

**MORAL DECADENCE IN EMEKA NWABUEZE'S A PARLIAMENT OF VULTURES  
AND FEMI OSOFISAN'S ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
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**FEBRUARY, 2025**

## **CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this was carried out by Alli Rhoda Gbemisola in the department of English and Literature, University of Benin, under my supervision

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof. A. P Mamudu

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God, who has sustained me and seen me through this phase via his divine guidance.

Also to my parents Mr Alli Joseph and late Mrs Sarah Alli for their relentless support and sacrifice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My acknowledgement goes to God Almighty for his grace, mercy, Love and strength from the beginning of my degree to its completion.

My humble appreciation goes to my project supervisor Professor Adekunle Mamudu for his patience, sacrifice and wisdom during the course of the research and taking out time to correct my work and ensuring I do things the right way.

I Want to express my gratitude to my parents for their physical and spiritual support and siblings for their sacrificial love and moral support bestowed upon me which has been a source of comfort and inspiration

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Miss Alli Grace for her guidance, unwavering support and commitment to achieving this heights.

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To my friends Mrs Helen, Peace, and Joy who have both shared in my happy and sad times. I really appreciate you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Parliament of vultures and Femi Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers criticis the widespread moral decline and Political dishonesty that affect Nigerian Society, today. Both plays examine the intricate relationship between leaders and citizens. They explore the harmful effects of dishonest leadership and the roles individual inadvertently play in societal decline. By examining actions and motivations of the characters in these plays, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to moral decline and the potential for societal renewal. The primary data for this study comprises of Emeka Nwabueze's Parliament of Vultures and Femi Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers the plays are Suitable for data collection because they provide insight on the corrupting influence of power, the roles of individuals in supporting corrupt system and the need for a just and equitable society. This study adopts a qualitative analysis. The qualitative approach rich interpretation and analysis on both plays The process of textual analysis Involves a close examination of both plays to uncovers hidden meanings, and to deepen our understanding of the plays and their significance.

## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Purpose of Study**

This study aims to examine the factors contributing to moral decadence in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of vultures* and Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*. The research specifically focuses on the role of leadership in fostering social decay and the complicity of individuals within a corrupt society. By analysing these plays, the study seeks to expose the complex interplay between leadership and individual agency in perpetuating moral decadence.

### **1.2 Scope of Study**

This study primarily focuses on the roles of leadership and individual agency in perpetuating moral decadence as depicted in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*. It examines the leadership styles and ethical frameworks of the characters in power, instances of corruption and abuse of power, and the impact of corrupt leadership on society. Additionally, the study explores the extent of individual complicity in corrupt systems, the moral dilemmas faced by characters, and the role of individuals in upholding moral standards and challenging societal ills.

### **1.3 Methodology**

This section provides a detailed breakdown on the method of data collection and method of data analysis. The primary data for this study comprises two plays, which are Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*. The data collection process involves a textual analysis, where close attention is paid to the character's actions, recurring themes related to leadership, corruption, individual involvements in the society.

Also, the researcher consults scholarly articles, books and online resources to understand previous interpretations, and employs a consistent system to record observations and insights. By

combining these methods, the researcher develops a comprehensive understanding of the role of leadership and individuals in the moral decay represented in both plays.

This research employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the plays *A Parliament of Vultures* and *Once Upon Four Robbers*. The qualitative research method offers a rich interpretation, description and analysis of the selected plays. A close reading of the texts will be conducted to identify themes, and characterizations related to moral decadence, leadership, and individuals. Character analysis will be employed to understand the motivations and actions of characters, while thematic analysis will identify recurring patterns and themes. By combining these methods, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to moral decadence in the plays and their broader implications on our society.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

This research is informed by the theoretical framework of Social Realism. Social Realism is a literary and artistic movement that emerged in the 19th century, characterized by its focus on the social, and economic conditions of the working class. It seeks to expose social injustice, inequality, and the impact of these issues on individuals and communities. Several critics have explained the concept of social realism and its origin, and we shall investigate some in this study. According to Khuman Prakash, “social realism is a term that derives from Russian-inspired beliefs about the function of literature in a revolutionary socialist society. The international production of social realist fiction characterized by a belief in the power of the word and in the writer's ability to portray a satisfying documentary fashion, the structure of social reality” (81). He explains that “social realism is inspired in various ways by the Russian revolution, Soviet communism, international Marxism , and the need to respond critically and in a denunciatory fashion to the various mechanism of repression and the frustration of personal and collective

aspiration.”(81) He further points out that social realism is the representation of how society not as it is but as it ought to be, and social realism requires that all work of art ought to represent the various ways in which individuals struggle towards a socialist future and a more equitable society (84).

Similarly, Robin Small argues that “social realism is a misguided attempt to combine sociological and epistemological claims about knowledge” (1). According to him, social realism offers a nuanced perspective on the relationship between knowledge and reality. It acknowledges that the production and dissemination of knowledge are inherently social processes, influenced by cultural, historical and political contexts. However, he maintains that even within these social constraints, knowledge can still be objectively true, corresponding to a real world that exists independently of human perception and interpretation (3). In essence, social realism recognizes the social construction of knowledge, while affirming the possibility of objective truth. This suggests that while our understanding of the world may be shaped by social factors, it is not entirely determined by them. Knowledge can still be grounded in empirical evidence and logical reasoning, allowing us to uncover truths about the world that transcends individual and cultural biases.

Another critic, John Berger, offers a more dynamic interpretation of social realism. While acknowledging its role in reflecting the existing world, he emphasizes its potential to drive social change. Berger views social realism as a powerful tool that can expose underlying systems and structures that influence our lives. By illuminating these hidden forces, social realism challenges the status quo and prompts critical reflection. In essence, social realism aims to inspire individuals to adopt a new perspective on the world and take action to improve it (35).

Again, Guillermo posits that social realism is a form of realism that specifically highlights the conflict between oppressive power structures and their victims. This artistic movement aims to portray the struggles of ordinary individuals, especially those who are marginalized or oppressed (16). By depicting the everyday lives of these individuals, social realism aims to expose the social and economic conditions they face (10). This artistic approach seeks to promote social justice and inspire change by giving voice to the experience of the working class and the marginalized groups.

Next, Richard Wightman Fox argues that social realists diverge from the romanticist approach by focusing on the harsh realities of life. Instead of idealizing and romanticizing human experience, social realists explore the gritty details of working conditions, exploitation, racism, prejudice, and economic hardship (2). By employing realistic depictions, they expose the plight of masses and challenge societal norms that perpetuate injustice and inequality.

Having examined the ideas of the social realism critics, we see that social realism emerges as a powerful literary and artistic movement that seeks to illuminate the realities of the working class and marginalized groups. By employing realistic depictions and unflinching honesty, social realists works expose the systemic injustice, economic disparities, and social inequalities that affect our society. This artistic approach not only serves as a mirror, reflecting the harsh realities of life, but also acts as a catalyst for social change. By highlighting the struggles of the oppressed and marginalized, social realist artists inspire empathy, provoke critical thinking and encourage activism.

As John Berger observed, social realism is not merely a passive reflection of the world but a tool for shaping it. By exposing the hidden structures of power and challenging the status quo, social realism challenges individuals to question the prevailing norm and strive for a more equitable

society. While the specific manifestations of social realism may vary across different historical and cultural contexts, its core principles of social justice and human dignity remain enduring. As we continue to grapple with social and economic challenges in the 21st century, the legacy of social realism continues. Its emphasis on realism, empathy and social justice continues to inspire artists and writers to address pressing issues and advocate for positive change. By examining the past and present of social realism, we can gain valuable insights into the power of art to shape our world and inspire hope for a more just and equitable future. Hence, social realism provides a powerful framework for analysing the plays *A Parliament of Vultures* by Emeka Nwabueze and Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*. By focusing on the social and economic conditions of the working class and marginalized group, social realism allows us to probe deeper into the moral decay and political corruption depicted in these works.

### **1.5 Review of Scholarship**

The tapestry of Nigerian literature is rich and diverse, reflecting the nation's complex history and socio-political landscape. Among the numerous literary works that explore the depths of societal issues, the plays *A Parliament of Vultures* by Emeka Nwabueze and *Once Upon Four Robbers* by Femi Osofisan stand out as powerful critiques of moral decadence and political corruption. Thus, this literary reviews provides a critical analysis of related works to identify areas where more investigation is needed, build upon existing knowledge, ensure quality standard of research and inform future research.

Chikerenwa Kingsley, in his work *Change Rhetorics and Leadership in Nigeria: Lessons from Emeka Nwabueze's A Parliament of Vultures* suggests that when political leaders are corrupt, and ineffective, they fail to inspire the people, and government's promises and plans often turn out to be empty slogans, repeated without real actions (288). He insists that Nigeria's political, social,

and economic landscape is marred by the pervasive influence of self-interest. This insidious force, he argues, drives leaders to prioritize personal gain over the welfare of the nation. As a result, the country suffers from widespread corruption, misgovernance, and a decline in the standard of living.

To highlight the detrimental effects of this leadership crisis, Chikerenwa draws on the insights of the social critic. His work shows that Emeka Nwabueze uses his art and intellect to expose the corrupt practices of those in power and expose the plight of the individuals, who are often marginalized and persecuted in the Nigerian society, and to unveil the dark side of Nigerian politics and society. He explains that Nwabueze employs the use of animal metaphor "Vultures" to describe the harm that the Legislators have rendered to the nation (291).

The researcher emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between literature and society. The researcher argues that literary works are not merely products of artistic imagination but also reflections of the social and political realities of their time. By analyzing these works, we can gain a deeper understanding of the historical and contemporary challenges facing Nigeria. , In essence, he suggests that by confronting the issue of corrupt leadership and promoting good governance, Nigeria can overcome its developmental challenges and achieve its full potential.

A close review on Obasi et al's *Perspectives on Corruption and Charlantry in Politics: An Analysis of Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People and Emeka Nwabueze's A Parliament of Vultures* reveals how the writers satirize different forms of corruption such as bribery, fraud, election violence, media corruption, embezzlement, favouritism, gutter politics and electoral manipulation, and how the politicians, through manipulative means, use public servants to achieve their selfish interests.

The researchers argue that Nwabueze and Achebe use satire, burlesque, caricature, and dramatic irony to satirize the follies of corrupt politicians in Nigeria. By employing humor, they highlight the serious issue of corruption and political ineptitude, inviting public discourse and action (8).

In this research, which employs political satire as its theoretical frame work, we understand that both authors present characters who, despite claiming to be the solution, are actually the problem, embodying corruption and criminality. While the characters may be comical, they represent real-world issues of social construction and political manipulation. Both texts expose the corrupt politicians' tendency to redefine themselves to manipulate the electorate and engage in outrageous looting, reckless display of wealth, and wasteful spending. Conclusively, the texts suggest that mass action is necessary to address these issues and bring about positive change.

*Dissecting the Bitter Truth About Our Politics and Leadership: A Study of Emeka Nwabueze's A Parliament of Vultures* by Nnyagu et al explores Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, through the lens of Realism, as a political satire. They examine different themes as they relate to the Nigerian society such as: Women in politics, misappropriation of public funds, neglect of the teachers, the role of women in an ideal home, the problem with the masses, and appointment of key posts (25).

The researchers argue that in our contemporary society, Nigeria's leadership is dominated by selfish individuals who prioritize personal gain over national interest. They agree that while capable individuals are discouraged from entering politics, corrupt politicians use intimidation to maintain power. Also, the findings from the research show that, Emeka Nwabueze, like many concerned Nigerians, believes that satire is a powerful tool to combat the issue of corruption. His play, "A Parliament of Vultures," satirizes the actions of Nigerian politicians, aiming to raise awareness and inspire change.

*Interrogating the Leadership Question in Nigeria: A Discourse on Emeka Nwabueze's A Parliament of Vultures* by Philip Peter Akoje explores the role of leadership in Nigeria's development, particularly focusing on the motivations of political leaders and their impact on the country's trajectory.

The researcher employs political Realism as a theoretical background to investigate the effect of leadership as a crucial factor in the development of any society. He emphasizes that the progress or decline of a nation, whether politically, economically, or socially, is significantly influenced by the quality and principles of its leadership (95). The study focuses on Nigeria's democratic context and utilizes an eclectic theoretical approach to examine the motivations of Nigerian political leaders, drawing insights from Emeka Nwabueze's play, *A Parliament of Vultures*.

The research findings suggest that a significant number of Nigerian political leaders are primarily motivated by personal gain. These corrupt officials have contributed to the nation's economic decline by implementing policies that have exacerbated economic challenges. To address this issue, the research advocates for the adoption of servant-leadership as a guiding principle for those seeking public office. Servant leaders prioritize the needs and well-being of their constituents and are committed to public service. By embracing servant leadership, Nigeria can foster a more equitable and prosperous society.

Additionally, the study recommends proactive measures to prevent economic downturns. By implementing sound economic policies and fostering transparency and accountability, leaders can mitigate the risks of economic recession and ensure the long-term stability and growth of the nation.

*Understanding Femi Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers and Aringindin and the Night Watchmen: A Critical Perspective* by Ajidahun is a critical discourse that investigates the

inefficiency of death penalty as a deterrent to armed robbery in Nigeria. He observes that the playwright contends that the death penalty is an ineffective measure to curb this pervasive issue. He argues that the root causes of armed robbery lie in deeper socioeconomic problems, including unemployment, poverty, inequality, and corruption.

He also examines these economic factors as a result of the failure on the part of the government and explains Osofisan's idea that the government resort to public execution as a method of eliminating the problem, instead of focusing on the social, economic and political issues facing the country, like the root cause of poverty, inequality and injustice (117). The researcher also observes that the song is an indictment on the greedy business men and women in the society. It criticizes the greed and exploitation of the wealthy class, who hoard goods and inflate prices. Thus, the research seeks to expose the social factors that contribute to armed robbery. It highlights the exploitation of the masses and calls for a societal transformation that will challenge the status quo and create a more equitable society.

*The Reinvention of the "Legend of Robinhood" in Femi Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers* by Peter Aihevba analyses how Femi Osofisan uses the technique of adaptation and revisioning in his play *Once Upon Four Robbers*. The researcher shows that by re-imagining the story of Robin Hood, Osofisan elevates his characters, poor robbers, to the status of reformers. This technique allows him to explore the theme of social injustice and critique social inequalities. The research examines how this adaptation technique enhances the impact of the play and its relevance to contemporary problems.

Again, according to the researcher, the presentation of the four robbers as social reformers explores the complex issues of armed robbery in our contemporary society. The research investigates the traditional notion of criminals and questions the social context that breeds such

behaviour. This investigation shows that the characters, who are inspired by the legendary Robin Hood, steal from the rich and redistribute wealth to the poor, raise question about the morality of their actions and the true nature of their intention. The research looks into the complexities of social justice and the blurred lines between heroes and villains. The researcher reveals that by presenting a controversial portrayal of the poor, Osofisan encourages the audience to reconsider their perception of crime and social injustice.

### **1.6 Thesis Statement**

This research illustrate corruption, Greed, prostitution and injustice in Emeka Nwabueze's *Parliament of Vultures* and Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**CORRUPTION AND GREED AS CONTRIBUTORS TO MORAL DECADENCE IN**  
**EMEKA NWABUEZE'S *A PARLIAMENT OF VULTURES* AND FEMI OSOFISAN'S**  
***ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS***

***2.1 Introduction***

Nigeria, a nation rich in both natural and human resources, has been plagued by a persistent cycle of systemic corruption( embezzlement of funds) and Greed. These socio-political ills, deeply rooted in the nation's social structure, have had a profound impact on its development and the well-being of its citizens. To explore the intricate nature of these issues, this chapter aims to analyze two significant Nigerian plays: Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*. Both plays, though distinct in their narrative styles, converge in their exploration of the corrosive effects of corruption, and Greed to moral decadence Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* presents a critique of the political elite, exposing their insatiable greed and their disregard for the plight of the common people. The play's central theme revolves around the corrupt practices of a fictional African nation's government, where power is wielded as a tool for personal enrichment and oppression. Through vivid characterizations and satirical dialogue, Nwabueze highlights the moral decay and ethical bankruptcy that permeate the corridors of power.

In contrast, Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* takes a more unique approach, exploring the complex interplay between poverty, crime, and societal injustice. The play investigates the lives of four armed robbers who are driven to desperation by the harsh economic conditions and the systemic inequalities that prevail. Osofisan's work underscores the fact that corruption and misappropriation often create a fertile ground for crime and violence. The play's characters, though morally ambiguous, are products of a system that has failed them. They are forced to

resort to illegal activities as a means of survival, highlighting the devastating consequences of structural violence and oppression. Through a detailed analysis of the plays, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between power, corruption, and social justice in Nigeria. By shedding light on the devastating impact of these issues, it aims to inspire.

## **2.2 Embezzlement of funds**

In *A Parliament of Vultures*, embezzlement is depicted as an institutionalized practice among politicians who exploit their positions for personal gain as seen in the excerpt below

Habamero: I have approved the sum of one million naira as your dress allowance. (24)

Habamero: By the power invested on me as the speaker of the house and chairman of this assembly. I approve the sum of two million naira for each member as inconvenience allowance. (27)

In the excerpt above, the senate president, Habamero depicts the example of a corrupt leader who as a result of his position in the Parliament plunder the nation's wealth in a weakness manner without conscience or sympathy knowing the consequences of his actions on the life of the people and state of the nation as it's gradually retrogressing rather progressing with men like Habamere at the helm of affairs. He lack empathy with the state of the nation and his not ready for service to his people who elected him as their representative but he wants to get paid for every inconvenience he encounters during his tenure as a parliamentarian and he his able to share this ideology of his to other parliamentarian. His philosophy of service as inconvenience is bought by the fellow parliament members except Mr Otobo and Dr Parker. The play presents a political landscape where corrupt practices are normalized, and public funds are treated as

personal resources. Also, the statement "...I, therefore, approve the sum of two billion naira for this purpose..." by Habamero illustrates embezzlement as it reflects the misuse of public funds for personal or frivolous expenditures rather than for essential services. Corruption emerges as a central theme in *A Parliament of Vultures*, serving as a mechanism that perpetuates economic marginalization. Nwabueze critiques the political elite's exploitation of resources and the neglect of marginalized communities, illustrating how corruption undermines economic opportunities for the majority. The novel's depiction of corrupt politicians and their exploitation of power serve as a commentary on the systemic inequalities that characterize Nigerian society.

The character of Chief Habamero epitomizes the corrupt elite who thrive at the expense of the marginalized. His wealth and influence are built on the backs of those he exploits, showcasing the stark contrast between the privileged and the impoverished. Nwabueze's portrayal of Chief Habamero highlights the ways in which corruption reinforces economic marginalization, creating a cycle of oppression that is difficult to escape.

Also, characters like Madam Omeaku's and Mr Brown exemplify this behavior, engaging in fraudulent activities such as inflating project costs and misappropriating funds intended for public welfare as illustrated in the excerpt below:

Brown: I suggest a vote of ten million naira.

Madam: for what? Are we teachers? This Parliament can't afford to be miserly as teachers. Nonsense!

Madam : First of all, we need appropriate dresses that would tell our position in society. The people we are representing will be unhappy if they don't see us in the

best attire. And no need to say that since we are representing parliament, parliamentary vote will take care of the cost of our attire. (71)

This statement emphasizes the prioritization of personal appearance over public service. Madam Omeaku's insistence on "appropriate dresses" funded by parliamentary votes illustrates a blatant misuse of funds for luxury rather than essential services. Their lack of scale of preference is demeaning and a shameful act that is not befitting. Bantering of words and insult is uncalled for and the statement "this Parliament cannot afford to be miserly as teachers" also reveals the fact that they willingly wish to unleash misery on the people as they have lost their heart of service (upholding truth, integrity, equity and justice) to corruption as also portrayed in the excerpt below;

Habamero: judging from the importance of such business, I'll say about a hundred million.

Parkers: (shouting) Christ Almighty.

Madam Omeaku: will that be enough? Aren't we going to invite our friends?

Parkers: Great heavens! This is criminal

Habamero: you can start with hundred million, if you need supplementary funds we can always divert some from education allocation. (67)

This approval is intended for lavish expenses like attire and entertainment for partying, prioritizing luxury over the welfare of citizens. This blatant disregard for fiscal responsibility highlights how political leaders exploit their positions to divert substantial amounts of public money for self-serving purposes, thereby perpetuating corruption and economic mismanagement in society. This reflects a corrupt mindset where government officials exploit their positions to finance extravagant lifestyles, neglecting the welfare of the citizens they ought to represent. Such

attitudes contribute to corruption, as funds meant for societal development is diverted for personal gain, lacking accountability and transparency in governance. The dialogue among the characters reveals a culture of moral decay and deceit. The characters' discussions often touch on the complexities of suppressing truth to execute their corrupt practices. Jossy: I hope disgruntled elements in our midst won't embarrass the president. (90),

This statement reflects a bureaucratic culture where opinions are suppressed to maintain the status quo. This illustrates how transparent leaders, like Dr. Parker and Mr. Otobo, are marginalized, and often intentionally excluded from meetings to avoid transparency, or informed about meetings hours after the meetings have started to carry out their agenda that thrives on secrecy and manipulation. This exclusion allows corrupt practices to continue unchecked, as they represent voices advocating for accountability and integrity.

The consequences of corruption is visible in A Parliament of Vultures are affecting the lives of ordinary citizens who suffer due to the misappropriation of national funds. When politicians divert resources meant for education, healthcare, and infrastructure into their pockets, it leads to widespread poverty and disillusionment. The stark contrast between the wealth accumulated by corrupt politicians and the impoverished state of the populace serves as a powerful indictment of their actions. The issue of embezzlement in *A Parliament of Vultures* raises significant moral questions about trust and responsibility in governance. Politicians are elected to serve the public interest; however, Nwabueze portrays them as betraying this trust for personal gain. This betrayal is not just an individual failing but speaks to a larger systemic issue where accountability is lacking. Nwabueze suggests that change is possible if citizens demand transparency from their leaders and hold them accountable for their actions. The character of Dr. Parker embodies this idealism, representing those who strive for integrity within a corrupt system.

Nwabueze also portray the challenges faced by those who seek accountability and fight this corrupt system.

Similarly, Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* explores embezzlement of funds and institutional theft through the lens of armed robbery, highlighting systemic corruption and societal failures. The robbers, driven by hunger and unemployment, symbolize the consequences of governmental neglect and economic disparity, reflecting a society where the rich exploit the poor and one of them referred to the leaders as having the Vulture like attitudes. Hassan: like Vultures. (6). The attributes of Vultures were mirrored alongside the character of the leaders who are selfish, embezzling the nation's wealth, feasting while its citizens is hungry, punishing crime while it engages in corrupt practices. These leaders who do not care about the citizens of the country as a result of the privileges they enjoy. Also, in the play, the sergeant, suggests that they should lie about the robbers escaping with the loot, indicating that they found nothing. This moment occurs when the soldiers recover the stolen goods but choose to keep them for themselves instead of returning them to the market women who were robbed. Sergeant: , As far as we know, the robbers ran away with the money! ... We found nothing. Pg (55).

This act of deception highlights systemic corruption and embezzlement within society, illustrating how those in power often exploit their positions for personal gain and making laws that aren't favourable to the citizens. The sergeant's decision to fabricate a story reflects a broader critique of societal norms where corruption is normalized. In today's context, this resonates with ongoing issues of embezzlement and misconduct among public officials who prioritize self-interest over their duty to serve the community. The soldiers' actions exemplify how corruption can permeate institutions meant to uphold justice, ultimately leading to a cycle of inequality and mistrust in authority. This portrayal invites audiences to question the moral integrity of those in

power and the impact of systemic corruption on society at large. This ethical decay among political leaders not only facilitates corruption but also contributes to a dismal standard of living for the populace, despite the nation's abundant resources. Angola: yes he died! The decree smashed him. (10).

The excerpt above illustrates the Law makers attitude and policies of leaders who do not adhere to the rule of law, who feel they are above the by the immunity of the position they hold. They who ought to uphold the law are breakers of the law are moving about unpunished while the masses are punished according to the law. The weight of the law is upon the less privilege in the society. The word "smashed" show the degree of the negative impact to harsh polices enacted by the law makers.

Femi Osofisan's play *Once Upon Four Robbers* serves as a critique or satire of government officials particularly focusing on the lack of accountability among leaders and their persistent failure to address fundamental societal challenges. This analysis will explore these themes in detail, highlighting how the play reflects broader societal issues and the implications of leadership failures. In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Osofisan presents a narrative that intertwines the lives of four robbers with the socio-political landscape of Nigeria. The play is set against a backdrop of economic hardship, corruption, and social injustice. This ideology has reshaped the lives and reduce their mentality of the citizens that they no longer see themselves as humans but corpse due to the situation society has reduce them to as seen in the excerpt below;

Angola: listen to him its disgusting! What are you if not a corpse? Tell me you were born in the slum and you didn't know you were a corpse? Covered in slim, you have always been a corpse you feed on worm and leftovers, your body nude like a carcass in the government's mortuary,

elbowing your way among other corpses and the stink is all over you like a flooded cemetery in lagos. Pg (10)

This is a powerful metaphor that exposes the pitiable impact of economic hardship and social injustice on poor communities, showing how these factors contribute to a cycle of crime and violence. The robbers, while engaging in illegal activities, are portrayed as products of a system that has failed them. This raises critical questions about leadership accountability and the responsibilities of those in power.

The characters in *Once Upon Four Robbers* reflect the struggles faced by many Nigerians who are trapped in cycles of poverty due to systemic neglect by those in power and their inability to create jobs or policies that would attract foreign investors but looting and draining the natural resources.

Alhaja: (in illiterate accents) wanted urgently: four boys and one girl standard six, an advantage but not a compulsory position.

Hassan (same game) service boys, waiter! Attractive salary.

Major: five naira per week. (22)

The government's inability to provide adequate employment opportunities (aside cook, cleaners, housemaids and part-time misress) or support for marginalized communities exacerbates feelings of hopelessness. As a result, some individuals resort to crime as a means of survival. The wages are less attractive and not enough to spend or fend for one's self. The statement "attractive salary" is an irony in contrast to the meagre or peanuts received as wages. Osofisan uses this

narrative to highlight the urgent need for leadership that is responsive to the needs of its citizens who entrusted them with service.

Osofisan critiques leaders who engage in self-serving behaviors while neglecting their duties to promote social welfare. This critique resonates with real-world scenarios where political elites exploit their positions for personal gain. The robbers' choice to target wealthy individuals symbolizes a form of resistance against systemic oppression. By stealing from those who benefit from corruption, they challenge the moral authority of a government that punishes them while allowing corrupt officials to thrive unscathed.

### **2.3 Greed Driven Leadership and individuals.**

Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* presents a critique of political leadership in Nigeria, particularly focusing on the theme of greed. The play, set against the backdrop of a corrupt political system, portrays politicians as self-serving individuals who prioritize personal gain over public welfare. Through its characters, particularly Madam Omeaku and Mr. Brown, Nwabueze illustrates how greed permeates political institutions, leading to a morally decayed society. Madam Omeaku is one of the central figures in *A Parliament of Vultures*, representing the archetype of a corrupt politician. Her character is multifaceted; she embodies ambition, cunning, and a profound lack of ethical integrity. As a newly elected member of parliament, she initially appears to be a figure of hope for her constituents. However, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that her primary concern is her own advancement. Madam Omeaku's ambition is obvious throughout the play. She expresses her desire for power not as a means to serve her community but as a pathway to personal enrichment. Madam: To be an honourable member is not enough. What matters is the position you get in parliament. (9 )

This statement encapsulates her mindset, reveals her belief that political positions are merely stepping stones for financial gain rather than opportunities to enact meaningful change and service to the Nation. She is after plundering into the nation's wealth so as to enrich herself and despite the wealth acquired she longed further for more. Her interactions with other characters further underscore her self-interest. For instance, she engages in discussions about securing lucrative committee positions without considering the implications for her constituents. This transactional approach to politics highlights how greed drives her actions and decisions.

Mr. Brown complements Madam Omeaku's character as another embodiment of greed-driven personalities. He is depicted as a manipulative politician who seeks power for its own sake.

Mr Brown: Too bad! That's why you have to support me in my quest for the chairmanship of the purchasing committee of Parliament. In a couple of months you will have enough refrigerators to give as present to your friends. (10)

In the excerpt above, Mr Brown's ambition is characterized by a willingness to engage in unethical practices to achieve his goals. Mr. Brown's character is marked by his ability to manipulate others for personal gain. He often engages in backdoor dealings and forms alliances based on mutual benefit rather than shared values or principles. His assurance to Madam Omeaku that supporting him will lead to "enough refrigerators" for her underscores his focus on material gain rather than ethical governance. Moreover, Mr. Brown's interactions with other characters reveal his cunning nature. He often undermines his rivals through deceitful tactics, showcasing how greed fosters an environment where manipulation and betrayal thrive.

Furthermore, Madam Omeaku's manipulation extends beyond her political dealings; she also exploits family relationships for personal gain. Her use of her daughter Nkechi as a pawn in

political games demonstrates how corruption deeply affects personal lives: Madam Omeaku: “Nkechi will do what I say; it’s all part of our strategy.”

This manipulation not only highlights Madam Omeaku's moral bankruptcy but also reflects how greed can corrupt familial bonds and values.

Nwabueze employs symbolism throughout *A Parliament of Vultures* to reinforce the issue of greed and corruption in political leadership. One significant symbol is the Ogbunabani—a fetish object representing occult practices among politicians. This reliance on occult practices signifies a departure from ethical governance and underscores how greed drives individuals toward morally questionable choices.

The symbolism extends beyond individual characters; it reflects broader societal implications regarding trust in leadership and governance structures. The reliance on symbols like Ogbunabani indicates that many citizens view their leaders as untrustworthy figures willing to engage in any means necessary for personal gain.

Habamero: Now, let us repeat what we have sworn before Ogbunabani. Anyone here who reports any other member of any offense without going through the chairman, anyone who talks evil about anyone here, especially with regard to financial gratification, may Ogbunabani rub that fellow with ash. (59)

This reveals a culture of secrecy, fear, and intimidation which is contrary to transparency and accountability. This approach of leadership style breeds corruption, and inefficiency. The requirement to go through the chairman for any accusation or grievance suggests a centralized and opaque decision-making, and the constraint of “talking evil” about other members, particularly concerning financial matters, is a clear attempt to stifle criticism and dissent. This

promotes a culture of conformity and prevents open dialogue and debate, which are essential for good governance.

Nwabueze's portrayal serves as both a reflection on contemporary Nigerian politics and a call for change a plea for leaders who prioritize ethical governance over personal enrichment. The play ultimately advocates for servant-leadership grounded in integrity, accountability, and genuine commitment to public welfare.

Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* provides a critical examination of greed-driven leadership, exploring how such leadership manifests in both the robbers and the corrupt authorities they oppose. This play investigates the issue of greed, highlighting how it shapes character motivations, societal dynamics, and the moral landscape of our today's society. The narrative revolves around four robbers who seek revenge against a system that has marginalized them. The play critiques not only the actions of the robbers but also the greed that pervades the leadership structures they encounter. Osofisan uses these characters to illustrate how greed corrupts individuals and institutions alike, leading to moral decay and societal dysfunction. He extends his critique of greed beyond the robbers to include the soldiers and government officials who are supposed to uphold justice. The soldiers, instead of returning recovered loot to its rightful owners the market women decide to keep it for themselves.

Soldier: The money, it's all here.

Sergeant: (knocking him down) shut up, you fool! Can't you restrain yourself?

(Looks round rapidly) couple take care of the money and listening dogs who may have been cursed to eternal poverty! We found nothing okay? Let's meet later tonight at my brother's house. And if I catch anybody with a running mouth...(50).

This act exemplifies how those in power exploit their positions for personal gain, mirroring the very behavior they claim to combat. The sergeant who is supposed to uphold the law, protect the citizen and restore sanity, peace and order in the military sector now becomes the perpetrator who exploits the loot. Osofisan through his writing shows that corruption and Greed is not only applicable to politicians but also in the military. The conversations above between the soldier and the sergeant is the reverse becomes the case as Osofisan critiques the issue of greed within the force. The soldiers are now embezzling funds from the society that needs their protection. The soldiers' decision to keep stolen loot instead of returning it to its rightful owners exemplifies this betrayal of trust. Osofisan critiques this hypocrisy by juxtaposing the robbers' plight with that of corrupt officials who face no repercussions for their actions. This selective enforcement of justice highlights how those in power perpetuate oppression while scape-goating marginalized individuals

Another Issue of greed is portrayed in the excerpt below

Major: Stop! Don't move any of you(kicks out a sack) Alhaja takes the sack and collect all the money. You heard me(reluctantly she does so) And I warn you no one else is to move. I love you all, but I won't hesitate to shoot any of you.

Hasan:( handling his share over to Alhaja) this is treachery.

Major: Treachery?

Hasan: The money belongs to all of us.

Major: Bring it to me Alhaja. Slowly. (Takes it from her) thanks the money belongs to me now. (55).

In the excerpt above the portrayal of greed is at the extreme as a result of the betrayal among the robbers. The robbers who seem to Once have a common goal now betrays his colleagues and

decide to escape with the loot alone. This reflects the fact that greed is not just systemic but in every sector, institutions, organisations, and most importantly is deeply rooted in individuals as well. His greed also led to his arrest while others managed to escape for their lives. It is quite ironical that the robbers who fight for a common goal would have a Judas perpetuating this same act. The four robbers exhibit greed as well after the first loot at the market which is a success that wasn't enough for them but still seek to rob the market women again.

Another instance of greed within the text reflects in the conversation between the soldiers as seen in the excerpt below

Soldier 1: Officer na yeye. I tell you I am going to become an officer too one day.

Soldier 3: By the grace of soponon, God of crow crow

Soldier 1: Sit down there. I won't tell you what I am going to do first after promotion

Soldier 2: the worst you can do is to overthrow the government. And as for that..

Soldier 1: fool how can I overthrow government when I will be part of it? Let me tell you all the fine fine places on Victoria island and ikoyi, all that better better land at ibadan, kaduna, pitakakwa and so on. I will declare them for government.

Soldier 3: Meaning for yourself?

Soldier 1: With immediate effect. (61-62).

Soldier 1: With these oyinbos and Koran, the only decent thing to do is to form company with them. Import and export enterprise, shipping lines, Engineering Consultants (Nigeria) limited etc. For all contracts above five million naira. (63).

In the excerpt above the 1st soldier portrays greed in his conversation with his colleagues. He aspires to be part of the government so as to acquire power to be a partaker of the national cake by

acquiring the choicest part of the nation to himself and to form an alliance with the secondary colonisers ( the oyinbos and the koras) by partnering with them through importation and exportation to plunge into the nation's wealth or natural resources.

Further more, *Once Upon Four Robbers* is set against the backdrop of Nigeria in the 1970s, a period marked by economic hardship, political instability, and widespread corruption. Osofisan uses this setting to illustrate how structural violence defined as harm inflicted upon individuals by social structures that perpetuate inequality affects marginalized communities. The robbers in the play are not merely criminals; they are products of a society that has failed to provide them with opportunities for a dignified existence. This analysis explores how Osofisan critiques these systemic failures to protect its citizens or provide them with basic needs. Instead, it enforces laws that disproportionately punish the poor while allowing corrupt officials to thrive without consequence. This selective justice system is exemplified by the public executions of robbers, which serve as spectacles rather than effective deterrents against crime. The character of Alani, the leader of the robbers, becomes a victim of this oppressive system when he is executed publicly. His death symbolizes not only individual loss but also the failure of a government that resorts to violence rather than addressing underlying social issues. Osofisan suggests that such punitive measures do little to combat crime; instead, they reinforce a cycle of violence and oppression.

### **2.3. The psychological of corruption and Greed**

The psychological effects of corruption is economic marginalization which is depicted in Nwabueze's novel. Characters like Chike grapple with feelings of inadequacy and despair as they confront the harsh realities of their economic circumstances. The constant struggle for survival takes a toll on their mental health, leading to a sense of hopelessness and resignation. Nwabueze

effectively conveys the emotional burden of economic marginalization, illustrating how it can erode self-worth and agency. Moreover, the novel explores the impact of economic marginalization on community dynamics.

The concept of structural violence encompasses the systemic ways in which social structures harm individuals by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. One critical aspect of structural violence is the perpetuation of inequality, particularly through government structures that maintain economic disparities. This phenomenon manifests in various forms, including discriminatory policies, unequal access to resources, and institutionalized corruption. This analysis explores how government structures contribute to the perpetuation of economic inequality, examining the mechanisms through which these structures operate and their implications for marginalized communities.

The psychological impact of structural violence is evident throughout *Once Upon Four Robbers*. Characters grapple with feelings of hopelessness and despair as they navigate a world that offers little support or. The trauma experienced by individuals subjected to systemic oppression can lead to dehumanization, as seen in Major's betrayal of his fellow robbers for personal gain.

Osofisan raises critical questions about how long individuals can endure suffering before it affects their humanity. The robbers' choices reflect a struggle between survival instincts and moral integrity a tension that underscores the psychological toll of living under oppressive conditions..

## **2.4 Conclusion**

*A Parliament of Vultures* and *Once Upon Four Robbers* offer stark reflections of the pervasive corruption, resource misappropriation, structural violence, and oppression that have plagued many African societies, particularly Nigeria. Through their insightful narratives, Nwabueze and

Osofisan expose the devastating consequences of greed-driven leadership, institutional decay, and the erosion of societal values. Both plays vividly illustrate the alarming extent of embezzlement and institutional theft perpetrated by corrupt officials. In *A Parliament of Vultures*, the parliamentarians, driven by insatiable greed, siphon public funds for personal enrichment. They engage in elaborate schemes, manipulating contracts, inflating budgets, and diverting resources to private accounts. Similarly, in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, the four titular characters, representing different societal strata, collaborate to plunder the nation's wealth. These acts of financial malfeasance not only deprive the populace of essential services but also perpetuate a cycle of poverty and inequality.

A fundamental theme in both plays is the absence of accountability among those entrusted with public office. This lack of accountability fosters a culture of impunity, where corruption thrives unchecked.

By exposing the dark underbelly of corruption and its devastating consequences, Nwabueze and Osofisan offer a critical commentary on the state of African societies. Their plays serve as a wake-up call, urging us to confront these issues head-on. To combat corruption and promote good governance, it is imperative to strengthen institutions, promote transparency and accountability, and empower citizens to demand justice. Only through collective action can we hope to build a future free from the shackles of corruption and oppression.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**PROSTITUTION AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN EMEKA NWABUEZE'S A**  
**PARLIAMENT OF VULTURES AND FEMI OSOFISAN'S ONCE UPON FOUR**  
**ROBBERS**

**3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Plays like *A Parliament of Vultures* by Emeka Nwabueze and *Once Upon Four Robbers* by Femi Osofisan in Nigerian drama shine light on the serious problems of prostitution and social injustice. These plays use stories to show how Nigerian society struggles with corruption, unfairness in how wealth is distributed, and a decline in moral values. By exploring these issues, the playwrights help us understand and criticize the problems we face in our society today.

In both plays, it is evident that while people choose to become prostitutes, it's deeply connected to bigger problems in society. Nwabueze's "A Parliament of Vultures" shows how political corruption enables people, especially women, into prostitution. Madam Omeaku wants power and wealth, and she is able to get it, even without the proper procedure as she is trapped in a corrupt system. This shows how politicians are morally bankrupt. Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* also reveals that prostitution is an ordinary issue, through the character of Alhaja who engages in immoral acts with the soldiers, thereby demoralising herself and her society.

Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* addresses the issue of social injustice through the lens of armed robbery, portraying robbers not merely as criminals but as a product of an unjust society. To appreciate the themes in these plays, it is important to consider the historical and socio-political context of Nigeria. The post-colonial era has been marked by political instability, economic hardship and rampant corruption. These factors have contributed to widespread poverty and inequality, and as John Rawls states "Injustice, is simply inequalities that are not to the benefit of all". This creates an environment where illegal activities such as prostitution and

armed robbery become common. Both Nwabueze and Osofisan draw upon these backdrop to craft narratives that resonate with the contemporary people.

Nwabueze's play reflects a society governed by selfish leaders who prioritize their interests over those of their constituents. The metaphor of 'Vultures' aptly captures the predatory nature of these politicians who feast on the resources meant for the masses. This imagery does not only underscore the theme of corruption but also highlights the social injustices faced by ordinary citizens. In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Osofisan similarly critiques societal structures that promote injustice and inequality. The robbers' plight is emblematic of a larger systemic failure. Through their stories, Osofisan invites audiences to question the moral implications of a society that fails to provide and protect its most vulnerable members.

### ***3.2 Prostitution***

Prostitution, a complex social issue, is explored through the lens of several authors in Nigerian literature. Emeka Nwabueze's *"A Parliament of Vultures"* and Femi Osofisan's *"Once Upon Four Robbers"* offer distinct portrayals of women involved in this trade, highlighting the economic, social, and personal consequences.

In *"A Parliament of Vultures,"* Madam Omeaku, a brothel madam, embodies the harsh realities of the sex trade. Driven by poverty, desperation, and greed, she becomes a ruthless businesswoman, and eventually, a politician, exploiting vulnerable women, including her own daughter, Nkechi. She encourages Nkechi to engage in prostitution to secure political favors and wealth, showcasing a troubling maternal influence that prioritizes ambition over ethics. Madam Omeaku's character reveals the intricate web of power dynamics and exploitation within the sex industry. She is both a victim of societal circumstances and a perpetrator, trapped in a cycle of poverty and dependence on the profits of prostitution.

Brown: So you would not need half a million at the moment. This is only the beginning. I'll give you three hundred thousand for a start. (opens his brief-case and brings out a wad of notes, and gives it to her. She removes the top of her wrapper and wraps the money, then embraces him, smiling. Mr Brown caresses her hair)

Brown: You are a very beautiful woman...

Madam: You should tell that to my husband who does not know what beauty means.

Brown: Your husband is very foolish ... [The door is flung open and MR. OMEAKU enters. He is dressed in jump-up trousers, a broad tie resting on his brown shirt, and a tight coat. MR. BROWN tears himself from Madam Omeaku]  
(12)

The excerpt reveals Mr. Brown's transactional relationship with Madam, who exchanges her body and influence for money. This interaction explores the commodification of women's bodies in a society where beauty is manipulated for political gain. Nwabueze cautions against this lifestyle, portraying prostitution as a pathway to moral degradation. Madam's remark about her husband not recognizing her beauty reflects the emotional void often present in such relationships, emphasizing that women should not define their worth through sexual transactions. Instead, their bodies are valuable and should be respected, not treated as commodities. Madam is portrayed as ambitious yet morally compromised, willing to engage in sexual transactions to secure her political position and financial security.

Nkechi, Madam Omeaku's daughter, who is only nineteen represents the tragic consequences of this cycle. Forced into prostitution by her mother, Nkechi becomes a symbol of the

dehumanization and exploitation inherent in the sex trade. Her story showcases the vulnerability of young women and the devastating impact of poverty and societal pressures. Nkechi's character evokes empathy and exposes us to the need for social support systems to protect vulnerable individuals from falling prey to such exploitative practices.

Habamero: That's all right, Madam. Perhaps the very Reverend Jossy does not understand the role of Miss Omeaku in the House. Perhaps he does not understand that Madam used her pretty daughter to bring down the former Speaker of this house. And Madam has more jobs for her(28).

In this scenario, Madam uses her daughter Nkechi as a pawn in political machinations, raising serious questions about the implications of such exploitation for democracy and society as a whole. Nkechi, at just 19 years old, is thrust into a world where her value is measured not by her intellect or capabilities but by her physical appearance and ability to influence powerful men. This exploitation represents a broader issue where women's bodies are commodified within political contexts. Madam's actions suggest that she views her daughter not as an individual with rights and aspirations but as a tool to achieve her own ambitions. By using Nkechi to bring down the former Speaker, Madam keeps a system going that unfairly uses young women. This system treats them badly and does not see them as real people. This does not only affect Nkechi, but also sends a damaging message to society about the worth of women.

Madam: Mr. Chairman, whereas Mr. Otobo, the Parliamentary Secretary has abandoned this assembly in search of his own personal enjoyment ...(49). The above excerpt supports the previous one that shows that Madam uses her daughter as a pawn to distract the honest secretary, Mr Otobo so that she can be appointed as the new secretary to enable embezzlement and corruption in the parliament.

Jossy: What about the girls? How do you plan to procure them for the party?

Brown: Thank you for that Reverend. The Chief of Protocol, whose responsibility this is, has already taken care of that. All he has requested from the committee is ten air-conditioned vehicles and a modest sum of one million naira fuel the vehicles to collect senior girls from University campuses, and take them back after the party.

Madam: ... furthermore, my daughter, Nkechi has been contracted to bring the younger generation of aspiring senior girls, the young school leavers, popularly known as Jambites. We're yet to receive her estimate (85).

This excerpt paints a disturbing picture of how deeply rooted prostitution has become in our society. It exposes the alarming involvement of influential figures, such as a Chief of Protocol and so called 'Reverend', in facilitating this exploitation. The casual manner in which the procurement of young girls for a party is discussed reveals the normalization of this heinous act. The most concerning aspect is the deliberate targeting of vulnerable young women: university students and school leavers ("Jambites"). This demonstrates how the perpetrators are actively grooming and exploiting the aspirations and insecurities of these young individuals. The normalization of prostitution defeats societal values and reduces the respect for human dignity. This is wrong because prostitution increases the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS. It also exposes individuals to the risk of physical and sexual violence. The fight against prostitution requires a collective effort from all sectors of society. By working together, we can dismantle the networks of exploitation, protect vulnerable individuals, and create a society where women and girls value and respect their bodies.

Also, in Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Alhaja's character can be interpreted as engaging in transactional relationships with soldiers, a form of prostitution. While poverty and economic hardship can be significant factors, it is important to acknowledge that individuals still possess the ability to make choices. Alhaja's decision to engage in transactional relationships with soldiers, contributes to a morally decaying society in several ways. Her involvement with soldiers may lead to shame, and the breakdown of social trust. Also, by engaging in these relationships, Alhaja may be contributing to a cycle of exploitation where women are objectified and their bodies used as a means of survival. This can perpetuate a system where women are seen as commodities rather than individuals with inherent worth.

Aafa: Alihamidu lillah. Your husband, was it? (ALHAJA and MAJOR are started. He chuckles). Alhaja! Yes, I recognize you. At the war-front, when you traded across the lines, selling to both sides, it was convenient then, wasn't it, to call yourself Alhaja? But your longest pilgrimage as we all know was to the officers' bed, not to Mecca! (19).

This excerpt goes beyond the initial portrayal of infidelity and delves into the exploitation of power dynamics inherent in prostitution. The line "trading across the lines, selling to both sides" strongly suggests that Alhaja engaged in activities that exploited the chaos and desperation of wartime. This hints at a form of transactional sex, where she may have used her body to gain favors, information, or resources from both sides of the conflict. Alhaja's title, "Alhaja," signifies a position of religious authority, but she abuses this position of trust and exploits her religious identity for personal gain. This highlights how positions of power and influence can be manipulated for exploitative purposes. The line "your longest pilgrimage as we all know was to the officers' bed, not to Mecca!" directly accuses Alhaja of deception and hypocrisy. She used

the religious title "Alhaja" to project an image of piety and respectability while engaging in activities that contradict those values. This excerpt portrays a more nuanced form of prostitution, one that involves the exploitation of power dynamics, deception, and the abuse of trust.

Alhaja: Officer, come back soon. (swings her waist suggestively). Your tooth, you said it can bite. I can hardly wait! (75, 76). This excerpt provides a glimpse into the transactional nature of prostitution and the exploitation of power dynamics. The line "Officer, come back soon" suggests a power imbalance in the relationship. Alhaja, likely aware of the officer's position of authority, uses her sexuality to manipulate and control him. This highlights how power dynamics can be exploited in the context of prostitution. "Your tooth, you said it can bite" is a sexually suggestive phrase. Alhaja is likely using her sexuality to gain favors or benefits from the officer, who holds a position of power. This portrays Alhaja as a commodity, objectifying her body and reducing her to a mere object of sexual desire. This dehumanization is a common feature of prostitution. The play helps us to understand that prostitution can contribute to a decline in societal morality due to factors like dehumanization, exploitation, normalization of exploitation and undermining family values.

### **3.3 Social Injustice**

Social injustice is one of the major issues that affect Nigeria, and with their works, many authors have touched on this topic. They employ the strategy of picturing clear instances of social injustice and the playwrights Femi Osofisan and Emeka Nwabueze are not left out. In *A Parliament of Vultures*, we observe how Nwabueze critiques social injustice through the lens of political corruption in Nigeria. The character Madam Omeaku, an uneducated business woman turned parliamentarian, embodies the moral decay of leadership. The play illustrates how

elections are marred by rigging and vote-buying, leading to the rise of self-serving politicians, depicted as "vultures" who exploit national resources for personal wealth. From this, we can understand that social injustice arises when a society's systems and structures systematically disadvantage certain groups of people. This can manifest in various forms, including unequal access to resources, opportunities, and rights. One glaring example of social injustice is the dialogue below.

Madam: The way you say it, one would think that your gratuity was worth much

Omeaku: It was the result of my thirty-five years in the service of my nation. The nation that gave me birth.

Madam: (mimics him) "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? If i hadn't brought you out of the village, you couldn't have smelt township life all the days of your life.

Yeye man! (16, 17)

The dialogue exposes social injustice in education, particularly the differences in opportunities based on connections rather than merit. It helps us to realize how much we need a society of justice that is empty of moral decay. Madam's belief that "whom you know" is more important than what you know shows the degree of barriers that many face, including marginalized groups who struggle for access to quality education and resources. These cycles keep people poor and make it very hard for them to get out of that situation. Addressing these injustices requires equitable policies and support systems to ensure all have fair chances at success. The dialogue suggests that simply obtaining a university degree is not enough if it does not lead to a job or a successful future. This reflects a growing sentiment that degrees may not hold the same value as

they once did, particularly if graduates lack connections in their desired fields. Social injustice in education is often reinforced by systemic issues such as discrimination, inadequate funding for schools in low-income areas, and biased hiring practices that favor certain demographics over others. These barriers make it difficult for disadvantaged individuals to compete on an equal footing (Asukwo, 192).

Otobo: The demand on public officers is too harsh. The fear of the unknown is the problem of our public officers, and the bane of political development in this nation. They are required to resign from their jobs before engaging in politics. They are afraid to do it, and prefer the devil they know. In Madam's constituency, for instance, it could have been a fight between a Director-General in one of the Ministries, and a University lecturer. But none of them was prepared to resign his appointment to pursue politics (35).

This excerpt highlights a serious problem in our society: injustice in the political system. John Rawls states that "a just constitution would be a just procedure arranged to insure a just outcome"(173), but in this case, it is not like that..Imagine that a successful professional, maybe a top official in the government or a respected professor wants to make a difference, to improve his community by becoming a politician. But there's a huge catch: he has to quit his current job, and in a country where they struggle to have a free and fair election. This rule of "resign to run" is a major obstacle for many talented people who could bring positive change. Many capable people are afraid to take the risk. They worry about losing their income, their benefits, and their hard-earned reputation. This means we miss out on the leadership of some of our most talented individuals. Also, this method benefits the privileged. People who are already wealthy or have

strong financial backing are more likely to take the risk. This creates a system where politicians are mostly from the same elite group, leaving out the voices and perspectives of ordinary people.

“Otobo: (still laughing) It was a campaign of calumny. The person running against Madam Omeaku, a lawyer by profession is married to a Canadian woman. This was what happened, what we in political science now describe as politics of bitter-leaf soup and the Canadian masquerade” (36).

This excerpt reveals that when prejudice and fear are used to influence elections, it affects the democratic process. People should be able to choose their leaders based on merit, not on harmful stereotypes. When we allow prejudice to dictate our decisions, we lose out on the talents and contributions of many qualified individuals. We need to actively fight against prejudice and discrimination in all forms. This includes: promoting education and awareness. We need to educate people about the dangers of prejudice and the importance of tolerance and respect for all. Also, when we see prejudice happening, we need to speak out against it and stand up for what is right.

Further, in Femi Osofisan’s *Once Upon Four Robbers*, the issue of social injustice is central. The playwright explores how corruption and economic inequality can drive people to desperate measures, even resorting to crime. Through the characters of the four robbers, Osofisan highlights the plight of those marginalized by society and the consequences of a system that fails to provide for its citizens. The play also critiques the hypocrisy of those in power who condemn the actions of the robbers while benefiting from the same corrupt system. Osofisan raises critical questions about how long individuals can endure suffering before it affects their humanity. The robbers’ choices reflect a struggle between survival instincts and moral integrity a tension that underscores the psychological toll of living under oppressive conditions.

“Angola: Like a ram. They slaughtered our leader like a Ramadan lamb” “Hasan: Or worse. With that cloth tied over his face, they denied him even the privilege of bleating.” (5). The excerpt, "Like a ram. They slaughtered our leader like a Ramadan lamb," by Angola, vividly illustrates this social injustice. The comparison of their leader to a sacrificial animal immediately paints images of powerlessness and brutality. The leader, symbolizing hope and resistance against oppression, is mercilessly silenced, much like a sacrificial lamb during religious ceremonies. Hasan's addition "Or worse. With that cloth tied over his face, they denied him even the privilege of bleating" (5), further exposes the dehumanization and oppression faced by the less privileged. The silencing, represented by the cloth over the leader's face, signifies the stifling of disagreement and the denial of basic human rights.

Angola: Listen to him! It's disgusting! What are you if not a corpse? Tell me. You were born in the slum and you didn't know you were a corpse? Since you burst out from the womb, all covered in slime, you've always been a corpse. You fed on worms and left-overs, your body nude like a carcasse in the government mortuary, elbowing your way among other corpses. And the stink is all over you like a flooded cemetery in Lagos... (10).

In the excerpt above, the character of Angola, through strong words and images expose the social and economic system that has condemned him and his fellow marginalized citizens to a life of abject poverty and despair. Through a series of strong metaphors, Angola exposes the dehumanizing impact of social injustice, reducing individuals to mere corpses within a system that offers no hope for survival or redemption. Angola's declaration, "You were born in the slum and you didn't know you were a corpse?" immediately establishes the play's bleak worldview. This metaphor powerfully conveys the speaker's sense of hopelessness and the belief that his

existence is predetermined by his social circumstances. Born into a life of poverty and deprivation, he feels trapped within a system that offers no escape from the cycle of destitution. The imagery of "fed on worms and left-overs" further emphasizes the scarcity of resources available to the marginalized.

Angola: Yes, but he died! The decree smashed him (10). In the excerpt above "Yes, but he died! The decree smashed him" powerfully encapsulates the play's central theme of social injustice. This simple statement reveals a system where the powerful wield their authority to oppress and harm the vulnerable. The phrase "The decree smashed him" suggests that an impersonal law or order, likely created and enforced by those in positions of power, had a devastating impact on an individual. This highlights how seemingly neutral rules can have profoundly negative consequences for marginalized members of society. It's not just about individual acts of cruelty, but about a system where the powerful use their authority to force rules that unfairly target and harm the powerless. This systemic oppression creates a deeply unequal society where the rights and well-being of ordinary citizens are often disregarded.

Aafa: Where will you run? They make the laws.

Major: Yes, and they build the law courts.

Hasan: Train the lawyers.

Angola: They own the firing squads.(sings) O se kere-e-e-e...

Aafa: So why not give up? There's enough employment in the country.(21)

The above excerpt also depicts the systemic nature of social injustice in the play. The robbers, through their playful yet touching dialogue, expose the inequality and exploitation rooted within the societal structure. They highlight how the powerful manipulate the system to their advantage,

leaving the marginalized with little or no options. The lines "They make the laws. They build the law courts. Train the lawyers." illustrates the concentration of power in the hands of the elite. By controlling the legal system, the powerful ensure that justice is not blind but rather serves their interests. The poor are denied access to fair representation and are effectively trapped within a system designed to maintain the status quo. The line "There's enough employment in the country" sarcastically highlight the limited employment opportunities available to the poor. The robbers mock job advertisements "Five naira per week!" and "House maid, part-time mistress!" to further emphasize the exploitative nature of these jobs.

Also from the following excerpt below: "Angola: Aafa, too many people ride their cars along the sore-ridden backs of the poor. Is there no other way?" "Aafa: None, son. Otherwise it'll be an empty force in your hands. I do not control it "(29). This exchange from the text, highlights a key aspect of social injustice: the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy. Angola questions the fairness of a system where the rich get richer by essentially "riding on the backs" of the poor. This means the wealthy benefit and become successful by using the labor and resources of the poor, often without giving them a fair share or treating them with respect. Aafa implies that to gain power and influence, one must often participate in this exploitation, even if it's morally wrong. This dialogue shows how social injustice isn't just about individual bad people. It is built into the very structure of society, where the wealthy and powerful benefit from the suffering of the poor.

Major: Yes. The day is beautiful. Your stomach proves it (laughter) But man is so fragile, so easy to kill. Especially if he robs and lies, if he wantonly breaks the law. Serg, today that law is on the side of those who have, and in abundance, who are fed and bulging, who can afford several concubines. But tomorrow, that law will

change. The poor will seize it and twist its neck. The starving will smash the gates of the supermarkets, the homeless will no longer yield in fear to your bulldozers. And your children, yes, your dainty, little children will be here where I stand now, on the firing block (84, 85).

Here, the speaker, Major highlights a stark reality: the current system favors the wealthy. "The law is on the side of those who have," he observes. This suggests a society where justice is not blind, but rather favours the privileged. The poor and marginalized are systematically disadvantaged, facing exploitation and oppression. This creates a deep-seated inequality, where basic needs like food and shelter are unattainable for many. Again, Major foresees a potential uprising. He predicts that the oppressed will eventually rise up against the system that has kept them down. The "starving will smash the gates of the supermarkets," and the "homeless will no longer yield in fear." This suggests that when people are pushed to their limits, they will inevitably fight for their rights and demand a more equitable society. While the tone is grim, there's an underlying message of hope.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

*A Parliament of Vultures* and *Once Upon Four Robbers* are powerful works of literature that offer a critical analysis of Nigerian society. They expose the deep-seated problem of inequality, and highlight the vulnerability of marginalized individuals. The plays also raise important questions about the nature of justice and the role of the individual in challenging social injustice. Through his characters and their experiences, Nwabueze critiques the socio-political landscape of Nigeria, highlighting the interplay between power, poverty, and exploitation. The politicians are likened to 'vultures', feeding off the nation's resources while leaving the masses impoverished and oppressed. This corruption creates an environment where individuals like

Madam Omeaku view politics as a lucrative business rather than a service to the people. Her ambition leads her to encourage her daughter, Nkechi, to engage in prostitution as a means to gain favor and wealth through political connections. This shows how corruption not only degrades moral values but also pushes individuals into compromising situations for financial gain.

The play's depiction of Madam Omeaku's character serves as a critique of women who exploit their sexuality for power. She represents a generation that has normalized immoral behavior in pursuit of wealth, demonstrating how societal values have shifted towards materialism. The normalization of prostitution among young women is evident when Madam Omeaku encourages her daughter's involvement in this illicit trade, showcasing how desperation can lead to moral compromises.

In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Nwabueze further delves into the theme of prostitution and how it can affect a person's self worth and the society at large. The characters in this play are driven by their circumstances to commit crimes, including robbery, which they adopt as a necessary means to survive in a society that has failed them. The robbers' actions can be seen as a direct response to the injustices they face. The play explains how societal neglect leads to crime and exploitation. The robbers express hatred for the corrupt elite who encourage poverty while benefiting from the system. We observe this with those who find themselves trapped in cycles of poverty and exploitation, where prostitution becomes one of the few avenues for economic survival.

Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and *Once Upon Four Robbers* serve as poignant commentaries on social injustice and prostitution within a corrupt society. Through his exploration of these themes, Osofisan sheds light on the desperate measures individuals take in response to systemic failures. His works challenge audiences to reflect on the socio-political

structures that support inequality and exploitation, urging for societal transformation that addresses these deep-rooted issues.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

#### 4.1 Summary

This study examines the concept of moral decadence in contemporary Nigerian society, as depicted in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*. Through an analysis of greed and corruption, social injustice and prostitution, it highlights the roles of government and citizenry on a morally decaying society. This work has revealed the complex interplay of factors contributing to the erosion of ethical values and societal breakdown.

In both plays, corruption is a big problem that cuts across all levels of society. In *A Parliament of Vultures*, the parliamentarians who are supposed to help the people, are only interested in making money for themselves. They use their power to steal public money for their own benefit. This makes people lose faith in the government and weakens democracy. On the other hand, Osofisan shows how corruption in the government makes people desperate and leads to crime. The four robbers became criminals because they were poor and the system failed them. They were basically fighting back against an unfair and corrupt government. Both plays show the devastating impact of corruption in the Nigerian society. It breaks trust in the government, weakens important institutions, and keeps poor people poor. Corruption diverts resources away from essential public services, such as education and healthcare, hindering the country's development and increasing social problems.

Another social vice that contributes to moral decay as portrayed in both texts is greed. In *A Parliament of Vultures*, Madam, a key figure, embodies this destructive force. Her insatiable desire for wealth and power leads her to prioritize personal gain over the welfare of the people

she is supposed to represent. This unchecked greed not only contributes to the rampant corruption within the government but also erodes the moral fabric of society. In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, while the four robbers are driven by poverty and desperation, their actions are also influenced by the pervasive greed that permeates their society. The play highlights how the pursuit of wealth and material possessions, often at the expense of others, can lead to moral compromises and ultimately, criminal behavior. Both plays underscore how greed can distort individual values and undermine societal norms. When the pursuit of wealth becomes the ultimate goal, individuals may resort to unethical or even illegal means to achieve their desires. This can lead to a breakdown of trust, a decline in ethical standards, and a society where self-interest reigns supreme.

The research also explores the role of prostitution in contributing to moral decadence. The analysis focuses on the influence of Madam on her daughter, Nkechi, in *A Parliament of Vultures*, and Alhaja in *Once Upon Four Robbers*.

In *A Parliament of Vultures*, prostitution is depicted as a normalized and accepted practice, particularly among the elite. Madam, a parliamentarian, who finds her way there through her selfish ambition, encourages her daughter, Nkechi, to engage in prostitution as a means of social climbing and securing a wealthy husband. Nkechi, under her mother's influence, views prostitution as a legitimate path to success and willingly participates in it. This portrayal highlights how societal acceptance and parental influence can normalize and even encourage prostitution, leading to a decline in moral values. Madam's relationship with Brown is a key aspect of her immoral behavior. Madam's affair with Brown is a clear violation of her marital vows. This act of infidelity demonstrates a disregard for her husband and the sanctity of marriage

In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Alhaja actively engages in prostitution, specifically with soldiers. This adds another layer of complexity to Alhaja's character and the play's exploration of moral decay. It highlights the hypocrisy of her actions, as she disguises as a spiritual woman and preaches piety while engaging in immoral acts. It also emphasizes the exploitation and degradation inherent in the sex trade, as even those in positions of power, like Alhaja, are not immune to its corrupting influence.

Lastly, this study challenges the conventional view of social injustice as merely a social issue by demonstrating its direct link to moral decay. In *A Parliament of Vultures*, the play powerfully illustrates how societal inequalities and lack of opportunity drive individuals like Omeaku towards desperate measures, forcing them to compromise their moral integrity for survival. *Once Upon Four Robbers* further emphasizes how social injustice creates an environment where ethical values are ignored, and individuals are forced into compromising situations. This analysis highlights the crucial link between social justice and moral integrity, highlighting that a just and equitable society is essential for fostering a morally upright citizenry.

In conclusion, *A Parliament of Vultures* and *Once Upon Four Robbers* are satirical plays that do not only depict societal problems but provoke critical thinking and social change. These vices – greed, corruption, social injustice, and prostitution – contribute significantly to the moral decay depicted in these plays. When individuals prioritize personal gain over ethical considerations, when corruption erodes trust in institutions, and when social injustice creates a climate of desperation, the moral fabric of society begins to unravel. Both the government and the citizenry play crucial roles in this process. Corrupt and inept leadership can worsen these issues, while the apathy and complicity of citizens can allow these problems to persist.

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