WRITING FOR THE DOWNTRODDEN IN A DRACONIAN SOCIETY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHARACTERS IN HABILA'S *WAITING FOR AN ANGEL* AND IKERIONWU'S *HEROES OF CHANGE*

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Abstract
This scholarship focuses on the plights of the downtrodden in a draconian society. It is predicated on the fact that there is little or no relative study of the plights of the downtrodden characters from the points of convergence and divergence in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2003) and Ikerionwu's *Heroes of Change* (2015). Through a discussion of the role of the (African) writer as a socio-political custodian and moral conscience of the society, the prose texts were reviewed. Thus the paper utilized the Marxist theoretical approach in the analysis of the selected texts, delving into such plights as poverty, unemployment, police brutality, oppression, marginalization and class conflicts. The method of analysis is qualitative. The paper concluded that the advent of draconian leadership in the African territory had truncated the transformational plans, wishes and aspirations of the masses whose expectations were endangered by successive repressive regimes, even beyond transition to democratic rule.
Keywords: African writer, draconian, downtrodden, Nigerian society

Introduction

That the African writer remains pivotal to the delineation of the socio-political ills, predilections, impediments, hopes and challenges of contemporary society for meaningful change and the promotion of equality, justice and fairness along egalitarian lines, remains a noble course advanced by critics and scholars of African literature for social rejuvenation. In recent times, the African writer has consistently projected multifaceted issues in his works, given the turbulent state of affairs characterized by those complex experiences of history of human relationships, particularly those of leadership problems that seem to have generated myriads of challenges against the aspirations of the common person. Indeed, writers derive inspiration from the misgivings and misadventures of society, where they seek to attenuate the sensitive subjects that tug at the heart of humanity in their crafts. To such artists, literary art becomes the fulcrum upon which such creative documentation of such events find common grounds for criticism and probable positive outcome, resulting in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's view that the writer's inspiration is drawn "from the conscious acts of men in society", and that, "the act of writing implies a social relationship" (5). Achebe unequivocally demonstrates that "The writer has a sense of obligation, a strong attachment to a cause… when we speak of a writer's commitment; we mean his identification with a particular social aim and use of his writing to advance those aims" (182). Such a writer does not fail to respond adequately to the wailings, tensions and plights of the masses in society while being preoccupied with other activities that may satisfy the demands toward change.

In consonance with Achebe's position, Okoli supports that "writers assigned themselves the noble tasks to educate and inform, dispel ignorance, superstition and myth: to liberate the mind and enthrone reason and critical appreciation of society, its institutions and values" (73). Thus, the African writer must endeavour to put things right as Osundare posits that "the writer by his ability to transcend quotidian reality, has a duty to relate not only how things are, but how they could or should be" (12). Obiechina reaffirms that the writer should be " a reformist and a crusader for social justice, for the rights of the individual, for the dispelling of ignorance and superstition and all those forces upon which the oppressors and exploiters have played over the centuries in their attempt to hold the people down" (4). Obi captures the view on literature and its social essence that it is an "… important means of understanding and interpreting human beings and aspects of society such as politics, religion, economics, social conflicts, class struggles and the human condition through the medium of language" (487). In a class-conscious society, the writer belongs to the masses whose disposition is influenced by the Marxist philosopher and his endeavour must reflect those of the oppressed and marginalized in that society. Thus, Ngugi reaffirming, believes that the writer is a product of society, he belongs to a certain class and he is inevitably a participant in the class struggle…" (76).

Waiting for an Angel is a uniquely written prose fiction by Helon Habila, which won the coveted prestigious Caine Prize in 2001. An examination of the novel reveals multifaceted standpoints in scholarly accounts on the style, themes and techniques used by the writer. *The Times Literary Supplement* notes that "Habila skillfully evokes an atmosphere of tension and fear. A powerful picture of a critical period in Nigerian history" (25). However, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh opines that:

> The journalists and the writers were the most wanted quarries. They were the most dreaded enemies of the government… Once in the government net, they were placed in conditions where their squirms and squeaks resounded into nothingness-top-security prisons. (368)

The resurgence of militarization as revealed by Habila recounts the regimes of Babangida in the 80s through the despotic rulership of General Sani Abacha in the 90s. Anthony elaborates further that:

> From the subtle but repressive government of Babangida to the crude and unbridled dictatorship of Abacha, were the periods characterized by the muzzling of the press and radical intellectuals by various agencies of the military. The masses were not spared; they languished in abject poverty, misery and general social malaise that were as a result of harsh economic policies, most especially the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the Babangida era. (169-170)

More so, Mary Whipper gives her standpoint in an article titled: "We Are Dying From a Lack of Hope", where she notes that "Nigeria in 1990 was a police state with human rights abuses so staggering that the country was expelled from the Commonwealth of Nations and faced with worldwide sanctions" (5).

Heroes of Change is Leonard Ikerionwu's debut novel, which x-rays the socio-political milieu of the Nigerian environment and makes a strong inquiry into the lived conditions of the citizens. As a very recent novel, very little is reviewed about it. The handy comments available come from the blurb and a recent online publication. The prose fiction focuses on the revolutionary agenda of socio-political change that is people-oriented; it accentuates its artistic trajectory and formative ideology into the theoretical account of Marxism as it concerns the social strata and the classes of the Nigerian downtrodden society, especially of the machination between its elites and the poor masses.

The novel is set in WAZOBIA with major events revolving around Umuowa, another setting in the prose. WAZOBIA is governed by a tyrant, Brigadier Banjo in whose presence the rotten eggs of corruption and leadership misrule are swiftly hatched; he does little to assuage the plights of the poor masses in his domain. In the novel, Ikerionwu satirizes other social anomalies that becloud WAZOBIA with Umuowa as a case in point, which is a microcosmic symbol of the Nigerian society. This is informed by his consciousness and subsequent 'ideological' dispositions towards his society. In a recent article, Onyejizu notes that:

> Leonard Ikerionwu tailors his scathing criticism towards the Nigerian terrain, examining extensively, the manifold crisis of human existence that has unnaturally become a common pastime in the lives of civilians. He registers his voice with a prose fiction that cast critical glances at Nigeria's recent history, suggesting a revolutionary modicum of liberating it…. (3)

The novel is a satire whose aims are to ridicule, conscientize and instruct in order to trigger the expected change in the Nigerian enclave and by extension. It addresses critical issues, which tug at the very heart of the masses in the hands of a draconian leader whose stuck-in-trade is the constant harassment of proletariats whose consciousness and revolutionary anger culminates in the change of a failed regime that is far removed from democratic humanism. Much of the social issues discussed in the novel dominate that of oppression, which seems quite distinct from the thematic centrality of politics. The didactic perspective to the novel is that the failure of political leadership is inimical to the social existence of Nigerians and in turn, fails in governance. The consequence is a protest, which snowballs into an unrecoverable revolutionary temper. What makes the novel unique is its bold but realistic depiction of the palpable experiences and plights of citizens, from the youths to the elder statesmen.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the novels under study are strong indictments of the political/ruling/bourgeoise class, who are devoid of passion for the masses over their socio-political conditions. Hence, the works under study are angling for sociopolitical and socio-economic change, by a change of tyrannical/dictatorial leadership where the poor, marginalized and oppressed in society by the privileged few who wield power, are liberated. The ruling class is so powerful due to their stronghold on the economy and security apparatus of their societies. Upon denial of these resources, the masses become angry, furious, frustrated, disillusioned, disenchanted, marooned, silenced, raped, humiliated and marginalized.

Theoretical Framework: Marxism

Marxism is a theory of social change, which embodies a wide spectrum of relationships with many fields of human and scholarly endeavours. The theory is drawn from the scholarly outputs of Marx and Engels in the works titled *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *The German Ideology* (1932). Dobie informs that: "Although it is often thought of as a twentieth-century phenomenon, partly because it was the basis of the social-governmental system of the Soviet Union, it reaches back to the thinking of Karl Heinrich Marx, a nineteenth-century (1818 - 1883) German philosopher and economist (8). Abram explains that:

> According to Marxists to other scholars, in fact, literature reflects those social institutions out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a particular ideological function. Literature reflects class struggle and materialism: think how often the quest for wealth traditionally defines characters. So Marxist generally view literature "not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as 'product' of economic and ideological determinants specific to the era. (149)

Marxism reflects the concerns that characterize social life and shows the relationship between form and content. According to Arvon "in the relationship between the economic base and the ideological superstructure, content is the governing factor, and through the form, in the final analysis, is always necessarily subservient to it" (90). It is a theory that is based on the critiques of the ideology and culture of Marx and Engel. It develops an interest in the mode of material production, which constitute the economic or material base of society. Eagleton views Marxism as "a scientific theory of human societies and the practice of transforming them" (111).

In literature, the Marxist has to deliver the story particularly of the struggles of men and women to liberate themselves from certain forms of exploitation and opposition. Francis Mulhern cited in Eagleton states that "Marxism is not merely sociology of literature" and that it emphasizes "sensitive attention to its form, style and meaning" (200). Ken Smith avers that "Marxism adds to an understanding of the capitalist world and how to change it" (1). For the Marxist, therefore, social change is the *numero uno*. Shaw informs that Marxism is "a system of thought which explains that throughout history, the state has exploited the masses" (221). Ryan confirms that "…the purpose of Marxism is to enable an understanding of the social and cultural world that will contribute to its transformation" (145). Nwahunaya captures a broad overview of Marxism that:

> What is often considered an extreme view of the sociological approach is the Marxist approach, which ties literature to the economic base and ideological superstructure in its system of dialectical materialism. It champions the downtrodden of socio-economic class, critiquing texts that assume a class society of economic elitism and hegemony, and champions texts that support the common man. (34)

To utilize Marxist ideas in literature is to concern oneself with the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the downtrodden class and the economic factors. Trotsky, however, argues that "Marxism in itself cannot provide the criteria for literary criticism" (116). It makes sense that Trotsky has given into the view that formalism can at least, particularly be employed with Marxist literary theory. Advocates of Marxism are of the view that writers should be at the vanguard of projecting man from sufferings and that literary creativity should be part of man's struggle against nature. They ask the writer to use his work as a weapon to expose the injustice of the bourgeois culture. They maintain that art should become a propagandist tool for the liberation of the society where humans will attain full happiness and freedom. The Marxist probes whether or not the work helps to suppress and advance the situation of the proletariat within the society. Viewed as a distinctive aspect of the sociological approach to examining literature, Marxist criticism projects the assumption that literature holds life reflections concerning man's social existence. The critic, therefore, must note the time, history and background of the people in the literature to help him gain a holistic view of the work. Thus to Eagleton "Marxist criticism wants a writer to devote his work to the cause of the proletariat" (38).

Textual Analysis

Waiting for an Angel is peopled with downtrodden characters and dissenting groups of people who feel dissatisfied with the state of affairs in a draconian-led society. The downtrodden characters face many challenges ranging from socio-political decay, police brutality, inequality, oppression, humiliation, victimization, extreme violence and other forms of human rights violations, particularly in regimes of Generals Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, Sani Abacha and Abdulsalam Abubakar. Characters like Lomba, Boy, Bola, Alice, Sankarah, James, Joseph, Joshua Amusa, Kela, etc are direct and indirect victims of several brutal political and socio-economic oppression of a repressive and draconian regime in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Habila's account of draconian leadership of the 90s in Nigeria which recounts the intense but rapid deterioration of the human self and psycho-social will to survive during the epoch where state police symbolized not only a debilitating force against mass protest, agitations and radical awakening but also a gruesome model of public chastisement. The story of Lomba's hard times in prison is told and revealed in a diary and poems written by him. It captures his days in the University, coupled with his life with Alice who later was compelled to get married to an army general, Ngai. The event in the novel moves back and forth in an illogical and non-chronological manner. Details of Bola, his friend who lost his parents and sister to a road accident and how he became trauma-driven and insane, were exposed. The story further projects Lomba as a school dropout and a frustrated youth resident in Morgan Street. It also tells about James, the editor of *The Dial* magazine, who employed Lomba, who also challenges the military regime and had his office destroyed. He admonishes Lomba to cover a peaceful demonstration led by Joshua (the radical leader and teacher) at Poverty Street. It is in the eyes of Kela that we learn the plight and fate of residents of Poverty Street. Lomba's involvement in the protest earned him incarceration without trial. Through Habila's artistic x-ray of the draconian terror and its horrifying hold on the lives of the populace; he presents Lomba, a representation of the intellectual class, a centrifugal character through whose account of suffering and terror is aptly felt in solitary confinement, as a frustrated political prisoner whose anger knew no bounds: "Here in prison loss of self is often expressed as anger. Anger is the baffled prisoner's attempt to re-crystallize his slowly dissolving self" (9-10).

The depiction of a warder manhandling an inmate before Lomba further highlights a point on draconian oppression. Like violence, it simply shows that anger begets vengeful anger. The various stiffening of humanity and apparent citizen's rights abuse and value system at the national stage was apparent. Like Lomba, the social existence of Nigerians found its commonplace in a prison-like scenario, where Nigerians had nowhere to seek asylum, far from the attendant vicissitudes of life in the 1990s; a situation where one's mental, physical, psychological freedom was frequently curtailed. Compared with the inmates in jails around the globe, Nigerians were terror-struck. Anger, a potent emotional tendency in a man dominated the very sphere of people's existence to fight for their right to equality, justice and freedom, though in perpetual fear but with resounding, hope. Lomba narrates the intense manifestations of the anger he felt in jail, thus he says, "Sometimes the anger leaves you as suddenly as it appeared, then you enter a state of tranquil acceptance. You realise the absolute puerility of your anger: it was nothing but acid, cancer, eating away your bowels in the dark" (10).
Another perfect symbol of the use of draconian coercion is Muftau as represented in Habila's *Waiting*, towards Lomba. This is holistically captured in a sensational manner, where Muftau constantly made Lomba write romantic and intelligent poems, which he uses to woo Janice. Janice upon discovering that the poems she receives from him were originally written by Lomba, tells Muftua the condition for their consummation was only when he gets Lomba out of prison. Nevertheless, Muftau declined and she says: "If you can't do that, then forget you ever knew me" (30). Muftau's attitude towards Lomba speaks of hatred, disdain, in the manner Lomba was treated in prison and accused of colluding with the protesters, and the subsequent brutal measures dished out to him, thus: "All I felt was the crashing blow on the back of my neck. I pitched forward stunned by my pain and the unexpectedness of it. My face struck the door bars … before the superintendent's boot" (14).

The height of draconian extremism was so severe, so much, so that the Common Wealth of Nations suspended the country during Sani Abacha's regime. The masses such as men, women and youths – all lost their voice as the military leaders were hell-bent on demoralizing and disenchanting the public. Journalists and writers, who are perceived as conscientious advocates

of the masses, given their intellectual merit and influence, were tagged as genuine enemies of the government in power. Literary and political activists were searched for and executed without trial. The murders of Dele Giwa (editor of *Newswatch* through a letter bomb), M.K.O. Abiola, Kudirat Abiola and Ken Saro Wiwa are real cases that point to the evils of the IBB and Abacha military regimes.

Habila uses the Angel of Death, Israfel, to depict the draconian regime in a bar where he anticipated the arrival of soldiers who shot him for being resistant to their coercive appeal. Ironically, he remarks: "But when I turn, it is not a soldier standing there. It is an angel" (38). And as he bled, he beheld "a huge bird shape flying out of the bar ascending with the sound of a thousand wings" (38). This disenchantment culminates in students' revolutionary temper and protests all over Nigerian universities. The students' angry protest by boycotting lectures in all the universities following Sankara's address to the student body is vividly captured in the succeeding quote: "'Remember what Soyinka wrote, 'The man dies in him who stands silent in the face of tyranny!"(40).

Further, he reveals his displeasure with the transitional government's policy towards change that is nothing but a mirage, "We are tired of phantom transition programmes that are nothing but grand designs to embezzle our money" (40). His conclusive remarks by Martin Luther that "…it is the duty of every citizen to oppose unjust authority…" (41), becomes the rational slogan on the lips of the protesters, to angrily end this oppressive but violent affair against humanity. The protest is taken beyond the school premises and environment to the streets on billboards that Lomba recounts: "I stared out of the window at the walls and billboards, flying past by the roadside, most of them defaced with anti-military slogan: IBB MUST GO! NO MORE SOJA!" (43).

University students embarked on a protest – a kind of peaceful demonstration against IBB regime. The demonstration snowballs into full-fledged violence as the police used tear gas to disrupt the situation. This culminated in the use of rubber bullets. The consequence is both a police officer died and a student died, while many students were seriously injured. Sankara is caught and arrested by the police officers while his school is shut down. During the IBB and Abacha regimes, there was apparent widespread distrust, absence of integrity and moral truth in the draconian governance of the 1990s. All publications that greeted publishing houses were scrutinized and censored. Intellectual succour was cut short by the government. Lomba is accused of treason and incarcerated without trial. Bola, who losses both parents to an accident is demented due to the measure of psychological brutality from the treatment he received at the hands of military officers. Brother, an impoverished character in the novel, takes to alcoholism and marijuana. Nancy expresses her frustration and discontent through her paintings. Nkem takes to stealing to survive the harsh socio-economic hardship in the country. Joshua's female pupil (girlfriend) takes to prostitution. Their worlds, together with those of the masses were consumed with uncertainty and fear of what the future may hold to the point that some of them sought a seer's help to know their destinies.

Habila depicts brother's residential street as something dotted with filthy trash and garbage, where people are encumbered in a life of hopelessness and insanity, only to live in a dream-like or utopian life in a pauperized location renamed Poverty Street (initially called Morgan Street). Brother, a one-legged character and tailor in the novel, sustained a gruesome injury on his leg fighting the soldiers, hence his physical deformity. His comic but realistic drama often conjures up the images of wealth and utopian expectations through his exposition of the affairs

of the residents of Poverty Street; this lends credence to the dissonances of civilians under the military regime: "We don finally reach the end of road…." (98).

The level of disillusionment and disenchantment in the Nigerian society as it affects Lomba, Kela, Brother, Joshua, Bola, Nancy, Kela, Hagar, Auntie Rachael, Sankara, James and other characters in the novel was explicitly explored. The adamant attitude of the armed forces to the underlying social contradiction of the masses and their overall experiences sparks off despotism in their projection of social injustice and inequality; hence the need to express their anger and frustrations through uncontrolled protests.

Social injustice is demonstrated by the absence of equality, fairness and justice in the granting of opportunity for all persons irrespective of affiliations. There was a widespread scarcity of fuel, absence of standard clinics, poverty, environmental pollution, political maladministration and murders of civilians without proper trial. A case in point on social injustice is poverty. It is a state of lack in virtually all aspects of human endeavours. Poverty Street is a haven for all kinds of social delinquency and immorality, a place where rogues, hooligans and the wretched of the earth live. Characters like Lomba, Brother, Auntie Rachael, Kela, Nkem all live in Poverty Street, which is described as a decrepit, disease-ridden quarters that dotted the city of Lagos like ringworm on a beggar's body (97). Everything about Poverty Street was unusually usual. From the poor roads to the shanty residential structures and the constant rancid stench oozing away from gutters, a pile of garbage and trashes – it was a tale of full-blown penury and wretched living, there are pieces of evidence of a sharp class divide between the corrupt and affluent military personnel and the masses. This call to mind the ideological claim by Karl Marx on society and social stratification where society divides across economic lines.

In the events leading up to the peaceful demonstration to protest the socio-economic and physical conditions of Poverty Street, Auntie Raphael reminds the leader of the protest, Joshua that such protests are not peaceful. She further cautions Kela to flee when the demonstration turns violent. The zenith of the protest is well-handled by the author through Joseph who exposed the Sole Administrator's refusal to pay heed to their pleas for an immediate change of the system. This left no doubt in the mind of the speaker to visit the administration since he has failed to come to them. The succeeding revelation is apt and unveils the barefaced treachery of the administrator: We have a right to complain to him, even though we did not vote him into office … And in a sense, this address is an accusation of this entire regime. (122-123). The areas of neglect by the administrator includes the absence of a borehole, clinic, well-equipped school facility for learning purposes and the lack of space enough to contain their children. These are the basic requirements that enhance human existence. The insensitivity of the administrator describes the military as anti-people, anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian. Joshua's concluding remark on the military reveals the degree of cruelty manifest in the attendant problem bedevilling residents of Poverty Street: "We don't know who Morgan was some colonial administrator perhaps, a reminder of our hopeless, subjected state" (123).

What appeared as a peaceful protest snowballed into a violent affair for the protesters as fifty police officers, armed to the teeth, dispersed the people with tear gas. All protesters witnessed the horrible scene of human brutality and in their attempt to escape the wrath of the police officers, saw some women and children crushed by some speeding vehicles. Clear pictures of the rancorous event become harsh realities on the sensibilities of the reader, thus: "The people, scared witless, hemmed in on all sides, stupefied by choking tear gas, ran out in all directions, like quails beaten out of their hiding places, coughing and falling." (134). The people decry the total abandonment of their neighbourhood with a glaring expression of hopelessness that was

manifest in despair and bleakness. Thus, the outcome of the agitation and revolutionary activism did not culminate in the change they yearned for but rather, ended in violence and casualties, thus: "We are dying from lack of hope. His friend Joshua says at the demonstration. The unarmed protesters are suddenly attacked by 50-armed riot police, tear gas is exploded, the women and children killed by cars speeding on the adjacent highway" (174).

Like all radical writers, Habila has refused to cower nor treat the preceding issues discussed with a kid's glove. His refusal to be silent in the face of draconian leadership, tyranny, dictatorship, oppression, marginalization, police brutality, corruption, class inequality and injustice towards the common person, pits him as an advocate of the masses in the quest for social transformation and radical change. He acknowledges the power of intellectualism that flows from the ink of the writer through the media that "Every oppressor knows that when one word is formed to another word to form a sentence, there will be a revolt. That is our work, the media, to refuse to be silent, to follow legitimate criticism whenever we find it" (186).

Heroes of Change is filled with downtrodden characters whose lived experiences are nothing to write home about; it exposes the themes of poverty, insecurity, police harassment, unemployment, class struggle and the many issues plaguing WAZOBIA and Umuowa, which continues to stimulate a social awakening. It is the quest for change of the status quo that the writer deployed heroic humanism, culminating in the depiction of Nigeria's real problems.

One of the themes of the novel is marginalization. In WAZOBIA as well as in Umuowa, marginalization is treated as a variant of oppression among the ordinary members of the military. The writer reckons that it assumes a rather frightening form of enslavement built on the hills of hierarchy, elitism and determined by education. A case in point abounds in the foregoing analysis when Saturday, Africa's father, who is a peasant ex-soldier, recounts his ordeal in the hands of senior military officers who oppress lower-ranked recruits. He has fought in the civil and Liberian wars but "was never given any benefit for his contribution to keeping the nation a united entity" (18), because of his lack of little education as a peasant fighter. Through him, we gain firsthand knowledge of the reminiscence of war; how the war led to the premature death of his father. The most startling aspect of his personal story rests in his lack of education, which leads to his "unselective military recruitment and hasty training which did not turn him out as a highly qualified soldier" (23).

Also, whereas the lower-ranked soldiers take to menial jobs and often end up as war casualties, the higher ranking officers, dubbed as elites/bourgeoisie, who occupy the Aristocratic space in the military especially based on their education and status "…felt that they were the jet probers of war" (26). They do not go to the war front to confront the enemy. Saturday remarks: "They stayed in their air-conditioned flats, which are well and exclusively furnished…." (26). This inequality in the military between the recruits and the elite soldiers creates a lasting problem within and accounts for the degree of marginalization he and other recruits experienced, given the numerous casualties witnessed on the part of the peasant soldiers during national or foreign missions.

Poverty and social inequality are products of a draconian government. A draconian government is the same as a military government where human rights abuse and all measures of oppressions prevail. It is a system of government that is antithetical to democratic rule where the people play pivotal role in the socio-political transformation of their society. It breeds elitist corruption and greed, built on the pedestal of the economy. In terms of poverty, it is a state of lack while the former is its by-product. In terms of the government's ill response to soldiers'

unpaid allowances, after several successful war missions, Saturday ends up a palm wine tapper with little or no support from the government who fails to compensate him, leaving him to dwell in abject poverty. A clear comparison between his shanty home and the lifestyles of the wealthy is aptly depicted. Thus, as the writer notes, his "walls cracked which allow bats, rats, insects and reptiles to forge inside the walls and fences are too low and some parts fall which allow goats, stray dogs, drunks and mad people to take refuge at will" (128). Consequently, this social situation forces Africa to decry his father's impoverished condition; he makes a sharp comparison between the ruling government and the peasant before Brigadier Banjo at Umuowa. This sharp divide between the haves and have-nots is potently captured thus: We do not know the meaning of electricity, clean water and social amenities that can give joy, pleasure and longevity…." (128). His verbal responses unveil unequal circumstances of class division, which is part and parcel of human existence at WAZOBIA and by extension, Umuowa.

The dichotomy between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' is what the writer addresses. This is centred on Nigerian society in terms of lack of social amenities, which cuts across the two classes. In a society run by dictators and tyrants, such a society often grapples with many challenges that relate to class struggle and/or social inequality. The emphasis on class and social inequality revolves around Saturday and the family of Mr Ogbaduju. Meanwhile, Saturday's proceeds, which come from palm-wine sales and distribution, are hardly enough to feed his family let alone foot his son's secondary education bills. His business fails to yield profit due to the reluctance of debtors like Banjo to pay up their depths in due time. Consequently, Africa is unable to continue his secondary school education, after gaining admission into WAZOBIAN Model Secondary School. He languishes at home running unsuitable errands for his father, while Mr Friday Ogbaduju's economic condition worsens daily following the downturn he witnesses in the wake of economic recession.This leads Regina Ogbaduju to remark that the country is a place "where just a few are milking the joys of the state while the majority are wallowing in poverty. They cart away the oil in barrels to foreign countries to make estacodes for themselves while the masses starve" (110). Again, the protection of lives and properties of the citizens remain one of the prime points of the military profession. However, this is the contrary. The military personnel champion the course of corruption, brutality, oppression, exploitation and further extort money from citizens of the country, putting them in perpetual fear and momentary panic with loaded rifles, as they drive along Nigerian roads: "Both the soldiers and Nigerian police at most checkpoints have not only tortured and exploited private and public drivers but have made them fill the compunction for … driving on the road" (56).

These soldiers and police officers take laws into their hands to harass 'those they are supposed to protect'. The warnings of their actions may culminate in the disaster which is made reference to APO six mayhem, an unfortunate event in Nigeria's history, which recounts the deaths of innocent Nigerian citizens, but "has not taught our security officers a lesson" (56). Interestingly too, much of the bitter denunciation of exploitation and harassment is directed at Brigadier Banjo who introduces the Sanity Control scheme, managed by three Para-military men who are bent on harassing innocent market women at Umuowa, rather than engender peace and mutual co-existence. Such a scheme headed by Banjo seeks to sexually harass women unduly: "The wretched market women carrying their wares on the head to the market…They would ask the market women to undress; feeling that they carry around heavy loincloth belt with a huge amount of money…." (122).

Godwin Okpara, an energetic graduate (in Accountancy) from a Nigerian polytechnic cannot secure a job with his degree certificate for a decade, because the unjust social system is fraught

with corrupt faces whose wealthy backgrounds determine their fate. This makes him "…despondent and disillusioned against those government officials who, after conducting examinations and subsequent interviews will replace the best and successful candidates with mediocre" (102). Miss Christabel Ogbaduju, the first daughter of Mr Friday and Regina Ogbaduju's eleven children remains jobless at home when all attempts to secure a better job to help her poor household proves abortive. Her father's vulcanizing business and mother's petty trading in perishable goods is not enough to cater for the family. Under much pressure, she yields to the exploitative tendencies of wealthy men, cheats and pleasure seekers, who constantly prowl at her threshold for some ulterior motives. Thus, she becomes prey having being exploited by "…several unsuspecting men…" who "… had either crossed legs with her or duped her with some reasonable amount of money, giving her the hope of getting her job" (104). Her impoverished circumstance compels her to become Alhaji Dansuki's mistress, an illiterate millionaire and capitalist, who has six wives and twenty-eight children. Alhaji capitalizes on her unemployed situation to exploit her. He furnishes her apartment and satisfies her material needs as a condition for greater material benefits, and nurtures the prospect of making her the seventh wife. This situation negates her will as a young and ambitious lady and places some constraints on her values. She vehemently refuses. Her refusal strains their relationship with Alhaji. Consequently, her fantasies and utopian lifestyles are cut short as he dishes out to her a sinister plan which is executed by three hefty men who "… drugged, assaulted, raped, abused and finally carried her away to an unknown destination and dumped her at a refuse heap that had witnessed a series of mixed dirt for a decade" (135). Fortunately, respite comes from two *Fulani* Samaritans, who miraculously rescue her to a hospital for rehabilitation. Through Rosaline, a devout Christian and friend, she discovers God and repents, becoming a Christian convert, preaching the gospel to all in the Young Shall Grow Transport Company.

A collective struggle underpins Marxist works and has the solidarity of society to bring about meaningful change. Africa imbibes this trait and inspires this symbolic quest. From a symbolic and critical viewpoint, Africa seems a microcosmic representation of the continent. Although he assumes the role of a radical character and leader, his actions and motives towards revolution seems a direct appeal to Africans. Again, his characteristic disposition towards heroic potentials is a pungent revolt against social inequality between the superstructure and the base. This gesture is attested to by him and informs of the seeming but the underlying principle of Marxism as it relates to radicalism. Thus, his angling with the downtrodden in the society reveals his accentuated and collective advocacy.

In *Heroes*, there is a projection of collective struggle. Such struggles are consequent upon a stratified society along the lines of materialism. Such struggle culminates in a classless society. The implication is that the peasants of the world would unite in a bid to exterminate the forces of social inequality, exploitation and oppression, to ensure that justice, fairness and better living conditions in society are met. This call for transformation begins to elicit strong revolutionary responses from the majority in both WAZOBIA and Umuowa, against the minority. Thus, of the many concerns in Marxist theory, one of them is a revolution. This is identified in the poetic revolutionary song/lines initiated by the Blind and the Cripple, who was billed for the Bring-Back-Our-Girls mission but sustained fatal injuries on their bodies, culminating in their physical deformity without compensation. They hold that they "have been hearing the piteous lamentations of people in the country begging government cap-in-hand to be paid unheeded… all the promises to pay our severance allowance have become illusory" (131). Thus in protest the masses all react: "We ask for change/That no one can stop./ We ask for no favour/ Other than a change./We need cohesive force/ And … volunteers/Who are indivisible/With collective

resolve/We foster the change/We condemn corruption/We condemn injustice/No kick backwards…/No kick sideways/We ask for change/That has a human face…/The change is a cloud /That will surely come" (130). This verse is humanist and revolutionary. The poetic rendition accentuates the mass's consciousness. Africa, as a peasant, who is affected by social inequality, does not hesitate to appeal to his likes – the blind and the cripple, the ex-servicemen, Aringo, Saturday, some angry women, traders, farmers, artisans, pensioners, children, all aggressively racing and wielding placards of war and greenish leaves to protest the indignities and injustice meted out against the poor and the entire population of WAZOBIA and Umuowa, by the capitalist exploiter Brigadier Banjo and his cohorts, who are created in the fictive mould of Nigeria's political leaders.

Conclusion

The analysis of the prose fiction reveals that the African writer is a sensitive force in the socio-political attempts at transforming his society for a glorified future, as expected and celebrated, particularly as it affects the downtrodden class of the masses or the wretched of the earth, who appear to have engaged the creative endeavour of the two writers this scholarship sought to analyse. In *Waiting for an Angel*, Habila captures the historic periods of militarization in Nigeria and its haunting presence on the masses' physical, social, economic and psychological well-being, while Ikerionwu re-enacts in *Heroes of Change* the spillover of draconian leadership in a democratic dispensation where egalitarian expectations are merely a mirage. The point of convergence between the two texts lies in their representations of the pains, agonies, mass brutality, class conflicts, marginalization and oppression of the masses, whose audacity of hope for survival is convivially daring.

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