The International Journal of Leadership and Innovative Management (IJLIM)
e-ISSN: 3064-7207 Vol.3 Issue 4 | 2026

Directorial Dynamics and the Realisation of Total Theatre in Esiaba Irobi's Hangmen Also Die

Oto-obong Etido Nkorok
Department of Performing Arts, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

Ekaette Brian Edem, Ph.D
Department of Performing Arts, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

Aniebiet Unwana Mbede,Ph.D
Department of Performing Arts, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria

Abstract: The theatre director occupies a crucial position in transforming dramatic literature into a coherent theatrical event. This article examines directorial dynamics and their contribution to the realisation of Total Theatre in Esiaba Irobi's Hangmen Also Die. Drawing from a qualitative and practice-led experimental study, the article investigates how directorial interpretation, rehearsal processes, interdisciplinary collaboration, movement, music, ritual, costume, lighting, sound, spectacle and audience interaction were integrated in the staging of the play. The study demonstrates that the director's role extends beyond the interpretation of dialogue to include the coordination and synthesis of diverse performance languages. The experimental production revealed that the political and ritual dimensions of Irobi's dramaturgy require an integrated directorial approach in which acting, choreography, music, design and technical elements function as mutually reinforcing components. The article argues that directorial dynamics constitute the principal mechanism through which the principles of Total Theatre are translated from theoretical concepts into embodied performance. It concludes that innovative directing can revitalise African dramatic texts, strengthen audience engagement and expand the expressive possibilities of contemporary Nigerian theatre.

Keywords: Directorial dynamics, Total Theatre, Esiaba Irobi, Hangmen Also Die, African theatre, directing, performance aesthetics, Nigerian theatre.

This is an open-access article under the CC-BY 4.0 license

Introduction

The transformation of a dramatic text into theatrical performance requires an interpretive process through which the director translates literary ideas into physical, visual, auditory and spatial action. The director is positioned as the central creative force responsible for organising theatrical signs into a coherent performance experience. This responsibility becomes particularly significant in African drama, where performance may incorporate music, dance, ritual, storytelling, drumming, chants, costume, masquerade and communal participation.

African playwrights have consistently explored the possibilities of Total Theatre through dramatic works that reflect indigenous performance traditions. Scholars have noted that dramatists such as

Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Ahmed Yerima, Tess Onwueme, and Esiaba Irobi deliberately incorporate dance, chants, ritual enactments, masquerades, songs, symbolic movement, and communal interaction into their dramaturgy (Clark 56; Osofisan 45). Their plays transcend conventional literary realism by emphasizing performance as a multidimensional cultural event. Among contemporary African dramatists, Esiaba Irobi occupies a distinctive position because of his revolutionary dramatic vision and experimental theatrical style. His plays interrogate issues of political violence, oppression, corruption, social injustice, and revolutionary resistance while employing ritual symbolism, poetic dialogue, choreographed movement, music, and visual spectacle. Jonathan Haynes describes Irobi as one of Nigeria's most innovative dramatists whose theatrical imagination fuses indigenous aesthetics with contemporary political discourse (Haynes 162). Similarly, Onookome Okome argues that Irobi's dramaturgy transforms political protest into highly theatrical performance through symbolic imagery and ritual action (Okome 18).

Hangmen Also Die exemplifies these theatrical qualities. The play presents a compelling critique of dictatorship, state violence, and institutional oppression through a performance structure that privileges spectacle, symbolism, rhythm, music, and ritual over conventional realism. Its dramatic architecture demands a director capable of interpreting not only spoken dialogue but also movement, spatial composition, visual symbolism, sound, costume, and audience interaction. Consequently, the artistic success of the play depends significantly on the director's creative imagination and ability to synthesize its diverse performance elements.

In contemporary African theatre practice, directorial experimentation has become increasingly important as directors seek innovative approaches to interpreting dramatic texts. Experimental directing embraces non-linear staging, environmental theatre, multimedia technologies, symbolic scenography, choreographic movement, improvisation, and audience participation. Schechner argues that performance should be viewed as a dynamic event rather than the mere presentation of a dramatic script (38), while Brook insists that theatre remains alive only through continuous experimentation and creative reinvention (96). These perspectives resonate strongly with the principles of Total Theatre, which encourage directors to explore multiple artistic forms in pursuit of a richer theatrical experience.

Directing African performances have a rich history, with roots that can be traced back to pre-colonial times. The continent's diverse cultures have given rise to a multitude of theatrical traditions, each with its unique styles, themes, and performance techniques. According to Okpewho Isidore (11) “the origins of African theatre can be traced back to the rituals and performances of African communities. These performances served as a way to celebrate important events, mark important milestones, and communicate important cultural values and beliefs”. African theatre has its roots in ritual performances that were integral to traditional African societies. According to Martins Tugbokorowei, “the concept called total theatre is one that is now also being used to describe a kind of staging that finds deep roots in the fertile African theatrical soil” (40). The total theatre concept has perculiar characteristics and qualities as experimented in the. Total Theatre, as conceptualised in African dramaturgy, is not merely an aesthetic choice but a reflection of the African worldview where performance serves religious, social, political, and pedagogical purposes.

Theatre in Africa has historically served as more than a medium of entertainment; it functions as a cultural and political instrument, a site of ritual communication, and a performative space where art and life intersect. The play *Hangmen Also Die*, exemplifies this philosophy through its embrace of total theatre, a concept that integrates multiple performance elements such as ritual, music, dance, spectacle, drama, and performative symbolism into one unified artistic and experimental whole. Staging a Total Theatre performance, with its multifaceted and hybrid artistic elements, poses significant directorial challenges at Pinnacle Theatre. The main issue lies in practically adapting the theoretical framework of Total Theatre into an experimental stage production. Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* provides an appropriate dramatic text for this

investigation because its dramaturgy combines political violence, oppression, resistance, ritual symbolism, poetic language, movement and spectacle. The article argues that the successful staging of such a text depends significantly on **directorial synthesis**.

Directorial Interpretation, **Themes and Aesthetic Vision in *Hangmen Also Die***

Directorial interpretation refers to the creative process through which a director translates a dramatic text into stage performance using movement, visual imagery, acting, rhythm, and theatrical symbolism. In the staging of *Hangmen Also Die*, the director's interpretive choices significantly shaped the thematic and emotional impact of the production. The play, written by Esiaba Irobi, explores sociopolitical oppression, tyranny, resistance, and collective suffering within postcolonial African society. Consequently, the director was required to employ innovative theatrical methods capable of communicating the intensity of these themes effectively.

The production adopted an experimental directorial style characterised by symbolic movement, ritual enactment, stylised blocking, and physical tension. The director utilised stage space dynamically to portray power relationships between oppressors and victims. Aggressive movement patterns, dramatic pauses, and choreographed ensemble actions reinforced the atmosphere of fear and political violence within the play. According to Peter Brook in *The Empty Space*, directing involves transforming dramatic literature into "living theatre" through imaginative stage interpretation (122). This perspective was evident in the production's visual and performative structure.

The director employed non-naturalistic acting techniques to heighten emotional expression and audience immersion. Actors frequently moved beyond realistic representation into ritualistic and symbolic performance styles. Chants, rhythmic movement, and stylised gestures contributed to the Total Theatre aesthetics of the production. Furthermore, lighting and sound were integrated symbolically to intensify dramatic moments and reinforce political tension. Through experimental staging and symbolic performance techniques, the production successfully communicated the sociopolitical concerns embedded within Irobi's dramatic vision.

Irobi's Hangmen Also Die treats adeptly the issue of violence and its effect on the society. Intertwined in the play text are the themes of corruption, militancy, abuse of power, revolution and the unnerving prophesy of the emergence of the Niger-Delta militants. Hangmen Also Die is a chilling and volatile tragedy. It tells the story of the Suicide Squad made up of seven university graduates unemployed and frustrated by the exploitation of the oil rich Niger Delta as well as the mindless corruption of the government of the day. The aesthetic vision of the researcher about the play depicts with chilling precision the resultant effect of ideology gone wrong in the hands of the youth. Revolution and revolt is the result of the frustration with the socio-political institution of the state. Supporting the Frustration Aggression Theory, which holds that aggression is the result of being frustrated (Berkowitz 5). These frustrated individuals experience the urge to be aggressive towards the source of their frustration. For Irobi, the cause of revolution is the state of mind of the people. The playwright states succinctly through the character of Acid 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 acing is the slime, the rot, the maggots, the viruses, the nauseating residue of a consumptive society! (26).

The hangman figure functions as both an executioner and a victim of institutional violence, collapsing the distinction between oppressors and oppressed. Through grotesque imagery and ritual repetition, the researcher exposes the cyclical nature of violence in authoritarian systems. The play's aesthetic vision resonates with Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, which advocates a visceral theatre capable of shocking audiences into awareness (Artaud, 87). However, the researcher localises this aesthetic within African cosmology and ritual performance, creating a theatre that is simultaneously metaphysical and political.

Total Theatre Aesthetics in *Hangmen Also Die*

Total theatre in African performance is a vibrant, multi-dimensional art form that combines various artistic expressions. It often includes storytelling through music and dance, elaborate costumes that reflect cultural symbolism, and interactive audience engagement. Rituals and communal participation are key components, transforming the performance into a shared celebration of African heritage and identity. This inclusive approach to performance creates an immersive experience, engaging spectators on multiple sensory levels. Total theatre also serves as a platform for preserving traditions, passing down cultural values, and expressing social commentary. It's a dynamic reflection of African communities' creativity and resilience.

Total theatre's communal nature fosters unity and shared understanding among participants and spectators alike. It adapts to contemporary contexts while honoring ancestral roots, ensuring African storytelling remains relevant and powerful. This art form is not just entertainment, but a living connection to history, culture, and collective memory. Furthermore, total theatre often incorporates improvisation, allowing performers to respond spontaneously to the audience and current events. This spontaneity keeps the performances fresh and engaging, demonstrating the adaptability of African storytelling traditions in a changing world. Johnson Pepper Clark-Bekederemo asserts that African drama is inherently total because it resists the fragmentation of performance components characteristic of Western theatre (52). In *Hangmen Also Die*, total theatre aesthetics operate as both an artistic strategy and a political tool, enabling the play to communicate meaning through sensory, emotional, and symbolic channels.

Applied to African drama, particularly the works of Esiaba Irobi, Total Theatre provides an essential framework for understanding the full performative potential of the text. *Hangmen Also Die* incorporates ritual symbolism, poetic dialogue, stylised movement, political spectacle, and musical elements that demand a Total Theatre approach to staging. The play resists reduction to spoken language alone and instead requires a directorial vision that integrates all theatrical resources into a unified expressive experience. Thus, Total Theatre emerges as both a theoretical construct and a practical performance strategy that redefines the boundaries of theatrical production. It emphasizes the synthesis of artistic elements, the centrality of sensory engagement, and the importance of cultural integration in the creation of meaning. Within the context of this study, it provides the conceptual foundation for exploring how directorial dynamics can transform Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* into a fully realized Total Theatre experience.

In *Hangmen Also Die*, total theatre's multifaceted nature allows the play to convey its themes and messages effectively. By engaging audiences emotionally and intellectually, it critiques political injustices and historical events. The play's use of total theatre transforms it into a powerful commentary on resistance and survival. The play leverages total theatre's immersive qualities to recreate the tension and drama of real-life hangmen, drawing viewers into the characters' struggles. Music, dance, and visual elements heighten the emotional impact, while the story's political undertones resonate deeply, making the performance both entertaining and thought-provoking. Total theatre in *Hangmen Also Die* also serves to subvert traditional narrative structures, mirroring the chaos and unpredictability of the hangmen's world. This unconventional storytelling keeps audiences engaged and invested, underscoring the play's bold artistic and political statement.

Total Theatre Techniques in *Hangmen Also Die*

1. Stylised Movement in *Hangmen Also Die*

Ultimately, stylised movement remains one of the defining techniques of Total Theatre because it recognizes the expressive capacity of the human body as an independent theatrical language. By integrating choreography, mime, ritual gesture, acrobatics, dance, and symbolic physical action into performance, Total Theatre expands dramatic communication beyond the limits of spoken dialogue. The actor's body becomes a living instrument through which emotional, cultural, philosophical, and political meanings are embodied and transmitted. This technique is especially

relevant to African theatre and provides an indispensable directorial strategy for realizing the ritual intensity, revolutionary vision, and Total Theatre aesthetics of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*.

Movement training began long before the actors memorised their dialogue. The researcher considered physical expression to be the foundation upon which characterization would later develop. Consequently, rehearsals commenced with movement workshops designed to liberate performers from habitual body language and to cultivate heightened physical awareness. The actors participated in exercises involving weight transfer, balance, tempo variation, spatial awareness, body isolation, and rhythmic walking. Improvisational tasks required performers to express concepts such as oppression, fear, authority, resistance, betrayal, sacrifice, and hope using only bodily movement. Dialogue was deliberately withheld during these exercises so that actors could discover emotional expression through physical action rather than verbal interpretation. One particularly effective rehearsal exercise required performers to imagine that every step carried the burden of environmental degradation suffered by the Niger Delta communities. As actors repeated this exercise, their movement gradually acquired noticeable heaviness, restrained energy, and emotional intensity. These discoveries later informed the movement vocabulary employed throughout the production.

Another workshop explored military discipline. Actors portraying wardens and government officials repeatedly practised synchronised marching patterns, abrupt directional changes, controlled turns, and rigid postures. The objective was not merely to imitate soldiers realistically but to establish a symbolic physical identity representing institutional authority and mechanical obedience. The researcher observed that these movement workshops significantly strengthened ensemble discipline. Performers gradually developed heightened sensitivity to one another's timing, spacing, rhythm, and physical energy, thereby improving the visual cohesion of the production.

Stylised movement became most apparent during scenes involving the Suicide Squad. Rather than entering casually, members of the revolutionary group appeared in carefully choreographed formations that immediately distinguished them from other characters. Their synchronised walking patterns, deliberate pauses, and unified body orientation communicated collective purpose and ideological solidarity before any dialogue was spoken. Throughout the production, individual movements rarely occurred in isolation. Every entrance, exit, confrontation, and transition was choreographed to reinforce dramatic meaning. During scenes of mobilisation, actors advanced diagonally across the performance space while maintaining equal distances between one another.



Plate 1: Stylised Movement during the Entrance of the Suicide Squad.

***Source**: Researcher's Field Production (2025).*



Plate 2: Wardens Formation in regard to Superior.

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025).

This arrangement produced visually balanced stage compositions that simultaneously conveyed discipline, unity, and strategic organisation. The prison warden officials were assigned contrasting movement qualities. Their walking pace remained slow, calculated, and authoritative. Shoulders remained elevated while facial expressions were deliberately restrained. Consequently, audiences could distinguish oppressive authority from revolutionary resistance through movement alone. Blocking was designed around circles, diagonals, triangles, and semicircular formations, each carrying symbolic significance.



Plate 3: Blocking designed for formation.

Source*: Researcher's Field Production (2025).*

Circular formations frequently accompanied scenes of communal deliberation or ritual action. These formations suggested collective identity and reflected indigenous African performance practices in which community members gather around a shared centre of attention.



Plate 4: Circular formation of the Suicide Squad celebrating Erekosima's capture.

***Source**: Researcher's Field Production (2025).*

Diagonal formations appeared during revolutionary confrontations. Because diagonal staging naturally creates visual tension, it reinforced the instability of the political environment portrayed in the play. As dramatic tension intensified, these spatial relationships gradually shifted until the revolutionary characters occupied positions of visual dominance. Such blocking decisions communicated ideological transformation without requiring explicit verbal explanation.

2. Choral Performance in *Hangmen Also Die*

One of the earliest discoveries made during rehearsals was that successful choral performance required ensemble discipline rather than individual vocal excellence. The Choral performance is one of the defining characteristics of Total Theatre. It involves groups of performers speaking, singing, chanting, dancing, or moving collectively as a unified dramatic voice. Unlike individual dialogue, the chorus represents communal consciousness and expresses collective emotions, beliefs, fears, and aspirations. The origins of choral performance may be traced to classical Greek theatre, but African performance traditions provide equally significant examples through communal songs, praise chants, festivals, ritual ceremonies, and masquerade performances. According to Wole Soyinka, African theatre naturally embraces communal participation, making collective performance central to its dramatic aesthetics (33).

Consequently, rehearsal sessions concentrated on developing collective listening, rhythmic precision, breath control, vocal blending, and synchronized movement. Before learning the songs contained in the production, performers participated in daily vocal warm-up exercises involving breathing techniques, resonance training, rhythmic counting, and tonal blending. These exercises encouraged actors to think of the chorus as one collective voice instead of multiple individual voices competing for attention. The researcher also introduced indigenous rhythmic exercises using hand clapping, foot stamping, body percussion, and drum accompaniment. These activities strengthened the performers sense of timing while simultaneously familiarising them with African rhythmic structures that later became central to the production.

Call-and-response exercises were equally important. Actors alternated between leading and responding to chants, thereby developing confidence in communal vocal interaction. This rehearsal strategy reflected indigenous African performance traditions where leadership continuously shifts between individuals and the larger community. As rehearsals progressed, the chorus gradually evolved beyond singing into coordinated physical performance. Vocal expression became inseparable from movement, gesture, posture, facial expression, and spatial composition. This integration embodied one of the principal objectives of Total Theatre, namely the synthesis of multiple artistic forms into one expressive performance language.

Throughout the production, the chorus functioned as the emotional heartbeat of the performance. Rather than remaining stationary at the rear of the stage, choristers continuously interacted with

principal actors, participated in dramatic action, and influenced the rhythm of scene progression. In scenes of the Suicide Squad's mobilisation, vocal dynamics changed dramatically. Soft chants gradually developed into forceful revolutionary songs supported by vigorous foot stamping and energetic movement. This gradual increase in vocal intensity mirrored the growing determination of oppressed communities to resist political exploitation. Rather than interrupting dramatic dialogue, the chorus frequently completed unfinished emotional statements through music. Whenever dialogue reached moments of heightened tension, collective singing emerged naturally from the dramatic situation, allowing emotional expression to continue through musical language.

One of the production's most emotionally significant applications of choral performance occurred during the procession of the Suicide Squad in the prison. As the prison wardens personnel's entered the stage, members of the chorus slowly assembled backstage during the procession while chanting repetitive phrases accompanied by subdued drum rhythms. As the procession progressed, vocal intensity gradually increased. Individual voices merged into unified revolutionary chants while it reinforced the emotional momentum of the scene. The audience therefore experienced the situation not merely as the imprisonment of several characters but as the collective suffering of an entire community.

The execution of Tamara provided another opportunity for the director to demonstrate the expressive power of choral performance. Rather than allowing silence to dominate the execution sequence, members of the Suicide Squad surrounded Erekosima while singing a fast inspired by indigenous Niger Delta musical traditions. Their voices remained hard, restrained, and rhythmically controlled. The Director intentionally instructed the squad members to avoid exaggerated emotional display. Instead, sorrow was communicated through vocal texture, measured breathing, and sustained harmonic blending. This artistic restraint prevented sentimental excess while intensifying the psychological impact of the execution.

As Erekosima approached her symbolic death, the chorus gradually altered the musical mood. Consequently, the audience witnessed an ideological transition from gyration to collective determination, reinforcing the production's central argument that revolutionary ideals survive beyond individual sacrifice. Every choral composition therefore incorporated coordinated body movement. Actors rarely remained stationary while singing. Instead, rhythm influenced walking patterns, body orientation, gesture, and spatial relationships. During revolutionary songs, performers advanced collectively toward the audience, reducing the psychological distance between stage and spectators. During lamentation sequences, performers moved in slow circular formations that suggested communal mourning and ritual remembrance. In PHASE ONE of the script, there was a conversation between Yekini (the hangman) and Doctor.

YEKINNI: But do you know what I saw last night when I looked at the faces of these boys in the moonlight?

DOCTOR: Guilt?

YEKINNI: Defiance

DOCTOR: Defiance?

YEKINNI: Defiance! Do you know what attracted me to their cell in the first place?

DOCTOR: No.

YEKINNI: A Song. They were singing. As they sang, their voices swept across the face of the mind like sea breeze on a cold night when the moon decides to peep into the soul of the ocean and becomes a lantern for the lonely fisherman.

The song's inclusion in the play sequence scored by the director is to underscore Dimeari's significance to the group and serves as a moment of catharsis. It allows characters and audience alike to process grief and reflect on the sacrifices made in the pursuit of justice or rebellion. The melody becomes a shared lament, bonding all in sorrow and remembrance.

Call: When I remember Dimeari, water run away for my eyes.

Response: A yeeeeeee, water run away my eyes.

The chorus also creates an atmosphere. During moments of crisis, collective vocalizations heighten suspense while synchronized chanting reinforces dramatic tension. During the death sentence pronouncement of the Suicide Squad members in PHASE ONE, the Reverend after reading the scripture Ecclesiastes chapter 3: verses 1-9 to the convicts, having making the sign of the cross one after the other on the foreheads of the convicts, the song "God be with you till we meet again" was the song, sung as an accompaniment to the prayers. These choruses were additionally songs to help serve structural purposes by linking scenes, unfolding events, and foreshadowing future conflicts. Instead of functioning merely as spectators within the drama, the chorus becomes an active participant in shaping the ideological direction of the performance.

This integration of voice and movement reflected indigenous African performance traditions while simultaneously fulfilling the objectives of Total Theatre. A director may employ the chorus to narrate historical events, comment upon oppressive political structures, express collective resistance, and articulate the aspirations of marginalized communities. Through synchronised movement, chants, revolutionary songs, ritual dances, and symbolic processions, the chorus transforms individual acts of resistance into expressions of communal struggle and national consciousness. Furthermore, the chorus function as the emotional heartbeat of the production, intensifying moments of conflict, mourning, sacrifice, and revolutionary awakening. Collective chanting may heighten scenes of political tension, while ritual songs may underscore moments of sacrifice and communal renewal. Choreographed formations can symbolise unity, oppression, resistance, or liberation, thereby reinforcing the ideological dimensions of the play through visual and auditory means. The director's effective coordination of choral performance therefore becomes essential to realizing the Total Theatre aesthetics embedded within Irobi's dramaturgy.

Ultimately, choral performance remains one of the defining techniques of Total Theatre because it embodies the principles of artistic synthesis, communal participation, ritual expression, multisensory communication, and symbolic representation. By integrating narration, music, dance, movement, poetry, ritual, and collective performance into a unified theatrical language, the chorus transforms dramatic presentation into a holistic artistic experience. This technique occupies a central position within African theatre and provides an indispensable directorial strategy for the successful staging of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*, where communal voices become powerful instruments of political resistance, cultural affirmation, and revolutionary transformation.

3. The integration of Music and Dance:

The integration of music and dance is particularly significant in the staging of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*. The play's revolutionary themes, ritual symbolism, and political intensity demand performance techniques that extend beyond spoken dialogue. Songs, chants, drumming, and choreographed movement can communicate collective anger, resistance, mourning, and revolutionary determination more powerfully than words alone. Ritual dances may symbolise sacrifice, communal solidarity, or spiritual renewal, while musical accompaniment heightens dramatic tension and emotional resonance. The director must therefore integrate musical and choreographic elements into every stage of production planning to ensure that they function organically within the dramatic structure.

Music is the organised arrangement of sounds through rhythm, melody, harmony, and instruments used to evoke emotions, communicate ideas, and create atmosphere. In theatre, music does more than entertain. It sets the mood, reinforces emotions, marks transitions between scenes, and creates a sense of communal participation. In African theatre, music often takes the form of chants, drumming, or call and response songs, making it a powerful vehicle of collective expression and resistance. In the stage experiment, the researcher uses music in the play to

provide rhythm for procession, chant for communal voice, and mnemonic devices (refrains, call – and - response) that embedded created slogans.

The strategic use of music in the play skilfully manipulates the audience's mood, enhancing key moments and amplifying emotional responses. By layering soundscapes, the production crafts an aural atmosphere that complements the action on stage, intensifying dramatic tension and emotional depth. The music's dynamic range, from haunting melodies to intense rhythms, mirrors the characters' inner turmoil and external conflicts. This sonic storytelling not only supports the narrative but also invites spectators to experience the story on a deeper, more visceral level, making the performance even more impactful. Furthermore, the music can act as a character itself, influencing the pacing and atmosphere of each scene. A sudden change in melody or tempo might signal a shift in plot or mood, guiding the audience through the emotional journey of the play and enriching their overall theatrical experience.

Indeed, music plays a dual role in the production: it provides structural cohesion by organising the performance's elements, and it evokes feelings, connecting with audiences on an emotional level. This duality ensures the music is both functional and expressive, contributing to the play's coherence and emotional resonance. The orchestration and choreography, guided by the music, create a harmonious balance between sound and motion. Each cue precisely directs the dancers and musicians, ensuring a seamless integration of performance components. Simultaneously, the music's emotional resonance enhances the audience's connection to the story, fostering a shared experience.

Furthermore, the music creation and usage in the performance operates as both emotional texture and political language. The drumming, chanting, and call – and – responses Songs Bridge the gap between performers and spectators, recreating the atmosphere to be an African performance, which makes it communal. The songs the researcher uses in the experimental performance laments societal decay, ridicule corrupt leaders, and glorify courage in defiance. The rhythmic interludes and dirge which embodies both mourning and action mobilisation, creates a collective soundscape of protest. The researcher makes the experimentation possible in the choice of music as it interplays between sound and movement which reminds the audience that revolution through music is a rhythmic force that unites the oppressed. In the researcher's experiment, the usage of music, does not merely accompany the story; it is the story's heartbeat.

The songs in the play serve multiple purposes: they narrate key events, invoke spiritual or cultural rituals, and express collective dissent. Through lyrics and melody, these songs offer insights into the characters' lives, traditions, and struggles, while also uniting the community in resistance and solidarity. Musical numbers can pause the action, allowing characters (and the audience) to reflect on the story's themes. Ritual songs may connect the narrative to ancestral beliefs, grounding the drama in cultural roots. Protest songs, sung by the ensemble, transform individual grievances into a powerful, unified voice for change.

The choral chants punctuate moments of violence, transforming individual suffering into communal expression. By embedding historical narratives and social commentary within catchy, memorable tunes, songs ensure these messages endure and spread. Singers become storytellers and activists, using their art to educate, inspire, and challenge the status quo. This tradition continues to empower African the play. Songs in African oral traditions indeed function as vessels for preserving history and voicing social concerns. They encapsulate communal experiences, pass down historical events, and critique societal issues through metaphor and allegory. This musical storytelling keeps memories alive and sparks dialogue about justice and equality.



Plate 5: The Suicide Squad Members, singing.

Source: Researcher's Stage Experiment (Pinnacle Theatre AKSU, 2025).

The student-director's original song for Dimeari's tragic death adds a poignant layer to the play. It mourns the loss of a friend and fellow fighter, while also highlighting the human cost of conflict. This musical tribute personalizes the story, inviting empathy and contemplation on the consequences of violence. The song's inclusion in the play's sequence underscores Dimeari's significance to the group and serves as a moment of catharsis. It allows characters and audience alike to process grief and reflect on the sacrifices made in the pursuit of justice or rebellion. The melody becomes a shared lament, bonding all in sorrow and remembrance.

Call: When I remember Dimeari, water run away for my eyes.

Response: A yeeeeeee, water run away my eyes.



Plate 6: Suicide Squad chanting over the capture of Erekosima.

Source: Researcher's Stage Experiment (Pinnacle Theatre AKSU, 2025).

Dance and music have indeed been inseparable for millennia, each enriching the other. From primal rituals to modern performances, dance movements often mirror musical rhythms, creating a symbiotic relationship that enhances expression and emotional impact. Together, they form a universal language of movement and sound. This timeless partnership allows dancers to embody the music's essence, transforming melodies into kinetic art. Conversely, music provides dancers

with a dynamic framework, guiding their steps and amplifying their emotional storytelling. Their union celebrates human creativity and connection.



Plate 7: Dance by Members of the Community

Source: Researcher's Stage Experiment (Pinnacle Theatre AKSU, 2025).

The dance sequences in the play are powerful expressions of intense emotions and collective experiences. They depict trance-like states, acts of defiance, and shared suffering, all rooted in ritualistic traditions. Through choreographed movement, the dancers convey profound feelings and communal bonds, deepening the audience's emotional engagement. These ritualistic dances not only reflect the characters' inner struggles but also connect the performance to ancestral practices. The synchronized movements symbolise unity and resilience, turning personal pain into a communal catharsis. Dance becomes a visceral, wordless narrative that transcends spoken language.



Plate 8: Prisoner's Dance

Source: Researcher's Stage Experiment (Pinnacle Theatre AKSU, 2025).

Dance, fuses the spiritual and the political. It is both expression and exorcism. The dance choreographed by the condemned prisoners becomes a ritual dance of defiance as seen in both plates (8 and 9) symbolising the refusal of the human spirit to succumb to oppression. Through rhythmic movements, the actors speak with their bodies, in a way that transcend verbal language. The researcher uses Irobi's drama and translates pain into motion, turning the stage into kinetic ritual ground. Each bodily gesture functions as testimony, a choreography of survival, a protest

inscribed in the flesh; which made the dances in the experiment both prayer and protest; the movement of the oppressed body becomes the rhythm of revolution



Plate 9: Prisoners dancing to music.

Source: Researcher's Stage Experiment (Pinnacle Theatre AKSU, 2025).

By treating music and dance as essential dramatic languages rather than decorative additions, Total Theatre creates richer, more immersive, and culturally meaningful performances. This principle is especially relevant to African theatre, where music and dance have historically functioned as primary vehicles of storytelling, ritual expression, communal identity, and cultural continuity. In *Hangmen Also Die*, their effective integration enables the director to realize the play's revolutionary aesthetics and transform the theatrical event into a truly holistic performance experience.

The integration of music and dance represents one of the most recognisable principles of Total Theatre. African dramatic traditions rarely separate dramatic action from music or dance because both function as narrative devices rather than decorative entertainment. According to Bakary Traore, African theatre naturally combines dance, music, ritual, and drama into a unified performance system that reflects communal experience (28). Similarly, Ossie Enekwe explains that music and dance in African performance are inseparable from dramatic communication because they embody cultural memory, spirituality, and social interaction (82).

The rehearsal process began with rhythm training rather than dialogue memorisation. Actors participated in daily percussion exercises involving indigenous drums, rattles, and body percussion. These sessions enabled performers to internalise rhythmic structures before incorporating dramatic dialogue. Choreographic rehearsals similarly emphasised the relationship between movement and dramatic intention. Every dance sequence emerged directly from the dramatic situation rather than functioning as decorative spectacle.

Scenes involving communal celebration, protest, mourning, imprisonment, and resistance were explored through dance before dialogue was introduced. This rehearsal strategy enabled performers to recognise music and dance as dramatic languages rather than supplementary performance elements. The opening scene immediately established the integrated relationship between music and dance. Before dialogue commenced, indigenous drummers entered gradually while performers dressed in the prison costumes executed slow ritualized and freedom movements. The choreography did not just simply entertain the audience. Instead, it established the geographical identity, cultural atmosphere, and communal solidarity of the dramatic world. Rhythmic foot stamping synchronised with drum patterns while performers gradually assembled into circular formations representing communal unity.



Plate 10: Fragmented choreography reflecting instability and social disintegration

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)



Plate 11: Fragmented choreography reflecting instability and social disintegration

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

Rather than interrupting dramatic action, songs emerge naturally from scenes of communal suffering, and revolutionary solidarity. Dance similarly communicates emotional states that spoken dialogue cannot adequately express. Consequently, music and dance introduced the ideological foundation of the performance before any spoken dialogue occurred.

Another most significant applications of integrated music and dance occurred during meetings of the Suicide Squad. Rather than expressing revolutionary commitment exclusively through speeches, performers employed synchronized movement accompanied by increasingly energetic percussion. The choreography evolved gradually. Initial movements remained restrained, reflecting secrecy and caution.



Plate 12: Revolutionary dance sequence by the Suicide Squad

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

As revolutionary determination intensified, dance vocabulary expanded to include larger body movements, vigorous footwork, raised fists, and collective rhythmic patterns. The accompanying drum rhythms similarly increased in complexity and intensity. This progression enabled audiences to experience the growth of revolutionary consciousness physically as well as intellectually. The researcher's production of *Hangmen Also Die* incorporates indigenous drumming, protest songs, revolutionary chants, choreographed movement, and symbolic dance sequences throughout the performance.



Plate 13: symbolic dance for coronation of Erekosima

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

To preserve the African identity of the production, preference was given to indigenous musical instruments. These included:

- Talking drums
- Wooden slit drums
- Gongs
- Bells
- Rattles

Electronic instruments were used only where necessary to reinforce atmospheric sound. This decision reflected the researcher's commitment to preserving indigenous musical aesthetics while accommodating contemporary theatrical production. According to Euba (43), African drumming functions as a communicative language that directs action and emotion in performance. The strategic use of drumbeats in the play heightens tension during dramatic moments, such as executions and rebellious acts. The pulsating rhythms create an unsettling atmosphere, psychologically affecting characters and audience alike. Drumming becomes an auditory tool to build suspense and mirror the turmoil unfolding on stage. The drumbeats escalates in intensity, mirroring the chaos of rebellion or the dread of impending execution. This sonic escalation keeps viewers on edge, immersing them in the characters' fear, anger, and desperation. Sound, in this case, is manipulated to evoke visceral reactions and underscore the play's dramatic stakes. Moreover, the drums fall silent after a climactic event, creating an eerie stillness that contrasts with the previous cacophony. This abrupt shift in soundscapes intensified the emotional aftermath, allowing the audience to absorb the consequences of the action they just witnessed.

4. **Ritual and Symbolism.**

The principle of ritual and symbolism is particularly significant in the staging of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*. Irobi's dramaturgy is deeply rooted in ritual aesthetics, employing chants, ceremonial movement, symbolic imagery, poetic incantations, and communal performance to explore themes of political oppression, sacrifice, resistance, and liberation. Rituals within the play function not only as cultural expressions but also as revolutionary strategies through which characters challenge injustice and affirm collective identity. Symbols such as blood, masks, chains, drums, costumes, and ritual processions communicate ideological meanings that extend beyond literal interpretation. The director must therefore possess a deep understanding of African ritual traditions to stage these symbolic actions authentically while ensuring that their theatrical significance remains accessible to contemporary audiences.

The symbolic complexity of *Hangmen Also Die* requires careful coordination of costume, lighting, music, movement, and scenic design so that every visual and auditory element reinforces the ritual atmosphere of the production. Lighting may symbolize spiritual revelation or political oppression; rhythmic drumming may represent communal resistance; ritual dance may embody transformation and renewal; while masks may signify ancestral judgment or revolutionary consciousness. Through such integrated symbolism, the play achieves the multidimensional aesthetic characteristic of Total Theatre.

Ultimately, ritual and symbolism remain indispensable principles of Total Theatre because they expand theatrical communication beyond ordinary language into the realms of spirituality, cultural memory, philosophical reflection, and collective identity. By incorporating ritual actions, symbolic imagery, ceremonial performance, and communal participation, Total Theatre creates performances that engage audiences emotionally, intellectually, culturally, and spiritually. This holistic approach is particularly relevant to African dramatic practice and provides an essential framework for understanding the directorial possibilities inherent in Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*.

Ritual and symbolism constitute fundamental principles of Total Theatre because they communicate meanings beyond literal representation. Ritual incorporates ceremonial actions inherited from cultural traditions, while symbolism enables objects, colours, gestures, sounds, and movements to signify broader social, political, and spiritual realities.



Plate 14: Waritimi getting the schnapp glass from RIP for libation pour.

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

African theatre draws extensively from indigenous ritual practices, where performance serves religious, communal, political, and educational functions simultaneously.

Symbolism of Costume and Colour in *Hangmen Also Die*

Visual spectacle refers to the creation of powerful stage images through the coordinated use of scenery, lighting, costumes, props, movement, colour, projection, and stage composition. Total Theatre recognises visual imagery as an independent language capable of communicating dramatic ideas. Schechner maintains that theatrical space should itself communicate meaning through carefully organized visual composition (110). Visual spectacle therefore transforms stage design from background decoration into an active storytelling device.

The director employs visual spectacle through dynamic lighting transitions, symbolic colour schemes, stylised costumes, and carefully arranged actor formations. Military uniforms visually reinforce authoritarian power, while contrasting costume colours distinguish ideological divisions among characters.



Plate 15: A Picture showing the costumes of Doctor and Hangman

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)



Plate16: A Photo showing costumes of the Superintendent

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

The light created a shift emotional landscapes such as that the bright white illumination represented public exposure and interrogation, whereas red lighting symbolises violence, revolution, and bloodshed. These striking visual compositions strengthen audience engagement while reinforcing the revolutionary themes central to Irobi's dramatic vision. The Costume colours carried deliberate symbolic significance throughout the production. Brown and earth tones represented indigenous identity and attachment to ancestral land. Black costumes symbolised mourning, political oppression, and institutional violence. Red represented revolutionary sacrifice, courage, and resistance. White appeared during execution scenes to suggest spiritual purification, moral innocence, and the continuity of revolutionary ideals beyond physical death. These colour relationships enabled audiences to interpret ideological developments visually.

In the performance of *Hangmen Also Die*, ritualised movements, ceremonial chants, symbolic processions, and stylised executions elevate political conflict into ritual drama. The repeated use of ropes, military costumes, masks, red lighting, and choreographed formations extends beyond realism to symbolize oppression, sacrifice, revolution, and collective struggle.



Plate 17: Symbolic dance for execution of Erekosima, dressed in black.

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

In the execution scenes, the Suicide Squad members, Tamara and Erekosima; Erekosima becomes a ritual enactment of state violence rather than mere theatrical representations of death. The execution of **Erekosima** was staged as a symbolic ritual of political martyrdom. Before the execution, members of the squad surrounded her while chanting repetitive revolutionary refrains in low, solemn voices. These chants transformed the execution from an individual punishment into a communal experience of suffering shared by oppressed citizens. As the chorus continued its rhythmic vocalization, Erekosima sat quietly on the execution point with measured and deliberate posture, suggesting acceptance of her revolutionary commitment rather than fear of death. Her posture reflected dignity, courage, and ideological conviction as a person.

The director further reinforced the ritualistic quality of the scene through the use of symbolic props. Instead of emphasising realistic weapons, a length of rope was treated as a ceremonial object representing state authority and institutional oppression. The rope was carried by the executioners with deliberate reverence, almost as though it were part of a sacred ritual rather than an instrument of death. This symbolic treatment shifted audience attention from the mechanics of execution to its political significance.



Plate 18: A rope used as a ceremonial object representing state authority and institutional oppression.

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

The revolutionary chants function not only as dialogue but also as ceremonial affirmations of resistance against tyranny. Through ritual and symbolism, the performance acquires psychological, political, and spiritual dimensions that encourage audiences to interpret the production metaphorically rather than literally. The play re-enacts communal rituals of judgment, sacrifice, and purification. Execution scenes resemble distorted communal rites, implicating society in systemic violence. Ritual in the experimentation of Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*, connects the present political oppression to the world of the ancestors. This suggests that injustice is not just a civic matter but an offense against the spiritual order. In this case, the Suicide Squad members get themselves fortified diabolically in order to fight the injustice in the governance of its people. Through this, they can attack whoever they want, and get their justice just like in the case of Chief Erekosima. However, Irobi's characterisation of the condemned men (Suicide Squad) suffering becomes a communal sacrifice, much like traditional rituals of atonement and cleansing. In the experimentation, the researcher creates some ritual elements such as the chants, and sacrificial undertones to allow the audience to experience purification. By staging the kidnap of Erekosima in the state coronation as a chieftaincy holder in the community. Through this act, there is a transfer of power from the oppressors (Erekosima) to the oppressed (Suicide Squad and Tamara).

As Victor Turner asserts, ritual performance marks transitions from one social order to another. In the play, it is a threshold between oppression and liberation. Ritual transforms the stage into a sacred space where injustice is confronted not only politically but cosmically. The hangmen rope,

blood, and chants evoke ancestral presence, implying that rebellion against tyranny has spiritual sanction. Thus, to the researcher, ritual becomes a moral theatre, a metaphysical protest where the oppressed reclaims dignity through symbolic enactment of sacrifice and rebirth.

Irobi's play indeed reclaims ritual as a form of political dissent, harnessing its cultural significance to challenge oppressive regimes. By reviving and recontextualising ancient rituals, the work empowers marginalised voices and fosters collective resistance against modern-day injustices, demonstrating the enduring power of tradition in fighting for change. This approach not only honors cultural heritage but also subverts the notion that rituals are static or apolitical. Irobi shows how ritual practices can be reinterpreted and repurposed as tools for social critique and activism, bridging the past and present in a struggle for a more just future.

5. Mime and Gesture in *Hangmen Also Die*

Mime refers to dramatic communication through bodily movement without spoken language, while gesture involves symbolic movements of the hands, face, posture, and body that communicate meaning. Total Theatre recognizes mime and gesture as autonomous languages capable of expressing psychological states, social relationships, and ideological conflict. According to Antonin Artaud, physical signs often communicate more effectively than verbal language because audiences instinctively interpret bodily expressions (46). African theatrical traditions similarly employ symbolic gestures in rituals, dances, and storytelling, where movement communicates messages understood within specific cultural contexts

Mime and gesture also enhance **audience comprehension and engagement** by providing visual clarity and emotional immediacy. Because non-verbal communication transcends linguistic barriers, it allows audiences from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to interpret dramatic meaning more universally. This universality is particularly significant in Total Theatre, which seeks to engage spectators on multiple sensory and cognitive levels.

In the staging of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*, mime and gesture are especially crucial for conveying the play's ritual intensity, political symbolism, and emotional depth. The text's revolutionary themes can be powerfully expressed through bodily actions such as restrained gestures of oppression, abrupt movements of resistance, ritualised postures of mourning, or symbolic acts of solidarity. Mime can be used to represent violence, imprisonment, sacrifice, or spiritual invocation in ways that transcend literal staging, allowing audiences to experience the psychological and ideological weight of the action more directly,

Ultimately, mime and gesture are indispensable to Total Theatre because they affirm the expressive power of the human body as a primary medium of communication. By prioritizing non-verbal expression, Total Theatre expands the boundaries of theatrical language and enables performance to operate across emotional, symbolic, and sensory dimensions. In doing so, it creates a richer and more immersive theatrical experience in which meaning is constructed not only through words, but through the full expressive potential of embodied action.

The development of mime and gesture began with intensive body-awareness exercises designed to eliminate habitual everyday movement. Actors were encouraged to become conscious of the expressive possibilities of every part of the body, including the face, shoulders, hands, fingers, torso, and feet. The researcher introduced several improvisational exercises in which performers narrated entire dramatic situations without speaking. Scenes involving fear, imprisonment, grief, betrayal, authority, and resistance were explored exclusively through physical expression. This process enabled actors to discover gestures that emerged naturally from emotional experience rather than mechanical imitation. Mirror exercises also formed an important aspect of rehearsal. Working in pairs, performers copied one another's movements with precision while maintaining uninterrupted eye contact. These activities strengthened concentration, ensemble awareness, and sensitivity to subtle physical communication.

Another experimental exercise that required actors portraying prison officials to express dominance without using dialogue. Through repeated improvisations, performers gradually

developed a vocabulary of rigid posture, restrained facial expression, calculated walking, and measured hand gestures that effectively communicated institutional authority. Actors portraying the Suicide Squad explored contrasting physical qualities characterised by alertness, flexibility, rapid directional changes, and expressive facial communication. This physical distinction enabled audiences to identify ideological differences between the revolutionaries and the oppressive state even before dialogue clarified the dramatic conflict.

In *Hangmen Also Die*, mime was also used to depict fear, execution, and resistance. This was established in the hideout of the Suicide Squad members, when Tamara encountered with them. This establishment was to define who Tamara was to the squad by Waritimi AKA Mortuary. From the definition of who she was by Waritimi, the director allowed the depth of fear swim through the spines of the gang members.



Plate 19: Waritimi on watch, sighting Tamara

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025).

MORTUARY: Tamara. A very stubborn woman. A priestess. Priestess of Tamara, the goddess. Very troublesome. Very difficult. She's my mother's friend. I know her very well.

Out of the fear he had for Tamara, the director makes him hide. This action draws a comic relief on the audience as some echoed "strong man dey fear woman?"



Plate 20: Waritimi hiding away fromTamara

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025).



Plate 21: Physical hand sign of pleasantry between the gang members.

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025).

Gestures further enrich characterisation. The director identified these gestures such as: raised fists symbolise resistance; bowed heads communicate submission; clenched hands indicate suppressed anger; extended arms may represent appeals for justice or solidarity. The accumulation of these physical signs constructs an expressive visual vocabulary that complements spoken dialogue. Mime also facilitates symbolic representation. Rather than presenting graphic violence directly, performers employ stylised physical actions that suggest torture, execution, and oppression. Such symbolic enactments stimulate audience imagination while maintaining aesthetic sophistication. Because mime and gesture transcend linguistic barriers, they make the political message of *Hangmen Also Die* accessible to diverse audiences regardless of language or cultural background.

Facial expression became another important dimension of mime within the production. Actors portraying oppressed citizens rarely smiled throughout the performance. Instead, subtle facial tension, lowered gaze, tightened lips, and restrained emotional reactions reflected prolonged psychological suffering. In a scene of Demeari's encounter with the Suicide Squad, he was caught

and beaten. His facial expression shows the act of pains and endurance because of his intentions of becoming a member of the gang.



Plate 22: Facial Expression of Demeari as mime

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025).



Plate 23: Mime in Facial Expression of a Fearful Character

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2026).

The prison warden's maintained emotionally detached facial expressions characterized by minimal movement. Their apparent emotional indifference intensified audience perceptions of institutional cruelty.



Plate 24: Facial expression characterised by minimal movement by the warden

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

By contrast, members of the Suicide Squad displayed highly expressive facial communication that reflected ideological conviction, anger, hope, grief, and determination. This careful contrast strengthened characterization while reinforcing the broader political themes of the production.

6. Environmental staging

Environmental staging is a theatrical approach in which the performance space extends beyond the conventional proscenium stage to immerse audiences within the dramatic environment. Instead of separating performers from spectators, environmental staging dissolves the physical boundary between acting space and audience space. This technique was significantly developed by Richard Schechner, who argued that performance should transform the entire environment into a theatrical experience (37). African indigenous theatre has long practiced similar staging methods during festivals, rituals, and communal ceremonies where performances occur within shared community spaces.

Environmental staging is particularly significant in enhancing **theatrical immersion**, one of the central objectives of Total Theatre. When audiences are physically surrounded by performance, the distinction between fiction and reality becomes less rigid, allowing for heightened emotional and sensory engagement. Sound, movement, lighting, and spatial design envelop the audience, creating a multi-directional flow of theatrical stimuli. This immersive quality intensifies audience responsiveness and strengthens the emotional impact of performance.

The environmental staging remains a defining technique of Total Theatre because it transforms theatrical space into an active component of performance meaning. By dissolving traditional spatial hierarchies and integrating audiences into the performance environment, it fosters immediacy, participation, and sensory immersion. This spatial reconfiguration not only enhances aesthetic experience but also reinforces the communal, ritual, and participatory foundations of theatre, making it particularly relevant to African dramatic traditions and the directorial realisation of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*.

The technique is especially effective in the staging of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*, where political tension, ritual symbolism, and collective struggle demand an environment that reflects the intensity of the dramatic action. Environmental staging allows the director to position spectators within the symbolic world of the play, making them witnesses to—and sometimes participants in—the unfolding conflict. Actors may move through the audience during scenes of protest or ritual, blurring the boundary between performer and spectator and reinforcing the communal implications of revolutionary action. Such spatial integration enhances the play's ideological force by implicating the audience within its thematic universe.

In the production of *Hangmen Also Die*, the environmental staging enhances audience participation by making the spectators feel directly implicated in the realities represented on stage. Actors entered through the auditorium, perform among spectators, and surrounded the audience during revolutionary demonstrations.



Plate 25: Actor performing among spectators

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025).

One of the production's most effective applications of environmental staging occurred during meetings of the Suicide Squad. The researcher transformed the same physical space of the prison into a secret revolutionary meeting ground through alterations in lighting, sound, actor positioning, and movement patterns.



Plate 26: The Suicide Squad secret revolutionary meeting ground

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

Same pattern was seen in the physical space of the Suicide Squad first entrance in the orchestra pit, transformed into a street.



Plate 27: Same space used for hideout, was transformed to a street.

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

Performers formed tight circular arrangements suggesting confidentiality and ideological solidarity. Dim lighting combined with subdued percussion established an atmosphere of secrecy while maintaining audience attention upon collective interaction rather than scenic realism. The audience therefore interpreted the environment through the coordinated interaction of performers, lighting, sound, and spatial composition

The stage properties such as prison bars, barricades, ropes, platforms, drums, and symbolic structures extend beyond decorative functions to become interactive elements within the performance environment. Lighting and sound further transform the stage into an oppressive landscape characterized by fear, surveillance, and conflict.



Plate 28: Lighting transforming the stage into an oppressive landscape

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

The environmental staging also created realism while preserving the theatrical symbolism. The audience experiences the atmosphere of dictatorship not merely through observation but through spatial immersion during the performance. This participatory experience strengthens the emotional and ideological impact of the performance. As a component of Total Theatre, environmental staging integrates architecture, lighting, sound, movement, and audience positioning into one comprehensive theatrical event.



Plate 20: Participatory experience of the audience

Source: Researcher's Field Production (2025)

7. Multimedia Integration

Within African and contemporary global contexts, multimedia theatre also enables new forms of cultural expression. Digital scenography can be used to project historical imagery, indigenous symbols, archival footage, or abstract representations of cultural memory, thereby enriching the narrative depth of performance. When carefully employed, these technologies allow directors to bridge traditional performance aesthetics with contemporary visual culture. Multimedia technology refers to the integration of digital and electronic media into live theatrical performance. These technologies include video projection, digital animation, computerized lighting systems, sound design, recorded voice, projection mapping, multimedia screens, and interactive visual effects. Contemporary Total Theatre increasingly incorporates multimedia to enrich theatrical storytelling.

Although in *Hangmen Also Die* the director employed multimedia to reinterpret the play for contemporary audiences in the aspect of sound design. Sophisticated sound design integrates recorded gunfire, military sirens, chants, cricket's chirping, cock crows, explosions, and ambient environmental sounds. These auditory elements heighten the dramatic tension while strengthening audience immersion. The lighting console used enhances emotional atmosphere by distinguishing between scenes of hope, violence, interrogation, and revolution. Sudden blackouts, flashing lights, and colour transitions symbolised psychological instability.

Within the framework of Total Theatre, the researcher can say that the multimedia technology demonstrates that contemporary theatre can harmoniously combine traditional African performance techniques with modern technological innovations. In productions of *Hangmen Also Die*, this synthesis expands the expressive possibilities of the performance while preserving the revolutionary spirit central to Irobi's dramatic vision.

Multimedia integration in the performance can significantly enhance the play's ritual intensity and political symbolism. Digital projections may visualize scenes of oppression, revolution, or ancestral invocation, while soundscapes can intensify the emotional atmosphere of protest and sacrifice. Lighting transitions can distinguish between ritual and realist dimensions of performance, while multimedia layering can create symbolic environments that reflect the psychological and ideological complexity of the play. In this way, technology becomes a tool for deepening—not replacing—the ritual and theatrical logic of the text.

Multimedia integration is a contemporary extension of Total Theatre principles rather than a departure from them. By combining live performance with digital scenography, sound design, and

interactive technologies, modern theatre expands its sensory and expressive range while maintaining the foundational ideals of synthesis, immersion, and multidimensional communication. This evolution affirms Total Theatre as a flexible and adaptive aesthetic system capable of responding to technological change while preserving its commitment to holistic theatrical experience.

Conclusion

The study offers a compelling analysis of Irobi's play, exploring how it embraces total theatre's holistic approach. By integrating music, dance, ritual, and audience interaction, *Hangmen Also Die* exemplifies African performance's capacity to merge artistic elements into a powerful, cohesive work that resonates on multiple levels. This exploration highlights the play's success in blending traditional African storytelling with contemporary political themes. Total theatre aesthetics allow Irobi to craft a richly textured narrative that not only entertains but also educates and provokes thought. Your research sheds light on the play's innovative use of performance elements to convey its message.

This study, has demonstrated that the success of any theatrical production depends significantly on the creative ingenuity, interpretative competence, and organizational ability of the director. The research established that the director serves as the central artistic force responsible for transforming the dramatic text into a coherent and engaging stage performance through the effective coordination of artistic, technical, and managerial elements. The experimental production of *Hangmen Also Die* provided an opportunity to examine the practical application of directorial principles within the framework of Total Theatre and to assess their contribution to contemporary Nigerian theatrical practice.

The study also demonstrates that directorial dynamics are central to the realisation of Total Theatre in *Hangmen Also Die*. The director transforms the dramatic text into an integrated performance through interpretation, rehearsal, artistic synthesis and interdisciplinary collaboration. The study concludes that directorial innovation can revitalise dramatic works, deepen audience engagement and enhance the expressive possibilities of theatrical performance. The study therefore proposes that **directing should be understood not merely as stage supervision but as the intellectual, aesthetic and organisational mechanism through which Total Theatre becomes possible**.

WORKS CITED

1. Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. Translated by Mary Caroline Richards, Grove Press, 1958.
2. Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. Penguin Books, 1968.
3. Clark, Ebun. *Hubert Ogunde: The Making of Nigerian Theatre*. Oxford UP, 1979.
4. Clark-Bekederemo, J. P. *The Example of Wole Soyinka*. Cambridge UP, 1981.
5. Enekwe, Ossie. *Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland*. 1981. Reprinted in *Performance Arts in Africa: A Reader*, edited by Frances Harding, Routledge, 2002.
6. Haynes, Jonathan. *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.
7. Okome, Onookome. *African Theatre: Histories, Criticism, and Aesthetics*. James Currey Publishers, 2011.
8. Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. Routledge, 1988.
9. ---. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2013.
10. Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge UP, 1976.

11. Stanislavski, Konstantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Translated by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, Theatre Arts Books, 1936.
12. Traore, Bakary. *The Black African Theatre and Its Social Functions*. Translated by Dapo Adelugba, Ibadan UP, 1972.
13. Tugbokorowei, E. J. *P. Clark-Bekederemo's Plays and the Challenges of Their Scenic Environments*. Diss. University of Ibadan, 1995.