

AN AFRICAN POLITICAL LIONESS IS PRIMED FOR BATTLE — THE KERIKTAN DICTATOR IS DEAD. FOR PAULA OKAPPAH, THE SCENT OF POWER IS NEARER THAN EVER BEFORE, IN EMMANUEL ACHETA'S ADVENTUROUS NOVEL.

*In an African Country of Kerikta, a determined Opposition activist takes a political struggle against a corrupt and ruthless African dictator to perilous heights. Paula Okappah galvanizes the opposition against President Junius Ike Wadhabo. Kerikta's security forces break up an alleged illegal political rally with deadly consequences.*

*Hunted, and disguised as a nun, she flees the country leaving behind fear, torture and bloodshed. In the churning and frigid waves of Lake Victoria, the dictator dies in a tragic air disaster.*

*Kerikta is stunned.*

*And with raging civil wars, will Kerikta hold together or self-destruct into blocks of civil war masterminded by warlords? Or will warlords and Kerikta's Generals march onwards to the scent of a power vacuum in the capital, Kerikta City? What about angry opposition activists formerly harassed, oppressed, tortured, hunted, and exiled?*

*The spectre of a chaotic transition looms.*

*And the dream for power is real. Who among them will abide by Kerikta's Constitution and lay to rest, forever, Kerikta's bloody past? Soon, Kerikta and the world will know that Paula Okappah was destiny's hand in the crisis.*



*A DUEL WITH A DICTATOR may well be a trashcan of rotten African politics. It is a tale of an African dictator parroting democracy. A story of intrigue, gross human rights abuses, and political violence within the tradition of African tyrants. But this despot and looter-this omnipotent god, President Wadhabo-must face off with a single-minded opposition activist. In Paula Okappah, we see a determined African woman pitied against a crooked tyranny. A great irony in the twenty-first century is that Western democracies still roll out red carpets for these repressive African pretenders to the throne. It is unbelievable!*

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Duel With A Dictator



An African Woman's Political Struggle



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**For Daw Aung San Suu Kyi—“The Lady”— Nobel Prize laureate  
and Leader of the National League for Democracy,  
for her calm but passionate advocacy of Democracy, Justice and  
Liberty in the face of a gross and peerless Burmese Junta.  
and  
For all women wrestling injustice and oppression  
in the Third World.**

# Chapter 26

## ENDURING TORTURE

**F**ROM BEHIND his blindfold, Nyendwa could only guess the time from the cricking of the insects. They reminded him of his childhood night escapades when he groped in the dark, for his first encounter with his childhood girl friend. Not Natasha Nyendwa. He knew the sound came from ant-like creatures, which ventured out from their burrows at night. That was the entire pointer with which he worked. The room was dark, pitch black. He could not tell the time of the night. And was it night? Something crawled on his head. He could not reach it since his hands were tight behind his back. *But where was he? Where had the masked men led him? Could he escape?*

He squatted, and then knelt. The floor was rough, the air in the room stuffy with stale smell of urine and human excreta. His throat was dry, worsened by the whisky he drank in the morning. Worst of all, he could not see in the dark and did not know where in Kerikta City's stinky dungeons the masked men had dumped him. He thought about Natasha, and wondered what happened to MPs Issah Walembe and Dr. Bairu. Had they done anything about his arrest? He shook his head in disbelief at the turn of events.

His stomach growled from lack of food. He had rejected a bitter and runny concoction his captors tried to force-feed him on. How would he know if it was indeed porridge or poison? Without sense of time, he could not know for how long he had been hungry. His captors had untied his hands only briefly so he could sign a confession. A confession he had not made. They had not allowed him time, even the composure to read and verify what he had signed. It was another brand of the most horrible injustice he had encountered. Ever. He wanted to stretch out. With hands tight behind him, it was

## Duel With A Dictator

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all but impossible. The sound of sobbing broke his interior monologue. Someone was crying. He did not know if it was the next room or house. But he had heard it. The sobbing.

"When did you join PDP?" a voice asked. He heard the question clearly. There was silence for several seconds.

Another voice answered tremulously, "I'm not a member of PDP. I was just carrying the poster for a man who wanted to tie his shoelace." At this answer, he heard the sound of an object, a boot or something hitting an object. The victim groaned. He then knew whoever the JSF was interrogating had just suffered a merciless kick. The victim sounded like he was vomiting.

He listened in, scared for his turn when it arrived.

The interview went on: "When did you last speak to Paula Okappah?"

*Paula Okappah?*

"I've never spoken to her. Saw her at Renaissance Square for the first time ever."

Seconds later, the voice let out a long shrieking sharp cry of a monkey.

"Increase the voltage, increase the voltage," another voice urged.

The victim yelled again. He realized the victim or victims were enduring electric torture. Horrified, he began to cry softly. He had never cried in the last twenty years. Even then, it was at the funeral of his hundred-year old mother.

"You're Roselyn?"

"Yes."

His heart missed a bit. *Could this be Roselyn, of Kansanga? Paula's aunt?*

He listened some more. *Did she receive my message, from Paula?*

"Don't lie to us. We know she's your niece. We know everything. We've even spent a night in your house." The interrogator breathed heavily.

*They spent a night at Roselyn's?* He became nervous.

"You're a known prostitute who sells beer to fund Paula's anti-government activities," a voice said.

It seemed to him a different voice. The statement offended him. For Paula had painted an honorable image of her aunt and her fiancé, Dr. Malunga.

"I sell beer to survive. My salary is not enough." A sound of a book or some heavy object fell onto the floor.

Then a loud scream.

"Don't slap me on this side again. . . Hearing problems. . . on this ear," the woman pleaded.

Someone had slapped her. He tilted his head, listening to the protracted silence.

Seconds later, someone, or a group of people walked into his room. The sound of their footsteps died down. They had stopped for some reason. He heard whispers. Were they planning his death, a gang rape or some homosexual scheme? He took a deep breathe.

"Okay. But he's a fat man," one voice said softly. Another chuckled at the remark.

*Fat man? Me?* He kept his head tilted in the direction of the dialogue.

"Nyendwa?" a voice called.

"Yes," he answered.

"Where are the military documents you fellows stole?"

The sound of footsteps was close.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. A slap landed on his left cheek.

Hardly had his body adjusted to the slap when another sharp one hit his right. He contorted his face in the dark. He did not know where on his body his torturers planned to hit next or what to inflict him with.

"Hear him denying like a biblical Peter. You, Paula and Mayuni boasted about billion-dollar evidence against President Wadhabo. You'll tell us and show us that evidence," a voice said in the dark. He remained silent. One of the men spat in the dark. He did not know if the man spat in his direction.

"When are you or Paula becoming President of Kerikta?" one asked.

"Don't know. That's for the people of Kerikta to decide," Nyendwa said, scared stiff.

They kicked him in the eye. "Ouch," he said. His eye started to heat up. The world around him became darker. "Don't kill me please."

"Don't tell us what to do. Who tells you we want to kill you? We're kicking you to begin with."

## Duel With A Dictator

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He tried to open his eyes. Only one eye opened.

“What became of your plan to assassinate the President?”

He waited for several seconds before answering.

“I 've never had a plan to kill anyone let alone Wadhabo-“

“Hear him, he doesn't even call him President Wadhabo.”

A boot landed on his chest, toppling him backwards. He hit something hard and rough. A brick or a rock. Next, they poured a watery liquid on him. It seeped first into his nostrils then downwards to his moustache, and finally settling onto his lips. Its smell was strong, even stale. He thought it was urine. “What are you doing, people?”

“You want more?” one of the men said.

He didn't answer. How could he?

“Zharch, splash again. . . more,” the voice added.

He recognized it was a woman's voice.

Zharch. Zharch, he had heard the name.

“Who's Zharch?” another voice said. Probably the voice of the man who had poured urine on him. It seems one of them had made a mistake of using names. Sorry, he heard the apology.

It was a woman's voice. A woman? A woman torturer? He shook his head in disbelief. He once heard of a muscular officer from JSF whose voice was like that of a woman. Was he the one? Or was she the one? Puzzled with the anomaly, he managed a weak smile in the dark. He listened to their whispers. They spoke good English. Almost Oxford-like English, he thought. They sounded educated and were probably University graduates. Someone groped his neck, another set of hands rested on his chest, then on his stomach, and on and on. Almost five pair of hands on him. They lifted him, head downwards.

For several seconds, he remained suspended. They began to do something to his swollen legs with what felt like wires or ropes. Within minutes, he dangled like a carcass of a bull in an abattoir. A sudden change of air pressure un-settled his eardrums. Shortness of breath followed. Then an uneasy feeling of nausea. With what felt like a cold iron poker, the men began to nudge his body. He began to sway back and forth from the pokes and kicks. He began to hiss at the nostrils. The men started to laugh. Devilish laughter. They kept at it. One of them stepped forward, pressed a cold metal beside his neck and rubbed it against his neck. Moments later, a gunshot went off. It

sounded like corn, popping. It seemed the metal that had pressed against his neck, was a pistol. The motion beside his neck, an act to work the trigger.

It was psychological torture, he thought. He began to groan. The men laughed. He had no way of knowing the men's next plan. For the first time, he began to worry he would die without saying farewell to Natasha and the children, especially Elizabeth. For the first time, he realized he was inside what Keriktans had for so long called confession theatres, the torture chambers the JSF operated and denied they ever existed. And for the first time in his Christian life, he began to contemplate revenge. Physical revenge against President Wadhobo, if he met him. If he survived the ordeal.

Outside, a wave of human laughter went into the air. KCC go, KCC go, the applause went. KCC was one of the local football clubs in Kerikita City. It occurred to him the torture chamber, was likely next to Nakivubo Football Stadium. And it could well be between 4:00P.M and 6:00 P.M, the usual time matches began or much later if KCC played the game under floodlights. He listened to the silence and watched the darkness in anger. Cigarette smoke billowed under his head, above his head had he been upright. One of the men was smoking. He wriggled his neck away from the smoke. Ironically, he had not smoked ever since leaving Kirra Road. He was tired. His head pounded, his heart raced, and a sharp pain in his lungs terrified him as minutes ticked on. He had not touched his mandatory asthma and diabetes pills for God-knows-how many days.

"I would like to ask you a question," he said to his torturers in the darkness. His voice sounded croakily.

They laughed, and said almost in unison: "A question? Have you gone nuts already?" Pause. He began to cry softly, more like he was sniffing. He heard a sigh in the darkness. His soft cry seemed to move one of them.

"Okay turn him around. . . or is the word turnover since he's upside down?" the voice said. None of them volunteered a reply. Slowly, they untied his left foot, then the right. Panting heavily, they turned him upright. His circulatory pressure surged with his body reversal. He shook his head as if to stabilize his brain. Struggling to keep his face upturned, he stared at his torturers, hidden by the darkness.

"Go on, ask your stupid question," one of them, a woman,

## Duel With A Dictator

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said.

He sighed and said softly, "Why do you do this? Are you aware that whatever our political or doctrinal differences, at heart we are all human? Do you know we have a shared existence in the eyes of God?"

They listened. His head throbbed as if poised to explode upwardly. He stared at them in the dark, waiting for their answer. Instead, a sadistic question rang out in the dark.

"Is that all, you preacher?" one said laughing as if under influence of some demon. Silence. Reluctantly, he broke it again. He seemed to forget his pain, and he knew this could well be the beginning of his end.

"Well, I've been in Keriktan politics long before any of you thought about RP."

He cleared his voice. "But look we are all human beings first, Keriktans second, and politicians third. Not one faith, not one cause, not even one political grievance should diminish or obscure our humanity--"

In a low voice, as if a whisper, one said, "Here are conditions for your freedom. Tell us Paula's whereabouts and her so-called billion dollar evidence, publicly renounce your anti-RP activities and send \$500,000 dollars to the address we'll give you." Silence engulfed the room again.

Voice contrite, he said: "I'll do all you want." When he yielded, they began to whisper in the dark. He pondered about the \$500,000 dollars. He thought ransom demands were a preserve of mostly Columbian thugs. It seemed Wadhabo had trained his goons on this as well. Kerikta under Wadhabo had indeed gone to the pigs. Tears gushed down his cheeks. He wanted to dab them off when he remembered he couldn't remove the handcuffs. *But where was this room or house? Was it some floor of a building?*

The sound of Congolese music seeped in. It reminded him of his wife, Natasha, the fan of Congolese music. A troubling cry of a child blared into the room. As if a doctor had pricked the child. He tried to keep his half-closed eye from closing. He stretched out his hands. They were stuck. Slowly he remembered he was not at his Kirra Road house. He was a captive of the JSF at an undisclosed place. He wondered what time he had briefly lapsed into a coma. The last noise he heard was of a crying child. Slowly, he became alive to his

circumstances again. He wondered when he would leave the dark room. And he wondered whether he would leave the room at all. Alive. The room was a puzzle and full of unanswered questions. It was a dangerous chamber. A death-scented theatre. An unforgiving furnace. A stinky gaol. Wherever and whatever it was, it was simply hell on earth. A whispered conversation, from somewhere, in the next room interrupted his thoughts.

“Open the pipe. We’ll hear how he responds.”

*Open the pipe? Which pipe? How do I respond?*

He waited. He was stiff with fear. Then in two seconds, crawling creatures burst into the room. They descended on his feet. A few climbed onto his thighs. From their feet and size, he knew the creatures. Rats. His captors had let in rats to torment him. From their speed, they climbed onto him like starved rats. He kept shaking them off, even treading on them. He imagined he trod on four, may be six, making a sickening mash on the floor. Others he shooed away, to scare them. But they counter-attacked, mounting him in a restless and vengeful festival of all time. The men in the next room laughed. Kept on tittering. He listened in. The rats seemed to gather in knots. Then in a curious coincidence of sadism, the rats seemed to giggle. Even rats are laughing at me, he thought. Tears gushed down his cheeks again. He wondered the evil side of human beings.

He thought about his political future. He reflected on Kerikta’s political opposition and Africa’s savage dictators. Unbelievable, Wadhabo’s politics. And most of Africa, hostage to Wadhabo-like dictators was rotting. Intolerance for opposite views and lust for unchecked power must surely rank as some of the nastiest forms of wickedness in human affairs. The RP had killed off democracy. He thought about the many families coping with the brutality of security agencies, and other unknown victims rotting away, in unknown places. Yet against this, President Wadhabo and his cronies lived a life of fresh air, stinking luxury, and unencumbered power.

He asked himself, almost above a whisper: Was Wadhabo with his increasing ration of wrath against the opposition putting into action Michiavelli’s injunction? Pause. Was he, a seemingly loyal student of Michiavellism being true to the Roman totalitarian of the old? Who proposed that men must be caressed or annihilated; they will revenge themselves for small injuries, but cannot do so for great ones; the injury therefore we do to a man must be such that we need

## Duel With A Dictator

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not fear his vengeance.

He waited. He didn't know if the next injury the JSF planned would be smaller or greater. His urge to revenge would be even greater, if he survived. And if he survived the men in the room.

# Acknowledgments

**M**any kind souls shared with me their suggestions and words of advice, sometimes a likely perspective from a brutal and corrupt dictator's mind. I shuddered at how they radicalized some scenes in this novel.

Occasionally, I hovered between tears and laughter as some scenes came alive. Because of you my friends, this novel has seen the light of the day. In your critical yet constructive minds you showed me what it is to love, cry and yearn for a truly "democratic" Africa, our earthly home. In many of your thoughts, we are one.

True, in their lust for an eternal and unchallenged power in all its forms, Third World dictators have dived to depths of savagery, risen to altitude of treachery, stayed at heights of messianic illusions that they wind up with an authoritarian aura without equal.

They have made a mockery of Athenian democracy. With bullets and teargas, who cares about ballots? Bandits legitimize themselves with sham elections or shoot their way to power. Once at the peak, they *massage* their country's Constitution, *defend* it with bullets, tear gas and torture. And through plunder, they march their countries onward to inadmissible misery and destitution. So many questions come to mind, such as: shouldn't foreign aid be restricted to the existing opposition parties, Non-Governmental Organizations, to the media and "treason suspects" in jail? And granted on the basis of how long a "leader" (read a dictator) has been in power?

Also, if Western countries are prepared to force banks to cooperate in tracking terrorist finances, shouldn't they be similarly aggressive in tracking loot for Africa's despots and their henchmen? For these financial and economic terrorists hatch their crimes not in African caves but in Africa's corridors of power where billions of dollars- "African bombs"-are then moved to vaults around the world, causing heart-rending collateral damage in Africa, by way of lost

social and economic programmes.

And might waves of determined and peaceful street protestors—“The People Power Movement” from other Third World corners especially Ukraine, Georgia, etc be a kind of *homework* for, say, African opposition parties as way to bring civility and accountable governments to Africa’s economic and political scene? After all cowardice before despots is cowardice before demons, which God abhors.

And so my friends, the struggle for accountable, transparent and democratic *Third World Order* must continue. May this novel inspire you to prevent and struggle against the chaos and the rotten politics of dictators from becoming an eternal way of life.

In researching for this book, I also received helpful references and encouragements from Nyaine Chan of Burma’s (Myanmar’s) National League for Democracy. To you, I’m eternally grateful.

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## Duel With A Dictator

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To my sister, Angela, from whose house ideas for this book first germinated: *Eyalama*, thank you. You kept lighting up my fire in some of the moments it flickered towards darkness. Remember my first winter and my *Carol-lessness*? God watched and heard us!

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*Emmanuel Acheta*

## Duel With A Dictator

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Partial proceeds of this book will go to fund activities of human rights organizations in the Third World.

And I want to hear from you. Please send your comments to *emmanuel\_acheta@porchlight.ca*

Thank you.

## About the Author

**E**mmanuel Acheta was born in Teso, in an Eastern African country of Uganda.

He graduated from Makerere University Kampala with B.Commerce (Hons.), from where he participated in university politics as a students' representative for Makerere University's Livingstone Hall. He was a Senior Lecturer in Financial Accounting and Quantitative Methods at Zambia's Evelyn Hone College of Arts and Applied Science.

Emmanuel works and resides in southwestern Ontario, Canada from where he follows among other issues World Affairs, Human Rights, Third World Politics, Dictatorships, and Global Stock Markets. A Christian apologist, he has deep affection for St.Paul of Tarsus. *DUEL WITH A DICTATOR* is his first book.