

The Moral, Social and Political Decadence in the Nigerian Society: A Case Study of Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel*.

Adewumi Samuel Idowu

Department of General Studies, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo. Ondo State Nigeria.
Akinkurolere Susan Olajoke

Department of General Studies, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo. Ondo State Nigeria.
Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.
olujoke2126@yahoo.com

Abstract

The moral, social and political decadence in the Nigerian society since independence in 1960 cannot be over emphasized. Since attainment of independence, all the facets of the Nigerian nation are decayed, totally in shamble and in a sorry state. At the age of fifty years plus, nothing can be said to be moving forward in the country whereas other developing countries like Nigeria are fast growing technologically, producing enormous goods for global consumption while our country still gropes in the dark as the text reveals "we are in for a long night". This paper focuses on the decadence in the country, using Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* as a case study. The drama piece vividly captures most decay be it moral, social, political in the county.

1. Introduction

A society according to Ajayi (1982) is defined as a community comprising a number of persons living within a certain geographical area whose members are conscious of their mode of life, aims, and values, always look toward the future in the direction in which they wish to change and the feeling of solidarity and consciousness bind them together into a unit. Cohen (1979:13) sees a society as a group of people who live together over an extended period, occupy a territory, and eventually begin to organize themselves into a social unit distinct from other groups.

According to Famade (2001:23) a basic feature of a society is that individuals and groups within it interact through various social organizations and institutions. Through these interactions, they become aware of the problems of their society, and try to find ways of solving them for the benefit of the people.

Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* is a drama piece satirizing hypocrisy and the decadence in the moral, socio-political decadence of Nigerian societal life. It dramatically reveals the way of life of people within the positions of authority thus showcasing the can of worms characterizing their actions and deeds within the society. No wonder, Awero, a parliamentarian, encourages her husband to pass the night outside their home so that she could enjoy herself to the fullest in company of Pastor Suuru – a close associate of her husband. She had this to say:

'For Christ's sake, what's wrong with you? I'm telling you its regular practice in parliament. All the male MPs are doing it, even to their own nieces and cousins! Everyone in our contracts and awards committee is taking some members of the opposite sex somewhere or the other before jobs are given out. They call it "sampling the goods". So why should I be different? Listen, we even have a song about it '(13).

On pages 1 – 2 of the drama piece, the welcome address of the manager vividly captures the totality of the topic of this paper showing the degree of decadence in our society thus:

Welcome to Midnight Hotel

Good evening

And welcome to Midnight Hotel

Tonight's dinner of song and laughter

Will be assisted by the orchestra.

Here, called the Petronaira Band,

Led by the one and only songmaster,

Who, over tonight's dinner,

Will preside by popular demand.

But, before you taste our dish

I'm told to ask if its your wish

To know the background of this hotel,

This place was built as a house of sin

In the year Nineteen Hundred and Fourteen.

It had just rooms at the beginning

But we've since added another sixteen

To raise the number to around nineteen

(Or nineteen two-thirds, if you count this place
Which we use only as reception space)
Our specialty is in those hidden games
Which we indulge in, and nations, sometimes,
In fact, ever since we got our licence,
And oil boomed into our independence,
We've taken pains to fill our stores
With every kind of corruption
Moral or political,
With all known forms of perversion,
Yes, we've got them all,
Without any exception
As long as its something sordid and odious
There's no sin we cannot supply
From pleasures that make men sigh
And faint away in ecstasy,
To those which merely tickle your kinni:
We've got them all, just place your order
Any peculiar indulgence
Whatever may be your preference
Just order, and we'll fill your plate.
For we'll always be here, always open
Even when engulfs the nation,
This war you call election
Which is coming fast like a huge conflagration.
Well, that's our story, you guest of tonight.
Welcome again have a splendid appetite! (1-2).

The welcome address by the Manager of the Hotel captures Nigeria as a nation from the amalgamation of 1914 by Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard culminating in the three regions of the country leading to the creation of additional sixteen states thus making nineteen states of the federation. The oil boom of the Gowon era later became the doomsday of the country leading to moral, socio-political decadence within the Nigerian society.

3. Osofisan's Drama in Relation to Brechtian Theatre

Osofisan's theatre has a lot to share in relation to Bertolt Brecht. Brecht aligns himself with some ancient theatrical conventions. Before Brecht's writings started seeing the light of the day, theatre performance was in the naturalistic form, thus creating "theatre of illusion", Brecht kicked against the theatre of illusion". Also, Osofisan takes after Brecht jettison 'theatre of illusion' showing his dislike for the orthodox theatre. The drama piece, *Midnight Hotel* written in 1982 during the Second Republic of Alhaji Shehu Shagari shows the decay, rottenness, corruption and state of disorderliness characterized the period. Osofisan in his dedication reveals:

This play is dedicated to
The Second Republic, and
To all those who are profiting
From it; like you, my friend . . .
Hypocrite!

This reveals the subject matter and thematic concern of the play. Brecht theatre is indeed a theatre and not real life. Like Brecht, Osofisan ignores lighting effects to create atmosphere and mood. As a result of this, lamp or the appearance of moon indicated the coming of the night. No wonder, Jimoh uses candle light to lead Mr. Asibong to Room 7 indicating that light has fallen. Brecht did not agree that curtains should be used to allow illusions to be prepared in secret. In *Midnight Hotel*, the playwright places the orchestra on the stage to the full view of the audience thus, carrying the audience along while light is not hidden and it is used to light the stage in order not to create any illusion. As regards music and songs, Osofisan in *Midnight Hotel* orchestra stays on stage supplying music and songs from the beginning to the end.

An illustration abound;
'wait (goes to the song master) please, song master,
you do have this song of the Lagos woman
don't you? Thank you. Let us sing it for this idiot.
(The song mater gives him a large tablet, starts the orchestra and they begin to sing ...)

According to Volkes (1979: 149), the works of Brecht and Osofisan can be related to Marxism. Volkes pointed out that he did not become a communist for want of a better past time but because he found that Marxist-Leninist theory introduced new quality into his work as a writer and according to Brecht himself “we derive our morality from the interests of the proletarian class struggle”. Thus, Brecht works clearly have interest in the welfare of the downtrodden and voiceless ones in the society. Osofisan, identifying with this school of thought satirizes the activity of the political and religious leaders in our society in *Midnight Hotel*. It would be necessary perhaps to examine the decadence pervading the landscape of Nigerian society morally, socially and politically for clarity sake.

3.1. Moral Decadence

The moral debasement in our society cannot be overemphasized because moral virtues had been thrown into the wind due to the various negative acts and deeds of majority of the population within the society. In the drama piece *Midnight Hotel* of Osofisan, the dialogue that ensued between Jimoh and his assistant – (Bicycle) concerning the naked woman that Bicycle saw in one of the hotel rooms is morally debased. Bicycle according to Egberibin (2010:62) “appears not to have encountered a woman, though naked, cares less about her nudity”. He is shocked at the display of indifference by this woman who could be, from every indication, a prostitute. He expresses his dismay as it concerns the attitude of this naked woman to his boss hoping that he would appreciate his confused state.

Bicycle: Jimoh, er, sorry Chief Jimoh
if you see de ting wey I take my eyes see jus’ now!
If you see am!

Jimoh: What did you see?

Bicycle: A woman, chief Jimoh. A woman!

Jimoh: You’ve never seen a woman before?

Bicycle: I tell you sah Jimoh de woman, she was ---- she was nakedly naked

Jimoh: And so? Were we not all born naked?

Bicycle: And she no care one ting at all -----
Boy, can you please take dis money and buy me some cigarette?
Just like dat.

Jimoh: Just like dat! Hen na . Look here, Bicycle how many times will I
remind you that you are no longer in your village?
This is Lagos, man, and in Lagos, sex is business. Naked women half naked women, women
about to be naked, women who have always been naked, women who will die naked all is
money in this city. By money! (pp 3-4).

The unholy love relationship between Awero and Pastor Suuru is morally uncalled for because Pastor Suuru, who calls himself a man of God having illicit affairs with the wife of his friend calls for questioning. it is imperative to note that at the hotel, pastor Suuru through the various discussion with Awero was fidgeting but Awero keeps making him bold to do the thing”

Awero: Will you stop that! You call yourself a pastor and you still want contract or don’t you?
Suuru: Well why not? After all, all the big Alhajis are emergency contractors also.
Even our Bishop! Is religion against profiteering? Anyway, you know that’s not why I am
afraid.

Awero: You’re afraid because I’ve brought you here isn’t it? You’re so naïve that I view why I am even
helping you. How do you think contracts are awarded by prayer, isn’t it? Nonsense! I told you
to relax, I’m sure the song master won’t mind singing us the song in praise of sampling the
Gods.
(Awero leads the song as they play)
The world’s a market they say
And so is parliament
So don’t bring us your lament
Unless you’re willing to pay
But please take off your clothes
And do not waste my time
I want to sample your type
You cannot like a government
If isn’t efficient
How shall we give example?
If we refuse to sample

- Suuru: It's not that I don't appreciate your helps
I'm just afraid that we may be seen
That's all I mean if your husband were to
- Awero: Relax, pastor, this place is quite safe (12-13)
As the incidents dramatized in the piece progress, Pastor Suuru is seen as a religious charlatan reminiscent of Soyinka's Brother Jero who was deceitful and mischievous in his character throughout the play titled *The Trial of Brother Jero*. The conversation between Alatise and Suuru calls for probes. Suuru could not give a satisfactory response to Alatise's question as to his mission at the hotel with only singlet as;
- Alatise: (Laughing suddenly) I don't wish to be too curious, pastor,... can one ask what kind of business you were going about at this hour ---- in your singlet?
- Suuru: Oh yes! Funny isn't it? Ha ha ha! Headmaster this is Lagos you know! We holy men in the city, the temptation we run through in the course of following the Lord's sheep (41).

3.2. Social Decadence

Socially speaking, hardly is there any nation worldwide with gleaming social life without its own social vices which is peculiar with the social misfits within the society. In Nigeria, there are glaring social vices, social decadence prevailing in nearly all the facets of the economy. This is dramatically illustrated by Osofisan in *Midnight Hotel* using some notable characters such as Jimoh, Asibong among others. The discussion ensuing between Jimoh and Asibong shows social decadence in the text. Asibong was at the hotel for the first time to book a room but to Jimoh, he was of the opinion that Asibong was there to 'buy sex'. He misread his intention because the usual commodity of trade is 'sex' within the society.

- Asibong: (looking round) Hello here. Hello!
where's the receptionist? Hello?
- Jimoh: (waking up, lifts newspaper) Yes, sir?
Can I help you, sir?
- Asibong: I should bloody well think so! Are you the receptionist here?
- Jimoh: A room, sir? Something . . . quiet, isn't it?
I know your type sir, and I know, just what will please you.
Please bring your woman in, sir, don't leave her outside.
There's a small hidden room at the back where the
Governor of Donme State entertains his
women whenever he's in town and doesn't
wish to be disturbed. In there, sir, your
woman may scream all she likes
without anyone trying to ...
- Asibong: Thank you, thank you. But you're
mistaken. I'm from Easy Con. Associates.
- Jimoh: Which means it's a group thing, Sir? No matter, we can also cater for you.
We have a suite which will do just fine provided you're not more than five couples and ...
- Asibong: Are you mad, boy? Or you're not listening to me?
- Jimoh: (hurt, with dignity) I am not a boy, sir. I am
Chief Jimoh, and I am not mad. (6 – 7).

Jimoh has been so engrossed in the social malaise pervading the society which overshadows his sense of reasoning. He sees all men coming to the hotel to lodge as men of questionable characters. He forgets that there are other social, religious, political and economic activities or programmes that can take place in a hotel. Asibong was at the hotel for business purposes.

Osofisan is able to bring out graphically the issue of corruption prevailing in our society in the text. This could vividly be seen through the discussions between Bicycle and Alatise when money exchange hands. Alatise was to lodge in the hotel but Bicycle told him that there was no vacant room again. With money exchanging hands, Bicycle changes tone.

- Bicycle: I swear to you we no get room again
And, Sir, dis na hotel, no be Africa
- Alatise: (Giving him money) Take this.
- Bicycle: (Taking it after some coaxing) Ah you be good man,
Sir! but na true talk I talk.
Except . . . oh yes, of course! We get one room, one big room,
if you go manage am
- Alatise: Just one room?

Bicycle: He big well well. And he get four bed dere self.
Alatise: Well good. The girls can take that. But what of me?
You can't find me a separate room?

Bicycle: Sorry sir. All other rooms don occupy finish (30).

The faulty switches in some of the hotel rooms depict the decaying state of infrastructures within the entire Nigerian state. It should be noted that Nigeria is seen as a nation where nothing works, a nation with dry pipe borne water where the taps stand perkily, decay infrastructures in the hospitals, epileptic power supplies, bad roads, falling standard of education etcetera, etcetera... This can vividly be seen in the discussions between Agnes and Awero before Alatise cuts in.

Agnes: And the light's on too.

Awero: Yes, I'm afraid, I switched it on.

Alatise: (laughs) You don't understand! In our room the switch is faulty,
and we have to use candles.

Awero: Oh, how sad!

Alatise: We'll manage. Its only for a night (36).

3.3 Political Decadence

Politically speaking, politics has not been practiced the way it should be within our society. It is widely believed that politics should be practised in a way that dividends of democracy could be brought nearer to the people particularly those at the grassroots. The reverse is the case in Nigerian context where politics is played by politicians to enrich their individual purses.

The discussion between Suuru and Awero is a clear pointer to this assertion.

Awero: You're afraid because I've brought you
here, isn't it? You're so naïve that I
wonder why I am even helping you. How do you think contracts are awarded?
By prayer, isn't it?

Suuru: I'm not saying that ...

Awero: I'm giving you a big chance by bringing you here.
As the only female member of the building committee in the House of Assembly.
I'm giving you an unfair advantage over other competitors to prove your competence. And
here you are trembling, when I am not.

Suuru: Well... you know, Honourable, its just that, that ...

Awero: For Christ's sake, what's wrong with you?
I'm telling you its regular practice in parliament.
All the male MPs are doing it, even to their own nieces and cousins!
Everyone in our contracts and awards committee is taking some members of the
opposite sex somewhere or the other before jobs are given out.
They callit 'sampling the goods'. So why should I be different?
Mister, we have a song about it. (12 – 13).

Suuru: Well, Awero ... you're sure I'll get that contract?

Awero: Why not? Once you cooperate and I sample.
(she goes to him, he recoil instinctively)
once you stop making a fool of yourself!
And not only Abuja, the new capital, I assure you.
Depending on you, your company can bag ten, fifteen contracts in a week!
Our committee has far-ranging powers over contracts from Aladja to Ajaokuta
to Warri, to Apapa, you name it!
All those places where we're
Carrying out our Grey Revolution. (19).

One could affirm that both Awero and Suuru (Pastor) are political prostitutes which denotes what is in vogue in our society today. The discussion between Alatise and Bicycle with Alatise introducing himself and how he lost the gubernatorial election through rigging reveals the various antics that characterized politicking in our society, where we now have nominated candidates, and not elected candidates.

Bicycle: Yes, sir. I be him assistant. You want room?

Alatise: Yes, we'll need rooms for the night.

Bicycle: For you and your wives?

Alatise: My daughters, boy! I am a Christian!

Bicycle: (laughing unbelieving) Yes, sir. I know your daughters dem!

Alatise: Look what's wrong with this boy? You don't know me? Mr. Jerome Paulinus Alatise, former

headmaster and proprietor of Paulinus Grammar School, Odogbolu near Ijebu-Ode: executive director of Paulinus Enterprises, and defeated gubernatorial candidate – defeated through rigging, mind you – of the Nigeria for Paradise Party at the last elections! I made some of the most resounding speeches, you must have heard of me! (28 – 29)

4. Conclusion

Taking a cursory look at the facts discussed above, Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* has brought to fore the various decay facing Nigeria as a nation i.e. the gamut of decay and corruption. Therefore, the assertion that literature is the mirror of society has been, once again, proved right by our examination of Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* as a reflection of the social, moral, and political decadence of Nigerian society.

References

- Ajayi, I. (1982) *Sociology of Education*. Lecture Series, Ogun State College of Education, Ijebu-Ode.
- Cohen, B.J. (1979) *Introduction to Sociology*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Egberibin, Denis (2010) 'The Comic Ripples in Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel*' *International Journal of Language and Communication Studies*. Vol. 3 (1 & 2).
- Famade, O.A. (2001) *Sociological Foundations of Education*. Lagos: Pumark Nigeria Ltd (Educational Publishers).
- Osofisan, Femi (1985) *Midnight Hotel*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers Limited.
- Soyinka, Wole (1973) *The Trials of Brother Jero*.
- Volker, Klaus (1979) *Brecht: A Biography*. London: Marion Boyars Limited.

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. There's no deadline for submission. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a **fast** manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Recent conferences: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

