



## Societal malfeasance as a survival strategy in Henry Leopold Belgam's *Erebie*

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### Abstract

The good, the bad, and the ugly, in the society are reflected in drama through the playwright who mirrors the society. This study examines societal malfeasances explored in Belgam's *Erebie* through contextual interpretation. Such societal malfeasances include Child Labour, Ritual Killing and Corruption. The study is hinged on the Rational Choice Theory of George Homas which states that actions of individuals in society reflect the sum of the choices made by them. It is supported by the Functionalist Theory of Emile Durkheim, also known as Structural Functional Theory which sees the society as a structure with interrelated parts, designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individual in that society. The study agrees with Durkheim that society is a complex phenomenon which must coexist as whole, with each individual striving to uphold the shared values and symbols while the Rational Theory of Homas allows an individual to make a choice that he thinks is sensible, depending on the prevalent circumstances, which will enable him to better his present condition. Conclusively, the choice of the two theories justifies the complex world we live in and the rational decisions we make believing to reap rationally from such choices. Unfortunately, such choices or decisions may not lead to the realization of our expectations. Again, actions of some of the components of the society which derail from societal norms to the detriment of such society become cogs in the wheel of progress of such society. The study recommends that people should be cautioned from indulging in societal malfeasance while government should strive to provide favourable conditions for her citizens aimed at reducing the poverty level in the country, and to encourage her citizens to abstain from the identified societal malfeasances.

**Keywords:** Child labour, Drama, Playwright, Societal malfeasances, Society

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### 1. Introduction

Drama plays many important roles in our society. Dramatists use drama as a tool in mirroring the society through their works. These playwrights have acted as agents of political, social, economic and religious change through topical thematic issues explored through drama. This makes them relevant in our society. Notable Nigerian dramatists include Nobel Prize Winner, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi, Ahmed Yerimah, Emeka Nwabueze, Alex Asigbo and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, among many others. These writers have explored and interrogated the social, political, economic, philosophical as well as the customs and traditions of the people through drama. Wole Soyinka treated the difficulty in making a choice between tradition and modernism in the *Lion* and the *Jewelas* depicted in *Sidi*, *Lakunle* and *Baroka*, while in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, he exposes the merchandising of religion through false prophets and organized fake healing revivals around the society. Emeka Nwabueze in *A Parliament of Vultures* mirrors the lives of Nigerian parliamentarians and exposes the machinations of our political leaders as represented by the legislator/ parliamentarians to enrich themselves as well as retain power for their selfish benefit, while Alex Asigbo captures the events that occurred in Nigeria after the unfortunate annulment of the 1993 general elections in *The Reign of Paschal Amusu*, exposing the machinations and intrigues of a cabal aimed at perpetuating themselves or their cronies in power. Femi Osofisan, tackles corruption and graft in the Nigerian society through *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* Ola Rotimi satirizes the political excesses of Nigerian politicians as well as the consequences of polygamy in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh tackles suppression and liberation of womanhood in Igbo society in *Olamma* while in *Otaelo*, Yerimah exposes the Osu caste system in Igbo land describing it as a retrogressive, unprogressive and frustrating practice. It is in the fulfillment of a playwright's social responsibility to his community that Henry Leopold Belgam's *Erebie* explores societal malfeasances in a multi ethnic society as Nigeria with the aim of exposing them for the good of mankind.

The foundation of modern Nigerian society was the handiwork of the British colonial masters who, for administrative convenience amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates to form Nigeria. These protectorates were made up of many autonomous groups that had existed as independent societies for centuries. Ayatse and Iorhen (2013: 178) submit that "Nigeria has as much as 350 ethnic groups based on lingual classification", while Mustapha Abdul, (2005: 4) opines that "Nigeria has about 374 ethnic groups that are broadly divided into ethnic "majorities" and ethnic "minorities". The exact number of ethnic groups in Nigeria is still a controversy. The multiplicity of the ethnic groups has made cohesion difficult. Since then, the inhabitants have been struggling to co-exist as one indivisible society. Coop (1992: 183) defines society as "a kind of collective entity as in a nation, a state, an organization and a family" Consequently, all the people in a country can be referred to as a society. Nigeria, as a country qualifies to be referred to as a society.

Sociologists agree that there are different classes of society- classless, multicultural, capitalist or civilized. Each society functions within agreed norms for the preservation of basic societal values necessary for the survival of such society. The societal values are built into societal institutions which remain a steady, dependable and reliable pattern of social behaviours expected of every member of the society. How each member of the society reacts to the set of values determines the social structure of such society. The uniting force or guiding principle of Nigerians is the constitution of the country. To make it work, each member of our society has a social role to play. Social role may be seen as the social or institutional roles played by people in a society. The father, mother, institutions such as the army, police, navy, and other security operatives have social roles to play in the society which must conform to the societal values, norms and expectations of the society.

Deviation from such social roles is viewed as social malfeasance, misfeasance or nonfeasance. The three words are interrelated and are interchangeable in this write-up as they refer to non-conformity to societal norms. The Encarta Dictionary defines malfeasance as "misconduct; conduct by a public official that cannot be legally justified or that conflict with the law" (2009: np). On the other hand, misfeasance is "illegally performing something legal; in law, the abuse of lawful authority in order to achieve a desired result" (2009: np). Many who engage in societal malfeasance pretend it is a survival strategy. It is in the light of the above that this paper will critically evaluate Erebie by Henry Leopold Belgam to extricate societal malfeasance and misfeasance through the use of contextual interpretation.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This work is hinged on the Rational Choice Theory of George Homas which states that actions of individual in society reflects the sum of the choices made by them. According to Homas, choices of action, behaviour or attitude made by an individual is consequent upon the circumstance he finds himself as such action can only be evaluated in terms of what the individual hopes to gain or lose from his prevalent situation (<http://postmodernopenings.com> np). The theory emphasizes that every individual will be reasonable to choose a course of action with comparative advantage which he believes will provide maximum benefit when compared with the cost of the action.

The above is supported by the Functionalist Theory of Emile Durkheim, also known as structural functional theory which "sees the society as a structure with interrelated parts, designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individual in that society" (np). The theory was propelled by the work of Herbert Spencer through his comparison of the society and the human body. According to Spencer, the society is made up of many components (parts) just as human body, with each part working in synergy with other parts to make the human body functional. In the same manner, Durkheim sees the society as comprising of many parts, (institutions) like the family, education, religion, economy, agencies including law enforcements that must work together to better the society.

Durkheim opines that society is a complex phenomenon but must coexist; as society is held together by shared values, languages and symbols which are built "on social facts such as laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashion and rituals which serve to govern social life" (np). A deviation from the above in any society results to societal malfeasance or non-malfeasance. Each of these social facts serves to uphold societal norms and values, which are also the guiding principles that must be obeyed; as abuse, neglect or disregard of the law in whatever guise means deviation from set values which will invariably reflect on the society and be a clog in the wheel of the society's progress.

### **2.1. Synopsis of Erebie**

Erebie is a two act play of five scenes each. The play opens in Mrs. Igbani's room, seen mending a dress while her daughter Erebie walks in wearing a brooding expression depicting resentment and complaining of their poor living condition as well as her mother's inability to foot the necessary bills for her schooling. The mother cajoles her into hawking fruits after school as a survival strategy to assist in providing her needs. Although Erebie disagreed with her, stating that such practice is child abuse, her mother's wish prevailed.

Eventually, Erebie joins her friends, Ngozi and Nkechi with her tray of fruits and is confronted by Ofegbe who promises to buy all her fruits but requests that Erebie should follow him to his house to collect her money. Attempts by her friends to stop her from following him, were shunned by Erebie who follows Ofegbe to his house where he first attempts to sexually molest her but was resisted. Ofegbe decides to strangle her but she screams and attracts Augustine who has been waiting for Ofegbe in his visitor's room as well as Ngozi and Nkechi who run to rescue her. Although Augustine tries to loosen Ofegbe's tight grip on Erebie's neck to prevent her strangulation, he refuses to let go of Erebie until she was unconscious. Chief Nnakwe, Ofegbe's accomplice walks in immediately with a big bag containing human parts and is

followed by the Police patrol team led by Karibe. They are all arrested and taken to the police station while Erebie who is now unconscious is rushed to the hospital where she was later confirmed dead.

At the police station where bail is supposedly free, Chief Nnakwe and Ofegbe are granted bail after paying a whopping sum of five hundred thousand naira (500,000) naira, but are quickly rearrested when the Commissioner of Police demands that the case file be updated for prosecution. Attempts by Chief Nnakwe to buy his freedom are rebuffed by the DPO who tells his subordinate that the order for them to be rearrested and prosecuted came from higher authority. When they (Chief Nnakwe and Ofegbe) could no longer buy the conscience of the Police officers, they resorted to clandestine means to diabolically kill the case. This led them to consult a traditional priest in his shrine to seek help. Their overtures are however rejected by the priest. Dejected, they reserve themselves to faith as they are arraigned in the court of law, charged for murder. They are consequently sentenced to death by hanging. Mrs. Igbani, Erebie's mother as well as Ngozi and Nkechi's mothers are ordered to be prosecuted for abusing the Child Rights Act to serve as a deterrent to other parents who may want to expose their children to the dangers of child labour.

### **3. Research method**

The study used the content analysis approach of the qualitative research methodology and examines societal malfeasances explored in Belgam's Erebie.

#### **3.1. Data analysis**

The data was analyzed through context analysis. Themes on societal malfeasance such as Child Labour, Poverty, Ritual Killing and Corruption explored by the author were contextually analyzed and interpreted as themes in the text. They will now be discussed in details. Child labour has varied connotations and definitions from many perspectives. According to Zinfar (2019:2), Child labour is:

a concept used specifically in international law to designate forms of work that are harmful to children. Child labour is forbidden by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which imposes obligations on state parties to eliminate it. Child labour deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and is harmful to their physical and mental development. It also interferes with children's schooling either by depriving them of the possibility to attend school altogether, or by obliging them to leave school prematurely, or by requiring them to combine school attendance with long and heavy work.

Again, Nwokoro (2011:12) copiously quoted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that Child Labour is work that is likely to be hazardous, or interfere with the child's education; or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual or mental development. For him, child labour entails a child engaging in a work to sustain self and family and warns that child labour endangers the child's development in many ways. Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity (2013:iv) admits that child labour by its nature undermines the rights of children to good living and above all denies them the opportunity to acquire basic education necessary for productive adult life. Child labour has manifested in various daring consequences on the health, safety and morals of children.

It is line with the above assertions that Nigeria ratified the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) in 1999 and further ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No 182 on worst forms of child labour in 2002, which "require member countries to determine after tripartite consultations, the types of work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of children"(np). What the above submissions are pointing out is that child labour is detrimental to the physical, social, psychological, educational development of the child and must be discouraged.

Causes of child labour are diverse. Nwokoro (2011:17) categorized them into remote and immediate causes which include; poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, culture, large household sizes, broken marriages and early loss of parents, ineffective laws and policies gravitated by lack will to enforce them, corruption and lack of appropriate social safety nets. Some of these societal malfeasances will be discussed in relation to the text, Erebie.

Poverty is one of the themes explored in Erebie. According to Gordon (2005: np) who copiously quoted a United Nations statement of June 1998 which was signed by the heads of all UN agencies, poverty is:

... a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and cloth a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation

The opening of the play reveals that Mrs Igbani is a poor widow who lives with her daughter in a poorly decorated room. As she is mending a cloth, her daughter Erebie walks in apparently dejected by the poverty situation she has found herself:

Mrs. Igbani: Erebie my daughter, why this ugly mask on your face? Any problem?  
Erebie: (Angry) mother, permit me to speak my mind this time.  
Mrs. Igbani: You have more than my permission. Talk to me my daughter what is the matter?  
Erebie: (Emphatic) I am fed up in this house mother. No good food, no good sleep, no money for my books no regular school fees, for

how long shall this continue? (13)

It is at this point that her mother cajoles her into hawking as a survival strategy and for her demands to be provided.

Mrs. Igbani: Is it why you keep face like a monkey deprived of its banana?...  
let me tell you my daughter, as long as this nation remains the way it  
is and as long as you, a girl like you has thought of no survival  
strategy to supplement what I can afford, the situation remains the  
same (14)

It is worthy to note that whatever name it is called or for whatever purpose it is meant to serve or problem to be solved, it is Child Labour. To Mrs Igbani, survival strategy means hawking after school to augment her income. She explains to Erebie:

Mrs. Igbani: Can't you see your friends, Nkechi and Ngozi? They don't lazy  
about after school. I want you to do the same. Sell fruits and assist  
your mother

Erebie: Oh! Is that what you mean? Ngozi and Nkechi hawk fruits after  
school. They hardly find time to do their homework. Is that what  
you my mother, wants me to do

Mrs. Igbani: You just have to, if I must provide all your needs. Other girls are  
doing it to assist their parents, why can't you?

Erebie: Mother, but that is child abuse (17).

Even when little Erebie reminds her mother that hawking by children is child abuse, she discredits Erebie's teacher who taught her that hawking by children is child labour and convinces Erebie who accepts to hawk after school.

Erebie: I understand you mother. Selling of fruits for survival strategy. I  
shall do it.

Mrs. Igbani: Good girl. Go and do your home work. You will start the hawking  
next tomorrow (18).

However, this decision by Erebie to carry out her mother's proposition of selling fruits after school turned fatal as she experienced a lot of challenges which eventually led to her death. If she had obeyed her instinct when she escorted her friends to sell their fruits (probably to learn the tactics of the trade) she would understand the many dangers associated with hawking. Her first experience was when she saw some hooligans helping themselves with the fruits of her friends. They pretended to be genuine buyers; they took to their heels but were lucky to be intercepted by a man who forced the hooligans to pay for the fruits they ate.

On the very first day she took her fruits to sell, she was approached by Ofege who pretended that he wants to buy all her fruits asking Erebie to follow him to his house to collect her money. Although her friends tried to stop her from following Ofege, she found his offer of buying all her fruits too irresistible, shunning their efforts and ended up following Ofege to his house who first tries molesting her:

Erebie: (Resisting) Don't touch me. Is this the fruit you want to buy?  
Please if you are not buying again, let me go (25).

Although, she resisted his attempt, but as she tries to carry her tray of fruits, Ofege grips her firmly. Her shouts attracted the attention of Augustine, Ofege's friend who has been waiting in his visitors room as well as Ngozi and Nkechi who were following Erebie from a distance.

Augustine: Ofegge! Ofegge!! Ofegge!!! Why now? Are you alright? Stop that!  
You will kill her.

Erebie: Help o. Help. o. Help.o.

Ngozi: Please don't kill her, she is our friend, we hawk and sell fruits  
together (26).

Unfortunately, their pleas fell on deaf ear as Ofegge refuses to release his grip on her in his bid to strangulate her. It was the arrival of the police patrol team, who is attracted by the noise that led Ofegge to unleash his hands on Erebie, albeit very late.

Another societal malfeasance is ritual killing. The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada(2005:1) defines ritual killing as the killing of human beings for ritual purposes (one of which might be characterized as human sacrifice). ... Ritual murder covers all delicts that relate to the murder of people and the use of human parts for any magical purpose. On why people kill or kidnap for ritual, even when it is prohibited in Section 201(c, e, and f) of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act of 1990, which stipulate punishment for anyone found culpable of ritual killing, Oyewole (2016:40) admits that ritual sacrifice is "a 'faith strategy' to acquire money, wealth, success, fame, favour, greatness, power and protection from dangers" Furthermore, Obineke(2008:3), accepts that Child labour fuels ritual killings and that the practice has been "rampant in the country for a very long time.

The ulterior motive of Ofegge in asking Erebie to follow her to his house was to kill her for ritual purposes. If his friend, Augustine was not waiting for him in his house, there may be no strong evidence to prove him guilty of Erebie's murder. His accomplice, Chief Nnakwe had arrived with a bag containing human parts apparently procured from another source, thinking that the merchandise he ordered is ready and that it will be business as usual.

Chief Nnakwe: Mr. Ofegge are you in? Why is this place rowdy? (*Forces himself into the room  
and drops his bag*)

- Karibi: You are all under arrest. Hands up all of you! Obey the last order.
- Chief Nnakwe: (Arrogantly) You can't arrest me. I have just come here to... (*Picks his bag, attempts to leave*)
- Karibi: Shut up! You are under arrest, drop that bag and stand still no shaking (26-27).

However, the arrival of the police patrol team could not save Erebie as she has lost consciousness and was eventually declared "Dead on Arrival" at the hospital where she was rushed for treatment by the police officer.

- Dr. George: Sorry there is no life in this body anymore. What a pity
- Aboki: What? Is she dead?
- Dr. George: That's exactly what I am saying, she lost so much blood. You brought her rather late. The best place for any treatment for her now is the mortuary. Inspector you have to undertake that responsibility. The body has to be preserved.(37-38)

Corruption is another major theme in *Erebie*. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria. Almost all the components of the country are entangled with corruption. From the civil service, security operatives, politicians and administrators, stories of corruption abound. Corruption is almost becoming a norm in Nigeria. It has become endemic. Inyang and Abraham (2013: 277) agree that corruption "connotes moral deterioration, depravation, perversion of integrity by bribery or favouritism" Again, Inyang and Abraham (2013: 277) who quoted Ikoh, Iyamba and Charles maintain that "several local jargons serve to describe corruption in Nigeria. Among policemen and women, it is named roadger. In government bureaucracy, it is often called kola, kickback, ten percent or lobby, depending on the subject matter of interest. The Yorubas for instance call it "egunje" that is (free food) while the Ibibios call it "Ubokedem" (money given through the back) as an inducement (278). Martini (2014) of Transparency International traces the origin of corruption in Nigeria to the discovery of oil in the 70's and the resultant wealth the country earned but greatly mismanaged by her leaders. According to her:

The discovery of oil in Nigeria brought a huge increase in state revenue, and consequently a scramble for resources among different ethnic groups... Corruption in Nigeria manifests itself in different ways, both on a micro and a macro level, and it occurs at all levels of society... With regard to the magnitude, studies suggest that public funds of between US\$300 and US\$400 billion have been lost to corruption since Nigeria became independent in 1960 (3-5).

Quoting a US Department of Justice release in 2014, Martini (2014: 6) further observes that General Abacha alone allegedly embezzled billions of dollars from the Central Bank of Nigeria between 1993 and 1998, which demonstrates the magnitude of the problem. Other examples illustrate how Nigerian politicians and subsequent heads of the national oil company have abused their power and control... to divert public money.

On the effect of corruption in Nigeria, Mohammed, Sarkin-Pawa, and Kurah, Salisu (2018: (240), agree that corruption has dented and tainted Nigeria's political image. It has represented the country in bad light. Nigerians are also treated with seeming distrust and apparent skepticism. One agency clearly indicted of corruption in *Erebie* is the Nigerian Police. The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) (2008) trace the origin of corruption in the Nigeria Police to the history of the formation of the force in 1861. According to the report:

...any adequate analysis of the problems and challenges of the Nigeria Police must start with the appreciation of the history and dynamics of its development, which from its infancy in 1861 was characterized and cultured in impunity, incivility, brutality, a lack of transparency and accountability all of which eventually metamorphosed into large scale corruption (2).

In *Erebie*, the Police we see are one that will rely on suspects and complainants to buy common stationery for effective running of the office. As a result, cases are delayed until God knows when. This is exposed by Ntugidem, a Police Investigating Officer (IPO) who refuses to make entry of Erebie's case because no complainant has surfaced. Hear him:

- Ntugidem: No complainant has surfaced sir and besides no arrangement of any kind to facilitate the purchase of paper, files and other things, you know what I mean? (42).

The Police Service Commission and the Media have consistently reminded Nigerians that police services are free. Especially, that bail is free and that we must not pay for bail. However, a visit to any police station will prove such admonitions wrong as people pay for practically every service provided by the police. From security for lives and property to the minutest service rendered by the police, the people pay directly or indirectly. In most cases, payment for bail at the police station has become a norm. These days, bail fee is negotiated based on the severity and weight of the crime as well as the guarantor. However, payment of bail fee does not guarantee absolute freedom or release from the crime as you may be rearrested after being granted bail as evidenced by the experience of Chief Nnakwe and Ofegge who were re-arrested after the payment of very huge bail fee.

- Ekpeyong: ...We have to immediately re-arrest those hooligans granted bail the other day.

- Ntugidem: ... sir, but they have been granted released on bail for #500,000 just few days ago. Here is the money.
- Ekpeyong: I know they were granted bail, but does that mean absolute freedom...get them rearrested immediately, besides there is no evidence that they paid for their bail any such evidence?
- Ntugidem: No sir, I was the one who collected the money as you instructed sir, I did, and you took it. (44).

The above even goes further to confirm some of the insinuations of some people that Nigeria police is made up of conscienceless people. How can you explain a situation where an officer who has just received #500,000 from a suspect for bail, will order for the re-arrest of the same suspect without refunding the money, insisting that there was no evidence to incriminate him? On the other hand, how do you explain a situation where a police man goes to negotiate with a suspect he is ordered to re-arrest over a murder case but instead of re-arresting the suspect, goes to his superior to inform him that the suspect is prepared to pay more money for the matter to be killed? These are all explained in the following dialogue between Ekpeyong and Ntugidem:

- Ntugidem: Yes sir, he is desperate sir. You know what I mean? #500.000 and conscience.
- Ekpeyong: Desperate over what? You mean that man is still being difficult? What does he want?
- Ntugidem: Well, he wants to grease your palm again. I mean he would like to see you sir, in a special way if the matter is killed. You understand what I mean? (46).

Another angle to the societal malfeasance is the diabolical nature of these ritualists who believe that money will solve all problems and will go to any length to see that all matters against them are crushed. However, for Chief Nnakwe and Ofegge, it is no longer business as usual as all efforts to extricate themselves from the murder of Erebie backfires. They approach a traditional priest, pretending to be humble and just in order to achieve their ulterior motive but their attempt to diabolically kill the case was disappointedly refused by the priest who cautions them to stop spilling blood.

- Ofegge: The wise one of the people, we greet you, the manipulator of human minds, we come to you with great honour and respect for your good works to the people. Please despise not your humble children.
- Priest: Children? You call yourselves children? What do the gods think of Erebie? And all the innocent children you slaughtered in cold blood for money? Too much blood! The gods are now angry so, what do you want me to do?
- Ofegge: We have killed many and now we are caught. Please protect us.
- Chief Nnakwe: Ofegge, it's alright, you have tired. I think it is my turn to speak. Let me talk to this man. Look. Mr. Priest, or whatever you call yourself, we have not come here for joke. We mean business. Grant our request and money will never be your problem (49-50).

After all the vituperations by Chief Nnakwe, the traditional priest furiously warns him that his words and action will destroy him.

- Priest: Taa! You open your mouth too wide against the gods? Your words and actions will surely destroy you. Go! (52).

#### **4. Findings and discussions**

Societal malfeasance exists in different forms and at different levels. The study exposed four major causes of societal malfeasance explored by the author in *Erebie*. They are Child Labour, Poverty, Ritual Killing and Corruption. It is disheartening that most institutions which should have championed the cause for the eradicating those malfeasances are benefitting from it and are reluctant to fight against it.

However, and on a good note, one institution that has stood against societal malfeasances is the judiciary. Having tried to bribe their way without success and having failed to diabolically stop their prosecution, Chief Nnakwe and Ofegge were charged to court where they were found guilty of murder and sentenced to death by hanging. Also, the mothers of the children involved in the hawking were ordered to be arraigned for abusing the child act law:

- Justice Trapam: ... I therefore find the accused guilty as charge. This is my judgment, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> accused will be hanged until they are confirmed dead... the mother of the deceased and those of Nkechi and Ngozi should be charged and arraigned before me for trial for having abused the child rights act... (104).



## 5. Contribution of the study

The study has exposed the sad effects of societal malfeasance and thus succeeded in creating further awareness of the dangers of child labour and its implication.

## 6. Implications of the study

The choice of the two theories justify the complex world we live in and the rational decisions we make believing to reap rationally from such choice; unfortunately, such choices or decisions may not lead to the realization of our expectations. Again, actions of some of the components of the society who derail from societal norms to the detriment of such society may become cogs in the wheel of progress of such society. However, these wrongdoings/actions explored by the playwright may have been necessitated by the need to survive in the face of harsh economic situations in the country. The police man who takes bribe, the woman who sends her child to hawk after school as well as the young who indulges in ritual killing to make money do so as a survival strategy. When citizens begin to look fervently for means of survival, they may be forced to cross the red line to attain their desires.

## 7. Conclusion

The work which set out investigate the themes of societal malfeasances in *Erebie* by Belgam agrees with Durkheim that society is a complex phenomenon which must coexist as whole, with each component striving to uphold the shared values and symbols which are built on social facts such as laws, morals, religious beliefs, customs, fashion and rituals which serve to govern social life. For society to function properly there must be harmony, with every section of the social fact contributing conscientiously for the good of the society. Where there is disharmony, things will fall apart, and the centre will not hold.

The Rational Theory of Homas which allows an individual to make a choice that he thinks is sensible, depending on the prevalent circumstances and which will enable him better his present condition may have propelled Mrs Igbani to send her daughter, Erebie to hawk fruits after school with the hope of using the proceed to better her situation in a complex world populated by hawks waiting for a prey. It is the same hope (economic gain) that their children will bring extra income to augment their meager earning that force some parents to engage their children in such risky venture. In such circumstance, they believe that they have made or are making a rational-reasonable and sensible choice; not counting the loss such choices may bring to bear not only on them but also on the child. Therefore, parents who engage their wards in child labour do it because of the optimum gain they hope to achieve at that particular time based of their prevalent situation. However, it is important for parents to stop imitating other parents or comparing them with their children. This is because, if Mrs Igbani, Erebie's mother had stopped comparing Erebie with others when she said "other girls are doing it to assist their parents, why can't you? (17). Maybe, Erebie would not have died. Therefore, government is called upon to ameliorate the biting economic situation in the society to reduce these malfeasances to the barest minimum. Again, it is recommended that individuals should endeavour to engage in extra ventures that will yield additional income rather than wait for their monthly salary which may not be enough to take care of their multifarious financial challenges.

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