

**POLITICS AND ITS PERCEPTION IN NIGERIAN LITERATURE: A STUDY OF OLA ROTIMI'S  
*OUR HUSBAND HAS GONE MAD AGAIN***

**Lotachukwu Loveth Amalukwue (PhD)**  
**Department of English Language and Literature**  
**Faculty of Arts**  
**Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka**  
**&**  
**Richard Nnamdi Ogbonnaya**  
**Department of English Language and Literature**  
**Faculty of Arts**  
**Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka**

**Abstract**

Politics as an activity associated with the governance of a country or a particular geographical area has been of great concern to many researchers. This is because politics, when approached positively, can lead to the growth and development of any society, while at the same time possessing the potential to stagnate and hinder development in a society where politicians handle it irresponsibly. Thus, for politics to achieve the desired success, it is pertinent that the perception of politics among those (politicians) saddled with the responsibility of governing the country be assessed. This paper examines the perception of politics through an analysis of characters involved in politics (politicians) in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. The paper is anchored on the Psychoanalytic theory, with particular focus on the concept of defence mechanisms. The study finds that most Nigerians, especially politicians, have a wrong perception of politics. They see politics as a means of acquiring wealth, improving one's social status, boosting one's ego, accumulating power and influence, and engaging in deceit. This paper is significant because it seeks to expose the mindset of the crop of politicians that emerge in Nigeria's political space and, at the same time, convey the message that there is a need for a total overhaul of this negative mindset. The paper concludes that these wrong perceptions of politics among politicians constitute a major setback to Nigerian democracy and national development.

**Keywords: Politics, Perception, Nigerian Literature, Corruption, Governance.**

**Introduction**

Politics is a broad phenomenon practiced all over the world. The word "politics" comes from the Greek word "polis" meaning everything that concerns or belongs to the "polis" or city state. In recent times, the "city state" could be said to equal the term "state" and as such, politics could be seen as "everything that concerns the state". It is not limited to governments or elections. At its core, politics is simply the social process through which people negotiate differences, make collective decisions and manage power. It has contributed in shaping nations and empires. From ancient civilizations to the contemporary era, politics has evolved significantly with the emergence of monarchies, empires and democracies, alongside philosophers or thinkers like Plato and Aristotle who described the concept in distinctive ways. Politics is as old as the human race. It has been observed that human beings are tailored to have natural urge to possess power and form societies that are structured through the art of governance, and in support of this view, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, maintains that "Man is by nature a political animal".

There is no one accepted definition of politics. What this means is that the term politics has a great number of definitions that are legitimate and equally acceptable. Modebadze opines that "Politics is defined in such different ways: as the study of conflict resolution, the art of government, the conduct and management of public affairs and so on"(39). In fact, he explained that there are two approaches to the definition and understanding of politics and these include: the broad and narrow definitions of politics (39). To Modebadze, "the broad conception of politics argues that politics is not only confined to a particular sphere but also takes place in all aspects of human life" (39). He went further to state that "the narrow definition of politics sees it as what takes place within the government and the state departments: only politicians, government officials, members of the political party are involved in politics"(39). These two contradictory approaches to the understanding of politics lay the foundation to the difficulty experienced in the definition of politics. This paper is interested in the narrow definition of politics which is closely linked with the art of governance. Heywood qtd in Modebadze is of the view that politics is not science but the art of government (41). Therefore, "politics can be defined as the study of the state, its aims and

purposes- the institutions by which those are going to be realized, its relations with its individual members and with other states” ( Valeri Modebdze, 41).

Politics in Nigeria plays out through democracy, the system of government that has been in existence in the country since independence. It is a system of government in which the state power is vested in the people or the general population of the state. According to Allen , “Democracy refers, at a minimum, to a political system that guarantees some involvement in decision-making. It gives citizens opportunities to choose and replace their leaders or representatives via free and fair elections”(The Conversations). Democracy in Nigeria has witnessed interruptions by the military through coups and counter coups from 1966-1979, and 1983-1999. Nigeria returned fully to democracy in 1999 under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Since then, the country has been struggling to combat the challenges of corruption in her political space. Politics in Nigeria has been a platform laced with corruption which has clearly proven to be a significant barricade to the development of the country. According to Achebe, the problem of Nigeria is “the failure of leadership” (1). To him, there is nothing wrong with Nigeria as a country, her land and the people therein but that “The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership”(1). Achebe’s remark reflected how democracy and politics have played out in the country over the years. Since Nigeria returned to democracy, looting of public funds, budget padding, oppression of the masses, political tension, rigging of elections, bribery in public offices, and so on, have taken over the country, and these have made politics take a different outlook from what it is suppose to be.

One begins to imagine how politics is perceived by Nigerian politicians that some of them display acts that are capable of truncating the very ideal in which democracy is hinged on. Perception according to Michael Mayor (2012), means “the way you think about something and your idea of what it is like” (1289). It refers to the way something is regarded, understood or interpreted. It is more like the way in which reality is viewed. It is through perception that one’s thoughts, feelings and actions are shaped. In the context of this study, perception is viewed as the way politics is regarded and interpreted in the Nigerian setting. As stated earlier in this paper, bribery, corruption and nepotism are the bane of Nigerian democracy and these are directly linked to the type of perception/mindset some Nigerian politicians have. The sordid state of things in the country is a testament to the fact that our politicians see politics and governance through an anti-people’s lens. Allen maintains that “Democracy also protects citizen’s socioeconomic, political and cultural rights”(The Conversations). It is believed that the success of democracy is hinged on its ability to change the living conditions of the people but the opposite is the case in Nigeria. The dividends of democracy which are expected to trigger national development are lacking. These impact negatively on the level of trust Nigerians have on their leaders, especially, those in government and in the governance of the country. Here, accountability and transparency become non existent, human rights and dignity become unprotected and corruption becomes the order of the day

This paper argues from a literary point of view that the challenges of democracy in Nigeria results from the faulty perspective in which politicians in Nigeria perceive politics. It does this through the analysis of those characters like Major Lejoka Brown, Sikira, Madam Ajanaku and so on who venture into politics in the drama, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi.

### **Psychoanalytic Theory**

This paper is hinged on psychoanalytic theory which is a form of psychological criticism that emerged in the 1920’s whose premises and procedure were developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). The application of psychology to the study of literature is not a new concern. Habib opines that philosophers and critics from the earliest of times, “have examined the psychological dimensions of literature, ranging from an author’s motivation and intentions to the effect of texts and performances on an audience”(233). According to Abrams “psychological criticism deals with a work of literature as an expression, in an indirect and fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of personality of the individual author” (256). From the above, one can assert that psychological criticism is “based on the basic assumption that the details and form of a work of literature are correlated with the author’s distinctive mental and emotional traits”( Abrams, 257).

According to Abrams, Freud developed a distinct form of psychology which he termed “psychoanalysis” for the “analysis and therapy of neuroses, but soon expanded it to account for many developments and practices in the history of civilization, including warfare, mythology, and religion as well as literature and the other arts” (257). Psychoanalytic theory is a broad structure for examining human behaviour, emotions and thoughts. Freud’s psychoanalytic theory explains human personality as a series of stage that are formed through inner conflicts. It mostly emphasizes the role of the unconscious mind in shaping behaviour. One of the concepts central to the

understanding of psychoanalytic theory is the “concept of the unconscious”. Tyson states that psychoanalytic theory is centred on the notion that “human beings are motivated, even driven , by desires, fears, needs and conflicts of which they are unaware-that is, unconscious...”(15). The goal of psychoanalysis is to help us resolve our psychological problem which is termed disorders or dysfunction of which none of us are completely free from. Our exhibition of this destructive behaviour persistently, makes it a pattern and a proof that there exist some significant psychological difficulty that has been influencing us for sometime and sometimes without our knowledge of their existence. It is this unknowing about the existence of a problem or even when we know, but we could not realize how it is influencing our behaviour that gives it so much control over us. According to Tyson:

The *unconscious* is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions , those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them. The unconscious comes into being when we are very young through *repression*, the expunging from consciousness, of these unhappy psychological events. However, repression doesn’t eliminate our painful experiences and emotions. Rather, it gives them force by making them the organizers of our current experience and emotions: we unconsciously behave in ways that will allow us “play out” , without admitting to ourselves, our conflicted feelings about the painful experiences and emotions we repress (15).

Thus, the unconscious is a dynamic entity that engages us at the deepest level of our being. It is only when we find a way to know and equally acknowledge to our selves the major cause/s of our repressed wounds, fears, guilty desires and unresolved conflicts, we may continue to hang unto them in a disguised, distorted and self-defeating ways (Tyson, 15).

Psychoanalytic theory is very apt in the analysis of the drama under study. This is because some of the characters in the text, especially those that are actively involved in politics like Major Lejoka-Brown, Sikira, Madam Ajanaku and so on exhibit what in psychoanalysis is referred to as “defenses”. Tyson (17) sees it as “the processes by which the contents of our unconscious are kept in the unconscious”. Here, we keep that repressed part of our unconscious repressed so that we can avoid facing that which we feel we cannot handle. The concept of defenses helps us to understand the core issues underlying the negative concepts these characters have about politics and its implications on the growth of democracy in Nigeria.

#### **Perception of Politics as a Means of Accumulation of Wealth in Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again***

In Nigeria, it is apparent that many politicians are corrupt and care less about patriotism and national development. Politics is now regarded as a “dirty game” due to the action or inaction of the politicians towards democracy and its tenets. This is what Ola Rotimi has documented in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Many Nigerians who join politics see it as a means of becoming wealthy, and this has contributed immensely in destroying the political space of the country and bringing it to the point of underdevelopment.

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, politics is perceived as an avenue for the accumulation of wealth. This is seen in Lejoka-Brown’s conversation with his retired military friend and lawyer, Okonkwo:

Okonkwo: Yarn me boh! Ehen, so you’re now in full time politics!

Lejoka-Brown: Are you there. . .? Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, mate. You want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life?- No, no,-you want to chop a big slice of the National cake?-Na politics... (4)

From the above, it is clear that Lejoka-Brown’s motive for joining politics has more to do with materialism than patriotism. A psychoanalytic study of the character (Major -Lejoka-Brown) shows that he has an insecure and unstable sense of self. An examination of his background shows that he resigned from the military and took over his father’s cocoa farm which he described as “falling to pieces” and made it a successful venture. One can say that he came from a humble background and that his family and society emphasize the need for hard work which he exhibited as seen from the success of the cocoa farm. He made enough money to take care of his needs but he feels that the idea of a successful cocoa farmer will not earn him much wealth which politics in Nigeria promises. In his unconscious mind lay the root cause of his desire for politics which he believes will fix his insecure and unstable personality. Here, one can see signs of the concept of defenses which he exhibits in form of “projection”. Projection is the process of ascribing our fear, problem, or guilty desire to someone else, and condemning them for it, in order to deny that we have it ourselves (Tyson, 18). His greed for more wealth becomes his excuse for polygamy and he begins to condemn Liza’s apparent refusal of polygamy. To him, he ventured into politics to secure their future:

Lejoka-Brown {Importantly}. After all, let’s face it, I got into all this mess in order to make her feel proud! (28)

Lejoka-Brown is a symbolic representation of many Nigerian politicians whose quest for power negates the concept of democracy which advocates for the government that is for the people and not for their selfish interest. The role of the unconscious, as regards to the concept of “the defenses” explains in clear terms the mentality of the likes of Major Lejoka-Brown. They are among the crop of Nigerian politicians who steal from the country’s treasury by all means because they have already considered politics as a means for wealth-making. This tells why Lejoka-Brown decides to go to any length to secure power so that he can be in the right position to accumulate wealth. He even goes to the extent of marrying Sikira who he does not love, but wants to use as a platform to secure votes from the market women, because Sikira is the daughter to the President of the Nigerian Union of Market Women. In his reply to Okonkwo as to why he married Sikira, this is observed:

Lejoka-Brown: That woman’s case is only for necessity, anyway-temporary measure. We need women’s votes, man. If we must win the next elections (10).

Winning the election by all means matters to him because that is the first step of getting into power and that will further give him access to public funds which will automatically satisfy his selfish interest of making more money through politics. This shows the extent Nigerian politicians can go in order to secure power. To them, politics is worth doing anything for because it is a means to an end. Any personal or selfish gains can be gotten through politics if one is ready to take the bull by the horn. According to Lejoka-Brown:

It is war! Politics is war. Oooh-I am taking no chances this time, brother mine. Mhm. Last time, I took things slow and easy and what happened? Chuu! I lost a by-election to a small crab...a baby monkey (7).

Some Nigerian politicians represented by Major Lekoja-Brown show how insensitive and desperate many of them are. Since politics is considered a tool of power and influence, hence, any means of getting it must be taken. This is also a critical commentary on the nature of Nigerian politicians in using political thugs, violence and other possible means to get power. Lejoka-Brown lost in the election the last time it was held but refuses to allow it to happen again and this explains why he is ready go to any length to win the elections.

#### **Perception of Politics as a Means to More Power and Influence in Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again***

In the play, any promise of a better life Lejoka-Brown makes to Liza, he attaches it to his political ambition which revolves around the selfish benefits of power and influence he intends to get after winning the elections. To him, politics is already a means of achieving his personal goals and interests. What the general public or masses feel or need is none of his business so far his interests are met. This is typical of most Nigerian politicians. They rush to the corridors of power so as to achieve their selfish desires of taking decisions that favour them mostly and not the masses. Politics possesses the potential to make one influential and powerful over night and Major Lejoka-Brown understands this truism as he does everything needed to get it. This perception of his on politics is well portrayed in the statement below:

Lejoka-Brown: I’ll become the Minister of Agric and Housing, Wife, by so, I will decide what houses to pull down and what shrines to leave alone...and so on, and so on. Oh I could become Prime Minister, too. Except...people will say I want to become everything.

As for you, Liza.....great plans! As soon as the elections are over, I’ll build you a special, private hospital-all to yourself (38).

Even Sikira is not left out too. She married Major Lekoja-Brown because of the power and influence that are attached to the position of a Prime Minister’s wife. From her mother’s speech at the party’s meeting, one can deduce that she (Sikira’s mother) has been expectant that the marriage will benefit her, especially if Lejoka-Brown wins:

Madam Ajanaku ...So now, last week ago, dis una Lejoka-Brown, abi na Lejoka-Yellow he say him be sef, he come kick my pickin commot for house throway for outside like dog. Na so ...na so una oga take suffer suffer my picken wey I give am for ‘yawo...(67)

Unfortunately, the marriage crumbles and she withdrew her support for the party on the grounds that Lejoka-Brown must step down because of what he did to her daughter. She even promises the political party the market women’s union support if they agree to field a female candidate. They did and the candidate is her daughter. Thanks to Liza that actually made her (Sikira) to understand that men and women are equal. In other words, what a man can do, a woman can do same equally.

**Perception of Politics as a Means of Improving One's Status and Ego in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad***

Again by Ola Rotimi

In the drama under study, Major Lejoka-Brown feels that politics has that capacity to make up for him what he lacks in terms of academics due to the fact that her wife is a qualified medical doctor. Thus, his venture into politics is for the wrong reasons. Lejoka-Brown maintains that he is doing everything in politics to match Liza's status and make her proud, and also, boost his ego as a man. He claims that a man must attain a higher status and rank in the society. To him, Liza's status and academic qualifications is way higher than an "...an Ijebu-Ijesha cocoa farmer!"(29). He makes an imaginary introduction of Liza to Okonkwo to explain to him how it ought to be for a man whose wife is a holder of academic degrees and that which commands respect in the society. To him, it should never be any other way:

Lejoka-Brown: Collecting degrees in medicine, ready to join Lejoka Brown afterwards. Now, you tell me which is better: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I have pleasure in introducing to you this evening, the chairlady of this august occasion..." People clap-pra-pra-pra-pra..."She is the one and only Dr Mrs Elizabeth Lejoka-Brown, MD, MSC, wife of .....an Ijebu-Ijesha cocoa farmer!" Now listen to this: "...She is the one and only Dr the Honorable Mrs. Elizabeth Lejoka-Brown, MD(Yale), MSC(Gynaecology), wife of the one and only Federal Government Minister of Agriculture and Housing, Mister the Honorable Major Rahman Taslim Akinjide Lejoka-Brown, ON,MHR, Esquire!"A man must measure up, brother (28-29).

In the grand scheme of things, politics is not supposed to look out for one's status, however Lejoka-Brown's mentality and perception speak volume of Nigeria's perception of politics where politics that is meant for nation building and a better society is being placed as a platform to build one's ego and status. It comments on the nature of misplaced priorities of politicians. In order for Lejoka-Brown not to feel less of a man to Liza, he clings to politics so as to redefine his status and ego and here is yet another manifestation of his unstable identity. According to Jegede, he opines:

Lejoka-Brown, the leader had abandoned his flourishing cocoa business to join politics because the nature of our politics is one that easily transforms the political class overnight (155).

**Perception of Politics as a Game of Deceit in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi**

In Nigeria, politics is considered a joke and a game played by politicians and used for deceiving the general public. Politics is supposed to be a very serious matter aimed at bettering the society and improving the lives of the people. Unfortunately, politicians see it as a game of deceit and they are very adept in playing it out. Ola Rotimi exposes this through the character of Lejoka-Brown, the members of the National Liberation Party, Sikira and her mother, Madam Ajanaku. Lejoka-Brown as the leader of his party and campaign, falls out with the members of his party due to his funny and strange military tactics which he intends to use in winning the forthcoming elections. Some of his party members frown at it and call it a sham.

Mallam Gaskiya: And aside from the fact that the present leader of our party is so old-fashioned and autocratic about the risky implementation, whimsical strategy, the whole mumbo-jumbo about military exercise in a political set-up is a sham! (52).

The above statement leads to chaos, arising from the fact that Lejoka-Brown refuses to listen because he feels the other members of the party are well read and that he is not, therefore, he is not going to watch them take decisions on his behalf. Out of anger, he dismisses "the house". This leads to a state of disorder in the conference room. This shameful action of the politicians who are supposed to be seen as custodians of law and order in the society later spreads out into the public and puts a question mark on the character of Lejoka-Brown and his party members who intend to lead the country. Politics as a joke and a game to Nigerians is clearly seen when Lejoka-Brown schedules a peaceful meeting of some members of his party with the members of the press and photographers.

Lejoka-Brown: Honorable Gentlemen of the world press. We have invited you here this evening to see see for yourselves. There are rumours and rumours that the Deputy Leader of my Party, Malam Gaskiya ...and I are hammering one another in a hot, hot struggle for power. Now, Gentlemen, see for yourselves. The breeze in our nation smells with rotten stories that the Secretary-General of my Party...and I, do not see eye to eye anymore. But Gentlemen...see for yourselves! (61-62).

The many internal shenanigans of Nigerian politicians are exposed in the above statement. This shows how politics in Nigeria has been made a thing of joke and a game played by tacticians of deceit and lies. Nigerian perception of politics is reflected in the above statement of a supposed prospective leader. The lies and staged performance between him and his party members define the idea of politics as a joke and a game that must be played with people who knows the game. Even the reason for Sikira joining politics is for her to get back at Lejoka-Brown for



all the deceit and ill treatment she gets from him. The mother as well supports this motive by telling the National Liberation Party that the women's market vote will not be for them since the flag bearer, Lejoka-Brown is trying to use the daughter as a platform for vote accumulation. The National Liberation party, aware of this, decides to take the bull by the horn by telling Comrade Lejoka-Brown to step aside as not to lose the election and drag the party's name in the mud. According to a member of the party:

A Member: Mr Chairman...I...move that a vote of no confidence be cast on the

leadership of Mr Rahman Lejoka-Brown (67).

The motive of Sikira in joining politics and her mother giving her the support she needs to win the election is not to see to the welfare of the people or for the people to be legally and appropriately represented, but to ridicule and champion the debasement of Lejoka-Brown. Indeed, it is a joke and a game. Politics is being turned into a show of laughter and a game that is being toyed with by politicians at the expense of the development and prosperity of the people.

Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* presents a powerful portrayal of Nigerian perception of politics. Through the characters of Lejoka-Brown, Sikira and Madam Ajanaku, the playwright espouses the perceptions of politics in Nigeria's political field.

In conclusion, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* captures the perceptions of politics held by many Nigerian politicians: politics as a means of acquiring wealth, wielding power and influence, enhancing one's social status and ego, and a tool for deceit and amusement. In this play, the characters analyzed serve as symbolic representations of some Nigerian politicians and their perceptions of politics. Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* focuses on the antics of a retired military major who ventures into politics in order to accumulate, acquire power and influence, exercise authority as he pleases, and elevate his social status to match that of his Western-educated wife. The reality reflected in the text is that many Nigerian politicians possess a misguided perception of politics. As a result of this mindset, they often perform below expectations in their leadership responsibilities, thereby posing a significant challenge to the growth of democracy in Nigeria and effective governance in Africa as a whole. The play therefore serves as a critique of the self-serving attitudes that characterize political participation among some politicians and underscores the need for a reorientation towards politics as a vehicle for the public service and national development.

### Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Heinemann, 1984.
- Abrams, M H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. 8th edition. Thomson Wadsworth, 2005
- Allen, Fidelis. "Nigeria has a Democracy Deficit-Corruption and a Lack of Welfare Policies are to Blame, in *The Conversations*.
- Habib, M A R. *Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell Publications, 2011.
- Jegede, Emmanuel. "Satirical Drama, Political Corruption and Development Implications for Nigeria: A Reflection on Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*." *EJOTMAS: Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, vol.5, no.1-2, 2015, pp.120-134.
- Kay, Marie Weir, editor. *Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus*. Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 1988.
- Mayor, Michael, editor. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: For Advanced Learners (New Edition)*. Pearson Education Limited, 2009.
- Modebadze, Valrie. "The Term Politics Reconsidered in the Light of Recent Theoretical Developments". *IBSU Scientific Journal, International Black Sea University*, Tbilisi, vol 4, Issue 1, PP 39-44. <https://hdl.handle.net/10419/54647>
- Rotimi, Ola. *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*. Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Senanu, K.E, and T.Vincent. *A Selection of African Poetry*. Longman Group Limited, 1976.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Garland Publishing Inc, 1999.
- Umeh, Okey Patrick. *Poetry and Social Realities: The Nigerian Experience*. Benamax Publishers Limited, 1991.