



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A  
ARTS & HUMANITIES - PSYCHOLOGY  
Volume 15 Issue 2 Version 1.0 Year 2015  
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal  
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)  
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

## The Writer as a Dreamer: Utopia and the Ideals of Utopianism in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's the *Presidential Handshake*

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**Keywords:** *utopia, utopianism, dreamer, society, corruption, political disillusionment, disenchantment, idealism, reformation.*

**GJHSS-A Classification :** *FOR Code: 190199*



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# The Writer as a Dreamer: Utopia and the Ideals of Utopianism in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *the Presidential Handshake*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature as a mirror reflects society and literary artists all around the globe reflect their societies in their literary works. Writers across the world have embraced this unique gift of literature to express the

socio-political, economic, religious and even cultural milieu of their people. These writers, under the umbrella of literature have created works whose goals are channeled towards the ideas of socio-political, economic, cultural and religious reformation. This situation and its manifestation is made possible by the "inner-light" believed to be possessed by any gifted writer with which may geared towards the better mind of mankind. According to Wole Soyinka:

The writer possesses an inner light not available to masses of his people and that it is his duty to use this inspiration and insight to guide his society towards a beautiful future. (7) [3]

Writers and literary artists have embraced the genres of literature to preach, shout, satirize and mock in order to purge their societies of all the canker worms that militate against positive and developmental inclination. As David Ker opines:

The writer is a member of a society and his sensibility is conditioned by social and political happenings around him. These issues will therefore perforce be present in his work. (*Literature and Society in Africa*, 7) [4]

No devoted and patriotic writer can escape this task of social crusading, re-ordering, re-orientation, re-educating, engineering and re-shaping that must be done in the society. In the views of Donatus Nwoga: "if it is necessary to throw bombs in order to change the society, then a writer should recognize his obligation to his society and throw as many bombs as possible ...." (4)

A writer ought not to be like the proverbial man who was busy pursuing a rat while his house was on fire. A writer in a society is the moral conscience of his society and his art should gear towards social issues and social rehabilitation. It is in tandem with this known fact about literature and literary writers in the society that this paper attempts a sociological reading of Ngozi-Chuma-Udeh's *The Presidential Handshake* with the aim of exploring the various socio-political and economic realities of our society that formed the matrix of the work; and the writers viewpoint in the quest for a better and ideal society of our dream.

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## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

By conceptual framework we have in mind the concept on which a given research is based. The adopted theoretical and conceptual framework for this study is the idea of utopian and ideals of utopianism in literature. Utopia novel is the type of novel where the writer creates a perfect and beautiful world; a world where everything is good and ideal, a paradise where life thrives in harmony and human development and achievements flower at its peak. This world is far from our world of reality, our world of flesh and blood but writers create them perhaps to show a picture of an ideal world and also to see if we can through constant effort and quest strive to model our world to a greater extent in the form of the ideal world. According to M.H Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham:

The term utopia designates the class of fictional writing that represents an ideal, non-existent political and social way of life. It derives from Utopia, a book written in Latin by the renaissance humanist Sir Thomas More which describes a perfect commonwealth; More formed this title by conflating the Greek words "eutopia" (good place) and "outopia" (no place). The first and greatest instance of the literary type was Plato's *The Republic* which set forth in dialogue, the eternal Idea or Form, of a perfect commonwealth that can at best be merely approximated by political organizations in the actual world. Most of the later utopias like that of Thomas More, represent their ideal state in the fiction of a distant country reached by a venturesome traveler. There have been many utopias written since More gave impetus to the genre, some of mere Aracadian dreams, others intended as blueprints for social and technological improvements in the actual world. (416)

### a) According to Charles Nnolim

Man writes utopian literature, it seems either as a personal revolt against the human condition (ie against things as they are) or in his perpetual search for a heaven on earth- an earth that partakes of the kingdom idea, namely: fullness, richness, manifoldness, satisfying individuality, paradise on earth. Utopian literature has always expressed man's longing for things as they might or ought to be, for it is the aim of utopian literature to invite the wretched of the earth to partake, even if vicariously, of the delights and satisfaction denied them in this valley of tears. (64)

The concept of utopia and the utopian leanings is the adopted framework for this study. Our interest is on how the writer created several unrealistic aspects of our society which is only part of the dream of the writer for a better and harmonious society.

## III. ALLIED LITERATURE: THE IDEALS OF UTOPIANISM VIS-A-VIS AFRICAN LITERATURE

As earlier stated, utopia can be defined as an ideal or perfect place or state, or any visionary system of political or social perfection. In literature, it is projected to refer to a detailed description of a nation or commonwealth ordered according to a system which the author proposes as a better way of life than any known to exist. It is a system that could be instituted if the present one could be cancelled and people could start over.

Utopia, as a word and concept has its own peculiar history. The one major work preceding More's in the field was Plato's *Republic*. Its influence on *Utopia* is said to be extensive and unmistakable. The central theme of both Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia* is the search for justice. In the *Republic*, the rulers are to be a group of intelligent, unselfish men called the guardians or philosopher-kings, who conduct public affairs for the good of the whole nation. Gold and silver coinage is outlawed, and there is a rigid proscription against luxury and ostentation. Life in the society is directed by a highly moral code of conduct. An educational system for the intelligentsia is elaborately and idealistically designed. Equality of men and women is proposed in both works, though with certain qualifications. There is allowance made in Plato's scheme for the practice of slavery, as there is in More's. There are, on the other hand, departures from Plato in *Utopia*, some quite radical. The *Republic* establishes sharply defined class distinctions — the ruling intelligentsia; the warrior class; commoners, consisting of merchants, artisans, and laborers; and finally, at the lowest level, the slaves. Utopians recognize no such gradations among their citizens. The religious beliefs and practices in the two books are, of course, quite different. These are among the various areas of similarities and differences evident in the two works pioneering the ideals of utopia in our various societies. Be it as it may, utopia in common parlance has come to mean an impractical or idealistic scheme for social and political reform in our various societies. In the opinions of Bill Ashcroft:

Wherever utopias occur, three key contradictions emerge: the relation between utopias and utopianism; the relation between the future and memory; and the relation between the individual and the collective. The dialogic ways in which postcolonial writers and thinkers negotiate such ambiguities create a distinct form of cultural and political hope. It is this negotiation and resolution of such ambiguities that demonstrates the utility of postcolonial utopianism.... The function of utopianism is the energizing of the present with the anticipation of what is to come. For Bloch, utopias are pipe dreams. Without utopianism, however, we cannot

live. We can see this confirmed in the fact that all "achieved utopias"... But despite these failures and the ambiguous relationship between utopias and dystopias utopianism remains necessary.... To emphasize this Bloch explicitly separates utopianism, which he sees as a universal human characteristic, from utopias, which, as playful abstractions, are pointless and misleading—a parody of hope. (4)

African literature from its inception has embraced the ideals of utopianism as a veritable way of ushering in change and bringing into the continent, the ideals and quality of life that are not in existence but yet, are highly essential and are sine qua non in the collective struggle to build a new Africa. African writers infuse in their works, the inventions of utopianism by creating a society that is larger than their immediate environment, a society that is ideal, corrupt-free, prosperous and harmonious in many accounting. This is a society these writers believe is obtainable and capable of replacing our corrupt society if only our bountiful human and natural resources, and enviable economy will be prudently managed and our socio-political and philosophical ideology reformed for the better. According to Craig Smith:

Since its emergence during the nationalist years of 1945-60, African fiction has persistently explored the dialectic between the promise of change and the pressures of compromise. The desire to re-imagine the nation-to constitute it anew, at any and all scales-is the lifeblood of this literature.... Utopia draws upon desire: desire for change, for escape both from the here-and-now and to what will be better, that goal which Ngugi describes as "true communal self-regulation and self-determination ... through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space." At their most powerful moments, the novels call for the creation of something new: a social order that will heal the scars of colonization, either by returning to pre-colonial values or by breaking free into a truly egalitarian polity. (81)

a) *The critic went further to posit thus*

...Yet at the same time that they envision this national rebirth, these works also inscribe the powerful resistance to change of specific social collectivities and ideologies. Texts become sites of struggle for control of the nation's imagination--the way it imagines itself to itself as well as to readers outside its boundaries. And the moments at which texts fight these social struggles open up new possibilities for understanding how political consciousness and literary expression work upon each other. (81)

The African continent has been a continent with a chequered history and unpleasant experiences. First is her experience with slavery that robbed her of great men and women of enviable skills and manpower. Again, she witnessed the inevitable colonialism that destroyed her

culture and left her in pains of humiliation and perpetual search for what is left behind that will guide her in the perfect direction and sooth her wounds forever. In the views of Bill Ashcott:

African utopianism...reverts either to an historic sense of pharaonic identity or embeds a sense of cultural 'Africanness' in a mythic consciousness that extends beyond any particular nation. The later novels of Ayi Kwei Armah are particularly engaged in the recovery of an African classicism in the appropriation of Pharaonic Egyptian culture to African history. Most commonly associated with the work of Chiekh Anta Diop in the 1970s... Ben Okri on the other hand generates a utopianism through an exuberant language that provides a richly utopian view of the capacity of the African *imaginaire* to re-enter and reshape the modern world. It is not merely a hope for African resurgence, but a vision of Africa's transformative potential. (7)

The African continent by the knowledge of her experiences is no stranger to misfortune, tragedies, backwardness and exploitation. Problems of leadership, poverty, neo-colonialism, dictatorship, corruption, ethnic rivalry and all sorts of afflictions characterize the map and identification of the continent, and though unarguably one of the richest continents in the world, Africa still remains undeveloped and poor when compared with the rest of the world. In congruence with this, Africa writers across the globe have taken it upon themselves the laborious task of addressing several nuances of injustices and past errors in their creative works. Utopian literature provides an escape route in the miasma of these socio-political and economic anomalies. It points at the way forward and serves as a beacon of hope and faith in the glories of the continent yet to come. Some African writers create utopian literature first, as a means of escape from the gory realities around them, second, as a form of elixir and consolation, third, as a symbol of hope and continual belief in a glorious future yet to come and lastly, in demonstration of their collective dreams as writers with visions and prophetic ideas of a new nation where peace and harmony, decorum and prosperity is the order of the day. According to Charles Nnolim:

Every utopia is but one manifestation of what man has as an inner aim and what he must have for fulfillment as an individual. To deny that man needs promise of a better future to exist is to reject utopia, to deny the truth about man's essence. According to Paul Tillich, it is impossible to understand history without utopia, for neither historical consciousness nor action can be meaningful unless utopia is envisaged both at the beginning and at the end of history. He further asserts that utopia has one positive characteristic: its fruitfulness – its ability to open up possibilities for man which would have remained lost to him if not



envisaged by utopian anticipation, for every utopia is an anticipation of human fulfillment. And many things anticipated by man in utopian literature have turned out to be real possibilities.

b) *Nnolim went further to posit thus*

Without this anticipatory inventiveness, countless possibilities would have remained lost to man and remained unrealized. And where no anticipatory utopia is created to open up possibilities for man, we find a stagnant, sterile present: we find a situation in which not only individual but cultural realization of human possibilities are inhibited and remain unfulfilled. (65)

All these are parts of the deep rooted beliefs and ideas of utopianism as relates to African literature. This type of literature smacks of fantasy; highly imaginary and unrealistic but in reality is apt and energizing in the face of the ever increasing need to search out for better ways to change the fortune and physiognomy of the continent for the better. Also, to continue to ensure the unwavering nationalist spirit that will help the Africans to work collectively to achieve the dreams of their 'African paradise' on earth is an inclusive aim and venture.

#### IV. SOCIO-POLITICAL DISILLUSIONMENT IN NGOZI CHUMA-UDEH'S *THE PRESIDENTIAL HANDSHAKE*

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *The Presidential Handshake* is a sequel to her first novel, *Teachers on Strike*. The novel is a continuation of the first novel where we had earlier met teacher Nebe. The story in the novel centers around a teacher named Nebe. Teacher Nebe was described as a teacher with high moral standards and values for life. He is a great activist and social crusader who always stands on the path of truth and what is right irrespective of what the leaders and society think about it. That was the only reason he was still a poor teacher despite the long years he had spent in the profession. He had rejected several avenues to enrich himself from bribery and ill-gotten wealth offered by some political leaders. He is armed with the belief that teaching is a passion, a calling and not a money-making venture. In *Teachers on Strike*, Teacher Nebe was a strong activist and the leader of the Teacher's Union who wedged a long and drawn-out war with the then sole-administrator who had sacrificed the educational standard of the state on the altar of politics, selfish and economic gains. In *The Presidential Handshake*, Teacher Nebe had refused to let go his experiences during the strike actions and that led to his bitter disposition towards politics. It was until the President, Supo visited his school that the anger was resuscitated and his hatred from the memory of the strike and its effect on the education sector came alive again. The writer captured this in these words:

... Supo's coming has brought so many bad memories to his soul. It had revived the ghosts of buried memory of the long, devastating teacher's strike action against the non-payment of their salaries by the immediate past District Administrator. It was a battle for life by the teachers. So many things were lost both physically and psychologically. People withered and died as if they were flowers starved of water. It was a terrible carnage on educational sector .... (24)

This is the plight of Teacher Nebe as a result of the strike action in the first novel. The strike left an indelible mark on the teacher, the society and the education sector as a result of a leader's insensitiveness. The strike took a greater percentage of the teacher's life, and that made the hatred for politics to take root and live with him. He hated the leaders and would wish to avoid them at all costs. The strike robbed him a part of him. Teacher Nebe became a representative of many teachers who may still battle to get over the psychological and traumatic experiences of the strike as the writer portrayed thus:

Since that strike, teacher Nebe had never been his real self. A very significant part of him went into the strike action but at the end of the protest, not all of him returned and he had been trying for years, to figure out which part of him that was still missing. He weighed his spiritual self, he weighed his physical and psychological self. Yet, he could not lay his hands on any tangible component of his being that was missing but he was sure something was missing. Another thing he was sure of was that the experience gathered from the strike action had taught him that no politician was worth giving an ear. He had made up his mind to create a safe distance from the politicking in the nation as he would give a hungry cheetah dangling gold in his claws. Politics was, indeed for the teacher, a very dirty game, a game of the sheathed claws of monster ready to pounce and tear ... (24).

It is this definition of politics accruing from Teacher Nebe's experiences from the strike actions that shaped his life. Teacher Nebe hated politics with a passion. He sees politicians as evil and oppressive sets of individuals who would continue to feed fat on the gullibility of the poor masses. Politics to him is a dirty game not worthy of venturing into. Our politicians in his concept are liars, oppressors, exploiters, and bloody-thirsty looters who are very insensitive and unconcerned about the plight of the masses that elected them into power. That was his belief and he vowed to stay away from politicians. That was the only reason he saw himself running far into his fellow teachers' farmland, just to escape the noise and applause coming from the hall where the school was honouring and celebrating the president of the country, Supo who came to visit the school. Supo was a former student of the school. Nebe

knew him as a student full of wit, cunning and deceit and could use the power of his wit to escape from any trouble and predicament he finds himself. Supo would have loved to see his ex-student prosperous and doing well in the labour market if not for the side Supo had identified with in the society. Teacher Nebe would have been happy and full of admiration and praise for Supo if he had been a successful business man. But Supo was a politician and that drew the gap between the teacher and his ex-student. His realization that Supo had succeeded in the game of blood to ascend to the pinnacle of politics and become the president of the country was a noble feat but Teacher Nebe's hatred for politics would reign supreme and that was why he took the decision not to honour, appreciate, regard or even identify with his former student who had become the president of the country. He was much convinced that Supo will only be one of the politicians that feed the masses with thousands of lies they have no hope of fulfilling. He would only feed on the gullibility of the masses. He would make them promises that would never come true and amass their resources which are stashed in foreign accounts around the world. This is why the applause for Supo's address which was still reaching him many miles in the bush where he was taking refuge was a noise and irritation to him as the writer depicted thus:

The teacher wondered what this last ear-splitting prolonged applause was all about because it surpassed the 'joy' of the visitor's presence among his 'people'. It almost uprooted the school from its very foundations. Whatever it was, be it a promise to build a castle in the moon for his people, tar the roads with diamonds, water the fields with silver, he vowed never to be moved like the rest of the gullible people around him. He sat put, undaunted on the stomp of wood in Aristo's bare existentialist farm .... (17)

This is the personality of teacher Nebe, a man who sees nothing in the ever delightful and promise-filled chants of our Nigerian politicians. Today in society we are familiar with politicians making empty promises to the masses during every electoral campaign period. Some of the politicians go as far as promising what civilization is yet to offer and this is an untold aspect of the realities of the lives of the people in society. The society is used to having politicians who promised heaven on earth and once elected, they begin to amass wealth and have no more business with the people who voted them into power. Their interest will be on the number of houses and properties they would acquire abroad and the millions of dollars they would transfer into foreign accounts before their dispensation will be over. Once their tenure is over, the vicious cycle of another set of thoroughly corrupt and unscrupulous politicians who promise all, but give nothing sets in again. They loot the treasury and squander the wealth of

the masses. The once disappointed masses continue to hope and pray with longing eyes and hungry stomachs for messiahs to come. This is of serious concern to the teacher as the writer depicted thus:

Teacher Emeka Nebe was not very happy about this mid-day roaming in the school garden but his heart was heavy, very heavy. His physical heart seems to have pains in it, as if small, sharp crystals were cutting into it. Everything seemed wrong to him, nothing was ever right these days. It was not just the ordinary quandary or misunderstanding or the tiny injustices prevalent in the daily National lives which majority of people feel pressing down on them. He felt rather serious brooding or premonition that the country was weighing down on him. (26)

Teacher Nebe becomes symbolic of those patriotic characters in society who still have the moral conscience in them, a conscience that still allows them to feel and be part of the sufferings, failures, broken promises, victimization, oppression, exploitation and corruption that have become part of the realistic aspects of society. Through the eyes of the teacher we feel and become part of the real life sufferings of many people in society made possible by mismanagement, corruption and political instability and dichotomy. The rich are getting richer, while the poor continue to languish in poverty. It is not that the nation lacks the economic and financial muscle to pull the masses from the cesspool of poverty, but corruption and bad leaders have continued to frustrate and ensure that the wealth of the nation is not evenly distributed among the owners of the wealth, the citizens in the country. Through the eyes and character of Nebe which the writer provides as lens, we see our society struggling to survive on the altar of bad politicking, exploitation and mismanagement. This is what Teacher Nebe has come to symbolize in the novel thus:

The teacher had passed through hard times in the country. He has towed the path of war with humiliating governmental policies. He had been a major stakeholder in the struggles of the masses to rise above debilitating governmental actions and decrees but the nation's quandaries seem to be growing in intensity instead of diminishing. In his society, the poor are downtrodden, though they do not seem to mind it anyway. If they do, they would not be shouting their heads off because a seeming oppressor came on a campaign tour ... (27).

This is the state of affairs of our society as captured by the writer in the novel. While Teacher Nebe was busy running away from Supo and his presidential entourage, little did he know that the president had come solely for him and to pull him into the politics he had avoided all his life. Just like the Biblical Jonah, Teacher Nebe was to go to Nineveh against his wishes. Unknown to the teacher, the applause that rang greatest



in his ears far away in the farm where he was hiding, came when the president announced his invitation to the presidential villa for a presidential handshake and other ceremonies. That was when the agonizing fate of Nebe in the hands of politicians and the society began. The moment Teacher Nebe came out from his hiding aware that the president had gone, he was greeted with applause, dance and ululation by the entire teachers who no longer see an ordinary teacher Nebe, but one who had just been invited to the presidential villa and with that singular invitation he will be drafted into the inner caucus of the president and whatever that will happen next will be a successful story of Teacher Nebe's journey to greatness in the political corridor. The reason for the cheerful celebration is because this is what politics and political appointment means to the masses – an avenue to enrich one's pocket and say goodbye to poverty. Teacher Nebe was received and addressed in the depiction of the writer thus:

... Everybody wanted to touch him as if he was some sort of relics. "You are a presidential guest", Dike cracked in his deep voice. As if to explain more, a barrage of voices interpreted the information to him in various ways. "*Iburu go kwa madu government*", "*obia ndi oyibo*", "Teacher, *okwa gi bu zi kwa na elu orji*" "*onye isi ala si gi bia rie, bia nua*", "Teacher *tinye kwa m na budget gi oo*".... (34)

All the italicized words are praises showered on teacher Nebe, signifying people's perception of his "life transformation" following his invitation for a presidential handshake. This is a deep exposition of the people's mentality and mindset towards politics. The above is a typical portrayal of how our actions and inactions help to fuel the political exploitation and disorder all around us. The news was not good to Teacher Nebe but that was not what the society cared for. Everybody wished to identify with him so that he could help advance their political, economic and other selfish interests to the president. Rather than trying to bring in positive change or sanity in the society, people are eagerly waiting for their own turn to amass the wealth of the nation. The news soon spread like wild harmattan fire that teacher Nebe had been invited by the president for a handshake. In tandem with that, cows, goats, gifts and money became a regular sight in Teacher Nebe's house from people who needed their interest to be sold to the president. Millions of naira were promised the teacher by different businessmen who wished to advance their business goals and interests. People urged him to accept the offer and alleviate himself and his family from poverty. It was indeed a lifetime opportunity in their eyes. The writer captured Teacher Nebe's situation in this scene:

"The teacher is back". A voice rang out from the roadside like the panic of a mad herd of cattle, the crowd surged forward. Nebe just had enough time to

wind up the window of Dife's Jalopy before they mobbed the car ... As the gate opened, the two men thought they were dreaming. Nebe wiped his eyes thoroughly to make sure he was not having a nightmare in broad day afternoon ... As he alighted the car, he noticed that the compound was full of different types of commodities ranging from bags of rice, heaps of yams to varieties of domestic animals, there were about fifteen cows tethered in the compound, countless rams, each with gigantic horns, jars of palm oil .... (116)

People from all works of life flooded Nebe's house seeking one help or the other. Teachers, traditional rulers, bank workers, the students and youths, Alhajis and market union leaders all came to Nebe begging for one selfish desire or the other. The fact that Teacher Nebe continued to reject the gifts did not stop more visitors with more enticing offers for him. One of the most peculiar and provoking episode worthy of note is the visit of the Traders of the under Bridge market. The market was described as a death zone that has recorded and continues to record great numbers of dead people because of the location of the market under a bridge. It was in the view of the increasing number of the people dying almost on daily basis that the government decided to build an ultra modern complex for the traders in a rather remote area far away from underneath the bridge. The idea is to protect lives and property of the people since the market is always flooded with buyers and sellers and can thrive anywhere it is located. But the leaders of the trade union of the market did not want such change. The reason is in the selfish deal that they profit heavily from the location of the market under the bridge. They had come to bribe Teacher Nebe with millions of naira to help them convince the president that the market should not be moved. Despite being reminded about the worrisome death tolls of people and the hazards in the location, the traders argued thus in advancement of their selfish economic interest:

"Yes, oga, Teacher, but death will come when it will, even when you are asleep in your bed. We are only doing our honest business. If one person dies, the market will continue. Human life and the market is the same thing. As people die, others are born. As one trader goes, another comes. Will a soldier refuse to go to war because he may be shot? Do we because termites will eventually eat the body refuse to have our baths? The pang of childbirth is great, but women get pregnant every day. The leader-trader philosophized to Dife's greatest annoyance. (145)

This is the view of the traders who would wish to remain under the bridge to maximize profit rather than moving to a safe ultra modern complex the government built for them. The head bridge market is real as well as the story surrounding it. It is located somewhere at

Onitsha, the River Niger Bridge that almost marked off the territorial boundary between Anambra and Delta States of Nigeria. The above scenario and many others in the novel is a bitter exposure of the mindsets of people in the society. As this continued to increase and the perversion in the society continued to be exposed in the demands and actions of those who visit teacher Nebe, the teacher lamented bitterly:

Why had the society reduced every variable to money and nothing more? Money... money, that is what he got to hear every microsecond of the day, money was valued far above human life, money was valued far above the human soul, and money was valued far above the sanctity of the human spirit. Money! (147)

This is the pervert mind of many people in our society. This is what brings tears to the eyes of Nebe. It was not just the traders who would wish to advance their selfish goals; even the youths came to Nebe to help them negotiate the sales of their voter's cards to the president. Dife had advised in these words:

"Do you know that these cards are your franchise and by selling them, you are selling your right to vote in the leaders of your choice? You will have no rights to participate in the nation's polity. Is that what you really want? These cards are the only power you hold over these politicians and if you dispose of them, you have disposed of the only franchise you have to make a meaningful contribution to your society. You will be selling away your rights to a broad egalitarian life for just twenty thousand naira .... (154)

But suffice it to say that this was a mere sermon to the youth who left Nebe's house still burning with desires to sell their voter's cards to a better buyer. There were so many other real life aspects of our society reveal in the novel which was only a pointer that our social life and perception of politics is in a real mess. Our mindsets need to be adjusted if we nurse any hope of building a harmonized and prosperous society.

## V. THE WAY FORWARD- THE UTOPIAN DREAMS OF THE WRITER

We have demonstrated earlier how writers use the avenue of their literary works to decry injustice, corruption, bad governance among other forms of vices which have eaten deep into the fabrics of our society and militate against our desired peace and progress. In *The Presidential Handshake* the writer sets out to expose the role the masses play in ensuring that this cycle of exploitation, bad leadership and political exploitation continues all around us. The problem, as we realize from the position of the writer in the novel, is not just with the leaders but also with the society, the masses who support the leaders to exploit them. It was when Teacher Nebe visited the president that he realized that the man was suffering. His ideas of politics

was different from what the people thought and he needed people like Nebe to help him make some positive changes and change the people's view of politics. The president, Supo had lamented bitterly thus:

... Because I felt time has come for necessary redirection of our people's mode of thoughts towards positivism. You see, teacher, it is not easy being a public figure. Everybody has a wrong notion of you, including your closest of associates. Your people expect you to bring back home all the money in the coffers of the government... they expect to go to bed and get rich the next morning because the president is their kinsman. I found myself in a most bizarre situation and I had to apply certain stringent measures one of which was to stay clear until I figure out ways of tackling the problems of making our people come to full realization that nobody is the government. The government is everybody. (348)

The president was full of lamentation on the state of affairs of the nation and what the people expect of him. From his perspective, it was the masses that in many ways push the leaders and give them room to exploit them. That was the only reason he had invited Teacher Nebe to join him in the task of re-orienting the mindsets of people in the society for effective and good governance. The president had confessed thus:

Teacher, as I told you before, the reorientation of our people is a task uphill which only the most dedicated souls could achieve and that is where you came in. Our people were bearing so much erroneous grudges for me because I disappointed their expectations of siphoning all the money in the economy back to the purses of my friends and relatives. I needed someone to illustrate to them the falsehood of their impressions about the nation's politics. I needed someone very intelligent and incorruptible to hammer real sense into their heads and you have started doing that. (348)

It was then that Teacher Nebe realized the plot. The president had chosen him to help him fight people's concept of politics and change their erroneous opinion about politics and national cake. The president, aware of all Teacher Nebe passed through from people from all works of life since he was invited for the handshake pleaded with him to feel what he had felt in the three years of being a president. It was while the president continued to explain that it all dawned on Teacher Nebe the reality of it all. The writer faithfully captured the scene of the realization in these words:

Realization dawned on the teacher that the problem in the country emanated from the erroneous perception of the entire society and not wholly from the nation's polity. All had misconstrued the core essence of governance. This misplacement of values had eaten so deep into the people and required very critical persistent modification. The teacher knew it would be





a long journey... this march for the redemption of the country but there was hope for emancipation through a great deal of capacity building inductions for reorientation of consciousness. (351)

The novel ended with the president and teacher Nebe, the politician and activist uniting in a common cause, a cause to salvage politics and re-orient the mindsets of the people towards the all important idea that politics is not really a call to loot but a call to serve and better the lots of the entire people in the society. It is a call to ameliorate the sufferings of many people in society and advance the nation's growth towards a more civilized, harmonious and idealized society. The people should realize that government does not belong to the leaders and politicians. Everybody is part of government. This is the message, the idea the president needed to impart on the people and he needed the likes of teacher Nebe, an incorruptible social activist and crusader to help him reach out and achieve this feat. This is the point where the utopian dreams of the writer were made manifest.

What we now establish in this section of the paper is that writers also in their bid to satirize, mock and correct through their literary works often create an unrealistic perspective of the society. This makes them dreamers who only live out their dreams and expectations in their literary works, a dream far removed from the real life socio-economic and political ideas of the society. Writers are in many ways, dreamers. They dream of things which in many cases are not in existence and wish they could through the powers of their imagination and creativity bring them into existence. According to Freud, dreams are wish fulfillment and they repress desires and fantasies which we conceal when we are awake because society abhors them. Dream according to Freud is a window to the unconscious. It could be a valuable tool for psychoanalysts in determining unresolved conflicts in the psyche. Sigmund Freud sees the writer as a dreamer and his works are as a result of his repressed desires. There is connectivity between the dream and the artist in that both express repressed fantasies. To write a story or a poem then is to reveal the unconscious. Such view makes the writer a complete individual working out his or her problems. According to Freud in his introductory lectures on psychoanalysis as quoted by Ann Dobie:

The artist has also an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become a neurotic. He is one who is urged on by instinctual needs which are too clamorous. He longs to attain to honour, power, riches, fame and the love of women; but he lacks the means of achieving these gratification so, like any other with an unsatisfied longing, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and all his libido too, to the creation of his wishes in the life of fantasy,

from which the way might readily lead to neurosis. (61)

The above view and statement is necessary and apt here to demonstrate how a writer is a dreamer and how his dreams inescapably diffuse into his literary works and formed part and parcel of his quest to achieve a new order of things and events which in many ways conflict with the traditional ways these ideas and events have been conceived and accepted. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh obviously as a writer, we can argue, is filled with dreams of a beautiful society; a society where the leaders know their roles and the limits of their powers and the masses equally recognize theirs. The writer dreams of a society where there is peace, progress and harmony. The writer also dreams of a corrupt-free society where excellence, merit and qualification will count in all spheres of lives; a society where the leaders serve and do not loot and all the basic amenities and infrastructures are well provided for the betterment of mankind in the society. She dreams of a society where education prospers and economy booms for the well-being of even the lowest citizen of the society. These are part of the dreams of the writer which unconsciously formed the matrix of her literary work. In the novel, *The Presidential Handshake*, the writer created a society where a president fully recognizes his role as a leader which is a call to serve and not to loot. This is why it was impossible for him to amass wealth from the nation's treasury to enrich his people as they expected of him in conformity to what is obtainable in society. Every leader once he seizes power is expected to loot and plunder the nation's economy until his tenure is over. His family and relatives are not expected to lack anything financially for life courtesy of money stolen from the nation's treasury termed the 'national cake.' This was a practice, the modus operandi which Supo decided to challenge and uproot as a president. The writer made President Supo to bear and fan the embers of goodwill and transformation needed in our nation's polity. Supo, irrespective of his rather infamous background as a student in teacher Nebe's class was fast to change his mindset the moment he became the president of the country. He was willing to institute positive change and he needed selfless and incorruptible activists like teacher Nebe to assist him in the struggle and quest to build a new society of our dreams. This is the dream of the writer as one can argue that such calibers of leaders are still nowhere to be found in most of our African and Nigerian society today. If they ever exist, they are still encumbered and far away from the corridor of power. But the writer's conceptualization of such idealized and long waited leaders, the 'saviours' of our world shows in actual sense that they are capable of existing in our real world.

The emergence of these leaders, symbolized in the character of President Supo who will connect with

the ever waiting patriots and visionists like Teacher Nebe and unite politics and activism under one common umbrella, is the dream of the writer for her society. Our argument is that the writer had only succeeded in leaving in the novel, a rather prophetic ideology that ought to live in our minds, and that is the idea of the emergence of the new sets of selfless, sincere, honest and patriotic leaders who will lead our society to their promised land. Perhaps, someday the future generation will discuss the novel on the basis of a dream come true just like one can argue that to a greater extent, 'the beautiful ones' are being born in modern Ghana today. And more are in the womb waiting to see the light of the day, all armed with visions and zeal to make Ghana a corrupt-free society which was the dream and vision of Ayi Kwei Armah in his highly satirical and scatologist piece, *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*, described as a bitter and biting criticism of the corrupt and socio-political and economic quagmire of the Ghanaian society in the wake of political independence. The least we could do is to watch, pray and hope in the best yet to come and condition our mindset for the advent and emergence of ideal leaders and society which we believe are intertwined in the future yet to come.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has done much to expose some of the social issues highlighted in the novel, *The Presidential Handshake*. The novel examined the various social issues and aspects of social reality portrayed by the writer which bothers on the politics and polity of the nation. The idea and information gleaned from the novel may sound absurd from our knowledge of our political leaders today but the truth is that the writer succeeded in reflecting many real life experience and affairs of the society. The novel was able to locate the problems of politics. With familiar characters, in familiar places of society, the writer made a point that politics will be better and society too if only we can change our mindsets towards politics and political leaders. If only we will know our rights and our powers and if leaders will realize that politics could still be a call to serve and not one to loot and plunder. The president, President Supo in the novel becomes symbolic of the rare kind of leaders which we clamour for and continue to wait for in our society. The president is symbolic of the new generations of leaders yet to come, the leader that will help once again to restore order and sanity in our political sector and restore politics to the enviable height of a responsible, transparent and accountable government. Teacher Nebe on the other hand, is symbolic of those patriots who still nurse in them the frail hope that society could still be better and took it upon themselves to shine as light; a light others ought to imitate in order to foster peace, prosperity and good ethical values in the society.

If the politician and activist could unite in one common cause like they did in the novel, we too could reconcile our differences and only then would we be ready to build the desired socio-political, economic and academic polity we are all in dire need of. But for now presently, we are hopeful dreamers like Ngozi Chuma-Udeh wishing fervently that our utopia metamorphoses into complete reality as soon as possible.

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