



MORAL DECADENCE AS SOCIAL CANCER: RESOCIALIZATION AS AESTHETICS OF NECESSITY IN *EVERY DAY IS FOR THE THIEF*

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Abstract:

Moral decadence, which is the collapse of moral and ethical values, norms, and principles, has not escaped the creative imagination of the American-Nigerian novelist, Teju Cole in his novel *Every Day is for the Thief*. In this novel, the unnamed narrator discusses this issue without sympathy and shows the extent to which unethical deeds have cut across the social strata with the benediction of all the stakeholders, unfortunately. The corruption and violence inherent in these unethical activities are characteristics of a society in decadence. The analysis of data gathered shows that the perceived causes of these have their roots in the activities of corrupt civil servants in complicity with government officials, and the youth who are exposed to inappropriate media with a lack of parental guidance. This paper examines the issue of moral decadence, its root catalysts and the urgent need to address this problem in an effort to bring back moral sanity through socialization and resocialization. The analysis is done through the lens of psychoanalysis, and the findings suggest that resocialization/re-education and a shift in mindset can aid in the restoration of ethical values, ultimately paving the way for a thriving and sustainable society.

Keywords: moral decadence, mindset, socialization, society, religion, moral sanity

Résumé :

La décadence morale, qui est l'effondrement des valeurs, normes et principes moraux et éthiques, n'a pas échappé à l'imagination créatrice du romancier américano-nigérian Teju Cole dans son roman « plusieurs jours pour le voleur ». Dans ce roman, le narrateur anonyme aborde cette question sans sympathie et montre à quel point les actes contraires à l'éthique ont malheureusement traversé les couches sociales avec la bénédiction de toutes les parties prenantes. La corruption et la violence inhérentes à ces activités contraires à l'éthique sont les caractéristiques d'une société en décadence. L'analyse des données recueillies montre que les causes perçues de ces phénomènes trouvent leur

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origine dans les activités des fonctionnaires d'état corrompus en complicités avec les responsables du gouvernement, et une jeunesse qui est exposée à des médias inappropriés et sans surveillance parentale. Cet article examine la question de la décadence morale, ses catalyseurs fondamentaux et le besoin urgent de résoudre ce problème dans le but de ramener la morale par la socialisation et la resocialisation. L'analyse est effectuée à travers le prisme de la psychanalyse et les résultats suggèrent que la resocialisation/rééducation et un changement de mentalité peuvent contribuer à la restauration des valeurs éthiques, ouvrant ainsi la voie à une société prospère et durable.

Mots clés : décadence morale, état d'esprit, socialisation, société, religion, santé mentale

1. Introduction

Chizaram et al (2017, p. 160) explain the social fabric of the society by emphasising that *“moral decadence poses serious challenges to the sustainable growth in moral education due to the lack of moral fiber in the conscience of many Nigerians irrespective of class, religion, socio-economic and political standing...”* They argue that this issue has become a serious one and a big challenge in modern society. This has been the concern of the American Nigerian novelist, Teju Cole, who takes the pain to discuss this as a social cancer which is hampering the growth of his country in his novel *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007). In this, he depicts characters who overtly defy social norms. In their deeds, they are aided by those who are supposed to be their guardians though. In this, the narrator witnesses and describes a series of unethical behaviours, including bribery, corruption, cybercrime, and exploitation, that are widespread in Nigerian society. Thus, the characters include religious leaders, parents, security forces, and guardians, who have vehemently overlooked their roles in educating and instilling ethics in the younger ones. They are all, unfortunately engaged in these unethical activities to the detriment of laws, norms, and principles in vogue in Nigeria as this dawn on the narrator that the social system is broken and ineffective.

Teju Cole, who has been away from home for more than fifteen years, comes back to find that his society is confronted with the issue of moral decadence. Thus, Cole carves characters who are confronted with a clear decline in morality and lack the traditional values of honesty, ethics, responsibility and security. All these have been replaced by suspicion, crime, irresponsibility and distrust and have for that matter, placed a moral burden on a society in quest of moral sanity. The outcome of this situation is unbearable and brings about issues such as family disarray, crime, bribery and corruption. The analysis of the materials gathered shows that the psychoanalytic lens (Hobbes, 1896) I used to explore the author's mind to better understand the characters, themes, and other elements of the text. This critical tool is used for it offers to promote awareness of unconscious and recurrent patterns of emotion and behaviour and thereafter helps address the root causes of their psychological issues. This paper, therefore, examines the issue of moral decadence, its root catalysts and the urgent need to address this problem

in an effort to bring back – moral sanity– moral values through socialization and resocialization.

2. Moral Decadence in *Every Day is for the Thief*

Moral decadence, defined by Muraino and Ugwumba (2014), is a decrease in moral values and standards within a society, characterised by a lack of ethical behaviour and a failure to uphold societal norms. This decline in moral fabric leads to a loss of integrity and social values, reflecting a person's lifestyle and excessive self-indulgence with a society.

Cole, an American-Nigerian novelist, features an unnamed protagonist in his novel to voice the shortcomings of his country, Nigeria. After almost fifteen years of absence, he comes back from America to find his country infested with the evils brought about by modern discoveries to the extent of destroying the sanity of society. For instance, his friends and family members are all engaged in unethical activities, and they find him very strange when he questions their behaviours: what he expects is far from what he sees in contemporary Lagos. In fact, all the cafes are full of scammers; the internet cafes are full of "yahoo boys" (29) or, better, robbers and gangs who spend all their time doing harm to the innocent masses. Uncle Tunde is a case in point. The narrator tells us how Uncle Tunde was attacked by armed robbers who broke into his house, used it as a gateway to reach his neighbour Adelaja's house and thereafter killed him. These armed robbers killed him and made his wife a widow. In fact, this surely delineates Adelaja's wife as a woman who has the burden of catering for orphans alone. This instance forces the reader to wonder if she can lonely give her progenies a decent education that can help them fit in society.

The novel highlights moral decadence through the illegal and immoral acts of some characters. Thus, characters like the consulate, the security officials on the road, the area boys, the yahoo-yahoo boys and the front desk lady, the armed robber, the eleven-year-old boy, and the government officials in the story are portrayed as disconnected from moral values as they go against social and religious norms. Their undertakings reflect the reality of contemporary Nigeria, as seen by the novelist in the following lines. The narrator does not sympathise with the scammers:

"[W]hile the men to my left and right are busy with their fraudulent work, I ask Muiyiwa about arrests, and he says it is actually quite common to see an officer hauling off a yahoo yahoo. They drag them outside and, threatening them with incarceration and torture, are able to exact steep fines, fifty thousand naira, say, which is more than three hundred dollars. This goes straight into the pockets of the arresting officers. It is a catch and release program." (18).

This is the answer he gets from Muiyiwa about police arrests. Moreover, he informs him that it is a frequent occurrence and a common sight to witness police officers

apprehending individuals involved in fraudulent activities. But these perpetrators are forcefully taken outside and coerced into paying large fines or bribes like “*fifty thousand naira*” (18). Such huge sums of money collected go directly into the pockets of the arresting officers. This is what the narrator calls a cycle of capturing and releasing offenders. The area boys, as they are called, engage in theft through the use of the internet which serves as a gateway for theft. Their strategy consists of using fake identities and lies to have access to innocent people’s personal account data and withdraw huge sums of money from unsuspecting individuals. This indicates that the fictional modern Nigerian society depicted by Cole is morally corrupt. Despite the fact that scams and crimes are illegal, these wrongdoers commit their crimes with the benediction of the security officers, though this crime is liable to life imprisonment. In fact, in this novel, the theme of corruption is captured in the characters of the security officers and the yahoo boys and how they operate, as described by Muiyiwa on page eighteen of the novel. At the airport for example, the narrator observes corrupt activities between toll-gate collectors by policemen and drivers: they demand bribes from drivers. The stratagem as described in the novel, consists of collecting money from drivers without providing receipts. Many of these car drivers choose to pay tolls at an unofficial rate, thus, enriching the collectors and their masters. Here is an exchange between the police and the drivers: “*Two hundred you get ticket stub*” our driver says, “*one hundred you get no ticket. What do I need ticket for? I don’t need ticket!*” And, in this way, thousands of cars over the course of a day would pay the toll at the informal rate, lining the pockets of the collectors and their superiors (9).

Officially, corruption of this kind is a major issue in the country and the main character is shocked by these practices. Bribery and corruption are depicted by Cole as an alarming issue in his society. In *Every Day is for the Thief*, the narrator experiences several instances of bribery and corruption at the airport in Lagos. As was said earlier on, his sojourn of some weeks in his native country gives him bitter experiences. The renewal of his passport has caused him to confirm that though the government has taken measures to curb the issue with strong “*billboards condemning corrupt practices and urging citizens to improve the country*” (8), the problem still exists. There are warnings on the billboard which read: “*Corruption Is Illegal: Do Not Give or Accept Bribe*” (8), which seem to dissuade bribe and corrupt practitioners. Even in the consulate, the narrator is asked to pay a bribe, though there is a notice urging people to report any employee who asks for a bribe to the Consul General. Another billboard reads: “*Help us fight corruption. If any employee of the Consulate asks you for a bribe or a tip, let us know*” (4). This reminds the masses to have the impression that serious measures are being taken against bribery and corruption, which in fact, is nothing more than a mirage. Another bribery scene that is palpable is when the narrator wants to renew his passport. On page three of the novel, the narrator recounts this when he meets someone in the same predicament. When he encounters a man sitting next to him filling out forms for his children, he tells him that “*to get one’s passport to be reissued quickly, he has to pay a fee of fifty-five dollars*” (3), though it takes normally four weeks.

Cole depicts the prevalence of bribery and corruption in Nigerian society, which he believes is a fundamental factor in individual moral decline and constitutes a setback to the country's development. This brings about a great deal of sadness as the way difficult economic pressures gradually break people down. Corrupt leaders take advantage of their vulnerabilities and thereby lead them to do things against their will.

In fact, the main issue was initially poor leadership, but now, one's oppressors seem to be one's fellow citizens, as their morals are weakened by years of hardship. This brings about greed and resignation which is truly heartbreaking. Thus, the narrator recounts:

"There is much sorrow, not only of the dramatic kind but also in the way that difficult economic circumstances wear people down, eroding them, preying on their weaknesses, until they do things that they themselves find hateful until they are shadows of their best selves. The problem used to only be the leadership. But now, when you step out into the city, your oppressor is likely to be your fellow citizen, his ethics eroded by years of suffering and life at the cusp of desperation. There is venality in abundance here, and the general air of surrender, of helplessness, is the most heartbreaking thing about it." (43).

For the narrator, when corruption is deep in the fabric of a society, it can't give something meaningful to the society. The extent of bribery and corruption, as discussed by the novelist, is alarming. Nigeria, a major global oil producer, is a victim of extortion and corrupt practices within the government. The author shows how economic hardships have driven individuals to commit unethical acts in order to survive. Thus, the country's infrastructure, economy, and social fabric are deteriorating gradually. The state of the museums and rising crime rates worsen the situation as the security forces and government officials are corrupt.

In his fiction, Cole also questions the quintessence of modern technology as he opposes benefits to challenges. There has no doubt been a significant advancement in science and technology worldwide to ameliorate people's lives. While these advancements have greatly improved the quality of life for many, they have also had a negative impact on morality. Despite the positive aspects of the internet for research and communication, there is also an abundance of immoral acts. Many of Cole's Nigerian youths are exposed to and participate in criminal activities glorified on these sites. As a result, moral decay is prevalent in Nigeria through the influence of the internet and many electronic devices. The author in this novel, stresses the need to connect with the rest of the world to improve human life. It has, in many ways, provided opportunities for unethical behaviours. Cole's fictional society is a society in which the "area boys" or "yahoo yahoo boys" engage in scams and fraud as a way of getting rich without working hard. They are supported by corrupt security officials in their activities. This delineates the use to which technology is put in modern society: to exploit innocent people for personal gain. All these emphasize how technology is misused to exploit innocent people for personal gain. Hence, the narrator laments:

"The Internet cafe is symbolic of a connection to goings-on in the larger world, an end to Nigeria's isolation. It is a connection shared by many other large countries trying to shake off poverty. The availability of computers is, in this sense, an index of progress. But while India is an emerging software player, and countries like China, Indonesia, and Thailand have successfully staked claims in manufacturing, Nigeria's contribution is much more modest. In fact, it is, for now, limited to the repetition of a single creative misuse of the Internet: advance fee fraud." (15).

The scammers are presented to the reader as individuals who are full of malicious intentions as they opt to avoid putting in the effort to earn money legitimately. In their endeavour, they prioritize personal gain over moral values and integrity, thereby normalizing dishonest practices. According to Ugwu (2002), *"Nigerian society is in a state of moral, social, political, economic, legal and educational decay"* (p. 16). In fact, the graphic exhibition or description of unethical actions in Cole's fictional world clearly shows a significant decline in moral values. The scammers or *"area boys or yahoo yahoo boys"* (16) have been depicted as people who have failed to meet the needs of a viable society. They have become irresponsible characters by *"cheating on innocent people"* and *"it is impossible to control because it is far more decentralized than anyone can govern"* (17).

Cole, in his analysis of the situation, believes that the root cause of moral decline in Nigerian society is often linked to parental irresponsibility. To wit, most of the characters in *Every Day is for the Thief* are tempted by the idea of making quick money through dishonest means. This often leads to desperation and unethical behaviour. Some malicious people often resort to odious actions in their attempt to become rich people with money. To gain much, some people even turn to occult practices, which can bring man wealth and fame. In an instance, the narrator is told to join the game:

"Someone told me to do it, he says, that man over there. He points. It's futile. A wiry man steps forward and slaps him hard. It's not a bag, it turns out; it's a baby he's accused of stealing. Everyone knows that you can use a stolen baby to make money, to literally manufacture cash, in alliance with unseen occult powers." (38)

This passage shows the extent to which a person in a desperate situation can surrender to unethical activities for survival. This emphasizes the challenges faced by Nigerians in providing and catering for their families. It is a common sight and knowledge that a stolen child can be used to generate money by partnering with some mysterious supernatural forces. This moral breakdown affects the entire nation as it does not exclude children. One deviant young character featured in the novel is a teenager who is engaged in the act of kidnapping. In fact, this act translates to the fact that young boys and girls are not taken proper care of in terms of education. This means that at an early age, children grow up by themselves. From this scene, it can be argued that in the light of the plot, parents leave home early in the morning to find ways and means to provide basic necessities for their families and return late, leaving their responsibilities

to others and technology. As a result, children learn bad habits from media and technology. In the process, they learn bad behaviours like inappropriate clothing, risky behaviors, excessive partying, and drug abuse. Thus, children are left to carter for themselves. The case of the eleven-old year boy is illustrative. They escalate to criminal activities and get involved in robbery, cult, fraud, prostitution, abortion, child trafficking, and drug abuse. This has been observed by Obiano (2016: 11):

"Parents and guardians leave the house early in search of the means of survival and come back late tired, they abandon their responsibilities to outsiders and technological devices. The results are bad habits learned from television, films, video games, telephones, internet and other social networks. These are expressed in the forms of indecent dressing, permissive lifestyle, wild partying and drug abuse. It gives rise to armed robbery, cultism, 419, prostitution, abortion, child trafficking and abuse." (Obiano, 2016, p. 11)

This pushes young men to espouse bad deeds and nurtures in them the desire for material wealth, which leads them to commit financial crimes. Thus, civil servants are geared towards embezzlement of public funds.

The moral decay portrayed in this novel has cut across all social strata, life, education, politics, and the economy, and therefore hinders the country's growth and development. The systems which are meant to help lift people out of poverty are continuously sabotaged, with the complicity of officials. The narrator observes that: *"The systems that could lift many people out of poverty are undercut at every turn."* (41). Thus, the deteriorating state of the country's infrastructure, economic disparities, power shortages, and the increase in crime rates are a consequence of the country's faltering economy. This has been observed by Soyngbe (2015), who found in his study that Africa, like other places, grapples with the lack of discipline and ethical values among its populace. While discipline and morals held significant importance in Africa in the past, the current trajectory suggests a troubling shift towards detrimental impacts on all members of the society. It is a fact that the lack of discipline always results in a decline in moral standards. This is attributed to the failure of the socialization process and it affects the future of the children. Thus, the care for children during the socialization process turns into failure. Since money constitutes the root of a decent life, everybody engages in it. For them, there is nothing like good morals. In Cole's fictional society, the amount of money one is able to secure makes you climb the social ladder. The unnamed narrator believes that:

"Money, dished out in quantities fitting the context, is a social lubricant here. It eases passage even as it maintains hierarchies. Fifty naira for the man who helps you back out from a parking spot, two hundred naira for the police officer who stops you for no good reason in the dead of night, ten thousand for the clearing agent who helps bring your imported crate through customs. For each transaction, there is a suitable amount that helps things on their way." (10)

As the above observation, money in this culture is used as a social lubricant, which facilitates interactions and maintains hierarchies. From this, it makes sense that the narrator is embarrassed as he realizes that bribery and corruption have become a common thing in Nigeria as he explains: *"The systems that could lift the majority out of poverty are undercut at every turn. Precisely because everyone takes a shortcut, nothing works, and, for this reason, the only way to get anything done is to take another shortcut."* (6).

It goes without saying that corruption is a widespread issue and phenomenon and has become so ingrained in society that it is seen as something normal and accepted by everyone, from top officials to ordinary citizens. For Gbenga, *"there has been a great increase in public outcry against bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, the desire to get rich quick and other moral vices like sexual perversion, nudity and loss of family values in the country. Indeed, all these vices are the bane of our society"* (Gbenga, 2009, p. 4).

In Cole's fictional portrayal of the Nigerian populace, this has become part of life and shows that in terms of morality, his characters do not shy away from activities that could lead to negative consequences. The moral connection between the people and individuals in Nigeria has been weakened and given way to a cycle where offenders are isolated from society due to their moral decline. In *Every Day is for the Thief*, the novelist highlights the moral crisis that affects psychologically post-colonial Nigeria and laments the consequences moral decay bears on the people:

"The splashing liquid is lighter than water [...] it drips off him (eleven-year-old boy) [...] The whites of his eyes are as bright as lamps. The fire catches with a loud gust... The boy dances furiously but, hemmed down by the tire, quickly goes prone and still... In a few days it will be as though nothing happened." (38)

Filth is one of the fields in which morality is discussed in the novel. The characters in Cole's fictional world are depicted as social misfits or deviants as they act in their own ways. In depicting the characters in this fashion, the author wants his readers to understand that the moral authority in the fictional Nigeria has been diluted. This demonstrates the extent to which the grassroots have failed to stand firmly for cherished social values. The narrator says in the above quotation that the action of hooliganism can create negative and profound impacts on society as well as promote moral and societal decay. The humanitarian relationship which formerly connected people tightly no longer exists. This scene has captured the narrator's imagination and it indicates that the people of metropolitan Lagos have lost confidence in the law system of their country. When a thief is caught, people deal with him mercilessly. As an example, we can talk of the eleven-years-old-boy, a psychologically immature lad who is mercilessly and pitilessly tortured and burned down into ashes by angry and embittered Lagosians. This inhuman act, we are told: *"will be as though nothing happened"* (39) on the following day. The consequences of an action always intend to instill moral lessons and, for that matter, serve as a means of deterring, preventing something from happening though. The punishment which comes from bad deeds and actions is a sort of what I call *"resocialization"*. But as is

in the case of *Every Day is for the Thief*, the moral level of the masses is so weak that they undermine the consequences susceptible of happening to them. This is an omen that human relationships are not a priority of the day in this community. Normally, before justice is served in any society, there is no intention of the people who attempt to report the case to the police. They do justice. The grassroots are depicted as people who render justice by themselves and for themselves as they take the law into their own hands and subsequently handle the matter the way they want it to be: they lack confidence in the institution of police and justice.

Another catalyst of moral decadence the novelist depicts is religion. In any society, religion is a fundamental element in modeling people and making them morally sound. In fact, for peace to prevail in any society, that society should espouse moral principles and a certain moral foundation or conduct. This means that religious leaders have the moral responsibility to see to it that moral and ethical principles are respected. In *Every Day for the Thief*, the church itself is seen as corrupt as hell. For the novelist, religion is an institution which only instils fear and makes the impression that everybody is happy even when one is not. The narrator bashes and grapes this institution as it deviates from its initial service:

“Religion, corruption, happiness. Why, if so religious, so little concern for ethical life or human rights? Why, if so happy, such weariness and stifled suffering? The late Fela Kuti’s prophetic song “Shuffling and Shmiling” still speaks to the situation. This champion of the people was also the fiercest critic of the people. He spoke fearlessly to our absurdities. “Shuffling and Shmiling” was about how, in Nigeria, there is tremendous cultural pressure to claim that one is happy, even when one is not. Especially when one is not. Unhappy people, such as grieving mothers at a protest march, are swept aside. It is wrong to be unhappy.” (91).

This passage discusses how the emphasis on prayers has overshadowed the importance of morality in society. There is a lack of concern for ethical life and human rights in *Every Day is for the Thief*. This novel addresses this issue by highlighting the pressure on Christian Nigerians to always pretend to be happy. Unhappiness is often deemed unacceptable, as mirrored in the dismissal of grieving mothers at a protest.

Building an individual moral character in society is crucial for promoting honesty and addressing issues such as theft, corruption, and mismanagement. However, some religious leaders are depicted as people who lack the knowledge and ability to effectively transmit these values to the people. Instead of serving as role models for a cohesive society, religious institutions have, therefore, become barriers to progress. Many people are made to rely on prayers for solutions to their problems. In so doing, they neglect the importance of working hard to succeed. This mindset, as depicted throughout the novel, leads to blind faith and belief in miracles. This pushes worshippers not to take practical steps to address societal issues. The outcome of religious gullibility pushes Cole with an important subject matter. Cole, therefore argues for a shift towards rebuilding moral

values and promoting hard work rather than having a blind faith in prayers for problem-solving. Religion has become, in this context a barrier for many countries in terms of development. The beliefs of most religions often involve individuals putting their faith in the miracle provided by the supposed messengers of God. For some religious leaders, such as the ones depicted and their gullible followers, prayers are seen as the only solution to their problems. The idea that material possessions and peace can only be obtained through prayers is overemphasized. Prayers are seen as a sign of faith. In Cole's society, there is a widespread belief that prayers are enough to prevent disasters, and those who do not receive their miracle are blamed for lacking faith. As the narrator aptly puts it: "*This is the worldview in which prayer is a sufficient solution for plane crashes. Everyone expects a miracle, and those who do not receive theirs are blamed for having insufficient faith.*" (91). This mindset results in many individuals relying heavily on attending church services. Cole advocates for a change in mentality and focuses on the rebuilding process of their society through hard work.

In his research on societal moral decline, Santrock (2005) emphasized ethical behaviour and strong values as significant features of socialization. He argues that acting morally and upholding good values are crucial for the well-being of societies, individuals, and nations. He compares the situation prevalent in societies with sound moral values as opposed to moral decline. Santrock's studies indicate that individuals of all ages and backgrounds are confronted with a significant challenge as the development of moral maturity occurs within environments such as families and religious institutions.

As far as religion is concerned, teachings individuals are instructed on good morals to ensure they act appropriately. Responsibility and religion go hand in hand, as they both emphasize virtues and the importance of doing the right thing. However, in Cole's fictional world, various religious leaders have been influenced by wealth acquisition. The strong belief in supernatural beings has left citizens vulnerable to manipulation by these greedy and dishonest leaders. Today, the Church in Nigeria has turned into a business acumen. Therefore, new branches and ministries are popping up rapidly. In *Every Day is for the Thief*, some Christians are fixated on fear and wealth acquisition. The narrator bemoans: "*Church has become one of the biggest businesses in Nigeria, with branches and "ministries" springing up like mushrooms on every street and corner. These Christians are militant, preaching a potent combination of a fear of hellfire and a love of financial prosperity*" (91). This is how the church has become a thriving industry in Nigeria, with followers spreading a message that blends a fear of damnation with a desire for material wealth.

Karl Marx (1844) contends that religion serves as a form of solace for the oppressed to voice their suffering. He goes on to describe religion as a manifestation of true hardship and a form of protest against it, labeling it as the expression of the downtrodden and as the opium of the masses. In Cole's fictional Abuja, gaining wealth is linked to the church. Religion, particularly Christianity, in Nigeria is used to instill fear of hellfire and to force submission in the people so that they can give out financial assistance to aid the mission of the church. Religious leaders deliberately instill fear and intimidate people

psychologically in order to ensure the flourishing of their enterprise - the church, shrine and mosque. While religion promotes integrity, its objective is not solely centered on saving souls but also seeks to transform society through the church congregation.

In addition to the church, *Every Day is for the Thief* reveals that Islam does not promote human rights in that it prevents people from their liberty. Though one's liberty stops where the other begins, the official mosque in the compound is always filled with a continuous sound of crying. There is a "constant wailing emanating from the official mosque in the compound" (91), which disturbs the freedom of others. Those who are part of this religious sect consider the noise as something morally right. Nonetheless, in Cole's fictional world, it prevents others' liberty. The noise coming from the mosques is harmful to human health. The gradual multiplication of megaphones and the sounds coming from them in the morning, midday and evening is a nuisance to human liberty. Why wailing? Through this analysis, Cole's wants to tell the readership that when people are committed to worshipping God, or Allah, or shrine, it becomes their responsibility to remember the times of prayers because they chose to do so. For peace to prevail, megaphones should not be a means of remembering Muslims of the time of prayers. Worshipping of Allah is a devotion, and it is whether one is committed to it or not. One chooses to worship or chooses not to worship. For example, if everybody feels hungry or thirsty and thinks of food or water to nourish the body or quench one's thirst without having been told, it is also important to notice that, similarly to the body, the soul does not need any reminder from anybody else to nourish the soul with prayers.

The disconnection of fictitious Nigeria from its daily realities is common. Everything, even religion, which prior's aim was to instill morality and ethics in people, is in a moral crisis. Its leaders tell lies to talk sweet, and such a dishonest act which intends to gain a particular interest and distance individuals from normative requirements in a cohesive society.

Though Cole's Nigeria is considered the most religious country in the World and its people seem to be the happiest, this assertion is far from the truth because "*Nigeria is tied for third from the bottom out of the 159 countries surveyed in the corruption perceptions index*" (92). In fact, the Christian religion introduced in Africa has envisaged individualistic aim with false prophets who use intelligence to prophesize lies to people. Thus, Richardson argues that "*the Christian ethics propagated in Africa was strongly influenced by Western individualism, secularism and dualism*" (Richardson, 1996, p. 139). Religion has been used as a state instrument in perpetrating crimes. Teju Cole hybridizes his writings by intermingling sociopolitical and religious matters altogether to show the true face of society today. In fact, in contemporary postcolonial countries, there is a blurred line between politics and religion, development goals and methods, the leader and the government, the leader's political party and the government, and the leader's personal finances and the national treasury. It can be said that nearly all aspects of postcolonial Africa are a mix of different influences. Teju Cole uses religion, - Christianity as a serious business acumen. Many characters in the novel are depicted as people who want to become rich at all costs through religion. Thus, pastors, and powerful religious

leaders manage to show that people's psychological needs can be fully fulfilled by prayers, not hard work. In his own words Issifou states:

"In postcolonial countries, politics and religion, means and ends of development, the ruler and the state, the ruler's political party and the state, the ruler's bank account and the national treasury are indistinguishable. It might not be exaggerated to claim that almost everything in postcolonial Africa is hybrid. Postcolonial Africans are the sites of hybridity par excellence because their encounter with colonialism exposed them to hybrid cultures, hybrid economies, hybrid societies, and hybrid milieu." (Issifou, 2012, p. 19).

Teju Cole sees religion as a failure in rendering social services. Thus, religious leaders such as pastors use religion as a tool in keeping people in bondage and chain them through the preaching of fear of hell and hellfire. They become flamboyantly rich on the backs of the attendants, the people who are taught to be submissive, forgive those who offend them, reconcile with them, keep on praying for their offenders, and keep on paying dues for their salvation. The narrator tells us how these leaders are and appear in public. In an instance, he says that:

"Pastor Olakunle is attired in a silk suit. His shoes are of fine Italian leather, his accent is American, as a befits a prosperous man ... and he "owns several Mercedes-Benz cars. It is not clear if he is living as victoriously as Pastor Michael, who, as is well known, owns both a Rolls-Royce and a Lear Jet, ..." (32).

This horrendous atrocity committed against the masses is what I call 'financial terrorism' or 'commercialization of religion'. Pastor Michel preaches virtues but practices vices at the same time. The indoctrination of the people through the preaching of fear of hellfire, a means of psychological indoctrination and torture, is a strategy put in place by religious merchants to carry their followers along, colonize and maintain them to ironically give out everything to God. This means that religion, as depicted by Teju Cole is a hypocritical institution. Though religion is to be the basis of moral fiber, in Cole's fictional Nigeria, it serves as an enterprise to collect or make wealth. In every society where the moral fiber is well built, and people are not disrupted from human-centered values, *"religion is a potent factor for peace and it should be practiced to let the nation grow, overcome differences and survive."* (Ilega, 2001, p. 11). Therefore, it can be argued that the fictional Nigerian society has disrupted the moral values in all spheres. In this case, it is of high importance to resocialize people to regain their senses in order to establish a moral fiber that is susceptible to preventing moral decadence in Nigeria.

3. Resocialization: The Quest for Moral Restoration

The restoration of societies is tantamount to reflection on the way of socializing children at an early age to develop moral values. It entails resocializing adults into ethical values

to curb vices. In fact, socialization is a process in which individuals acquire certain values, attitudes, and behaviors of the society they live in. This has been stressed by Anthony Giddens who thinks that: “*Socialisation [...] process which transforms a quite helpless human infant into a self-aware, knowledgeable person who is skilled in the ways of their society’s culture*” (2014, p. 263-64). To a greater extent, it involves learning and implementing acceptable values from the community and can be categorized into different types such as pre-primary socialization, primary and secondary socialization, anticipatory socialization (see Merton, 1957), re-socialization (Ferguson, 2002; Kennedy et al., 1973), and adult socialization (Mortimer and Simmons, 1978). Socialization has three phases namely primary socialization (infancy to childhood), secondary socialization (childhood to adulthood) and adult socialization and resocialization (adulthood).

Frønes defines primary socialization as “*the internalization of the fundamental culture and ideas of a society. Thus, socialization shapes the norms, values and beliefs of the child at a time when it has little understanding of the world and its different phenomena, and the basic socialisation agent moulding the child is the family*” (Frønes, 2016, p. 13). The primary socialization occurs during infancy, when infants learn and integrate language and behaviors directly from their parents. Here, the infants see, observe and imitate. Just from an early age, they start to learn by imitating little-by-little, habit, behavior from their parents within the family space. The family plays a significant role in shaping the infants’ understanding of the world and instilling cultural norms and beliefs. It teaches direct or indirect language, and basic behavior patterns to infants so that they can have a little understanding of the world while progressively heading towards childhood. This stage is extremely important in setting or modeling the infants in the right or wrong direction depending on the way the socialization shapes them.

When a child is born, it does not have the choice of who gives birth to it. So, there is a process for a few moments where culture, tradition, geographical location, social norms, education, clan, biology, parents, friends, its environment, in a world influence the information that it takes upon. These elements define the gateway of information for the child. Giddens espouses this argument when he points out: “*Socialisation refers to the process which transforms a quite helpless human infant into a self-aware, knowledgeable person who is skilled in the ways of their society’s culture*” (2014, p. 263-264). At this level, society does not consider the infant as a responsible human being in that, it cannot exercise any personal judgement about its life. However, through socialization, it gradually becomes self-aware in the way society wants it to be because it observes, imitates, and implements things it comes across. Though it is shaped by society to be dutiful and submissive, such values do not confine it as responsible until it is grown up and becomes fully aware of what society has taught it. So, when an infant does something wrong, its parents assume the consequences until it becomes fully grown up and autonomous enough to assume liable for its actions or inactions. This suggests that at a certain age in time, the child passes from the stage of childhood to youngness. Here, the young boy or girl starts to act independently and consciously and exercise his or her own personal judgement, and at this very moment, the socialization exceeds the family sphere. This is the stage of

secondary socialization where the focus is mainly on the “*acquisition of knowledge and conscious learning, and thus opens for critical reflection*” (Frønes, 2016, p. 14). The young boy or girl acquires knowledge and social values from different stakeholders. These social values/roles are then prescribed by culture to individuals and allow them to be aware of themselves, and acquire knowledge about the existing culture of their society. In this case, the cultural environment influences people's lives and establishes societal norms and expectations that individuals must adhere to in order to fit into their community.

Arguably, at this stage, where the process of socialization is oriented towards the youth, they get exposed to a certain number of realistic and false values. Thus, society conditions them from an early age and shapes them in a given order. For this reason, they develop responsible or irresponsible attitudes and comportments depending on the environmental influences. Depending on the context, when the youth are exposed to false values or irresponsible people, they are more likely to adopt negative attributes and become a burden to society. On the contrary, when they get into contact with realistic values or responsible people, they are more likely to become responsible and positive agents for society.

External forces play a cardinal role in determining what kind of person society wants children to become based on the environmental influences they experience. In case they are exposed to both types of values, they may act out both good and bad behaviors depending on their education or moral maturity. However, there are in every society established laws and norms that restrict negative actions and enforce a certain standard of behavior such as theft. For example, the stolen of the baby by “*the eleven-year-old boy has cost him death*” (91). This could have been avoided if his parents had taken their responsibility properly. In this sense, responsibility is the result of the personal integration of attitudes, emotions, perceptions, and interactions with others. Flangan and Gallay as quoted by Kinena argue that: “*The responsibility is personal psychic functions integration result composed attitude towards obligations, emotions, subjective perception, personal interaction expression interaction, cooperation shapes and values.*” (Kinena, 2013: 4376). As children grow into adults, they continue to learn from various sources such working places, home, and from other people with whom they chat, work, worship or play.

The necessity to rethink the socialization process in the modern world and focus on re-socialization to correct wrong behaviors and adapt to new circumstances or to start a new life devoid of the wrong habits or behaviors is pivotal. According to Fein, resocialization implies the pre-existence of some social roles which must be superseded or changed. (Fein, 1988, p. 91). Though in *Every Day is for the Thief*, there is the issue of “*eye for eye*” and “*teeth for teeth*”, in every society, this issue should be superseded, that is, granting a second chance for all individuals. As a matter of fact, all the characters involved in the killing of the eleven-year-old child have the responsibility to face the law for resocialization. Though he has committed a crime just as those who have killed him. Cole suggests that when socialization fails to positively operate at home or elsewhere, resocialization is the better alternative to bring back moral values. Re-socialization is the

process of giving up old behaviors and adopting new ones, as well as adapting to new values or norms. Because of the dynamism of society, circumstances may undergo drastic or dramatic changes. Thus, re-socialization intervenes when an individual recognizes their failures and seeks to correct them.

4. Conclusion

This paper has shown that moral decadence stems from the failure of the socialization process which is due to mentality. The focus was put on the widespread issue of moral decadence in Nigeria, in general, and Lagos in particular. Despite the increase in security officers, churches, and institutions which were believed to promote moral values, they have become deviated due to some reasons- wealth acquisition which gives rise to criminal activities such as cybercrime and kidnapping, corruption, and theft. In this study, corruption seems to be part of society, with some members of the government believed to be complicit directly or indirectly, making it difficult to combat offenders. The analysis has it that the shortcomings of society have their roots in the lack of proper socialization at an earlier age. This has bred dissenters and deviants. The findings show that moral decadence has become a social ailment and it is shown through the characters that undermine societal morals. Thus, only a positive mindset and re-education can combat moral decay, restore ethical values, and pave the way for the advancement of modern African societies.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

As a passionate English and African Literatures PhD candidate, Laboratory of Languages, Literatures and Development (LaLD) at the Université de Kara, Boussangue Kokou has more than five years of experience in Academia and has obtained a degree in psychopedagogy at the Institute of Science, Pedagogy and University Administration at the same University. He is currently teaching English and French at Marie Romano Senior High School, Niamtougou, Togo. He has participated in a number of academic colloquium conferences and symposiums. His recent piece of scholarship is *Moral Decadence as Social Cancer: Resocialization as Aesthetics of Necessity in Every Day is for the Thief* where he spells out the reasons behind his infatuation with literary criticism.

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