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African Drama As a Humanizing Agent: Esiaba Irobi's Hangmen Also Die and The Other Side of the Mask

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Abstract

Drama which triumphs in imitating human actions as well as telling a story through human actions and speeches is a humanizing agent. This is because it constantly invites us to enter imaginatively into the lives of others, so that we might understand their aspirations and motivations. It helps us also to affirm the human nature of others. Moreover, it helps us to recognize the inalienable humanity of other individuals and including those individuals in our moral considerations. African drama, in particular, reflects on human condition, furnishing us with insights into the precarious nature of our existence. This calls for support and collaboration. It calls for a deeper understanding of each other and what can make us to be strong together. Moreover, it calls for a deeper reflection on the foibles of human nature, which we must collectively rise to fight against for a continual existence of our human society. Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Other Side of the Mask* appreciate in totality the full import of this humanizing role of art, particularly the need to x-ray the dilapidating structure of our society and to offer us a keen insight into the steps to take towards the amelioration of our human sufferings. In both dramatic texts under study, Irobi aspires to unearth the social dislocation and decadence of our society with the principal vision of initiating social conscientisation, edification and mass action for social change. This paper, therefore, holds strongly that African dramatists should emulate the dramatic tradition of humanizing the actions of the dispossessed and socially emasculated people in our society, which Irobi champions and demonstrates through *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Other Side of the Mask*.

Keywords: Literature, Drama, humanizing, justice, society.

Introduction

Drama is basically a performance that deals with conflicts, emotions, and the portrayal of human experiences through dialogue and action. It presents a story or situation that engages the audience's emotions, eliciting in them intense feelings such as tension, excitement, or empathy. What makes drama to be unique is its ability to act as a humanizing agent- the ability to affirm the human nature in man.

The justification of the inalienable humanity of others becomes more pronounced in African drama. African drama is perceived as a drama that embodies the yearnings, experiences and the sensibility of the African people. In doing this, it tries to understand the socioeconomic situations in Africa and its environs that greatly shape the actions and inactions of Africans. It tries to recreate the struggles of the common people in Africa as they grapple with the joys and sorrows that fill their daily existence.

In this study, I will be focusing my attention on the dramatic works of Esiaba Irobi, particularly his *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Other Side of the Mask*. Armed with the naturalist theoretical framework which was championed by Emia Zola in the 19th century following the theory of evolution established by Charles Darwin, I will analyze critically the drama texts under study. This naturalist theory holds that social condition, heredity and environment have an inescapable force in shaping human character.

Here, I will try to explain how the frustrating social conditions in Nigeria rape the dreams and aspirations of bright and intelligent young Nigerians and consequently force them into fraudulent and criminal activities. It is the aim of this study to explore how the African dramatists have used and are still using their dramatic texts to humanize human actions despite their oddities. To effectively carry out this task, I shall make use of Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Other Side of the Mask* as reference texts.

The Concept of Humanization

The word "humanizing" is derived from the adjective "humane" and the noun "human". The derivation from the noun "human" implies belonging to human beings as opposed to animals and inanimate objects. Conversely, the adjective "humane" implies treating people or animals in a way that is not cruel and not inflicting pains and suffering on them. According to Naboth Nwafor and U.J. Nwogu, "to humanize a situation means to treat such a situation as if it were a human being, and not as if it were a thing or an object that has no feelings or thoughts." (1) This is to say that to humanize means to give human attributes to all things, whether or not they deserve them. This, in a way evokes the feeling of humaneness, i.e., a feeling tinged with compassion, sympathy, empathy and consideration for others.

Thus, humanization in a social context is a process of giving human attributes and values such as honour, respect, love, dignity, friendship, etc., to other people: their social status, age, and level of education notwithstanding. This approach, according to Nwafor and Nwogu is "anchored on the theory of humanism, which is a system of beliefs concerned with the needs of people, and the restoration of the universally acceptable human values." (2) In fact, the concept of humanization seems to be in tandem with the existentialist philosophy, the fundamental drive or urge is to exist and to be recognised as an individual (Titus, et al, 1979). In recognition of this, the existentialists argue that people in the society should concern themselves with the unique personality of each individual member of the society, and that they should strive to relate to them in what Buber in (Nwafor, 2010) refers to as an "I-thou" instead of "I-it" relationship. In other words, individual members of the society (and even outside of it) should be regarded and treated as humans and not as objects. In essence, to humanize the society, therefore, implies to impart desirable human qualities, values, attitudes and interests to the individual members of the society with a view to making them acquire worthwhile affective qualities of human beings. This can only result from a healthy interaction between the leaders and the led which in turn would engender growth and development in the society.

Overtly, humanization is seen as a process of showing that someone has the qualities that are typical of a human, in a way that makes one more likely to feel sympathy for others. According to Tamar Wilner in an article, "Encourage the Humanization of Others", humanization "acts to help prevent cruelty and aggression. When we humanize others, just actions towards them appear to us as simply the right thing to do." (2) For Michelle Maiese, humanization "is a matter of recognizing the common humanity of one's opponents and including them in one's moral scope." (3) She notes that viewing an adversary as outside the

community in which moral norms apply can reduce restraints against aggression and legitimize violence. It is thought that recognizing the human characteristics of one's opponents can help to limit escalation and violence.

Humanization is related to valuing the human being and knowing how to accept, respect and understand the other. It is a broad process that consolidates developing social values and respects of the individual as a whole. Such a process postulates the awareness of justice, freedom and solidarity. Humanizing is further linked to raising the psychological state to a recommended performance that presupposes the individual is involved and committed. Humanization is vital for human coexistence. This is so because it can help to break down enemy images or damaging stereotypes. Once one's opponent is viewed not as an evil monster, but as a fellow human deserving of moral consideration, the conflict can be reframed in more productive ways.

As suggested above, humanization can help to reduce a conflict or limit escalation, as well as minimize the likelihood of mass violence or genocide. Parties who regard each other as human will find it much more difficult to rationalize harsh tactics or disregard human-rights norms. However, Michelle Maiese, in her article, "Humanization as a Response to Violent Escalation", notes that, "humanization might also play a role in conflict-resolution processes more generally. It is often a crucial component in establishing cooperative relations between parties and promoting trust-building and constructive resolution. Recognizing the common humanity of one's opponent can pave the way for mutual respect, mutual trust, and mutual security". Once parties have begun to appreciate the humanity of their opponents, they can begin to listen responsively to the views of the other, build on their ideas, and engage in constructive resolution. This might involve taking responsibility for harmful consequences, apologizing for them, and seeking reconciliation. Recognizing the other as a member of one's moral community also fosters honesty and leads parties to focus on actual issues rather than engaging in personal attacks.

Humanization can also give room for reciprocity and a belief in human equality, creating shared norms that constrain the way the conflict is waged. Reciprocity requires that each party treats the other with the fairness and respect that it would normally expect if in the other's position. It is an expression of the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Human equality implies that all human beings are entitled to just and respectful treatment. Humanization can allow parties to see that even their opponents are deserving of such treatment. Thus, it can be a crucial component of conflict transformation.

Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen also Die* as an Agent of Humanization

Esiaba Irobi's *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. According to Benedict Binebai ,

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 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.(4)

As an agent of humanization, Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* draws our attentions to the frustrating situations in our society that are compelling our youths to venture into different activities that are gruesome and are capable of destroying the fabric of our existence. It helps us to understand that we are products of our society. This is to say that the members of the suicide squad are members of the Nigerian society and as

such, the drama aims at humanizing their actions and deeds, since they overtly did what they did because they were raped by the society that suppose to protect them.

Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* painting for us a picture of the consequences of this societal rape, tells us that the Suicide Squad, led by Tarila Iganima alias R. I. P., has strong faith in crime, criminality and violence to eke a living for itself. 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. Binebai notes that,

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 having been found guilty in the court of the suicide squad (5)

Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* 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 aspect 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. Binebai in his article, "The Literary Text as a Testament of Social Disparagement", notes that,

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 (22).

He experienced joy; he was contented in his serene environment where he could see the face of God. Binebai further observes that "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, as Binebai points out that "he is deceived to work as a hangman." (23) Yekini regrets ever getting involved in such a pitiless work. He lost his humanity while as a hangman. 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 carryout 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 in *Hangmen Also Die* Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* is thus a melange and a colonnade of moving spectacles that attest to individual and collective tragedy. It is 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. in their article, "Democracy and the Rise of the opposition in Nigerian Politics", 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)

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 Ph.D 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 vandalisation, 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 in Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*,

We maim. We murder. We massacre [...] We are the Suicide Squad. We are the Kamikazee [...] 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 [...] 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. (Hangmen 65-66).

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 propel young and old Nigerians into all forms of social vices like Cultism, ritualism prostitution, armed robbery, yahoo yahoo, women and child trafficking, etc.

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. Ogbansiege 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 actualization of Yoruba self determination. Following this trend, Boko Haram is perceived to be a deliberate creation of politicians who seek power to negotiate the actualization 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.

Igbo and 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 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* was written with the ideological fire of the promethean myth. It represents the dramatist's 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 is not ideologically committed to change the society. They are just 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 is their practical manifesto. It is the happening and most cherished iconoclastic philosophy of the Squad until they encounter Tamara who educate and induct 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 do not even think of a revolution even when it is obvious that they constitute the latent radical force. It is 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 economically marginalised and oppressed people from the poverty imposed on them by the likes of Erekosima. Tamara responds when asked by the Suicide Squad if she wants to hire them, thus:

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? (Hangmen 78)

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.

Looking at *Hangmen Also Die* critically, we discover that it is a humanizing agent. Irobi through the eyes of Yekini, invites us for a sober reflection. He tries to question the rationale of the government for trying to hang the members of the suicide squad. Through an intense retrospective reflection, he helps us to understand that the members of the suicide squad were young adults who once had dreams of becoming responsible members of their society. They all went to the university, studied different courses and came

out with different academic qualifications. But, unfortunately, they society that they find themselves has no space for them to grow. The society has no space for them to survive. The society has no space for them to make a meaningful impact. Hence, they are forced to plunge into depression. They feel they had no future. They see their dreams disappearing from their hands. They see their parents dying helplessly in the village. They see their younger ones wallowing in ignorance and poverty. They begin to form the Suicide Squad to engage into criminal activities as a means of survival. It is their encounter with Tamara that makes their criminal acts to have a focus. The focus is to eliminate the source of their problems. The source of their problems is no other than the rich and mighty in the society. The source of their problems is the politicians who have embezzled the scarce resources in the country for their own selfish well being. It is this same politicians and leaders that have employed the hangman to hang them for their crime.

Irobi is arguing that the members of the suicide squad are human beings and should be treated as such. There is no justification for imprisoning them. There is no justification for hanging them. There is no justification for seeing them as being intrinsically evil. There is no justification for treating them as the scum of the earth. There is no justification for denying them of their future in the first place.

Irobi is thus, of the view that the government and its leaders should treat the youths with love and justice. The government should create an enabling environment that would make it possible for our youths to actualize their dreams and purposes in life. They should create a space for them to inhabit and grow to the full realization of their dreams. Anything outside that would attract a negative energy from the youths.

Esiaba Irobi's *the Other Side of the Mask* as an Agent of Humanization

Esiaba Irobi's *The Other Side of the Mask* recapitulates the travails of the great artist in a gruesome manner. In this play, Nobert Eze noted that "Jamike, a first class sculptor and a university lecturer, is driven to atavism by years of denial of recognition by the organizing committee of the national art competition, which views his works as excellent specimens of decadent petty bourgeoisie art, lacking any trace of material dialectics."(4) In a fit of rage and frustration, Jamike kills Dr. Animalu, the secretary of the organising committee, not only because of the subterfuge involved in their judgements, but for coming to sneer at his works in his studio. Eventually, as noted by Eze, "the burden of un-fulfilment compels him to take his own life, just as the daughter of his mentor, Kayine, returns from Paris with the laurel he won in an international competition."(5)

As the play opens, we observe Jamike encountering distraction from the outside .The coming of his brother and Naval officer Kamuche with Elsie the supposedly abandoned fiancée of the artist, paints the picture of the humdrums of life impinging on the artists chosen life of solitude. Eze helps us to understand that "Life of solitude is an escapist tendency which the Romanticist employs to avoid the objective world he cannot change."(6) The Naval officer's perception of himself as an important figure in the society constrains him to ignore Zhipora's appeal to restrain himself from tampering with Jamike's peak moment of creativity. Kamuche's thunderous order to his orderly to destroy Jamike's door by all means, is a way of devaluing the artist, and this is most unfortunate because as Zhipora tells us, Jamike's concentration period which the naval officer abuses recklessly is: "when his feelings are most intense and his intellect more at ease. This is the moment in the day when his visions harden into distinct images. And he pummels them into shape like a blacksmith at his anvil." (7)

The hammerings on Jamike's door by the naval officer's orderly diffuse the sculptor's concentration, eternally dislodging his vision. As Eze rightly observes, "whatever reason Kamuche has for his unruly interruption, the damage done to Jamike's creative spirit is irreparable because the vision of that moment may never crystallize again. The artistic loss cannot be quantified."(7) Eze went further to say that "for the intellectual, especially the creative artist, silence is golden and is consciously cultivated because it affords

him the opportunity to attain spiritual buoyancy necessary for an uncommon embrace with the goddess of sublime art. This is the reason the great artist eschews noise, unnecessary pleasantries and in fact prefers a life of solitude." (8) Kamuche's show of brazen force, and atavism demonstrates the degree in which militarism pervades the psyche of the average Nigerian man of authority, and the extent to which the university lecturers are held in contempt by the establishment. All these indicate that the artist lacks a conducive atmosphere for his work. Again, Eze observed that "Jamike's flight into his garden is, therefore, a way of running away from the humdrums of life." (8)

Kamuche's insistence on gaining access to Jamike's house by force in the artist's most treasured moment, incredibly betrays man's selfishness. As Eze notes, "the naval officer's discussion with Zhipora demonstrates that he respects the ethics of his profession, yet he decides to mock those of his brother, the artist" (9). This is the reason Zhipora gazes at him and his atavistic behaviour with utter consternation. However, the naval officer's act of impudence is Irobi's undisguised illustration of his deep-seated hatred for the military as destructive elements and symbols of corruption.

In fact, the playwright makes Kamuche indulge in acts of impunity like one bereft of the faculty of reason, in order to reveal the military as zombies who are wanting in contemplative life. As a despot, the naval officer's guiding philosophy is to permanently destroy every perceived obstacle to his intention of wielding absolute power. As an image of friction and noise, Eze notes that, "Kamuche's cacophonous exhibition of power demonstrates unabashedly, the military's mindlessness in brutalizing normal sensibilities and their reckless abuse of fundamental human rights. But his compelling need to assert self and authority, overshoots the bounds of civility and human dignity and reduces the despot to an unsettling state, very incongruous, yet laughable as a result of the foibles of a psyche gone paranoid." (24)

According to Eze, "a major cause of agony that frequently wracks the mind of the artist as exemplified by the character, Jamike, is the need for recognition. Every great artist expects public acclamation of his greatness. The dialogue below shows that this is exactly the case for Jamike:" (10)

Kamuche: I hear he wakes up in the middle of the night screaming, I am the next. I am the next. Lady, you who minister unto him in his hour of need, what does he mean by I am the next.

Zhipora: (with zest) The next great artist! Like Michelangelo. Leonardo da Vinci. Van Gogh. Pablo Picasso. Greatness! That is his favourite theme. As Eze observed, "he is always pondering over the magic, that mysterious phenomenon that makes a work of art endure the menace of time. He is a great mind. He will be the next." (10)

Kamuche: I hear that even in the midnight hour, even when he is alone, he talks to himself.

Zhipora: Spiritedly!

Kamuche: Punching the air and slashing the wind muttering wicked imprecations at some bearded sentinels to give him his laurels (13-14).

Two things are evident in the above dialogue. In the first place, the dialogue suggests that a major travail of the artist is the tendency not to be satisfied with his products. According to Eze, "every great artist usually feels that his work can be better than it is, thus, he is constantly in search of the elements that imbue greatness to the work of art." (11) He grapples to represent reality at both empirical and metaphysical levels for, according to Emmanuel Obiechina, "a great artist is a man sensitive to the nuances of our chequered existence, who feels and sympathizes deeply, a suffering human soul who suffers with those who suffer and is able to pierce the barriers set up by the embattled people in order to reveal that which is being hidden away from view" (2). Because the great artist works on uncharted terrain, he is often misunderstood.

The second point that emerges from the dialogue is the contest between subjectivity and objectivity. This is gleaned from the dominant value of making out laurels to writers on the basis of connections. Jamike's conception of his works as excellent works of art, deserving laurels, is challenged by the prevailing social morality, the objective life. Zhipora tells us that "he is a harassed man because for the past six years, he has been entering for national art competitions, hoping to win, but each year, he is given special mention, while the prize goes to some other person who is a great name in the eyes of the judges or someone who is a friend of the secretary of the organizing committee for the competition." (14) This idea of giving artistic laurels to writers on the basis of connection is validated and given sufficient weight in the text by Kamuche when he tells Zhipora:

He should have entered again for this national competition. And informed me. I would have gone to meet the judges one by one in their homes and brought the laurel here to him two days before the announcement of the results. Lady, I am respected. I have powers. I throw my weight around. In this country, I have connections (The Other Side 14-15).

The issue of unwarranted suppression of excellence and unmerited award of literary and artistic laurels, as well as giving sensitive positions to people on account of connections, is a major national question, one which has continued to make genuine development in the country intractable. That Jamike eventually wins an international award with the same piece of art work, which only received special mention locally, suggests that he has been casting his pearls to the dogs all these while. This indicates how badly the country's intellectual life has been tainted by corruption.

In addition to deceitful award of artistic laurels, is the tendency to give intellectual accolade to writers and artists on the basis of ideology. Dr. Animalu who has been the secretary of the national art competition for years, quarrels with Jamike's works on the ground of ideology. Examining one of Jamike's sculptural works in his studio, Animalu cynically remarks: "But I don't see any trace of material dialectics in it. No ideological perspective. And no symptom of commitment" (The Other Side 39-40).

For Animalu, the essence of art lies in ideological clarity, what the playwright refers to as "Bolshevik hobbledehoy." (40) But in spite of Animalu's disdainful comment, he nevertheless recognises certain elements of greatness in Jamike's works which he considers as "Excellent specimens of decadent petty bourgeoisie art." (40) Animalu's one dimensional perception of art does not permit him to understand that, "an artist is the vortex of forces and vibrations swirling all around him, and that he digests life at both empirical and metaphysical level." (49) Animalu, the critic, fails to "comprehend that the great artist does not present a simple story with an easily digestible ideology, but a web of ideas that frequently refrain from the judgement of closure." (Lester 258)

Gideon Lester further argues rightly that ideology is not the quality that imbues the work of art with greatness. He substantiates this argument with Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. He posits that what makes this play great is not ideology but the shifting layers of narrative motif which permeates the plays plot structure. According to him:

The frequent contextualization and the shifts in emotional allegiance that result, yield great dramatic dividends. The scene that immediately follows Shylock's dialogue with Tubal takes place in Belmont, where Bassanio correctly solves the riddle of the caskets. No sooner have he and Portia, Nerissa and Gratiano sworn to solemnize the bargain of their faith than Salerio enters with the news from Antonio that steals the colour from Bassanio's cheek and suspends the action of the scene". (258)

For Lester, "what is so exciting and attention-arresting in the text is that, one of the plays principal narratives, is without warning obtruding on the other, forestalling resolution and forcing Bassanio (and eventually Portia and Nerissa) to adopt quite different character functions." (258) In most cases, according to Farrell, "what insistence on a clear-cut ideology does, is to crush and destroy the real talents among writers and artists, and to permit those who are not serious, those who have nothing to say to come to the front" (7 of 8). The author of *The other Side of the Mask* appears to be saying that this is the case in Nigeria, where mediocre artists are frequently glorified and given all manner of awards for producing weak but ideologically-clear works, while the real talents are merely given oblique attention or not mentioned at all. The text suggests that Jamike is a great brain, one cut out for laurels. Kamuche, the naval officer, tells us:

If only you had seen his report cards when he was in elementary school and secondary schools (intensely). Made a distinction in his first school leaving certificate Exams. Six aggregates. A1 in all his subjects. Made a first class honour in his Bachelor of Arts degree exams. In fact, he was the best in his department, the best in his faculty, and the best graduand in the entire university. (The Other side 18).

In spite of excellent academic records, Jamike never rests on his oars. He works assiduously and pushes for excellence to the point of developing health problems. Recalling his physical travail, Jamike laments: "Each year the ulcers in my stomach blossom in rhythm with my rippling muscles. Each season the ulcers crack like the surface of the barren Earth and bleeding like a dead man's neck. Each year my talents bleed. But in harvest season? Nothing!" (The Other Side 65)

History shows that where geniuses are neglected, the creative juice normally congeals and decays. And when it ferments, it evaporates into violence. This is exactly the picture Irobi paints of Jamike in this disturbing tragedy. He creates an image of a deeply troubled artist in order to remind us as Chukwuma Okoye would say: "The active life of the artist is generally a restless, inspired, often agonised, but never ceasing toiling in the farmland of the human spirit sustained by confident hope of effective communication though without timely acknowledgement much less, commensurate material reward." (9)

In the absence of societal appreciation of his artistic endeavour, Jamike opts completely for a life of interiority, his mind becoming the substratum of his existence. "He wrestles with ideas and no longer cares for the mundane, especially such things that will interfere with his pursuit of the ideal approachable through his artistic productions. To keep his mind afloat in the mire of drowning souls" (10), Jamike rarely eats, "sometimes going without food and water for days, in order to enable his spirit to soar above the mundane into the realms of the sacred." (11) Zhipora is of the opinion that in this condition of existence, Jamikes reflexes become sharper, his intuition deeper, and consciousness more visceral. His abandonment of Elsie is hinged on the idea that the woman being an expert in catering business, only knows about food and domestic affairs, without any knowledge of art, much less transcendental art, which is his artistic preoccupation. When Njemanze asks him whether he will not marry, Jamike simply retorts: "Unless to an artist. A refined mind. A woman with heightened sensibility who will appreciate both my person and my genius" (The Other Side 76-77).

Elsie lacks the basic requirement for the kind of marital relationship the artist may wish to enter. "At best Elsie can feed the flesh and moisten the groin, but she ostensibly does not have access to spiritual food, the type the artist needs to attain the infinite" (76), which is Jamikes subject of interest. A union with Elsie will produce defective children, ones whose whole beings, as a matter of fact, would be immersed in materiality. This is the reason he is contented with his artistic children. In regarding his sculptural pieces as children, Jamike gives up all relationship to objective reality, making the subjective to work at extreme cross-

purposes with the world of facts. According Georg Lukcs: "This situation gives rise to a romantic lack of moderation in all directions. The inner wealth of pure soul-experience is seen immoderately as the only essential thing; the futility of the soul's existence in the totality of the world is exposed with an unequal immoderate ruthlessness, the souls loneliness, its lack of any support or tie, is intensified until it becomes immeasurable, and, at the same time, the cause of this situation is mercilessly revealed" (The Theory of the Novel 118).

Jamike's personality underscores Irobi's perception of human nature as extremely evil. For him life follows dark path and gazes more on the dark part of the orbit. If Jamike, humiliated by life, drifts into the wilderness of lost souls and eventually kills himself, it is because the society he labours so much to illuminate merely sneers at him and his artistic productions. He takes his life stoically because he no longer feels secure that his knowledge of himself as an excellent artist is countered by his experience of rejection. He kills himself for he no longer wants to remain in the labyrinth of what he is and what he wants to be. So his death is a kind of coup de grace. In Romantic perspective, his death according to Menhennet, "is a permanent removal of the barrier to the enjoyment of the ideal" (The Romantic Movement 68). For Jamike, earthly life subsists on binary opposition between the self and the other. The artist perception of who he is negated by the subversive objective reality. Since what he thinks of himself only exists in the world of the ideal, his death simply annuls that gap between his subjective experience and the objective world of hard facts that seek to submerge him.

The Other Side of the Mask is an arduous illumination of the battle between subjective reality and the vulgarity of the hard facts of objective life in which tension is resolved through the Romantic mechanics of transcendence. The battle is played out within the context of the travails of the artist crystallized in the active artistic life of the character, Jamike. It seems to me that this character is Esiaba Irobi's image of himself - his objectification of his artistic vision and obsession. Anyone who knew Irobi when he was in the country knew that he was a great mind, who had laboured greatly in the farmland of creative soil, producing enormous artistic dividends, without any form of recognition. It may be the sense of lack of recognition that led Irobi to denounce Nigerian citizenship and left the country the time he did. However, numerous intellectual and artistic laurels overseas indicate that Irobi was a superb artist who might have been, for long, a victim of nepotism and subterfuge.

As an illumination of the Romantic tradition, "the play is situated within the province of individual consciousness. In the text, the outward and the inward, the public and the private, action and consciousness coexist in an uneasy, even contradictory, juxtaposition" (Crow 148).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that *The Other Side of the mask* is a humanizing agent. Irobi, through the character of Ziphora, helps us to appreciate the agony that Jamike feels as an artist, a first class sculptor, whose works of art are never appreciated by his own people, because he is not connected to the high and mighty in the society. Jamike is forced by the society to become a shadow of himself. He is forced by the society to deny himself the pleasure of life, the pleasure of marriage, the pleasure of becoming a father and the pleasure of leaving out his artistic dreams to the fullest.

The corrupt society that he finds himself into rapes him of his creative talent. The society rapes him of the confidence that he has in himself. The society makes him to be physically and emotionally weak. The society frustrates him and turns him into a murderer. He has to kill Animalu. He has to kill Ziphora. Finally, he has to kill himself. The international awards that he got posthumously is an indication of the intellectual and artistic greatness, which he has been severally denied by the powers that be in his country due to ideological differences and corruption emanating from his inability to know somebody that knows somebody that can put a word in his favor before the powers that be.

Irobi's *The Other Side of the Mask*, more or less, is a call for those in authority to be just and firm in their decisions, particularly when it comes to the assessment of an individual's effort in different walks of life. Proper assessment should be made without any form of biasness and an award or reward given to the rightfully person that merits it. Leaders or people in authority should not allow their sense of right judgement to be swayed by their desires for material gifts. They should not allow their emotions to entangle with their duties as arbiters of truth and justice, thereby propelling them to dish out wrong judgement.

Overtly, Irobi uses the character of Jamike and his ordeal in the hands of the jury to let us know the experiences some intellectuals or academics in the university settings are facing when it comes to the assessment of their intellectual and creative outputs and promotion. Whereas in some situations, some academics or Lecturers can be said to have received a fairly good assessment and reward in the past, it can be said that all have received the same favourable assessments and rewards. Many have been denied of fair assessments and rewards because of their religious affiliations, political and ideological affiliations and even because of their ethnic groups.

The Imperative of Humanization as Postulated In Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* and *the Other Side of the Mask*

Our analysis of the *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Other Side of Mask* reveal a lot to us. It helps us first and foremost to understand that nobody is born a bad or an evil person. Every individual is intrinsically good and has the capacity to excel to the highest level of human achievement. The problem that the individual faces that occasionally make him turn his back from his childhood ideals comes from his environment and from the society. If the society he finds himself into becomes unreasonably hostile to him, it brings out the hidden devil inside him. It brings out the animal in him and makes him to change his vision of the society. The society becomes a jungle where he must kill to survive.

This is exactly what plays out in the two under study. The members of the suicide squad in *Hangmen Also Die* are raped by their society. They are emasculated by the political class of their society. They have no option than to turn themselves into animals in a jungle, killing and maiming others for safety and survival. They take laws into their hands, since there is no sense of law in the jungle.

Similarly, in *The Other Side of the Mask*, Jamike feels frustrated when his great artistic achievements can not impress the juries. He works tirelessly, denying himself of both physical and emotional pleasures, without anything coming out from it. The intellectual community that he finds himself into rapes him. The society denies him of becoming the “next”, despite his constant dreams and visions with regard to creative excellence and rewards. In the midst of waiting perpetually to become the “next”, the animal in him is freed and he turns himself into a murderer, killing Animalu and Ziphora, who he perceives to have failed him in one way or the other. At the end, he kills himself.

In a situation like this, humanization becomes imperative. We have to question ourselves greatly. We have to intentionally introspect here. First, the tragic characters in the two drama texts, do they deserve their fate? Is the death of the members of the suicide squad by hanging justifiable? Is the tragic end of Jamike's life justifiable? If yes, why? If not, why not?

Moving a little bit beyond this, we can still reflect on how many suicide squad we have intentionally created in our society in recent times due to our greed and our appetite for material things. We have to intentionally meditate on how many Jamikes that we have populated in our university environment in particular and in our society in general.

The earlier we start treating people around us as humans and relating with them as such, the better for us. They earlier we start treating people around us with justice and fairness, the better for each and everyone

of us. We should be fair in the distribution of the scarce socioeconomic resources. We should not exploit and dehumanize others, because of our greed and insatiable appetite for material things.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is cristally clear that drama is indeed a humanizing agent. This is seen from the way and manner in which Esiaba Irobi through his dramatic works, *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Other Side of Mask* draws our attentions to murderous intents and actions of the suicide squad and Jamike respectively, which are necessitated by the corrupt society that they found themselves into. Irobi's overall intent in the dramatic works is not necessarily to x-ray the societal evils, but to give us insights on the need to emphasize with characters: the Suicide Squad and Jamike, and soberly find reason to treat them as humans, who deserve justice and equity from the society that denies them of their humanity. Through these dramatic works, we come to understand that if we must grow and operate as a society, we have to identify the humanity of others, relate with them as such with a true sense of justice and fairness. Where we fail in this, in Irobi's perception, we will be creating a jungle that harbours animals as human beings, instead of a society that is filled with peace loving humans.

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