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Faction in Wale Okediran's *Tenants of the House***Oguntoyinbo Deji**Department of Languages,
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Since the publication of Kole Omotosho's *Just Before Dawn* (1988) which is generally believed to be a faction, there have been groundswell of Nigerian writers gravitating towards this narrative mode. Literature, according to these writers, is one of the greatest tools in the representation of reality. They use real – life materials in terms of characters and situations to construct and document reality. Political, cultural, economic and social issues form the crux of their works. These set of writers achieve the illusion of reality through their selection of factual details from the goings – on in the society.

It is in this context, that this paper attempts to analyse Wale Okediran's *Tenants of the House* as a work of faction.

Morphologically, faction is a portmanteau word which combines fact and fiction. In this context, fact refers to the creation of social reality in a literary work. On the other hand, fiction refers to the creation of illusion in a work of art. Such a work is either invented or imagined. Fiction is basically a work of imagination; thus it is not real as compared to fact. Juxtaposing the two literary concepts, faction is a literary work that presents factual contents in fictional form. Apart from the fact that the underpinning plot in faction, there is a collage or hybridization of factual contents serving as the form of a supposedly fictional novel. It should be noted that such overwhelming specificity is not coincidental but deliberate. Since socio – cultural cum political realities turn to history in no distant time, faction might also be referred to as 'historical novel'. Thus, faction can denote a deliberate interaction between history and fiction. According to S.E Ogude, he opines that "there is a sense in which every literary work is a response to a definite historical and socio – political condition" (1). Toeing the same line of reason, Ernst Fischer says that literature is "born of reality and acts back upon reality" (496). Literary works are set 'in a particular movement of time and the writer is often conditioned by his environment' (Jean Pierre XI). "Literature and history", according to Paul Ricoeur are "real events in one side, imaginary events on the other" (175). He resolves that both literature and history share a common 'ultimate referent' (64).

Though literary works (especially the novel) steeped in facts and fictions (faction) have existed over the ages, the narrative concept of faction started around 1960's. With novels like Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*, Beryl Bainbridge's *According to Queenery* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, faction was firmly implanted on the world's literary map.

Despite the fact that various Nigerian writers have been writing literary works suffused with socio – political realities over the years, the literary medium called "faction" became pronounced and gained attention (recognition) with the arrival of Kole Omotoso's *Just Before Dawn* (1988) in the nation's literary market. In the novel, Omotoso embarked on a "course of communal awareness and social reconstruction as he shows socio – political issues in Nigeria" (Akingbe, I). Since then, there have been avalanche of new writers who are pitching their narrative tent towards this mode of writing. They include Helon. Habila, Sefi Ataa, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Segun Afolabi, Chris Abani, Okey Ndibe, Helen Oyeyemi, Akachi Adimora –

Ezeigbo, Maik Nwosu and Wale Okediran, the focus of this paper. During the 2012 annual October Lecture of Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), Kaduna State Chapter, Okediran gives reasons why he used such a narrative mode. He says “I wrote a fictional novel (*Tenants of the House*) because I am not that rich to hire lawyers for all the court cases that would arise”.

Wale Okediran was born in April 1955 in Oyo State. He qualified as a medical doctor from University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1980. He worked in government and private hospitals before veering into private practice in 1987. In 1999, he went into politics and was appointed Chairman of Oyo State Hospital Management Board. Known for his novels, short stories, poems and essays, Wale Okediran is a Nigerian writer whose literary oeuvre is deeply rooted in the contemporary Nigerian society. A recipient of many national and international literary awards, the distinguished medical doctor, scholar, poet and prolific author has over ten literary works to his credit. They include *Boy at the Border*, *The Rescue of Uncle Babs* (winner of the ANA Prize for children’s literature), *Dream Die at Twilight*, *Strange Encounter* (winner of the 2005 ANA Fiction Prize) and *The Weaving Looms*. Wale Okediran served as a member of the fifth session of Nigeria’s Federal House of Representatives, Abuja between 2003 and 2007. Also, he was the national President of the Association of Nigeria Authors (ANA) between 2005 and 2009.

Tenants of the House chronicle occurrences in Nigeria’s lower legislative chambers, which is also popularly referred to as the House of Representatives. Since the author was a member of the hallowed chamber between 2003 and 2007, reporting the incidents and events was less than a fiction especially the third – term saga that dominated that legislative session. Since independence, Nigeria has had its own share of various military heads of state. With the inception of democratic governance in the most populous black nation (Nigeria) in 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo became the President for two consecutive and constitutionally approved terms of four years each. These are between 1999 to 2003 and 2003 to 2007 respectively. During the second term of the President, it was widely reported that he sent a bill to the House of Representatives, in form of a constitution amendment, to extend his regime. Thus, the tenure elongation saga of the former Nigeria’s leader started around the temporal setting of the novel. Though this has been half – heartedly rebuffed by the man in the eye of the storm, there are sufficient evidences that proved otherwise. In the words of President Onyea, (unmistakably, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo):

Now to your question, my dear speaker, how
do we hope to remain in office? This, as you
know can be achieved only by a constitutional
amendment. This is where you will be very
useful, my dear speaker. As the Bill has to
be passed by the National Assembly (140).

This action of the president divided the honourable members of the House into two opposing camps – those that supported the tenure elongation bill and those against it. The intrigues, schemes and politicking of these two groups form the kernel of the novel. In the ten page presentation by a leading voice of the anti – third term agenda, Hon. Kalkulus outlines the following issues – “Why we oppose a third Third Term”, ‘A third term is immoral and unconstitutional’, ‘A third term will lead to instability’, ‘A third term is an insult to Nigerians’, ‘A third term is evidence of failure’, ‘A third term promotes a culture of intimidation and corruption’ and ‘A third term is not divinely ordained’ (253 – 255). The tenure elongation plot, otherwise referred to as third term, of President Olusegun Obasanjo met innumerable

resistances and thus could not sail through just as the case of President Oneya in the denouement of the novel. One of the resistances include the fact that President Obasanjo is a southerner and that is should be turn of the Northern part of the country to produce the next president. This same fate befalls President Oneya. Hon. Samuel Bakura opines that “we cannot possibly extend the tenure of the president, when everyone knows, it is the turn of the North to provide the next president.. it is our turn. The North will set the country on fire, if we are cheated. We must produce the next president, or else” (159 – 160).

The use of real names also attenuate the status of the novels as a ‘faction’. In fact, there are avalanche of paragraphs that can pass for news item. A student of Nigerian politics will be acquainted with the following names ‘crafty Ibrahim Babangida’, the psychopathic Sanni Abacha’, quickly efficient Abdusalam Abubakar’, Alhaji Ismail Gwarzo, ‘Brigadier – General Sabo Mohammed,; Major Hamza – Al- Mustapha’. ‘Sergeant Barnabas Msheila’, Mohammed Abacha’ and Bashorun M.K.O Abiola’. Other international figures or personalities mentioned in the novel include ‘Geroge Washington’, Thomas Jefferson,’ Nelson Mandela’, ‘Julius Nyerere’, ‘Mobutu Sese Seko’, ‘Robert Mugabe’, Daniel Arap Moi, Paul Biya, Yuweri Museveni, Abdulaziz Bouteflica amongst others. There are names of institutions and agencies that permeates the novel like the ‘African Union’, ‘BBC’, ‘VOA’ and ‘CNN’, ‘Nassarawa State University’, ‘University of Abuja’, ‘Nicon Hilton’, ‘NTA’, ‘State Security Service’, ‘Nigeria Police Force’, ‘NNPC’, ‘NYSC’, ‘Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)’, ‘Nnamdi Azikwe Airport’, ‘Northern Governors Forum’, ‘African Peer Review Mechanism’, ‘The Sun’, ‘The Daily Independent’, and ‘AM Express’..

Okediran X- rays the snatching of mace, which has become a norm, in the House of Representatives. This is always carried out in an ambience of disagreement, confusion and melee. In the words of the narrator:

The uproar spread through the chamber. Voices were raised in angry debate. The short distraction was what was needed. He walked towards the Speaker’s seat as if he was going to confer with him, then suddenly lunged towards the mace, snatching it in an instant and yanking it off its base. He flung it to Hon. Kasali, who caught it deftly and sprinted with it through the rear door (23 – 24).

Also the author comments in the June 12 election imbroglio. The then Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida conducted an election which was won by the late business mogul, Chief Moshood Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The election, which has been adjudged as the freest and fairest since independence, was surprisingly annulled by the military president. This sparked riots all over the country as countless lives were lost. Eminent Nigerians went to consult with the self - proclaimed military President so as to vacate the post for the rightful owner. But all fell on Gen. Ibrahim Babangida’s deaf ears. This is captured by the narrator when he says “I saw Babangida holding court, as verily he did, and receiving delegation of eminent Nigerian who had come to see him on the issue of annulled national June 12 elections (177).

Since the House of Representative comprises members from various parts of the country, there is hardly any state that escaped the author’s pen. Apo, the legislator’s official residence resonates throughout the novel. The mysterious disappearance of the Nigeria satellite comes to

the fore. Actually, this occurred in 2005 when the supposedly new satellite was missing in space. The project which was executed for National Space Research and Development Agency by the China Great Wall Industry Corporation is about N40 billion. The satellite was supposed to improve internet access and enhance the government's economic reform. The satellite "was said to have a lifespan of 15 years, it has since packed up" (222). In his review of the novel, Reuben Abati opines that "In Okediran's *Tenants of the House*, we are introduced to a terribly disoriented society, where there is much conflict between appearance and reality, individual and society, and this reproduced not only among the political elite but also at all states of the society"

In conclusion, *Tenants of the House* is a narrative that draws on an historical event or situation that is mediated by the literary mode. By mixing fact with fiction, Okediran tries to transform literature to a product of self-awareness using the aborted third term saga of the former Nigeria's President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. In addition to this, numerous incidents that occurred in the nation's House of Representatives serves as ingredients that enveloped the narrative.

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