

**LEADERSHIP ISSUES IN MODERN NIGERIAN DRAMA:  
A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF ESIABA IROBI'S  
*HANGMEN ALSO DIE***

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**Abstract**

*Nigeria is currently witnessing the worst economic recession in the past decades. Leaving behind scores of high inflation rate, unemployment, decline in exchange rate and drop in gross domestic product, and so on. These challenges, which are draining the Nigerian economy, are products of maladministration of either an individual, as a president, governor, or member of the executive council and the like. This study is a critical discourse of Esiaba Irobi's **Hangmen also Die**, as a remedial measure to cushion the biting effects of the present economic recession, even if it cannot be totally contained. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology. The study recommends, among other things, that political office holders should be treated to stage performances at every political retreat, with this metaphorical construct. This is with the view to re-directing their focus on the need for them to become politically considerate in the art of state craftsmanship to save the nation from future economic downturns and sliding again into economic depression.*

**Introduction**

A recessing economy is a product of poor decision making either by a leadership or an institution conferred with the responsibility of decision making and policy implementation. It is evident that most of the Nigerian political gladiators are self-enriching, corrupt, and so on, prominence is not given to decision making and the implementation of policies that will bring about the advancement of the entire economy that will benefit all. Consequently, the Nigerian political leadership landscape is wrought with leadership ineptitude clueless policy implementers, economic mal-administrators, unnecessary cross-carpeters, hate mongers, attackers of personalities rather than issues, among others. With this in place, the Nigerian economy is bereft of tangible growth and development, leaving the Nigerian socio-economic terrain at the

mercy of a near absolute infrastructural lack and decay, high unemployment and exchange rate, armed robbery and terrorist attacks, kidnapping, pipe line vandalism, ethnic bigotry, hunger, poverty and the like. A nation with this kind of poor socio-economic report card ordinarily should have a recessing economy which leaves a great level of hardship on its populace.

It is against this backdrop, that this study will attempt a noteworthy study of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangman also Die*. It will dwell its analysis specifically more on the need to create a socio-economic and political platforms where the issues of high rate of unemployment (as a symptom of one of the factors responsible for recession and a recessed economy) are given due consideration with a view, to forestalling a further and future acute economic meltdown and decline of the Nigerian economy into depression. This is so because, to tame the excesses of recession, due politico-economic consideration should be given to diversification of the economy, which to a very large extent equals employment for the available human resource. And more so, Chiedu notes that, "there is a nexus between a country's level of development and its leadership. Since Nigeria became an independent country, it has not been led by its best politicians, who possess probity and leadership qualities" ([www.sunonline.com/nigeria-at-a-crossroads](http://www.sunonline.com/nigeria-at-a-crossroads)).

### **Recession and the Nigerian Economy**

Economic recession, as a phenomenon, has occurred many times through human economic records and it remains traditionally a part of the world economic sequence. The implication is that nations of the world from time to time could experience recession. This is so, because Adams Hayes claims that:

Less than a decade ago, the world economy sank into the Great Recession, the deepest and the most widespread down turn since the Great Depressions of 1920s and 30s. Since the stock market crashed in 2008, recovery has been long and slow, marked by persistent bumps in the road along the way ([www.investopedia.com](http://www.investopedia.com)).

From Jonathan Hayes' argument, economic recession has always been a part of human economic history which occurs from time to time. It is a cyclic phenomenon that goes and comes with its recovery period usually very slow leaving scores of hardship on the masses while it lasts. As a general down turn in any economy, recession is associated with high unemployment, slowing gross domestic product and high inflation (Mckinney, [www.study.com](http://www.study.com)). The Nigerian economy was equally caught up with this economic bug some times in 2015, where suddenly its unemployment and exchange rate, prices of goods, and so on skyrocketed and its Gross Domestic Product declined. Malinga Doya captures the Nigeria's recession succinctly by saying that:

Nigeria's economy shrank for a fourth consecutive quarter in the three months through December and contrasted for the whole year, the first such move since 1991.... Gross domestic product of Africa's most

populous country in the quarter from a year earlier, after shrinking 2.2 % in the previous 3 months, the National Bureau of Statistics said in an e-mailed statement Tuesday the median of 10 economist estimates compiled by Bloomberg was for the economy to shrink by 1.4%. GDP contracted 1.5 percent for 2016. It was full year drop in 25 years, according to International Monetary Fund data ([www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com)).

The graphic picture from above relays a serious and pathetic recessed economy. A recession period which ought to have lasted for just a few months stressed through the whole of 2016, one which has not experienced for over two decades making the Nigerian experience peculiar. Little wonder many Nigerians have resorted to unwholesome practices to do something very unusual and out of place as remedial measure out of this quagmire. Some people have gone to the extent of taking their own lives at will. This disturbing menace Temilade Aruya relates thus:

Recent incidence of suicide in the country is, no doubt, alarming and disturbing. Most shocking is the fact that younger ones are not even excluded from this worrying trend. It is ironic that Nigerians that were once famously labelled 'happy go lucky people' now finds suicide attractive ([www.pmnewsnigeria.com](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com)).

Okoye corroborates this as he posits that:

Nigeria is pirouetting dangerously, with millions of Nigerians becoming suicidal. In the recent past some Nigerian took their lives owing to the economic hardship which buffeted them. Our mono-economy, which went into recession when global oil prices slumped, has not recovered... ([www.sunnewsonline.com](http://www.sunnewsonline.com)).

The high rate of suicide committed by Nigerians in the last few months puts an average right thinking Nigerian on his/her toes to finding solution to this social concern. Many Nigerians, either now hang themselves, jump into lagoons or drink deadly substances. But before now,

Nigeria ranks well in the world Happiness Records. It ranked 78<sup>th</sup> in the world and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Africa on the world Happiness Report for the year 2016. Curiously, the country dropped to 103 and 6<sup>th</sup> position in 2017 Happiness Report (Aruya, [www.pmnews.com](http://www.pmnews.com)).

This is what has become of this nation, with a once high record of happy and resilient people. So, the question now is; how did Nigeria get to this point? In furtherance of this discourse, Aruya again, tries to proffer an answer, saying that:

A host of factors have been attributed to the growing suicide trend in the country. The first on the list is current economic hardship facing the country. The country's debt profile is on the high, inflation is on the increase, companies are folding up while there is high rate of unemployment coupled with the escalating cost of living. It is therefore not unusual that economic recession is resulting into depression for compatriots who are increasingly being overwhelmed by its negative inputs ([www.pmnewsnigeria.com](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com)).

From the assertions above, people just take their lives because they can no longer cope with the present economic reality as we have seen so far. And one issue, which one of the above quotes claims and which is of great importance to this study is that, the Nigerian present recession stems from being a mono-economic country, since it is highly dependent on crude oil (meaning, other sectors of the entire economy that would have taken care of the unemployed Nigerians are left unattended to) and because there is a global fall in oil prices, the nation has slumped into recession longer than expected with great negative impacts. To further substantiate Okoye's position, the Vice President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, confirmed at the 6<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the Academy thus:

The oil sector remains the dominance revenue carrier earner accounting for about 70 percent of Nigerian export earnings. However, this non-mono product status is essentially predisposed to the vagaries and vulnerabilities of the world market with attendant consequences for the growth and development of the national economy ([www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com)).

Nigeria is presently in her socio-economic/political journey experiencing the worst economic decline, partly because its leaders both past and present have refused to broaden its foreign earning beyond crude oil. They failed to create a robust economy, where government's policies and implementations are opened up to a multi-product-status that would have definitely curbed the excesses of this recession. Hence, other sectors that would have helped to stabilise the economy at a time like this are ignored. Substantively, Emy Arinze concludes:

Apart from corruption, another cankerworm dwarfing Nigerian economy is sole dependence on oil. The Nigeria economy is unstable as the fluctuating global oil price. The economy that depends solely on one product would be unable to meet the basic social and infrastructural needs of the people or develop like others. The oil windfall has been abused and mismanaged that it will be foolhardy for anyone to rely on it for development of this nation (<https://emyarinze.wordpress.com>).

From Arinze's position, Nigeria's over dependence on oil is a poor administrative policy which its leadership has perpetrated for decades since after oil was discovered. Hence, each time global oil price plunges, its very economic foundation is violently shaken, leaving its foreign currency reserve at the mercy of the devaluation of the naira and the cutting down of federal spending which could lead to retrenchment of staff (leading to high rate of unemployment) and untold hardship on the citizenry.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts a theory, known as, Keynesian economics or Keynesianism, a theory that was considered to be one of the most influential economic theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was propounded by a British economist known as John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946). His ideas changed the theory and practice of macro-economics and the policies of governments most especially that of the developing nations ([en.m.wikipedia.org](http://en.m.wikipedia.org)).

This theory relays how within a given period, principally during economic down turn, how the economic outputs of an economy is heavily dependent on aggregate demand (total spending). For either of these theories, aggregate demand does not automatically become the productive capacity of any nation's economy. But could be influenced by others factors. Whatever the factors could be go a long way in affecting employment and inflation rate, which actually determine the production capacity of an economy. Furthermore, as far as the Keynesian economists are concerned, because and whenever total spending power of a country is unstable, a trading financial system will time and again experience a macroeconomic shocks and can be cushioned by an immediate monetary policy responses of the fiscal policy, either by the central bank or by the government in the quest to stabilise outputs over the business cycle

For Keynes, the profounder of this theory, an economy begins to undergo contraction when there is no guarantee that goods and services produced by an individual will be purchased. Resultantly, periodic unemployment reoccurs from time to time. Therefore, at the micro economic level people and firms will spend, invest and save less, leading a country to operate below its potential output and growth rate. ([https//en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)).

### **Recession in Nigeria and Keynesianism**

The present precarious situation Nigeria is experiencing, has drastically affected its level of production of goods and services, employment and inflation rates. As things stand, it is glaring that the Nigerian economy is at present under recession, and that has actually affected the socio-political and economic life of the masses and governmental policies and its implementation. For instance, from the argument of the Keynesian apologists, it is characteristic of any nation under recession for its populace to lack the financial capacity to patronize the goods and services in circulation thereby leading to low investment rate and less saving attitudes among its populace. This dictum is succinctly captured in Maria Famakinwa's assertion that:

The current economic crisis Nigerians are going through is taking its toll on almost every sector of the economy... findings across the nation show that the economic situation is getting worse by the day, as prices of food stuff and other essential needs has jumped up. Citizens are lamenting the rising in inflation, factory closure, which is increasing the already disturbing unemployment rate. Some financial institutions in order to wade through this hard time resulted to sacking of workers, while some slash salaries by 20-50 percent (www.thehopenewspaper.com).

The quote above only revalidates the predicament of most Nigerians who are presently under the strangulating grips of abject lack and want. Many of them cannot afford to buy staple food items because of high increase in prices, pay their children school fees and to travel from one destination to other both at local and international levels. To heighten their plights, institutions, both government and private, that would have helped to cushion the effects of this hardship are either shutting down or downsizing and slashing salaries, even when there is a high increase in the cost of goods and services. A case in point is a comment made last year by Guy Ryder to mark the International Labour Organisation Day as the Director-General in Ahiuma-Young Victor that, "though work should be the best route out of poverty, but 327 million working men and women live in extreme poverty and 967 million moderate and near poverty" (www.vanguardngr.com). This goes to show why there is low patronage of available goods and services, low investment by individuals and companies and low saving attitude among the Nigerian populace.

To further advance this discourse, the theory under scrutiny reveals that an economy that is contracting will always have its government coming up with spontaneous economy policies so as to save its economy by injecting more money into the economy in the main. This is why the theory says that,

within a given period of short time principally during economic down turn ... the economic outputs of an economy becomes strongly and heavily dependent on aggregate demand (total spending). For this theory, aggregate demand does not automatically become the productive capacity of any nation's economy (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>).

Because the total spending of an economy becomes unstable, a market economy will usually and negatively affect the outputs of the macro economy. And this can only be corrected through active monetary policy by the central bank and fiscal policy by the government. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>). Therefore, Nigeria being a recessing economic nation, in the heat of the moment embarked on erratic monetary and fiscal policy action to save the nation's economy from further decline, which of course, in the real sense of economic reality does not reflect our productive capacity in the main. In this vein, the African Development Bank GP, commenting on *Nigeria Economic Outlook*, reports that:

The Central Bank Nigeria pursued a contractionary monetary policy stance. It increased the monetary policy rate to 14 percent from 11 percent in 2015 to attract capital inflow and control upward ticking inflation. To protect priority sectors from the rate hike, the cash reserve requirement was reduced and the amount raised was warehoused to be accessed by priority sectors at single digit interest rate.... The fiscal authorities on the other hand pursued an expansionary fiscal policy with the objective of deflating the economy by allocating close 30 percent of the budget to capital expenditure. The expansionary budget was planned on the back of existing fiscal consideration underpinned by domestic resource mobilization and expenditure rationalization measures (<https://afdb.org/en>).

From the above, Nigeria being a mono economy of crude oil, which accounts for 75% of Federal Government export, and with the consistent fluctuations in global oil prices, for it to defend its currency against the present account deficit occasioned by low oil pricing and raising capital outflow both at the local and global economic level and the increased utilization of foreign exchange reserve, the financial authorities have to carry out monetary action by devaluing the naira in order to curb federal spending. Which is why “the year saw a significant reduction in foreign reserves which fell to USD 25.8 billion as at the Year ending 2016 from USD 28 billion in the corresponding month 2015” (<https://afdb.org/en>).

Drawing strength from the dissertation so far, another indicator of a recessed economy as espoused by Keynesianism is high rate of unemployment. An economy which its populace can barely patronize its goods and services, means that, there is little or no cash in circulation for the masses, whose spending powers would have reduced the speed and effects of recession on the nation. One factor that could be responsible for lack of cash in circulation is unemployment. When people do not earn, invariably there will be low investment and saving rate and such an economy will only experience stunted growth and is easily vulnerable to economic holocaust. Nigeria is one country that deliberately positioned its economy to the attack of economic meltdown even before the 2015's. This is clearly substantive in the report on Nigeria Unemployment Rate released by Trading Economics in August, 2017 that:

The unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 14.2 percent in the last quarter of 2016 from 10.4 percent earlier. It is the highest jobless rate since 2009 as the number of unemployed went up by 3.5 million to 11.549 million.... Unemployment rate in Nigeria averaged 9.76 percent from 2006 until 2016, reaching an all time high 19.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2009 and a record low of 5.10 percent in the fourth quarter of 2010. ([www.tradingeconomics.com](http://www.tradingeconomics.com)).

The report from above, points to the fact that, the unemployment rate has been enjoying a mathematical progression on its labour force until in 2016, when it skyrocketed to an alarming rate because of the recession. 10.4 percent unemployment rate as of 2014-15 is an anathema for a nation that is naturally endowed with so much natural and human resources. In the area of decisive policy making and strict implementation, Nigeria leadership has refused to appropriate these blessings by expanding its production capacity beyond crude oil to the benefit of all, so that when the world witnessed short fall in global oil price, other sectors would have provided it a soft landing into recession.

About the Play, *Hangmen Also Die*

*Hangmen Also Die* is a graphical dramatic piece which sets in an imaginary world called Izon State, relating the ordeal of seven graduates from the university, with varying excellent results up to PhD levels in their different fields of study. As undergraduates, they were conscripted into a group known as Comrades, which disrupted many political opponents of their master, Dr. Ogbonsiegbé. They later realize that he is using them for his selfish interest. They hang him and disbanded after then, and to regroup into a Suicide Squad, having sought jobs for seven years after graduation, terrorising, stealing, maiming and acid bathing community members.

In the process, Dimeari, Tamara (a leader of the Widows Association of Izon state)'s son, joins the squad, being frustrated by the society which they have served during their National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) is unable to provide for their basic needs and employment. Hence, the only way to live is to live dangerously. In a bid to find her son and to persuade him from joining this group, since she does not want to lose her only son and as widow, the pains will be so unbearable. She locates their hide outs, demands for her son and enjoins them to turn their anger on one Erekosima Isokipiri a commissioner for a local government that is given three million naira to clean up the oil spillage in that community which he squanders and that has rendered their farmland, water, and lives useless.

The squad interrupts Erekosima's coronation ceremony at the nick of time; kidnaps him to their hide out in the forest. Under pressure he relates how the money was squandered without a single wretch getting a dime. The squad decides to hang him, Tamara begs on his behalf and in the heat of the moment, some aggrieved members of the community team up against the squad and make a request for an immediate release of Erekosima, since the reason for his abduction is unknown to them. In the middle of the struggle, a mobile police team arrives on the scene, Tamara is killed among others.

The seven members are arrested, tried and condemned to life imprisonment without fair hearing. Daminagbo, the Chief Superintendent of the Prison Service, who is the Godson of Erekosima, writes to the governor of the state that they should be hanged, having benefited from the three million naira. Yekini, a former fisher man turned hangman at the prison service declines in spite of the pressure and threat from his superiors having realised the under currents behind their execution. He takes off his uniform, throws it at them and returns to the sea.



### Guidance from *Hangmen also Die*

The playwright being an integral entity of the society, weaves his/her craft, using the socio-political, economic and cultural goings on in his/her immediate constituent as his/her unprocessed bits and pieces into a graphic whole. He/she does this most earnestly, to chart the course for a better society (among others) through his/her work by putting the society at and on a very conspicuous platform for all to see. Agaku Jacob buttresses this validation when he says that,

Every society produces its artistes and they react to the social creation depending on their understanding of that which creates them. Thus, being a product of a society the good artiste studies the everyday innuendo of political, religious, cultural and other non-material aspects of culture to talk to the society (45).

This he/she does, to trigger critical thoughts among its audience (either private or public), thereby bringing about communal accomplishments that could bring about desired change for the betterment of all. This responsibility he/she treats with a sense of obligation. It is this onerous task that prompts Esiaba Irobi to poke at some ills which are inimical to the overall development of society, and which the researchers try to high light here.

Of uttermost concern to this study, is the abandonment of the agricultural and raw mineral sectors at the dawn of the oil boom by our past leaders, sectors, which were already generating a steady foreign exchange, and putting food on the table for the populace. This singular economic policy is what he throws up through Yekini, one of the characters in this work, as he relays thus:

**Yekini:** (*With feelings.*) You see, Doctor, (Pause) I was once a fisherman living by the power of my paddle and the weight of the net. My life was the sea and it sustained me and my family with the fishes that I caught day by day... and Doc, I was happy. A very happy man. A joyful man. A contented man... But, one Saturday, I remember very well, in 1965, that Superintendent...came to my stilt hut at Forcados and said to me, "Yekini, my brother-in-law, I don find job for you. Better job. Government job. A warden's job..." I didn't even ask him how much. I was...overjoyed. I dropped my paddled and net and followed him like a fish follows fattened worm, not knowing the worm conceal a metal hook. The hook of death... and since that day..., something in me has been dying. Dying daily (19).

Yekini's ordeal, paints vividly how the government of that time and at present take hasty decisions on policy of governance concerning over 170 million people, and mortgaging their welfare without recourse to critical thoughts on the way and manner in

which economic policies ought to be scrutinised before reaching a conclusion. For instance, it is in this clime that a presiding president left the vast Nigerian economic and political sectors running for six good months without ministers even with key sectors like agriculture, power, petroleum, and so on, and then suddenly withdrew the Niger Delta agitators guiding the oil pipe lines at the creeks, that equally led to the drastic reduction in the production of the oil level, 75% foreign earner of the economy. Good economic policy promulgations and implementations demand that sentiment and selfish ambition are shelved in order to give room to critical and logical arguments, which could take a little while yet, its results, are worth their onions.

Additionally, it suffices to say here that, from the moment the Nigerian leaders then abandoned other sectors of its economy and were carried away by the lure of the oil boom era, unemployment sets in. Diversification of its economy would have brought about a robust economy that would have taken care of this economic malady. Of course, an economy that is mono-economic should experience worse economic recession, if its only source of foreign earnings experiences a financial shock.

Another critical issue of concern, which Irobi is quick to identify and which he thrusts to the fore of our discourse, is that our leaders are egocentric, self-enriching, politically inept and clueless. Hence, they do not know what good governance entails. This is so because, each time decisions are taken and implementations are made (if there are actually implemented), the people who voted them in to power and who they claim to have come to serve, are usually at the receiving end of their hasty decisions. Irobi capture this argument again through Yekini who has refused to hang members of the Suicide Squad, though as part of his primary service, saying that he knows why they committed the crime. He says:

**Yekini:** Thank you. You see, some time ago, the Federal Government gave the citizens of this state, which as you know is a riverine state, the sum some of three million naira as compensation money for the oil spillage which has ruined their farms... homes, and their lives.... But the man they killed. One Chief Erekosima, a Commissioner for Chieftaincy Affairs, connived with his Councillors and Local Government Chairmen to confiscate the three million naira. The Councillors took one million and shared it among themselves. The Local Government Chairmen shared one million. The Commissioner himself, one million. No single citizen, no matter how wretched, got a kobo. That was when these men stepped in. That Commissioner, who they killed was also responsible for Daminagbo's rapid promotions in the prison service. That is why, when all the citizens of Izon State petitioned the Governor asking him to commute the death sentence of these boys into life-imprisonment, Chief Superintendent Daminagbo went to the Governor's house and spoiled his mind. He told the Governor

that these boys were armed robbers..., criminal, head-hunters, terrorists, everything... (22-23).

From Yekini's dialogue with the Doctor as seen from the dialogue above, pops to the public domain the reckless impunity with which office holders handle the issues concerning the governed. There is no time in Nigerian politico-economic history where decisions and implementations are pursued to the later holistically without their selfish interests. Is it not because of their own welfare that they callously abandoned other sectors of the economy to the suffocating grip of a monolithic economy? Is it not also, as a result of self-aggrandisement that that huge sums of money meant for the overall development of our nation, are stolen from the Federal treasury, laundered and stashed in homes, foreign accounts, while virtually almost every sector of it economy like agriculture, education, health, and other critical infrastructure are left at the mercy of brain drain, importation rather than exportation of goods and service, health tourism, bad roads, epileptic power supply among others. Diversifications of the economy, transparency and accountability on the part of office holders would definitely take care of the economy in the time of economy crunch without ruthless consequences on the masses.

It is also the order of the day among Nigerian political actors, to treat popular opinions with levity. If not, why is that even when the masses are given a "chance" to contribute to making policies that have direct bearing on their welfare, such decisions if ever taken, are treated with utter disdain and levity or is it the case of playing politically to the gallery? If not, what has happened to the report of the happening to the constitutional conference convened by the immediate past President Goodluck Jonathan (at a time like this when the entire economy is under the threat of depression), where huge sum of money was squandered on what the researchers believe is a jamboree. Trust Nigerian leadership, that document is lying there gathering dust. Pray it is not missing, being padded or eaten by rats.

In the opinion of Irobi, the masses have no place in the scheme of things within the Nigerian political space. Their rights are not only been relegated to the back bench of altruism but slaughtered on the altar of bad administrative prowess, leaving the average Nigerian in depravity, rejection, dejection, frustration and worthlessness. Consequently, to live becomes a dread as no one is sure of what the future holds for him/her. This is captured in the dialogue of all the members of the suicide squad. Take, for instance, the following:

**Acid:** (*Standing.*) After that the comrades disbanded. We disbanded.  
Then the years went by and we graduated.

**Dayan:** (*Turns.*) And we started looking for job.

**Chorus:** No jobs.

**RIP:** (*Vehemently.*) We have no jobs.

**Acid:** Therefore we have no money.

**Dayan:** Which means we cannot marry.

**RIP:** And consequently cannot have children.

**Chorus:** We are the rejects of the world.

**RIP:** Seven years later we met again. This time at the office of the Directorate for Employment... which claims that the government is giving loans to unemployed graduates who want assistance for self-employment for small scale industries.

**Acid:** We were there seven times a week.

**RIP:** From eight in the morning to eight in the night.

**Dayan:** We even went on Sundays.

**Aid:** But we never got a kobo.

**Chorus:** Our job in this nation is to look for jobs.

Nigeria still remains one country, where the talk about the welfare package of the citizenry is a mere rhetoric and only found on the pages of newspapers, billboards, radio and television. Practically speaking, the Nigerian leadership has not been able to appropriate the Nigerian vast resources to the benefit of all; so much that unemployment is reduced. Therefore, the white collar and private jobs are in short supply considering the number of graduates churned out every year from our citadels of learning. In fact, to a reasonable extent, the entire economy provides no level plain ground for even those who want to be self-employed. It is either government loans are given to relatives, cronies or private financial houses give loans with unbearable high interest rate. Consequently, many Nigerian graduates are found on the streets loitering about in frustration and rejection thereby resorting to economic sabotage and ventilation of their justified anger with dire attendant consequences as witnessed in the play. We dare say the proliferation of terror groups like Niger Delta Avengers, Egbesu Boys, different cult groups and even the dreaded Boko Haram Islamic sect that have become a menace to our nation, are as the result of the crux of this thesis. Their actions are acts of frustration and retaliation for negligence, untold hardship, mal-administration, and nepotism, and so on, that have become the bane of our national life.

Finally, another topical social malady, which the playwright tries to address in this dramatic piece is the rate at which people want to cut short their own lives without recourse to its whatever consequences. Hopeless living has a dire dangerous effect on even the most astute minds, if it goes on for a long time unchecked. This assertion he consolidates through the character of Dimeari (Marine Engineer, who also graduated four years and yet jobless and now wants to be a member of the Suicide Squad) and R.I.P thus:

**Dimeari:** I am a frustrated soul. A frustrated mind. I am tired of living a lifeless life.

**R.I.P:** A lifeless life how?

**Dimeari:** I graduated from the University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, four years ago.... Since then I have been unemployed. I have bruised my knuckles on the doors of oil companies.... I have slept on the pavement of the recruitment office of shell, B.P for two nights. I have attended more fifty

interviews in the last two years. Still no job... I am a reject of the society. A piece of human furniture standing unobserved in the living room of blind world. I feel empty. I feel impotent. I feel useless. I want to do something that will shock the world. Something that will make the world realise that I exist. And also make me feel I am some body. Something challenging. Something violent! Some form of dangerous employment (69, 72).

Nigeria, as a country, is one clime where the welfare of its citizenry is treated with the highest order of recklessness. As a nation blessed with enormous resources, it becomes unheard of that widespread poverty, dearth of social services, insecurity, high unemployment rate etc. look many Nigerian straight in the eyes. It is equally annoying that, “no fewer than 112 million Nigerians now live below poverty level... representing 67 percent of the country’s total population of 167 million... it robs individuals of their dignity and increase vulnerability to hunger, physical and mental illness, human rights abuses and exclusion” (Ahiuma-Young, [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com)). This dicey ugly scenario is what most Nigerians go through, makes them worthless and make them want to take their lives without winking an eye, as if to say, that it is safer being dead.

## **Conclusion**

It has been established that Nigeria is passing through one of the worst economic meltdown in decades, leaving its trail of unbearable hardship of hike of price in food stuffs, drop in GDP, retrenchment and downsizing, and closure of business outlets and hardship in nearly all strata of our national life which made the government of the day taking some spontaneous fiscal and monetary policy that does not reflect the real productive capacity of the nation in the face of economic recession. It has been observed that there is a connection between the stability of a nation’s economic policy and the decisions made and carried out by its leaders. The Nigerian leadership has deliberately refused to make and take decisive actions that will bring about appropriation of the vast natural endowments to the general well-being of the masses.

This frustrating stance has left the masses leaving their lives dangerously, in a nation that was once rated among the happiest people of the world becoming suicide freaks. The suicidal trend among Nigerians became glaring as many astute personalities turned thieves, jump into lagoons, hang themselves in their rooms or nearby bushes and drink poisonous substances, because they could no longer afford money to buy the exorbitant food stuffs, pay house rents, pay their children’s school fees, settle hospital bills, and so on. It is this challenge, that prompted this study as it takes a critical look by analysing Esiaba Irobi’s *Hangmen Also Die*, with a view to forestalling further and future severe economic meltdown and its unbearable consequences on Nigerians and majorly, the over 112 million Nigerians who now live below the poverty level.

## The Way Forward

Nigeria, as a country, we all know is enormously blessed with human and natural resources. Therefore, enough of the lip services paid to the diversification of the economy. The onus is on the present administration to ensure that its economic decisions are carefully thought out and implemented without recourse to whose ox is gorged.

Hasty political decision should be jettisoned. The peoples' opinion should be given fair hearing, and dialogue instead of the military option, should be implored to resolving impasse between government and the host communities where these human and natural resources are inhabited. The carrot and stick approach remains sacrosanct in the body of world politics.

There is the need for most Nigerian politicians to embrace the call for moral value. Politics should be seen as a platform for service to humanity and not a goldmine for acquisition of primitive wealth at the detriment of the people who voted them into power. There is the need for prudent financial management on the part of those empowered by the constitution or statutory rules to ensure strict implementation of policies in the area of economic and employment challenges. For a better future, the onus also lies on the masses to take a resolute stance in the face of their sufferings, to see election periods as opportunity to vote out corrupt leaders, who will always come around doling out peanuts to canvass for their votes during electoral campaigns. This is where theatre has a vital role to play. As an agent of change, the practitioners should take advantage of the sociological relationships on-going in our climes, to revitalise and furnish our stage with more topical political issues and also, go into collaboration with other political institutions to ensure that from time to time the Nigerian political actors are treated to stage plays of this kind during their political retreats so as to instil the necessary dynamics of statecraft in them until the desired change comes.

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