
SOCIAL REALISM IN AFRICA FICTION: A STUDY OF ESIABA IROBI'S HANGMEN ALSO DIE AND ANASI OBUMNEME'S THE INDISPENSIBLE ACHING TOOTH

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets to look at the social Realism in Africa Fiction as it is dramatized in Esiaba Irobi's Hangmen Also Die and Anasi Obuneme's The Indispensable Aching Tooth. The interest of this study in these plays is centered on corruption which is the key problem portrayed in these playtexts. Corruption gave rises to other problems such as Unemployment, Oppression, Embezzlement, Briber, Religious Segregation, Terrorism, Murder and Cultism. The term social Realism which is the main concept understudy can be defined as a work of art which reveals the truth, which may emphasized the ugly and sordid. It can also be described as a new visual source that creates a desire for people to produce things that look objectively real. Realists believed in the ideology of objective reality and they revolted against exaggerated emotionalism. All these can be said to be found in these two playtexts as it tries to portray all the ills affecting the society as it is written without embellishment. Thus, this paper used the two fiction texts to show that Africa writers do not write in vacuum but they write to show various aspect of Social Realism in African society.

Keywords: *social realism, fiction, Africa fiction and corruption.*

Introduction

Literature can be defined as an imaginary work of art. The New Webster Dictionary of the English Language defines it as "Written compositions in prose or verse especially of lasting quality or artistic merits". It is literary composition or a kind of writing which is imaginative and which uses the medium of language to create form, beauty and meaning. Literature, unlike other kinds of writing presents the illusion of reality. It is an art but unlike other forms of art such as painting, drawing, sculpture and music. It presents a more realistic view of life and uses spoken or written language as a medium of

expression. Thus, literature can be rendered orally or in writing. Literature only imitates the real life situations which can also be seen a realism. For a literary work to have effect on the society, its main purpose must be focused on the people or audience.

Every good literary work must be able to portray and interpret the sociological, economical, political and cultural issues affecting the lives of that contemporary society. This simply means that a good literary work should be able to show to the society the occurrence of the past and also be able to give meaning to what is shown to them in order to cause a change positively or negatively.

The main concept of this work which is social realism can be defined as the visual arts or literature which depicts the society as they appear in our everyday life without embellishment. The term is also used to describe works of art which in revealing the truth and may emphasize the ugly or sordid. Truth and accuracy are the main goals of many realist writers. Thus, Esiaba's *Hangmen Also Die* and Anasi Obumneme's *The Indispensable Aching Tooth* use the medium of drama to expose all the ills of the society. These writers focus their attention on the logical issues that reflect some ugly sides of life in a given society. They therefore, use these medium to educate, conscientize and also correct certain errors, events, problems and inspiration of our society.

The relevance of these realist writers is their ability to really portray the social reality of their contemporary society. Lukacs, a literary critic, sees a successful work of art as one which provides "an image of reality in which the oppositions of appearance and essence of the individual case and the general rule of the immediacy of the senses and abstract conceptualization are resolved". A responsible literary writer cannot afford to close his eyes on the problems affecting his contemporary society and write about the beauty of nature and when there are more pressing issues at stake to be discussed or talked about.

Methodology

This paper looked at social realism in Africa fiction using Irobi Esiaba's *Hangmen Also Die* and Anasi Obumneme's *The indispensable Aching Tooth*.

These two fictional texts can be regarded as being realist plays even though the setting of both texts are not real but they fit into the Africa setting. Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* is based on an event that took place in Port Harcourt about seven assassins were pronounced judgment by Justice Amakiri for the brutal murder of Chief Isikipiri Erekosima of Kalabiri. The Anasi's *The Indispensable Aching Tooth* is based on the event that happened between the beggars and the Head of Department of Hygiene at Guzo.

This paper shows how these two authors in their texts really depicts the level of corruption in our contemporary Africa society. A society where the poor is getting poorer and the rich is getting richer, a society of class division of the upper class and the lower class. So, these writers can be seen as the realist writers because they used their playtexts to depict the society without embellishment. This paper shows how Irobi's text and Anasi's text bring out all ills affecting Africa society. It is from the above that this paper critically analyzed the two playtexts to show that African writers are not just writing in emptiness but writing to show social realism in their fiction works.

SOCIAL REALISM IN IROBI ESIABA'S *HANGMEN ALSO DIE*

Hangmen Also Die was written by Esiaba Irobi who is born in Nigeria and

have lived in Britain and USA. He studied at the University of Nigeria, Sheffield, Leeds and holds a B. A in English/Drama, M.A in comparative literature, his other play, *Cemetery Road*, won the prestigious world Drama Trust Award for playwriting in 1992. His other published plays include: *The colour of Rusting Gold*, *Why the Vultures Head is Naked* etc. Thus, in his *Hangmen Also Die*, Irobi acknowledges that African fiction really reflect the social relationship of our time and it is part and parcel of our changing society. The problems affecting the African society which Irobi discussed in his playtext includes; Unemployment, Oppression, Embezzlement, poor standard of education. Terrorism and cultism. On the issue of unemployment, youth are usually the victims of circumstances in our African society. These young men who right from school had nursed the ambition of a better life and also how to affect their society positively but instead, they are being confronted with frustration as a result of unemployment which made them wild and brutal. Irobi gave them names like RIP, Mortuary, ACID, Dayan, Tetanus, Khomein to really show how deadily and brutal they are to their society RIP who is the leader of the gang narrates his ordeal, as the leader of the squad and also his qualification.

... Tarila Iganima
alias RIP.

I have a B. A in
sociology. But as you know
unemployment
starts with the social
science, so I have been pacing the
streets with bleeding
heels in search of a job for the past

eight years. But as
you can see; I am gainfully
employed. (P.35)

These men have been so frustrated that they
have an anthem that talks about their life.

We have no homes,
no love, no cares; no compassion for
self, friend or foe.....
we have no place, no spot, no piece of
ground, no plot of
land, no solid earth to stand upon.

we are murderous
vampires, hangmen, out
laws...

we have the license
to Kill, we have no rag to
salute in

the name of a flag.
No anthem to murmur like a
murderous

mantra composed in
foreign language. no pledge
to recite

like parrots dirging
on an empty stomach. We
are brilliant, gifted,

talented, ambitious,
and industrious And
Unemployed. (P. 36)

Irobi used these characters to really depict
an African Youth who had lost moral
responsibility as a result of frustration and
hunger.

On the issue of oppression, this playtext
therefore depicts an African society where
there is complete oppression by the upper
class to the lower class. Yekinni who is a
victim of this case narrates his experience
as he is asked to leave his job as a
fisherman to do a job, his brother in-law
describes as a better job. He narrates his
experience.

... one Saturday, I remember very well, in 1965, that superintendent, that pekeletubo Daminagbo, that obtuse being shaped like a water pot Came to my stilt hut at forcados and said to me Yekinni, my brother-in-law, “I don find job for you! Better job, Government job. Warden’s job”. (P.8)

Irobi therefore uses his playtext to depict a society which is suffering from the problem of terrorism in the hands of so-called leaders who promised to protect but rather they destroy. One of the youths used by Dr. Ogbansiegbe said;

... we are just tools in Dr. Ogbansiegbe’s hands. Spanners and hammers in the hands of a political Mechanic ... (P. 28)

Irobi’s *Hangmen Also Die* is therefore a playtext that tries to depict a system that has failed us and has given us false hope. What this playtext portrays is not so new or isolated but it is larger than life and threatening to destroy the contemporary African society.

SOCIAL REALISM IN ANASI OBUMNEME’S *THE INDISPENSABLE ACHING TOOTH*

The Indispensable Aching Tooth was written by Anasi Obumneme in 2006. He was trained as a Theatre Artist at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The playwright tried to reflect on the suffering

of the poor masses in Nigeria and in essence to educate the masses on their right as individuals so that the contemporary African society will be a classless society of equal right and privileges.

Thus, as social realism is defined as a visual art that depict the society as they appear in our everyday life without embellishment. Realism believes in the ideology of objective reality and they revolted against exaggerated emotionalism. This playtext practically reflect on the incidence that happens in our contemporary African society as the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. The main goals of the realist writer is truth and accuracy. This playtext can therefore be regarded as a realist play of our contemporary African society. The playtext is set in Guzo village. The playwright therefore depicts a society whereby the rich who were once poor not aware of the saying “No condition is permanent”. Anasi used the beggars as victims to shows that their condition can not remain permanent.

The problems affecting the African society which this playtext portrays are unemployment, oppression, poverty and suppression.

The issue of unemployment which is indeed one of the serious problems affecting the growth of the African society has turned the citizens to be fulltime beggars.

Due to lack of employment opportunities in African, these beggars are left with no other choice than to begging.

Aisha who is the head of beggars points out; “ It hurts some of you to accept that we are beggars”. (p.5). Amina who is also a secretary to the Head of Department of Hygiene understands the plight of the poor beggars says to Mr. Adamu.

They were before you were born, even before

the time of
our great parents.
How would
They live if
they didn't beg? (P. 10)

She understands their condition by saying that if the government is offended by the beggars parading on street, they should create more job opportunities to completely eradicate it.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO TEXTS

The ability of a literary work to be rooted deeply in a people, bears in an inescapable manner the stamp of these distinctions, in the mental and the spiritual world of the people, will be born on the terrain of the best cultural traditions of the people, will be able to express the demands, the struggle, the efforts, the dreams of the people. Such is the literature of social realism which stands close to the efforts and aspirations of the people. The writers in their work show how people depend in the socialist homeland and the gains of the revolution from internal and external enemies, how they struggle to turn the homeland into a powerful and advanced socialist state and how they support the revolutionary movement.

Both playwrights therefore depict all the ills the African society undergo in their society and also offered solutions to these problems. In Anasi's *The Indispensable Aching Tooth* and Esiaba's *Hangmen Also Die*, it is observed that they portrayed almost the same issues of the problems the Africans face in their society. Problems such as unemployment and oppression. Well, having compared the two playtexts, one should understand that African writers write to show social realism in our society some of the social realism depicted in the two play texts analyzed above include unemployment, cultism, corruption, poor

standard of education etc. This paper hereby recommend that while reading African fiction, do have the society in Mind because it is written to describe social realism in the society and in return make some changes which can be positive or negative.

CONCLUSION

From all said, social realism is seen to be an accurate description of the society, a rejection of "literary lying". It therefore means that all the issues pointed out in Esiaba's *Hangmen Also Die* and Anasi's *The Indispensable Aching Tooth* are nothing but accurate description of the African society as it affects the society

without embellishment. As social realism is the newest and the most powerful artistic method of expressing issues affecting the society, these playwrights therefore left no stone unturned be really narrating all the experiences of the lower class in the hands of the higher class. These playwrights made use of various languages to really portray the languages used by both the poor masses and the upper class to really depict the African society. Social realistic writers therefore put forward the true and clear programme of activity for the radical transformation of the society and the liberation of the working masses from exploitation. Finally, one can assert that social realistic writers therefore put forward the true and clear programme of activity for the radical transformation of the society and the liberation of the working class from exploitation.

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