

## THE LITERARY TEXT AS A TESTAMENT OF SOCIAL DISPARAGEMENT: ESIABA IROBI'S HANGMEN ALSO DIE IN THE HUB

\*Benedict BINEBAI

### Abstract

*Since the days of Aristophanes in classical Greek drama, the judgmental role of drama has been established. The dramatic medium has been appropriated to seek several truths and its function as an instrument of social criticism is well founded. It is against this backdrop that this paper uses the literary drama to assess critically the socio-political and economic situations in Nigeria. Using *Hangmen Also Die* for illustration, the study discovers that committed dramatists in Nigeria, particularly, the Niger Delta use their plays to unearth the social dislocations and decadence of the society with the principal vision to bring about social conscientisation, edification and mass action for social change. The paper holds strongly that Nigerian dramatists should emulate the dramatic tradition of projecting social reconstruction for the transformation of their society.*

**Keywords:** Literary, Text, Testament, Social criticism, Political attackancy

### Introduction

The text, whether literary, improvised or in the structure of visual literature, across broad boundaries is a little artistic universe of life constructed by the writer to explain, portray, investigate or denounce the universe of man. The text is the writer or composer's critical judgment of what goes around him in his society. In the field of drama, the playwright creates stories that are logically and aesthetically plotted. He creates the environment and a combination of plausible characters accompanied with visual properties of light, costume, scenic background and sometimes with music and sound effects to produce a world that that reflects strongly on the goings on in our society. Particularly when such a text is driven by the utilitarian essence of art, it becomes the playwright's eye and voice of social conscientisation. This unique role of drama as an instrument of social criticism came into prominence from the classical Greek age when Aristophanes wrote plays to criticise the Greek Society.

The playwright like journalists has a strong inspiration to write plays from his experiences in society. Like prophets, he writes about the ills he sees men do and call for their condemnation. Like the school teacher, the plays have a pedagogic influence on the society and like the religious priest the artistic universe he creates is

designed to teach some severe moral messages. In a society where corruption, Social Darwinism and several shades of evils hold sway, the playwright has a responsibility to appropriate his plays to achieve social reconstruction. This responsibility of the writer is acknowledged by many first generation African writers. Of particular interest is Chinua Achebe who stated resoundingly that an African writer who avoids the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat? (75) Achebe is not alone in this functional advocacy of art. Etherton (318) expresses the fact that African Playwrights have been concerned to relate their art to their societies much more directly, either to reflect social change, or, radical change through the content of their plays. Esiaba Irobi is a distinguished Nigerian playwright, poet, stage director, actor, literary theorist and scholar who has been at the forefront of social crusade through drama and theatre. His drama *Nwokedi* is a incensed crusade designed to cleanse the society that has been defiled by corruption and all forms of grimy human thoughts and practices. The overriding revolutionary vibes is that of a people who have gone beyond the dominion of the old culture. It is a revolutionary aesthetics with Marxist canon. For example, the revolutionaries under the command of *Nwokedi* sing and cheer him to victory over injustice leading to the murdering of his father and his brother-in-law for the eventual decontamination of the land. Here the collective action of the masses is showcased. Also in *The Other Side of the Mask* Jamike the artist, is noticeably presented as the symbolism of a farsighted artist in quest of ingenuity and the celebration of artistry through his art yet incongruously damned to the judgment of society. Once again Esiaba Irobi subjects the judgment of society to social criticism. He has used his works to unearth the ills and evils of his society. This essay shall apply the social criticism theory of Art and the literary methodological approach predicated on content analysis of text to explore the issue of the literary text as a social vilification in *Hangmen also Die*.

Social criticism is about the critical but purposeful assessment and explication of the socio-economic and cultural conditions of society either by a writer in his works or by a social critic. The journalist, the creative artists, the human right activists, feminists, the minority rights defenders are all varieties of social critics. This is because social criticism places interest on the values of the society and how these values are being bettered or battered by rules and rulers of society. Social criticism can be constructive as it questions and evaluates social structures, which societies mull over to be incompatible. The intention is to hold out a handy solution to solve the predicament faced by the society. Social criticism drama is therefore a drama in which the playwright takes on an interpretation on an aspect of society he feels is fruitless or deceitful. Thus social criticism in whatever form it manifest executes and promotes the emancipatory service of knowledge. Social criticism as used by the writer takes practical and utilitarian forms. It queries and faces up to all shades of dominance and exploitation that contribute to the operation of reconstructing decent and self-governing societies. Craig McFarlane in his definition of Critical social theory expresses the point that

Critical social theory is a form of theoretical practice in the social sciences which attempts to further the project of 'the autonomous society' by providing a relentless critique of all forms of domination, oppression and heteronomy. Critical social theory presents an anti-foundational epistemology that is sensitive to the local context of struggles against oppression recognizing that struggle and conflict does not take place in a vacuum, but, rather, in the historical context of a 'matrix of intersecting oppressions.' Oppression and domination are real and, thus, are able to be recounted in a correct and truthful manner, even if the truth is partial as it arises from one's location in the intersecting matrix of oppressions. (35)

From the above citation it becomes clear that the business of social criticism is to dispassionately subject the operational values of society to critical evaluation. The ideologies, programmes and activities as well as the political, cultural and economic attitude of holders of political power at any given geo-political level of human existence falls within the crucial range and lens of the social critic. In *Myth and the African Universe* the social function of art is vividly accounted for by Abanuka. In his own view

Literature is undertaken in the general background of a people's culture to interpret the culture and emphasize some aspects of it which should be studied or promoted, or to satirize some other aspects in order to point them up for correction or abandonment. Works of literature whether they uphold the culture or are critical of it, subsequently become part of the culture in so far as, in some sense, they interpret the culture (27).

This is a cardinal function of the literary text particularly that of the dialectical paradigm. We shall then proceed to interrogate Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* as a literary text of social criticism.

### **The play *Hangmen also Die***

*Hangmen also Die* is the dreadful story in which the lives of seven young men are to be terminated by means of the guillotine because they murdered Chief Erekosima, in cold blood. Yekini the hangman's aggressive refusal to hang the young men who are to be murdered unfolds the events leading to the action of the young terrorist through a flashback dramatic methodology which narrates the story of the foundation of the Suicide Squad, a vinegary and impertinent bunch of criminals, dispossessed and displaced but suitably educated youths, who are strong-minded to visit the very society that failed to give them decent living with celebrated violence. The Suicide Squad, led by Tarila Iganima alias R. I. P., has strong faith in crime, criminality and violence to eke a living for themselves. Prompted by Tamara, the priestess of a goddess they receive the logic and propulsion of revolution against their popular cause instead, the squad confronts Chief Isokipiri Erekosima who is about to dance home with a high value chieftaincy title for embezzling three million Naira, compensation money paid to the common populace of Izon state for the devastation of their livelihoods by oil spillage. Erekosima after his abduction by the Suicide Squad confesses that he spent half a million naira on his coronation as the Amatemeso of Izon State. He also reveals paying some money for the educational pursuit of his children abroad due to the fallen standard of education in Nigeria. Chief Erekosima is hanged from a tree haven being found guilty in the court of the suicide squad.

### **Social criticisms in *Hangmen also Die***

#### **The Tragedy of a Nation**

*Hangmen also Die* is one of the most virulent plays written by Esiaba Irobi that captures with prophetic potency the tragedy of post colonial and post independent African nations. This assertion is held sacrosanct because most post colonial African nations are still beleaguered by corruption, and tyranny against the masses. The play, first published 1989, set in the Niger Delta, in an imaginary Izon State, is a tale of woes for the Niger Delta in particular and the Nigerian nation in General. The drama cast in the mode of tragedy is constructed with an electrifying linguistic structure that narrates the tragic story of the Nigerian Nation after British

colonialism. The play sharply exposes the tragedy of a generation of youths displaced and dilapidated by unemployment and social negligence. The dramatic screen of the play further shows a cannibalistic society that is repaid with cannibalism by its victims. There is also the tragic example of a people whose collective economic glory is predated upon by high voltage political goblins and unabashed capitalists. Another angle of tragedy the play projects, is the case of a society languishing in the hands of its real enemies in their various capacities as rulers, leaders, opinion leaders, advisers: the likes of Chief Erekosima. Besides the tragedy of political violence perpetrated by politicians of the likes of Dr. Ogbansiegbe, an orator, a political demagogue and an ideologue, there is the strong case of individual tragedy on the part of Yekinni.

To elaborate further, Yekini was a happy man in his environment as a fisherman. He experienced joy; he was contented in his serene environment where he could see the face of God. This bliss and satisfaction of Yekinni faded away when he becomes continually troubled by the apparition of those he murdered with authorization as an official hangman. He claims he is deceived to work as a hangman. Yekini regrets ever getting involved in such a pitiless work because he has lost his humanity. His tragedy is that of daily death. In his honest confession to the medical doctor, he dies each time he hangs a living soul to death. His tragedy is heightened and sharpened by the psychological violence which befalls him. Here Esiaba Irobi presents a character of great moral integrity that is forced to kill his fellow humans. His decision not to hang the members of the suicide squad is an ethical revolution. The text strongly vilifies a nation and its powers that be who in one form or the other force or criminally persuade innocent people to carry out murderous acts against their conscience. A man can be rich or poor, big or small, educated or illiterate. His psychological state dictates his peace and joy. The moment he suffers psychological dislocation his life will be ruled by misery and emotional anguish. Such is the case of Yekinni.

Hangmen also Die is thus a melange and a collage of moving spectacles that attest to individual and collective tragedy. A play in which the plot, the characters, thoughts and language are aesthetically configured to act out social decadence in many of its sides and the imperative of social engineering for transformation of the society. Thus, the characters Esiaba parade in the play fall in line with his vision of textual appropriation for social criticism. These characters are either built for condemnation because they are bad or structured to condemn the evil people, visions and forces that stand in opposition to human progress. Esiaba Irobi in this drama graphically dramatises the tragedy of the Nigerian nation. It is a tragedy with a big moral lesson. Like Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*, the play questions the philistinism of the highly placed- the smooth and bigger robbers.

### **The formation of anti- social gangs**

Social group is a collection of individuals who share characteristics, interrelate with one another and possess a strong sentiment of unanimity. Roger A. Coate and Jerel A. hold that human needs are a powerful source of explanation of human behaviour and social interaction. All individuals have needs that they strive to satisfy, either by using the system 'acting on the fringes or acting as a reformist or revolutionary. Given this condition, social systems must be responsive to individual needs, or be subject to instability and forced change (possibly through violence or conflict) (1)

Violence in post civil war Nigeria is no doubt caused the endlessly changeable political background in Nigeria and want for progressive management of

the economy resulting in skyrocketing inflation and accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few in positions of public authority propelled frustration, extreme anxiety and despondency among the masses particularly the youths of Nigeria. This is undoubtedly a capitalist oriented predicament. Esiaba Irobi is blunt about these social conditions leading to the formation of the terror teasing gang in the play. The text informs us of how deviant gangs are constructed in our society. An interesting dimension to the formation of anti social gang is the fact that all the members of the Squad are intelligent and properly educated. The least is a first degree and the highest educational qualification is the PhD in reputable academic disciplines. From RIP, Discharge, Tetanus, Acid, Khomeni and Mortuary the story of joblessness runs through. These characters share the collective experience of joblessness and lack of economic empowerment more than half a decade even with their prestigious degrees. Their sad story is the story of thousands of graduates in Nigeria who are unemployed and jobless as a result of financial profligacy by the rulers of the Nation. Angered by this perpetual and torturing economic and social conflagration the youths have no choice than to take their destinies into their hands. This aspect of the play in many ways foretells recent happenings in the Niger Delta. First is the Ogoni Saga in which MOSOP under the leadership of Kenule Saro Wiwa was alleged to have murdered the Ogoni Chiefs. An action which eventually resulted in the trial and extra judicial hanging of Ken Saro- Wiwa.

It is pertinent to note that the same economic frustration of the Niger Delta and the consistent pressures of marginalisation forced the Egbesu Boys of Ijaw nation to carry arms against the multi- national and transnational oil merchants and the Nigerian state, leading to pipeline vandalism, kidnapping of foreign expatriates and crude oil bunkering in the marine Delta. Some of these militants were sent to their early graves by Nigerian soldiers authorised by the Nigerian government. The emergence of area boys and other groups in the guise of ethnic militia fall within the prediction of Esiaba Irobi in *Hangmen also Die*. The suicide squad is a collection of angry young men, young men as angry as their artistic creator and frustrated Nigerian youths, who have decided to live life the way it is available to them. This again runs into contemporary society as it depicts a generation of degenerate youths determined to live life the hard way. In the words of the Suicide Squad

We maim. We murder. We massacre [õ ] We are the Suicide Squad. We are the Kamikazee [õ ] we sway. We prow! And pounce like apes. And roll like dogs and stand like snakes. We strike like mambas and leave on your flesh the marks of our fangs, the sign of our venom, the insignia of our grief. We leave on your skin, in the language of your blood, the anthem of our fury [õ ] and we do what we do because we have no future, because we know that no matter what we do, no matter how hard we try, no matter how high we aspire, there is something waiting in the atmosphere to destroy us. (6566)

By logical deduction, these members of the suicide squad are forced by the tyrannical social and economic conditions to accept the fate imposed on them by society in which they are brought up. They remind us of the image generated by Soyinka's *Abiku* in his poem. They are proud and derive joy from their exploits. This is the psychological prompting they receive from the Society. Convinced beyond reasonable doubt that they have no future, and further by the depressing passion that no matter what they do, how hard they try, how high they aspire there is somewhere waiting in the atmosphere to destroy them they have to do what they have to do to hit back at the society. This is the real reason and desperation that propels young and old Nigerians into all forms of social vices like Cultism, prostitution, armed robbery, 419, Women and child trafficking and even ritualism.

This literary signification of the Suicide squad in *Hangmen also Die* properly suits the present Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria. The Boko Haram sect portrays real traits of a suicide squad. Moral failure, economic hypocrisy, religious chalatanism and the struggle for political power account for the emergence of these terror gangs. Just as Dr. Ogbansiegbe was a political God father to the RIP led Suicide Squad so is the Current and sophisticated terrorist gang of Boko Haram controlled by some political big wigs. Until the commanders of this deadly division are commanded out of command by superior commanders, Boko Haram will continue to be a turn in the flesh of the nation. Politics, revolution and militancy have become a way of agitation and negotiation in Nigeria. Militancy was and is still attached to Niger Delta freedom struggle. OPC, the militant wing of the Yoruba people is attached to the quest for actualisation of Yoruba self determination. Following this trend, Boko Haram is perceived to be a deliberate creation of politicians who seek power to negotiate the actualisation of their political ambition in the foreseeable future. This is a warning offered by Esiaba Irobi in *Hangmen also Die* long before the manifestation of these suicide squads. The Nigerian rulers are reminded that terror teasing gangs will continue to emerge and rule the physical space of the country if deliberate efforts are not made to address social problems like corruption, unemployment and economic cannibalism.

### **The imperative of social revolution**

Igbo & Anugwom hold that "The introduction of capitalism in place of the traditional African communalism in Nigeria was initially believed to be a welcome change which freed many youths from the shackles and strains of traditional agriculture and offered them better paying jobs and socially exciting lifestyle in the new urban centres. However, available industries have been unable to provide jobs for all those who deserted the rural areas in search of industrial and office jobs in urban cities. This imbalance created the problems associated with urban living, including crime and delinquency, etc., which are mostly a result of unemployment" (77).

The over production of university graduates and graduates of other tertiary institutions in Nigeria year in year out and inability on the part of government and private industrialists to absorb these graduates in a country where leaders publicly proclaim that Nigeria's problem is not money but what to do with money further push the jobless youths to violence. *Hangmen also Die* is written with the ideological fire of the promethean myth- it represents the dramatists divine spark of thought and creativity to generate defiance, through his revolutionary characters, against arbitrary authority and the capacity of humans to change their destiny. The play is a literary document with vilifying philosophical thoughts that represent genuine revolutionary impulses aimed at social reconstruction. It not only sarcastically condemns and exposes the grinding ills of the society but also points the way forward for an oppressed society. The Suicide Squad was not ideologically committed to change the society they are paying back with violence. Their frustration is so pathological that not even a little light of purposeful reasoning reminded them of their capacity to change their society. Violence against the society was their practical manifesto. It was the happening and most cherished iconoclastic philosophy of the Squad until they encountered Tamara who educated and inducted them into the ideological war between the rich and the poor, the oppressed and the oppressor.

While they have the means to embark on social change by means of radical revolutionary methods they lack the ideological fire and bearing to effect the change. In fact they did not even think of a revolution even when it is obvious that they constitute the latent radical force. It was Tamara who confronts, challenges and mobilises them to transform their energies and anger into a social cause that will

bring economic liberation to the oppressed masses of Izon State. She states unequivocally that the Suicide Squad should direct their radical energies towards the trendy and communist philosophical foundation of emancipating the economic marginalised and oppressed people from the poverty imposed on them by the likes of Erekosima. In page 87-88 of the text Tamara responds when asked by the Suicide Squad if she wants to hire them.

Tamara: (exploding) why should I hire you to recover money which belongs to you? Even if I had the money to hire you, would you accept it from a widow? A Grade 11 Teacher on level 05; N200 a month? Can't you show your humanness, your compassion, your sympathy for the poor, and how tough you are by fighting on the side of the disposed? The side of the poor, of those who have nobody? The wretched of the earth? Is there no vision to your rebellion? Are you emptied cups? Do you have in your skulls what should be in your anuses?

This moral light of revolution offered the Suicide squad by Tamara has the support of Marx and Engels who comment on the imperatives of revolution

The people are very active but the lack of a reliable prop (a well-articulated, rallying document of the procedure for mass action) is rather noticeable. Until the principles are set forth in a few publications where they are shown to have been logically and historically evolved from hitherto existing mode of thinking and from history as it has been up to now and shown to be their necessary corollary, everything will remain rather hazy and most people will be groping in the dark. (17).

Tamara is a very significant character in the play that helps to spread and twist in a logical manner the plot of the play to achieve her revolutionary agenda against the bourgeoisie class of cannibals. Esiaba Irobi creates her as a character with the promethean guilt. For the betterment of the oppressed Izon State, she persuades the Suicide Squad to rise against Chief Erekosima who digs the grave of the poor masses with his greedy throat. She reminds the suicide squad that she is urging them to fight a battle of the dispossessed against the self possessed, between the haves and the have-nots. Tamara paints the tragic picture of their seventy-year-old grandmother who still farms before she eats; the poverty stricken people as well as the petroleum which is being pumped out daily from the veins of the Niger delta people. She strongly recommends that the members of the Suicide Squad should fight for their freedom and the freedom of the Izon State. She chronicles the constant political and economic woes of the Niger Delta region and paints a lurid picture of Erekosima as a dirty and greedy political vampire who is presented as a character worse than us. Today, whether in the Niger Delta or in any other part of the Nigerian federation, the population of the Erekosimas is increasing in a geometric frequency and manner.

In this revolutionary phase of the play, Esiaba Irobi acknowledges the participation of women in liberation struggle. Tamara points to the case of women in the recent history of the Niger delta in which they rose to condemn economic exploitation of their communities by the oil companies. Tamara's characterisation provides a pedagogic example of women activism in the Niger Delta struggle for self-determination and economic empowerment. Esiaba Irobi brings to limelight the theory of symbolic interactionism, in which women's activism in Niger Delta struggle for economic self-determination is influenced by the militants struggle for a better pact. Again he brings to critical attention the scourge of neglect, divide-and-rule, and insensitivity of men, particularly, indigenes in government, to the plights of peoples in the Niger Delta.

The Ijaw Women of Gbaramatu and the Itsekiri women, all in Warri South-west Local Government Area of Delta State draw our attention to the revolutionary inspiration of Esiaba Irobi's Character Tamara in *Hangmen also Die*. What this suggests is that women are also fundamental partners of the society. They should act beyond their traditional place in the kitchen to get involved in state politics that will bring succour to their society. The consequence of the revolutionary proposal by Tamara is to reconstruct a new society where there are checks and balances and punishment for offender. This is an invocation of the human needs theory which argues

one of the primary causes of protracted or intractable conflict is people's unyielding drive to meet their unmet needs on the individual, group, and societal level. For example, the Palestinian conflict involves the unmet needs of identity and security. Countless Palestinians feel that their legitimate identity is being denied them, both personally and nationally. Numerous Israelis feel they have no security individually because of suicide bombings, nationally because their state is not recognized by many of their close neighbors, and culturally because anti-Semitism is growing worldwide. Israeli and Palestinian unmet needs directly and deeply affect all the other issues associated with this conflict. Consequently, if a resolution is to be found, the needs of Palestinian identity and Israeli security must be addressed and satisfied on all levels. ( Sandra Marker 2)

Tamara is an ideologue endowed with a very sophisticated characterisation. Her courage, confidence and ideas are exemplary. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* stops war, JP Clarks *Koko in The Wives' Revolt* stands in opposition to gender discrimination and leads her women folk in protest against the patriarchy, Barclays Ayakoroma's *Alaere In Dance on his Grave* leads women against war contemplated by Her Husband King Olotu and the Men of Toru- Ama and in *Hangmen also Die*, Tamara is packaged aesthetically as a strong female character who redirects the energies of vibrant young men in a suicide squad to embark on a revolutionary sojourn against the economic pirates of the Izon state.

### **Reflections on the culture of political attackancy**

In no other part of the text is this subject prominent than the Suicide Squad's dramatisation of how they were used by a political demagogue, the great orator fondly called the African reincarnation of Fidel Castro, Dr. Ahitophel Ogbansiegbe who is said to have tutored the suicide squad the uses and abuse of terrorism. They are made to believe that terrorism is a legitimate tactic of all down trodden people seeking to combat oppressive government (*Hangmen also Die* 39) the political juggernaut brainwashes the members of the suicide squad to unleash terror on his political opponents having failed Governorship Election in Imo State. He is bent on hitting back at his political enemies. For quite some time this violent political vision of Dr. Ahitophel held sway. They are used for many terrible attacks including the stealing of the car of a government official who is billed to give a talk at the university. They are also detailed to go and burn down the house of the chairman of the party that rigged him out of the elections. But this evil of political attackancy was put to an end when the squad realises through the redefinition of the French student on the concept of revolution that they were gullible to the reception of Dr. Ahitophel's insane philosophy. They reasoned strongly that terrorism is useless if they are not organised. The squad feels being badly used so returns to the house of their mentor and kills him.

Esiaba Irobi once again presents political violence in post independent Nigeria and other African nations to social derision. The level and magnitude of



electoral and political violence has risen and the political elites have often converted poverty ridden unemployed Nigerian youths into readymade machinery for the perpetration of electoral violence. This is linked to the political system and institution that in theory has failed political participation and in practice has seen the political elites forming bulk of the sponsors and perpetrators of electoral violence (Aniekwe, Kushie 1) Igbuzor takes a step further by defining and enumerating political violence as:

Any act of violence perpetuated in the course of political activities, including pre, during and post election periods, and may include any of the following acts: thuggery, use of force to disrupt political meetings or voting at polling stations, or the use of dangerous weapons to intimidate voters and other electoral process or to cause bodily harm or injury to any person connected with electoral processes (Igbuzor qtd. in Aniekwe & Kushie 3)

The relationship between Dr. Ahitophel and the suicide squad is a symbolic representation of the Nigerian political tradition in which politicians muster political thugs carrying weapons to rig elections through violence or unleash terrorism on political opponents who are perceived to have rigged them out. Political attackancy an Irobian coinage is a term used to describe the violent and near war political culture of African politicians. It captures the attack and counter attack ritual of politicians that lead to destruction of lives and property. The Irobian thugs in *Hangmen also Die* are considered far better than the political thugs we experience in contemporary Nigerian politics that see thuggery as a way of life. They are never in any way ready to rise against their mentor's life as the Suicide characters in *Hangmen* did. Election after election in Nigeria, political attackancy manifest in an alarming frequency, people are maimed and displaced, killed, elections are rigged by violence. Houses and other valuables are burnt down or destroyed. Esiaba Irobi proposes a rebellion against the politicians who train and mobilise thugs to cause political violence in Nigeria. The revolt of the suicide squad members against Dr. Ahitophel Ogbansiegbe and his consequential assassination by the gang, through the prompting of a new wave of consciousness attest to the fact that youths in Nigeria should screen philosophies and intentions of politicians before been loyal to them. Political Attackancy is a major bane of post colonial politics and democratic stability in Africa. Esiaba Irobi calls for its total elimination in this seminal drama under investigation.

## **Conclusion**

*Hangmen also Die* is a drama which puts the Niger Delta and the Nigerian nation to very severe evaluation. From politics to economy, from ideology to the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed masses, the play remains clear in its statement of social criticism and social reconstruction. From this our literary methodological investigation of *Hangmen also Die*. The point becomes clear that the dialectical romance between Drama and society establishes the play text as a crossing bridge of social criticism. In this exploration of the text as testament of social criticism, the Niger Delta region in particular and the Nigerian nation in general are effectively presented and reflected upon by the playwright as a tragic society. Social Darwinism, the travails and tragedy of a society, the violent political culture of attackancy, the negative indoctrination and mobilisation of educated youths to embark on suicide squad as well as the sad tale of the hopeless life of the younger generation of Nigerians are vividly captured and vehemently indicted in the playwright's court of justice. In *Hangmen also Die* Esiaba Irobi further graphically portrays the tragedy of the individual, the sad experience of being ruled, controlled and manipulated by the very enemies of the masses, the collective cruel fate of

youths frustrated and abandoned by the awesome force of capitalism and the participation of women in the transformation agenda of a society in need of transition.

Esiaba's Marxist ideological engagement reflected strongly in the linguistic formation and its appropriation for the materialisation of the revolutionary vision he proposes for the reconstruction of his society. We agree with the popular postulation put up by Bertolt Brecht that drama is an affair for philosophers and for such philosophers who wish not just to explain the world but to change it. Esiaba Irobi is a social realist dramatist whose works expose, explain and point the way forward at the same time. *Hangmen also Die* and its author Esiaba Irobi present an Irobian school of dramatic writing that is revolutionary but nationalist and patriotic. He is an artistic gadfly, a big and beautiful example of an African dramatist who uses the power of his art as a tool of social criticism to reconstruct his society.

### **Works Cited**

- Abanuka, B. *Myth and the African Universe*. Onitsha: Spiritan Publications, 1999.
- Achebe, Chinua. 'The African Writer and the Biafran cause.' *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975.
- Aniekwe, Chika. C., Joshua Kushie. "Electoral violence situational analysis: identifying hot-spots in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria". Abuja: National Association for Peaceful Elections in Nigeria (NAPEN), 2011
- Etherton, M. *The Development of African Drama*. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1982.
- Igbo, E.U.M. and Anugwom, E.E. *Social Change and Social Problems: A Nigerian Perspective*. Nsukka: AP Express Publishers, 2002.
- Irobi Esiaba. *Hangmen Also Die*. Enugu: Abic, 1989.
- Irobi Esiaba Nwokedi. Enugu: Abic, 1991. -.
- Irobi Esiaba. *The Other Side of the Mask*. Enugu: Abic, 1999.
- McFarlane, Craig. *Advanced Introduction to Critical Social Theory Critical Social Theory Comprehensive Examination*, 2006
- Roger A.Coate and Jerel A. Rosati, 'Preface,' in *The Power of Human Needs in World Society*, ed. Roger A.Coate and Jerel A. Rosati, ix. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988.
- Sandra Marker 'What Human Needs Are. In *Beyond Intractability*', [http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/human\\_needs.jsp](http://www.beyondintractability.org/m/human_needs.jsp)>. August 2003. Retrieved 3/8/2012