

# **RADICALISM AND VIOLENCE AS IMPERATIVES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *HANGMEN ALSO DIE* AS A METAPHOR FOR NIGERIA'S SITUATION**

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## **Abstract**

The research explores the recurrent controversies surrounding radicalism and violence as imperatives for social change. Therefore, the problem of this study emanates from the preferred concept of social and revolutionary change: violent or peaceful processes to change. Since this concept is linked to leadership, the researcher critically examines the themes of leadership failure and the resultant radicalism and violence which stem from the lopsided relationship between the leaders and the led, the privileged and the less-privileged, as explored in Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* which is used as a paradigm to discuss radicalism and violence as inevitable reactions of the masses to insensitive leadership. The justification behind this research work is hinged on the fact that not much critical attention has been paid to the selected play from the standpoint of the failure of leadership giving rise to expressions of radical views by citizens who feel marginalized, oppressed and estranged by the system and the resultant violence in their determination to confront their oppressors and effect positive changes. Case study and content analysis approaches of the qualitative research method were adopted by the researcher for data collection and analysis. The primary source of data is *Hangmen Also Die* while the secondary sources are books, journals, magazines, and newspapers from the library and the internet. Marxist philosophy of a classless society provides the foothold for the thematic and ideological position of the playwright whose work has been used in this study since Marxism contends that the masses,

otherwise referred to as the exploited class are inevitably locked in perpetual conflict with the bourgeoisie who own and control the means of production, thereby continuing the exploitation of the masses. Finally, the work recommends responsible leadership as a necessary antidote to radical agitations and violence by the masses. It also presents drama and theatre as tools for conscientization, reformation, transformation and national development.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria has been grappling with violence exemplified by demonstrations, riots and even agitations for self-determination from major ethnic groups. Armed conflicts, banditry, kidnappings, assassinations or killings, most times of hapless victims which the country has been recording over the years daily, are outcomes of frustrating experiences of citizens as a result of what they perceive as the insensitivity of the ruling class. This has, therefore, led some pundits, especially African playwrights, to hold the view that violence in its different shades or forms rocking and threatening to destabilize the country, constitutes a reaction from the masses who feel marginalized and short-changed by an entrenched system that thrives on injustice, exploitation and corruption.

*Hangmen Also Die* is metaphorical in the sense that it graphically captures contemporaneous socio-political happenings in present-day Nigeria. Radical playwrights and other writers, including those in the social sciences, contend that governments in Africa are to be held responsible for the radicalism and violence rocking third-world countries, including Nigeria. They have, through their intellectual outputs, made conscious efforts to x-ray the exploitation and injustices that are unleashed on the hapless masses in various shades by political jobbers who wear the toga of leaders. These pundits are of the view that radicalism and violence exemplified by agitations, street demonstrations, riots and even armed conflicts are reactions from the masses who are insensitively

cheated by the same system that empowers just a few individuals over and above the majority without considering merit.

In recent times, Nigeria has not had a single day of reprieve from violence which the country grapples with in one form or another, because the masses are held captive by an unjust and exploitative system put in place by a small clique of individuals who feel that the only way to change the pitiable situation in which they find themselves is to confront their oppressors, using the twin weapons of radicalism and violence. Radicalism or expressions of radical views by knowledgeable individuals in the society therefore, oftentimes, provide the window for violence to erupt. This is the reason most radicals are labelled and treated as deviants by governments. The labelling theory propounded by Edwin Lemert but extended by the work of Howard Becker has Lauer and Lauer stating that:

According to Howard Becker, deviance is not a particular type of behaviour but is the consequence of some particular behaviour being defined as deviant... the deviant is simply someone who has been successfully labelled an outsider. To say “successfully” labelled implied, among other things, that everyone who behaves in a particular way will not be labelled. It also implies that some people may be unfairly labelled, as having broken no rules. (23)

Generally, as often as acts of violence resulting from expressions of radical views occur, society experiences loss of lives and property. For instance, the October 2020 radical agitations and protests against alleged police brutality tagged *END SARS*, which reverberated across the length and breadth of Nigeria, is a case in point. Several youths were felled by live bullets from the barrels of the guns of Nigeria’s security personnel deployed by the authorities to put down the protests while property worth millions of Naira was destroyed in the process. Before the 2020 *END SARS* protests, Nigeria had the 2012 protests championed by some human rights activists like radical Lawyers Femi Falana and Josephine

Odumakin. The protests staged to extract a rescission of the policy of removal of fuel subsidies from the then Federal Government of ex-President Goodluck Jonathan eventually snowballed into riots. Again, on August 2, 2023, millions of Nigerians from every nook and cranny of the country led by the Nigerian Labour Congress took to the streets in protest against economic hardships occasioned by the sudden removal of fuel subsidy by the President Bola Tinibu-led Federal Government. There are other crises in various parts of the country such as the *Boko Haram* insurgency in the North. The South East is not spared either as businesses and their owners continue to groan as a result of constant “sit-at-home” orders allegedly issued by the *Independent People of Biafra* (IPOB), an alleged separatist group, which allegedly claims to be fighting for the restoration of the *Republic of Biafra*. Those who allegedly made attempts to defy the “sit-at-home” order of IPOB paid dearly for their stubbornness in different forms, including death. One Simon Ekpa, often referred to in media circles as the “self-acclaimed ‘Biafran’ Prime Minister” is the latest dramatis personae in the macabre drama playing out in that region of Nigeria, with him dishing out “sit-at-home” orders that are meant to last for several days. These agitations have numerous casualties and debilitating socio-economic effects on the country.

The country’s recording of mishaps after mishaps daily has been blamed on the insensitive nature of our leaders who do nothing to douse the feelings of discontent and disillusionment which they create in the people through their anti-people policies and actions or activities. Commenting on this feeling of discontent and disillusionment by greedy, insensitive and clueless leaders, Nwosu states that “the rulers having denuded the entire landscape of the nation through the exploitation of its natural resources and brutalization of the entire human race, especially the youths, leave the nation with high rates of unemployment, starvation and hunger, favouritism and mediocrity...” (17)

The opinion expressed by Nwosu closely aligns with that of LaPalombara who states that "... all around us ... we find evidence that political systems and governments, from cities to nations, fail to keep violence within decent bounds. These governments often instigate and perpetuate violence..." (5), hence it is correct for one to assert that our leaders are not sensitive and sympathetic to the plight of the masses. Similarly, Iyayi notes in his book entitled *Violence* that we have a prevalence of crime and violence in our society because our leaders confiscate and deny their citizens the opportunities to actualize themselves and realize their life-fulfilling goals. He states that "... acts of violence are committed when a man is denied the opportunity of being educated, of getting a job, of feeding himself and his family properly, of getting medical attention cheaply, quickly and promptly". (185)

Thus, it is the frustration resulting from being denied opportunities that leads the oppressed masses to resort to radicalism thus rationalizing in their frustration that radicalism and violence are veritable tools at their disposal which they can use to bring about desired changes in their situation. After all the masses understand rightly that radicalism is all about a belief in radical ideas and principles with the sole aim of bringing about thorough, complete and far-reaching socio-political changes in a system. The instances of radicalism and violence in *Hangmen Also Die*, the play selected for the study, point to the fact that radicalism and violence as catalysts or imperatives for social change are characterized in the words of Saint Gbilekaa as "... the adoption of the collective concept of heroism, the negation of a fatalistic view of life, the debunking and exposure of the mechanisms of capitalism which seek to perpetuate the status quo..." (13)

Essentially, this study seeks to establish the fact that the feeling of frustration that is a consequence of the government's failure or sometimes, outright refusal to live up to the people's expectations as well as respond to non-violent and peaceful agitations and approaches by the masses often, lead to radicalism

and violence expressed through acts of aggression, disobedience and confrontation by the oppressed masses. The average Nigerian citizen has been wreathing under the heavy burden of ensuring daily sustenance for himself and his dependents, occasioned by the sharp increase in the pump price of petrol which the government has made attempts to pin on the removal of fuel subsidy, since May 29, 2023. Two months later, the government has yet to put measures in place to cushion the harsh or difficult living conditions which the policy has inflicted on Nigerians. The study seeks to support Irobi's recommendations and justification of radicalism and violence as veritable instruments of liberation which the oppressed or the downtrodden can use to overthrow and dismantle an undesirable socio-political system. These twin tools of liberation have proved to be effective in revolutionising societies of the world where they have been tested.

### **Change Through Radicalism and Violence**

Social change is transformation; however, according to the Institute of Social Sciences, there are "... methods of a socialist transformation of human society" (18). There are conservative and radical approaches to social change. Marxism is a major theory that supports the radical approach to social change. Broadly speaking, socialism which may be regarded as Marxism-Leninism changed the philosophical outlook of social change, especially Marx's theory of scientific socialism. This theory is "... inseparably linked with revolutionary practice", (Institute of Social Sciences, 19). What necessitates radicalism and violence in the process of any social change is the insistence of the exploiter class to continue to exploit the masses. Therefore, Marxism insists that social change through radicalism and violence, according to the Institute of Social Sciences, requires "... Revolutionary unity of all working-class people irrespective of their religion, nationality and race, the formation of local working class as an embodiment of the revolutionary will..." (335)

The thematic and ideological standpoints expressed by the playwright in the play derive from the Marxist approach to revolution. The Marxist ideology about class struggle is, therefore, unarguably the philosophical thread that runs through *Hangmen Also Die* thus providing an invincible foothold for the ideologies expressed in the play.

Marxism is a theory about political and economic changes in society as a result of the unending opposition between the two dominant social classes. The conflict theory as developed by Karl Marx examines the relationship in terms of basic inequalities between the privileged, wealthy class, otherwise, the bourgeoisie and the poor class of the masses, also referred to as the proletariat. The bourgeoisie who are also referred to as the capitalists, dominate and exploit the masses because they are in control of the means to produce wealth. This is responsible for the continuous class struggles between the two classes. This struggle is basically, responsible for the prevalence of radicalism and violence which society has continued to experience. Commenting on the Marxist theory, Henslin opines that:

... in each society, some small group controls the means of production and exploits those who do not. In industrialized societies, the struggle is between the bourgeoisie small group of capitalists who own the means to produce wealth and the proletariat mass of workers exploited by the bourgeoisie. The capitalists also control politics so that when workers rebel, the capitalists can call on the powers of the state to control them. (27)

The Marxist theory, in summary, views a society as consisting of two groups who are in constant competition for scarce and limited resources. Hence, Henslin, quoting Robert Merton, states that the feeling of discontent created in the masses by the exploitation and marginalization to which the privileged class subjects them elicits different responses from the masses, one of which is rebellion. Rebellion as a reaction from the masses implies that the short-

changed masses when confronted with limited opportunities and possibilities “reject both goals and legitimate means of achieving such goals”. Lauer and Lauer state that rebellion is: “... not only a rejection of both goals and means but also a commitment to replace them with a different system... and the rebels will become political radicals pressing for structural changes in what they believe is a debilitating economic system”. (20)

Drawing an inference from the writings of Robert Rotberg, who is a renowned pundit on terrorism, Achebe states that a state such as Nigeria is usually overwhelmed by radicalism and violence when such a state or country “... is unable to perform its duties (to its citizens) on several levels”. Achebe makes further attempts to explain that radicalism and violence occur when the masses realize that the powers that be exploited and deprived them of their rights and opportunities. He states that “...Economic deprivation and corruption produce and exacerbate financial and social inequities in a population which in turn fuel political instability... (250)

Radicalism as a catalyst for social change is marked by a complete departure from what is considered “usual” or “normal”. Radicalism and violence as tools for social change should be able to threaten the establishment and shake up the entire system.

### **Indicators of Leadership Failures in Nigeria and the Need for Radicalism and Violence in *Hangmen Also Die***

*Hangmen Also Die* is a play that captures very lucidly, the crises that beset the Niger Delta region of contemporary Nigeria. The play opens to reveal the defiant faces of seven young men who have been condemned to death by hanging for the murder of a commissioner known as Chief Isokipiri Erokosima. The seven condemned young men are members of a terrorist gang and group known as the *Suicide Squad*. They are Waritimi Tamuno otherwise known as MORTUARY, Atiemie Waribo (MOSHE DAYAN), Labomie Ailagoa (AYOTOLLAH KHOMEINI), Tekena Iketubosin (HYDROCHLORIC ACID), Konji Amakarama



(TETANUS), Fubara Igonikon (ACCIDENTAL DISCHARGE) and Tarila Iganima (RIP).

These young men acting on information from Tamara, a mother to Dimeari, a member of the *Squad*, that the three million naira approved to be paid to the people of *Izon* State by the Federal Government as compensation for the oil spillage that has ruined their sources of livelihood which are mainly fishing and farming, has been confiscated and diverted into Chief Erokosima's private pockets. On the strength of this information, the *Squad* storms the venue of Chief Erokosima's chieftaincy coronation organized and sponsored with the stolen funds, abducts and takes him to their hideout in a bush clearing, tortures him and eventually executes him by hanging. According to Tamara:

Tamara: But there is a man in my local government area, a commissioner for that matter, Chief Erokosima by name, who is being crowned the Amatemeso 1 of *Izon* State today. This man is a distinguished thief. He confiscated our money. Stole our 3 million naira... 3 million naira compensation money which the Federal Government gave to the citizens of *Izon* State to balm our minds against the crude oil spillage which ravaged our farms and wrecked our lives. This man seized it and is using it to crown himself today. (58)

*Hangmen Also Die*, depicts several indicators of failure of leadership which have turned Nigeria into a Hobbesian jungle where life is short, nasty and brutish and where the unwritten rule is survival of the fittest. One of these indicators of leadership failure which the play highlights is corruption. Corruption is a monster which has been majorly responsible for the stunted economic growth and general underdevelopment of Nigeria. As depicted in the play, it is brazenly perpetrated in varied forms by the leadership class and their cronies.

The anti-corruption agencies set up by the Federal Government, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), etc, all appear helpless and handicapped in discharging their primary charge of tackling cases of corruption at all levels. This is basically because, the more efforts are made to tackle this monster and apprehend perpetrators, the more sophisticated the methods of perpetration become. The public is inundated with stories of names of dead public servants or sometimes, even the ones who have never existed anywhere in any record of public service, popping up in governments' payrolls, thus resulting in public funds disappearing into private pockets. At present, efforts by some notable and "respected" Nigerians are on to persuade the President to probe the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited. The question is, what are they afraid of? It is not the common man on the street that device means of pocketing these funds that are dubiously taken from government coffers. Rather, it is the dishonest or criminally inclined government officials and political jobbers who have access to the necessary government facilities such as computers, store vouchers, biro, erasers, corrective fluid, et cetera, which such government officials can use to doctor and change official records. This researcher is certain that before now Nigerians did not understand what it means to pay or remove subsidies on petroleum products, especially the premium motor spirit, which for several months preceding the February 2023 elections were scarce and beyond the reach of the masses. The controversies surrounding claims of payment of subsidies by the government are such that the Nigerian public suspects that the government has never been honest with the people as far as payments of subsidies on petroleum products were concerned because of corruption; hence some Nigerians doubt if there are such payments at all, except on paper. Let us also not forget news reports of millions of school children being fed by the government in its *Feed School Children* programme. According to

an online report of Daily Trust newspapers anchored by Idowu Isamotu, as of October 8, 2022, the government of Nigeria claimed that it had spent a whopping one hundred million dollars to feed ten million children in Nigeria. Yet the impact of this supposed intervention is far from being felt. Therefore, one seriously doubts how true this story of having expended one hundred million dollars to drive the programme is.

Nigeria has been in the vice grip of corruption since the time of the first republic. In 2014, the then Attorney General of the Federation, Mohammed Adoke, was reported by Tell Magazine in its April 7, 2014 edition, of initiating commendable efforts in collaboration with the United States of America to repatriate funds that ran into billions of dollars allegedly stolen and deposited in foreign bank accounts by the late General Sani Abacha, Nigeria's former Head of State. The Attorney General was quoted as explaining that the overall aim of the collaboration between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the United States Government as reported by Anayochukwu Agbo, was to ensure that:

... Nigeria as the "victim state" can get the forfeited assets which had been converted to funds, repatriated to Nigeria to fund development projects for the benefit of the people in accordance with the dictates of Chapter IV of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption... (34)

Since 2014, funds allegedly stashed away in foreign bank accounts by the late General have continued to be repatriated in instalments to the country. In its August 23, 2022, online report anchored by Ameh Ejekwonyilo, Premium Times Nigeria reports that:

The Nigerian government... signed a fresh agreement for the return of over \$ 23 million looted by the late dictator Sani Abacha. The Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami represented the federal government at the agreement signing ceremony held at the Federal Ministry of Justice in Abuja...Mary

Leonard, U.S. ambassador to Nigeria, signed the agreement on behalf of her country. Mr Malami... said the decision to return the fresh tranche totalling \$23,439,724, which he termed 'Abacha 5', was a product of a series of tripartite negotiations between Nigeria, the U.S. Department of Justice and the UK National Crime Agency, NCA... (np)

*Hangmen Also Die* is no doubt an attempt by a Nigerian playwright to expose and combat corruption in the system. The play depicts contemporaneous socio-political happenings in Nigeria. It raises tangibly, salient and crucial leadership questions, thereby portraying the leadership class as grossly corrupt, exploitative and insensitive to the plight of the masses. The play shows very clearly, how the government has conspired with big multinational companies like Shell to systematically destroy the environment in Nigeria's riverine communities in the Niger Delta through pollution arising mainly from oil exploring activities of such Oil Companies operating in the region. The disastrous consequence of this situation is that the helpless and hapless people of *Izon* State become impoverished beyond redemption as their natural endowments are destroyed to the extent that they can no longer make a decent living out of the natural environment. That is the pitiable situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria today. The famous *Ogoni 9* led by renowned writer and environmentalist, Ken Sarowiwa, were executed by hanging on November 10, 1995, by the dictatorial military regime of General Sani Abacha for agitating and fighting for a better and safer environment for the people of the region. As captured in *Hangmen Also Die*, the hardest hit are fishermen. Tekinni, once a fisherman, recalls with nostalgia, the peace and calmness that pervaded the environment before the pollution. He states that:

Tekinni: I was once a fisherman. A fisherman living by the power of my paddle and the weight of my net. My life was the sea and it sustained me and my family with the fishes I caught day by day. I knew the joy and calm, the peace of

mind of sailing out unto the belly of the ocean to rescue from the depths of its gullet what belongs to man... Sometimes, I paddled to the horizon where the sky merges with the sea and everything is blue. There, I saw the navel of the rainbow! There... I saw the ceiling of heaven! There... I saw the face of God! And... I was happy. A very happy man; a joyful man; a contented man... (8)

Arising from the pollution and degradation of the environment is the destruction of the *Izon* people's main source of livelihood. The chronic and abject poverty resulting from this deplorable situation leads to existential disharmony exemplified by extreme destitution, illness and all kinds of disabilities among the people. One of the numerous casualties of the environmental pollution is Ibiaye whose two sons are sent to their early graves by the oil exploring activities of oil companies operating in the region. His eyesight is also affected thus turning him into a blind man. He recounts how it all happened:

Ibiaye: It was in the morning. We woke up to see the sea heaving. The sea was roaring, its face black with anger. The sea was boiling. On its blue surface was something black. Something thick and pungent; something like mud. But it was oily, oily like petroleum jelly. It surged like lava from the armpit of the ocean until it embalmed our little creeks. Covered it; conquered it. Condoned off the mouth of the freshwater spring from which we daily drink. Our plants began to die; and our roots to rot. Our seeds shrivelled. We fled; me and my children... in canoes. But somewhere before Opukiri, our canoe capsized in an ambush of water hyacinths. Everything we own was lost except our lives... We swam onto the shore. But little did we know that the water had been poisoned by the film of rancid crude oil... On the first day, my eyes were itching... three days later I could no longer see the sunlight... (71)

The playwright has also striven to enlighten the audience that the failure of leaders to meet the rising expectations of the masses by, for example, creating employment opportunities for the teeming population of youths is mainly responsible for the emergence of all kinds of groups, including the militant ones, that are unleashing mayhem and causing destruction everywhere, all in their attempts to send signals to the powers that be that they are fed up with the pitiable situation in which they find themselves. Some members of the *Suicide Squad* recount what job-seeking youths go through in their quest for employment:

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

**ACID:** We were there several times a week.

**R.I.P:** From eight in the morning to eight in the night.

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

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

**R.I.P:** And there, on that sweating Friday afternoon, we formed this outfit: Suicide Squad: so if today we have turned to violence as the only weapon to redeem our destiny, redeem our fate, our future and our manhood, it is because...

**DAYAN:** We have no place in the politics of this nation. (31)

Arising from the frustrating experiences of these youths, the *Suicide Squad* decides to undertake the task of ridding the society of corrupt leaders who use their positions in government to rupture the collective destiny of the masses. Despite the sufferings of the masses, some of their leaders have continued to celebrate and throw parties with the public funds that they have stolen. The *Squad* finds this insensitive conduct of leaders irksome and then decides that the time has come to make an example of at least one rogue. Having gathered the necessary intelligence about Chief Erekosima's coronation, the *Squad* courageously storms and

overruns the venue of Chief's coronation disrupts the ceremony, takes him hostage and finally assassinates him. The reason for this audacious move by the *Squad* as explained by Yekinni, one of the characters in the play is corruption. He states that:

Yekinni: ... Sometime ago, the Federal Government gave the citizens of this State... the sum of three million naira as compensation money for the oil spillage which has ruined their farms, their homes and their lives... Chief Isokipiri Erekosima, a commissioner for Local Government, Rural Development and Chieftaincy Affairs, connived with his councillors and local government chairmen to confiscate the 3 million naira... No single citizen, no matter how wretched, got a single kobo. (13)

By murdering Chief Erekosima, the *Squad* successfully sends a clear signal that corrupt and insensitive leaders, irrespective of their brand names, whose stock-in-trade is to deny the masses their God-given opportunities to actualize themselves, will not be tolerated, accommodated or spared.

The play also criticizes the practice of recycling old and spent politicians who have nothing fresh or new to contribute to governance. This is another indicator of leadership failure that has characterised Nigeria's political system since independence. The same people who have been in leadership positions since 1960 when the country gained its political independence from Britain are still there. When they get retired either by old age or death, their sons and daughters take over and continue from where they left off. The simple reason is that the desire of these spent political jobbers is to continue to dominate the country's political space, thereby denying the youths the opportunity to contribute to the development of the country in whichever way they can, using their God-given talents. According to two members of the *Suicide Squad*:

ACID: The Constituent Assembly is filled with the faces of ancient chimpanzees.

R.I.P: We have no chance to help in shaping the destiny of this nation... We are not even given a chance to contribute our quota... we have been marginalized out of existence... (32)

The play condemns very strongly, the inability of Nigerian leaders to elevate the masses out of poverty and squalor even when such leaders are notorious for financial debauchery and squander mania. These are leaders who travel to Europe and other parts of the World for even the flimsy excuse of going for medical check-ups for a toothache. Yet the resources that ought to be used to develop and equip our hospitals are plundered and embezzled. Recently, the media have been awash with reports of the President of Nigeria's Senate, Godswill Akpabio who confirmed in a live television coverage that Nigeria's leadership class reeks of corruption with his now famous utterance that "a token has been sent to your bank accounts..." and then when he realized that he had goofed, he quickly changed it to "a prayer has been sent to your emails". For how long will these people continue to exploit, short-change and daringly attempt to deceive the masses? However, it is instructive to note that this "token" is alleged to be a certain amount of money for each Senator for their *Sallah* break. This is happening in a country where the masses cannot feed well because of galloping inflation that has hit every household in the country very hard which is a result of the mismanagement of the country's resources by the country's clueless leadership class. Painting a lucid picture of the situation of things in the country, the *Suicide Squad* states that:

R.I.P: Here we are ...  
DAYAN: A generation of young men and women who have nowhere to turn to.  
ACID: We are not sure of where our next meals are coming from...  
DISCHARGE: A generation born into an epoch when nature gave us mineral wealth.



KHOMENI: Mineral wealth with which we could have built this nation and fortified the future for ourselves and posterity for four generations to come. But some wretched souls squandered the riches.

The mission of the *Suicide Squad* is to sanitize society and weed out the bad eggs. The execution of Chief Erokosima is therefore meant to indicate or underscore the unwillingness of youths whose future is constantly under the threat of being ruptured by the older generation of leaders who have refused to quit the stage but have continued to pillage the economy of the Nigerian State, that corrupt leaders will at some point be made to pay the supreme prize. Their actions and utterances indicate that they are completely for a just Nigerian society and the tools that are available to them to achieve their commendable objectives are radicalism and violence. ACID who is a member of the *Squad* justifies their actions when he states thus:

ACID: ... Terrorism is a legitimate tactic of all downtrodden people seeking to combat oppressive governments... revolutions are always based on terrorism. Revolutions are always used on violence. On bloodshed and terror. Revolutions are never achieved by holding hands and singing “we shall overcome”. Revolutions are never achieved that way because a revolution is not a dinner party, it is not a disco competition, it is not ideological romance. It is an act of insurrection where one party overthrows the other. It occurs as a result of the accumulated grievances of the common man. It explodes like gunpowder. (25)

The playwright also explains that hunger, starvation and frustration resulting from outright and deliberate denial of opportunities which the people are systematically made to suffer by the leadership class through various retrogressive and anti-people’s policies and programs over the years, must at some point lead to violent

confrontations between the people and their leaders. ACID states that:

ACID: Revolutions do not start in the head. They start in the stomach, with starvation and hunger, with marasmus and kwashiorkor, with joblessness. Revolutionaries do not grovel. They topple. They do not grin and laugh, they frown because what they are facing is the slime, the rot, the maggots, the viruses, the nauseating residue of a consumptive society! (26)

The playwright highlights instances of radicalism to demonstrate that poor government officials who are also affected by the wickedness of leaders can sometimes muster the courage to defy the authorities in support of the actions of their fellow oppressed citizens. It is radical of Yekini, the official hangman of the *Izon* State to blatantly refuse to carry out the death sentence passed on members of the *Squad* which is to die by hanging because he is convinced that members of the *Squad* do not deserve to die. It is instructive to once again recall Yekini's statement on page 13 of the play:

... Some time ago, the Federal Government gave the citizens of this State... the sum of three million naira compensation money for the oil spillage which has ruined their farms, their homes and their lives. But the man they killed, one Chief Isokpiri Erekosima ... connived with his Counselors and Local Government Chairmen to confiscate the three million naira. No single citizen, no matter how wretched got a single kobo. That was when these young men stepped in.

The above statement by Yekini is the playwright's subtle endorsement of violence as a protest tool which the masses can adopt in combating an oppressive system and consequently, free themselves from the vice grip of roguish, nepotistic, myopic and insensitive leaders, the likes of which Nigeria and indeed the whole of Africa have in large numbers. Military Coups are being staged

all over Africa presently to flush out bad and failed leaders who have overstayed their welcome: Niger Republic, Gabon mainly because of widespread discontent among the suffering masses of these African countries. Therefore, Yekini views the *Squad* as a group of determined and patriotic young men who should not be punished for championing agitations for a better and sanitized society.

The same Yekini laments the poor condition of service that the Government is not keen on improving. He queries thus: “Why hasn’t the government protected me from poverty all these years? Why has it not promoted me from Hangman to Chief Warder? ... Where I live I have no water, I have no light. The stream is two miles away. I have no car”. (16)

This character’s lamentations aptly describe the abject poverty that has come to characterize the daily existence of the average civil servant in today’s Nigeria. Yet, the same civil servants are witnesses to the flamboyant lifestyles of their leaders, sponsored and supported by the leaders’ easy and unrestricted corrupt access to state funds.

## **Conclusion**

From the analysis of the selected play, it is obvious that radicalism and violence are the aftermaths of the activities of irresponsible, exploitative and insensitive leaders who are not giving up on exploiting the masses. The oppressed masses, like the proverbial goat which bites when pushed to the wall, oftentimes, resort to radicalism and violence as instruments of confrontation which they can use to dismantle an oppressive socio-political system. Thus, it is apt to state or conclude that the masses whose impoverished state is the outcome of the exploitation they suffer from the leadership class are like the crocodile which is usually tolerant and patient but bites fatally when it has to. The play has, therefore, shown that there is a limit to which the oppressed can endure unpalatable situations especially when the leadership class is not willing to

make sacrifices as much as they often urge and expect the masses to. Therefore, it is dangerous to ignore the suffering masses even when they are not complaining openly for too long otherwise a consuming explosion with a circumference that cannot be determined by even the government and its agencies when it occurs, is imminent.

Drama is a tool for conscientization, liberation and change. The researcher therefore, drawing inference from the Marxist standpoint as expressed in *Hangmen Also Die*, thinks that the society will continue to have upheavals so long as leaders continue to fail in their duties and obligations to the masses. The researcher therefore concludes by recommending that the African dramatist should not fail to use his drama as a tool for liberation, reformation and change as we all strive towards attaining a better society. This way, the image of the theatre as a seriously inclined medium of change rather than an entertainment medium would have been enhanced.

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