

## **Nation and Narration in Wale Okediran's "The Boys at the Boarder"**

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**Abstract:** The country has been turned into a scavaging field where each one tried to out-do the other in the race of corruption. The fallout of corruption was that people are disenchanted with the happenings in the country's terrain, quite agreeably, writers usually rise to the occasion using the medium of art to express the people's mind. It is common knowledge that the problems of democratization in Nigeria have left a profound mark in literary circle as there has been a gradual shift from military misrule to that of political and social diagnosis. This includes a satirical portrayal of the Nigerian political class, the meddlesomeness of the working class and the all pervading cynicism in the polity. Wale Okediran Social engagements are noticeable in his treatment of these burning issues. This work takes a look at how Wale Okediran has been able to narrate one of the plagues killing our nation using a branch in one of our numerous institutions in his book "The boys at the boarder".

**Keywords:** corruption, Wale Okediran, Nigerian political.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Socio-political development in the country has always provided artists with enough materials to engage in disputations on how the society is run or governed. Before the Independence in 1960, writers were already pointing to the faulty foundations on which the new nation state was being built. Writers have always made use of literature to champion the cause of the society. Rather, as an Obligation, artists use their different literacy forms to interpret social actions for the purpose of realising a more conducive society in terms of human relations [3]. The writers have consistently struggled to use their works as veritable tools for the systematic and orderly transformation of the society. In Africa, for instance, arts for the sake of it, has never found a place or even been considered as being realistic. Even when a writer denies any purpose for his work, such work usually shows an aspect of his experiences or of the society's beauty or ugliness. As Achebe reveals in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, "all literature must seek the things that belong to its peace, must in other words, speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current, and the aspirations and destiny of its people".

African oral literature, for instance, plays an incontrovertible roles in the transmission of culture and knowledge in inculcating the right type of values into the members of the society. Beside aesthetics, value and their didactic functions, oral performances were and are still, used to instil in the subjects the moral values of the

society. The dances, drumming, chants and storytelling land recitation are, and have been, part of the primal vision and social life of the African people. Some of these performances express existentialist truths about life as well as dramatise social vices in society, with the ultimate aim of eliminating such evils from society. Akporbaro [1] contends that;

*In addition to the general moral-aesthetics Functions or oral forms the folktales in Isoko provides the form in which the dark and sinister realities of life are portrayed through the modes of narrative plots fantasy and characters.*

The writer is therefore, not contented with writing about social issues alone, but he is also interested or concerned with identifying these social issues, exposing them to the players with the intention of ridding them off these follies. Ngugi Wa Thiongo [5]states: 'The writer cannot be exempted from the task of exposing the distorted healthy human relationships' This paper examines a Nation in Narration using Wale Okediran's *The boys at the Boarder*. The paper traces the social evils amongst the Nigerian Custom services as a branch of Nigerian working institutions [2].

### **NATION AND NARRATION IN WALE OKEDIRAN'S "THE BOYS AT THE BOARDER".**

'The boys at the Boarder' exposes the nefarious activities of man in the society which distorts the effective or smooth running of the government.

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Wale Okediran showcases the activities of the custom official as they associate with smugglers. There is disillusionment in the heart of men who are supposed to protect the interest of the citizens and country but they joined hands with the smugglers in smuggling goods in and out of the country. Lati Baba is a notorious smuggler and the chairman of associations of smugglers under the guise of progressive traders association (PTA). From the text, it is noticed that the custom officers are in strong co-operation with the smugglers in neglect of their civil duty to fight against them because they have been bribed by the smugglers.

The novel starts with the writer using an incident where a custom officer is shot dead by the smugglers as a result of the disagreement over the amount to be paid before they are allowed to cross with their goods. This explains how bad our country has become. One is killed in his bid to extort money from another. These custom men involve themselves in bribery, they charge the smugglers and allow them to bring in their goods. Lati Baba opens this to us in his discussion with Peter Ikoku on the murder of one of the custom men.

*Sam, so it was sam who was killed? But why? None of my boys could have done it' We have no problems with you and we had already agreed on what to give you. I personally handed the money over to you last night...so (9)*

The extract above shows that these custom officers work hand in hand with the smugglers. These bad activities are not restricted to the custom officers at the borders their directors and bosses are all in full support of their illegal acts. Infact, they are the architects of the whole plague. In the character of Alhaji Jibo and controller Arebo, we can deduce these tendencies. The Boys at the Boarder is a strong political satire that stresses on the break down of law and order. Okediran presented man as a creature that is capable of reason but not in possession of it. Man is presented in a state of full degeneration. Alhaji Jibo and controller Arebo who were expected to be embodiment of good traits and maintaining law towards the development of the country are rather devoted tools for bribing corruption and all evils that go with it. When Lati Baba truck was seized by Peter Ikoku, Alhaji Jibo became interested in the case and advised Peter to hand over the case to him, After an argument to share 50-50 when the goods are sold, Alhaji Jibo decided to release the truck.

The writer satirizes the situation where highly placed government officials like Alhaji Jibo comptroller Arebo who are to guild and control the activities and

protect the interest of the citizens in Nigeria decided to reduce themselves and esteemed offices to a degrading state of aiding and abetting a notorious smuggler and his gang in their illegal activities. When the activity between the director of customs and Lati Baba was opened, detectives were brought in to investigate the matter and arrest the culprit. Controller Arebo sends out Adeli to inform Lati Baba to lie low for a while. A question is now been generated on when and how can Nigeria move forward for positive results when everybody including the lawmakers engage themselves in bribery and corruption. They make laws and yet are the violators of the laws they made. Laws in banning the possession of fake currencies by the citizens are made but rather the custom officers are in possession of the very fake currencies. Gladys demands that the sum of twenty thousand naira be given to her by Alhaji Jibo if he did not want her to publish her articles on his bribery transactions. Alhaji Jibo pay her but with fake currencies. Unfortunately for him, Gladys's published her articles. The writer is disturbed by such acts which are evident in government officials; even the chief of staff and these men are guilty of blackmail and corruptions. This can be deduce from the text through Emeka Emordi:

*I have reports from my intelligence unit that certain of the armed forces are colliding with the smugglers in their nefarious activities. We even have case of diplomatics, who use diplomatic bags to smuggle, not to talk of those army officers who use their person to guide trucks waded with contrabands goods into the country (2a)*

Instead of the President to discuss with Emeka Emordi on how to combat the situation he took offence which resulted in Emordi's dismissal from the civil service.

Apart from the irregularities of the custom officials, "The Boys at the Border" explore other vices which hinder the development of our country. Among these vices include dictatorship and autocracy. When the author presents the President, we find the inherent tendency of autocracy and dictatorship manifesting. He summons Emeka Emordi concerning incessant smuggling activities but gives him no chance to explain his views. But rather, he orders Emeka to arrest the situation without considering how possible it would be. According to the writer the President had no certificate probably he had gotten into the army through recruitment but because of power he weilds and that autocratic tendency in him. We see a degree holder in shivering before him as we see in Emeka.

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Marginalization and tribalism have always been the problem in Nigeria due to her multi-ethnicity. No ethnic region wants to see the development of the other. The President sacked Emeka Emordi because he is not from his ethnic region. He did not give him a chance to explain himself but sacked him. Alhaji Jibo who is from the same ethnic region with the president became the brain behind Emeka's predicament. He did this so as to occupy Emeka's seat. When Alhaji Jibo's involvement in bribery was discovered, the President gave him fourty eight hours to resign from office which gave room for him to collect all his entitlements. Just like Peter said, 'that is the problem with a country without a law; Nepotism becomes the order of the day.'

*...the only thing is that I was expecting outright dismissal... but... anyway, that's the problem with this country. A whole director of customs caught red handed collecting bribe? In other countries, he would have been charged to court. But what do we do? Give him all his entitlement and send him home. I won't be surprised if they give him another national assignment (93).*

The writer is not happy about this because it sets the nation backwards. A hardworking man sacked and his office given to a corrupt and lazy man just because the latter is from the same ethnic region with the head of state. To the writer, as long as the government of this country continues in this terrain, there can never be a good government in Nigeria. Nigeria can only survive when the political procedure can allow the more honest individuals and political experts who have authentic political ideology to come to power.

In an informed editorial in the "Nigerian Tribune" of Friday 3<sup>rd</sup>. April 2009 [3] , titled "Lawlessness of custom men" the following was said:

*"Willful murder and barricading of Nigeria Roads were until very recently, the Pleasure of arm robbers, men of the Nigerian police and reckless drivers.*

But the situation appears to have worsened with the blatant manner officials of the Nigerian customs service (NCS) have been killing people on the nation's roads. While the NCS, the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) and the Nigeria police are said to be competing for the top position as the most corrupt government establishments, the NCS is trying hard to catch up with the police in terms of brutality and murder of innocent Nigerians on the roads.

Within the last three months, no fewer than three Nigerians have been reported killed by trigger-

happy custom men. Among these reportedly killed in cold blood by the custom men was one Adeyemi Bayode, who was shot dead on Friday, January 16<sup>th</sup> at Ogene town on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway allegedly for refusing to "Co-operate" with one senior inspector Daniel Egeh. Mr Bayode was killed, his wife critically injured when the said inspector fired gunshots at the couple's car (13).

The editorial was not done yet: "Even if these allegations, as some custom chiefs held in the past, were mere illiterate guesses, the fact that custom men and other officers have continued to live in crude and boastful affluence over the years, readily fuels intelligent suspension. Therefore, the NCS needs more than ever, a total interval cleaning based on the genuine and honesty appraisal of its activities, especially since the return to democratic government in 1999. Among other recent questions the editorial has gone ahead to ask are:

*... Given the series core duties of collecting, exercising and importing duties, protecting the nation's borders against smugglers and assisting in implementing the government trade and fiscal policies, would the deployment of a considerable number of its men in the nation road not worsen the situation at the country's already porous borders?..."*

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this editorial is to a great extent a thorough expose on the central concern and relevance of the novel. "The Boys at the Border" is clearly pin-pointing the problems of the custom authority and its men in Nigeria, and strongly exposing the great threats such problem creates for the country. This editorial could be said to be almost a derivation from the themes of this novel of social contemporary criticism of this powerful organisation which has today been rubbished thwarted and purged of socio-political relevance.

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