

THE ARTISTIC VISION OF MORALITY IN DJOLETO'S *MONEY GALORE*

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Abstract

*The issue of morality has not only engaged the attention of the clergy, psychologists and other social scientists but has also come to be accepted as part of the issues artists deal with. The latter, in artistically recreating the realities of morality (or immorality), assume the role of teachers marching right in front of society with the task of re-educating and regenerating society (Achebe, 1975:15). How Djoletto, in **Money Galore**, (1975) portrays his stance in dealing with some issues connected with morality, and his artistic vision for society are the central concerns of this paper.*

1. Introduction

Amu Djoletto, the relatively “obscure”* Ghanaian novelist, creates an artistic world peopled by individuals who insatiably and wrongly crave for money, fame, wealth, power and sex. The artist seems to be questioning the core values of what society considers admirable as he portrays the characters in a tragic-comic way, exciting the reader’s psycho-somatic passions with virulent disgust. The feeling the reader gets in *Money Galore* is quite similar to what D.H. Lawrence expresses about *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* [that] “nothing nauseates him more than promiscuous sex in and out of season”. It is into this nauseating feeling wrapped in notions of morality (or immorality) that the novelist plunges the reader who is guided mentally to “keep alive in his/her breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience” (Washington, 1980). The novelist’s success in the work is his bold attempt at confronting society with the stark realities of the

human condition which seems to pride itself in excessive aberrant immoral behaviour, obviously threatening society's core moral values. This paper seeks to examine how Djoleto, in *Money Galore*, portrays his stance in dealing with some issues connected with morality (or immorality) as he crafts his vision for society, cautions it to retrace its steps and redefines its ethos and essence in life.

*** *Obscure not in terms of he being difficult to understand, but simply not being well-known or celebrated as the other great writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Armah, Ngugi etc***

2. The Context

The issue of morality has not only engaged the attention of the clergy, psychologists and other social scientists but has also come to be accepted as part of the issues artists deal with. The latter, in artistically recreating the realities of morality (or immorality), assume the role of teachers marching right in front of society with the task of re-educating and regenerating society (Achebe, 1975:15). Though the task of each writer is circumscribed by the specific community he/she serves (or influences intellectually) he must present life as universally accepted to be right. The writer should seek the bedrock of reality upon which all truths in life are built; truths, which Sophocles describes in *Antigone* as *...theunwritten unalterable laws of God and heaven,... . They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting, though where they came from, none of us can tell.* A writer therefore guides society or the reader to discover these truths, by employing the various metaphors, ironies, innuendos and other artistic devices. Though a writer may not have control over the fossilised moral concepts a reader might have formulated, he is, as Awoonor (1969:13) puts it, "... a person who has some kind of conception of the society in which he is living and the way he wants the society to go". The African artist therefore assumes the role of a moral pivot

that judges society and prompts it to retread the mores and paths acceptable to a particular community. That is why the writer represents the conscience of his people.

The question of morality has agitated the minds of many people in society. Some individuals perceive morality in terms of what they consider to be right or wrong; this is usually a function of their religious beliefs, their psychology, personal biases and/or selfish motives. Any action or thought they consider best forms their corpus of morality. These notions of morality are usually self-centred and could be detrimental to societal aspirations. Morality should be viewed in terms of societal values - certain basic standards by which people within a particular society judge what is good and acceptable, and what is bad and unacceptable. A.N. Whitehead, the British Philosopher and Mathematician in his essay, "Dialogues", responding to the query of what morality is, opines that "... it is what the majority then and there happen to like and immorality is what they dislike". Consequently, if a society considers, for example, sexual promiscuity as bad then such an act must be seen as immoral and detrimental to society's progress. Djoleto's artistic vision captures the viewpoint of Whitehead as he presents the theme of immorality in the novel, *Money Galore*.

3. The Voice of the Ancients

The theme of morality (or immorality) fascinated the ancient Greeks who sought through artistic reconstruction of the theme in their epic poems (Homeric poems – *Odyssey* and *Iliad*), dramatic works (Sophocles' *King Oedipus* and *Antigone* and Euripides' *Hippolytus*), and the several cults and gods (Pluto, Dionysius, Bacchus etc.) that presided over moral activities, to portray the very soul of society. In fact, the issue of morality predates the Platonic debates in the *Republic*. Plato

exiled some poets from his ideal society because he thought that their works encouraged immorality or portrayed base characters who exhibited immoderate actions. Though Aristotle disagreed with Plato, he equated morality to aesthetics and politics. He maintains that the arts affect human character, and hence the social order. Aristotle held the view that happiness is the aim of life and that the major function of art is to provide human satisfaction. In his *The Poetics*, the major treatise on writing a good tragedy, Aristotle argues that the concepts of hamartia (which is simply acting wrongly in ignorance or acting in the heat of passion) in both the plot and character, and catharsis (the fear and pity readers experience in response to the tragic hero's fall) justify the relevance of morality (and emotion) in the arts. He explains that the hero's hamartia destabilizes the natural order of society, when he is punished society's harmony is restored.

The early Greek dramatists' and poets' handling of the theme of morality reveals a forceful insight into the complexity and paradoxes associated with human behaviour. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, for example, readers are "horrified at Phaedra's passion not only because incest is a sin but also because he (Hippolytus) feels that sexuality is impure and his commitment to Artemis makes any other liaison a betrayal" (Sackey, 2010:67). Though the Phaedra Myth in Literature has been handled by Euripides, Seneca, and Racine, the story of Phaedra's passion is relevant in that it provides each dramatist the opportunity to portray a particular morality according to the needs of the different communities they serve and the artistic choices and ends the artists seek to achieve.

Centuries later, Shakespeare dramatizes the conflict involved in some moral issues in his plays, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*. In the latter, for example, the issues of sex, death and justice are the central concerns of the play. The dramatist's skillful handling of the conflict throws the issues at stake into a sharper relief than any rhetorical debate between flesh and the spirit such that by the close of the play the formal resolution of uniting the various couples does not resolve the questions raised throughout. What, for example, are the essential differences between love and lust, sex and marriage? And what is more important to maintain: law or liberty, innocence or life? Shakespeare's conclusions on the moral issues in the text are not so prescriptive in the true sense of the word but they provide "headaches" for the reader to unravel its mysteries (Achebe, 1988:148); they serve as an index to moralise about issues connected with sexuality and sensuality.

4. Djoletto's Treatment of the Theme of Immorality

Following (but departing from) the Shakespearean and Ancient classical writers' handling of the theme of morality (or immorality) Djoletto, in *Money Galore*, seems to be vociferous in pointing out to society its immoral acts and behaviours. His forthright and fearless approach in satirizing the ills among the clergy, politicians, businessmen and women, ordinary people and even the youth is an index perhaps that links him to great minds like Boccaccio in his *The Decameron*. Like the fourteenth century novelist (Boccaccio), Djoletto condemns licentious lives of politicians, priestly unchastity, hypocrisy, deviant sexual behaviour, and amorous living. Though these immoral acts usually go unpunished in the fictive works, both novelists leave the reader in no doubt about the negative effects these acts have on society. Other writers like Achebe in *A Man of the People* (1967), Armah in *Fragments* (1970), Okpewho in *The Last Duty* (1976) have

also expressed similar concerns. Djoletto, however, manipulates several ironies, sarcasms, contrasts and humours to the effect of pronouncing his judgments on the misconducts of the characters in *Money Galore*.

Djoletto's main concern in *Money Galore* is to paint a gloomy picture of how corrupt and money-minded a society can be if its psychology is not properly oriented and firmly grounded in its moral and ethical values like moral uprightness, discipline, chastity, sincerity and faithfulness. His satirical butt is directed against the counterfeit political and religious leaders, who are expected to give society spiritual and moral direction, but who have themselves become architects of moral bankruptcy. The novelist's criticism of this moral decadence is seen in the portrayal of Rev. Dan Opia Sese, a bald, fair-coloured man who always wears trendy and expensive shirts and ties but finds it difficult to discard old coats and trousers (suggestive of his affluent and hypocritical life); he is not fond of the clerical garb, though he is an ordained minister of religion. This suggests that Opia, a reverend minister, has skeletons hidden in his cupboard, as far as his moral life is concerned.

The novelist provides the reader with a brief background of Opia's life, which serves as a guide to measure his moral purity (or otherwise). As a priest-teacher, he takes sexual advantage of a seventeen year old girl in her first year at training college, attempts to deny responsibility for her pregnancy, but is compelled to marry the girl "to avoid an open scandal"(p.12). Rev. Opia neither drinks nor smokes in public. We can speculate that he drinks and smokes in secret.

The artist's profuse use of irony and paradox excites the reader's sense of humour and disgust for the pretentious and morally bankrupt men of God; here is a married pastor who has a chorister girl-lover, Lydia Johnson-Baiden. After Opia has fully satiated his sexual drives on her, he

decides to literally 'transfer' Lydia to Kafu after the Thanksgiving service. He even drives Lydia to Kafu's lodgings where Opia *had stocked the place with a selection of expensive drinks They chatted till about twelve midnight. Dan Sese insisted it was too late to drive Lydia home so he left her with Kafu* (p.78). Opia shamefully accepts responsibility for any pregnancy that might result from Kafu's illicit affair with Lydia. He confidently intones to Kafu:

leave that to me Abraham. Expect nothing (p.78).

Opia's immoral exploits go beyond the bounds of his congregation in Cape Coast and extends down to Kafu's home in Accra where he throws all caution to the wind, woos a house-girl (Gloria Opoku), ravishes her, impregnates her, attempts and succeeds in aborting the pregnancy. The novelist's detailed description of the setting and actions of Opia foregrounds his ironic criticism of immorality among the clergy.

The evening before, Rev Opia Dan Sese had contrived to effect the desired contact with Gloria Opoku ...he cleverly and surreptitiously watched the movements of his heart's desire. And the moment came. She had gone to do up his room. He was talking with Grace, then asked to be excused. He went to the toilet only briefly, then slipped quietly, tiptoeing, into his room. The young girl was spraying the room with air-freshener when he suddenly held her by the shoulders. She gave a cry of fright but he had put his hand on her mouth and that was it- no noise was heard! 'Take this' and he flashed thirty cedis in bright new ten-cedi bills Opia felt strongly that she would very much like to have it. He had little time. His move had to be fast now 'It's for you', he said. 'Don't worry. I've some more. I can give you some more. hei, hei, hei? My dear'! He kissed her. It was adroit anaesthetic. She did not resist and he turned off the lights (pp.129/130) (Emphasis mine).

The above extract establishes the fact that Rev Opia is an expert lecherous man who has lost his moral sense of duty to humanity, for a sixty-one year old pastor ravishing a fifteen-year old house-girl is a veritable proof of rot in society. Evidently, Opia has no conscience. This incident

echoes Boccaccio's *The Decameron* in which the abbot, an elderly priest, ravishes a thirteen-year old girl in a 'grand style'. Let us listen to Boccaccio:

Master abbot surveyed her from her head to foot, and seeing that she was fresh and comely, fell a prey, old though he was, to fleshly cravings no less poignant and sudden than those which the young monk had experienced, and began thus to commune with himself: "Alas! Why take I not my pleasure when I may, seeing that I never need lack for occasions of trouble and vexation of spirit? Here is a fair wench, If I can bring her to pleasure me, I know not why I should not do so". ... the abbot, who after bestowing upon her many an embrace and kiss, got upon the monk's bed, where, being sensible, perhaps, of the disparity between his reverend portliness and her tender youth, and fearing to injure her by his excessive weight, he refrained from lying upon her, but laid her upon him, and in that manner disported himself with her for a long time. (Novel IV, pp.2-3) (Emphasis mine).

Djoleto expresses his disgust at the way politicians use their positions to sexually take advantage of young girls and women through the ironic portrayal of his protagonist, Kafu. The reader gets the impression that immoral sex is the ultimate goal in life, something that makes the exacter experience an explosion of emotional satisfaction. Kafu exacts sexual pleasure from Lydia - Opia's lover- and confesses later to Opia thus:

*..... don't forget to give my love to Lydia, you know?
She was damn good the other day. Really nice and
wholesome. Gosh!(p.144).*

Such a remark is unbecoming of a minister of state and an MP. It is simply condemnable. It is a criticism of politicians (and people) who reject and neglect their wives at home, and become so promiscuous that even their conscience does not prick them. Grace's sarcastic statement to her husband on the night when he arrives home very late is noteworthy in this regard. She says:

... the politician's first domestic obligation is to some woman in town who keeps him till after midnight! (p. 99).

Kafu gets so deeply involved immorally with Odofo, Salamatu and Mercy to the extent that he impregnates Odofo and Salamatu concurrently. Ironically, this is a man who has been featuring on radio and TV programmes preaching “more mortification of the flesh and sound moral life” (p.128). This ironic twist echoes what Bertrand Russell, the British philosopher and mathematician, postulates in his skeptical essay, “Eastern and Western Ideals of Happiness”. He observes that

We have, in fact, two kinds of morality side by side; one which we preach but do not practice, and another which we practice but seldom preach.

Djoleto’s presentation of Kafu and Opia reveals the universal paradox associated with the lives of leaders who appear saintly outwardly, are in the forefront of moral crusades, yet their inner lives exude the stench of rot and putrefaction.

The world of the novel is portrayed as stinking when we look at both the male and female characters through the lens of morally acceptable behaviour. Odofo Lamptey, for example, is presented as morally weak to the extent that Ofori Nortey and Nee Otu Lartey “service” her in addition to Kafu's persistent “servicing”. The portrayal of Odofo reveals the pathetic plight of women whose acquisition of wealth and property does not give them fulfillment and happiness in life. These women scheme and plot to win their happiness. On a particular Sunday evening meeting with Kafu in her house, Odofo returns from church and decides to sit on a “rocking chair” she had bought at an exhibition. Her near-nakedness, as she awaits the arrival of Kafu is suggestive of her seductive moves towards Kafu. In her disappointment and disgust at Ofori Nortey’s presence in her house, Odofo “forgot to gather her cloth round her properly and her wonderful body showed in parts” (p.91). The novelist provides the reader a good humorous meal. This promiscuous and avaricious desire in Odofo portrays her as immoral. She loses her

sense of moral dignity and purity as she kisses Nee Otu and Kafu openly in the Makola market, and allows Ofori Nortey (“conception contractor”), Nee Otu, and other different kinds of men into her ‘cocoon’.

Salamatu is another character representative of this sexual craze in the fictive society. Djoleto presents her as a woman who drinks strong alcoholic beverages such as brandy and whisky, smokes and prefers men who drink whisky to men who drink beer. She is not contented sexually with one man, “a dignified but supercilious queen...very much in control of herself”. She allows herself to be “serviced” by Ofori Nortey, Nee Otu Lartey, Mr. Mills Blankson (a father), Dr. Mills Blankson (a son) and impregnated by Kafu.

Djoleto stirs the reader’s imagination with the above issues, and questions what kind of legacy such a society can leave behind for its younger and unborn generations. This question becomes more relevant especially when we consider the fact that fifteen-year old girls, enjoy tickling touches from sixty-two year old men like Rev. Dan Opia. Djoleto records thus:

...in their twenty-minute encounter..., Opia managed also to touch her left breast, which tickled both of them a lot . Then she giggled, but not recoil and said shyly, ‘oh, Osofo, I don't like that!’ Then Opia counselled softly with his right forefinger on his lips, ‘shsss, don't let your boy-friend do that to you, my dear’. And she smiled(p.79). [Emphasis mine]

The tickling, giggling and smiling of Gloria Opoku (Kafu’s house-help) becomes the object of the novelist’s attack on a society which has decayed to such an extent that it applauds the acts of Mercy Mensah,(another twenty-six year old character), a real sex maniac who knows all about casinos, hotels, discos, and gambling.

The novelist suggests that society’s failure to deal effectively with immoral behaviour in the present will have disastrous consequences for the future. This is established through the negative

influences the artist designs for Mercy Mensah to exert over Kafu's life. She fires Kafu's imagination about casinos and seemingly glamorous scenes. She convinces Kafu that:

You'll have everything- everything! Including cash and an old maid like me to warm you up as the...climax? Anticlimax? Epilogue? Whichever way you like it dear! (p.122)

Mercy's reasons tantalize the amorous Kafu so much that he cannot resist the temptation. To concretise and seal her amorous moves, she gives Kafu "a good kiss which was a fast, expert operation mesmerizing Kafu with a mixture of paralysis and satisfaction" (p.123). Kafu becomes quiet and motionless, as she repeats the operation this time thoroughly well. This irresistible and overpowering force in Mercy's personality, Djoleto indicates, tethers amorous men like Kafu to the stakes of moral bankruptcy. Kafu becomes so deeply involved with Mercy that he degenerates into a drunk, a heavy smoker, a gambler, and a swindler.

Where then is society heading? Djoleto seems to be asking. Achebe (1984) perhaps, in his booklet, *The Trouble With Nigeria*, seems to be posing the same question as he examines issues of indiscipline and immorality in Nigeria. He argues that if a leader lacks discipline, the effect is likely to spread automatically down to his followers. The less discerning among these (i.e. the vast majority) will accept his action quite simply as "the done thing", while the more critical may worry about it for a while and then settle the matter by telling themselves that the normal rules of social behaviour are mostly flouted by those in power. Achebe, in his booklet, contends that *when such a situation happens something noxious has been released into the very air the people breathe- an emanation stronger than the precedent; stronger because its association with power gives it a strange potential to fascinate the powerless* (p.31).

In his novel, *A Man of the People* (1967), Achebe expresses a similar intense disillusionment with the general mess and moral bankruptcy (in society) with the portrayal of Chief Nanga whose political career is characterized by selfish desires and an unbridled sexual craze for women. The novelist's presentation of Nanga parallels Djoleto's portrayal of Kafu. A critic, Shatto Gakwandi (1977:77), aptly observes that Nanga

... is a truly Machiavellian hero whose pursuit of personal goals is unhampered by any moral scruples... . [He] begins a career of long tours round the country accompanied by extravagant ceremonies, numerous foreign visits, the accumulation of personal fortune and the endless seduction of young women, married and single alike.

In an interview with Robert Serumaga, soon after publication of *A Man of the People* (1967), Achebe suggests that *...if it were for me to order society I would be very unhappy about the way things have turned out* (p.13). However, the artist's attempt "to order society" with the presentation of Odilli in the novel and Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* (1969), is cosmetic and doomed to failure. Similar attempts (to order society) by Armah in his portrayal of The Man and Teacher in *The Beautiful Ones* (1969), and Baaku in *The Fragments* (1970) also fail. These failed attempts by the novelists (to order society), perhaps, appear to suggest that the issue of immorality has been deified (by society) as a hydra-headed monster that defies taming, especially if we consider the fact that Djoleto, in *Money Galore*, even does not create *a strong moral centre*; what Adjei (2009: 97) describes as "a character or a group of people committed to initiating fundamental change philosophically or ideologically".

5. Djoleto's Artistic Vision

Djoleto's inability (in *Money Galore*) to create "a strong moral centre" (similar to Achebe's and Armah's), does not blur his vision for society to deal with the canker of immorality. The mores

of society, as Djoletto conceives them, should be the guiding principle to regulate the conduct of mankind in any particular society which expects its leaders to demonstrate and live by its tenets. The novelist identifies the mores of society in the lives of the ordinary peasants, teachers, sanitary workers, drivers, and the proletariat, who experience and suffer the consequences of the immoral acts and behaviours of the leaders. The lives of the masses look so bleak and economically bankrupt to an extent that society is choked with hopelessness and emptiness all around. Civil and public servants are unhappy, sanitary labourers feel cheated, ordinary drivers are dissatisfied with conditions in the country, students and teachers are unhappy; this situation generates an instant national crisis destined “to paralyse the whole country” (p.175).

Djoletto’s sympathies are directed towards the ordinary people in society while his anger and disgust are geared towards those in leadership positions whose “immoral stratagems ... create countrywide political holocaust”. He cautions society through the editorial in the *Morning Herald*:

Woe betide a people whose governance is full of moral irresponsibility such as we have indicated above (p.149).

The editorial ends with a positive declarative statement that suggests his revolutionary vision for society: ***We shall overcome!***

The novelist provides realistic means in subtly dealing with the problems of immorality in his work. Rev. Dan Opia’s immoral and hypocritical deeds are exposed after the near-death and later confessions from Gloria, who is saved from societal ridicule and embarrassment. Mr. Mills Blankson, the artist designs the loss of his favourite (and only) son, Attuquaye, under very bizarre and shameful circumstances during the collapse of the Atukpai ‘tiafe’ walls. The novelist’s choice of the death spot (for Attuquaye) portrays his disgust for the likes of the

Blanksons who defy moral decorum in the African society which frowns upon a father and a son “diving into the ‘cocoon’ of the same woman” (Salamatu). As for Odofo, Salamatu and Mercy, the novelist frustrates their efforts to continue propagating their immoral deeds by exterminating “their object of desire” personified in the protagonist, and rendering their children fatherless. Kafu’s shameful and tragic death at the close of the novel is perhaps a powerful reminder to society that humans need to be discreet in regulating their moral lives in dispensing the power they wield.

Djoleto captures society’s displeasure with Kafu’s immoral life as a politician by employing a traditional retributive justice system (synonymous to the Ewe Halo Songs) meant to censure and reform human beings. The artist’s deliberate distortion of the question posed by one of the tanker drivers to Kafu (manipulated by Vuga, the Permanent Secretary) coupled with the animated response by Kafu generate excitement and humour that enthrall the long procession at Essikado, after the Gyandu Park abysmal showdown of Kafu’s political career. This scene conveys the novelist’s disgust at immoral behaviour. Children, the youth, the elderly and all chant:

‘ Kafu, your mother!’ Kafu, your father!’...Kafu is a thief, Kafu is a thief! Adza! Adza! Dza! Dza! Dza! Dza! Dza! Dza, dza,dza, dza! And the lissom teenage girls danced sinuously with the right thumb pressed against the left buttock, the feet astride while their waists moved up and down in the hopping lusty dance (p.179).

Though the language may appear unsavoury and the lusty dance offensive, Djoleto portrays the reality of the traditional sanctions of a particular community and how the society is repelled by the indecent acts of humankind. His work therefore must be seen as a testament cautioning men and women about the way they conduct their political and moral lives.

Djoleto's vision for society portrays an optimism embedded in the traditional sanctions of a particular community, which abhors immorality of every kind, willing to punish all acts that destabilize the harmony and moral order of their existence. He empowers society, through his fictional work, to serve as the moral vanguard and conscience of the community whose mores must be the yardstick to judge all conducts of humankind. Though these mores and customs might be good for a particular society, some aspects could be culpable and detrimental to the progress of it. Elsewhere, for example, in Achebe's novel (*Things Fall Apart*) aspects of the Umuofian mores, which pride itself in the excessive display of strength and masculinity, have been criticized. Indeed, the killing of Ikemefuna is unheroic, reprehensible, and nay barbaric.

All in all, the mores are a good guide to decent living and society must ensure that these are crafted and exercised to uphold the dignity and well-being of the individual.

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