

## SATIRE AS A LITERARY STRATEGY FOR SOCIETAL REFORMATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT A STUDY OF WALE OKEDIRAN'S STRANGE ENCOUNTER

**Dr. (Mrs.) Edokpayi, Justina Ngozi**  
Department of English  
Faculty of Arts, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma

### **Abstract**

Satire is a literary device in which the literary artists deploy the resources of language to expose and denounce the vices or crimes of a person, a group of people or institutions, which are inimical to the growth and development of the society. Satire is aimed at the correction of such vices for the reformation of the society and the promotion of sustainable development. Sustainable development is the development which meets the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. As a society, Nigeria is bedeviled by a lot of vices such as corruption, embezzlement of public funds, abuse of power, arm robbery, kidnapping, killings and so on. Corruption and other crimes in the different areas of human endeavours are the major causes of Nigeria's underdevelopment. Nigeria is regarded as the giant of Africa, yet there is an alarming rate of poverty, unemployment, hunger, corruption, terrorism and other vices that are inimical to national development. Wale Okediran's *Strange Encounter* is a Nigerian novel with the social problems of Nigeria as its major thematic preoccupation. Okediran exposes and denounces the societal ills and advances measures towards correcting them. The author also advocates positive changes for the reformation of the society, in order to promote sustainable development in all facets of life. This paper examines Okediran's deployment of satire as a literary strategy to convey his themes of societal reformation for sustainable development in *Strange Encounters*.

**Keywords:** *Satire, Literary, Resources, Institutions and Society*

### **Background to the Study**

Satire is a literary device in which the literary artists deploy the resources of language to expose and denounce the vices or crimes of a person, a group of people or institutions, which are inimical to the growth and development of the society. Satire is aimed at the correction of such vices for the reformation of the society and the promotion of sustainable development. Sustainable development is the development which meets the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. As a society, Nigeria is bedevilled by a lot of vices such as corruption, embezzlement of public funds, abuse of power, arm robbery, kidnapping, killings and so on.

Corruption and other crimes in the different areas of human endeavours are the major causes of Nigeria's underdevelopment. Nigeria is regarded as the giant of Africa, yet there is an alarming rate of poverty, unemployment, hunger, corruption, terrorism and other vices that are inimical to national development. There is, therefore, the need for every Nigerian to deploy every available avenue to war against corruption and all forms of crime with all seriousness. This is the only way to achieve sustainable development, and for Nigeria to qualify for her exalted position as the giant of Africa. Sustainable development comprises

healthy environment, economic development and social equality. As members of the Nigerian society, the literary artists employ various literary forms and means, especially satire in the war against societal ills for a better society and all round development of the people. This is what sustainable development is all about.

Wale Okediran's *Strange Encounter* is a Nigerian novel with the social problems of Nigeria as its major thematic preoccupation. Okediran exposes and denounces the societal ills and advances measures towards correcting them. The author also advocates positive changes for the reformation of the society, in order to promote sustainable development in all facets of life. This paper examines Okediran's deployment of satire as a literary strategy to convey his themes of societal reformation for sustainable development in *Strange Encounters*. "A satire has usually been justified by those who practice it as a corrective measure of human vice and folly" (Abrams, 1981:168). Abrams further explains that a satirist is a realist or a moralist who either because he cannot or does not wish to speak openly employs means "that allow him to utter the unspeakable with impunity" (168). Okediran x-rays the Nigerian society, exposes and denounces the alarming rate of corruption in the different fields of human endeavours employing the language of satire.

That cases of corrupt practices abound in every facet of life in the country, especially among our leaders is a common knowledge. The Nigerian Observer of Tuesday August, 20, 2013 reports in the article "Corruption: Nigeria in Global Perspective", that "It is an incontrovertible veracity that since the inception of the Nigeria's fourth republic, the nation has come under scrutiny over corruption. That every facet of life in Nigeria is being ravaged by corruption is no longer a subject of debate" (16). The report also discloses that Nigeria's performance is poor in the areas of equitable distribution of resources, acceptance of the rights of others and level of corruption (16). From all indications, corruption is the greatest problem of Nigeria, and also the major cause of underdevelopment. It is, therefore, a serious matter that demands serious and urgent attention the transformation and development of the nation, therefore, demand total eradication of corruption. The novel, *Strange Encounters* is an engaging and provocative statement about a people in urgent need of moral rejuvenation" (blurb). Okediran exposes various instances of moral decadence in the health sector, judiciary and police force, and the adverse effects of such corrupt practices on the growth and development of the nation. He also advances the measures to be adopted to curb the menace, in order to promote sustainable development

### **The Author and his Novel**

Okediran's major focus in the novel is on the Nigerian health sector. As a medical practitioner, the author has an in-depth knowledge of the Nigerian health sector and personal experiences of the day to day activities in a hospital. He x-rays, exposes and ridicules corruption and moral decadence among hospital workers as he experiences them from time to time. He points his searchlight on the dubious staff who engages in corrupt practices ranging from the sales of government hospital equipment and drugs, to the activities of quacks in the medical profession, who engage in illegal medical practices to the detriment of their patients.

The author also mirrors and exposes the alarming rate of corruption in the Nigerian Police Force and the judiciary, condemning the police officers, magistrates and judges, who aid and abate corrupt medical workers and armed robbers in their nefarious activities. In the attempt to contribute his quota to the war against corruption for societal reformation and sustainable development, Okediran deploys satire replete with harsh, abusive and violent linguistic markers, utilizing appropriate language registers peculiar to the various fields of the human endeavours addressed in the novel. Lamidi, (2000), defines language register as the use of certain vocabulary items that are peculiar to a certain fields (116).

Our emphasis in this paper is an examination of Okediran's special use of language to convey his messages, in his bid to achieve his aim in the text under study.

### **Textual Analysis**

We examine and explicate the author's utilization of some functional sentence types below in the following sections:

#### **Satire and the Nigerian Health Sector**

The health sector is a very vital to every society by virtue of the fact that it caters for the health needs of the people. Human needs are the needs, which sustainable development seeks to incorporate in the pursuit of economic and developmental objectives. As an important sector, the health sector ought to be given priority attention by the government and the general public. But reverse is the case in Nigeria due to the corruption in the society and negligence by the government. The budgetary allocation to the health sector is inadequate to meet the health needs of the people. The irony of it all is that the money that comes to the sector is embezzled by the dubious and corrupt government officials at the hem of affairs to the detriment of the citizens. Corrupt hospital staff who are morally bankrupt do not help matters. The nefarious activities of the corrupt hospital staff, their adverse effects on the very important health sector, and how to remedy the situation are the main concern of the author in *Strange Encounters*

Okediran exposes the activities of some hospital workers who pilfer hospital equipment and drugs. They convert such items to their personal uses in their private hospitals. There have been various reported cases of instances where some hospital staff is caught stealing medicines and equipment in government hospitals. This practice is an impediment to the achievement of the goal of the provision of adequate health care services for the citizens and, therefore, a major setback to the health sector. This is because the public for whom such drugs are meant are deprived of them. Some of such patient especially the very poor ones who cannot afford the drugs from the public pharmacies end up dying prematurely.

### **Textual Analysis**

In the novel under study, the author satirizes the dubious practices and ridicules the characters involved in them. For instance, Census, a theatre assistant in Faith Medical centre in Gom, and Alhaji Adamu who has only two years working experience as a theatre assistant at the mission hospital in Jos are the two major characters who specialize in pilfering hospital drugs and equipment to the detriment of the patients for whom such items are meant. Census steals the items from the hospital and sells them at very cheap rate to Alhaji Adamu who run an illegal clinic in Gom. Below is the discussion between both of them in their transaction of the dubious business:

1. "What have you brought for us today?" Alhaji's voice brought him out of his thoughts. Census displays the contents of the bag he was carrying. According to the authorial voice, "assorted bottles of drugs, vials of injections and syringes were scattered on the table amidst other surgical instruments. The man picked up the instruments. "These are the things I have been looking for." The two men came to an agreement on the prices. After a few minutes, Alhaji Adamu handed Census a wag of Naira notes." (43) On another occasion, when Alhaji Adamu runs short of ergometrine injection while seriously in need of it, he threatens Census. Here is the argument between them:

2. "Census,... I need some ergometrine injections," Alhaji Adamu said." I don't have any more," Census replied. "Then go and get it from the hospital as you normally do." "No, Alhaji, I am not going again. At any rate, I am very busy now." (82-83) Provoked by Census' response and desperate

to get the drug by all means, Adamu threatens Census saying:

3. "If you don't get me the injections, I will go straight to the police with all the things you stole from the hospital. You can be sure you will end up in jail." (84)

Afraid of being reported to the police, Census gives in to Alhaji's request of pilfering the injections. But in an attempt to hand them over to Alhaji, he is caught by the matron. Arraigned before the disciplinary committee of the hospital and found guilty, Census is sacked. In the above excerpts, Okediran paints a clear picture of the hospital environment in Nigeria, giving an account of the high degree of moral decadence prevalent there. Okediran emphasizes the trial and dismissal of Census artistically as a warning to those who indulge in such dubious activities, and others who would want to resort to such practices as a way of making ends meet.

In the same vein, the author exposes and condemns the quacks in the medical profession running illegal medical centres and endangering people's lives. Many of such clinics abound in different parts of the country, especially in the rural areas. Many people have lost their lives and some others are maimed by the nefarious activities of the quacks. Aside their not being qualified as medical practitioners; the quacks treat the unsuspecting patients with fake and expired drugs, thereby subjecting them to health hazards. Such practices have resulted in the loss of so many lives in the different part of the Nigeria. This is a great loss of human resources, which the author condemns in its entirety in the texts.

Okediran also presents Alhaji Adamu and Census as quacks in the novel under study. Alhaji Adamu operates an illegal clinic, where he carries out various activities such as abortion, extraction of teeth, injections and so on. In many instances in the text, the patients to whom he renders services either die or they are rushed to other hospitals for the urgent attention of specialist doctors. According to the authorial voice:

4. During that period, he had killed and maimed many people few through his nefarious activities. (25)  
Many pregnant girls for whom he does abortion die, and on one of the numerous abortions, the patient bleeds so profusely that Adamu becomes terrified. The girl, a daughter of an influential member of the society, Alhaji GGGGg is rushed to the hospital, but on examination the doctor confirms her dead. Aggrieved by the loss of the girl, and suspecting the cause of the girl's death, Dr. Abe who examines the bleeding girl, asks whether it is another case from Alhaji, to which the matron nodes in affirmation. Commenting on the incident, the matron says:

5. "What a waste. No doubt she was a lovely girl" (89).

Similarly, Okediran presents another case of a victim of attempted abortion by Alhaji Adamu, brought to the hospital in a very bad state. Disturbed by the incessant cases of casualties due to Adamu's activities, Dr Abe resolves, saying in a declarative sentence:

6. "I will have to go to the police and report the man to them."

As Dr. Abe gets ready to leave for home, a nurse calls his attention to the girl and on close examination, he discovers her dead. The doctor becomes furious, cursing silently:

7. "blast these quacks".

Having been dismissed from job as a theatre assistant for stealing, Census becomes so poor that he can no longer feed himself, let alone pay the school fees of his two brothers. He takes advantage of Alhaji Asdamu's disappearance from the town because of the death of Alhaji G daughter, Census opens an illegal clinic in his

room to earn money for a living. He engages in illegal abortions for girls who asks for his services, and with the drugs he pilfered from the hospital, he treats patients who pay him at the end of his services. As the authorial voice reports:

8. Slowly he withdrew some of the contents of the vial into the syringe. Since he could not remember how much to give, he decided to inject just a small dose into the child. Okay, madam, hold him well," he said, turning to the mother... "Rub it well for him," Census directed the mother (151).

On one occasion, a child to whom Census administered an child an injection dies soon after, and on another occasion, he almost cuts off a small boy's penis in an attempt to circumcise him. Although Census later opens a medicine store, buys a motor bike and marries a wife with the money he earns from his dubious activities, but he ends up in prison. He suffers the loss of his only child and desertion by his wife. On his release from prison, he leaves Gom in disgrace and frustration. Here is a conversation between him and Dr. Abe as he leaves Gom:

9. Thank you, Census. When were you released? "Two days ago," he said quietly with sadness in his eyes. You mean you spent the whole of Christmas and New Year's Period in detention? The boy could not speak. He managed only to nod his head in reply...'

#### **Are you travelling?"**

Yes, doctor. I am going back to Calabar. I am fed up with life up here, Census said, looking genuinely sad. 'How about your wife and... child? I thought she was pregnant?' 'She left me while I was in detention. I was told that the Child had measles and died...' (303)

In the extract above, Okediran does not only expose and discourage corruption, but he conveys the fact that the wicked does not go unpunished. He recommends that whoever indulges in corrupt practices should be brought to book to serve as deterrent to others. If the government and Nigerians in every sector implement this recommendation by meting out strident punishments to offenders irrespective of their social classes, it will go a long way in curbing corruption in the country.

#### **Satire and the Police Force**

Okediran also attacks the Nigerian Police Force in the novel, exposing and emphasizing the alarming rate of moral decadence in the force. It is important to state here that the author does not just expose and ridicule the corrupt policemen, but he also suggests the measures to be adopted in order to rid the Police force of the unscrupulous elements that are denting the image of the Nigerian Police Force. This is geared towards the reformation of the force in particular and the society in general, to promote sustainable development. Various instances of corrupt practices by policemen abound in the text under study. In the attempts to enrich them, they aid and abate Census, Alhaji Adam, the quacks and the armed robbers in their illegal businesses. The author x-rays the police force in the excerpts below. He indicts the force and revealing some of the corrupt practices of some policemen with Alhaji Adamu, the authorial voice states the following facts in declarative sentences. Commenting on Inspector Chike, a very corrupt police man, the authorial voice says:

11. During his ten years of service, life treated him well. He grew through lucrative corrupt-practices in the force he had about five commercial buses plying the roads in the country while he had just completed two houses in his Hometown. All these on a monthly salary of about six thousand naira.

12. "Despite more than ten arrests and fifteen court cases his Business continued to thrive due to the ignorance of the inhabitants of the town and the goodwill of a corrupt Law-enforcement agency." (25)

13. "Although he had given the divisional police officer his Monthly dues, he still had to be careful so that the police in Jos would not know what was going on." (28). The atrocities of the quacks in Gom and the corrupt police men are further reiterated in the conversation between Dr.Saheed and Dr Abe. Dr. Abe complains about the incessant cases of the patients already at the points of death transferred from the illegal clinics of the quacks to Faith Medical sayings:

14. "Their cases are getting too much for us. I am thinking of making a formal report to the police." (67) In response, Dr. Saheed says: "Ha my friend, don't do anything like that .Those people all work together with the police."(67) Okediran further reiterates the corruption in the police force by their involvement in illegal extortions of money from people. For instance, Inspector Chike forces a man whose vehicle is stolen to pay him the sum of five thousand naira to obtain a police report for the stolen vehicle. As the man appeals to him to help get the report ready the next day after paying the illegal fee, the inspector says to him:

15. I will see what can be done about it, although you will have to give us additional five thousand naira to hurry it up.(59)

In the text under study, the author also ridicules the evils in the society, employing a plot through which the corrupt characters render themselves ridiculous by their actions and speeches. For example, after Alhaji Adamu has paid the usual monthly bribe to Inspector Chike, he solicits the inspector's help to convince Dr. Abe, to cooperate with them in their illegal quackery business. Responding to the request, the Inspector says to him:

16. "Look here, man. I can't continue covering you up everywhere. If those people in Jos find out we are helping you so much, they would soon be here for some investigations." (61)

Alhaji keeps quiet, staring into space. Then, Chike advises him to befriend and bribe the new doctor. Shamelessly, Alhaji responds saying:

17. Yes, I think that is what I am going to do. That means I have to see him urgently"(61).

In the samples above, Alhaji and Inspector Chike render themselves ridiculous by both their actions and speeches. In the same vein, the corrupt divisional Police officer in Gom renders himself ridiculous by both his speeches and actions. In an attempt to take bribe from a woman whose son is accused of rape ,he says to the woman and her sister:

'18. "This case is a serious one. Your son could go to jail for more than seven years for raping an underaged girl."... If you want help, go and bring twenty thousand naira" (210).

Having collected bribe from the rapist's mother, the DPO tries to convince the girl's mother to settle the case out of court. In response to the woman's refusal to settle out of court, he says to her:

19. "In that case, you have to give the police something."(211)

The author also exposes cases of falsehood prevalent in the police force. Various instances of the falsification of reports are recorded in the text as exemplified in the following extracts. For instance, as the DPO fails to get money from the girl's parents, he dismisses them and sends the girl through a sergeant to the Egyptian doctor in Faith Medical to issue him a falsified medical report in favour of the rapist from whom the DPO collected bribe. Unfortunately for the DPO , the report written by Dr. Abe and not the Egyptian doctor states that the girl has been raped.

Knowing that the rapist from whom he has collected bribe would be jailed should the report be tendered in court, the DPO makes frantic efforts to get the doctor to change it to no avail. Bent on convincing Dr. Abe to change report earlier written, the sergeants make further effort by visiting the doctor at home to beg him. According to the authorial voice, after the doctor had asked the sergeants out of his house, he says to Elizabeth, his girl friend: these

20. "Policemen are terrible. Imagine all the atrocities they commit." "They are dangerous people." "They will still come back, you will see..." (235). Since all effort to make Dr. Abe to change his mind fail, the DPO decides to set him up by making Sergeant John to plant wraps of Indian hemp in the doctor's house. The doctor is arrested, locked up in the cell, tortured and forced to change the medical report. In the above account, Okediran artistically paints a picture of the Nigerian society where the corrupt officers whose duty is the protection of lives and properties function not only as terrorists, but thieves. The corruption in the force is one of the major problems in Nigeria. As the author reiterates, they are involved in aiding and abating different types of criminal activities which are inimical to sustainable development in the country.

### **Satire and the Judiciary**

Wale Okediran does not spare the judiciary in the war against corruption in Nigeria. In the *Strange Encounters*, he points his searchlight at, and exposes the corrupt practices in, the Nigerian judiciary, advancing the measures that should be adopted for positive changes, in order to move the nation forward. He criticises the magistrates and judges, who indulge in dubious practices in their quest for wealth. Some of them pervert justice for financial gratifications and otherwise. The conducts of such corrupt magistrates and judges have posed serious problems to the country. One of the acts of corruption in the judicial system satirized by the novelist is the involvement of money in the judiciary.

As depicted in *Strange Encounters*, some judges and magistrates connive with the unscrupulous elements in the police force to demand financial gratification from the people awaiting trial before they perform their duties. The manner in which justice is delayed in courts for financial reasons is a serious issue that calls for government intervention as depicted in the text. There are instances where accused persons are left in prison custody for several years, some of them even die while awaiting trial due to their inability to bribe their ways through. Okediran conveys the idea of denial of justice prevalent in the Nigerian society. People are denied their fundamental human rights in Nigeria due to the corruption in the judiciary.

Below is a conversation between the magistrate and his police accomplice about a case in his court on their visit to him.

21. "Gentlemen, I have called you about the Gidado's case." There is severe pressure from Jos about the case, and I think you should know." (135) When his guests remained silent, he continued: "The situation is so tough that I might not be able to help as there are moves for the case to be transferred to Jos". (135) On another visit of the dubious policemen to the magistrate's house, Dr. Abe listens to their conversation involving an armed robbery case unknown to them. One of the policemen says: 22. "I am not still sure if Cosmos will reveal us.", having made arrangements for Cosmos disappearance from the town. The other adds, "Cosmos should be in Chad Republic by now." The magistrate who later joins them says to them:

23. "You... boys should make haste and let me my share of the money. I need something to retire on quickly," he said as he hiccupped. (290) Unfortunately for them, the doctor narrates what he has heard the culprits saying the previous night to the superintendent deployed from Lagos over the robbery incident in which the police in GOM and the magistrate are collaborating with the robbers. As soon as the officer informs the authority in Lagos of the involvement of the magistrate and the policemen, they are arrested and taken to Jos under tight security. At the end, all the culprits involved in the robbery, the policemen and the magistrate who have aided and abated them are sentenced to jail terms ranging from fifteen to twenty-five years. With the various samples above, Okediran reveals the atrocities being perpetrated by the officers of the Nigerian arm Forces and the judiciary, who ought to protect the citizens as a result of materialism.

What then is the fate of the citizens when they are neither protected by the police nor the law? The Nigerian laws seem to be made for only a certain group of people while others, the sacred cows, are above the law. This is why some Nigerians who embezzle public funds, commit grievous crimes and indulge in all forms of fraudulent practices are not held accountable. The Nigerian Observer earlier referred " states that:

24. Government sponsored panels and committees have unearthed mindboggling fraud and monumental financial losses to the Nigerian citizenry but nothing has followed... In spite of efforts by the anti-grafted agencies namely the Economic and Financial Crime Commission EFCC, Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission, ICPC, which have often resulted in bringing to limelight high profile cases of corruption against public officials, there has been no appreciable success as quite a no of persons alleged are shielded from prosecution...(16) Such sacred cows shielded from prosecutions are usually highly connected people, members of the ruling political parties, their wives, children and relations The report further cites cases of the highly publicised oil subsidy scam, the police pension funds and the trial and conviction of James Ibori as challenges that the government must take up in tackling corruption in the country. Similarly, the Nigerian observer of Thursday, October 10, 2013 points out that "the "oil block licensing scam and widespread corruption and stealing in the oil industry suggests that Nigeria is far from combating graft as perpetrators are allowed to escape the justice system."(12)

If the Nigerian government must succeed in curbing corruption, all hands must be on deck. But unfortunately, no strident penalties are meted out to offenders in Nigeria no matter the seriousness of their offences, especially when the offenders are highly connected. It is also reported that "a roll call of the recipients of national merit award show that some of those who have frittered public funds are among those honoured by government..." (12). Is the act of honouring such thieves not an encouragement to other Nigerians to join in looting public funds, and to further indulge in corruption? But in the text under study, Okediran exposes and denounces corruption in its entirety. The novel is, therefore, a call on Nigerians to desist from all form of corruption, and to stop rewarding corrupt practices and their perpetrators who enrich themselves with public funds. This reiterates the fact that the relevance of literature goes beyond entertainment, as the literary artists are actively involved in the war against corruption and other vices in the society, aimed at sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have examined and expounded satire as a literary device in which literary artists deploy language in a unique manner, aimed at the exposal and denouncement of corruption and other vices that are responsible for the underdevelopment of the nation. We also established the fact that *Strange Encounters* as a literary text is a call to all Nigerians to fight the war against corruption with all seriousness in order achieve national growth and sustainable development.

In the novel, Wale Okediran does not only expose the alarming rate of corrupt practices in all facets of life in the country, but also condemns corruption in its entirety with the deployment of some significant linguistic parameters which aid him in the conveyance of his artistic visions.

### **Recommendations**

1. All Nigerians should be involved in the war against corruption to make Nigeria a better society.
2. Nigerians should stop rewarding corruption.
3. The Nigerian government should enforce the anti-crime laws in all sectors in the society irrespective of the social classes of those involved in criminal activities.
4. There should be no "sacred cow" in the enforcement of the laws.

5. Nigerians should desist from all forms of corrupt practices.
6. Law enforcement agents should stop aiding and abating criminals.
7. Judges and magistrates should stop perverting justice.
8. The rights of Nigerian citizens should be protected.
9. Whoever is found guilty of criminal offence should be punished.

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