


## Neo-colonialism and the burden of social realism in wale Okediran’s *strange encounters* and Chris Egharevba’s *canopy of thunder*

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ARTICLE INFO	Abstract
<p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Misappropriating, Corruption, Grossly, Debauchery and Denigration.</i></p> <p>©2025 Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International</a></p> 	<p><i>The post-independence Nigerian has for a long time sought vehemently to obtain some form of liberty, not from the government of the colonial masters but from the government of their own people – the very same people whose reign was heralded by optimism and the joy of freedom. What was expected was not to be as these new set of leaders became the masses’ nightmare – taking undue advantage of the power bestowed on them and wantonly misappropriating national funds. This corruption was however, not peculiar to the people at the nation’s highest cadre as down the ranks, individuals who have been granted positions of authority even at the lowest levels grossly abused these responsibilities. This paper examines and eviscerates the place of the masses versus the powerful in a society that is characterised by debauchery and amoral practices. This paper particularly examines the incidents in Wale Okediran’s <i>Strange encounters</i> and Chris Egharevba’s <i>Canopy of thunder</i> in a bid to bring to limelight, issues pertaining to the denigration of the nation. His paper concludes that the plight of the masses and, in fact, corruption can be significantly alleviated if the people jointly rise against the factors that promote their occurrence.</i></p>

### Introduction

When colonialism came to an end and liberty of self-governance was granted to African nations, a new group of people assumed leadership. These people are mostly the elite members of the newly independent societies and they were expected to govern their own people. This hope of redemption however turned sour when the ruling class began to abuse their powers. Leadership in these societies became characterized by unprecedented ineptitude, moral decadence, corruption, political subterfuge, shenanigan and immense lack of social responsibility. The leaders wantonly embezzled public funds, submerged voices of reasoning and oppositions and ‘sat’ on the peoples’ rights. The problem of the ordinary person living in the typical post-colonial nation became, in essence an extension of the calamities of colonialism and in most cases, worse. The modern government of the African nations became overlords, subjugating the masses to a state of servitude and in doing so, perpetuating the suffering of the masses. The apathy that formed the heaviest weight of the government upon the plight of the people threatened to and in some cases, succeeded in crushing the people who had looked upon them with hope and belief.

The government has become so detached from the people whose interests they have been elected to represent that they have developed a sort of laissez-faire attitude to the ever denigrating plight of the masses. They assign positions to subsidiary arms and fail in every necessary way to ensure the people appointed to represent the executive government carry out their designation with dedication. The result of this is an inescapable lack in organisation and constant thwart of judgment that leaves the ordinary masses at the receiving end of a cruel system of government. These people whose voices have been muffled by the ceaseless bullying of government official and people who seemingly are law-enforcement agents withdraw into their shells and live as subalterns, people whose voices must never be heard. The few whose moral standing prompted to speak out against the injustice

of the government and the fast decaying society become scapegoats, a warning to anyone who would dare to stand against the government and the corrupt officials. This further pushes the masses into a dark corner, aggravating their worries and perpetuating their suffering.

Describing these people of inferior social positioning as subalterns, Mohammad Deyab in his essay entitled, 'The Subaltern can Speak in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*, published in the fifth volume of the *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* holds that:

The term "subaltern" draws different definitions from different intellectuals and postcolonial critics and writers. The word subaltern, meaning "of inferior rank," was used by Antonio Gramsci as a concept referring to groups in society subjected to the hegemony of the dominant ruling classes. According to Gramsci, the subaltern is anyone who is "subordinated in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (341).

The modern African governments are renowned for their notoriety in having the masses subjected to a system of exploitation and subjugation that has been unmatched in the history of mankind. The brutal economic exploitation and political oppression of disempowered and subaltern groups in modern African societies presents an ethical dilemma to African writers who consider using their writing as a means of voicing out the maladies of the African masses their responsibilities.

The writings of this era therefore echo the dissatisfactions of the nations they mirror and the writers capture in their works, the aggregative collection of the peoples' experiences. These include the disappointment of the people and the problems of social dissonance that emanated from the bastardization of politics and the economy of the nations. Typically, the agitations that foreshadowed independence were filled with anticipations and fervour. To the average African character, independence symbolized socio-political and economic liberation. The independence came amidst raised hopes and the dreams of solving to a large extent, the problems faced by the colonized persons in colonial nations. The wake of independence was accompanied by many promises and economic plans which Chuma-Udeh (2011) describes as based on "broad egalitarian precept (117)". Simply put, the independence was naturally expected to herald the onset of a new and positive turn in events for the post-colonial characters. Chuma-Udeh is of the opinion that;

It came amidst anticipations for economic, social, cultural and human development for all the citizens of the new nations. It was supposed to be a harbinger of proper political affairs for the new nations. Independence was intended to be an epoch of re-orientation from the shackles of colonialism to the righteousness of self-rule. It was to mark the end of servitude under the West and the end of unfulfilled life, rancour, brutality of Western dominance and the pains of economic sabotage. (117-118)

Thus, the disenchantment that dominated the post-independence era was a reaction to the cold grips of political vagaries and economic debilitations that has, since independence flourished in most African nations. Post-Colonial or Post-independence Disillusionment is a trend that is recurrent in most colonized, particularly African societies. It stems from the inability of the ruling power to govern dedicatedly and their dexterity at misappropriation and diversion of public funds, subjugation of the lower class, the sit-tight syndrome and eating-propensity.

### **The Corruption of the Modern African Government and the Agony of Subjugated Masses in Wale Okediran's *Strange encounters* and Chris Egharevba's *Canopy of thunder*.**

The average person existing in the modern African society has always been a sort of subaltern. This is as a result of colonialism and post-independence suppression. The natives had hoped that with the passing of colonialism, their voices would rise and in rising against colonial subjugation, it did rise. This voices were however drowned in the disenchantment that characterised and soon corroded in the post-independence era, seeping into the very fabric of these societies and implanting itself strongly within the governing circle. The government of the modern African societies became

besieged with corruption that eats deep into the lives of the masses, placing them at the very brink of the society. This surprisingly disappointing turn in events unleashed a more critical subalterns- people who are subjugated not by the colonizers but by their own ruling brothers.

The dream of liberty became a mirage and their trapped voices echoed the fear of the unknown. Once again, the Blackman began to taste the bitter pill of “subalternity” and this time, with the incessant rise in corruption, nepotism and other vile societal ills, their hopes of redemption became bleak and dwindled with each passing day. The characters presented in the texts under study are the subdued voices of the disgruntled, people who though do not align with the dictates of the ruling government have no audible voices of opposition against the forces that threaten to annihilate their existence. The people become equable bystanders in the game of national politics, bereft of any chances of contribution or opposition. In some instances, these subalterns are citizens who are forced by the gun-wielding maniacs that have following the usurpation of government, assumed authority to just sit back and watch in silent agony as lives are maimed and properties destroyed. They languish helplessly under the suppression that characterises the “government of the people”.

Wale Okediran in his *Strange Encounters* tells the story of a promising young Doctor, James Abe who having been posted to work in Faith Medical Centre, a missionary hospital in the little town of Gom, somewhere in Northern Nigeria, faces the most trying times of his life. He comes in contact with the most debilitating form of decay in the society, enhanced and fostered by the inactivity and corruption of the government workers. First was Alhaji Adamu, the notorious quack doctor whose shanty clinic has more patients than the missionary clinic and whose unlicensed practices has led to an uncountable number of severe complications, often leading to death. Despite knowing that Alhaji’s practices constantly endangers the lives of the people and in most cases, leads to patient being wheeled into the emergency room for complications, the Senior Medical Officer does nothing to stop the practices because not only is he aware that Alhaji is in bed with the utterly corrupt Divisional Police Officer but he too is a recipient of Alhaji’s bribes, alongside the Irish Matron of the Clinic.

Again is Census, the Theatre Assistant who steals drugs and medical instruments from the Clinic and sells to Alhaji. Most of the time, these drugs are expired drugs, marked for disposal. Then is the Divisional Police Officer whose sheer corruptions makes him turn a blind eye to the vices that corrodes the community and again is the Homosexual Irish Priest, Father Raleigh who accepts money from the Divisional Police Office in a mutually beneficial ploy to stay out of each other’s business. Doctor Abe struggles to keep his head high in the midst of the corruption and nepotism that beleaguers the town. When following the admission of a patient who eventually dies due to complications generated by a failed abortion attempt in Alhaji’s clinic, Doctor Abe decides to involve the police, he is strictly warned against such actions and even the Senior Medical Officer tells him in clear terms that “those people all work with the police (67)”. When he pushes further, Doctor Saheed says;

You don’t understand what I am saying. Just do your own work and ignore them. You will only get into trouble with those people... Look, Doctor, I am the senior doctor here, and I’m not giving you permission to see the police, and that is final... I am sorry James. I understand how you feel, but we don’t want any problems. If the police find out that you are getting too inquisitive, they will only cause trouble for you. They are very mean around here. (67-68)

The Senior Medical Doctor’s caution is further buttressed by Alhaji himself, who tries to bribe Doctor James but is met with a cold reception. When James threatens to involve the police if Alhaji does not quit his illegal practices, Alhaji responds “I have already told you, Doctor that the police are behind me. All we have to do is to arrange a convenient time for you to come to the clinic. I hope about four thousand naira every week will be all right (77)”.

Doctor James finds himself standing alone in the battle against an obtuse and decayed system of government. This corruption filters into the justice system as the corrupt magistrate who has been bribed by the police fails to exert justice when Alhaji Gidado’s daughter who is also the girlfriend of

the District Police Officer dies on Alhaji Adamu's table. Despite using his prominence to seek the intervention of the government at the State level, Alhaji discovers, to his chagrin that the ordinary person is no match for the antics of the corrupt government. In the end, the people he tries to bring to justice turn against him, sabotaging his business and destroying his warehouses. He eventually gives up on his pursuit of justice for his dead daughter.

The homosexual priest on his part inflict life-threatening injuries on the students he constantly abuses and at first, self-medicates them to cover up his heinous crimes. In the end, these students, unable to condone the molestations of the Priest speak out but their voices are as usual suppressed by a government that is unwilling to fight their cause. The few who were bold enough to stand against the priest are expelled from the school. Doctor James Abe's woes began when he refused to alter the death certificate of AlhajiDagogo's daughter upon the request of the DPO. This is further aggravated by his refusal to write a report in favour of a rape victim. Eventually, the government turn on him and in a matter of time, he is wrongly accused of drug peddling, incarcerated and tortured into submission.

In the text *Canopy of Thunder*, Chris Egharevba, satirizes the level of social decadence and violence playing in the Nigerian society. The story revolves around the less-privileged and the wealthy classes of the society exemplified by the characters- Nosa, Omoregie, Idubor and other activists. It also depicts the radical attempts the masses who perpetually suffer under the weight of a corrupt government make to ameliorate the constant oppression of the masses by the government. These include laws that have been made to protect the rich and subdue the poor. The novel features the character of Doctor Omoregie, an optimistic doctor who is posted to work in a newly opened hospital in Ogo, a village kilometres away from the state capital. Despite having the wherewithal to influence his posting to a better and urban hospital, his optimism pushes him to accept the appointment at the Ogo Hospital.

There however, his expectations are crush when he realises that despite being averagely equipped, the hospital has laws against performing major surgeries without explicit permission from the state capital. In the first week of his resumption, he is presented with the case of a woman who urgently needs surgery to save her life and the life of her unborn baby. Defying the Chief Medical Officer's instruction and putting his career on the line, Doctor Omoregie proceeds with the surgery and though the baby survives, the mother dies barely five minutes afterwards with a smile on her face. The child delivered by Doctor Omoregie eventually grows to become Constable Nosa, a police officer. His first assignment is to raid brothels and slums for harlots and their patronisers and hemp smokers. Secondly, Nosa changes to the Motor Traffic Division (MTB). Within six months, under the scorching sun or icing vain, constable Nosa as a traffic Warden had been performing his duty with some zeal efficiency as he had done in the criminal division.

One eventful day, while he is directing traffic zooming from Akpakpan road, he started passing the vehicles from James Watt, a side road suddenly, he heard a prolonged scratching sound of tires on the tarred road behind him. He turns casually and sees it is a blue Mercedes Benz 0280E automatic nodding to a halt. Incidentally, the man sitting in the owner's seat point a finger at him and shouts his anger childishly against the delays. The man in the owner's seat chides "you think you can delay me eh? Try such nonsense and you will smell yourself (26)".

This incident leads to Nosa being reprimanded by the DPO. Eventually, he is re-deployed to guard the living resident of Honourable Adams. Honourable Adams is a minority leader. His promiscuous behaviour irritates Nosa who believes that the money Honourable Adams spends on harlots and the hiring of exorbitant hotels could be re-channeled to anchor the poverty rate of the masses. Incidentally, while these thoughts were going on in Nosa's mind, he inadvertently discharges a bullet through the pelvis of a man he was to protect. Constable Nosa is dismissed and is handed over to the police for questioning while Honourable Adams is taken to the Hospital. At the police detention, Nosa meets Dr.Omoregie, an activist who was equally arrested for insight violence against the government that humiliates and suppress the masses. Nosa is inspired by Omoregie's teachings

and philosophies of violence while in prison. He hates injustices and oppression and his whole philosophy finds concrete reality which confirms with Omoregie's thus "throughout my youth... I have been truanted, abused, and discarded as an abomination, as a thing fated for the refuse dump. I was given all sorts of names, bastard, and killer of my mother and so on (94)".

Nosa is rejected in society because the man who impregnated his mother refuses to claim him after the death of his mother. Dr. Omoregie injects the spirit of violence and revolution into Nosa's bloodstream. To him, "to break the circle of injustice calls for violence... against the system and those perpetrating it for such violence to be effective, there is the need for organization (98)". Therefore, Omoregie preaches that the age of appealing to the conscience of the oppressors is gone while the oppressors have oppressed with violence and it needs a counter-violence to destroy their power. Eventually, Constable Nosa is released from jail because of the corrupt antics of the former school mate, Chief Amenaghawon Idubor who is now a politician and a member of the house while Dr. Omoregie was sentenced to death. On a fateful day, everybody including Chief Idubor, the judge etc. visited the ground in which Omoregie is to be executed. The revolutionist group voice of thunder (VOT) nurtured by Dr. Omoregie storms the execution ground with barrages of gunshots. Constable Nosa, who is the orderly, assigned to the chief judge, shoots the chief judge personally, paradoxically, these barrages of gunshots spit violence elements of oppression, suppression, and injustice to the masses. After the death of Dr. Omoregie, his wife Malsoken takes over the charge of the radical group voice of thunder (VOT) to continue to fight against corruption, injustice, humiliation, oppression, and so on through the name of violence.

### **Social Realism, Bribery and Corruption in Wale Okediran's *Strange Encounters* and Chris Egharevba's *Canopy of Thunder*.**

Modern African writings echo the maladies of the nations they mirror and the writers capture in their works, the aggregative collection of the peoples' experiences. These include the disappointment of the people and the problems of social dissonance that emanated from the bastardization of politics and the economy of the nations. The understanding of these social maladies lead to the suggestion and implementation of remedial measures for the ailments of the society. In expressing the burden of the writer who mirrors the plight of the people, Pankaj Mishra, who refers to this as ideological commitment avers that:

...bound to be subjective, reflecting the author's stand regarding major social questions. It would quite conspicuously represent the ardour of the writer's commitment to society. He does not seek freedom the bondage: it is a pledge he has made of his own, not out of frustration or coercion, but out of the conviction that society can be improved, provided there is a concerted effort of the artist, of the social reformer, and, at times, of the politician as well. The writer finds in life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his intention is to make these appear as distortions to his people who are used to seeing them as natural and he is forced to take all available means to get his vision across to the people. To the hard of hearing, he shouts and for the visually impaired, he draws large and startling figures... The committed writer has the sharpest eye yet for the grotesque and the perverse. He has the courage to call a spade a spade. He also shows the means to correct the distortions and to remedy the situation by calling attention to the fatal eventuality of frenzied action and the equally fatal consequences of apathy (25-26).

For Pankaj, once the writer is committed to a particular ideology, he embarks upon a course of action to achieve his cherished goal. Typically, the years that heralded independence were filled with expectations and enthusiasm. To the average African character, independence symbolized socio-political and economic liberation. Social Realism as Pankaj.... depicts in his "indicates the writer's commitment to the cause of society, and his determination to plan his role as an intellectual leader,

in exposing the drawbacks through his writing and stating appropriate actions that are conducive to change (33).”

Mirroring the suffering of the masses as a result of the corruption embedded deeply within the government in writing became a major trend in modern African literature. These writings present characters whose voices have been drowned in a subterfuge of immense moribundity. Critics of African literature agree strongly with the writers’ ideas of speaking the voices of the suppressed masses. Bill Ascroft et al in presenting the opinion of Gayatri Spivak, in the text *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* assert that:

Gayatri Spivak questions whether or not the possibility exists for any recovery of a subaltern voice that is not a kind of essentialist fiction... For her, one cannot construct a category of the ‘subaltern’ that has an effective ‘voice’ clearly and unproblematically audible above the persistent and multiple echoes of its inevitable heterogeneity. (8)

The above opinion they hold, is in spite of Spivak’s “considerable sympathy for the project undertaken in contemporary historiography to give a voice to ‘the subaltern’... (8)”. The writers Wale Ogediran and Chris Egharevba depict the characters of people who suffer the fate of the subaltern but in whose suffering the voices of the masses are heard. James Abe, prior to his incarceration refuses to let the corruption of the government subdue his voice. He openly rebuffs the DPO’s attempt to silence him and Alhaji Adamu’s attempt to bribe him. This is such that the DPO acknowledges the fact that his voice has become a threat to them. The corruption is so deeply etched into the society that even the religious partake in it. Doctor James Abe’s resistance to the psychological bullying generated by his refusal to alter the death certificate of the girl creates noticeable tension in the community and especially, the clinic. Even the corrupt Doctor Saheed felt the heat of his resistance. Doctor Saheed’s experience with the demand to alter KudiDagogo’s death certificate is thus captured:

Earlier in the day, he had been called to the matron’s office where he met Father Raleigh. The three of them discussed the case, with the matron requesting that the doctor do his best to help Inspector Chike. She called him a worthy Catholic and a good friend of the church. Though the matron did not directly ask the doctor to tell any lies, he knew he was being asked to create some ambiguity in the death certificate that could help the police officer during a court case. For him to be able to do that, he had to personally sign the certificate since he might be asked to testify. However, after the discussion with Dr. Abe, he seriously doubted that it would be possible. Even the matron had warned him that the young doctor would be difficult to handle. “That young rebel,” she had called him. (106-107)

On the other hand, Constable Nosa’s dissatisfaction is evident in his disgruntled assertion;

‘This is the nature of our society,’ he went on grumbling as he strode, ‘Monkey dey work, baboon dey chop. I am here suffering in the cold, guarding the house for a man enjoying with a woman now at the Peacock.’ He stopped... ‘That is why they always die of heart attack....’ ‘If you see anyone, don’t hesitate to shoot the person dead,’ he repeated, mimicking the voice of the man. Why should I shoot at them? Because they want to take a little from the lot you have stolen so easily with a stroke of the pen? That is the irony of this bad system. We protect the bigger rogues from the lesser ones and the bigger rogues make laws not only to protect themselves but to punish the smaller rogue. (44-45)

## Conclusion

The undoubtable fact that the African government not only creates more suffering for the people but also ensures the masses remain relegated to the background further accentuates the frustration, suppression and disillusionment that characterises the modern African societies. These are inimical factors which as sheer drawback, sharply contradicts the excitement that heralded the independence and crushes the expectations of the masses. Despite this, the people have constantly and endlessly pushed against the will of turbulence that the ruling class or government throws in their

directions. The characters examined in Wale Okediran's *Strange Encounters* and Chris Egharevba's *Canopy of Thunder* exemplify this assertion. In the text under study, there is an ostentatious portrayal of the ability of the people to unite and form a voice of opposition to forces that threaten to wantonly subdue their right of social participation and to spit back at the terror that besieges the society. This study concludes that the suffering of the masses in modern African societies, spurred by the corruption of the government can be alleviated if the people unite and form a strong voice of opposition against the corruption that plagues the societies.

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