



**EXPLORING MORAL AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES
THROUGH DRAMA: A STUDY OF IFEYINWA UZONDU'S
*WHICH WAY IS RIGHT?***

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Abstract:

This study delves into the exploration of moral and ethical principles through the dramatic lens, with a specific focus on Ifeyinwa Uzondu's play titled *Which Way is Right?* In contemporary society, the erosion of moral principles has become a pressing concern. The decline in ethical values, societal norms, and the erosion of moral boundaries have led to various social issues, impacting individuals, families, and communities. Literature, particularly drama, has often been a medium through which society reflects on its values and seeks to restore or reshape them. Ifeyinwa Uzondu's play, *Which Way is Right?*, explores themes related to moral dilemmas, societal norms, and the consequences of one's actions. The theoretical framework employed in this research draws from moral philosophy, ethical theories, and dramatic literature analysis. By examining the intricacies of Uzondu's play, the study aims to elucidate how drama serves as a powerful medium to engage with and interrogate moral and ethical dilemmas. The methodology involves a comprehensive textual analysis of *Which Way is Right?* to identify and dissect key moral and ethical themes. The findings illuminate the effectiveness of Uzondu's artistic choices in conveying complex moral dilemmas to the audience. In conclusion, this research makes a noteworthy contribution to knowledge by expanding our understanding of the moral dimensions of dramatic literature and the capacity of theatre to foster ethical awareness. It underscores the importance of engaging with art as a means of grappling with and understanding the intricacies of moral decision-making.

Keywords: ethical literary criticism, moral values, moral compass, societal norms, character development

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1. Introduction

In an era characterised by complex ethical challenges and shifting societal values, the restoration and preservation of moral principles are pursuits of paramount significance. Within this ever-evolving socio-cultural landscape, literature, particularly drama, has emerged as a potent vehicle for the examination, exploration, and potential restoration of the moral compass guiding human behaviour.

According to Justin Awuawuer:

"The unfolding issues within Nigeria have remained a careful evaluation and a critical interrogation of Nigerian Drama and theatre for the purpose of heralding the moral virtues and simultaneously attacking the vices prevalent in Nigerian society for general social transformation." (Awuawuer 66-67)

Playwrights have harnessed the influential aspect of drama throughout history to offer insightful observations on societal events, leading to positive transformations in human lives and their surroundings. In Nigeria, the postcolonial theatres of Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Moses Olaiya, Kola Ogunmola revolve around the subject of morality and conscience.

According to Tunji Sotimirin:

"Folksongs, which are also a medium of communication found in these folkloric plays, are fruits of traditional culture and display certain unmistakable features. These include part chant, part song, part dialogue nature. It is pertinent to recall here their closeness to Renaissance European with its librettos, arias, and scores, its spectacle, and dramatic and theatrical/improvisational nature. Occasionally, people who have gone against the norms of society are warned through folksongs and these serve as a means of social control. They are very significant in the daily lives of any community and are often used as a medium of communication throughout the world. They are used in every aspect of human activities, particularly during important occasions including ritual celebrations, religious festivals, social engagements, wars or coronations." (Sotimirin 71)

These songs celebrate chiefs or obas, while others serve the purpose of conveying broad concepts or expressing personal sentiments. In their examinations of the practical values within these songs and plays, Obafemi (1996) and Jeyifo (1984) highlight the cultural significance deeply ingrained in the realm of these folk songs.

Sotimirin observes that:

"Songs in Ogunmola's plays deserve careful study and critical analysis in order to be understood the message they are meant to convey to us. Apart from using these songs to communicate his opinions to the audience, he also employed the use of the folksongs to remind the Yoruba people of their cultural heritage and their religious beliefs. For instance,

in Asoremmasika, Ogunmola reminds the Yoruba of their traditional belief in reincarnation and retributive justice.” (Sotimirin 72)

Consequently, it is noteworthy that Nigeria's traditions of literary and theatrical endeavors persist and thrive within the country, as the populace comprehends the genuinely beneficial influence of drama in their lives. This is because, according to Emmanuel Ebo, in employing drama as a tool for social commentary, the playwright is making an "objective evaluation, exposition or the critical assessment of the sociopolitical conditions in society" (Ebo 108). Therefore, the playwright serves as both a societal observer and a reviewer, as art undeniably continues to be a powerful tool for depicting the world, enabling us to understand and analyze various facets of society, including its underlying contradictions and truths. This implies that every piece of art, particularly drama, should consistently align with established social norms. Consequently, the socio-moralist perspective emerges as the most reasonable method for assessing Nigerian drama, as it mirrors the authentic societal conditions of Nigeria. This approach will enable readers to unveil several aspects: the fundamental underpinnings of morality, how societal norms endorse moral principles, the potential link between religious beliefs and morality, and the extent to which the younger generation can comprehend and endorse these moral values.

Therefore, the dramatic arts have a unique capacity to capture the intricacies of human ethical dilemmas, challenge conventional norms, and provoke contemplation about the right course of action. Ifeyinwa Uzongdu's *Which Way is Right?* stands as a compelling exemplar in this context, weaving a tapestry of moral quandaries, individual choices, and their far-reaching consequences.

This study endeavours to delve into the profound narrative of *Which Way is Right?* and decipher the intricate ways in which drama, as an art form, contributes to the revival and reaffirmation of moral principles. The study examines how Uzongdu's play brings forth the dynamics of ethical dilemmas, showcases the complexities of human choices, and ultimately, raises thought-provoking questions about the resilience of moral values in a world that is constantly in flux. In doing so, this study aspires to shed light on the transformative power of literature, particularly drama, in nurturing and restoring the moral principles that anchor us in an ever-shifting ethical terrain.

2. The Historical Trajectory of Moral Exploration in Plays

Exploring moral and ethical values in plays takes us on a captivating journey through the annals of dramatic literature.

Adebayo Afolabi contends that:

“Throughout the history of mankind, playwrights have always written or improvised plays to ensure morality in society. Whether in the pre-literate or modern society, they have always stood as sentinels, guarding society against immorality and other vices that are

detrimental to human existence. The truism of the perpetual inextricability of drama and society has been established over the ages. The reasons for this are not far-fetched: the playwright, as a member of his society, is naturally affected by the things that go on in society. He, therefore, writes based on his experiences, with society serving as the source of the raw materials with which he manufactures his plays. Moreover, when a playwright writes, he has a target audience in mind. It is this audience that consciously or unconsciously tempers and directs the playwright's dramaturgical and thematic foci. Like the two tongues of a pair of scissors, therefore, art and society are inseparable. Any attempt to separate them engenders dysfunctionality and social lethargy in both. But when complementarily synergized, they operate at optimal best levels." (Afolabi 61-62)

Given the significance of morality in every human society, the playwright consistently acts as a vigilant guardian at the societal gate, monitoring and preventing the infiltration of external amoral influences into the community. From ancient Greek tragedies to contemporary works, playwrights use the stage as a dynamic space to dissect, challenge, and reflect upon the moral dilemmas of their respective eras. This exploration evolves, mirroring the shifts in societal norms, cultural values, and philosophical inquiries.

Niyi Osundare emphasizes the idea that a writer bears responsibilities in any human society, presenting a moral duty to rectify inconsistencies and demonstrate ways in which society can be improved:

"So, the writer... has a duty to relate not only how things are, but how they could or should be. He must not only lead the people to the top of the mountain and point out the Promised Land. He must also show them how to get there." (Osundare 3)

In ancient Greece, playwrights like Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides laid the groundwork for moral exploration through tragedies that grappled with the consequences of hubris, fate, and divine intervention. For instance, Sophocles' *Antigone* explores the moral conflict between obeying the laws of the state and adhering to a higher moral duty. These ancient plays are deeply rooted in religious and ethical inquiries, setting a precedent for the moral discourse unfolding on the stage. Even the comic plays of Aristophanes often comment on moral issues with the aim of making society better. Aristophanes' comedies, which date back to the 5th century BCE in classical Athens, primarily sought to entertain and satirize the political and social aspects of his time. Aristophanes frequently targeted prominent political figures and institutions in Athens. By exaggerating and ridiculing the flaws and vices of politicians, he aimed to bring attention to the moral shortcomings of those in power. This indirect critique encouraged the audience to reflect on the state of their society. His comedies, especially *Lysistrata*, often addressed contemporary social issues, such as the role of women, the effects of war, and the consequences of wealth and power. By exaggerating and parodying these issues,

he provided a humorous lens through which the audience could view and question their own societal norms and values.

The morality of 15th-century Europe was designed by the theocratic governments to teach moral purity, uprightness, and godliness, with the goal of creating paradise. It was a necessary intervention into the performing arts by the Christian Church, which was in power then, all over Europe, because performances had degenerated into exercises in obscenity and vulgarity, as sex exploitation had become the order of the day at the beginning of the medieval period. Centred in the church, morality plays were employed to teach virtuous living to bring the soul of man to God. *Everyman* is a classic example of morality plays.

The morality play tradition continued through the ages, albeit with slight variations. Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is a classic example of Elizabethan morality play. In contradistinction to medieval morality play, which was centred in the church and had a religious motivation and inspiration, latter-day morality plays were inspired by the personal convictions of playwrights about the plight of man. While the medieval example concentrated on assisting man to make paradise, subsequent models focus on making the world a better place for man before eventually going to paradise. The medieval model had presented the world as a place of vanity and suffering where man should not expect any reward as his reward is in the heavens. Subsequent models try to make the world a better place to live in while keeping paradise in sight. Medieval morality plays use concrete allegorical characters such as vice, virtue, good works, etc. They tend to deal with real human problems and the problems of immorality in human societies.

Shakespearean plays, such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, mark a Renaissance exploration of morality. Shakespeare's characters confront moral complexities, delving into themes of ambition, betrayal, and the consequences of unchecked power. For instance, in *Othello*, *Iago* is a character who uses deception and manipulation to achieve his goal. This raises moral questions about the ethics of such actions and explores the consequences of deceit.

The 18th century, often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment, was characterized by intellectual and philosophical movements that emphasized reason, science, and a questioning of traditional authority. The plays of this period reflected these broader cultural shifts and often commented on moral issues with the aim of contributing to the betterment of society. The 18th century saw the rise of sentimental drama, which aimed to evoke and explore the audience's emotions, particularly empathy and sympathy. Playwrights like Richard Steele and Richard Sheridan used sentimentality to address moral issues such as virtue, benevolence, and the importance of compassion. These plays often featured characters facing moral dilemmas and emphasized the emotional and moral dimensions of their decisions.

Satirical plays were a popular form of entertainment in the 18th century. Playwrights like Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan used satire to critique

and ridicule societal vices, hypocrisy, and corruption. Through humor and wit, these plays sought to expose moral shortcomings and encourage societal self-reflection.

Some playwrights embraced a more didactic approach, explicitly seeking to instruct the audience on moral principles. Ben Johnson, for example, wrote plays with a moralistic tone, intending to convey moral lessons and virtues. The emphasis was on using drama as a tool for moral education.

The Comedy of Manners, a genre popular in the 18th century, satirized the manners and behaviors of the upper class. Playwrights like William Congreve and Richard Brinsley Sheridan used wit and clever dialogue to expose the moral shortcomings of the aristocracy. By portraying characters engaging in morally questionable behavior, these plays invited audiences to reflect on societal values and norms.

The 19th century brings about the emergence of realism in drama, with playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov challenging societal norms and moral conventions. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* famously questions the traditional roles of men and women within marriage, sparking debates on individual agency and societal expectations. Chekhov's works, such as *The Cherry Orchard*, depict the moral decay of the Russian aristocracy, reflecting the broader socio-political landscape.

The 20th century witnesses a radical shift in theatrical approaches and the exploration of morality. The works of Bertolt Brecht, known for his epic theatre, seek to engage audiences intellectually and morally, fostering critical reflection on social and political issues. Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* uses the backdrop of the Salem witch trials to explore the dangers of moral hysteria and the abuse of power.

In the latter half of the 20th century and beyond, playwrights globally engage with postmodernism, deconstruction, and the questioning of absolute moral truths. Contemporary plays, such as Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, confront issues of identity, morality, and societal structures in the face of changing cultural landscapes.

In the vibrant tapestry of Nigerian plays, the exploration of morality unfolds as a complex and multifaceted narrative. Playwrights delve into the intricacies of societal values, cultural traditions, and individual choices, weaving together stories that challenge, provoke thought, and reflect the dynamic nature of morality in a rapidly evolving nation.

In Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the ancient Greek tale of *Oedipus Rex* is transposed into a Yoruba context. The play interrogates the intersection of fate and morality, as the protagonist, Odewale, grapples with the consequences of his actions in the context of divine will and familial duty. Rotimi's work serves as a poignant exploration of how personal choices intertwine with the moral fabric of a culture.

Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* confronts the moral implications of forced marriages in Nigerian society. Through the character of Ogwoma, the play challenges traditional norms, questioning the morality of sacrificing personal happiness for the sake of cultural expectations. Sofola's narrative becomes a platform for examining the moral

dimensions of cultural practices and the evolving rights of individuals within a communal setting.

The playwright reveals African norms and belief systems that sustain the waiting or mourning period. Sotimirin says that:

“Uloko, the impatient lover, could not wait for Ogwoma to complete the mandatory mourning period after the latter lost her husband. He decides to have sexual intercourse with Ogwoma. Such an action is taboo, outrightly immoral. This is why at the end of the play, tragedy befalls the people involved, particularly Uloko and Ogwoma. To the African, the woman is not free yet until certain rules are done before she could re-marry or be re-married to another man in the family.” (Sotimirin 73)

Wole Soyinka commenting on the moral responsibility of writers avers that *“writers should have the courage to determine what can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity”* (Soyinka 75). Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* transports audiences to the intersection of Yoruba tradition and British colonial morality. The play intricately weaves a narrative around Elesin, the King's Horseman, and his moral duty to fulfill a ritual suicide. Soyinka provocatively explores the clash between indigenous beliefs and colonial imposition, prompting a reflection on cultural relativism and the consequences of imposing foreign moral values.

The theme of morality is intricately explored in the complex situation of Zifa in J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat*. Zifa, who is unable to father children with his wife Ebieri, receives counsel from the Masseur to offer his wife to his younger brother due to his condition. Naturally, such a disagreeable suggestion is met with strong resistance. Zifa unequivocally rejects the advice, refusing to entertain the idea. Ebieri is advised to openly communicate Zifa's condition to her parents, emphasizing that such disclosure is not morally wrong. Additionally, there is a moral obligation for a man to fulfill his marital duties to his wife. Despite these considerations, Ebieri eventually succumbs to her desires and seductively engages in sexual relations with Tonye, her husband's younger brother. Regardless of Zifa's condition, this act is deemed taboo, as it is entirely immoral for a brother to be involved intimately with his brother's wife. As a consequence, Tonye pays for his transgression with his life, and the entire household suffers severe repercussions for this immoral act.

The East African literary Colossus, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a socialist realist who believes in the social function of arts, sees an artist as a moral upholder of truth, a prophet of justice, one who reveals all that is concealed by darkness. Emblemized in the person of the Gicaandi player in *Devil on the Cross*, the writer is figuratively taken to the rooftop, where he can see all the hidden things and so pronounce on them. This figurative height refers to a writer's privileged position, which is a result of his higher sensibilities, sensitivities, and education as a writer. To Ngugi *“writers are surgeons of the heart and souls of a community”* (Ngugi 22). According to L.O. Bamidele *“Literature is instructive and closely related to the moral life of a man. He sees it as an art that is devoted to the task of inspiring virtue*

or purifying manner—the interplay of aesthetics and moral factors” (Bamidele 12). According to Ian Gregor and Brian Nicholas, “plays and novels are basically concerned with two things—the moral and the story. The moral aspect is indicative of a writer’s relationship with the society while the story has to do with his relationship with his arts” (Gregor and Nicholas 26).

Chinua Achebe, talking on the pedagogical responsibilities of artists, avers that they are naturally saddled with “the task of re-education and moral regeneration of society- a task in which they should be pioneers” (Achebe, 24) This is in line with the views of Friedrich Schiller, who regards the stage as a moral force that normalizes all anomalies when society tends to haywire. A look at playwriting and production over the ages will reveal the fact that playwrights have always been interested in the moral life of society and have been making efforts to uphold same.

Collectively, both classical and modern plays serve as a testament to the rich and diverse exploration of morality within the nation's dramatic landscape. They engage with traditional values, confront the impact of colonialism, and interrogate contemporary societal issues. Through the medium of drama, playwrights contribute to a dynamic and ongoing conversation about the moral compass that guides individuals and communities in their quest for identity and progress.

The historical trajectory of moral exploration in plays illustrates a dynamic interplay between dramatic art and the ethical inquiries of the times. Playwrights, through their works, have contributed to moral discourse, challenged societal norms, and provided audiences with a reflective space to ponder the complexities of right and wrong. As the theatrical landscape continues to evolve, so too will the exploration of morality on the stage, shaping and reflecting the moral consciousness of each era.

3. Theoretical Framework

Ethical criticism involves analyzing literary or artistic works through the lens of ethical principles and values. When applied to drama, this perspective delves into how a play explores, challenges, or reinforces moral and ethical ideas. This approach contends that literature serves as a distinctive manifestation of ethics and morality within a specific historical context, asserting that literature is not merely a form of linguistic art but rather an art of textual expression. Within the framework of ethical literary criticism, the primary function of literature is viewed as the promotion of moral enlightenment and education, with aesthetic appreciation considered as a secondary aspect.

According to Nie Zhenzhao, ethical literary criticism is defined as a critical theory for reading, analyzing and interpreting the ethical nature and function of literary works from the perspective of ethics. Seeing literature as a product of morality, it argues that literature is a form of ethical expression in a specific historical situation. The theory examines literature as a unique expression of ethics and morality within a certain historical period and that literature is not only an art of language but also an art of text. Literature is, in essence, an art of ethics. Out of the demand for ethical expressions,

human beings invented written symbols to record their lives and their understanding of ethics as texts (Zhenzhao 189-190).

More specifically, ethical literary criticism aims to unravel the ethical dimensions embedded in literary compositions, offering insights into characters and their lives from an ethical standpoint and providing ethical evaluations of their actions.

Throughout the course of human civilization, two significant processes have shaped mankind: natural selection and ethical selection. Natural selection facilitated the physical evolution of humans from apes, while ethical selection serves as a spiritual distinction, setting humans apart from animals. From an ethical perspective, the culmination of these processes is represented by the Sphinx factor, which can be understood as the amalgamation of human and animal elements. The Sphinx factor stands as a central theme expressed in literary works, reflecting the complex interplay of human and animal characteristics in the ethical development of humanity.

In the context of Ifeyinwa Uzundu's play *Which Way is Right?*, ethical criticism can be a valuable approach to understand the work's engagement with moral dilemmas and ethical considerations.

Ethical criticism often thrives on the exploration of moral ambiguity and complexity within a narrative. In Uzundu's play, ethical criticism would highlight situations where characters face difficult choices, challenging the audience to consider the complexities of right and wrong.

Characters in a drama are key elements for ethical analysis. Ethical criticism will focus on the moral development of characters in *Which Way is Right?*. Ethical criticism involves in examining how these principles are represented and whether they align with societal norms or challenge them.

Uzundu's play addresses issues specific to a cultural context, providing an opportunity for ethical analysis within that framework. Therefore, ethical criticism will explore how the play reflects or challenges cultural and social ethical norms.

In summary, ethical criticism of *Which Way is Right?* involves a deep examination of the play's characters, themes, and narrative structure to uncover its engagement with moral and ethical principles. It allows for a nuanced understanding of the ethical dimensions embedded in the drama, offering insights into the playwright's perspective on morality and challenging the audience's own ethical perspectives.

4. *Which Way is Right: An Analysis of Ethical and Moral Principles*

The play dramatises one of Nigeria's perennial post-colonial crises which is manifested in ethical challenges. It vividly reveals the difficulties experienced by Nigerian youths who have been uprooted and devastated by the combined effects of joblessness and societal neglect. Set against a typical African society, the play opens along the roadside and two very important female characters are introduced to us. Chioma and Ogechi, are NYSC corps members, who have just concluded their national youth service. Unlike Ogechi, Chioma's experience throughout her service years had been a pleasant one.

During the conversation between the two, the playwright reveals that Chioma is a character, who can go to any length so as to actualize her ambitions.

To emphasize the need for the restoration of moral principles in society, Ifeyinwa Uzundu introduces the character of Ogechi, a teenage girl known for her qualities of integrity, compassion, patience, courage, and a sincere dedication to societal progress. Despite the tough financial difficulties and disappointments she keeps facing in her bid to secure a job, Ogechi displays remarkable resilience, unwavering truthfulness, unflinching bravery, and a steadfast commitment to her ethical values. Ogechi refuses to be sexually molested by men, who are in a position to employ her. The frustration that has been building up within Ogechi becomes readily apparent during one of her conversations with her mother:

Mama Ogechi: *"My daughter, you are welcome, how did it go?"*

Ogechi: *"Mama, the same old story. After the interview, the general manager gave me this complimentary card to meet him in all Bright Hotels this evening for further interview. Mama I'm tired."* (29)

Worried as a result of the constant sexual advances towards her daughter, Ogechi's mother believes that the only solution lies in the hands of Pastor Jacob, a fake pastor whom she believes possesses the power to pray and deliver her daughter from the evil spirits hindering her from getting a job. Things start getting worse for Ogechi, when Pastor Jacob makes sexual advances to her, like other men. When being confronted by

Ogechi's mother, Pastor Jacob levelled false accusations against the young girl. Pastor Jacob lied that Ogechi tries to seduce him, but he resists the temptation. Ogechi's mother eventually throws her daughter out of the house, believing every single word of this self-acclaimed 'man of God'. Here, the play also spotlights the pervasive sexual exploitation within the religious circle, where charlatans and hypocrites dressed in religious garbs like Pastor Jacob crave for carnal pleasure and satisfaction under the guise of religion. This has led to family disputes and other social maladies. The fact that the so-called or self-acclaimed 'man of God' is among the men wanting to sexually exploit the young girl underscores the nature of the decay in the religious system. The playwright calls for a comprehensive reform of the religious body and the eradication of corruption within Nigerian society. Pastor Jacob is eventually punished as he is caught raping one of his church members.

Chioma decides to welcome Ogechi into her house, but the young girl's continued stay in Chioma's house is shortlived as a result of Tony's infidelity. Believing that Ogechi will ruin her marriage, she orders Ogechi to pack out of her matrimonial home. Frustrated, Ogechi moves in with one of her friends, Agnes, who promises to help her to secure a job. As usual, Andy, the general manager of the company wouldn't take his eyes off the young girl. He tries to woo Ogechi to no avail. At a point, Andy gets angry and orders her out of his office. Without compromising her womanhood, Ogechi later on,

secures the job in the company and even Andy proposes marriage to her. Unlike her friend, Agnes, who resorts to offering Andy sexual pleasure in exchange for employment, Ogechi, through sheer hard work attain a greater height. Things turn out fine for Ogechi as she is honored with a very big position in the company, along with a tastefully furnished apartment and a car to her credit. Uzongdu in *Which Way is right?* advocates for a good moral orientation which is the basis of societal peace and harmony. Neither the rejection from her mother nor friends deters Ogechi from excelling in her chosen career. She is seen in the play doing so well in her recent position in the company even to the extent that Andy, her employer proposes marriage to her. It should be noted that the playwright does not only make Ogechi to excel in her career, but she places her in a position of authority that is enviable in the company. Ogechi is able to change her undesirable conditions through her salient virtues.

Through Ogechi's character, the playwright underscores the significance of strict adherence to societal values. The society depicted in the play is portrayed as deeply concerned about the anomalies in the society and demanding a change in the social fabric of the nation, where moral principle have been jettisoned. *Which Way is Right?* is a play that delves deep into the moral tapestry of human lives, presenting a canvas upon which a spectrum of moral dilemmas, ethical quandaries, and the often-unforeseen consequences of human actions are vividly painted. Through its characters and their intricate dilemmas, this play holds a mirror to society, urging its audience to question, reflect, and engage in a profound dialogue about the fundamental tenets of morality.

Additionally, the playwright points out that impatience, lack of contentment, and greed of the youth have driven some to engage in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, armed robbery, cybercrime, kidnapping, and ritual money. The character of Okechukwu and Ikenna, young men who end up arrested for the offence of kidnapping and attempted murder, serve as an example of the consequences of such behavior. The young men find it difficult to secure a job or any means of livelihood immediately after their NYSC programme and they resolve to reach out to Honourable Nkemka, a politician who, in quest for political power, promises to help them but ends up dumping them. When Okechukwu and Ikenna could not bear it any longer. Ikenna says:

Ikenna: "That's the spirit bro! Now, listen I told Skido and his group what Honourable Nkemka did to us and they promised to help us get back at him, by kidnapping either his wife or one of his children for ransom. As I speak with you now, his house is under surveillance. Very soon, we will cut our own pound of flesh. That is what our society demands from us." (43)

These young men joined bad gangs that planned the kidnapping of Honourable Nkemka's wife. Unfortunately, they were caught in the process and sentenced to twenty-seven years imprisonment. The playwright uses these young men to reinforce the theme of nemesis in the play. The sudden and unexpected apprehension and confinement of Ikenna and Okechukwu reflect the principles of retributive justice, commonly associated

with the concept of nemesis. These young individuals, who were previously used as thugs by Honourable Nkemka during his political campaign believe themselves to be untouchable until the repercussions finally catches up with them.

The play also adumbrates gender concerns, especially as it concerns sexual exploitation of women by men. Andy is emblematic of the moral bankruptcy of many employers in Nigeria. He sleeps with young girls before employing them in his company. He becomes disappointed when Ogechi vehemently refuses to give up on her virtues and resist his lewd proposal. Ogechi refuses to be swayed neither by Agnes, her friend nor pressures from her society. Ogechi does not want any stain of adultery to destroy her reputation as she turns down Andy's lewd proposal when he continues with further attempts to lure her. This social construction of a woman as a sex object to a man, reinforces the gender oppression that overwhelms the lives of the female protagonists in *Which Way is Right?* and some other African plays. Ogechi is a typical example of a womanist. Oluwatoyin (2015) says that "*the strength of the womanist rests solely in her ability to remain strong and undefeated in the face of oppression.*"

In contrast to Agnes, the playwright positions Ogechi as an exemplar for young women and womanhood in general. Ogechi is portrayed as morally upright, conscientious, hardworking, possessing fortitude, stoicism, and brimming with ideas — an embodiment of the playwright's concept of an ideal woman. Through this character, the playwright illustrates the potential of young women to achieve great heights, akin to eagles, while maintaining their virtues. Just as Andy symbolizes moral decay in *Which Way is Right?*, Agnes serves as the female equivalent. She sleeps with various men and eventually learns a lesson in a hard way.

Set against the backdrop of a world where moral ambiguities are not merely confined to the pages of literature but resonate through the complexities of daily existence, *Which Way is Right?* engages its audience in an intricate web of ethical choices. Through the vivid portrayal of characters entangled in moral dilemmas, Uzondu's drama not only serves as a mirror to society but also offers a lens through which one can scrutinize, question, and potentially rejuvenate moral principles. It beckons the audience to navigate the labyrinth of human morality and encourages contemplation on the path one chooses in the face of ethical crossroads.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of moral principles through the medium of drama, as exemplified in Ifeyinwa Uzondu's *Which Way is Right?*, offers a profound opportunity to engage with and reflect upon the complex ethical dilemmas that shape our lives. This captivating work serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring relevance of moral values in our ever-evolving world. Through the art of storytelling and the portrayal of multifaceted characters facing moral quandaries, Uzondu's play invites us to contemplate the consequences of our actions, the nature of our decisions, and the paths we choose in our journey through life. By delving into the intricate web of human emotions,

relationships, and choices, *Which Way is Right?* not only provides a mirror to our own moral compass but also impels us to assess, reconsider, and potentially reshape our understanding of what it means to live by one's principles.

This study underscores the profound impact of drama as a means to provoke discussion, stimulate critical thinking, and foster empathy towards diverse perspectives on morality. It reinforces the notion that the arts, including theatre and literature, remain a vital platform for ethical exploration, prompting us to navigate the intricate labyrinth of right and wrong. In a world confronted with constant change and ethical challenges, Uzondu's work stands as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and drama as vehicles for moral reflection and rejuvenation.

Ultimately, *Which Way is Right?* highlights the enduring importance of grappling with moral principles, as it is through this continual engagement that we can hope to restore and uphold the ethical values that underpin our societies. By engaging with such thought-provoking works, we are reminded of the timeless need for empathy, introspection, and dialogue in our collective pursuit of a more just and compassionate world. Ifeyinwa Uzondu's play, like drama as a whole, reaffirms the enduring belief that the quest for moral clarity is a journey worth undertaking, and that the arts offer an invaluable compass in navigating the complex, ever-changing terrain of human morality.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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