Research Article

The Theme of Moral Decadence in the Emergent Nigerian Drama: A Study of Emeka Nwabueze’s A Parliament of Vultures and Esiaba Irobi’s Hangmen Also Die

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Abstract: Literature must serve the society by stepping into politics, and by intervention. To achieve these writers must not merely write to amuse or to take a bemused, critical look at the society role. Literature should be politically and socially committed. Any good story, novel or drama should have a message and a purpose. Moral decadence is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society. Bribery, corruption, fraud, embezzlement of public funds among others, is found in almost every sector of our society. It is seen from the politicians to the public servants, to the civil servants and also found among the youths. Owing to this, writers in Nigeria have taken upon themselves to address and expose the state of moral decadence in our society with the purpose of correcting and bringing about a change in the moral behaviors of the citizens of the country. Accepting that moral decay is a vice that has become part of our society may be a sure way of joining heads to fight this vice.

This study is particularly concerned with the theme of moral decadence in the emergent Nigerian drama and this will be realized by doing a critical study of two drama texts written by Emeka Nwabueze: A Parliament of Vultures and Esiaba Irobi’s Hangmen Also Die. The secondary method of data collection was used. Other useful sources included magazines, journals, articles, libraries, postworks and internet. The literary theory used in this study is the Marxist theory. The goal of Marxism is to bring a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The theory is also built upon the socialist thinking which was produced in France Revolution and it inverted some of the early idea of economic and social benefits to the entire society.

Keywords: Moral, Decadence, Politics, Social, Commitment, Corruption, Embezzlement, Marxist Theory.

Introduction

Writers through their work mirror life, therefore, we can say that literature is life. When literature is defined as an imitation of life, it refers to the manner in which life or human experience is captured and reconstructed in societies where life’s realities are normally and naturally realized. Thus three genres of literature (i.e. poetry, drama, prose) are modes or phases of literature for imitating life. Literature cannot be separated from the society. It provides an insight into all that is obtainable in the society. Society is an aggregate of life or people and it is an incontrovertible fact that literature is meaningless without society; likewise society is an in complete without literature. Society which obviously is fragile, decadent and pervasive could have totally been in great confusion if literature had not made attempt to capture the moral decadence.

African writers have an unending propensity for social and political realities in their societies. In affirmation to this, Ogungbesan (2004) Literature and Society, accepts that the writer is a member of society and that his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happenings around him (pg 19). Olu Obafemi (1996) asserts that Nigeria independence was not only welcomed with wire, music and dance was also loudly applauded and welcomed our literary celebrities. On this note, Ogunbiyi (1981) also asserts that there was mass hysteria as moral or ethical ideals were thrown overboard for selfish pursuits. These trying moments were vividly captured in the literatures of the day. This manifested itself in drama. This growing sense of political commitment was evidenced in Soyinka’s satirical sketches and revues. Before the Blackout (1965), Kong’s Harvest...
initially, African literature was a tool for cultural emancipation and identification. later it was used as an instrument for anti-colonial struggle, while at present; it is employed as an indispensable weapon for combating the post-colonial disillusionment in African nations. in this regard. achebe posits that Literature should be able to interpret the soul of the society of its origin. (Literature...19).

African literature reflects African experience prevalent in their society. since the writer is the conscience of the society, he (the writer) seeks to give vision and hope in a visionless and hopeless society synonymous to post colonial African society through the means of social critical criticism. However, the duty of an avant-garde writer is to educate, correct, direct, lead inform and criticize social nuances, which is a means of commitment in this regard, achebe sees it as “the responsibility of literature to teach and educate the society of its origin”(Literature and society....P. 19).

We therefore, believe that the foregoing may have led Nwabueze and Irobi to artistically reflect the moral decadence in the society in both A Parliament of Vultures and Hangmen Also Die, respectively. They seem to support what achebe in his position Morning Yet on Creation Day, (1977). That “…an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant” (78).

Again both plays criticise various social disorders ranging from leadership failure, mismanagement of resources: Godfatherism, ethnocentrism, unemployment, incompetence, injustices, academic decadence, massive poverty, and class stratification in the contemporary post colonial Nigeria etc. In affirmation established institutions or societies “drama is an indispensable instrument for social and political control” (beyond entertainment...20) the plays we have chosen seem to support the above postulation as we intended to show in this research work.

Significance
This paper will be of benefit to scholars whose area of interest is making a literary voyage into the literary world of playwrights Nwabueze and Irobi to be precise, and what they have achieved through drama. The work is also to contribute to the growth and expansion of academic development. Again to further research on coming writers on the literature of commitment. However, the research work exposes socio-political, economic, cum religious decay predominant in Africa ever since independence was achieved, and finally aims at instigating change in the society.

Scholaristic Evidence
The writers of post colonial period create their work from the experience they have from the society. the artists are members of the society and the content, moral decadence and style of their works are affected by the society’s conventions. In affirmation of the need for the artist to depend on the society for his inspiration, Kolawole Ogungbesan (1979) says that: 

The writer is a member of society and his work is conditioned by the political happenings around him, for these issues form part of substance of life within which his instinct as a writer must struggle. (in Egbundu, 2)

The above assertion by Kolawole shows that literature should be limited to what is happening around the writer. In support of this view Ifeyinwa Ogbozi posits that:

“an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant (morning yet...98)”

From what we have been saying, it becomes clear that a literary committed artist draws his inspirations from society and set out to condemn correct and criticize those decadent aspects of the society.

To lend credence to this, literary critic Bayo Ogurijimi harmonizes the role of the contemporary African writer when he opines that:

The artist creates caricatures of African leaders, exposing their slavish mentality, lack of organizing ability, business acumen and concern for the governed (Literature, 90)

In support of this, Maduka claims that:

Literary artist through careful diagnose of ills of the society opens people’s eyes to the follies of man a social animal. The criticism of the short comings the social institution and the people’s attitude to life could eventually lead to meaningful change in life style. (Regenerations, 86).

Suffice it to say that a committed literary artist is
the light bearer, conscience and sole changer of his society. 

Nwogu lent credence to this, when he aggressively avers that:

“If it is necessary to throw bomb in order to change society, then the writer must recognize his obligations to his society and throw as many bombs as possible, after all, his own safety may depend in it. (Literature and Modern, 4).”

However, the writer’s bomb in the words of Nwogu, implies the ability to use words to combat injustice, tribalism, impurity corruption, calls formation and gender prevalent in the society etc.

“In support of this, Achebe observes that: If an artist is anything he is a human being with heightened sensitivity; he must be aware of, or indifferent to, monumental injustice which his people suffer. (Morning yet…79).”

Moreover, over the years, writers (playwrights) have been part of this social transformative process through moral decadence. Ifeyinwa Ogbazi notes that:

A particular literary artist may employ the vehicle of his own imagination towards a redefinition of a universal question. He may at rejecting an existing social order, or his main target may be to paint a picture of social anarchy for his intention could be to make mockery of the illusory existence of harmony in a given society or he may linger his interest of the exposition of human short comings and excesses that is on the negative aspect of human that stultify personal growth and impede social development. Literary artists try to impose as order on the variegated and may raid experiences of the people in society (Regeneration, 78).

However, by exposing human and moral decadence in the post-colonial Nigeria state, literary artists (playwrights) call for change on social political transformation. Ngugi agrees with this, when he posits that “a writer responds with his total personality to a social environment which changes all the time. (Home Coming…47).

The hope and anticipation for independence was interpreted as the situation for many years of colonial subjugation and brutality. After independence had come what Africa needed most was socio-economic freedom which the leaders were unable to provide for the masses of the continent. The masses live in slums and squalor in the midst of abundance. Achebe observes that:

The Trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigeria problem is the uncollingness or inability of the leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hall marks of true leadership (The Trouble…7).

Because of the politics of moral decadence and social affrication that tend to characterize numerous African countries many writers of the continent are referred as instrument of change whose job is to expose, decry and criticize, the moral decadence that are predicament in the contemporary post-colonial society.

However, post-independence Nigerian society is undoubtedly ripe for social change and this has greatly encouraged writers (playwright) like: Wole Soyinka, Sonny Oti, Femi Osofisan, Nkama Ibiam Opia, Obumneme Anasi Francis, Esiaba Irobi, Emeka Nwabueze and host of other writers to galvanize their artistic impetus towards the recreation and reorganization of their society, moreover, the literary writers employ drama as a tool to criticize the political, social, cultural and economic problems of the nations. They strike to create plays that aimed at raising questions and promoting debate about the present condition of the nations with the view to institute change. Enekwe opines that the main aim of drama has always been to improve and stabilize society.(Beyond Entertainment, 20).

In support of this stance, in Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities (vol. iv 2002) ,he asserts that:

“The impact of drama is direct and more immediate than other forms of artistic expression. The immediacy and concreteness of social ills such a acts of lawlessness, sectarian violence and other moral decadence of the present Nigerian society (215).”

Again favoritism and Godfatherism are predominantly part of the social critical issues of our leaders in the society today. In this regard, Opia’s No Bread on the Bookshelf, depicts statism, quota system and visionlessness of our leaders. Opia in an indicting stance but with a careful expression of optimism captures esthetically the social realistic issues of quota system and federal character. However one of the most remarkable moral decadence, which Opia tries to decry to the reading evidence and spectators, is quota system and ethnicity with their unending implications in the society. This is because other
critics in the society stem from this issue of quota system and ethnicity, as Opia perceives it in his text. Bearing in mind that some states are usually educationally disadvantaged, opportunity at the centre if equally distributed according to doctrine of quota system will make many personnel in an area that is educationally advantaged areas, many opportunities will go to mediocre, in a kind of authorial commentary. Opia rummages and avers:

No wonder people who read Languages, and Linguistics are being made commissioners for Finance and Economic Development and others for Agriculture and Natural Resources. As a result of lack of knowledge about all those things such departments suffer administrative muddling incompetence and mismanagement of resources. (15)

Nigerian playwrights have consistently directed their criticism on the insensitivity of the leaders and their penchant for power. Plays such as: Echoes of Madness by Emeka Nwabueze. The Indispensable Aching Tooth, by Obumneme F. Anasi, Once Upon Four Robbers, and so on expose the egocentric tendencies of our leaders. In Echoes of madness, it condemns irresponsible politicians, who are mindful of what they can get than what they can do to improve the life of the masses, just like A Parliament of Vultures and Hangmen Also Die. Meanwhile, in the play A Parliament of Vultures, Nwabueze exposes his society’s fate, decay, leadership irresponsibility, contradiction, rottenness, bankruptcy, inter/intra party conflicts etc. In support of this, Okoro in his article titled, “The Dramatic Genre” in Essays and Literary concepts in English (2006) lends credence to this, he says:

... We are presented with two worlds: the world of the Omeaku family and that of the nation’s parliament. The rottenness of the smaller world, seen in the life of madam Omeaku and her daughter, is in sense of fore showing (a hint of what is to come) of the general moral bankruptcy in the nation typified by the parliament.

The saint in the smaller world is Mr. Omeaku who insists that Nkechi, the younger daughter, be not ruined by her mother who has already ruined their first daughter. It is his view that Nkechi should study and be a graduate but his wife would rather buy a degree than have her daughter study for one,... the president of parliament, chief Habamero, and the chief of protocol along with madam Omeaku, Mr. Brown and Reverend Jossy discuss money and party for greater part of their deliberations. Hardly is law which should be neither their primary nor the state of the nation their object of importance. (Essays...193-194)

Hangmen Also Die, is an auspicious play that reflect the moral decadence of leadership failure, class stratification and its implications, and finally projects and criticizes the rottenness of social formation that was intensified by an oil wealth. It portrays heartless exploitation of the masses, by the ruling class, betrayal of public confidence, administrative irresponsibility, moral decadence and socially stratified society that breed and nurtures corruption and oppression of the less privilege in the society.

The works of the duo of Nwabueze and Irobi with other playwrights criticize the despair and coherence endemic in an oppressive eroded society and the same time offering an ethnical perspective and revealing possibilities beyond the present.

African Literature and Moral Decadence

Moral decadence is a canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society. Bribery, corruption, fraud, embezzlement of public funds, among others, are found in almost every sector of our country.

African literature refers to literature of and from Africa. With independence and increase in literacy among the Africans in the 1950’s and 1960’s, African literature has grown dramatically in quantity and in recognition with numerous African works appearing in western academic curricula and one of the best in the list compiled at the end of 20th century. African writers in this period wrote both in western languages (i.e. English, French and Portuguese) and also in traditional African language.

Olu Obafemi (1996:269-275) asserts that the reality of neo-colonialism and post colonialism has compelled Nigerian dramatists to re-appraise their commitment to issues of cultural nationalism, race retrieval and the general ideology of liberal humanism to engage in topical, political committed dramas. Such is the response of the first generation of intellectual dramatists, Wole Soyinka, J.P clark, Ola Rotimi and Zulu Sofola to mention but a few, the bankrupt and dysfunctional comprador system in Nigeria. Their plays, of the effect have become deep into the fabrics of our society. Bribery, corruption, fraud, embezzlement of public funds, among others, are found in almost every sector of our country.
as revolutionary emergent dramatists. Even from as early plays as The Road (1965) and Kongi’s Harvest (1967), we have begun to notice Soyinka’s concern with the plight of the proletarian population and the dysfunctional leadership offered society by the modern political elite- a preoccupation with which Biodun Jeyifo graphically identifies as “class hidden war”.

Olu Obafemi’s major plays, Night of Mystical Beast (1986), The New Dawn (1986), Naira Has No Gender (1990) have been defined as addressing exploitation on both political and economic in Nigerian state authorities and government officials, employers and other members of the elite impose their preferred interpretation of the world on the people they exploit.

In an interview with Wole Soyinka, when he was asked about his own view on the level of moral decadence in the Nigerian state then he said that:

*There is a philosophy of cannibalism in Nigeria at the moment, ruthlessness towards each other. Market people-the moment there’s a whisper, there’s going to be an increase in petrol price, even before it becomes a reality, they are already increasing the price of food. Even before the rumor is established…there is a level of exhibitionism in corruption which is unprecedented in Nigeria. Not even under Shagari- a total corrupt government has the level of corruption reached such height. Not even in Shagari’s era.*

Wole Soyinka’s political plays talks about satire in political corruption and the gross violation of human rights by the military dictatorship in Nigeria.

A Historical Survey Of Drama In Nigeria

Drama is a reflection of life. It has been in existence right from the pre-colonial period. It reflects in the people’s festivals, rituals, mythology and other forms of social engagement. Africans are bound to frown on theatre as entertainment because, to them, it goes beyond that. It is a medium through which they reach out to the supernatural world and some mysterious developments or phenomena of life in order to go beyond them.

The Nigerian drama has a variety of folk opera of Yoruba people of South West and it emerged in the early 1940s. It is a combination of mime, colorful costumes, traditional drumming, music, and folklore.

It is usually directed towards a local audience and it has Nigerian themes, ranging from modern-day satire to historical tragedy. The plays are usually performed entirely in Yoruba language, but it can be understood and appreciated by speakers of other languages with the aid of a translated synopsis.

There were lots of traveling theatre troupe but three professional troupes were recognized. These groups were headed by Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo. Each of these troupes has created a distinctive style shaped by its founders. Hubert Ogunde’s plays have religious, social and political themes. It also have titles such as Garden of Eden, Nebuchadnezar’s Reign, Herbert Macaulay, Journey to Heaven, Strike and Hunger and Yoruba Ronu (Yoruba rethink). But occasionally, he came into confrontation with the political authorities and had his plays banned. In 1945, Ogunde was the first to establish a Professional theatre troupe after Herbert Macaulay found politics more attractive than the theatre.

Hubert Ogunde also found solution to the problem of frequent resignation and departure of actresses, especially as soon as they got married. He solved this problem by marrying virtually all his actresses. He was the first professional theatre man in Nigeria who lived entirely by the art.

Apart from the traveling theatre of Ogunde and his followers, there arose the literary dramas which were pre-dominantly Anglophone. By far, the dominant personality in Nigeria literary drama is the noble laureate, Wole Soyinka. He has been in active theatre both inside and outside Nigeria since the 1950’s. Early in his career, he also established the Orisun Theatre Company and the 1960 Masks. Most of the literary drama from 18th century has sought to encourage its audience to become better informed and more exposed to the range of political, social and moral issues.

Drama is also an art form and it can offer the demanding experience of aesthetic pleasure. In the early 20th century the art theater movement stressed this purpose in particular, by presenting drama whose primary goal was an artistic experience. Because drama is a literary form that is designed for public presentation, presentations about drama have often explored how drama relates to society. Various theories have argued that, as an art reflecting social concerns for a group audience, drama is suited to stimulate social changes. Others have argued that the group orientation of drama can never seriously challenge the audience’s general assumption. The central purpose of drama has always been to provide a means for a society to reflect upon itself and its beliefs.

Drama And Satire

Drama came from Greek word “Dran” meaning “to
do” or “to act”. Dramas are being classified as either tragedies or comedies; one of the differences between the two is in their ending. Comedies end happily while tragedy ends on an unhappy note. Tragedy arouses pity for the striking one and terror. A classical tragedy tells of a high and noble person who falls because of a “tragic flaw”.

Oyin Ogunba (1977) identifies three broad categories into which plays can be placed: propaganda plays, involving politics and ideology; nationalism play expressing preference for new culture and integrationist vision, and finally, the satiric plays. Ogunba’s classification was relevant as at the time when he suggested it, but new dramatic form have emerged thus bringing about changes in literature.

However, regardless of the nature of topicality or form in African literature, it has always been written in some measured degree of satire. Some literary writers are concerned about societal issues. Since Ogunba’s classification is not really applicable to the modern African literature, Dasylva (2004) gives four broad classifications: cultural plays, nationalist plays rational and neo-rational plays. The cultural plays, involve the constant probe of new acquired European values; the nationalist plays involve the political struggles with nationalists e.g. Maumau struggles in the colonial Kenya; and this can be seen in the Trial of Dedan Kimathi by Ngugi and Mugo. Rational classification has the fusion of both cultural and nationalist plays. The neo-rational category recreates myth and pursues nationalist interest through culture.

African writers are seen to be satirists in a sense in their work but the fact that the African situation really calls for the attention of these writers. Gbileka (1993:2) asserts that: “in Africa, there has been symbolic relationship between writer and political themes in their works, but mainly that the writer and the politician are all rolled into one”. The political absurdities and the moral decadence in the society (Africa) are real enough to arrest the attention of African writers.

*** In some satirical plays, one or two good characters, usually “saints” whose souls pine away at the terrible blunders of their society; are made to observe or to suffer from the action of those who are guided by self-interest and villainy. In a play text of this study, A Parliament of Vultures by Emeka Nwabueze, we are presented with two worlds: the world of the Omeaku family and that of the nation’s parliament. The rottenness of the smaller world, seen in the life of Madam Omeaku and her daughters is in a sense of foreshadowing (a hint of what is to come) of the general moral bankruptcy in the nation typified by the parliament. The saint in the smaller world is Mr. Omeaku, who insists that Nkechi, the younger daughter, be not ruined by her mother who has already ruined their first daughter. It is his view that Nkechi should study and be a graduate but his wife would rather buy a degree than have her daughter study for one. In the parliament, apart from Dr. Parker and Mr. Otobo who are insistent on the right thing being done, the rest have cultivated the grab culture of sharing the nation’s resources among themselves instead of using it to benefit the populace that voted them in. In language as base as their actions, they tell of their exploits and plan their strategy for milking the national cow dry. The president of parliament, chief Habamero, and the chief of protocol along with Madam Omeaku, Mr. Brown and Reverend Jossy discuss money and party for a greater part of their deliberations. Hardly is the law, which should be their object of importance.

Nwabueze employs dramatic irony to satirize and criticize a situation where the police inspector, who should stand as an epitome of justice, equity, fairness is used by the parliamentarians as a instrument to silence opposition in the house, to arrest and detain the likes of Parkers and Mr. Otobo without legal trial because of the fact that they are the true representatives of the masses in the parliament. This can also be seen in Esiaba Irobi’s Hangmen Also Die, where the six suicide squad were arrested and detained without trial.

Emergent Nigerian Dramatist

A dramatist, also called playwright is someone that writes plays as defined by Yemi Ogunbiyi (1981). He observed that the Nigerian drama, since independence has been in a constant state of change; from the tradition of the pioneer conventional playwrights to the playwrights of the radical aesthetics beginning from the 1970s and beyond, in theory and practice. It has presented itself as an ever-dynamic variety, with attendant frustrations and hopes; the major challenge being the continuing dominance of the older generation of playwrights over the fledgling creativity in the face hard socio-economic milieu and state tyranny.

From the traditions of the pioneer dramatists through the second generation to the new voices, the output grew tremendously, with constant charging features. Consequently throughout Nigeria’s history, the role of drama and the dramatist in moralizing, identity and character
formation, etc, has not only been enterprising but also purifying. These periods have variously been captured in such plays as Soyinka’s konji’s Harvest, Madmen and Specialist, king Baabu, Ososfisan’s A Restless Run of Locust, Midnight Hotel, Aringindin and the Night Watchmen, Ojo Bakare’s This Land must Sacrifice, Hagher’s Swam Karagbe, Emeka Nwabueze’s A parliament of vultures, to mention but a few. The above plays fall into the different categories of playwrights according to generation, which are: the first generation of early post-independence conventional playwrights, the post-civil war radical playwrights whose subject matter became the then running battle between capitalism and socialism and fronting for the later in their ideological confrontations, the middle generation which emerged in the dying days of Marxism is praxis, and the new generation which are a product of the last decade.

The last category has been clustered “New Voice” in Nigerian Drama. This classification is reached from the conviction that in their search for aesthetic ideology, they attempt desperately to reach new goals or build on or re-construct old dramatic canons within eco-aesthetic boundaries in both language and theme. For the first and second groups of playwrights, critical literatures abound all of which variously provide bases for classification in ideology and aesthetics. Ether as in depth critical materials on individual playwrights or a generation, theses first two generations have enjoyed a much privileged critical attention to the point of a rehash. Apart from the avalanche of essays and chapters in journals and books on individuals playwrights, full-length books such as Olu Obafemi’s Contemporary Nigerian Theatre, Artor Dugga’s Creolisations in Nigerian Theatre and Jane Booth’s Writers and Politics in Nigeria and others on these generations. Since the exit of the military in 1999, play texts have not ceased to flood the bookstands from both the old and new playwrights. Some of these post-1999 plays are: Ojo Bakare’s Once Upon a Tower, J.P Clark’s All for Oil, Soyinka’s King Baabu, Ososfisan’s revised version of Aringindin and the Night Watchmen, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh’s Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again, Sowande’s Super Leaf, Effiong Johnson’s The Stolen Manuscripts and others. Hardly do any of these plays deviate from the burning issues confronting post-colonial transitory state of Africa or Nigeria. While Soyinka has abandoned the lofty shrine of Ogun for the public proletarian space in his two outings i.e. the Beatification of Area Boy and King Baabu, Femi Ososfisan has virtually defied being caged with the second generation aesthetic ideology of popular justice for which he was arguably the most prolific. Radical theatre therefore has in his hands been remolded or repackaged to meet needs of the millennium.

From his revised Aringindin and the Night Watchmen to the Life of Ajayi Crowther, Ososfisan now opts for a more sympathetic and suitable approach to the problem of leadership, poverty and inter-group relations in the society. He has therefore abandoned orthodox Marxism for a more suitable, humanistic approach; a somewhat “reformation of Marxism on revolutionary front within the post-colonial transitory democracies of Africa and the third world”

Tracing historically some of the works of the older generation, the heart is warm. Some of the works that came to mind can be captured to give more bite to their emergence as great dramatists; one obvious fact is that playwrights of the new generation are still struggling to find their feet within the highly competitive space of dramatic writing in which both the first and second generations are still actively participating and dominating.

Theoreticssal Framework

The researcher adopts Marxism as a literary theory in analyzing the play texts of this study. This theory shall be used in this study to portray the theme of moral decadence in the emergent Nigerian drama. Marxism is sometimes considered a philosophy, a theory, a method and a movement, its main goal is to change the status quo of a society or world. This theory aims at changing the world from the place populated by the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ to a classless society. It also shapes the society’s consciousness and also the social, economic, political conditions.

In a related development, Bresslar (1994) addressed the society.

Rise up oh! proletariat
Rise up oh! common worker
Seize the moment. Rise up
You that are about to be enlightened concerning the nature of reality and two relationship among human kind and philosophical idea that affect the way we live, listen, learn and be free (Bresslar 204)

A lot of things have been going on in our society which calls for our moral wakeness. The society at large has been affected with this moral decadence which can be seen in all aspect of the society, and this is why the Marxist theory calls the attention of the proletariat (working class) to expose the ills of
the bourgeoisie. (upper-class) as seen in the works of these writers that are considered in this research. Along the same line of thought, Akporobaro et al (2010) go on to say:

*The theory considers the society as polarizes along class dichotomy between the bourgeoisie who controls the economy through political power and the proletariat who constitute the oppressed working class.*

(Akporobaro et al 583)

Two German writers, philosophers, political economist and social critics (Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1823) and Fredrick Engels co-authored a text “Communist Manifesto (1848) that proclaimed Marxism’s basic doctrine. In this work Marx and Engels declare that the capitalist or bourgeoisie have successfully enslaved the working class or the proletariat through economic policies and control of the factors and method of production. They assert that the proletariat (oppressed) must revolt and strip the bourgeoisie of their economic power and hand it over to the state which will equitably and fairly distribute it for the benefit of all.

Writers and critics have chosen this medium to expose all the vices conducted by the majority ruling class of the society to show to them that enough is enough and that all their immoral acts have been exposed. Through Emeka Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures*, he was able to use satire to ridicule the moral decadence found among prominent people in the society; how the economy of a nation was in shamble. In the same vein, Esiaba Irobi’s *Hangmen Also Die* is an auspicious play that reflects the evils of leadership failure, class stratification and it’s implications, and finally projects and criticizes the rottenness of moral formation that was intensified by an oil wealth.

Again, in the play *A Parliament of Vultures*, Nwabueze exposes his society’s filth, decay, leadership irresponsibility, rottenness, bankruptcy, inter/intra party conflicts etc.

According to Dada (2002) who stated that:

*Marx therefore considers it expedient distribution through a political awakening to the effect that the proletariat should organize a revolution which could enable them seize control of political power and by extension, economic power, freedom and wealth (Dada 61)*

This revolution is displayed by writers through their works. Their exposures of the societal ills are awakening the society that there is need that all these moral vices, exploitation, corruption etc should be addressed; hence the purpose of this study. Most writers base their works using satire, sarcasm, ridicule to expose those follies found in the society. Every literary theory creates the pattern to be followed to reason, to understand motives and assign true meanings to the actions and reactions that constitute the work of a writer. In the same vane, an Igbo proverb stipulates, “what a person says is the person’s heart revealed” As in most of the cases, it is not the writer’s open avowal or espousal of a theory that matters; rather, the proof of the theory lies in the arrangement of thoughts or points of understanding which can be derived from the syllogism involved.

**Syllogism is a type of logical argument comprising three propositions:**

(i) A major premise,
(ii) A minor premise,
(iii) A conclusion.

**For example:**

All women are weaklings.1
Jane is a woman.2
Jane is a weakness.3 This conclusion is deduced from the first two propositions.

On this topic, The Theme of Moral Decadence in the Emergent Nigerian Drama: A Study of Emeka Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures* and Esiaba Irobi *Hangmen Also Die* within the range of these two works of drama: *A Parliament of Vultures* and *Hangmen Also Die*, Marxism fosters the mindset to view the society from the Marxist conception of the state as part of the superstructure of the entirety of the human society. With Marxism as a rule, the state did not exist prior to the division of society into classes; it emerged and grew and became as the need is always there to protect the class-interests through an inventory of rights classically recognized. Against upholding this situation of things perpetually against one another, place is given to the legal political and philosophical controversies that culminate in social conflicts; these can be as ugly as anything corruption or moral decadence, etc.

As a prescient into the situation or context for which the Marxist literary theory is deemed a match, it is crucial to note that class struggle tends to delimit the exclusive assertions in the recognition, and definition of the individual, public and social interest. Class of society, however, banks on constant associations between certain economic, technical, social and individual movements; so, the struggle never ends. With the Marxist theory, it has given the researcher an eye opener on this research.
A Parliament of Vultures and Moral Decadence.

Literature is a fictional representation of reality. It is meant to mirror and project what is obtainable in a given society for people to read, ruminate on and learn with a view to changing the society for the better. Emeka Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures* and some other plays by Nigerian dramatists are based on satire on some personalities in the African or Nigerian political history.

The pervasive moral decadence has been blamed on colonialism. The nation’s colonial history may have restricted any early influence in an ethnical revolution. Throughout the colonial period, most Nigerians were in ignorance and poverty. The trapping of flashy cars house and success of the colonialists may influence the people as the poor see the colonialists as symbols of success and to emulate the colonialists in different political ways.

In the above named play text, the playwright, Emeka Nwabueze, paints the picture of African eroded countries whose political villains, that infested it with egocentric siphon and bastardization of it’s economy through reckless squandering of it’s resources cause frustration, fear of the future, hopeless and underdevelopment in the contemporary Africa post-colonial society. Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures*, exposes different moral decadence endemic in the present African society.

Moreover, it reflects and brings out the moral decadence of leadership failure, nepotism, corruption, human right abnegation, political manifestation, and irresponsibility on their part, they do leave the people they are representing to languish in abject poverty. However, this is reflected in the speech of the unknown prefer to remain in civil service, to avoid political linings or avoiding both to the alter of the unknown prefer to remain in civil service, to joining political linings or avoiding both to the alter of self employment. Just like Obiora’s character in Emeka Nwabueze’s *Echoes of Madness*. Leaving the affairs of the government in the hands of mediocres and almost stark illiterates is undeniably leading to underdevelopment. In the play *A Parliament of Vulture*: Madam Omeaku’s inability to read or write minutes having snatched the secretaryship from Mr. Otobo, is quantum evidence or focal point of moral decadence in the play text. However, chince’s lamentations of incompetence in the purported democratic regime is prevalent here. He posits that:

> Their politicians had no formal training they were the dregs of the society: passengers, touts, shoe shine boys semi-literate army generals and police corporals school teachers, failed academics (The Visitor, 95).

Eminently, chief Habamero, the chief of protocol, Mr. Brown, Reverend Jossy and Madam Omeaku, fit into this aggressive criticism of chince’s description.

Moreover, the theme of hypocrisy of the clergy is captured in the play, in the personality of Jossy. It is difficult to establish who among the members of the clergy is a junk Pastor or Rev. Again, Pastors are mostly used by politicians as a means of lending a false valuable credibility to the dubious practices are brought within the political circle, they give up their fake religious consciousness to sing a new song. However, in the play, Jossy’s character falls within this hypocrisy of the clergy, just like Jero’s character in the Soyinkas’s *The Trials of Brother Jero*, more over, Jossy uses religion to deceive people and get what he wants. Habamero says to Rev. Jossy: “I have approved the sum of one million naira as your dress allowance”. (24). In essence Nwabueze sets out to decry the members of the clergy, who sacrifice their religious oaths and defile their righteousness, on the altar of corrupt political dividend provided to the detriment of the suffering masses.

The African countries political office holders are hell bent on milking the nation’s cow dry by squandering and diverting public treasuring into the purse of few politicians in the country. This irresponsibility on their part, they do leave the people they are representing to languish in abject poverty. However, this is reflected in the speech of the president of the parliament Thus, he says to the members of the parliament:

> You can start with a hundred million if you need a supplementary fund, we can always divert some from the education allocation (A Parliament of Vultures; 67).

Education in the country which should receive priority attention is totally robbed, all in the name of organization of parliament’s party which is represented by Dr. Parkers and Mr. Otobo. This is simply because they have all shifted their children abroad for quality education leaving the common people to grope for knowledge in moribund and rejected schools.

Again, *A Parliament of Vultures* captures and criticizes the precarious economic condition of the
masses. There is a great distinction between the rich and the poor. The rich live in a city that has all the infrastructural development as oppose to the inhibition of the poor. In *A parliament of vultures*, Mr. Brown, chief Habamero and madam Omeaku live in a different world different from the world of the masses. This captures and criticizes social stratification in the society. In this regard, this call for Ngugi’s Opinion in (1992:24); he posits that:

*Tribe is a special creation of the colonial regime. Now here are only two tribes left in Africa: the ‘have’ and the ‘have-nots’ what goes for tribalism in Africa is really a form of civil war among the ‘have-nots’ struggling for crumbs from the master’s table*....

However, Ngugi’s opinion gives more evidence of class stratification endemic in contemporary African society mirrored and criticized by Nwabueze. Moreover, in the play, the remote rural area is the world of politicians. The plight of the inhabitant of the masses is revealed by the character of Mr. Brown’s parliament. He says: “the whole place is so congested, and the inhabitants look like hungry folks. The whole place is fifthly and….” (*A Parliament of Vultures*, 9): This portrays a classed society.

Political thuggery, especially during election has become part of the political life of the country. The politicians are always full of guilty conscience. Ruled by fear of insecurity from the aggressive oppressed masses, they move with dogs in the mask of human beings. This is to silence any opposition from every quarter it might creep out from. Who does not hear from information communication media radio, television, News paper, magazines etc that after 2003 election, politicians could not retrieve the guns they gave to their thugs. They now live in neo-in-security from those who had protected them. In essence Nwabueze sets out to decry political thuggery prevalent in the society at large.

Nwabueze employs dramatic irony to satirize and criticize the moral decadence in the society. A situation where the police inspector, who should stand as an epitome of Justice, equity, fairness, is used by the parliamentarians as an instrument to silence opposition in the house, to arrest and detain Dr. Barkers and Mr. Otobo without legal trial because of the fact that they are the true representatives of the masses in the parliament. This incident is equally treated by Irobi in the *Hangmen Also Die*, where the six suicide squad were arrested and detained without trial. In essence the contemporary playwright condemns all this inhuman treatment endemic in the society. Again, the rivalry that exists in *A Parliament of Vultures*, is equivalent to what is happening in the Nigerian government, where a fellow parliamentarian who attempted to use his intellectual acumen, just like: (Dr. Parkers and Mr. Otobo) to curb or check the executive rascality, political calumny and dictatorial tendency of the president or governor of a state etc, will instantly be ousted from his or her post.

Another important theme of moral decadence in *A Parliament of Vultures* is that it mirrors exploitation and under payment of the civil servants. The civil servants are highly exploited in all ramifications. Sometimes, the worker works from year to year without being paid. However, this can be justified in different state universities in Nigerian where lecturers are not paid their salary and still expect them to lecture students. In the above named play the defiant and reproachful speech of Mrs. Omeaku on the failure of Mr. Omeaku to provide for the family is a terrible condition of Nigerian civil servants, even in civil service in African society at large. Nwabueze carefully captures this moral malady through dramatic style of mimicry and irony, madam Omeaku says;

*“Thirty five years in the service of my nation”. What was such a service worth, Mr. Omeaku thirty-five years as a teacher in a primary school? What is such service worth in the present age? (A Parliament of Vultures; 17)*

Moreover, Madam Omeaku’s dramatic action is contemptuous, yet ironically it reveals the nasty and precarious economic conditions. Nwabueze is ironically saying that it is pathetic that a civil servant who spent thirty-five years of service and cannot provide for his family because of exploitative tendency of the leaders.

In conclusion, in *A Parliament of Vultures*, Nwabueze is identified with the masses. He sets out to institute order, fairness, classless society, equity and justice in contemporary post-colonial African societies embedded in moral decadency and rottenness. Hence, the above analysis portrays the themes of moral decadence prevalent in the contemporary African milieu.

**Hangmen Also Die and Moral Decadence**

The above named text is an apocalyptic and nosradamic play project Esiaba Irobi, in a revolutionary and combatant mood with the
extraordinary artistic power and exaggerated style reflect a society endangered and engulfed in joblessness, corruption political assassination, poverty, leadership irresponsibility, injustices, class disparity, God fatherism, quota system religious bloodletting and academic impoverishment. A close view of the text reveals Degemu local government in Izon state.

*Hangmen Also Die* is a picture of moral decadency to imminent dying contemporary African society. This presents societies where embezzlement, leadership irresponsibility and moral depravity throw the societies into anarchy through the degeneracy and acclaimed revolutionary activities of the suppressed class. Moreover, featuring most prominently among other social criticisms in Esiaba’s *Hangmen Also Die*, are leadership irresponsibility and embezzlement. In the play, Chief Erekosina, the commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs embezzles the compensation money of about three million naira that the federal government gave to the oil producing area for compensation on an incident of oil-spillage, and unhealthy life. But the chief siphoned the money into his private account only to use it to acquire extravagant title of Amatemso 1, in his Izon state. This mad Dog in the mask of human being confiscates the states money leaving the people to die of hunger in the midst of abundance.

The text, *Hangmen Also Die* is a auspicious play that reflects the moral decadence of leadership failure, class stratification and it’s implications, and finally projects and criticizes the rottenness of social formation that was intensified by an oil wealth. It portrays heartless exploitation of the masses, by the ruling class, betrayal of public confidence, administrative irresponsibility, moral decadence and socially stratified society that breeds and nurtures corruption and oppression of the less privileged in the society circle. In the play it is difficult to establish who in particular the Hangmen are. Neither Yekini, Chief Erekosima, the Warden, the Doctor, nor the seven suicide squad are the Hangmen. Everybody in the play is directly hanging one another. However, typifying this issue by Chief Isokrio Erekosiam, Yekini reveals that:

*Some time ago, the Federal Government gave the citizen of this state, which as you know is a Riverine state; the sum of three million naira as compensation money for the oil spillage which has ruined their farms, their homes, and their lives. But the man they killed, one Chief Isokipiri Erekosima, a Commissioner for Local Government, Rural Development and Chieftaincy Affairs, connived with his councilors and Local Government Chairman to confiscate the 3 million naira. The councilors took one million and shared among themselves. The Local Government Chairman took one million. The Commissioner himself, one million. No single citizen, no matter how wretched, got a single kobo. That was when these young men stepped in… (Hangmen Also Die pg 12-13).*

One tendency of the fraudulent individuals is inhumanly mindedness, committing of evils they stepped on otherwise chief Erekosian would have had compassion for the poor villagers whose farms were ruined by oil spillage and especially, Ibiaye who lost his sight as a result of the spillage.

In the society unemployment which contributes to social vices such as killing, burglary, in the African society, specifically Nigeria where a lot of graduates are jobless and this has put them in a state of despair and frustration as the employed persons see themselves as being useless in the society. This is depicted in *Hangmen Also Die*. This play presents a seven man suicide squad, namely: Acid, Dayan, Rip, mortuary, khomemi, Discharge and Tetanus. Completely educated to the apex level but have been seeking employment nearly more than seven years without job so forthcoming, they engage themselves in the revolutionary stance through a radical organization so as to effect change of nation’s leadership. The organization voices out the apocalyptic commitment to the masses:

*DREAMS AND AMBITIOUS TO CHANGE THIS NATION. CHANGE IT'S LEADERSHIP, CREATE A NEW LEASE OF LIFE FOR ITS CITIZENS, SO WE FORMED AN ORGANIZATION, AN ORGANIZATION POISED TO CHANGE THE WORLD (HANGMEN ALSO DIE, PG 24).*

This character in the play see revaluation as the only means to make positive change of the nations malaise, however, the moral malady criticized by Esiaba in *Hangmen Also Die* is also of great importance. This can be seen in Femi Osofisan, in his play; Once Upon Four Robbers, which mirrors a society engulfed and embedded in social stratification and unemployment. This directly induced the character of Alhaja, Angola, Major and Hasan to involve themselves in arm robbing. In other words there is joblessness, poverty, hunger and the consequent outcome is armed robbery just like the seven suicide squad in *Hangmen Also Die*, because of the fact that in Nigeria a few privileged members have appropriated other people’s labours
and the nation’s wealth, diverting it to their private pocket.

Hangmen Also Die chronicles the theme of Godfatherism in Izon state. This is the reality of Nigerian society where everything is based of favoritism and nepotism in society; where getting jobs, promotion etc., is a matter of whom you know and your involvement in partisan politics. In the play the chief superintendent does not merit the post of the director general to be the head of the prisons but he is favoured by Chief Erekosima whose decision remains unquestionable in State of Izon. In the same way, Damingbo made Yekini Hangmen simply because of the fact that he is an in-law.

Again, the play mirrors and condemns bribery and corruption, Erekosima was killed because of the fact that he siphoned the nation’s wealth as reported by Yekini. This makes the young mobs to kill him as a means of averting the future occurrence and so give the leaders, both present and future a sense of governance. The play equally reflects the economic political ideology which had endangered the masses. Irobi criticizes the unnatural class disparity between the rich and the character of Tamara; she says:

*Here is the battle, a battle of the dispossessed versus the self-possessed. Between the haves and the have not, between the landless and the landlords. (Hangmen Also Die, pg 65).*

Irobi brings it to the masses awareness through Tamara, that the masses are enchainy by the training and geocentricism of the leaders whose avarices present job opportunities to the masses so as to make people engage them in stealing in the society. This is an evident of unemployed graduates in Hangmen Also Die. Dimerar the son of Lolia, gives out these criticisms through his letter, it says:

*Mother I am tired of being jobless.
I am tired of pacing pavements in search of jobs. I am tired of attending interviews. I am also tired of pilfering your money, kobo by kobo, naira by naira everyday so, today; I have left home to join the suicide squad. (Hangmen Also Die, pg 45).*

However, unemployment leads to hunger and poverty which in turn leads people into armed robbing.

In conclusion, Esiaba through flashback and foreshadowing, exaggeration and other literary aesthetic creation, project the moral decadences and realism in its beauty and splendor which includes: leadership failure, unemployment, religious bloodletting, arrest without trial of the poor members of the society and among others discussed in the above analysis.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, attempts have been made to view drama as a tool for combating moral decadence. Drama as a genre of literature does not exist in isolation of the society. That literature is a reflection of the society is a fact that has been widely acknowledged. Literature indeed reflects the society, its good values and its ills. In its corrective function, literature mirrors the ills of the society with a view to making the society realize its mistakes and make amends. It also projects the virtues or good values in the society for people to emulate. Literature, as an imitation of human action, often presents a picture of what people think, say and do in the society.

In literature, we find stories designed to portray human life and action through some characters who, by their words, action and reaction, convey certain messages for the purpose of education, information and entertainment. It is impossible to find a work of literature that excludes the attitudes, morale and values of the society, since no writer has been brought up completely unexposed to the world around him. What writers of literature do is to transport the real-life events in their society into fiction and present it to the society as a mirror with which people can look at themselves and make amends where necessary. Thus, literature is not only a reflection of the society but also serves as a corrective mirror in which members of the society can look at themselves and find the need for positive change.

A playwright either consciously or unconsciously strives to make his work have human society and social relevance. It is this relevance of literature that gives a writer (the playwright) the room to make his own contribution to the socio political and economic development of the society. This is where the study of Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures* and Irobi’s *Hangmen Also Die*, became imperatives. They have adopted their plays as mechanism for social criticism (criticism of human life) *A Parliament of Vultures* and *Hangmen Also Die* look into the inner fiber of the society to expose its social degeneracy. The plays have gone in a long way to harangue the challenge of poor leadership and exploitations of the masses that are facing the new independent African society. They reflect a society whose leaders are carried away by the euphoria of wealth.

As moral conscientious artists Nwabueze and Irobi,
in their respective plays; *A Parliament of Vultures* and *Hangmen Also Die* project a utopian society that has higher human alternatives. This envisages their artistic vision. Nevertheless, since writers do not have same treatment or approach to a particular issue the envision of revolution as a means of social behaviour regenerated in *A Parliament of Vultures* and *Hangmen Also Die* is not a surprise. It is mild in Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures* while the characters in Irobi’s play *Hangmen Also Die*, are rebellious against the social systems that oppress them. Irobi envisioning this exploitative tendency of Chief Erekosima propels the oppressed to radicalism. In Nwabueze’s play; *A Parliament of Vultures*, the characters are defiant, always willing to operate in the social system they find themselves. By way of argument, both plays argue that to change human social behaviour, the whole concept of structure must be changed.

**Works Cited**


