

**POST-INDEPENDENCE DISILLUSIONMENT IN NGOZI CHUMA-UDEH'S *TEACHERS ON STRIKE*
AND HELON HABILA'S *WAITING FOR AN ANGEL***

Obi, Gladys Nwakaego, PhD
Department of English
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Igbariam Campus, Anambra State
nwakaegoobi@yahoo.com
08035522897

&
Amah, Uche Chinwe, PhD
Anambra State Polytechnics
Mgbakwu, Awka North, Anambra State
08035437956.
amahuche92@gmail.com

&
Udeh, Bryan Jachukwuike, PhD
Department of English
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University
Igbariam Campus, Anambra State
bryanudeh9@gmail.com
07038961426

Abstract

Literature is a tool, a mirror through which writers explore their societies. It has become a means of self-expression, an avenue through which writers express their experiences, observations, sense of sympathy and patriotism to their various societies. As an instrument of social change, the writers studied brought to limelight the social vices in their environments and advocate the reformation and rehabilitation of their societies towards a beautiful and glorious future. In this research entitled "Post-Independence Disillusionment in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers on Strike* and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, the novelists satirized the corruption among the ruling class, and how the spirit of discernment has been long dead in the heart of the ruling class. The novelists showed us the society reeking in corruption that gave birth to the literature of post-independence disillusionment. The texts studied are the primary sources of data while library texts, journals, abstracts and internet are the secondary sources of data. The theoretical framework adopted is Maxism. The researchers believe that the novelists succeeded in exposing the issues that undermine the lives of the people; hence they set out to address those ills and expect rebirth, reformation and equity. Thus, both novelists are advocating good governance, honesty in leadership and elimination of intimidation, man's inhumanity to his fellow man, and intolerance.

Keywords: Disillusionment, Oppression, Disappointment, Crime, Betrayal, Unemployment.

Introduction

Literature has been a medium through which artists crave for equality and for the well-being of the society. For instance, before the attainment of independence in Nigeria in 1960, many thought that immediately the white man leaves the seat of power, the road to having a good society will open. They hoped that corruption, degradation, political and economic exploitation would stop. But, ironically, these ills rather than diminish, increased with the departure of the colonial masters. According to Kofi Awoonor in *A Survey of the History, Culture and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara*: "Revolution and socialist programmes degenerate into disguise, corruption and political thuggery. Neo-colonialism, which some African scholars naively believe was a figment of Nkrumah's imagination, is the real monster of post-independence Africa" (32).

Nevertheless, the writers of post-independence faced the challenges posed by the problems of social ills. This led the writers to change to writing novels that reflect the problems in the system of government and life in general. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh in *Trends and Issues in Nigerian Literature* reaffirms:

The most prominent feature of the literature of this era was the stiff aggressive way in which the writers criticised the post-independence: rulers. They openly and uncompromisingly declared that the ruling class was corrupt, devoid of every vestige of vision and common sense (135).

Corruption became the bane of the new nation and hindered any form of development in the country. An accusing finger could conveniently be pointed at the effects of colonialism on the ruling class who had

been alienated from the true values of their people. Chidi Amuta in his *Towards a Sociology of African Literature* summes up the literature of this period thus:

This is the quintessential expression of superlative dissonance and sin. Its characteristic landscape is a world asunder. The symbolic homeland of this genre is the urban market place. This is the novel of noise and filth. The heroes are the thieving politicians (133).

However, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh and Helon Habila try to look into the post-independence dilemmas of the political dispensation in their various societies and other crime rates that brought about the betrayal of hopes and dreams. The writers felt that time had come for the abandonment of the delicate bases of their country's unity by writing only on their cultures and traditions. The situation of their country seems to be critical that many felt the need for reappraisal. As a result of exploitation of the masses by a few political elites at the top, the novelists as the watchdogs of the society took their pens to expose and attack the predominant case of man's inhumanity to man and crimes in their various societies.

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers on Strike* portrays a realistic picture of life where the masses and the teachers suffer under the leadership of His Excellency (H.E.), the Governor of Uma Province. In Udeh's *Teachers on Strike*, the novelist satirises the unabashed corruption, hypocrisy, betrayal, selfish and egocentric dispositions of the ruling political class many years after independence. The government in the novel was brutal and heartless to the people. Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* is described as a tilling insight into life under a modern dictatorship and a portrayal of trials, tribulations, injustices, imprisonment, love and deaths. The novel portrays the country as a police state with human rights abuses and series of episodes that evoke with passion, the humiliation of the masses under a dictatorial regime.

The theoretical framework for this study is Marxism. Marxism is a political and economic theory of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels that interpret history as a continuing economic class struggle and belief that eventual result would be the establishment of a classless society and communal ownership of wealth of the nation. Marxism is summed up in *Encarta Reference Library* as a theory in which class struggle is a central element in the analysis of social change in western societies. According to Swingewood Allen in his book *The Novel and the Revolution*, Marxism maintains that "a Marxist writer is one who is conscious and fully aware of his own responsibility in the society. No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distanced from the oppressed" (23).

The Marxist, committed to human liberation does not become the prisoner of a circle of certainty within which he also imprisons reality. It is of paramount importance to note that since the modern society is a highly stratified one, any committed writer who is oriented towards Marxism automatically sets himself against the political elites. The political elite who is bent on maintaining the status quo cannot imagine a likely push in the great changes tendency towards modern literature. Marxist theory holds that conflict which leads to radical ideas for a change are borne out of the displacement of the strata in the society.

According to Ngara Emmanuel in *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*

Social stratification and inequality are a historical part of our society and these are what Marxist writers are continually lighting against in our society. Through the change significant attention of social structures will be made. This will come in form of a revolution which is the displacement of one class by another (31).

Ngara says that every Marxist literary work is a protest against the deplorable human condition, against the unbridgeable gulf between what man professes of man when in the firm grip of fate. Man in all ramifications of life hardly gets optimal satisfaction and so protests against those situations and recommends most probable alternatives. The result of this line of thought is a Marxist literature, a proletariat literature that would eventually lead to a classless order. In quoting P.J. Brown's *The Proletariat Episode in Russian Literature*. Allen Swingewood states:

In a class society, literature serves the interest of a particular class and only through that class does it serve all humanity. Therefore, proletarian literature is such a literature organized by the psyche and the consciousness of the working class in the direction of the final talk of the proletariat as the creation of communist (classless) society (84).

The Marxist art, therefore, serves as a mirror with which the proletariats or the masses can see themselves and through which their social consciousness is developed.

Ngara Emmanuel again posits that; the term Marxist art to refer to "works which depict reality from a Marxist point of view. Works which reflect the social structure of society and which present social struggle from the point of view of a class and promote the ideals of socialism" (17).

This kind of art is geared towards a change in basic mode of production and this change in the mode of production will result in a change in the structure of social classes: the eventual overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of proletarian dictatorship. It is pertinent to note that during the years of proletarian dictatorship, this working class based literature took shape and evolved ideologically into a prominent position in world literature. Some have ascribed this form of literature to Marxist aesthetics and hereafter become popularly known as Marxist literature.

As a result of the endowment of the Marxist art, it has become unique and possesses some defining features. First, it must be faithful to life, that is, realistic to true life experiences and its simplicity is highly commendable. This simplicity of a Marxist literature is not just a question of coincidence but a deliberate one aimed at making it a commonplace interest of great effectiveness. Hence, it is devoid of experiments, individual, religious, mystic, sexual themes and most importantly every sort of formation.

Swingewood also says that "Marxist writers pay less attention to form unlike realistic literature where much emphasis is laid not on what is said and on the way it is said" (17).

Another feature of Marxist art is the positive hero. They must represent the so-called typical. This does not mean that what is characteristic of the real state of reality but what would be desired for emulation, in all cases, these heroes are usually a manifestation of the ideal Marxist sense.

Marxist art calls for representation period which were in consonant with the communist theory. The implication of this is that it seems the results of deliberate limitation of the choice of subject matter in the part of the writer. According to Ngara, Marxism, therefore, "is a means of consolidating their existing ideology in the socialist world" (31).

Charles Nnolim in *The Critics of African Literature* talks about "art that contemplates society we expect, art that is propagandist, art that tends towards proletarian concerns and art that has Marxist undertones" (33). Consequently, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers on Strike* and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, and many others stand as examples of this form of art. They could be classified as Marxist arts.

Post-Independence Disillusionment in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers on Strike*

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers on Strike* explores, among other things, the themes of disenchantment, suffering, disappointment, oppression, pain, poverty, dejection, inhumanity of man against his fellow man and their attendant consequences on the people of Nigeria under a despotic leader. The novel is a post-independence narrative that unmasks the nefarious and selfish nature of political leaders in the society, as seen in the governor of Uma Province. It is set in modern day democracy in Nigeria. The pathetic feelings, conditions and sufferings of the masses under a heartless political dictatorship are exposed, thus unveiling in a satirical dimension the gulling nature of our leaders after the attainment of independence in 1960.

The novel points out the insensitivity of the ruling class to the plight of the masses. Their ostentatious style of living dampened and damaged the morale of the poor masses, putting the politicians perpetually on the defence of their privileges. They are neck deep in corruption, mismanagement, selfishness and unpatriotic acts, all of which undermine the stability and well-being of the society. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh also sardonically explores the moral decadence prevalent in the society today. She paints a picture of man in his cannibalistic nature, where man derives pleasure in punishing his fellow man unjustly. The novelist again frowns at the immorality of men portrayed in the actions of His Excellency. Emmanuel Obiechina explains this corrupt nature of quack politicians thus:

The writer satirises the corrupt method used by many people to amass wealth. It is a doleful tale of embezzlement of public funds, appropriation of public facilities to private use, and the use of bribery and corruption for personal enrichment. A corrupt society is full of thieves, big and small, professional and amateur (67).

So, through the actions of His Excellency, the governor of Uma Province, the novelist satirises the unabashed corruption, hypocrisy, betrayal, distortion of information, dishonesty, selfish and egocentric disposition of the ruling political class many years after independence. The novel began with evening walk taken by the protagonist, Teacher Emeka Nebedum, to ease off the tension and stress of not being productive and active in service, and also unable to provide for

the family. The narrator puts it thus:

As his legs encountered the sandy soil, the grains necked up to the holes of his weather-beaten, worn-out shoes . . . his mind was heavy indeed. What else if not a heavy heart could drive a man out of his house when all others were retiring to theirs. . . . His agony was such that he began to doubt the stability of his own mental state, it was hard to retain one's sanity in this crazy situation (1).

The teachers lived in abject squalor and misery. The agonising situation is as a result of the non-payment of teachers' salaries. It leads to closure of schools for almost a year. Teacher Nebedum has his motto "Teach them for posterity" but now, the motto is a mirage. The narrator vividly captures the situation thus:

All these were mirage now. The raucous noise of the school environment, the somber look of the students in a classroom situation, the boisterous noise of games in the playground—all these were a mirage, a dream, an unrealistic flash of fantasy. There are no more schools to go to. No more students to teach. The schools are closed. Teachers are on strike (2).

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh through her novel *Teachers on Strike* indicates that the literature of post-independence in Nigeria is a strong voice of criticism and satire. She sees a corrupt society, she exposes the disillusionment. Therefore, she has no indignation but her satire is laced with double-edged irony. Incidentally, it is the eight months of their strike for non-payment of teachers' salaries, yet His Excellency, the Administrator of Uma Province, is unmoved. The teachers had to proceed from a "sit-down" to a "lie-down" strike as His Excellency rebuffed all the efforts for a peaceful resolution of the industrial action.

The strike brought a lot of ills and vices to the society. Many were tormented by hunger, the boys had to join armed robbery to survive and some female students took to prostitution. As the narrator recounts:

Two females detached themselves from the shadows. Whores . . . Nebe recoiled in disgust as their figures become discernible. They were chortling gleefully, may be at the success of their amorous games, quite oblivious of his presence. Then the women noticed him and began to swagger. They walked towards him wiggling their waists in a most coquettish and disgusting manner . . . probably soliciting for his clientele (4).

As the daughters of easy virtue are trying to woo Nebe to patronise them, he suddenly recognises one of them, and he called out the name. But, as soon as he called out the girl's name, they bolted. Adaora happened to be the only daughter of his bosom friend, Mr Dife. She has taken to the streets as a prostitute—a class two student in secondary school. Nebedum is shocked to the marrows at such a price we had to pay for bad leadership. The novelist says:

What type of leadership is this? The action of the people in power is destroying the very fabric of the society. The youths are being destroyed with reckless abandon. Havocs are being wrecked on posterity and nobody bates an eyelid (5).

More so, the truancy and oppression meted out to teachers, especially their union leaders, makes them now schedule their meetings at nights to avoid arrests and detention. The agony of non-payment of salaries is enough trouble for them.

At the union meeting, all the members could be seen suffering from stress and hunger. The narrator calls it "a hunger without expectations, without even hope of an expectation" (27). And, which is the resultant effect of "cash squeeze" as they have stayed "eight good months of no single kobo income" (27). The emergency night meeting brought to the fore the numerous sufferings, deprivations and humiliations the teachers have passed through as some of the teachers suggested that the strike be called off. The narrator pointed it out that their "eyes were sunken deep into the cavity of their faces . . . which were all laden with the trauma of hunger and deprivation" (30).

The meeting with H.E. further exposes the heartlessness of the powers that be in a corrupt state. It is observed that while His Excellency is a paunchy, balding middle-aged man with an air of satisfaction, the executives of the teachers looked "haggard, mournful and hungry." The narrator says:

His Excellency considered the pale proud faces before him like someone looking at the decaying body of a dog. He could get even with these proud wretches who themselves teachers. He could feel the hostility in their seditious souls like the stench of the soak-away pit. They all looked hungry and badly emaciated (36).

Moreover, the appearance of the teachers and their piteous situation makes His Excellency think that he will just send them away with some little cash token, but the teachers were determined to record higher expectations. The teachers consider the governor's action "a carnage being wrecked on the educational system" (39).

Nebedum sees the governor as:

A man more loathsome than a toad . . . as a human mule. That God must have run short of hearts (when he was created) and had simply moulded a dark stone into His Excellency's body. For how else could someone be so unreasonably insensitive to the plight of the very people under his care? (40)

Meanwhile, instead of agreeing to pay the teachers' salaries, His Excellency's corrupt nature manifested as he tries to bribe the leaders of the teachers with one million naira each to call off the strike, as His Excellency says: I will make you an offer you cannot say no to. Just call off the strike, call the teachers back to the classroom and I promise you will not regret it. . . Two hundred thousand for each of you ... I can make it up to four. Four hundred thousand naira for each one of you (41).

When His Excellency does not get the desired response from the teachers, he further increased the amount: Let me humbly offer you one million naira each. I am not asking you to do much, just ask the teachers to go back to the classroom. I am paying six million naira just for a single announcement from you (41).

This shows the type of leadership in the country after her freedom from the colonial masters. Gladys Nwakaego Obi states that:

Nigeria as a country has been suffering from problem of leadership since after her independence. Their leadership failure in Nigeria and by extension, Africa, is more deadly than the colonial administration. These leaders subjugate their fellow Africans with different forms and styles of exploitation, oppression, suppression and marginalization (67).

The money to pay the teachers for the work they have done is there in His Excellency's bank account but he sits on the money and watches the teachers die of hunger and starvation. Teacher Irukwe lost his pregnant wife because of lack of money to provide the necessary diet and medicine needed in his wife's condition. This sorrowful case of the school gateman whose wife went to gather firewood and is bitten by a poisonous snake and later she has her leg amputated is a result of the negative effect of nonpayment of salaries.

The novelist also portrays other instances of humiliation suffered by the teachers due to their financial obligations. The case of the female teacher Philo, who is sexually harassed by her landlord because of her inability to pay her rents. The landlord demanded sexual gratification in place of the default but Philo rebuffed his advances. Hence, she is forcefully ejected from the house, her belongings scattered all over the place and her soup poured away.

Philo's landlord takes advantage of the teachers' predicament to harass her, being selfish and egregious in his demand for sex. He also strives to win her over with material wealth, having known that she is in such problem of want. But, Philo is not thrilled by his material seduction (81).

The author x-rays in totality the image of the Nigerian leaders through the loopholes of His Excellency who is a pen-portrait of the Nigerian leaders. In fact, His Excellency's determination to secure a re-election is so strong that he calls the union executives for another meeting to make them call off the strike. When teacher Nebe asked if he had taken time off to take stock of his achievements and failures for the past four years, he cautioned him to be conscious of whom he is talking to. Then Nebe reacts thus:

Yes, Your Excellency. I realise whom I am talking to, the head of a kakistoracy. I am talking to one murder of posterity. I am talking to an enemy of progress. The arch-enemy of teachers who have willfully marked them out for extinction (115).

His Excellency is just a prototype of Nigerian political leaders whose aim is for their personal interest. The attitude among the leaders appalled the writers of post-independence novels who sardonically exposed the magnitude of corrupt practices among the leaders. The leaders are insensitive to the plight of the masses. In fact, in a clear language, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh gives graphic details of the problems Africans encounter with their leaders just after they gain their independence.

Post-Independence disillusionment in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*

Helon Habila's debut novel *Waiting for an Angel* has seven interconnected episodes each named after the narrator, or a major character or incident. The novel also explored among other things the themes of suffering, pain, disappointment, tyranny and oppression, poverty, dejection and their attendant consequences on the people of Nigeria under a despotic leader.

The novel is set in Nigeria of the 1990s during the reign of military dictators. The use of real places and names of individuals established this fact. For instance, we see names of real places like Lagos, Jos, Abuja, etc. Real persons

like Dele Giwa, Ken Saro Wiwa, IBB, Abacha, Abdulsalam Abubakar, etc, even real events like the famous bloody post-June 12, 1993 riots, the release of political detainees by Abubakar in 1998, etc. The story is set in Nigeria in the 1990s during the military regimes of Ibrahim Badamosi Babaginda, Sani Abacha and Abdulsalami Abubakar.

It tells the story of the sufferings, pains and disappointments of the people personalised in the major character Lomba, a young brilliant journalist though a school dropout. From Lomba's hard times in the prison (revealed by his diary of poems and letters meant to be sent to nobody), the story flows backwards in time, telling tales of Lomba's years in the university, about his first love Alice, forced to marry an army general (Ngai), about the university students' agitation which led to the closure of the school and how Lomba's friend Bola lost his parents and a sister in a fatal accident due to bad roads and went mad as a result, about a helpless Lomba who lives in Morgan Street as a school dropout, jobless, wretched and helpless, about James, the humiliated and traumatised editor of *The Dial* magazine who employed Lomba in the art department, who dared the military dictators, had his office destroyed and his passport seized. He equally convinced Lomba to cover the "peaceful" demonstration of the residents of Poverty Street. Also, through Kela, a fifteen year old boy, we learn more about the pains and disappointments of the residents of Poverty Street, Lagos; about the resistance leader Joshua, in love with his former pupil turned prostitute, about one-legged brother, who lost his leg in a fight with some soldiers, about Madam Godwill and Nancy her servant who are both victims of the hard times. Finally, about the demonstration by the residents of Poverty Street led by teacher Joshua and covered by Lomba, and which led to Lomba's arrest and subsequent imprisonment without trial. In fact, the novelist tells us about Lomba, his experiences in the prison. Here, the young man Lomba languishes in prison under the supervision of the merciless warders and in the poor condition of Nigerian prisons. At a time "in the middle of his second year in prison," he started a diary. He wrote poems and letters to keep himself busy. But he was discovered and severely punished and thrown into the solitary cell. After this, the superintendent, Muftau made him write love poems which he (Muftau) gives to his lover, Janice. Later, Janice discovers that Muftau did not write those poems himself, she decided to visit Lomba and tells Muftau that she will not marry him unless he gets Lomba out of the prison and she says: "If you can't do that, then forget you ever knew me." But out of Muftau's selfishness, he refused to help him (30).

Habila uses "The Angel" to expose the military dictatorship in Nigeria in the 1990s, the difficulties of life under dictatorship in Nigeria. Here, the narrator sits in a bar one evening waiting for an angel—the angel of death, Israfael—who comes in form of soldiers and shot the narrator. According to the *narrator*, ". . . it is not a soldier standing there. It is an angel." (38). And as he bled to death he saw "a huge bird shape flying out of the bar and ascending with the sound of a thousand wings" (38). The University students agonising situation, led by Sankarah, staged a peaceful demonstration against the IBB's military regime. As a result, the demonstration turned violent as the police tried to repress them using tear gas and rubber bullets and later used real bullets. At last a student and a policeman died. Many students were wounded. Sankarah was arrested and the school closed. According to the narrator, "it was bloody brilliant" (39). To *Studies in the African Novel*, Habila's vivid, exciting and heart-wrenching debut novel opens a window into a world in some ways familiar with his sensuously depicted arrests, students lie, and the vibrant local characters, yet ruled by one of the world's most corrupt and oppressive regimes, a scandal that ultimately drives Lomba to take a risk in the name of something, the pains, shattered hopes and expectations, the betrayal, the energy, sensitivity, despair and stubborn hope of a new African generation with a combination of gritty realism and poetic beauty, saying: When I turn, it is not a soldier standing there. It is an angel. It opens its enormous wings and closes them again in a clapping motion. The air from the wings lifts me up and carries me all through the door. I land with a splash on the wet street, I am bleeding from the chest. . . (43-44).

According to *The Observer* newspaper in London, *Waiting for an Angel* "is graphic details of leadership problems in Nigeria under military" (16). The newspaper further states that Nigeria in the 1990s, the setting for the novel, was a police state of such sadistic violence, with human right abuses so staggering, that the country was expelled from the Commonwealth of Nations, and virtually every other country had sanctions against it. As the author says in the "Afterword" to this stunning novel: "There was nothing to believe in the only mission the military rulers had was systematically to loot the national treasure, and their only morality was a vicious survivalist agenda. In which any hint of disloyalty was ruthlessly crushed" (226).

"Every hint" of dissent and every suspicion of democratic thinking by many of the country's most gifted writers and the military government by Sani Abacha wiped out thinkers.

The first portrayal of suffering, pain and disappointment in the novel was imprisonment of innocent people without trial; and how the writers explored the imprisonment of the protagonist named Lomba, who is a political prisoner in Nigeria. Focusing primarily on Lomba, a journalist and the frustrated novelist, who in the opening chapter is a starving political prisoner in a Lagos jail, Helon Habila jumps back and forth in time,

introducing us in succeeding chapters to the lives of ordinary citizens of Lagos, men and women including Lomba himself, twinge on Poverty Street, trying to maintain some semblance of hope in an increasing hopeless world, a world filled with disillusionment and disenchantment. This is shown as the novelist portrayed the poor state of Morgan Street and the country in general, marked by low standard of living of the citizens. Women like Lomba's woman neighbours took to prostitution (85) while men like Nkem took to smoking marijuana and stealing (85). There is no equality—the problem of fuel scarcity as cars queue around filling stations for days waiting for fuel (87).

Poverty Street's real name was Morgan Street, one of the many decrepit, disease-ridden quarters that dotted the city of Lagos like ringworm on a beggar's body (92). There were hotels for sex and alcohol, and there were doorways and alley-mouths for marijuana and cocaine (92).

Brother, a poor tailor who lost his leg in an encounter with the soldiers and who dreams of becoming rich one day at the back of his shop, which is covered by garbage heaps and in front of the shop was a burst pipe—deliberately axed, which shot out water all day (96).

Lomba, jailed for two years without a trial as the novel opens, has gone beyond anger which he describes as "the baffled prisoner's attempt to recrystallise his slowly dissolving self and entered a state of tranquil acceptance of his fate (4). When the jailer, Muftau, finds the poems and journal entries he has written and hidden, he persuades Lomba to write some love poems for the better educated woman he is courting. A brief ray of hope flickers when the woman recognises Lomba's cryptic message and comes to prison to meet him. As Ujowundu further states, Lomba's imprisonment appears as the first chapter, hence the reader experiences a sense of *deja vu* throughout the reading of the novel as the action backtracks, forcing the reader to experience the event which led to the opening chapter and to wonder, if anything could have prevented Lomba's eventual imprisonment.

The second portrayal of suffering, pains and disappointment in the novel is explored through the wanton killings of innocent citizens. The author shows us the effect of this dictatorial government on ordinary people who populate the country. Though life is difficult and opportunities almost non-existent, the young people still have hopes and dreams. When Lomba and a friend have their fortunes told by a poet, one of the young men asked to know the day of his momentous, a day he is assured he will know when the time comes and goes. A second friend whose parents have been killed in a car crash is so grief-stricken that he makes an intemperate and realistic speech, then is arrested, severely beaten and driven insane with no chance of getting his own novel published. Lomba himself takes a job writing for *The Dial*, for which he occasionally reports on political demonstrations, one of them a demonstration in which people peacefully protest the neglect of their neighbourhood.

We are dying from lack of hope. His friend Joshua saws at the demonstration. The unarmed protesters are suddenly attacked by 50 armed riot police, teargas is exploded, the women and children killed by cars speeding on the adjacent highway (174).

The third portrayal of sufferings, pains and disappointments as explored in *Waiting for an Angel* is human rights abuses, especially detentions without trial, depicting the everyday life and hopes and dreams of the participants. The leaders easily imagine what life must have been like during this time and can envision what their own life must have been under the same circumstances. But Habila adds further reality to his depiction of life in Nigeria under Sani Abacha by including some well-known historical events and their effects on Lomba and the other fictional characters and hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa, the killing of Dele Giwa, the editor of *Newswatch* magazine by a letter bomb (151), and the shooting of the wife of Abiola, the opponent of Abacha who was jailed for challenging him. Their human rights were abused by those in charge of protecting them.

The novelist used Muftau the superintendent at the prison where Lomba stays to reveal the selfishness and self-centredness inherent in human beings out of his wickedness made Lomba write love poems which he gives to his lover, Janice. He could have helped Lomba out of the prison but he did not because of his selfishness. And when Janice asked him, he says, "I didn't, I couldn't you know ... I thought he was comfortable. And, he was writing the poems for you ..." (31). Muftau tells Lomba, "Don't think because you are political detainee you are untouchable. Wrong, you are all rats, saboteurs, anti-government rats ..." (14).

According to the narrator, "a lot of these political prisoners died in detention although only the prominent ones made the headlines—people like Moshood Abiola and General Yar'adua (32). In fact, the poor masses did not only wallow in poverty but they live in total fear—fear of the unknown. In describing the situation of things in the society, the narrator of the story entitled "The Angel" says that the people "lock their doors and turn off their lights and peer tearfully through chinks in their windows at the rain-washed post-coup d'etat streets" (37). Such is the fate of Nigerians under military regimes.

The hardship caused by the military rulers bring about poverty which in turn brings about moral corruption as the youth indulge in stealing, drug abuse and prostitution. For instance, Nkem, Lomba's neighbour, has to steal to be alive and Hagar has to be a sex hawker to survive, while Brother and his friends took to smoking marijuana.

This poverty is another aspect of sufferings and pains. There is smell of poverty throughout the story. The few military generals loot the public funds, while the poor masses become even poorer. It is written all over Morgan Street and its residents. Even-thing about this street and the people living in it is poor—the bad roads, the miserable houses, the street full of huge hills of refuse that overflowed and blocked the footpaths, etc. No wonder they changed the street's name from Morgan Street to Poverty Street. Lomba, Brother, Hagar, Nkem and even Alice are victims of poverty in the novel.

All these incidents of pain, sufferings and disappointments in the novel portray Habila's powerful defence of the freedom of the press and a celebration of the life of those courageous writers who have refused to be silenced, even when faced with death. As he says; "Every oppressor knows that when one word is joined to another word to form a sentence, there will be revolt. That is our work, the media, to refuse to be silent, to follow legitimate criticism wherever we find it" (186). This moving study of idealistic young people refusing to give up even when faced with truths of their very lives is an unforgettable story of the human spirit waiting for an angel and sometimes meeting the angel of death. In his review of the novel in *Rhymes With Orange*, S.I. Calhoun says:

Lomba is a young aspiring novelist who is struggling to jumpstart his writing career in the midst of chaos and rebellion in Nigeria during the 1990s. The brutal and corrupt Nigerian military government and their battle against pro-democracy demonstrations and sympathisers while simultaneously distancing themselves from other nations from the backdrop of this wonderful and poignant novel. Although Lomba dies not actively, join his classmates and colleagues in their dangerous protests for human rights and government accountability he can't help but be immensely affected by the political events unfolding around him: he is a bystander who quickly becomes a victim of the circumstances. Calhoun further observes that:

Written in non-chronological order, *Waiting for an Angel* keeps the reader on edge even though the ending is revealed in the first chapter. This novel is a fresh and evocative first-person narrative into the political instability of Nigeria and its effects on the everyday individual combining a mixture of historical people. Incredible, albeit horrifying circumstances. That Habila has created wonderful highly textured characters that are at once believable and evoke reader empathy and emotion, as written in a previous preview, it is recommended to read the Afterword first as it contains essential political context for this novel. There is little doubt that Habila possesses talents as a novelist and I am looking forward to reading more from him.

Furthermore, "Reed Business Information," an Internet web under 'clarksville.org' says:

Nigerian author Habila's debut novel is a noble account of how even the poorest and lowliest people must rise up against oppression regardless of the consequences. Habila tells the story of Lomba as he goes from student to failed novelist to journalist to political prisoner, trying to retain his dignity despite the corruption and violence that has contaminated every part of Nigerian society. As, one by one, those he loves or cares about are battered, in one or another by the regime, Lomba realises that he must take action, however small, in order to remain the history of Nigeria's brutal juntas, it is Habila's fictionalisation that reveals the true casualties of oppression better than any news account or history.

Ujowundu in his systematic analysis of the novel says:

In fact, the novel opens in a Nigerian prison where Lomba, a young reporter, secretly writes poetry with a pencil and paper he's forbidden to have. When the superintendent discovers Lomba's writing supplies, he has an odd request: he wants Lomba to write love poems to his sweetheart. From Lomba's imprisonment, he story moves backward and a series of closely connected stories shows Lomba's life before his incarceration and the fateful choice—to report on a demonstration on Poverty Street—that leads to his arrest. Violence and abject poverty surround Lomba; his university roommate loses his grip on reality after the death of his family and falls victim to some brutal police officers. While his first love, Alice, forces herself to marry a rich man who pays her mother's hospital bills. Lomba tries to hide from the reality of the world he lies in until an activist named Joshua begs him to cover a demonstration he is leading. The oppressive atmosphere of Nigeria in the 1990s drivesthabila's powerful novel.

All said and done, Habila's first novel captures the sufferings, the pains, the disappointments, the chaos and brutality of Nigerians in 1990s under the rule of despotic military dictator Gen. Sani Abacha. The story follows Lomba, a quixotic political student in the capital city of Lagos, who is trying to write a novel in his shabby tenement on Morgan Street (better known as Poverty Street) and covering arts for a city newspaper, *The Dial*.

Soon, Lomba's roommate is attacked by soldiers, journalists are arrested all over the city and *The Dial* offices are set on fire. Lomba decides to take part in a pro-democracy demonstration. There, he is arrested and imprisoned for three years. The novel's narrative moves back and forth in time, beginning with Lomba's life in prison and ending with the climatic events leading up to the arrest. Some chapters are written in the third person, others narrated by Lomba himself and still others by a high school student named Kela, who lives near Lomba on Poverty Street and crosses paths with him before the fateful demonstration.

Through their eyes, Habila paints an extraordinary tableau of Poverty Street ("one of the many decrepit, disease-ridden quarters that dotted the city of Lagos like ringworm on a beggar's body"), bringing their sounds, sights and smells to life with his spare prose and flair for metaphor. Kela's aunt runs the Godwills Food Genre Restaurant. Through his encounters with the patrons, as well as his activist English teacher, Kela (and readers) learn about Nigeria's bloody post-colonial history. Though somewhat marred by the abrupt, disorienting shifts among narrators and time periods, this is a powerful startling vivid novel.

Conclusion

The two novels Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Teachers on Strike* and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* portray the suffering, pains, disappointments and disillusionment of the people, as emanating from the leadership style of the ruling class. The insensitivity and lack of regards for the lives of the people were vividly explored. The novelists depicted the humiliating situations of the people struggling to survive in hostile environments and conflict-ridden societies.

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