylistics to investigate Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi* would contribute to the growing number of works in postcolonial studies. Given the advocacy for violence as the ideological drive of the play, socio-political discourse may tilt towards violence in Africa, if the present social inequality and social injustice continue unabated, as some African countries are now under military rule. The Arab Spring of 2011 still resonates in global politics. This study's findings are expected to catalyze a heightened awareness among Nigerian and African leaders, advocating for policies prioritizing rapid and sustainable development for their populations. This research also encourages further scholarly inquiry into Esiaba Irobi's remaining plays, employing Critical Stylistics as an analytical framework.

Critical Stylistics is an approach to textual analysis and interpretation that uncovers ideologies in texts. Lesley Jeffries (2010) developed Critical Stylistics as a discrete sub-branch of stylistics, a sub-field of applied linguistics that examines formal patterns that constitute the fabric of texts, spoken or written, literary or non-literary. She drew her inspirations from a

harvest of insights and principles from Fairclough (1989), Fowler (1991), and Simpson (1993, 2004). This suggests that Critical Stylistics is heavily indebted to Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. Norgard et al. (2010) further explain that Critical Stylistics is also concerned about the relationship between language and power and how language can communicate hidden ideologies and intentions in texts and talks.

According to Jeffries (2014), Critical Stylistics emerged as a reaction against Critical Discourse Analysis due to the inability of its practitioners to provide what she describes as ‘a reasonable broad range of tools.’ While asserting a sharp distinction between Critical Stylistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, she introduces the concept of ‘textual-conceptual functions’ to the field of stylistics. This linguistic tool interrogates language’s power dynamics and uncovers ideological concerns within texts. Textual-conception functions combine textual features (triggers) and the ideation function. Many have a prototypical form that always carries the conceptual effect...’ (Jeffries, 2014, p. 412).

This form-function textual construction meaning is anchored on Halliday (1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2004, 2014) notion of the three metafunctions of language (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) model of generating linguistic meaning. Jeffries (2010, p.15) mentions these textual-conception tools, and they are listed below:

- Naming and Describing
- Representing Actions/Events/States
- Equating and Contrasting
- Exemplifying and Enumerating
- Prioritizing
- Assuming and Implying
- Negating
- Hypothesizing
- Presenting the Speech and Thoughts of Other Participants
- Representing Time, Space, and Society

Not all the tools are discussed in this paper for space considerations. Only those selected for the analysis of Nwokedi were briefly explained to understand the concepts adopted for analysis. Three out of the ten tools were adopted for this analysis. The three tools are Naming and Description, Representing Actions/ Events/States, and Equating and Contrasting.

Naming and Description are the potential participants the nominal group revolves around. The Naming and Description constituent, or the nominal group’s constituents, has three grammatical units: *Pre-modification*,

which can be a determiner and adjectives; and the Headword, the semantic core, is the nucleus of the nominal group. It comprises a common noun, a proper noun, or a personal pronoun without modification. Post-modification follows the Headword and has a function called Qualifier, which can be a prepositional phrase or a clause. Pre-modification says something about the Head and is functionally subdivided into several parts: Deictic, Numerative, Classifier, and Epithet (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). According to Jefferies (2010), the nominal group contains a great deal of information that can be used to explore the dominant ideology of a text through the choice of nouns, noun phrases, and their modifiers and nominalizations. For example, within the Nigerian context, the choice between “An unemployed young man” and “A jobless young man” has some ideological mapping, for the latter connotes a derogatory remark.

Representing Actions/Events/States refers to ‘clause as representation’ and captures the transitivity system. The transitivity system construes the world of experience into process types. “Transitivity,” writes Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), “is a system of clause, affecting not only the verb serving as process but also Participant and Circumstance” (p.181). Processes relate to the theory of experience and account for most of the clauses in a text. Jefferies (2010) identifies four process types: material, mental, relational, and verbal. Material processes describe what is happening or being done in the external world, which she further categorizes into three subtypes: Material Action Intention (MAI) denotes intentional actions carried out by a conscious human being (e.g., The woman slapped the man); Material Action Supervention (MAS), where the verb or the action performed is beyond the Actor's control (e.g., The man slumped); and Material Action Event (MAE), where the verb refers to an inanimate Actor (e.g., The tree fell on the road). The two dominant participants in a material clause are the Actor and the Goal.

Mental process describes the state of the mind in psychological events (Bloor & Bloor, 2004). It represents something or a process that goes on in the internal world of the mind. While Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) sub-categorize mental processes into four, namely, cognition, perception, emotion, and desideration, Jefferies gives three sub-categories of the mental processes as cognition, perception, and emotion. The two functional elements of the mental clause are the Senser/Experiencer and the Phenomenon. For this paper, Jeffries’s three sub-categories of mental process were adopted for analysis.

The relational processes are realized by the verb be or some verb of the same class (known as copular verbs). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014)

explain that relational clause shapes the outer experience of the material world (material clauses) and the inner world of our consciousness (mental clauses) as experience of 'being' rather than 'doing' or 'sensing'. Being in relational clauses has two parts: "something is said to be something." The English system operates with three main types of relation: intensive, possessive, and circumstantial. In addition, each of the three main types of relation has two distinct modes of being: 'attributive' and 'identifying'. The two functional elements of attributive relational clauses are Carrier and Attribute, as in 'Life is good' and 'The man seems crazy.'

In comparison, the two functional elements of identifying relational clauses are the Identifier and the Identified, as in 'Dr. Ibrahim is the team leader.' The verbal process describes the verbs of 'saying.' It intermediates between material and mental processes and involves "saying something is a physical action that reflects mental operation" (Thompson, 2004, p. 100). The two functional labels of verbal clauses are Verbiage/Sayer and Target.

Equating and Contrasting: Equating, within the context of Critical Stylistics, refers to the creation of equivalence. Equivalence suggests synonymy. Two words are synonymous when they are closely related in meaning. In other words, it deals with sameness in meaning (though not complete sameness) or similarity or nearest in meaning that words contract in sentences. Text producers explore the rich landscape of synonyms in English to express related or connected ideas. Equating is the relationship of equivalence, and writers employ it to create ideological structures. According to Jeffries (2010), syntactic triggers to construct equivalence include noun phrase apposition, parallelism, relational intensive transitivity, metaphors, and simile with the SPC structures.

Apart from the creation of equivalence, contrast, also known as an antonym, is another textual means of creating ideology in texts. Contrast expresses oppositeness in meaning. It is a very complex and natural feature of language. Two words are opposite when they share all but one of their semantic properties. The semantic property that the words do not share is present in one but absent in the other. In semantics literature, scholars have discussed kinds of antonyms: gradable and non-gradable antonyms, which trigger ideological structures. In addition to gradable and non-gradable (complementarity, converses, directional) antonyms, Jeffries avers that negated opposition, transitional opposition, comparative opposition, replacive opposition, concessive opposition, explicit opposition, parallelism, and contrastives are common syntactic elements that trigger contrast in texts (Jeffries, 2010).

This paper deployed the analytical tools of Critical Stylistics to

uncover radical ideology driven by violence in Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi*. This study employed three core analytical tools of Critical Stylistics—Naming and Description, Representing Actions/Events/States, and Equating and Contrasting—to interrogate how lexicogrammatical choices signpost the play's thematic concerns and unpack its ideological orientations.

Literature Review

Esiaba Irobi belonged to the third generation of Nigerian playwrights. These playwrights wrote from the late eighties to the twilight of the nineties (Roy-Omoni, 2022, p. 14). Before his untimely demise in 2010, Irobi published six plays: *Colour of Rusting Gold* (1989); *Hangmen Also Die* (1989); *Nwokedi* (1991); *The Other Side of the Mask* (1999); *The Fronded Circle* (1999); and *Cemetery Road* (2009). *Hangmen Also Die* (1989) and *Nwokedi* (1991) have received more critical appraisal than the other four plays. As this paper's chosen text for analysis, this review focuses on *Nwokedi*.

Scholars and critics such as Osu (2011), Akingbe (2013), Ignatius and Udoka (2014), Ebekue (2018), Okoye (2019), Inegbe and Basse (2020), Amiriheobu, Eleberi and George (2020), Eze and Salifu (2021), and Shittu (2022) have critically studied and appraised *Nwokedi*. These scholars examine the play's thematic focus, cultural perspective, revolutionary bent, and linguistic choices. Osu (2011) sees *Nwokedi* as a play that mirrors the Igbo traditions as rituals and myths characterise it. To him, *Nwokedi* is “a reliable source of inspiration for literary expressions, which enacted as a struggle to overthrow the greedy politicians who have ruptured the future of the youths that bear the brunt of inept leadership” (p. 151). Like Osu, Shittu (2022) equally observes that *Nwokedi* is situated within the cultural realm of Igbo oral tradition because it is a play that hinges on ritual cleansing for community renewal and continuity. This cleansing, Shittu argues, constitutes an antidote for “political debauchery and social imbalance” (p. 64) that characterize both military and civilian administration and governance. According to Shittu (2022), inept leadership, bad governance, mindless plundering, and siphoning of the people's resources provide the catalyst for violence and revolt, which envelop the setting of the play.

Violence, Shittu (2022) maintains, reflects Esiaba's renunciation of spineless political gladiators, social inequality, and pervasion of justice, which, Osu (2011) argues, constitute the reason why *Nwokedi*, the leader of the Ekemeku, a revolutionary cult, employs violent revolutionary tendencies to deal with the politicians. This revolutionary terror, anchored on Marxist

revolutionary aesthetics, is directed at politicians perceived as the architects of the social malaise threatening the socio-economic survival of the youth. Thus, violence that rocks the fabric of the text is ignited by radical social change aimed at eliminating all corrupt politicians.

Radical social change premised on the altar of violence and terror is also the thrust of Ebekue's (2018) work. Ebekue examines the yawning gap between 'the haves' and 'the have-nots' in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and *Nwokedi* as a study that interrogates the power, relevance, and frosty relationship between the two opposing social classes in the play. He contends that the flash of tension and oppression that overwhelms the play arises from the social violence and friction characterizing revolutionary struggles. According to Ebekue (2018), "material gratification and personal aggrandizement" (p. 77) serve as the fulcrum that perpetuates social inequality. An attempt to denounce modern capitalist hegemony of controlling the reins of power and factors of production by the corrupt political class precipitates an atmosphere of violent responses and counterattacks. Like Osu, Ebekue applies Dialectical Materialism as the theoretical framework to analyse the class struggle that dominates Irobi's plays. Through this Marxist-driven dialectical materialism, Ebekue envisions, in the plays of Esiaba Irobi, a radical change. This revolutionary change is the metaphor for sustainable social revolution that would usher in robust social and sustainable development.

Violence and destruction as a means of seeking socio-political and economic redress is the focus of Eze and Salifu's (2021) study. The duo conducts a comparative study by examining the psychic and social paralysis of a rising generation in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi*. In their paper, particularly in *Nwokedi*, Eze and Salifu (2021) contend that socio-economic and political factors paralyze the youths and alienate them from the mainstream scheme of day-to-day social life; therefore, they resort to a howling revolt to uproot the social system that has perpetually impoverished them and rent their future into shreds. The authors contend that unemployment, corruption, and political exclusion significantly constrain the youths, prompting them to direct their anger and resentment toward the ruling class. This accumulated frustration, fueled by pervasive corruption, financial mismanagement, the pilfering of public funds, widespread unemployment, and crushing poverty, escalates into violent eruptions. These outbursts, in turn, breed social dislocation, exacerbate social stratification, and lead to extensive bloodshed in *Nwokedi*.

The above-reviewed works focus on literary criticisms based on thematic explorations and analyses grounded in Marxist revolutionary

aesthetics (Osu, 2011; Ebekwu, 2018). However, Okoye (2019), Inegbe and Bassey (2020), and Amiriheobu et al. (2020), like the present study, are language inclined. Okoye (2019) carries out a linguistic stylistic analysis of Esiaba Irobi's three plays, namely, *Hangmen Also Die*, *Cemetery Road*, and *Nwokedi*, by examining the foregrounding features in the play to identify how the playwright adroitly manipulates his linguistic choices to convey meaning effectively. Stylistically foregrounding features of deviation and parallelism examined in the selected texts reveal that the works have revolutionary undertones and fervor that escalate into violence and revolt.

Similarly, Inegbe and Bassey (2020) explore the polemics of language in Esiaba Irobi's *Cemetery Road* and segment the analysis of language in the chosen text along the following parameters: language of wit, mockery and sarcasm, macabre language, language of violence, persuasive language, proverbial language, language of abuse and insensitivity, language of despair and imagery. Although Inegbe and Bassey claim to deploy linguistic tools to analyze their chosen text, based on the title of their work, they succeeded in drawing lexical and sentential examples appropriate to the parameters listed above. The methodology and analysis employed in the study do not reflect a linguistic analysis of a literary text.

The foregoing paragraphs have shown that though the works of Irobi have enjoyed critical attention, research studies, to the best of the authors' knowledge, have not focused attention on a linguistic study on *Nwokedi* which deploys the tools of Critical Stylistics that relate linguistic options in the text to thematic exploration and ideological orientation of the author, using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. In other words, previous studies have not examined the linguistic features through which Esiaba Irobi communicates and espouses his radical ideological vision. This current study intends to fill the gap.

Methodology

This paper deployed three out of the ten analytical tools of Critical Stylistics as described by Jefferies (2010): Naming and Description, Representing Actions/Events/ States, and Equating and Contrasting. The paper adopted qualitative research techniques, using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Data for analysis were drawn from the three cycles that constitute the setting of the play, namely, Osisioma, Bakalori, and Osisioma. The choice of nouns and noun modifications was analyzed for Naming and Description. For Representing Actions/Events/States, material, mental, and relational processes were analyzed. In analyzing Equating and

Contrasting, the paper focused on syntactic triggers like simile, metaphor, and antonym.

Synopsis of the play *Nwokedi*

Nwokedi is a play woven around the annual Epke festival celebrated on the 31st December to renew the earth's strength and atone for the sins committed. A goat is to be slaughtered and its blood spilled to cleanse the land for societal rebirth and communal regeneration. The Ekumeku, *Nwokedi*'s age group, oversees the festival. In the distant past, human beings were sacrificed to purge the land of its sins. Thus, members of Ekumeku, headed by *Nwokedi*, are determined to use human beings for this year's Epke festival. They settle for the serving politicians, *Nwokedi*'s father and Senator Arikpo, who, they believe, have desecrated the land through their failed promises, inordinate selfish ambition, and personal material acquisition that have created galloping unemployment and crushing poverty. So, *Nwokedi* is a violent response to the philistine political leadership characterizing Nigeria's governance.

Results and Discussion

Nouns and noun modifications are employed in the play to provide some ideological information. Arikpo names the youths that waylay him as 'nonentities', 'louts' (p. 3), and 'hooligans' (p. 4) to register the numerical strength and preference for their violent disposition. Similarly, Mrs *Nwokedi* tells Aripko that the Unemployed Youths Association of Osisioma is called Ekumeku, which means 'hurricane' and 'whirlwind'. This choice of nouns denotes violence and implies that youths are pursuing a violent agenda and radical ideology to remove all spineless politicians who have ruined their future forcefully.

The employment of noun modification or nominal group signposts the ideological divide that runs through the thread of the play. Nominal groups that denote naming and description punctuate the conflict that drives the play and emphasize the confrontational posturing and the widening ideological gulf between the youths and the politicians. After he narrowly escaped being burnt by the Unemployed Youths Association of Ugep, Arikpo narrates his ordeal to Mrs. *Nwokedi* and describes these violent youths in pejorative and derogatory names which have far-reaching ideological effects:

Devil's Own Brigade

a miserable mob of jobless young men and women

a menace of unemployed chimpanzees

a harvest of political illiterates. *Nwokedi*, (p. 3)

The functional significance of the choice of noun modification reinforces the deep-seated feelings of hatred Arikpo nurses have against the youths who have reduced him to dust and his residence to ashes. He says they are 'dangerous,' 'murderous,' and that "violence roils in their veins like viruses" (p. 8). These linguistic choices are 'unique identifiers' (Jeffries, 2010, p. 19) contributing to how Aripko frames the Unemployed Youths Association of Ugep.

Similarly, the unemployed youths who bear the brunt of political and rudderless leadership pour verbal venom on the political institution that has fractured their future and vision on the altar of greed, selfishness, and aggrandizement. In his re-election campaign activities to return to the Senate, *Nwokedi Sr.*, the biological father of *Nwokedi Jr.*, the protagonist of the play, approaches the electorate, among them the *Ekumeku*, to canvass for their support and votes. At the campaign ground, *Nwokedi Jr.* exhibits his violent revolutionary posturing as he campaigns against his father and even nominates *Ozomena*, a member of *Ekumeku*, to represent them at the Parliament. He piles up a cluster of noun modification laced with harsh and horrible descriptions that are loaded with huge ideological content to condemn, disparage, and demean his father:

m h
'distinguished rogue',
m h
'political obscenity'
m h
'resourceful liar'
m h
'high-degree thief'
m m h
'a confidence trickster'
m m h
a carapaced tortoise

Nwokedi (p. 11)

The filial confrontation between father and son sets the tone of socialist ideology, violent radicalism, and revolution, imprinted on the

pages of *Nwokedi*. The ideological divide anchored on different political persuasions creates an atmosphere of seething anger and violence that overwhelms the play. Note the semantic heightening in the choice of the negative and derogatory nouns: ‘rogue,’ ‘liar,’ ‘thief,’ ‘trickster,’ and ‘tortoise’ that aptly describe politicians (Nigerian politicians in particular) as cunning and deceitful personalities, corrupt and ghoulish individuals. These descriptions ‘package up’ ideas about the traits of Nigerian politicians and underscore the revolutionary bent of Nwokedi, who refuses to be carried away by filial relationships (Jeffries, 2010, p. 19). Nwokedi demonstrates a towering figure who rises above primordial feelings or sentiments by standing as a stumbling block against his father’s senatorial ambition.

The choice of Action/Events/States in the text equally signals the ideology of violence, the employment of Material Action Intention (MAI), which denotes that the Actor (s) of the material processes intentionally carry out the actions. Arikpo tells Mrs Nwokedi how his new house in Ugep is reduced to cinders and stones and dust:

Arikpo: My people, (bitterly) They burnt my car, burnt my life. They have butchered me like a sacrificial animal. They have torn my flesh limb from limb.... The only job they could find was to shatter my house into fragments. (p. 3)

Arikpo: They planted a bomb in the parlour and blew into pieces. In law, they razed it to ground, to the very foundations. (p. 40)

The choice of the material verbs: ‘burnt,’ ‘butchered,’ ‘turned,’ ‘planted,’ ‘blew,’ ‘razed,’ ‘shatter,’ from the excerpt above, indicates violent activities, which underline the ideological orientation of the youths. This ideology thrives on destroying, maiming, annihilating, and killing elected political office holders and voluptuous politicians who murder their dreams and rupture their future. The material verbs in the excerpts above are foregrounded as they serve as co-text (Jeffries, 2010; Iyakwari et al, 2024) that reinforce the semantic import of ‘burnt’ and ‘planted’ respectively. Similarly, due to corruption, greed, and non-performance leveled against Senator Arikpo, the Unemployed Youths Association of Ugep wrote him not to contest in the coming elections. He ignores their threat and goes on to campaign, seeking re-election to the Senate. He relays his ordeal to Mrs Nwokedi:

Arikpo: In-law, when I saw the debris of my labour, I wept. Crippled in body and spirit I crawled into the car to drive to the police station but somewhere near the Ugep Township Cemetery, the hooligans waylaid me. They smashed my windscreen with a thousand stones. Dragged me out and dealt me these cuts with pieces of broken glass. Some used daggers. Other machetes. This wound (points to his head) was carved with an axe. (p. 4)

Again, 'waylaid,' 'smashed,' 'dragged,' and 'dealt' me these cuts with pieces of broken bottles' are Material Action Intention (MAI), which are collocates of violent activities and intense reactions and activities occasioned by mental frustration, social hardship, and harrowing conditions. These Material Action Intention process verbs frame the youths as a band of violent radical individuals who are determined to uproot all forces of retrogression and political backwardness. Thus, the Material Action Intention verbs, as identified in the drama text, explicitly connote violence, where 'smashed,' 'dragged,' 'carved' function as co-text to 'waylaid' and provide crucial linguistic and interpretative functions (Jeffries, 2007) to stress the violent ideological orientation ingrained in the mind of the youths.

Similarly, in Bakalori, where Nwokedi is observing his one-year mandatory National Youth Service Corps, he exhibits his socialist ideology premised on brutally dislodging any political leadership that constitutes a clog in the wheel of social progress, economic development, and political advancement. He instills a fire of revolt and revolution into the minds of other corps members:

'...we must gather our strength and energy into the demands of a revolution'. (p. 28)

'We must revolt against those disembodied godheads....' (p. 28)

'Our roots are in the future. We must revolt.'(p. 28)

' A man must dare.' (p. 29)

'We must seize the reins of power in this nation.' (p. 30)

'We must spill his blood this evening.' p. 71

Nwokedi's brute call to a violent revolution at the orientation camp demonstrates his iron-willed determination to change the status quo forcefully. It is also a vehement denunciation of the repressive and oppressive military oligarchy that has suppressed the will and siphoned the commonwealth of the people. Nevertheless, his fellow corps members turn their backs against him and remind him of the failed Biafran Revolution.

Since he believes that ‘A man must dare,’ he single-handedly challenges the established order and fights two soldiers. Thus, ‘we must gather our strength’, ‘we must revolt’, ‘we must seize the reins of power’, ‘we must spill his blood’ are Material Action Intention verbs skewed in obligations and inclinations of high modulation ‘must’ and ‘will’ (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) and are ‘performed by a conscious being’ (Jeffries, 2010, p. 40). Of course, Nwokedi, a conscious revolutionary figure, will perform and execute the repeated obligations. Thus, these obligations are lexicogrammatical indicators of a revolution anchored on collective engagements that involve killing all perceived politicians who have shriveled the future of the youths. The identified action-packed material process verbs define the ideological struggle in the play.

Still on processes, the harrowing mental experience that racks the nerves of Mrs Nwokedi as a result of the filial face-off between her husband and son dictates the use of Mental Cognition process verbs to condemn politics utterly. She enthuses: “I hate politics. I detest it. It is a useless game. Very dangerous and violent” (p. 15). Through the choice of the verbs ‘hate and ‘detest’, the reader could observe the speaker's inner world, represented by the pronoun ‘I’, who is the Senser. Her inner feelings, denoted by ‘hate’ and ‘detest’, emphasize the mental agony rending her heart as a result of the political ideology that erects a wall of separation and mutual hostility between father and son. The father, Mr. Nwokedi Snr, is equally a victim of mental grief as he recounts his humiliating defeat at Parliament to Arikpo, who advises him to control his raging emotions. In an outburst of anger, Nwokedi Senior explodes:

‘How can I? Why Should I? How can I control myself when I have lost my seat at Parliament? Lost my case at the Court of Appeal. Lost my deposit. Lost my name and my face. How can I when I have lost everything that gives meaning to my life.’ (p. 66)

This outburst is rhetorically appealing and stylistically foregrounded. One, the Mental Cognition process verb ‘lost’ is repeated five (5) times to convey his debilitating shock and sense of dispossession, having lost at the Parliament. Two, the parallel structures in “I have lost my seat (I have) lost my case ... (I have) lost my deposit’ etc. reveal the gripping grief knifing through the landscape of the inner world of his heart, making him mentally unstable to manage and control his actions and feelings. In other words, his inability to control (Mental Reaction process verb) the tension gnawing at the terrain of his mind engenders mutual hostility between him

and his son on one hand, and between him and his wife on the other hand. Encircled in these wild emotions, he resorts to name-calling, describing Nwokedi Junior as 'a prodigal son, 'a renegade,' and 'a mercenary' (p. 66).

This mutual hostility, dictated by ideological divide, further sharpens the tension and violence that rocks Mrs Nwokedi's matrimonial home. In one tumultuous encounter, Nwokedi fiercely confronts his father and says: "Father, I hate you, I hate your roguish generation.... Father, you are the object of my hatred. You and your squandering generation. I hate you" (p. 77). Thus, Nwokedi's deep-seated hatred of and simmering anger for his father are summed in the choice of the Mental Cognition process verb 'I hate you', which aptly explains why he publicly ridicules and condemns his father. According to Jeffries (2010) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), verbs in the mental cognition process construe and reveal the speaker's stream of consciousness, which may be traumatic, as in the above example. The tense and volatile atmosphere created by the physical violence in the play further provokes the use of mental process verbs that underline the emotional violence and turbulent eruption in the internal world of Arikpo. As a victim of physical and mental assault, his conversation with Mrs Nwokedi is laced with the choice of mental processes that mirror the troubled landscape of his mind. In the third cycle, when the Epke festive mood gathers momentum and the sound of the drums becomes macabre and murderous, fear rumbles in his mind and he tells Mrs Nwokedi: "I have a strong premonition that if I stay here much longer I may live in a coffin.... I feel harassed. I feel like a ram bleating at the shrine—a helpless animal surrounded by a thousand glinting knives" (p. 51).

The entire utterance punctuates the wild and tumultuous wave of emotions running through his veins. His repetition of the Mental Reaction process verb 'feel', known as the mental clause of perception (Jeffries, 2007, 2010; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), paints a clear picture of a freezing and fidgeting figure wobbling and wagging on the crest of death. His grim mental imbalance is further punctuated by the conceptual metaphor 'a helpless animal surrounded by a thousand glinting knives.' A similar mental process verb that reflects mental and psychological violence is further gleaned from the text. As the Epke festival reaches its crescendo and the drums grow madder, Aripko and Mrs. Nwokedi see death, violent death, lurking in the festive air that beclouds Osisioma. First, it is Aripko, who, in a clear and simple choice of Mental Perception process verb, discloses the ferocious fear gnawing at his troubled heart: 'The drums I hear are the drums of death' (p. 85). Notice the Mental Perception process verb 'hear', which collocates with drums, to express certainty that death, violent death,

looms on the horizon.

Next, it is Mrs. Nwokedi who confirms Arikpo's fear and worry as she divulges the sombre musings rocking the internal world of her mind. She prophesies: "I perceive the smell of blood. And the stench of graves. In my inner mind, I see fresh mounds of earth. (mystically) Senior, the scent of death is thick in the festive air" (p. 86). Here, Mrs. Nwokedi employs two Mental Perception process verbs, 'perceive' and 'see,' to communicate her unstable and fractured emotions that gravitate towards death. Consider the strong collocations: 'blood', 'grave', and 'mounds' explicitly heralding the 'scent of death'. Also, the verb 'see' is instructive because she can probe through the inner recesses of her mind into the shrouded velvet of the future. Though her emotions may be macabre, murderous, and violent, her prophecy, colored by mental agony, comes to pass as Nwokedi beheads his father and Senator Aripko to purge the land and atone for their sins to pave the way for a revolutionary change, a new vanguard of leadership symbolized in the youth-dominant Ekumeku. These properties of mental clauses, as analyzed in the preceding paragraphs, evoke the inner turmoil and somber mood that have enveloped the characters.

Furthermore, Relational Intensive processes are employed in the text to add to the violent ideological bent. Such relational processes complement the material and mental processes' activity-packed verbs and emotion-driven clauses. Few examples are stated thus:

I am Nwokedi....There is magic in my name
Our roots are in the future. We must revolt.
Nwokedi (p. 28)

In the above excerpt, the Relative Intensive process 'I am Nwokedi' is driven by protest, violence, and radicalism. It connotes audacity and temerity that challenge any established constituted authority. Amazed by Nwokedi's effrontery, one of the most senior army officers in the Orientation Camp at Bakalori, addresses Nwokedi thus:

Adjutant: You look like a subversive element
Nwokedi: I am not a subversive element, Bokassa
Adjutant: What are you?
Nwokedi: I am a rebel.
Adjutant: A rebel? What is "a rebel?"
Nwokedi: A rebel is the man who says "no". The man who says "it is enough!" (p. 31)

Nwokedi's brisk and thorny responses mirror his revolutionary ethos and raging abhorrence for the system that has instituted social inequality, abject poverty, and galloping unemployment. This system, Nwokedi describes as "a stinking, rancid and swampy system" (p.78). Right in front of the military officer that would tear him to shreds, he boldly proclaims himself 'a rebel,' an Attribute (Jeffries, 2007, 2010; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), suggesting a violent outburst and open challenge to the political order that has truncated the dreams and aspirations of the youths, that has created joblessness and hunger and that has pushed the unemployed to the abyss of disillusionment and disenchantment. Thus, the Relational Intensive process of being "I am rebel" aptly captures the thematic focus and ideological orientation of Nwokedi.

Completely possessed by the murderous anger of the old, corrupt, and deceitful politicians, symbolized in the personality of Aripko and his father, Nwokedi, pointing a knife fixedly in their faces, says: "Both of you are criminals!" (p.79). It is a succinct and serrating Relational Intensive process that reverberates the thundering anger brewing in his mind against all leaders who have floundered the hopes of the youths. It is a punchy and weighty clause that defines Nwokedi's harsh and harrowing assessment of his father and Nigerian politicians.

However, the first relative clause, "I am a rebel," and the second clause, "Both of you are criminals!" have far-reaching ideological implications. While the Attribute of the first clause, 'a rebel,' may suggest a freedom fighter, a revolutionary ideologue that champions social change, the second clause, 'criminals,' connotes a niche of negativity and a pack of crooks. This seemingly differing ideological orientation, couched in the rhetoric of violence, is expressed in the text through another Critical Stylistic tool known as equating or equivalence and contrast.

One of the features of equating or equivalence that is widely used in the text is simile, which denotes violence and radicalism. At the beginning of the play, Aripko likens the Unemployed Youths Association of Ugep to viruses. In other words, the Youth Association is synonymous with viruses. He says: "Violence roils in their veins like viruses" (p. 8). The simile implies that just like viruses spread and attack every pore of a healthy body, the mayhem perpetrated by the Unemployed Youths Association and *Ekumeku*

has an overwhelming grip on the society.

In addition, due to the thunderous drums of the Ekpe and their sinister messages, Aripko conveys his premonition and weird feelings. He compares himself to a bleating ram: “I feel like a ram bleating at the shrine. A helpless animal surrounded by a thousand glinting knives” (p. 51). The image in the two similes (the second simile being ‘I feel like a helpless animal surrounded’) depicts doom awaiting a ram bleating in the shrine and an animal surrounded by a sharpened thousand knives, as both are already shrouded by gruesome death. Nwokedi equally confirms this murderous feeling of gruesome death that seizes Arikpo’s mind as he tells Arikpo: “You look like a ram to me... a sacrificial ram... I mean that a constipated destiny is staring you in the face” (p. 71).

Apart from simile, metaphors are also used to structure violence and convey anarchy that aptly reveals the ideology that runs through the play’s thread. Due to the closeness between Nwokedi and Ezinna, her sister, Mrs. Nwokedi discloses to Arikpo that “when they were children, people used to call them sword and scabbard” (p. 52). The phrase “sword and scabbard” is a conceptual metaphor. They are ‘sword and scabbard,’ meaning that Nwokedi and Ezinna are identical regarding intimate siblings who are stubborn and strong-headed, confrontational and violent. Senator Arikpo, Ezinna’s husband, describes her (Ezinna) as “a very stubborn girl” (p. 62). This metaphor type is what Jeffries (2010) refers to as ‘conceptual equivalence’ (p. 54).

Metaphor as ‘conceptual equivalence’ is implied in Lakoff and Turner’s (1980) view of metaphor as a conceptual system that largely structures and conveys daily realities and reflects our thinking, action, and perception of social occurrences. Thus, Nwokedi Sr, relating how he lost his seat at Parliament to Arikpo, structures his experience to imply and implicate that Mrs. Nwokedi insidiously worked against his bid to return to Parliament, using a cluster of animal metaphors: “This is the female spider who cuts off the head of the male spider after they have made loveShe weaves the web but hides behind. She lent the rabbit the iron trap with which it caught the tiger” (p. 66).

“This is the female spider ...” generates the conceptual metaphor Mrs. Nwokedi is the female spider, following the SPC structure. The tenor of the excerpt is replete with animal imageries (metaphor) that conveys conflict and violence, particularly as the female spider kills the male spider after making love, weaves the web to catch its assailant, and lends the rabbit the iron trap to kill the tiger. The material process verbs ‘cut off,’ ‘weaves,’ ‘lent,’ and ‘caught’ provide concrete and illustrative animal metaphors that

foreground the domestic tension and humiliating electoral defeat which mark the twilight of Mr. Nwokedi's political career.

Still on metaphors, the martial music which heralds the military takeover at the end of the play, finally shatters the heart of Senator Arikpo. He breaks the news of the coup to Nwokedi Sr., employing metaphors (and simile) that convey chaos and violence: "In-law, these soldiers will rupture what is left of the future like a virgin's hymen. They will perforate it with bayonets and plant bullets within that womb" (p. 89). Material verbs 'rupture,' 'perforate,' and 'plant' collocate with the weapons of war like 'bayonets' and 'bullets' to produce collocations of conflict, instability, and violence. The tenor of the metaphor is the effect of the coup on the politicians which is likened to the forceful destruction of a virgin's hymen through a violent rape that often leaves an indelible psychological scar on the mental state of the victim of rape. Furthermore, that psychological scar is aptly communicated by Nwokedi Sr.: "The meaning of this life we live eludes me" (p. 90).

Senator Arikpo mostly receives the overwhelming crushing effects of the coup. He is psychologically mangled, socially ostracized, and economically bankrupt. So, the coup's news breaks his fragile frame and lacerates his somber mood. He piles up dozens of elliptical conceptual/animal metaphors to describe the military: "Hyenas! Vandal!, Jackals!, Animals!, Cannibals!, Carnivores!, Kosokos!, Wolves Civet cats!, Vermins! Uniformed rams! You will all die! (p.90). The metaphors employed in the play are mostly, as rightly observed by Jeffries (2010), interpreted and understood through 'cognitive strategies' (p. 54) that underline our everyday experience. Applying these strategies would reveal that the metaphors resonate with physical destruction and mental devastation.

In addition to equivalence, contrast as a Critical Stylistic tool to denote a violent ideological perspective runs through the fabric of the text. The conflict in the play is the differing ideological orientation between the jobless, restless youths and the greedy, inept political leaders in the corridors of power. Nwokedi and his Ekumeku group regard the politicians, symbolized in Mr. Nwokedi Sr. and Arikpo, as a pack of 'excuthieves' (Osundare, 1984) and 'nonentities.' Nwokedi describes his father and Arikpo as 'distinguished rogue,' 'a political obscenity,' 'a resourceful liar' ... 'a high degree thief,' 'a confidence trickster,' 'a carapaced tortoise,' 'marauding monsters and bleating beast' (p. 11). In contrast, Arikpo holds the youth in high contempt, representing their turbulent activities and reactions to socio-political issues as dangerous and violent. He depicts them as 'Devil's Brigade'(p 8), 'a disco-going, hemp-smoking, beer-guzzling generation,' 'louts,' 'jobless

vagabonds,' 'an irresponsible generation,' 'a brigade of unemployed youths' (p. 15), and 'peasants' (p. 19). These noun phrases contrast sharply with the naming and descriptions Nwokedi employs to describe his father. Contrast generates the differing and simmering ideological twist (Jeffries, 2010, p. 56) that defines the content of the play.

In an encounter between Nwokedi and his father, contrast drives the philosophical and ideological differences between the opposing, antagonistic camps. Nwokedi describes his father and Arikpo as a 'squandering generation,' 'irresponsible generation,' 'roguish generation,' 'confused generation,' 'Trousered Apes,' 'Night's acrobats,' 'Culture Vultures' (p. 77), 'vampire bats' (p. 78), 'tyrants' and 'criminals' (p. 79). Vultures, bats, tyrants, and criminals produce an image of prey, scavenging and swooping on the lesser animals. In contrast, however, Arikpo describes Nwokedi Junior as 'idealistic' (p. 78), often terrorizing people (p. 80) and 'blinded by daydreams' (p. 81). Ideological conflicts create cracks and 'exploits... subdivisions' (Jeffries, 2010, p. 56), violence, and anarchy.

Findings

The foregoing discussions reveal that the noun modification or the nominal group is employed to name and describe the youths and the politicians who constitute the two opposing classes in the play. While Arikpo uses derogatory and pejorative labels 'hooligans,' 'a miserable mob of jobless young men and women,' 'a harvest of political illiterates' to describe the violent, restless and restive youths, Nwokedi equally piles up a cluster of noun modifications couched in biting invectives and loaded in ideological content such as 'high degree thief,' 'a confidence trickster,' to describe the greedy and selfless and spineless political leaders.

The choice of material processes such as 'burnt,' 'butcher,' 'shatter,' 'smashed,' 'dragged,' 'seize,' and 'spill' are Material Action Intention verbs, which depict the wild revolt and intense violence of the youths to demonstrate their revolutionary candor towards change. The mental process verbs such as 'lost,' 'hate,' and 'feel' foreground the intense emotional pain and agony suffered by the different characters in the play as a result of the ideological divide that creates simmering seeds of discord between father and son on one hand, and between husband and wife on the other hand.

The use of relational intensive clauses such as 'I am Nwokedi' and 'I am a rebel' stresses the violent radicalism of the hero of the play. It establishes his radical ideological belief, which is grounded in the language of violence and revolt as the only instrument to entrench change, equality,

progress, and development.

The use of similes such as 'I feel like a ram bleating at the shrine' and 'You look like a ram to me' connotes the gruesome death that looms on the horizon of the play and confirms the murderous and macabre tone that resonates in each line of the play. Similarly, one-word conceptual metaphors like 'Animals', 'Cannibals', 'Carnivores', 'Wolves' reveal the overwhelming debilitating effects on the coup on Arikpo, which finally wrecks a morbid and violent impact on his mental frame of mind. The choice of contrast linguistically polarizes the characters in the play into two opposing camps: the youths and politicians. The contrast also punctuates their ideological divide, creating tension, revolt, and violence that runs through the fabric of Nwokedi.

Thus, the study confirms previous studies such as Okoye (2018), Inegbe and Bassey (2020), Eze and Salifu (2021), and Shittu (2022) that Esiaba Irobi's Nwokedi advocates violent revolutionary tendencies as political ideology to address leadership failure, sordid social conditions, and economic backwardness. The present study differs sharply from the previous ones as it identifies Noun modification/nominal groups, processes like material, mental, and relational, and equivalent and contrast couched in simile and metaphors as the lexicogrammatical options through which Esiaba Irobi communicates and espouses his Marxist revolutionary aesthetics, which he believes will establish radical social change.

Conclusion

Class Violence, as typified in *Nwokedi*, is a recurring ideological vision that runs through the fabric of Esiaba Irobi's plays. In *Hangman also Die*, the narcissist Marxist ideologue Ogbansiegbe is killed by the Suicide Squad, the revolutionary vanguard force, in order to pave the way for a more communalist and masses-oriented Marxist ideology (Osu, 2011), and in *Cemetery Road*, a government official and Lawani are brutally murdered in the play. Even Mazeli, the firebrand revolutionary hero in the play, is killed. This penchant for a violent form of revolutionary change underscores Okiche's (2016) assessment of Esiaba Irobi as a Marxist revolutionary who 'sought a method to violently revolt against oppression and intimidation to achieve political rebirth. . . ' (p. 73)

Thus, the proclivity towards violent radical change to address post-colonial ineptitude of political governance and the general putrescence in the society (Agho, 2016) marks Irobi as a critical realist in the mode of the first and second generations of African writers who are Marxist ideologues

such as Ngugi wa Thiong’O, Alex La Laguma, Ebrahim Hussein, Festus Iyayi, etc. These writers, like Esiaba Irobi, are advocates of organized revolts and forceful removal of the corrupt, selfish, and greedy ruling class by the oppressed class. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1972) asserts that ‘violence to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savage: it purifies men’ (p. 28).

As long as economic hardship, social injustice, and political misrule pervade human societies, people would orchestrate violent revolt, after all forms of possible non-violent outlets have been exhausted. Some ethnic militias and resurgences across Africa and other parts of the world are products of social revolutionary change geared towards addressing bad governance and injustice. Unless African political leadership implements programs that would stimulate social justice, economic growth, and sustainable development, African revolutionary writers of a Marxist strain would continue to advance violent change and organized revolt to address socio-economic and political disenchantment.

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