

## POLITICAL TRAUMA IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF WALE OKEDIRAN'S *TENANTS OF THE HOUSE*

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### Abstract

As far as the human society is concerned, humans, from time immemorial aspire to be engaged in activities that warrant his political occupation of offices that gives him the right to lead other fellow humans. This behaviour of man, makes him to be known and regarded as a political animal in all human societies. Bet this as it may, man is totally involved in all the actions or inactions that constitute the making of a government and its attendant positive or negative effects. In the light of this, therefore, this study examines Wale Okediran's *Tenants of the House* in line with the obnoxious and obscure activities that characterise politics and political drama in Nigeria. The paper does this through the lens of trauma theory. The paper uses qualitative research methodology. The findings of the study show that Okediran through fiction, depicts the true nature of Nigerian politics on the one hand, and on the other hand, the corruptible tendencies, practices and calculations that are inherent in it. The paper concludes therefore that, Nigeria cannot and will not experience any atmosphere of peace and tranquillity unless the powers that be, learn to play politics in a manner that will benefit and take care of the needs of the generality of the people. By the time this happens, politics will become a game played by the people, for the people and for the betterment of all, irrespective of religion, region and tribe.

**Keywords:** Peace, Politics, Tranquillity, Trauma, and Vision

### Introduction

There is no gain saying that politics in Nigeria is not without pains, as the aftermath of political manipulations and operations leave more sorrow, frustration and despondence than satisfaction and self-actualisation to most political players. It is common knowledge that most people who go into politics with a true intent of having a turning point do not usually have the opportunity to do so. This is so because Nigerian politics does not give room for true and honest people to be part and parcel of the decision-making process of the Nigerian political space.

Being that Nigerian political water is filled with people who go into politics, due largely to the fact that, they want to enrich themselves rather than the concern for the masses, anyone who does not navigate along this direction, is on their own. With this sort of consciousness, politicians have made sure that politics and its practice, should actually be enshrined in a kind of occultism world, where every prospective member must necessarily be a part of it. In the absence of this, a prospective member is viewed by the political gladiators who have spent years in the business of politics, as not being serious.

The scenario above, shows clearly that politics is not meant for the Godly-hearted, but for those whose hearts are made in such a way that even if it means passing through fire, so as to have the opportunity of dining with the devil, they will stop at nothing to achieve it. If those who are novices in this game of politics, must occupy political positions and space, they must willy-nilly dance to the tune of the political gladiators who see themselves as god-fathers, without whose permission and approval, nothing can take place.

It then follows that politics of rancour in Nigeria has become the order of the day, hence, the popular saying in politics that "there is no permanent enemy in politics, but permanent interest". The Nigerian political class is more concerned about how much money it can syphon and stash in foreign banks accounts than the corporate existence of the Nigerian polity and its citizenry. Hence, the Nigerian political space is nothing but a sorrowful and sorry state, as most people who have had the intention of being the Moses of our time, lack the strength and wherewithal to change the narrative in a way that will better the lives of the vast majority of the people of Nigeria. Thus, the future of Nigerian

politics still remains bleak. But of course, Nigeria is the only country that we have. We will not run away. For there will surely be room for the younger generation someday, for them to strive until they see light at the end of the tunnel.

**The Vision with which Wale Okediran Writes**  
Looking at Wale Okediran (2009)'s *Tenants of the House*, there is no doubt that he knowingly conceives of this literary piece through the lens of the sort of trauma that is visited upon the Nigerian political space and politics, hence, the use of trauma theory. In a discourse that dwells on trauma theory, MNL Azmi (2018:58) opines that:

The evolution of trauma theory in literary criticism might best be understood in terms of the changing psychological definitions of trauma as well as the semiotic, rhetorical, and social concerns that are part of the study of trauma in literature and society. Trauma theory denotes a vibrant, interdisciplinary area of western scholarship developed since the 1980s through cross-fertilisation between psychology and the humanities.

Looking at the above excerpt, it then follows that the assumed inherent neurobiological features of trauma that refuse representation and cause dissociation were significant to arguments that sought to emphasise the extent of profound suffering from an external source whether that source is an individual perpetrator or collective social practice. Understanding trauma, for example, by situating it within a larger conceptual framework of social psychology theories in addition to neurobiological theories will produce a particular psychologically informed concept of trauma that acknowledges the range of contextual factors that specify the value of the experience. This stance might therefore consider dubious the assertion of trauma's intrinsic dissociation.

Nigeria as one of the countries in Africa, undergoes very serious traumatic experiences, especially as Africa too, undergoes same. In the bid to extricate the pitfalls that are associated with governments in African continent, Solofu Randrianja (1996:41) writes that:

The problem facing Africa is not so

much having to choose between a collective conception of democracy and a representative conception based on individual choice, but rather, how to harness democracy to economic development. In any event, one of the functions of democracy is to install a framework which sociability may be negotiated without recourse to violence.

Again, Nigerians have been traumatised and are still being traumatised due largely to what Kole Omotoso (2013:70) presents in the following lines:

Most governments had been unstable owing to ethnic competitions for political power and economic advantages. Laws had been outlawed because of corruption and there was no learning to be held in the educational institutions whose infrastructure had decayed. The failure of the nation-state to be responsible for all its citizens led individuals to seek protection under the still surviving ethnic structures of the particular nationalities.

In consideration of the above therefore, it is important to note that African writers of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have in their literary prowess, written in a way that their literary productions have taken cognisance of the peculiar nature of the African continent. In this light, they have had the herculean task of bringing to the fore, the traumatised events that have debased the mass of the African people, especially the downtrodden of the society on the one hand, the crass corrupt nature of leadership and government owned institutions in Nigeria, that have to a greater extent registered disillusionment on the psyche of majority of the Nigerian people on the other hand. It is this sort of scenario in most Nigerian literary works in particular and Africa in general that informs L.O. Bamidele's (2000:89) reasoning that:

Because alienation is central to the theme and form of the novel and drama in the twentieth century, one finds that

both psychologists and sociologists discuss it as an extraordinary variety of psycho-social orders that include loss of self, anxiety state, anomic, despair, depression, depersonalisation, rootlessness, isolation, pessimism, loss of faith, belief and value.

### **Textual Analysis**

In reading Wale Okediran (2009)'s *Tenants of the House*, the very first thing that arrests the reader's sub-conscious mind, is the brand of politics typical of Nigerian political dynamism which of course, is not totally exclusive to Nigeria, but somewhat a general practice obtainable in Africa.

As events in the novel unfold, the reader is being faced with the crass non-challant attitude that is mostly linked to politics and politicians. Here, Elizabeth Bello, who is fondly referred to as Lizzy, a member of the Federal House of Representatives, representing one of the constituencies in Kaduna State, jolts her counterpart, Samuel Bakura, to utter bewilderment when the latter discovers a gun in the former's handbag. Curiously, he tries to quell his obvious uneasiness elicited by the strange discovery as he responds with an avalanche of questions to which Lizzy's response is, "...what kind of questions is that? Am I a bumbling starter? You think I am a newcomer to politics like you ... Hear this, and hear it well. To kill is a crime: to kill at the right time is politics" (Okediran 2009: 3). Due to the shock of this experience, Samuel Bakura could not have a sound sleep as "that night I tossed and turned in bed recollecting the episode of the gun. "To kill is a crime, to kill at the right time is politics... what did guns have to do in serving one's country?" (Okediran 2009:3).

The gun that Honourable Bakura discovers symbolises politics of terror that is often characterised by all kinds of pandemonium, ranging from the exchange of fisticuff and verbal assault, to gun battle that usually leave scores of deaths and others maimed.

Again, the novel x-rays what can be termed politics of money in a grand manner. To this, the reader has the opportunity to see where Lizzy strives to indoctrinate Sam, by informing him that, in the parliament, money is nicknamed

"fertilizer". And as such, one needs so much of it to blossom in the game of politics. Consciously or unconsciously, there is usually a nexus between politics and money, which gives rise to the sort of violence being witnessed during electioneering campaigns in Nigerian politics. All through the text, money politics is obviously responsible for many of the tensions, traumas and crises that have given Nigeria her national identity better than the one given by even the Nigerian flag.

The sort of things that happen behind the screen as far as money politics and other associated accompaniments are concerned, make Samuel Bakura to be mesmerised and traumatised to the extent that he cannot help but express his surprise in the following words:

I had coughed up half of my annual income for the nomination but it was not enough. "Double the money!" A particularly truculent party chieftain exclaimed. "We know how much you make from your law practice". I doubled the money but I drew the line at the next outrageous request. "Meet us at midnight tonight with a newly-made earthen-ware pot, ten fresh eggs and the drained-out blood of a freshly-killed fowl". "God forbid!" I screamed. "Give me my money back!" They turned gentle. "Take it easy, Sam. We will use part of the money for the necessary rituals. No cult for you now but you will see the need in future..."

( Okediran 2009:4-5)

Again, due to the disillusion and anger, Okediran depicts through Sam, the fresh and young entrant to the murky waters of Nigerian political intrigues, that, there exists in reality, some clandestine associations that one has to belong if he hopes to be fully accepted as a member of the inner caucus among the power brokers without whose influence, nothing really can be done. One of such associations is known as a secret cult. It is shocking to hear members of the party boldly admit to Sam that he will see the need to belong, to which he spontaneously fired back, "I will never see the need. Never bring up the idea again" (Okediran 2009:4). On the issue of cultism,

Damian Anyam (2012:293) posits that:

Cultism is a serious problem in Nigerian society today. The proliferation of several fraternities and massive initiation of members have pervaded all strata of the society. On a daily basis, cult groups make conscious efforts to find new members and spread their circle of influence. It is now very common to find cultists at work place, in schools and at the places where we gather to play or pray.

Apart from gun and money already identified in politicians' armoury, there is also the one of prostitution scandal that takes place among politicians within the political space. This is indeed, a demystifying one. Sam, even in his dream, has an encounter with Lizzy. The following lines corroborates this fact:

I fell asleep and had a dream in which Lizzy said, "I will spend three nights with you at the Nikon Noga hotel but you must read this". She then handed me a note, smiling bewitchingly all the time. The note said, "three cosy nights, Barrister Sam, but you must buy me a gun!" I woke up, screaming, "No!". (Okediran 2009:5)

Prostitution and sexually related scandals among political office holders do exist, as this has been well reported by the media. This could be the reason why some have as a matter of fact, not been able to keep their marriages floating. Both Lizzy and Sam are divorcees with each of them having some endless tale of sexual escapades. Of the two, Lizzy's case of sexual escapades is more pronounced as her name rings bell in the newspaper:

Rumours swirled around Lizzy's name. The soft-sell magazines wrote of her romantic linkages with one minister and two senators... as I enter the sitting room, a tastefully furnished place, the aroma of a recent smoked cigarette hit my nose. The smoker had to be the man sprawled on the settee. He looked familiar and I now searched my mind for his name

without success then I saw her and my spirit fell (Okediran 2009: 9-10).

According to Steve Bode Ekundayo (2013:9), "...the use of human sexuality for socio-economic and political purposes in human society and interaction as recreated in different syntagmas...", in the novel is an eye-opener revealing the decay ongoing under close doors in many quarters in the society, politics inclusive. Elizabeth Bello, practically and perfectly exemplifies this in her desperation to achieve her aim, not minding the unwholesomeness of the agenda, and at all cost, she wants it achieved. She therefore, throws caution to the winds when she says to Samuel:

Please, Samuel, I am ready to co-operate with you ... "co-operate with me over what?" "Over your former request", she said as she approached me again. Giggling, she unbuttoned the top of her nightgown to reveal two perfectly formed breasts. Smiling wickedly, she lifted her left breast towards me. "Come, Samuel, you have always wanted this". I was still staring at the dark rigid nipple when the doorbell rang (Okediran 2009:66).

It has therefore become a common trend that people lure other people into sexual deeds for a particular purpose or end. Again, the novel reveals a phenomenon that may be surprising to many readers of it. This has to do with a term that is categorically being referred to as gigolos, used to describe male prostitution, whose sole aim is to offer 'professional services to women of substance in the nation's capital. The text shows that these are types of women who are said to be lonely and often times, deprived of sexual satisfaction due largely to their busy schedules or aged partners who practically cannot perform much compared to what a young man can do. Some, are women who have never been married in their life time before, thereby, having such young men who are fondly being called gigolos to have sex with them, and in return, they are handsomely rewarded financially and otherwise.

One gets traumatised as the novel gives a revelation that the game of corruption is one that cuts across the various strata of the society,

especially the Nigerian society as this is a conspiracy between the media and the government meant to subvert the developmental strides of the nation. This is made crystal-clear when Senator Smollet divulges or rather, hints at a salient truth that cannot be swept under the carpet as he says, “without a complaint media, the project may fail” (Okediran 2009:29). In his meetings with the president at the presidential villa to arrange for money with which they intend to bribe the members of the House of Representatives, into silence in order that an impeachment might sail through, and to turn the eyes of the media the other way, he adds, “Make it twenty-percent your Excellency. The media boys must have their own envelopes” (Okediran 2009:29).

It is this sort of unholy attitude of government and the Nigerian society generally, that Joseph Omotayo (2013:1) submits that the book “...struggles to narrate the country’s political corruption and schemes, much of which still put the nation in a constant ruin”. With the above submission, it then follows that Omotayo’s view shows without mincing words, impasses that are not new; neither are they done under cover, rather, they have become entrenched in the nation’s psyche of the mainstream politics, which breeds abundantly and hopelessly, without any serious measures to check the abysmal doom, hence, putting the citizenry in perpetual traumatic situation.

Juliet Ekpang (2014:246) corroborates the sort of traumatic depiction in Okediran’s *Tenants of the House* as she says that “...patriotism is alien to the Nigerian soil...All people want is money to eat and that no man will stand up to oppose what is wrong except such a person is financially motivated”.

Wale Okediran (Okediran 2009) hammers on the rotten state of the Nigerian government and society just the same way that Wole Soyinka does in his *Season of Anomy*. This is brought to limelight through the words of L.O. Bamidele as he avers of *Season of Anomy* thus: “In the complicated narrative structure of *Season of Anomy* for instance, there is a revealed flux of emotions of anger, love, hatred and violence in a society that is bedecked with corruption, torture, menace of thievery and daylight massacre”

(Okediran 2009 : 91).

In addition to the above excerpt, Bamidele again shows that Okediran succeeds doing in his literary work what other literary productions have been able to achieve. To this, he opines:

Literary creativity in the novel has picked up the question of integrity/disintegration of the social order more than sociology has done and that is why titles of some African novels such as *No Longer at Ease*, *Things Fall Apart*, from their yeatsian usage could be seen as part of cultural criticism within a broad sociological spectrum defining the consequences of cultural anarchy on ‘mass man’ and the living nightmare of anomie and alienation faced by contemporary man (Okediran 2009:92).

Going by the excerpt above, Samuel Bakura to his chagrin, discovers that bribery and corruption have eaten deep into the fabric of the society. This discovery is made clearer due to his meeting with Linus Wenike and Lizzy, in Lizzy’s house, which gives him the opportunity that indeed money as a ‘fertilizer’ comes as a bride in politics: ‘where is the fertilizer?’ Lizzy demanded from Linus. The man “... fished out an envelope from somewhere. With his crooked smile, he passed to me an immaculate white envelope, whispering, “the first of three instalments”. In the envelope, Sam is stupefied when he sees its content: “many freshly-minted American dollars” (Okediran 2009:11).

Samuel Bakura again, feels traumatised by this bribe especially as he is given this money to make him support the impeachment process that is meant to unseat the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Honourable Yaya, who is from Kaduna State. The Speaker’s offence is nothing more than his being against the president’s tenure elongation agendum. Even though Samuel Bakura collects the money, and reluctantly accepts to take part in the deal, the entire idea remains a daze to him, hence, his continuous traumatised state.

Of course, this informs the sort of questions he directs to Lizzy: “Lizzy, ah, ah! Why? The speaker is your friend. Why then do you want him out? I don’t get it” (Okediran 2009:10).

In her response, Lizzy replies, “Yes, Speaker Yaya is my friend. But in this matter, he is not... there are no permanent friends in politics, only permanent interest” (Okediran 2009:10). This whole response from Lizzy shows that as far as politics is concerned, what matters to those who practice it, is their interest and nothing more. Thus, their over bloated appetite and bottomless pockets may never have swallowed enough to think of the people of this country, who do not belong to the same cult with them.

Again, this singular factor shows that the tension that always grips the nation, especially when elections are at the corner, is not about developing the country as they, the politicians claim, but about gimmicks deliberately employed to make it look as if a revolution is about to take place in the political life of the nation. Whereas, in all honesty, it is a charade staged by shady political businessmen and women who are bent on rocking the boat of the Nigerian collective destiny, if their selfish interests are not met.

In a democratic setting the world over, impeachment is a measure meant to keep political office holders in check. However, in Nigeria, it is deployed to serve as kinds of diversionary purposes for the ruling class and the powers that be. If indeed, the speaker commits an offence that warrants his being impeached, the House members know exactly what to do and how to go about it. In fact, Honourable Bakura, one of the arrow heads behind the impeachment move at a point informs the member of the House, after being visited by a strong feeling that the speaker is innocent of whatever allegations, and being highly traumatised by the action of fellow legislators, states that, “I reminded the meeting that we had no concrete evidence against the Speaker to warrant his impeachment. Don’t forget that Section 5 subsection (i) and (ii) of the constitution is very clear on the conditions that must be met before a Speaker can be impeached” (Okediran 2009:40).

It is therefore, a point of great trauma as one notices a scenario of this sort. Lawmakers have turned lawbreakers as all they are concerned about and delighted in, is to enrich themselves at whatever cost, as this whole drama of impeachment boils down to the popular saying that the end justifies the means. The end here, is not

about providing dependable and profitable legislation and leadership to the people, but about self-aggrandisement. Wenike, in response to Bakura’s statements sarcastically says to him, “You are the lawyer. Tell us exactly what the constitution says” (Okediran 2009:41). With this kind of response and like a stream of consciousness, Samuel’s original intention of studying law in his life is triggered afresh. He thinks of law being the only means with which he can use to fight the notorious group that commonly refer to itself as “Fulani Herdsmen”. He again, recounts an action that has been carried out by this group against his family in the following submission:

We were all looking forward to the bumper harvest with the hope of making up for the loss of previous years. Then, the Fulani herdsmen and their cattle came in one full swoop; the cattle devoured all the millet stacked ready for the market. The crops on the farm were also not spared as the animals uprooted and chewed the green plants. My father, weak and weary from tilling the land in difficult times, tried to fight back together with my other brothers and me, but the Fulanis were too powerful for us. They beat us with their sondas and wounded my brother, almost severing his left ear lobe with their sharp daggers (Okediran 2009:58).

With the above, and going by all the happenings around Samuel Bakura, the author portrays him and many more others like him as that foolish proverbial house owner, who abandons his house to be consumed by fire to pursue rats. Way back in the village, he informs his father of his intention to become a lawyer in order to always fight for his family and the society at large. When he tells his father of this, his father “fixed his greyish-brown eyes on me and asked, you said you want to be a lawyer, why?” and he responds, “because, I want to deal with those Fulanis, who are always destroying our crops” (Okediran 2009:60). His long-time dream, therefore, is to make it to the parliament and sponsor bills that would throw the

Fulanis out of their farmlands. With this thought fresh again on his mind, he refuses to be part of the impeachment process, as he views this to be an act of injustice. Despite his refusal, the impeachment plan rages on:

“We are grabbing the mace”, Wenike told Kasali [the retired thug turned parliamentarian from Oyo State]. “I will throw it to you. Catch it and make a dash for the door...” “which door, the main door?” Kasali asked squinting with alcohol-soaked eyes in the direction of the mace where it lay on its table directly in front of the Speaker’s Seat. “No, Kasali, not the main door, the door behind the speaker. A member of the chamber has opened it, just for us. Dash out of that door. Outside, my PA and driver will receive the mace and run with it (Okediran 2009:21)

### Conclusion

From the discourse in this work, it will not be out of place to submit that Okediran’s true intent of writing this novel, is that of a depiction of the sort of decay that has been visited upon the body politics of the Nigerian state and its attendant

traumatic outcome on the psyche of the Nigerian masses. Through the episodes in the text, the reader has come to terms with the fact that politics is a game that is meant and played to enrich a few people in the society, especially the Nigerian society. Then, it is therefore, not a game meant and played for the common good of the generality of the masses.

Those who choose to be in this game therefore, have decided to throw caution, morals and decorum to the winds. And in place of all these, they have embraced injustice, wickedness, crass ineptitude and incongruous disposition to life. The decay in the Nigerian socio-economic and political terrain therefore, makes many more Nigerians to undergo more disheartening traumas, just the way Julius Lester writes of the American society, especially as it concerns black/white relationship, that is, the ordinary Nigerians, the middle class and the downtrodden of the society on the one hand, the successive governments of Nigeria on the other hand. To this, Lester (1969:41) opines “...we are killed, injured, maimed, or brutalised every day. We recognise that we do not deserve it. Yet, it is done to us”.

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