



Pensioners Plight as Seen through Tunji Ogundimu's *Pensioners and Prisoners*

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.14588794](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14588794)

Submission Date: 14 Nov. 2024 | Published Date: 31 Dec. 2024

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Abstract

*This article aims at examining critically pensioners' predicament through a study of Tunji Ogundimu's *Pensioners and Prisoners*. The research work delves into the reality of retirees who solely rely on their pensions and gratuities to survive. It also intends to bring the African States to avoid despising the cry for help of the pensioners who have toiled for their countries for a long time before retiring. Pensioners' plight as Tunji Ogundimu views it in *Pensioners and Prisoners* constitutes a great handicap for the wellbeing of the civil servants who retire. The pensioners' plight may therefore be described as a humanitarian crisis since they suffer a lot and are unable to meet their fundamental needs. Hence the necessity to scrutinise it in order to denounce it for the improvement of the retirees' living conditions. I have used the qualitative research methodology in this research work, so as to find relevant information or data through documentary research. This methodology has enabled me to collect and analyse data coming from Internet sources, such as E-books and academic articles, and from library sources in order to carry out this research work efficiently. The Marxist critical approach which focuses on class struggle and concentrates on the power of money in literary works is the literary theory applied to this study. This literary theory is appropriate here because two opposed classes – the corrupt (the indelicate civil servants and politicians) and the non-corrupt (the pensioners) – are at stake. The study has found that pensioners are treated as prisoners in the novel under study, which is abnormal. It concludes that pensioners deserve a good treatment by the Nigerian government and by African governments at large.*

Keywords: Retirees, predicament, Nigeria, world, improvement.

Résumé

*Cet article vise à examiner de manière critique la situation difficile des retraités à travers une étude du roman intitulé *Pensioners and Prisoners* de Tunji Ogundimu. L'étude se penche sur la réalité des retraités qui dépendent uniquement de leurs pensions et de leurs gratifications pour survivre. Elle vise également à amener les États africains à ne pas mépriser l'appel à l'aide des retraités qui ont travaillé longtemps pour leur pays avant de prendre leur retraite. La situation des retraités, telle que Tunji Ogundimu la perçoit dans *Pensioners and Prisoners*, constitue un grand handicap pour le bien-être des fonctionnaires qui partent à la retraite. La situation critique des pensionnaires peut donc être décrite comme une crise humanitaire dès lors qu'ils souffrent énormément et sont incapables de satisfaire leurs besoins fondamentaux. D'où la nécessité de l'examiner de près afin de la dénoncer pour améliorer les conditions de vie des retraités. J'ai utilisé la méthodologie de recherche qualitative dans ce travail de recherche, afin de trouver des informations ou des données pertinentes par le biais de la recherche documentaire. Cette méthodologie m'a permis de collecter et d'analyser des données provenant de l'Internet, telles que des livres électroniques et des articles académiques, et de sources bibliothécaires afin de mener à bien ce travail de recherche. L'approche critique marxiste qui se fonde sur la lutte des classes et se concentre sur le pouvoir et l'argent dans les œuvres littéraires, est la théorie littéraire utilisée dans cette étude. Cette théorie littéraire est appropriée ici parce que deux classes opposées – les corrompus (les fonctionnaires et politiciens indelicats) et les non-corrompus (les pensionnaires) – sont en jeu. L'étude a montré que les retraités sont traités comme des prisonniers dans le roman étudié, ce qui est anormal. Elle conclut que les retraités méritent d'être bien traités par le gouvernement nigérian et les gouvernements africains en général.*

Mots-clés: Retraités, situation difficile, Nigéria, monde, amélioration.

Introduction

Ogundimu's works mostly deal with the societal issues as he severely criticises many social vices undermining the development of Nigeria and of Africa at large. One of the issues to which he tries to draw the attention of the public and of the Nigerian government is pensioners' predicament in Nigeria, where the novel is set. In this society where retirees suffer from the State governor's pig-headedness, the author addresses a serious and common issue worth being analysed and settled. This situation, not only occurs in the Nigerian society but it also occurs worldwide. Pensioners around the world suffer pains, hopelessness and a lot of frustration. Hence the importance of this study which intends to shed light on pensioners' plight in Ogundimu's *Pensioners and Prisoners*. In other words, this research work aims at examining critically the predicament of pensioners who resemble prisoners throughout this novel. Thereupon, I will show how the pensioners live on a daily basis with the State not paying their pensions and gratuities. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to present a thorough study of the discussion on pensioners' plight in Ogundimu's novel. The focus in this work is to bring out the effects of the delay in the payment of the pensioners' pensions and gratuities through Pa Joshua's life. Another purpose of this study is to show what happens when a government or a State fails to pay the dues of the retirees on time.

The theoretical framework of this study focuses on Marxism which is the literary theory used because of the class struggle prevailing in the novel under study which shows the disparities between the rich and the poor or rather between "the haves" and "the have nots." The research methodology employed to collect and process the data in this study is the qualitative research method through documentary research which encompasses online sources, such as articles and e-books, as well as library sources such as books. The theories and methods that I have chosen to use are pertinent insofar as they will induce an understanding of the theme under study and a literary appraisal of pensioners' plight through a study of the chosen novel. The study includes three aspects, namely Pa Joshua's struggle to get his pensions and gratuity, the general plight of the pensioners, and the responsibility of the government in the pensioners' plight.

1. Pa Joshua's Struggle to Get his Pension and Gratuity

The failure of the Nigerian Government to treat the retirees well by promptly paying their pensions and gratuities as soon as they retire has a lot of consequences on their social and economic wellbeing. Hence the necessity to examine this situation critically through a study of the chosen novel. Corruption leads some indelicate civil servants and politicians to seriously delay the payment of pensioners' pensions and gratuities. They want the poor pensioners to bribe them first before they examine the documents they have duly submitted. As a result, they toil everyday by going to the Ministry of Pensions and Gratuities early every day and going back home empty-handed. Some of them even end up dying in the process.

According to the Law Dictionary & Black's Law Dictionary 2nd Ed, Pension is "a retirement fund that is partial compensation in the future for work performed by employees and may contain some portion contributed by employees with a contribution from the employer." "Contributory pension, as the name implies, is a pension arrangement whereby the employer and employee contribute certain percentages of the employee's income towards the employee's pension at retirement" (E. U. Etuk, 2022, p. 266). "Pension has also been said to comprise the lump sum payment made to an employee upon his detachment from active service" (A. I. Adebayo and R. Dada, 2012, cited by E. U. Etuk, 2022, p. 266). "The new pension scheme which was established in 2004 under the Nigeria Pension Reform Act No. 2 is contributory in nature" (B. C. Uzoh and S. C. Anekwe, 2018, p. 531).

Fèmi Joshua, affectionately called Pa Joshua in *Pensioners and Prisoners*, is the protagonist of the novel under study. He is the first character that the author has introduced to the reader as a pensioner who struggles to get his pension and gratuity (p. 7). However, trying to get his pension is not enough to say that he is going through a predicament. His plight lies in the sufferings he endures as he attempts to obtain the payment of his entitlements. His countless trials to the Ministry of Pensions reveal the merciless treatment that the government inflicts to the retirees. Referring to the shortcomings of the Nigerian pension system, M. Egbosiuba (2012) declares:

Nigerian pension system is fraught with problems. Most pension funds are underfunded or simply not funded at all. Most have unsustainable outstanding pension liabilities with weak and inefficient pension administration. Most workers in the private sectors are not covered by any form of retirement benefits arrangements.

The first chapter of the novel recounts his first and second visits at the Ministry of Pensions. His predicament starts when he tries to get his pension unsuccessfully for several times. The first thing that has happened to him and which is the beginning of his plight is related to the fact that they ask him to bribe the officers with fifty thousand Naira the first time he has gone to the Ministry of Pensions. They say this is what he has to afford if he wants his pension to be paid fast. He replies that he cannot pay this amount as it can be understood from his answer to Kòfó, the clerk in the Ministry of

Pensions (p. 7). So, it appears that corruption is one of the issues that the author has addressed in the novel. It also appears that corruption is one of the main reasons why which pensioners' pensions are hanged for long.

Following the description of the events by the writer, it is clear that his plight has begun one year after his retirement. As a result, he has sold his car to pay his children's school fees, and this has not given him the full solution. The narrator reports that about one year of his retirement, "he had sold his Toyota Carina to pay school fees and finance Bóla's project. The sale did not solve the family's problems" (p. 92-93). It is clear that his lack of money leads him to sell most of his properties to solve problems temporarily. However, many other hard times have occurred to him as he lives without any of his entitlements paid.

The first problem identified in this research work is the inability for pensioners to take care of themselves and their families. Life after retirement often becomes tougher for pensioners even if their pensions are paid normally. For instance, many Japanese want to go to jail after they retire in order to survive (Ed Butler, 2019). However, in *Pensioners and Prisoners*, pensioners suffer from the non-payment of their dues. Pa Joshua's character is an illustration of this situation. He is heavily indebted, and he cannot provide for his family as he used to do while he was still in service. As a result, his son wants to leave the country for overseas to make a fortune (p. 11-15). His wife is driven out by her landlord from the shop she uses for her small trade and which helps them survive in the family (p. 22-28). This situation is due to the fact that she has not paid the rent of the shop for six months and Pa Joshua keeps asking the landlord for more time until he gets his pensions. Such a situation shows that things are not easy for the pensioners if the payment of their pensions is delayed. The fact that the landlord has driven Pa Joshua's wife out of her shop highlights the inability for them to ensure their business or their home basic needs.

The writer also underlines how pensioners' plight can restrain their children's future. Going to school is a way of changing one's life in our societies. It is paramount for the development of a nation and especially for the students who attend school and complete their studies. In the novel, the narrator tells us that Pa Joshua has three children: Bola, his first son, Yòmí, the younger son, and Bridget, his daughter, who is still a student. If Bola is an unemployed graduate, Bridget, is an SSSB student at Owólabi College. Pa Joshua has failed to pay his daughter's school fees. Therefore, she is expelled from the school and denied the exam papers. It can be seen in this dialogue between Pa Joshua and Julie, his wife:

'Your daughter has been suspended.'

'Suspended?' he raised his head.

'For non-payment of school fees.' (p. 19)

Even in Pa Joshua's daughter's answer, the reader understands that she cannot sit for the exams without paying her school fees. She tells her father that they have been called out during the assembly and are told not to bother coming for the examination if they do not pay their school fees. Through this situation, it is clear that children are affected their father's predicament. Pa Joshua has unsuccessfully negotiated so that his daughter should sit for her exam on credit. In short, his daughter has been suspended from school and is not allowed to "write her exams on credit" (p. 48). This is a restraint to the children's future. Worse, most of the students expelled from the school for the non-payment of fees are pensioners' children. This unveils the catastrophe in which pensioners find themselves. It is therefore obvious that pensioners' plight also affects their children's future. This is due to the fact that most of them rely on their pensions to take care of their families, especially to ensure their children's schooling.

Another issue which occurs when retirees are left without any pension or gratuity is the psychological impact. This is a common issue worth being analysed. People are likely to suffer from psychological problems or worries when they are not able to get what they deserve. In the novel under study, the main character's life exemplifies this situation. Throughout the novel, the writer often describes Pa Joshua as someone who has been thoughtful and worried about his living conditions brought about by the non-payment of his pension and gratuity. The narrator says that when he has returned home from another outing to the Ministry of Pensions, his wife's reaction has pained him. As a consequence, "Pa Joshua sighed, ready to cry" (p. 29). This shows how hard it has become too hard for him to bear his harsh living conditions. He inwardly knows that his wife's attitude towards him that day is motivated by his incapability to ensure the basic needs of his family. They almost live without hope; moreover, Pa Joshua is facing an everyday humiliation just like the other pensioners.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'humiliation' as 'the state of being humiliated, humbled or reduced to lowliness or submission.' It pains the person who is victim of it. Pa Joshua has gone through so much humiliation in the novel. From his landlords, to the drivers and even through his wife's reaction to his fruitless trials to get his pensions at the Ministry of Pensions. His wife's landlord has insulted his family as it appears in what Pa Joshua says in this excerpt: "You don't have to insult my family, Chief. My wife is not denying he owes you. When an offender admits to being culpable, he is not kept long on his knees for too long" (p. 25). This statement makes it clear that the pensioner has been

humiliated. The landlord talks to him as he wants by alluding to his family the way it pleases him, just because of the unpaid rent.

Pa Joshua is even bound to hide when his landlord, Alhaji Ramoni, has come to claim indirectly for his rent. He tries to simulate his absence because of the rent he has not paid. But when he realises that it is not wise, he comes out of his hiding place in shame to face the landlord who asks him to pack up and leave his house within a month (p. 82-86). In addition, on his way to Oloke Meji, he has been humiliated by a taxi driver who has agreed to take him to his destination just for 200 Naira. However, to Pa Joshua's great surprise, when the driver has found three other passengers with the best offer, he asks him to get off his car. Reluctantly, he gets off the car, knowing that he has just suffered another humiliation because he has no money as a result of the non-payment of his entitlements (p. 98). So, this kind of stuff illustrates what any retiree is likely to go through when his or her pension is not paid on time. Humiliation is so painful for anyone; however, retiree citizens go through it as shown in the novel under study.

Y. C. Aguessy (2019, p. 115) writes: "The plight is so critical that even the basic services are not ensured. Pa Joshua cannot afford a transport fare of a six kilometers trip. So, he has to wake up early in the morning, braving and going through darkness [...]. The narrator recounts this sad fact in the quote below:

Having said their morning prayers, Pa Joshua told his wife that he had to trek to the Pensions Office. Julie did not ask him why; they both know the reason.

Julie opened the door, looked out, paused and cast a doubtful glance back at him. 'But it is still dark outside?' Yes, but it's almost six o'clock. You know I can't walk in the sun; and Falode to Oke-Mala is about six kilometers. If I get there before the office opens, I shall wait. I stand to lose nothing, if I wait.'

'Okay, I wish good luck.'

'Thank you darling.' (p. 16)

Through this conversation, it is clear that Pa Joshua cannot even pay the daily small expenses. After spending years working for his State, he cannot afford to live a peaceful life. Despite the fact that he has tried everything, his situation at home and at the Ministry of Pensions has not changed. He has done all that he can. He has even called a commissioner, a pastor (known as Pastor Fakorede), who is said to be close to the Governor, but nothing good, except a huge disappointment, has come from him. Pa Joshua is not allowed to meet the Governor. The instruction has been given to each of the commissioners to focus their attention on the assignment given to them by the Governor, and not to intervene in the affairs of other ministries. The help Pa Joshua has asked for is simple: "have a word on behalf of pensioners before the Government" (p. 68). The commissioner's refusal to allow Pa Joshua to meet the Governor clearly shows that all the government members are well aware of the pensioners' plight. It also shows how a category of people exerts their dominion over another category of people by the means of pensions. The pensioners who represent the working class suffer because of the greed of the employers representing the government. Referring to Governors' deplorable attitude towards pensioners, S. Tella (2023), declares:

The Nigerian pensioners are usually presumed dead long before actual death. That was why an ex-governor, while still in the saddle, referred to pensioners as dead people. When journalists asked him what had been done to assuage the plight of pensioners who protested the non-payment of their pension, the ex-governor told them that he was still battling to pay the outstanding salaries of the living and "the dead ones were making a noise."

Pensioners' plight is seen as a prison for them, as suggested by the title of the novel under study. The reader discovers the extent of the pensioners' predicament the day Pa Joshua has gone to ask for help from the commissioner of religious affairs, Pastor Fakorede. "Our pensions have been hanging in the air for thirty-two months" (p. 67). As a result of that, they live hell on earth. Every day of their lives becomes a difficult challenge to embrace. They live in debts and are subsequently unable to get loans again because they cannot pay back what they have already taken. It can be seen in Pa Joshua's response to his wife as he cannot pay his daughter's school fees. He says, "Already, I'm neck-deep in debts; I do not know how else I can raise money. I have borrowed from all my friends and relatives. They are all pressing me for payment. I cannot go back to them" (p. 38).

This response highlights the hardness of life for a pensioner whose pension is not paid. It makes his living conditions so critical and unbearable that his son compares him to a prisoner. Worse still, the normal prisoner is better than him, according to his own son. The words and the language used by Pa Joshua's son unveil the reality of what his father goes through as a pensioner on a daily basis. Bola tells his father:

I regard you as a pensioner-prisoner and I asked myself; are you not worse than a normal prisoner? At least, a regular prisoner is aware that he is paying for a crime which he committed. He has been tried and found guilty. And even then, the state provides his food. But here you are, after your meritorious service; thrown overboard, hungry and helpless. (p. 80)

As it is said in this statement, the pensioners are like prisoners who are not charged with any guilt. However, they suffer more than real prisoners who are fed by the State that has jailed them. This comparison even justifies the title of novel: *Pensioners and Prisoners*. It really shows what the pensioners go through since they cannot even ensure their basic needs. They suffer continuously and are unable to get their pensions. The State forgets them and continues keeping them in a continual distress which can be compared to a prison. Moreover, the merciless treatment that the government reserves to the pensioners is also outlined in the statement.

Another situation which pensioners often face after they retire is health problem. Being healthy is everyone's will. People generally say 'Health before everything.' so, health should be a priority in life. This underlines the importance of health for anyone and health before anything else. But to be healthy, one does not only need good hygiene but also money to eat well and take care of oneself. Pensioners are often sick and are unable to get a good treatment because they lack money. Pa Joshua's case has been highlighted in his statement to the Commissioner, Fákóredé, as he seeks for the latter's assistance: "My health has been unstable for the past two and half months and it is getting worse. I can pay neither hospital bills nor buy prescribed drugs. It seems that I am at the end of the road. I don't know where to turn" (p. 67). Through his statement, it is obvious that his health issues are directly related to his state of being penniless. He does not enjoy good health due to his poverty brought about by the non-payment of his old-age pension.

Like Pa Joshua, in Adimora-Ezeigbo Akachi's *Trafficked* as cited by O. Solomon and G. Olaniyan (2019, p. 111), "Ogukwe is a pensioner who hopelessly waits for his pension." They also report that Ogukwe is supposed to be the breadwinner; unfortunately, he cannot help the situation. All these things make Nneoma opt to travel out in order to escape the pangs of penury. Ogukwe hears a strange rumour that the Federal Government is going to pay outstanding gratuities to retirees. The source informs him that those that have waited for up to five years would be attended to first. This seems to be the fulfilment of his age-long dream. They refer to Ogukwe's daughter, Mma, as expressing pessimism by saying: "This is cheerful news. But let's not rejoice until the money is in your hands. I don't trust our government. Look at the teachers' strike, nothing has been done about it. We have forgotten very thing we learned in school. No one knows if we will ever go back" (A. E. Akachi, 2008, p. 110).

Following this development of the case of Ogukwe, a pensioner, it is obvious that pensioners' plight is a worldwide issue hitting everywhere and everyone. As in the novel under study, there are announcements in *Trafficked* from the government to pay the pensioners' money. Yet, the main character's daughter shows her pessimism as seen in her statement. This also brings out the government's lies concerning the pensions' payment. The situation can then be described as alarming since a lot of people experience it around the world.

As the novel progresses in describing the desperate situation of the pensioners, the pensioners decide to take actions in order to force the government into paying their entitlements. This action is described as the fight for their pensions, in which several people, including the youth's association, get involved. In this fight, Pa Joshua is nominated as the State Chairman of the National Union of Pensioners (p. 127). This comes as a result of his commitment and determination throughout the novel. He is the one whose endurance shows the resilience of some pensioners despite the different frustrations, pains and sufferings they experience as their pensions and gratuities remain unpaid.

The pensioners, under Pa Joshua's leadership, have eventually succeeded in overthrowing the Governor, Awawi, the root cause of the pensioners' crisis. It is following the series of protests during which many pensioners have paid the price through their lives that the governor has been ejected from his position of Governor. The new appointed Governor, Bimpe Àjànàkú, has promised to start the payment of the pensions of the retirees just the following week. Even though the author makes no hint of how and when the payment of the pensioners' pensions would start, the latter are confident, albeit with reserve, in these political promises. Yet, through Pa Joshua's words after he is released from prison, the narrator makes it clear that there is a sigh of relief in the pensioners' hearts.

2. General Plight of the Pensioners

Pensioners are people who have retired from a job or people who are old and unable to work due to a sickness or an infirmity. They live from the pensions that the government or the company they have worked for pays them after their have retired. Unfortunately, the reality is that when most of the pensioners retire, they hardly get their pensions before their death. Paddy Ezeala (2019) has reported that in Nigeria, where *Pensioners and Prisoners* is set, from the year 2000 to the moment he wrote his article "Understanding the plight of pensioners," many retirees have died without collecting their entitlements. He posits:

A governor in one of the states in the southeast, more than a decade ago, in the full glare of television cameras, said that it was better for him to take care of current workers in his state than to devote state resources to pay gratuities to those who were already retired from service. This governor never had any paid employment in his life; neither did his parents nor siblings. A retirement benefit to him was more or less an unwarranted

distraction. In this state, no retiree till date has received any gratuity since the year 2000. Many retirees have since died without collecting their entitlements. Current workers are also not that hopeful that they would be receiving their entitlements as and when due on retirement. Even salaries are not received regularly. The horizon has been gloomy.

The quotation reveals one of the causes of the early death of the pensioners after their retirement: the delay in the payment of the pensions and gratuities which has led them through a real predicament and eventually to their death. However, as the situation keeps rising, there are authors who keep writing about this desperate and critical situation these people go through every day. M. Ivor Takor (2017) says:

Nigerian pensioners have had a raw deal and continue to suffer in the hands of employers, who are expected to protect them against old age poverty and destitution. Employers in the first place, based on contractual agreements have a legal and moral obligation to protect workers against old age destitution and poverty. Unfortunately, it is these same employers who have opened them up against old age destitution and poverty especially in the public service.

M. Ivor Takor further views the plight of Nigerian pensioners in terms of bad reforms which make pensioners suffer a lot. He relates the main reason for such a situation to the fact that “Public service pension was unfunded, relying on annual budgetary allocation thereby having outstanding liabilities, with workers who retired, not knowing when their benefits will be paid, thereby leaving them in the streets as destitute beggars” (M. Ivor Takor, (2017).

The pensioners’ plight is so dramatic that “It was common sight around Agura hotel in Abuja to see military pensioners who came from their home states or who were unable to return to their home states, waiting indefinitely for the day their retirement benefits will be paid” (M. Ivor Takor (2017).

Even civilians are not spared as M. Ivor Takor (2017) writes:

Civilian public service pensioners were not better off. They also became destitute, dying in droves as a result of hunger and lack of health care. The real shame for the nation was during the annual dehumanising ritual called pensioners verification exercise. This was the time when these senior citizens were made to lineup supported by their children or relations to be counted among the living. It was meant to be a punishment for those of them who were still alive, for having not died like their colleagues who had died without testing the fruits of their labour (gratuity and pension). (M. Ivor Takor, 2017)

Many things can happen to pensioners when the Government fails to satisfy them. In the novel, the writer shows us the critical situation in which the pensioners find themselves as a result of the unpaid pensions and gratuities. Pensioners’ predicament through Tunji Ogundimu’s *Pensioners and Prisoners* needs to be analysed carefully. As in any other climes around the world, pensioners suffer a lot when their entitlements are not paid on time, or when they are denied the payment of their dues. It is a serious matter which draws the readers’ attention. As a matter of fact, the author describes the pensioners’ lives as being worse after their retirement. In the novel, he points out that all the pensioners regularly visit the Ministry of Pensions, expecting to get relieving news, that is to say having their pensions arrears paid. Yet, their plight never stops increasing since the government releases no money to anyone among the pensioners. In other words, the pensioners are always living in the hope that they will be paid one day. However, their visits to the Ministry of Pensions and Gratuities have never brought goods news. Only frustration after frustration.

In the novel under study, the National Union of Pensioners has unsuccessfully tried several times to meet the Governor. They are always told that he is not at his desk. Pa Joshua is not the only pensioner who has seriously suffered from the lack of payment of pensions and gratuities. When such a situation occurs, no one is spared. Some live in bad conditions, while others live in worse ones. It is true that the author describes Pa Joshua’s situation as bad in the novel; however, he shows that many pensioners are in a state worse than his. Pa Joshua laments: “[...]. Governor Àwáwí has knocked down every pensioner out. I am not the only one in a tight corner. Many of my colleagues are suffering like me. Some are worse off” (p. 42). The statement makes it clear that the non-payment of the pensions has led to a general crisis in Oyan State. Pa Joshua’s character is just used to follow with precision the scale of the plight in which pensioners find themselves. Although it is known that most of them may be sick, overwhelmed by their living conditions, it should be noted that some of them have died while waiting for their pensions.

Another issue which occurs to pensioners as they wait impatiently for their pensions is death. When all the things you rely on to survive are not provided, it causes stress and sometimes death from exhaustion. In *Pensioners and Prisoners*, T. Ogundimu makes the account of what has happened to pensioners whose pensions have not been paid by the government. He reveals that most of the retirees have died while expecting their pensions in vain.

The next predicament of pensioners occurs with the screening exercise initiated by the government. This screening exercise is used as a sign of relief for the pensioners because it is regularly announced that the government is ready to pay the pensions. However, because of Governor Awawi's incapability to handle the situation, it has become something else. As the narrator puts it, it has become an "exercise in futility" (p. 108). This process aims at eliminating "ghost pensioners" according to the government. The government regularly does it and yet the pensioners' situation has not changed. It has happened about three times since Pa Joshua has retired; yet, the pensioners could find no essence in those screenings. Pa Joshua laments: "What is the essence of the current screening?" (p. 105). Unable to answer this question, they come to the conclusion that it is a way for the government "to buy time and fix their money in banks to generate interest for sharing" (p. 105).

One can conclude that the screening process is of no profit to the pensioners. It only favours the government and allows it to show the people that it is preoccupied by the pensioners' predicament. However, the pensioners continue to suffer with all kinds of difficulties and die from exhaustion. The writer describes the screening exercise as deadly for pensioners because most of them have died during and after the screening. Twenty-two pensioners have died during and immediately after those screening exercises (p. 143).

The general plight of the pensioners is clearly noticed for the first time in the novel during this screening process. It publicly exposes the pensioners' predicament, showing the difficulties in which all the pensioners are. Pa Joshua realises how fragile he is if he does not take care of his health. The situation of one old woman carried on the back by her daughter shows how wretched they are.

The pensioners' plight has reached its peak with the continual killing of the pensioners during their claims when the Forum for the Youth Unemployed Graduates has got involved. It is even seen in the statement of Faruk, the chairman of this forum: "Many things are going wrong in this State, the pensioners' crisis is getting worse. Our government has gradually become intolerant and cold-hearted. Violence is escalating" (p. 119). This quotation highlights the worsening of the pensioners' crisis. The government is merciless with the pensioners every day. They go through unprecedented killing in their peaceful claims. The leaders' lack of sympathy for the pensioners is the main reason for their plight. Apart from the many vices which have become the common practice in the State, the pensioners' plight joins the issues related to social disparities. All of them need to be addressed for the development of our societies. In the novel, the means that the pensioners use to claim their pensions and gratuity is protest. This protest includes the struggle for pensions and gratuity.

Commitment and fighting are most of the time the weapons used to reduce the social disparities. After all the attempts of the pensioners to get their entitlements have failed, further actions and means are often required. It has become the common practice in many people's daily lives, especially when dealing with upper classes which are in this context the governments. *Pensioners and Prisoners* recounts the predicament of pensioners who endure the resistance and pig-headedness of their State to pay their pensions and gratuity. After three years of their retirements, new pensioners have joined the group of old pensioners whose pensions have remained unpaid for a long time. So, the members of this class of the have-nots have used the means at their disposal to fight for their pensions through a genuine commitment from all the members. The pensioners' union is supported by the Forum of the Unemployed Graduates to fight not only for the release of the pensioners' pensions and gratuity, but also for the problem of the youth's unemployment. The Students' Union Government of the State University which is not used to partaking in the demonstrations against the government in the State joins in the youths to protest. It should also be noted that even artisans and idle youths have joined the demonstration. It is evident that the matter is too serious to the point that nobody keeps silent. The first two unions have drawn so many people to join in their fight.

The writer uses so many techniques to show how the people in his culture do react to the government's merciless treatment of the pensioners. It is mainly noticed during the protest. Moreover, the author has used so many literary devices to criticise the government's merciless treatment of the pensioners. It can be seen through the abundant use of proverbs from the Yoruba culture and even songs. Their use is motivated by the author's will to convey his message by sticking to his own culture. The power of songs is a means to strengthen the pensioners' fight. In the novel, four songs are used by the pensioners while claiming their pensions. They use them as a weapon not to kill anyone but to express their desperate situation and plead with Governor Awawi and his government to hear their cry and pay their pensions. However, these songs are not welcome by the Governor who finds them annoying, offending and intending to curse him or demean his status.

The first song composed and sung by a drummer that the pensioners have hired is written in the Yoruba language. The song chorus is "*Gbogbo wa ni ó dítàn*," which is translated into English as "We shall all become history" (p. 145). This song outlines the pensioners' determination to make history through their struggle. This has led the Governor to accuse them of trying to "disparage constituted authority." Yet, for this first song, though he has got annoyed, he has managed to

show on a broadcast that pensioners are to blame for not caring for in-service workers. The next song is entitled “The Executive Quack” and its chorus is “*Alugbenren, Babaláwo, a wá bèbè*” meaning “Babaláwo, we have come to plead” (p. 151). This song relates the unkept promises of the Governor and his government. This song also annoys the Governor, but the pensioners have not given up their pleas.

The third one is “*Bo lè dogun kó dogun*”, sung by the Youths’ Union from Penséké to Òke-Málà. The song means “Let it become a war, if it must!” (p. 173). It has been sung by the youth protesting against the killing of the pensioners and against the unemployment of the youth in the State under the rule of the same Governor. However, the chairman of the youth association, Faruk, stops his colleagues from singing the song, marvelling that their protest is not a declaration of war to the State government. The halt to this song has pushed one lady who is said to be in the rear of the crowd to sing another song. This song represents the last of the fourth songs used by T. Ogundimu to show how pensioners have led the protest in order to win their fight.

“*Bígbábá dojúdé, à á sí í*” is that fourth song, which the author has translated as “If the calabash overturns, we shall open it.” The song is also another “war song.” Once more, the youths’ chairman has tried to halt them from singing, but it is too late. Those songs would not be welcome when heard by the governor who hates hearing them. Therefore, it can be noted that songs are powerful instruments used in the novel to expose the seriousness of the retirees’ crisis. The writer, T. Ogundimu, seems to have been inspired by the real protests which take place as soon as some trade unions or associations go on streets to ask for better working conditions or for better living conditions. Songs appear to be a weapon that energises and strengthens people’s demonstrations.

Another means by the pensioners have used to enhance their demonstration and determination to force the Awawi government into giving in to their claims is invoking the god of iron named “*Ogun*” through a ritual. The term “ritual” is defined by *Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary* as “a series of actions that are always performed in the same way, especially as a part of religious ceremony.” This practice is said to be uncommon in the State during public demonstrations. The narrator says that it is unannounced and unexpected at official demonstrations of this nature. Particularly, he adds that it is an improbable performance, at Oke-Mala, in front of the Government Secretariat (p. 158).

Obviously, the pensioners are willing to show that they are no longer joking. “Enough is enough,” as people usually say when they become overwhelmed by a situation, and they are ready to stand up against this kind of injustice that they have been undergoing. As for the ritual which consists in invoking *Ogun*, the god of iron, the members of the National Union of Pensioners (NUP) have been assigned to come with cooking-pots at the Secretariat of the Government at Oke-Mala the following day morning. The Ministry of Pension and Gratuity is located there. The narrator tells us that most of the members are excited at their being told to bring cooking-pots for the following day morning to continue the fight. However, the narrator also says that they do not know why they are asked to bring those kitchen utensils. As a matter of fact, these pots with other ingredients brought by their PRO would serve to perform a ritual, during which the god of iron would be invoked on behalf of all the crimes and killings that the Governor and his administration have committed. An arena is then created with the cooking-pots and all the members of the union are gathered there, watching in suspense what the PRO is doing. The ministry workers are also watching with great astonishment the scene from afar. He created something like a statue on whose face he poured out palm oil.

When the PRO has finished what he ought to do, the Secretary Assistant of the Union has called two other people. The latter made the scene more serious and worrisome by bringing out some stuffs which are a taboo for the god of iron. Knowing that their god does hate the ingredients that he is pouring out on the god’s statue they have made, he has started to invoke and call on his revenge and wrath on their enemies. This is how the narrator describes the whole scene of their incantations to *Ogun*, the god of iron:

‘This is àdí,’ he told them. With the left hand, he shoved the pack of salt and said, ‘This is iyo.’ He walked round the heap, allowing the darkish oil to pour down as he moved on. He stopped after the third round and began to extol *Ogun*’s qualities as the avenger of the oppressed. ‘*Ogún Lákáayé Osinmolè, onílé kángun-kángun òrun, aṣẹgbè léyin eni à í dá lóró.* ‘Your enemies are starving you and starving the populace. They are feeding us with bladder. And, as if that was not bad enough, they have colluded to send this salt and àdí to you. They know too well that salt is your taboo. They also know that you hate àdí in the extreme. Yet, it is what they offer you. This looks like a challenge. But it is worse. It is a provocation! They are daring you. It is for you to take vengeance, within seven days as is your practice. It is for you to show them that nobody can dare *Ogún* and go scot free. Nobody! Don’t forgive these executive thieves. They had been stifling and killing us gradually. But they were not satisfied. Now they are shooting at us. *Ogun*, quickly come to our rescue. Take vengeance on our enemies. We are sure you will do it. (p. 157-158)

The above quotation is about the ritual which is performed by the protesters in claiming the pensioners’ pensions. All this ritual has one aim: to revenge them from the Governor and his government for failing to hear the pensioners’ cries and

take concrete actions. It also aims at making them come to terms with the pensioners lest they should go through the consequences of their pig head ness and mass killings of the pensioners. This unfolding ritual looks unusual before the eyes of all the ministry workers and even among the members of the Union. This practice qualified as a “sinister ritual” by the author would hit everyone involved in offending the adepts of the god of iron. It is expected to have more consequences on the oppressors. Later, the ritual bears fruits with the killing of the Governor’s son in a car accident.

The fact that the writer uses this ritual, shows the extent to which the exhausted pensioners can act. However, he has gone far by using this technique to portray the pensioners’ situation. It is true that their plight has reached a level of exhaustion, but an overstatement can be noticed in his description of the situation. Writing about a ritual being performed during a demonstration is seen in this context as an alternative to solving pensioners’ plight. In the end, “Pensioners helped by the youth impeach Governor Awawi and free their social class from [the] precarious living condition[s] they experience” (Y. C. Aguessy, 2019, p. 110).

3. Responsibility of the Government in the Pensioners’ Plight

In the novel under study, the pensioners’ plight mainly comes from the responsibility of their state government. Although one may think that the pensioners themselves are responsible for their own plight for failing to fight for their rights while they were still in service, it is crystal clear that the government is solely responsible for their plight. The government plays an important role in its people’s welfare or distress. When things are going right in a country with its people, it may be because of the good will of their State or government to properly manage the resources of the country. In the same way, when a group of people who work for the government suffer, it is also the responsibility of their State or government. That is what the reader of *Pensioners and Prisoners* can understand as he or she reads the novel. Pensioners are people who spend their lives working for their State. But as soon as they retire, the same State turns its back on them, leaving them without pensions and gratuity for three complete years. The fight between the pensioners and the government is one with unequal arms. They have suffered from what is known as the State’s lack of sympathy for the retiree citizens.

These old and helpless people, senior citizens, as they are known in the novel, live in desperate conditions. The author even writes that so many of them have died waiting in vain for their pensions and gratuity. As if that were not enough, this same State they have worked for kills them as they stand up to peacefully claim their pensions and gratuity. This can be equated to the use of violence against peaceful protesters. The author writes about the shooting that has taken place the second time the pensioners’ leaders have gone, in a small group, to meet the Governor and talk with him. The narrator explains that three people among them have lost their lives. This includes the Chairman of the NUP, the secretary and one female demonstrator. Some of them, including the group’s PRO, are wounded. The narrator says: “Unfortunately, stray bullets and panic did a tragic job. The Chairman, the secretary and of the two female demonstrators lost their lives” (p. 115).

It clearly appears that the government uses violence to repel the peaceful pensioners’ union by causing the death of some of them. However, the States’ News never talks about the happenings. But using the government’s propaganda, the news, quickly corrupted by the Governor’s Adviser on Media and Publicity spread false claims about it. They talk about saving the Governor’s life against hoodlums (p. 116). As the novel progresses, the attempts made by the pensioners to get their pensions paid has been to no avail. It becomes obvious that the Oyan State Governor has no disposition to pay the pensioners’ entitlements.

The Pensioners try to speak with him several times, but they are never given the chance to do so. It seems that he has given instructions to his staff never to tell the pensioners that he is in his office. The latter always announce his unavailability or absence to the pensioners: “His Excellency only came in to sign some urgent documents. He is very busy at the moment and his schedule will be tight for the next few weeks” (p. 108); “He may not come back today” (p. 110). Even his deputy Governor supports his absence and wants the pensioners to believe him. However, the truth is that the pensioners’ delegation knows that the so-called absent Governor is around. He is only not willing to receive them. The State resistance to the pensioners’ claim to see their entitlements paid is also marked by the Governor’s strong opposition. The pensioners’ attempts to have their pensions and gratuity paid have “annoyed” Àwáwí (the State’s Governor) who has gone on the radio to spread false news. He blames them for their plight and accusing them of trying to despise him as governor (p. 144).

Another charges he puts forward against them is their responsibility for trying to “disparage the constituted authority” (p. 145). Again, he falsely claims that the pensioners are expired political enemies trying to oppose him and his government. Worse still, he asks a question to know if his government should pay pension arrears while those who are still working are not yet paid (p. 146). His message on the air is clear, he is doing the right thing for the State while pensioners are wrong in their doings. It is crystal clear from this attitude of the governor that he is an arrogant man. He

boasts over lies by looking down on pensioners and by harshly criticising them. By using his character, the writer shows that when some people have the power over others, they use it to despise the people under them.

These claims from the Governor show his merciless attitude towards the pensioners. He spreads false information to lead the public to condemn the pensioners' protests as if they were the ones who want to steal the government. The claims make him look like a good and right ruler while the pensioners, the protesters should be considered as the State's enemies.

Another cause of the pensioners' plight is the Governor's greed. According to *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, "greed is a strong desire for more wealth, possessions, power than a person needs." If pensioners have gone years without any payment of their entitlements, it is mainly because of the greed of the governor. As illustrated by the cover page of the novel, the Governor has sat down on pensioners' money. He wants to be the only one to have money. After the unfolding ritual that has taken place in front the Government's Secretariat, Pa Joshua, the demonstrators' leader, declares:

Many understand that the just exercise will have far-reaching consequences. First, it should portray the futility of greed. Two, it should show that a community can eat and exhaust the food provided by an individual, who decides to feast them; no matter the quantity of such food (...). So Awawi has to learn that too much greed is insanity. (p. 159)

The author uses this statement to highlight the selfishness of the Governor who thinks of himself only. As if this were not enough, he puts his hands on other people's money. His attitude may be seen as greed. Greed is a vice. A greedy person cares for himself only. Other people are seen as unimportant and not having any need. Or if they have, a greedy man wants to have more than anyone else.

Another issue which has been found with government is corruption. According to *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, corruption is "a dishonest, illegal behaviour, especially of people in authority." In other words, the concept of corruption is mostly related to those in positions of power, such as managers or government officials. Corruption is everywhere. But it often said to be the cause of the problems in poorer countries. Nigeria is one of those developing countries where corruption is a common practice in public administrations. That is what T. Ogundimu debunks through the delay in the payment of the pensioners' pensions and gratuity, especially Pa Joshua's pensions and arrears, in *Pensioners and Prisoners*. As his pensions do not come after he has retired, Pa Joshua starts to visit the Ministry of Pension and Gratuity to see what is going on so that his pension and gratuity should be released. To his great surprise, the ministry workers have asked him to pay some "fifty thousand naira," which he rejects by saying that he cannot afford to pay this amount of money. This is required from him by a man in the office named Mr Ajégunlè and a lady named Kofo (p. 7). As Y. C. Aguessy, (2019, p. 116) puts it, "Corruption is in full swing. Civil servants go up to ask a pensioner with more than eight months of non-payment, bribe." Pensioners like Pa Joshua who try to resist the phenomenon become curious people. When Pa Joshua refused to offer bribe, "[...] the woman threw a sarcastic glance almost asking "how do others get it?" She did not put the question openly though; but her look was eloquent enough for him to understand" (p. 8). This is a shameful situation; and to hide their shame those corrupt civil servants commonly claim that "only those who wet the ground shall step on moistened land" (p. 9). So, corruption "has been turned into a socially acceptable phenomenon" (Y. C. Aguessy, 2019, p. 116).

They say that if he wants his pensions to be paid fast, he has to give some money in exchange of the speedy processing of the payment of his pensions and arrears. The narrator says: "That day Mr. Ajégunlè had sat him down and quietly advised on what to do, if he wanted his pension and gratuity paid as early as possible. He said that he should find something for the lady to speed up the process; that she was very energetic and would personally do the follow-up" (p. 19).

It is what the ministry workers require from a pensioner for the payment of his pension and gratuity. This is called corruption from the officials who are supposed to fight against corruption. However, when Pa Joshua refuses to give in to their demand to corrupt them, the lady says something which clearly shows that they have made other pensioners corrupt them. When Pa Joshua answers her that he has no money to pay them, the lady retorts: "How do others get it?" (p. 8). Through this quotation, it is clear that the pensioners' entitlements can be paid fast. It also means that the State does not lack money to pay its pensioners. However, corruption is prevailing over ethics. By pointing out this practice at that point, the author wants to show that one of the major issues which undermine the development of Nigerian is corruption. Pa Joshua's refusal to corrupt the officials explains that the writer is against corruption and wants to condemn its practise.

M. Egbosiuba (2012) condemns the hardship that the Nigerian government inflicts to the poor retirees as follows:

The monthly ritual of frail individuals who could barely work straight without the aid of a stick, some so old they shake while in a queue for several hours or days waiting to collect their check is a sickening sight for any

sane person. Some of these pensioners have endured abuses and uncondusive work environment while in service and now have to put up with months of waiting for their paltry gratuity. The worst part is that the pension backlog runs into months and years without any sense of urgency by the government officials who are supposed to know better. Even in the year 2012, the story has not changed much. Nigerian media have been awash with news of many of pensioners collapsing in various parts of the country, some dying while standing in queue to collect their meager stipends. The story has been the same from the military to the police to the civil servants. The unending nightmare of fraud perpetuated on pension accounts is inflicting untold hardship and pains to retirees. They read on daily newspapers how their entitlements are embezzled by government officials who are supposed to manage their pension.

Senate president, David Mark, seems to back up what M. Egbosiuba (2012) has said as it can be seen in the quote below:

Senate president, David Mark, who declared the public hearing open remarked that “if your wealth is from people’s pensions then that is blood money. It is a blood money because you cannot take away the sweat, the entitlements of an old man or an old woman who is looking up just to that little appreciation from his country and believe that he will live in peace. You cannot because the prayers of those old men at home will not only follow you, it will also follow your children and children’s children.”

According to Mark, “Pensioners are pensioners because they have served their nation faithfully and on retirement must become a part of that vulnerable population that must be properly taken care of.” Well said, Senator Mark. (M. Egbosiuba, 2012)

In *Pensioners and Prisoners*, the author shows how badly the government treats the pensioners. It has no concrete plan for pensions even though the federal government has created a Ministry of Pension and Gratuity. But this has not served the pensioners but the governor Awawi whom the author describes as an “executive quack” (p. 149). As a result of the government’s failure to listen to the retirees, they indulge in all sorts of unimaginable jobs. That is what F. A. Eboiyehi (2006, p. 245) deplores when he writes:

Findings show that pensioners are passing through psychological trauma in Nigeria due to [the] the non-payment of their pensions and gratuities. Consequently, some of them have died of hunger, depression and preventable ailment. In [their] attempt to avoid untimely death, some of the pensioners have engaged in all kinds of odd jobs such as alms begging, night guards, petty trading and small scale farming.

The above quotation clearly shows that the Nigerian government has pushed the retirees to do odd jobs instead of allowing them to take advantage of their pensions and gratuities to live decently. Deploring the retirees’ plight in Nigeria, K. E. Uma and H. O. R. Ogwuru (2015, p. 1441) write:

Disgustingly, what many retirees pass through to access their pension contributory funds at [the] federal level is repulsive and most critical at state and local government levels. In his comparison of the treatment of pensioners in Nigeria vis a vis [sic] few developed nations, Fuayafik (2014) asserts that the existence of great disregard of the elderly or pensioners by the society and the climax of this inhuman treatment is the actions of the government.

The foregoing quotation shows that the government inflicts an inhuman treatment to the pensioners. It means that the government is mainly responsible for their plight.

Conclusion

The study has dealt with three aspects, namely Pa Joshua’s struggle to get his pensions and gratuity, the general plight of the pensioners, and the responsibility of the government in the pensioners’ plight. It has endeavoured to shed light on the pensioners’ plight through the novel under study which constitutes the primary source and secondary sources which are critical documents on the Nigerian pensioners’ plight. The study has revealed the hardship that the pensioners have undergone is due to their merciless government. This government through the Governor has prevented the Pensioners from getting their pensions and gratuities. Their situation may be described as a humanitarian crisis since the pensioners suffer a lot and are unable to meet the fundamental needs. Proverbs and songs are the literary techniques that the writer has used to convey his message. He has succeeded in impacting his readers by showing that the Nigerian government has failed in the payment of the retirees’ pensions and gratuities and by showing that the Nigerian pensioners are keen on fighting for their rights. Even though the novel tells us about no concrete payment of their entitlements, it is must be noted that the fight has been fruitful. The writer has shown through different ways how the pensioners have protested, using rituals, and their determination to force the Governor and his government to pay their pensions and gratuities. He has conveyed a powerful message that the Nigerian retirees, and African retirees at large, should be treated very well insofar as they have toiled for their nation for many years. So they deserve the gratitude of their countries which should be shown through the prompt payment of their pensions and gratuities from the month following their retirement.

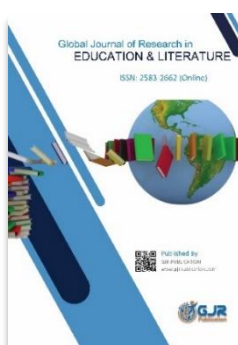
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CITATION

SIDI CHABI Moussa. (2025). Pensioners Plight as Seen through Tunji Ogundimu's Pensioners and Prisoners. In Global Journal of Research in Education & Literature (Vol. 4, Number 6, pp. 182–193).

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14588794>



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