

**BEARING WITNESS TO AN ERA: CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN  
FICTION AND THE RETURN TO THE RECENT PAST**

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## Abstract

The body of writing collectively referred to as third generation or contemporary Nigerian literature emerged on the international literary scene from about the year 2000. This writing is marked by attempts to negotiate contemporary identities, and it engages with various developments in the Nigerian nation: Nigeria's past and current political and socio-economic state, different kinds of cultural hybridization as well as the writers increasing transnational awareness.

This study argues that contemporary Nigerian fiction obsessively returns to the period from 1985-1998 as a historical site for narrating the individual and collective Nigerian experience of the trauma of military dictatorship, which has shaped the contemporary reality of the nation. The study builds on existing critical work on contemporary Nigerian fiction, in order to highlight patterns and ideas that have hitherto been neglected in scholarly work in this field. The study seeks to address this gap in the existing critical literature by examining third-generation Nigerian writing's representation of this era in a select corpus of work spanning from 2000-06: Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000), Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come* (2005), and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006).

The four novels chosen were written in response to military rule and dictatorship in the 80s and 90s, and they all feature representations of state violence. This study finds that, despite variations in the novels aesthetic modes, violence, control, silencing, dictatorship, alienation, the trauma of everyday life and resistance recur in realist modes. Above all, the study argues that contemporary Nigerian fiction's insistent representation of the violent past of military rule in Nigeria is a means of navigating the complex psychological and political processes involved in dealing with post-colonial trauma by employing writing as a form of resistance.

## **Authors Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all critical and other sources (literary and electronic) have been specifically and properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

Parts of this thesis appear in the following publications:

Tenshak, J., "Dictatorship and Alienation in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come*," in Walter P. Collins III (ed.), *Writing Contemporary Nigeria: How Sefi Atta Illuminates African Culture and Tradition*, New York: Cambria Press, 2015.

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## **Chapter One**

### **History, Memory and Imagination in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction**

#### *1.0 Introduction*

Colonialism may have come, and can be said to be gone as it was practiced from the 1870s to the 1960s, but its consequences continue to reverberate in the study of Africa and its literature. The colonial situation has had a lasting effect on the establishment of the literary culture of the continent. African literature from colonial times to the present is, to a large extent characterised by the production of realist narratives which clearly show a criticism of the colonial portrayal of the continent and its people. It also shows a focus on the disruptive effects of colonialism on traditional African society through the imposition of Western values on the people.

Nigerian literature in particular, especially its prose fiction reveals a form of resistance to the colonial encounter in its examination of the challenges that cropped up after the attainment of independence. The failings of the post-colonial nation state, neo-colonialism, globalization and all the issues that arise from it, are evident in the Nigerian writers' engagement with the present times. These writers are, creating fictional narratives out of historical facts and (re)presenting the lived experiences of the people. The construction of these narratives from Nigeria's turbulent and oppressive history can be traced in the works of first-generation writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and, also, in the works of the writers who came after them. There are obvious differences in style and focus, but the nation has remained at the heart of the Nigerian writer's literary concerns.

Contemporary Nigerian writing in its engagement with the nation ties some of the concerns it presents to global currents. The global issues the writers engage with are connected to migration, exile, trans/multi culturalism and to questions on individual and collective identity. These writers are engaging with national issues in parallel with global issues given that a large percentage of them are writing from the diaspora. The most obvious engagement with the nation in

contemporary Nigerian writing<sup>1</sup> is the obsessive return to the period of the mid-80s to the late 90s as a historical site for narrating the individual and collective Nigerian experience of an era.

This study is an examination of the years from 1985 to 1998 as they are expressed and represented in selected contemporary Nigerian fiction. It is this study's contention that scholarly criticism of contemporary Nigerian writing has failed to address the obsessive return to the era of the mid-80s to the late 90s, by third-generation Nigerian authors, as a historical site in the narration of the Nigerian story. This study will explore the ways in which third-generation Nigerian writing interrogates this period through a close reading of Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000), Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come* (2005) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006).

The critic Christopher Okonkwo suggests that *Arrows of Rain*, *Waiting for an Angel*, and *Purple Hibiscus* can be "linked 'dialogically' [...] that is, these are novels unconsciously in dialogue, they are talking about, conversing, and/or contributing discrete voices or perspectives on that subject of Nigeria's post-war bleak epoch" (2005: p.4). The unconscious dialogue Okonkwo refers to is connected to the state of Nigeria that these writers describe in their works, in which, actual historical facts and events that took place during the era of military dictatorship from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s are referred to both symbolically and directly.

This view is not shared unanimously, though. In response to questions posed by Mc Philips Nwachukwu in 2008, the Nigerian literary critic Charles Nnolim, discussing the socio-political responsibilities of the writer, argues that contemporary Nigerian writing has no specific thematic focus. Making references to the works of Adichie and Habila amongst others, Nnolim further claims that "Contemporary Nigerian literature hardly has a national concern or a central focus" (p.48). Nnolim argues that the present generation of Nigerian writers lack thematic focus in their work. He posits that national concerns are neglected in the narration of their stories, which he says is primarily concerned with 'enjoyment'. Nnolim acknowledges the social vision that echoes through the motifs of the works of contemporary Nigerian writers, but rejects the idea

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, we use contemporary Nigerian literature/writing/writers interchangeably with third generation Nigerian literature/writing/writers. This is because the terms do not have any contestable conceptual implication.

that these writers show a concern with the political condition in Nigeria. This thesis argues that, contrary to Nnolim's postulation, contemporary Nigerian writing, as we shall soon see, has a strong thematic focus and does show a distinct concern for the nation.

This study takes the opposing views laid out by Okonkwo and Nnolim as its starting point. Firstly, it seeks to improve on and extend Okonkwo's argument and posit that, indeed, the works of Adichie, Atta, Habila and Ndibe are not only in dialogue in their discussion on the subject of the Nigerian state, but are also instructive in examining the era from the mid-80s to the late 90s. These writers are, through their writing, not only mapping out a particular *zeitgeist*,<sup>2</sup> but are also offering their perspectives on the era through their experiences as literal and literary "children of the post-colony" (Waberi, 1998: p.8).

Secondly, this study seeks to disprove Nnolim's claim by showing that contemporary Nigerian writing as represented in these novels has a central theme, namely, anomie,<sup>3</sup> which is occasioned by the historical, socio-political and economic conditions that Nigeria faced during the era of the 80s-90s. These writers engage with this period and in the process reflect on present-day socio-political problems of abuse of power by the ruling elite, corruption, widespread social inequality and injustice in Nigeria. In light of this, the study will show that contemporary Nigerian writers as represented by our corpus have identified the challenges of their time as related to issues emanating from the disintegration of binding socio-political norms and which give rise to; silencing and control, resistance and popular struggle, dictatorship and alienation, and the socio-economic challenges that emanate from the effects of the economic policy of SAP.

This study identifies these concerns as emanating from the incursion of the military into national politics. Nigeria in the 80s and 90s as remembered by these writers was, therefore, a place of the most brutal military rule in Nigerian history. These writers, by remembering this painful past, bear witness to it. The notion of testifying to the past according to Laurie Vickroy "has been an urgent task for many fiction writers as they attempt to preserve personal and collective memories

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<sup>2</sup> This word which has German roots, means 'the spirit of the time' and in this study, it refers to the contemporary in Nigerian literature.

<sup>3</sup> Anomie is used in this study largely to refer to the way individuals or communities feel their leaders are indifferent to their needs, that their society is lacking in order and that the promises of their leaders are unfulfilled.

from assimilation, repression or misrepresentation” (2002: p.1). These writers, use their memories of Nigeria of the time, and return to this era as an act of dealing with a past that was traumatic for the people because as Binyavanga Wainaina suggests, they realize the need to take control of their history in order to manage their present (“About the Book,” 2006, online).

What is significant for this study is how the recent past looms large for these writers in their portrayal of the Nigerian socio-political and economic situation of the 80s and 90s.<sup>4</sup> They present this era as characterized by the trauma of military dictatorship, and intertwine the role of the military with the escalation of the crises experienced at the time. Consequently, because these novels imaginatively represent the Nigerian experience of military rule in the 80s-90s, the formal structure of the novels revolves around the conflict between the rulers and the ruled. Furthermore, thematically, the novels collectively engage with a critical denunciation of post-independence disillusionment. The novels, therefore, highlight and critically interrogate the attempt by the state to remove the people’s legitimate rights. As a result, questions of human rights abuse and the failed promise of the public sphere dominate the trajectory of the plots in the four chosen texts.

In addition, these novels are linked in an unconscious dialogue on the subject of Nigeria during the military era of the 80s-90s. Indeed, the conversation between the chosen texts shows a correlation between military rule and the socio-political and economic conditions of Nigeria during the years from 1985-1998. These connections are alluded to in each of these novels, creating an unconscious form of inter-textuality. The socio-political and economic issues that are depicted in these novels are real; the artistic productions in these novels are a ‘truthful’ narrative of Nigeria in the 80s-90s. Indeed, as each of the texts adopts a broadly realist approach to the era in question, these novels could be argued to constitute a corpus of verifiable, realistic literature on postcolonial Nigeria during the military era of the 80s-90s.

The turmoil brought about by the incursion of the military into governance and the declining economic fortunes of the country encouraged migration. A majority of third-generation writers are situated in and write from the diaspora and, thus because of this, concerns relating to identity

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<sup>4</sup> 80s and 90s will be used throughout this work to refer to the period under study.

are also evident in contemporary Nigerian literature. Christopher Ouma maintains that contemporary Nigerian writers “write from their experiences of the diaspora or with a diasporic consciousness” (2011: p.5). Indeed, Willem Smit argues that the diasporic consciousness lies behind the construction of hybrid identities in third-generation novels which, he posits, are increasingly becoming transnational in their settings (2009: p.11).

For these writers, how they perceive and portray their time is influenced by the experiences that come with being migrants and having to live their adult life elsewhere. The different places they have had to pass through have continually required them to negotiate and re-negotiate what it means for them to be Nigerian. The place of these writers is thus uniquely defined by the duality of the challenge of being Nigerians and of being situated in the West. Although these writers write from the diaspora, a place far removed from their places of birth, their works are portrayals of their respective Nigerian realities, and show an engagement with the Nigerian literary heritage inter-textually (this is evident in the echoes we notice from their literary forbearers).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, though these writers are exposed to a cultural community different from that of their homeland, the subject of their writing and their identity as writers points to them being Nigerians. However in their identification with the problems in the Nigerian state, they do not engage with the country from the ‘other’ perspective but write from the perspective of insiders, members of a community who are writing about issues that affect all Nigerians, including themselves. Evident in the work of these writers is an engagement with the challenges apparent in Nigeria’s troubled socio-economic and political landscape that emanate from the interference of the military in the political landscape of the nation especially during the 80s and the 90s.

It is obvious that these writers’ obsession with the past stems from remembering the time when they lived in Nigeria. The memories of Nigeria we encounter in their works are not only representations but recreations. Thus, these writers do not only remember a past but also creatively engage with the effects of this past on their present situation. Adichie, speaking on behalf of her contemporaries, argues that what they have set out to do in their writing is to reflect their lives, which unfortunately are defined by social unrest (“My Book Should Provoke,” 2007,

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<sup>5</sup> The opening line of Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* “Things started to fall apart when my brother Jaja did not go to communion” is a clear allusion to Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart*. Allusions to the works of writers who came before permeate contemporary Nigerian writing especially Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* which is one of the texts under examination in this study.

online). These writers, therefore, confront issues tied to the challenges they have had to grapple with in regard to Nigeria's socio-economic and political history, and they do this because their identities as Nigerians are tied to these experiences.

Indeed, the challenges that come with having to deal with issues related to their country's troubles requires them to keep negotiating and re-negotiating their identities as Nigerians; hence, questions tied to national and cultural identity loom large in their writing. Although these writers focus on the individual's identity, this focus is informed by a sense of the individual's identity as a Nigerian. The Nigerian identity of the writers selected for this study is clearly marked by a combination of contesting expressions, ideologies and practices that border on the political, cultural and religious which show a relationship between these writers and the nation. This relationship, though intricate in nature, persuades us to read the stories these writers tell as allegories of the nation. This study will draw on the arguments promoted by Frederic Jameson and Frantz Fanon regarding the relationship between the individual, his society or the nation in its analysis of some of the novels under examination. We do this because the experiences of the characters in these texts invite us to read the stories we encounter as allegories given that they also reveal the truth of the nation.

The debut novels of four writers have been chosen for this study. All four novels present some seminal characteristics of contemporary Nigerian writing which according to Wilhem Smit, include, features such as:

Voicing marginal (gender) identities; breaking taboos; reinterpreting and revisiting longstanding themes and events to allow for the articulation of contemporary commentary; engaging with hybridization and multiculturalism; challenging social and literary conventions; and reflecting national and political engagement. (2009: p.1)

These novels are, therefore, drawn from novelists of the same generation in Nigerian writing, and their classification as contemporary or third-generation writers signify writing coming out of and from Nigeria at the present. The term contemporary or third generation signifies what this

writing also represents; a definite process in the context of the larger corpus of existing Nigerian writing, (Ouma, 2011: p.3), as well as in terms of its moment of publication.<sup>6</sup>

Each of the writers selected here, as we will see in the course of this study, raise a number of issues that are critical to the study of the era of the 80s-90s in contemporary Nigerian fiction.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the writers and the novels chosen for this study use the figures, images and memories of the 80s-90s to reflect on the Nigerian experience in a way that is markedly different from what we notice in the works of their contemporaries. The era of the 80s-90s, as portrayed in our corpus, presents a discursive field of experiences, memories, personalities, places, and times that are reflective of these writers' experiences of the era under examination. There is a construction of the individual and collective identities of the characters we find in the stories the writers selected for this study tell. An examination of the era of the 80s and 90s is helpful in understanding the disposition and nature of these identities.

The choice of the writers is furthermore informed by their position in the literary production of contemporary Nigerian writing.<sup>8</sup> Ndibe's novel, which was published in 2000, appeared at the start of the period generally accepted as marking the emergence of third-generation Nigerian writing. Habila's novel was the first from this generation of writing to win a prestigious literary award,<sup>9</sup> and Atta and Adichie's novels are the first notable novels written by female writers of the third generation.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, two of the novels in the corpus are written by male writers and two are written by female writers. This is noteworthy on two counts: firstly, to engage with an

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<sup>6</sup> This study promotes the idea of generations because it is important to our interpretation of the stories we read. This is not to mean, the choice of the writers and novels chosen for examination here is solely guided by the notion of generations. This study is therefore, not a pointed attempt at defining the writers or selected texts as a new generation, but rather sees the notion of generations as critical to the study of the era of the 80s and 90s because of the issues the selected writers raise.

<sup>7</sup> It is impossible for four novels to represent an entire body of literature, but our choice of the corpus for this study is largely informed by the manner the novels sketch a clear portrait of the Nigerian socio-political situation of the 80s and 90s in a way that is distinct compared to other narratives from the same generation.

<sup>8</sup> Adesanmi and Dunton note that the works of these writers are highly acclaimed, given the enthusiastic recognition and wide dissemination they have received.

<sup>9</sup> Helon Habila's short story 'Prison Notes', won the 2001 Caine Prize for African writing. The original collection of short stories from which 'Prison Story' was taken from was published as the novel *Waiting for an Angel*, and this volume forms the corpus of our study here.

<sup>10</sup> Although Adichie is the most notable writer in the present generation of writers from Nigeria, this study does not make that fact an over-determining issue. Her choice, as well as that of the other writers chosen for this study, is guided largely by chronology - the time of the publication of her novel, and also by the issues she raises in the story she tells.

equal number of works by both sexes is to suggest that female writers in this present generation are producing literary works on a par with, if not better than, male writers.<sup>11</sup> Also, working on an equal number of novels by both male and female writers presents an opportunity to examine the issues we have identified as pertinent to this study from two perspectives; male and female. We notice that while the male writers engage with oppression as directly stemming from the state, the female writers deal with it as emanating from the micro level of the home and they translate this into the macro level of the state.

The four novels chosen for this study lack closure on the narrative level and in characterization. The main characters in all four novels are left suspended in stasis and what they end up doing is left ambiguous, due to a lack of closure in the narratives. Kambili, in *Purple Hibiscus*, tells us at the end of her narrative that when her brother Jaja is released from jail, they will leave Nigeria for the United States of America. But, whether they leave or not is left for the reader to decide. *Everything Good will Come* ends with the main character and narrator of the story Enitan dancing in the street, and we are not told what becomes of her. We are not told what happens to Lomba in *Waiting for an Angel*, either. We, therefore, do not know if he remains in prison or has been released. The main character in *Arrows of Rain*, Bukuru, commits suicide at the end of the narration. But we are not told what happens to Femi, the other narrator.

Although closure is not obligatory in a narrative, and many narratives end without it, we agree with Peter Brooks that closure in literature is, for many readers, the very purpose of reading, as it sheds light on a text and retrospectively gives it meaning (1984: p.92). The importance of closure in a narrative is therefore tied to the satisfaction the reader gets from the feeling that the story is complete and the conclusion is final. However, if, as John Hawley suggests, the catharsis of closure in narrative fiction “may by default have become the only effective means to digest the poison of the past, and to slowly heal from within the damage that has been done” (2008: p.16), then the writers chosen for this study prolong our engagement with the Nigerian past of

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<sup>11</sup> Scholars and critics (Jane Bryce, Pius Adesanmi and Chis Dunton) argue that there is a numerical superiority of women writers in third generation Nigerian writing. Indeed, they recognize the overwhelming presence of female writers in contemporary Nigerian fiction and posit that this is a first in the historical progression of Nigerian fiction. They point out that previous generations of writing in Nigeria were largely male dominated, but that the situation has changed markedly with this present generation.

the 80s-90s and its effects by not using the traditional concept of closure and, consequently, they deny us a simple resolution of this past and its traumas.

### 1.1 *A New Generation of Writers and Writing from Nigeria*

The term generation is multifaceted and has different functions depending on the field in which it is used. Attempts to identify distinct periods, especially historically, in Nigerian literature require us to think in terms of generations.<sup>12</sup> Our use of the term in relation to Nigerian literature functions mainly as a means of marking the shift from one literary group of writers to another. We engage with the division of Nigerian literature into periods cognizant of the limitations that can arise in periodizing literary movements. Indeed, we agree with Harry Garuba that “the project of defining and delimiting the boundaries of a literary generation can never escape the problem of semantic, thematic and even ideological indeterminacy” (2005: p.53). This is because thematic fluidity and temporal overlaps can present discrepancies when applying the rules in marking generational literary boundaries.

Charles Nnolim, in his essay, ‘Trends in the Nigerian Novel’, expresses reservations about drawing overly rigid boundaries between literary periods. He posits that a critic is limited when he/she is forced to untangle the relationship that exists between a literary trend and its “literary history as a kind of by-product of social change, or literary history as a sort of intellectual history which chronicles the great movements of ideas” (2010: p.53). He argues that this kind of limitation serves to over-simplify the intricate relationship between literature and the milieu from which it emerges. He concludes by suggesting that “we should regard a literary period as a time-section dominated by a set of conventions which have crystalized around certain historical or political events and possibly modified the concept of the whole period” (2010: p.54). Garuba and Nnolim’s views provide some insight into the way in which literary movements, in general, can be mapped. Thus, we proceed with the marking the boundaries of Nigerian literature because it “remains one of the cornerstones of literary criticism largely due to the possibilities it offers for a systematic understanding of literary trends and currents synchronically and diachronically” (Adesanmi and Dunton, 2005: p.13). Our examination of the texts in our corpus indeed, requires

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<sup>12</sup> The question of generations is of importance to this study. But this study is not a designed exercise at defining the novels in our corpus as a new generation. Each of the novels selected raise a number of issues that are critical to the study of the 80s-90s.

that we explore what Nigerian literature is saying at the present time alongside what it has been saying over time.

Ngugi Wa'Thiong'o, in his article 'Writing Against Neo-Colonialism', presents some of the historical and political events that might provide a framework for the periodization of literature in Africa. He identifies the three main stages in African literature as those of anti-colonial struggle, independence and neo-colonialism (1986: p.92). This study adopts Ngugi's model because Nigerian literature can partially be divided into these three broad periods. While on the one hand, this model provides a point of departure for the study of some writing, on the other hand, it is over-burdened by temporal specificity. Thus, because this model is bound by historical events, it tends to lose sight of characterization, and central themes that are not determined by colonization (Smit, 2009: p.4). This study makes use of the generational marker because it provides a provisional map for our engagement with Nigerian literature. However, this marker is understood to be open-ended and, therefore, open to revision.

The first generation of writers in Nigeria (Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, T.M Aluko, Flora Nwapa et.al) started to publish their works during the colonial period that lasted roughly from 1900-1960. Evident in their works is a form of anti-colonial nationalism which, Charles Nnolim states, "stresses and promotes the innate dignity of the black man and makes creative use of myths, legends, rituals, festivals, ceremonies and folklore" (2010: p.55). The promotion of a belief and pride in the indigenous culture and traditions of the people is also seen in the poetry and drama of this generation of writers. These writers, according to Harry Garuba, had "a firm belief in the truth of the 'nation', a truth rooted in the people, their culture and traditions" (2005: p.59). By writing in this way, first-generation Nigerian writers worked towards re-establishing an African identity rooted in a cultural and traditional heritage which they saw as having been tainted by the colonial experience. The writers of this generation are predominantly male: Flora Nwapa is the lone female writer of this generation.

Second-generation writers in Nigeria (Festus Iyayi, Ben Okri, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Buchi Emecheta, Femi Osofisan to name but the most prominent) were born into the colonial situation, but their formative years were shaped by independence and its aftermath of disillusionment and stasis

(Adesanmi and Dunton, 2005: p.14).<sup>13</sup> After the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970, the narrative of the nation and community inherited from the previous generation could not survive in the same form, which meant that these writers have had to move away from cultural nationalism. They depicted the pathetic circumstances of the poor masses in a society in which the oppressed and the oppressor, the exploiter and the exploited, share an unequal and uneasy co-existence (Nnolim, 1989: p.58). Thus, a majority of the writings of this generation, especially its fiction and poetry, were a form of protest writing against the neo-colonial governments of the time. It is on these foundations that third-generation Nigerian writers are constructing their works.

Third-generation Nigerian writing contributes to an updating of Nigerian literature through the ways in which the writers are re-inscribing and re-focusing on themes and concerns already explored by their predecessors. Indeed, by making the point that third-generation Nigerian writing is built upon the literary exploits of the first and second generation of Nigerian writers, we echo Tuzyline Jita Allan's claim that previous generations of Nigerian writing are the strong pillars that support new Nigerian writing (2010: p.xiv). It is noteworthy, though, that while contemporary Nigerian writing builds on the foundations laid by previous generations of writing, a significant distinguishing feature of Nigeria's third-generation writing is a departure from the trend of engaging with colonialism as a theme. Although contemporary Nigerian writers do not engage with colonialism to the same degree as the generations of writers before them did, they engage with its consequences. This is evident by the concerns these writers wrestle with: their experiences as a generation that grew up after Nigeria's independence, their being witnesses to the epoch of military rule and dictatorship, and therefore, removed from a personal life history of colonialism (Ouma, 2011: p.4).

The term 'third generation' in Nigerian literature refers to a textual rather than to authorial development, meaning that temporal coevality and ideological/thematic coherence are the two significant features that define third-generation writing in Nigeria. This demonstrates that this emerging literary trend that is taking shape presents texts with similar sentiments and goals; an emphasis on deprivation, on the denial of individual human rights and aspirations, and on the degradation of social relations under a series of increasingly despotic and corrupt regimes

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<sup>13</sup> I draw extensively on the critique guest-edited by Adesanmi and Dunton because as the first major compilation of academic essays on third-generation work, it provides insights that shed light upon the key features of third-generation writing.

(Adesanmi and Dunton, 2005: p.11). The current prominence of the third-generation Nigerian novel therefore dates from about the year 2000 and the writers from this period, according to Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, are “writers born after 1960, the emblematic year of Nigerian independence from colonialism” (2005: p.15).

Several third-generation novels are engaged with extremely disturbing subject matter such as incest and other sexual violence and, in the process, they break the silence on previously taboo topics. Indeed, some of these topics which were previously marginal to Nigerian fiction (rape, incest, homosexuality and international prostitution) are evident in Jude Dibia’s *Walking with Shadows* (2005) and *Unbridled* (2007), Chris Abani’s *Virgin Flames* (2007), Sefi Atta’s *News from Home* (2009), and Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters Street* (2010). The construction of gender identity vis-a-vis national identity is also portrayed in contemporary Nigerian fiction as Atta’s *Everything Good will Come* (2006), Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2006), and Chris Abani’s *Becoming Abigail* (2006) present to us characters who negotiate their gender identity and voice to constitute themselves as independent individuals.

Contemporary Nigerian writing, through an engagement with the child or childhood, also focuses on the growth and development of the individual’s identity: see for example, Abani’s *Graceland* (2004), Atta’s *Everything Good will Come* (2005), and Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2006). These writers find in the figure of the child an apt vehicle for the expression of their disappointment with the reality of Nigeria as a failed post-colonial state. They also share, along with their child characters, the trait of having a multiplicity of identities and experiences that are tied to their geographical locations.

The individual’s negotiation of a transnational hybrid identity, such as is seen in the works of Helen Oyeyemi’s *The Iscarus Girl* (2005), Segun Afolabi’s *A Life Elsewhere* (2006), and Diana Evans *26A* (2009), show this generation of writers also having to deal with issues related to diasporic identities, exile, migration, and globalization. These writers are tackling the tropes of identity, trans-culturalism and exploitation in relation to a world where the boundaries of geography, culture and language are fluid. Although the novels mentioned above do not capture the full thematic scope of contemporary Nigerian fiction, they embody and reveal some of the central thematic thrusts and emerging characteristics of this body of writing (Smit, 2009: p.12).

As already noted, contemporary Nigerian writing emerges from the literary foundation laid by past generations of writers in Nigeria, and is, as well, a response to factors which include Nigeria's socio-political history. As our corpus reflects the authors' responses to past and current situations in Nigeria, it is important to understand the conditions that have paved the way for the present generation of writing from Nigeria, which this study identifies as related to the nation's literary environment, socio-economic challenges and the political state of the nation.

### 1.1.1 *The Literary Shift*

The decade from 1985-1995 marked the peak of the literary production of second-generation Nigerian writing. Oyeniyi Okunoye suggests that the production of works of poetry dominated this decade (2011: p. 65). The prominent writers of the period such as Obi Nwakanma, Afam Akeh, Nduka Otiono and Sesan Ajayi, were poets. The importance of poetry during this decade was underpinned by a number of factors. Firstly, the writers who wrote at this time did so against the backdrop of military rule, particularly the regimes of Generals Mohammadu Buhari and Ibrahim Babangida. These regimes were notorious for muzzling dissenting voices. A lot of writers at the time were intimidated, harassed, detained or forced into exile for various offences ranging from being seen as a security risk to the state to publishing material calculated to ridicule the government.<sup>14</sup>

Although writing in the manner they did exposed the poets to danger, given that their art involved reacting directly to unpopular government policies, celebrating people known to be critics of the military and giving voice to victims of government excesses (Okunoye, 2011: p.70), the poetry thrived regardless because, as Niyi Osundare points out:

The more repressive the situation, the more urgent the communicative purpose of the freedom loving writer: the wider the tyrant's dragnet of silence threatens to spread, the more passionate the writer's communicative impulse [...]. A writer in dire need to subvert the dictator's silence invariably reaches for an idiom which will be readily accessible to the people whose dreams he plans to stir. (2001: p.134)

Relying mainly on humour and hyperbole, these poets satirize the military and their excesses. The critical intent in their work is conveyed in a variety of idioms such as we see in Niyi

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<sup>14</sup> Using the powers it conferred on itself by Decree 2, the Buhari regime threw its critics such as the afro-beat singer Fela Kuti in jail. Also, in 1984 the Buhari government passed Decree 4, the Protection Against False Accusations Decree, which was considered the most repressive press law ever enacted in Nigeria. The journalists Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor of the *Guardian* were amongst those tried and jailed under the decree.

Osundare's poem "A Tongue in the Crypt" (1990). Osundare's poem like most of the poems written at the time is stylistically indirect and parabolic. Indeed, the more repressive the situation became the more cautious and more implicit the poets, their verses and songs became.

Secondly, the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) clearly legitimized poetry as the major genre of its emergent members through its sponsorship of poetic publications and the awarding of prizes for poetry that were far more visible and privileged than the prose and drama prizes (Adesanmi and Dunton, 2005: p.9). In this decade of second-generation Nigerian writing, the novel was relegated to the background. Indeed, no noteworthy work of fiction interrupted the flow of poetry during that ten-year period.

The present generation of writers are heard across the gulf that separates Nigeria from the rest of the world and they express an anger that Frank Bures says "we all know well" ("Things Come Together," 2006, online), an anger that Chike Ofili calls "the anger of un-fulfilment" ("Things Come Together," 2006, online), the feeling that something was promised but never received. This anger stems from the realization by contemporary Nigerian writers that the generation of writers that came before them, as Odia Ofeimun argues, "left some questions unanswered and at the same time, raised questions" (2008: p.31). Thus, these new writers question the stories that had been told to them, are telling their own stories and in the process are making a great impact on the world literary scene, as can be seen by the enthusiastic international reception of works such as Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006), and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007) and Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004) amongst others, all contributing to a renewed interest in the novel in Nigeria.

### 1.1.2 *The Socio-Economic Situation*

The years starting from the mid-80s, as we already noted, are fundamental to the emergence of the literary current at the heart of contemporary Nigerian fiction. The socio-economic landscape that informs contemporary Nigerian fiction is that of political turmoil and economic decline which was brought on by the IMF/World Bank-sponsored economic policy of SAP during the 80s and 90s. As a result, contemporary Nigerian literature, especially its prose fiction, focuses on different dimensions of the Nigerian experience during this era. Third-generation Nigerian writers experienced the structural and economic disjunctions that characterized military rule in the 80s and 90s, and they have consciously chosen to structure their work around this experience.

The turbulent era of the 80s-90s served as an impetus for third-generation Nigerian writing. The literary productions of this generation reveal these writers to be grappling with the social and political fallout of SAP which Brian Ikejiaku outlines as “social/environmental damage, political unrest, conflicts, insecurity and sufferings” (2008: p.4). Indeed, there is ample evidence in contemporary Nigerian writing that SAP is a critical idea that dominates Nigerian literature, especially its prose fiction. Third-generation Nigerian writers’ engagement with SAP’s economic stabilization policies, which led to the devaluation of the naira, is most evident in Atta’s *Everything Good will Come* (2005), El Nukoya’s *Nine Lives* (2006) and Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2006). The fall in standard of living and a dearth of social sector programs is evident in Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Teju Cole’s *Everyday is for the Thief* (2007), Adaobi Nwuabani’s *I Do not Come to You by Chance* (2010), and Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Shegi’s Wives* (2010). While wage bill and job cuts is most evident in Habila’s *Measuring Time* (2007), Sefi Atta’s *Swallow* (2008), Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* (2010).

These writers also engage with the various challenges that arose due to the effects of these policies, by examining the consequences of urban migration, especially the rise of slums and shanty towns as is evident in Chris Abani’s *Graceland* (2005), Sefi Atta’s *Swallow* (2008), and Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* (2010). The consequences of SAP and its economic stabilization policies generally worsened the living conditions of the people. One of the results of this was that the government increasingly lost the support of the people, which in turn encouraged the government to use suppression rather than persuasion to stay in power in its bid to continue the enforcement of the SAP. This stance was met with protest and resistance by the people as is evident in Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain* (2000), Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2006) and Jude Dibia *Unbridled* (2007). Indeed, in drawing inspiration for their art from the past, contemporary Nigerian writers do not only engage with the socio-political aspects of the past, but also with the economic aspect of this past.

### 1.1.3 *The Political Influence*

Nigerian literature is extremely dynamic. It draws inspiration from socio-economic issues as well as from political, personal and related issues. Politically, three major national events have significantly impacted on Nigerian literature: The Nigerian crisis of the 1960s,<sup>15</sup> the Nigerian

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<sup>15</sup> After the attainment of independence in 1960, it became obvious that the Nigerian nation state was deeply divided along ethnic, religious and regional lines. By 1963, issues related to the control of the power of the state, resource allocation and citizenship generated civil strife, minority agitation and violent conflicts which led to the

civil war that lasted from 1967-1970, and military rule and dictatorship that lasted from 1966-1979 and 1983-1999 (Okunoye, 2011: p.65). Contemporary Nigerian writing is significantly impacted by the military rule and dictatorship of the 80s-90s.

Given the centrality of military rule in the socio-economic and political history of the Nigerian state, it is not unusual that its influence is reflected in Nigerian literature. Indeed, military rule not only impacted various spheres of Nigerian life, it also serves as a catalyst for the growth of Nigerian literature, especially in these contemporary times. As Okunoye suggests in relation to the 80s-90s and third-generation writing, “there is a correlation in the developments within the political sphere and responses in the Nigerian literary imagination of the time and this defines the unique character of a major phase in Nigerian literature” (2011: p.64). Gbemisola Adeoti gives a broader outline of the impact of military dictatorship on Nigerian writing. She presents to us writers and works that respond to the Nigerian military experience, and argues that there is an age-old dialectical affinity between politics and literature, and therefore, a people’s socio-political development is recorded not only in historical and political treaties, but also in the gamut of their literary and performing arts (2003: pp.11-12). From the foregoing, the creative writer can and sometimes does depict the social, political and particular realities of a place and period with clarity of perception that historians would sometimes be reluctant or unable to express. In Nigeria’s particular case, the ability of literature to provide remarkable insights into socio-political events should not be overlooked or underestimated. Indeed, this is the reason Ola Rotimi argues that, through literature, a society can question “the prevailing credos and practice of authority with a view to opening up its monopolies to the beneficial generality” (1999: p.34). To this end, literature in Nigeria demonstrates a commitment to keeping history alive, which is rewarding not only to literary scholarship, but also to the study of politics in the postcolonial state.

The authors who engage with soldiers and the military as subjects in their writing deal with the themes of economic mismanagement, abuse of power, and other legacies of military rule. They also capture the change in the initial perception of soldiers as saviours, who would rescue the nation from the corruption and excesses of the political establishment but who turn out to be as

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civil war that lasted from 1967-1970. These conditions, which were a defining characteristic of the time, are what this study refers to as the Nigerian crisis of the 1960s.

bad as the politicians in plunging the nation into political and economic turmoil. Oyeniyi Okunoye is of the opinion that military rule has left the nation's economy in ruins, frustrated her democratic desires and brought the Nigerian military into disrepute (2011: p.64). Indeed, he tells us that:

To speak of the military era in Nigeria is to focus on a period that reminds Nigerians of not just the infringement on the rights of the individuals and the stagnation of the country, but one that also accounts for such unprecedented developments in the nation's annals as the murder of journalists and politicians and the frustrations of Nigeria's aspiration to democracy. (p.66)

Contemporary Nigerian writing, in particular the four texts of our corpus, continues this critique of the military as an institution and as a political force by inscribing it into the very fabric of its narration. This engagement with the military, as we have already noted, reflects the experiences of these writers which come from being witnesses to the turbulence of military rule. Realism as used by the writers in our corpus describes life under the military in the 80s-90s without idealization. Our reading of the narratives we have chosen for this study leave us with the impression that the stories being narrated are reflections of an actual way of life during the era under study. The representation of the recent past in our corpus creates realist portraiture of an era which the next section seeks to map out.

### 1.2 *The Representation of History in the Selected Texts*

Okey Ndibe's novel, *Arrows of Rain*, was published in 2000. Set in the fictional African state of Madia (which is quite recognizable as Nigeria) under a military dictatorship, the novel tells the tragic story of the central character, an eccentric wanderer known as Bukuru. In parallel, the novel also explores the excesses of a military that is beyond control under the ruler-ship of General Isa Palat Bello, whose history is intertwined with that of Bukuru. Although the novel takes the form of a first-person narrative, the story is in fact narrated by two people: Bukuru and Femi Adero. This means that our point-of-view on events shifts at different moments in the novel. By telling the story in this manner, Ndibe intertwines two different story lines. A reading of *Arrows of Rain* leaves one confronted with the grim reality of Nigeria's military history as Ndibe dramatically recreates a canvass of corruption, brutal killings, dictatorship and various other ills that were the lot of the people. In his presentation of General Isa Palat Bello and President Askia Amin, Ndibe provides a compelling representation of the extreme corruption

experienced on all fronts, whereby the wealth of the nation is squandered in a most reckless manner and also of the careless attitude of the country's leaders towards the plight of the people as the machinery of state power is mobilized at all levels to control the people and to keep them quiet.

Helon Habila's novel, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), is a multi-vocal, chronologically fractured collection of seven stories that together form a single narrative. The structure of the novel is compelling because each of the seven parts of the narrative is centred on the story of a different character, yet it is the character Lomba who provides the focal point for the entire text by tying the stories together. History and fiction are intertwined in this novel and although some historical incidents are taken out of sequence in the manner they are narrated, the chaos and brutality of military rule in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s are clearly captured. Thus, in the telling of the stories of Lomba, Bola, Kela, Alice, Joshua and the other vibrant local characters, Habila not only opens a window into a traumatic past and the nightmare that was visited on the Nigerian people by the military, but also illustrates how the people move from lethargy into action through resistance and protest.

Sefi Atta's novel *Everything Good will Come* (2005) tells the story of Enitan in parallel with that of the Nigerian state. Two main themes are evident in Atta's novel: The theme of female assertiveness and an examination of post-independent Nigeria. Thus, as the story of Enitan unfolds that of the nation too unfolds and the country's socio-political life is imaginatively captured. This is done in the manner Atta uses her historical knowledge and personal experience of post-colonial Nigeria to critique and expose the socio-political landscape, especially under military rule. The political environment as revealed by Atta is not only characterized by coups, detentions, unwarranted arrests and outright military brutality against the populace, but also by economic challenges brought about by the effects of the IMF/World Bank policy of SAP.

Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006), like Atta's *Everything Good will come*, is a novel in which the narrative is related in the first person by a child revealing the story of a family as a microcosm of wider society. As in Atta's text, the novel exposes problems ranging from the familial, social and economic, while on the other hand it relates the story of a

complicated, dynamic, and deeply fractured postcolonial society trudging along under the biting tyrannical excesses of military ruler-ship. Adichie explores the gap between the public performance of Eugene Achike and his private irresponsibility in parallel with that of the military government of the time, and presents to us a novel focused on dictatorship, alienation and the trauma of everyday life.

In the novels chosen for this study, history compliments art. Indeed, the historical facts of the 80s and 90s in Nigeria are at the root of the stories the authors relate. This study is cognizant of the fact that it is difficult for the past to be accessed and rendered objectively. Indeed, one cannot talk about ‘history’ but rather about ‘histories’, since there are as many versions and re-writings of the past as there are historical discourses. We thus, recognize the fact that there is ‘official’ history and literary history and the accounts these histories narrate can be different. The writers chosen for this study make no pretence about the subjectivity of the stories they tell. What is obvious though is that the different stories they narrate reflect the same thing - the historical facts of military rule in the Nigeria of the 80s-90s.

The historicisation of the era of the 80s and 90s by these four writers is an act of socio-political engagement which evokes the peculiarities of the time, especially the trauma of military rule. These writers’ personal experiences of the period are infused into their narratives and they shape them in obvious ways. Okey Ndibe tells us:<sup>16</sup>

The moment I decided the setting, time and place, of my novel, there’s no question that the reality of experience in Nigeria and elsewhere in Nigeria infused the narrative, shaped it in subtle but potent ways (even when I was not conscious of the tracings). I’m attentive to events as they flow, and invested in history. Given these facts, the fictive canvas of *Arrows of Rain* was perforce fertilized by my complex sense of events in 1980s, 1990s Nigeria and Africa. (2015: n.p)

Similarly, Helon Habila, in an online interview with Jane Musoke-Nteyafas, admits he resorts to history for the stories he narrates in *Waiting for an Angel*: “I lived under Sani Abacha. I saw the great evil he perpetuated. I wasn’t told about it, and so I made it the main preoccupation of my novel. I try as much as possible to approach things from a historical perspective” (“African

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<sup>16</sup> Okey Ndibe says this in an email interview with this researcher in March 2015.

Writers: Meet Helon Habila,” 2006,). Sefi Atta, discussing *Everything Good will Come* with Ike Anya, says “I write about a dictatorship” and goes on to posit that the novel is “a very personal chronicle of post-independent Nigeria” because “I lived in Lagos during the time the story is set” (“Interview with Sefi Atta,” 2006, online).<sup>17</sup> These writers make the point that they write about a lived experience, but the use of their imagination to relate this experience should not be ignored. Indeed, Ndibe again goes on to make the point that “it would be wrong to see the novel as reducible to the data of history, the quotidian events of the period in which it’s set. It remains, for all the history and memory that impinged on it and vitalize it, a dynamically imaginative enterprise” (2015: n.p). It would, therefore, seem that, for these writers, writing their novels the way they have done presents an opportunity for dialogue through which their people can come to understand their lives better (Christian, 1996: p.149).

The way these writers’ engage with history in their narratives is central to the way in which the era of the 80s-90s will be explored throughout this study. Adichie, Atta, Habila and Ndibe revisit historical events by engaging with the trauma that emanates from military rule. In doing so, to borrow the words of Habila, they “react to their times” (“Everything Follows,” 2003, online). This reaction to their time is part of an attempt to negotiate a place within the colonial formation that is Nigeria. Post-colonial Nigeria is defined by the experiences of a civil war, back-to-back military rule, socio-political conflicts and economic challenges. The present generation of Nigerian writers is navigating its way through the aftermaths of the challenges of military rule in their art in an attempt to negotiate their place within the nation state, because they realize, as Adichie says, that “we cannot begin to make sense of our present and of our future until we engage properly with our past” (“My Book Should Provoke,” 2007, online). These writers, therefore, return to the past not just for the sake of returning to bygone times and depicting them as history. They return to the past as a form of resistance. This past still has an influence on the present, for some of the challenges of that time remain the challenges of the present.

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<sup>17</sup> Adichie is the youngest of the writers selected for this study. She as well as the other writers in the study experienced the fallout of the era of military rule and dictatorship in the 80s-90s. Given that she was just at the threshold of her teenage years at the beginning of the era under study, it would appear that her experience of the time was mostly tied to challenges related to education especially at the tertiary level given that she was brought up in a university environment. She is not as outspoken on her experiences of the era under study as the other writers here are, but there is no mistaking the fact that her novel that is chosen for this study is greatly influenced by Nigeria, and its history especially that of the 80s-90s.

These writers all use a narrative structure that combines a distinct mix of historical and imaginative ‘truths’ to offer a factual depiction of a period. Thus, the stories related in the texts are constructed around the many ways in which the excesses of the military shatter the lives of the people, especially those of ordinary people whose names do not appear in any history book. The writers organize the details of the stories they tell around some of the key events and people of the period. We are thus presented with ‘real’ people in the texts such as Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, Dele Giwa and Ken Saro-Wiwa.

These writers also fictionalize events that correspond to historical facts such as the killing of the journalist Dele Giwa, the hanging of the activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, the various skirmishes between the government and Nigerian students, civil society and university lecturers. Also, using a combination of specific events and the political ideas prevalent at the time, such as the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential elections, these writers make their characters’ personal story a part of the national history: for example, Habila in *Waiting for an Angel* re-enacts the suffering of the people under the military through the life of the character Lomba, making this character a synecdoche for the nation as a whole. Similarly, Adichie, Atta, and Ndibe, through their main characters’ lives, reveal to us the challenges in the nation under the military. The stories which are told by these writers through a record of incidents in the daily lives and relationships of their characters reflect the dynamics of life both public and political in Nigeria during the 80s-90s.

The traumatized in the texts are the voiceless and socially marginalized and our writers bring to bear the power of their imagination and symbolic experimentation to expose the terrifying and alienating experience of their characters’ trauma. We see this in Bukuru’s encounter with General Bello in *Arrows of Rain* where he is a witness to Iyese’s abuse, rape and murder. This is also evident in Lomba’s experience of physical violence at the hands of the agents of the state (*Waiting for an Angel*), Enitan’s witnessing of Sheri’s rape (*Everything Good will Come*), and in Kambili’s experience and witnessing of physical and psychological violence in her home (*Purple Hibiscus*).

By using their imagination in this way, our writers perform a socio-political critique of the military regime of the 80s and 90s which fosters violence and trauma. Trauma as realized in these novels is not simply a personal tragedy, although it is made most evident in the lives of individual characters. It is a collective tragedy and the consequence of the destructive forces embodied by the military regime. These writers therefore bring social, historical and psychological awareness to the reader by presenting the military state as a force of social oppression. Trauma in these novels is an indicator of social injustice or oppression and the ultimate cost of socio-political institutions (Vickroy, 2002: p.x).

In fictionalizing historical events, these writers have a choice regarding what to represent and what to ignore. This privilege to choose what to represent means that these writers are at liberty to include or exclude significant historical episodes in their narration. We see them engage with issues that are deemed to be unresolved. For example, Atta, Adichie and Habila engage with the unresolved issue of the murder of the journalist Dele Giwa in 1986. These writers also comment on the despot General Sani Abacha, whose cause of death in 1998 remains the subject of debate in Nigeria even to the present times. The inclusion of unresolved issues such as these creates gaps and erasures within the narration. This makes it clear that some of the events and issues that defined the period defy explanation, resolution or closure.

### 1.3 *The Past in Nigerian Fiction*

Nigeria, like all of Africa, has a long literary tradition, but one that was not written down before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to widespread literacy, Nigerian literature was primarily oral and passed from one generation to another through memorization and recitation. Owing to the British colonization of Nigeria, much of Nigeria's written literature is in English. The past has, therefore, been a re-occurring theme in Nigerian narratives. However, the representation of the past in Nigerian literature has evolved across time.

In Nigerian literature, the representation of the past popularly starts with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), a novel that imparts aspects of the tragic into its exploration of the impact of colonialism on traditional African cultures. Achebe says he was challenged to write this novel after reading works of fiction on Africans by non-Africans (e.g. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939), which did not portray Africa

as he knew it and Africans as he knew them ('Nigerian Literary History,' 2007, online), so he sought to correct such misleading artistic impressions. Achebe further explains that "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially those set in the past) did no more than teach their readers that their past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery" (1964: p.40). The earlier works of Achebe and his contemporaries were largely influenced by anti-colonial sentiments, and thus were written with the aim of asserting the value of indigenous Nigerian cultures. The representation of the past in these novels, according to reiterate Charles Nnolim, "stresses and promotes the innate dignity of the black man" (2010: p.55).

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) are other examples of pre-colonial accounts set in Nigerian villages, yet affected by European values. Nwapa, in *Efuru*, writes about women and their lives, and the issues and concerns within a traditional Igbo culture that is not affected by British colonialism. Elechi Amadi's world in *The Concubine*, focuses on the private, the social and the supernatural. In this novel, Amadi, shows a concern with the notion of cosmic totality, the precarious nature of man's relationship to the supernatural, a relationship in which forces manipulate human life and control human thoughts and actions in a painful and tragic human drama. These writers, on the one hand, show the past as ideal but their representation of the past present a largely believable version of reality - a sense of verisimilitude. The image of pre-colonial Nigerian society in their work reveal a people paradoxically in harmony but also in conflict with the values of their community, as we see in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). But for the most part, first-generation Nigerian writers used their art as an instrument to present their cultural heritage, which they see as being excellent especially to a world that venerates a Western way of doing things (Emenyonu, 1979: p.1).

Much of early Nigerian literature, therefore, chronicled the consequences of British colonialism in Nigeria, and dealt with themes like the colonial administrative system, colonialism's destruction of indigenous cultures, Christianity in Africa and colonial education. It is noteworthy though that after independence, Achebe and his contemporaries criticized the new black leaders as much as they had distrusted and criticized the white minority rulers.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See for example, Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1964), Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) and T.M Aluko's *Chief the Honorable Minister* (1970). The focus of their writing shifted from a veneration of the past by upholding the values of a way of life (Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*), to an examination of the clash between African traditions and the European mode of life (Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964), T.M. Aluko's *One Man, One Matchet* (1964) and John Munonye's *Obi* (1969)), and then to a criticism of the indigenous governments (Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1964), and Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964).

The disenchantment felt by Achebe and his contemporaries caused the generation of writers that came after them to see through the fog of independence euphoria and to realize that it was not about the person in the office, it was about power. The root of this disenchantment was the observation that leaders who began as statesmen became corrupted by the process of ruling over their fellow men. Nigerian novelists who came after Achebe and his contemporaries include Ken Saro Wiwa, Ben Okri, Tanure Ojaide, Zaynab Alkali, Buchi Emecheta, and Isidore Okpewho amongst others. These writers, sometimes referred to as the harbingers of modern Nigerian writing, were confronted with spectres of arrested decolonization, widespread autocratic rule, collapsing states, mass unemployment, worsening conditions in schools at all levels and a decline in health care. This is made evident in works such as Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976), Saro-Wiwa's *Songs in a Time of War* (1985), and Okri's *The Famished Road* (1990).

We see contemporary Nigerian writers drawing inspiration from the themes and subject matter of previous generations of writers and reinterpreting them from their more contemporary vantage points, using the past as a platform for the construction of their work. This is evident in third-generation writing's return not only to the subject of military rule and dictatorship in the 80s and 90s but also to the subject of the Nigerian civil war: see Dulue Mbachu's *War Games* (2005), Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of no Nation* (2005) and Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006).

Mbachu's narration of the Nigerian/Biafran war through the eyes and consciousness of a child lingers on the war itself and not on an assessment of the war's impact on the cultural expression of the people. Adichie, on the other hand, employs the war as a setting for ethical questions regarding the brutality of the war on both the peasants and the intellectuals. Iweala examines the role of boy soldiers in times of war in a fictional West African country, in a way that is not so much about the specifics of the war, but more about exposing the atrocities that civil conflicts such as the war can promote.

These writers, who are all of Igbo descent,<sup>19</sup> engage with the contested and intertwined terrains of the ethnic and the national within the post-colonial dynamics of the Nigerian nation-space (Adesanmi and Dunton, 2008: p.ix). Their engagement with this aspect of the nation's past

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<sup>19</sup> Shortly after Nigeria gained her independence from British colonial rule, conflicts with other Nigerian ethnicities, led to the Igbo dominated Eastern Nigeria seceding to create the state of Biafra. This led to the Nigerian/Biafran civil war which lasted from 1967-1970, with the defeat of Biafra. It is therefore, noteworthy that a large percentage of the work on the Nigerian/ Biafran war is written by the Igbos.

creates a sense of Nigeria being an unfinished nation. Indeed, Eddie Iroh observes “that the writers of his generation, who had lived through the Biafran conflict, were too close to the suffering to write the definitive accounts of the war, and that the task would fall to later generations” (1986: p.150). This present generation of writers, who engage with the subject of the Nigerian civil war in their art, witnessed it as toddlers or were born long after the war had ended. Consequently, the temporal distance which separates these writers from Biafra, according to John Hawley, “accounts for imaginings in which art and memory are not prisoners of history” (2008: p. x).

Helon Habila is another third-generation writer who uses history as a platform on which to construct his writing. In his novel *Measuring Time* (2007), his engagement with pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Nigeria presents different historical events from the one Adichie and others engage with. Although he too visits the subject of the Nigerian civil war, he does so only in passing. The writers chosen for this study, Ndibe, Habila, Atta and Adichie all utilize the literary foundation laid by the previous generations of writers, by engaging with history and the past in their writing. The past they engage with, which they experienced, and which defines them, is that of military rule and dictatorship in the 80s and the 90s. These writers and their peers, therefore, confront and interrogate this phenomenon as they seek to make sense of the present, on the one hand, and, on the other, attempt to produce their own interpretation of this history.

#### *1.4 Literature and History in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction*

The historical facts of the 80s-90s in Nigeria form the basis of the stories that the authors chosen here tell in their novels. Arthur Marwick posits that history is made up of “the bodies of knowledge about the past produced by historians together with everything that is involved in the production, communication of and teaching about that knowledge” (2001: p.1). Historical fiction on the other hand, if viewed in a broad sense, involves the attempt in literature at capturing a specific moment or period in the past with realistic attention to historical fact (De Mey, 2011: p. 12).

A factor that separates historical writing from historical fiction is historical writing’s claim of objectivity. This means that historical writing is seen to produce a factual account of an event in the past while the fictional narrative in a novel is an imaginative representation of a time past.

However, with regard to these two concepts, this study agrees with Patrick Brady in his distinction between the two when he says, “history [...] refers to a ‘real’ past, a belief or set of beliefs about that past, and purports to report the ‘truth’ about the ‘real’ past. The historical novel, on the other hand, like the autobiographical novel, refers to a ‘real’ past but neither aims nor claims to reproduce it with scrupulous accuracy” (1993: pp. 17-18). The writers selected for this study mainly use historical events and personalities in their narratives to ‘show’ the past in order to advance an understanding of historical events and actions in the manner they bring them together to make sense to us. They make no claims to objectivity in their narrations neither do they purport that the stories they tell are absolute facts.

Jerome de Groot, in *The Historical Novel*, examines some of the methodological and theoretical issues in the field and argues that the inter-generic hybridity and flexibility of historical fiction have for a long time been amongst its defining characteristics (2010: p.2). Although the discourses of historical writing and historical fiction are more alike than different given that they both draw on memory a large percentage of the time, it is, the relationship between textuality and context, or put differently, literature and the object world, which raises the question of how much liberty the creative artist should take in the representation of social reality. An attempt to answer this question will throw up a barrage of theoretical and critical issues that will take us in directions that extend beyond our primary focus here.

Works of literature by their nature seem to have a basic and unavoidable reference to, and concern with reality. We say this cognizant of the argument Derek Attridge presents that:

Literature always seems to present itself in the final analysis as something more than the category or entity it is claimed to be (writing that has a particular institutional function, say, or writing with a particular relation to truth), and as valuable for something other than the various personal or social benefits that are ascribed to it. This ‘something more’ or ‘something other’ remains obscure, however, although many different attempts have been made to specify it. (2004: p.5)

Regardless, works of literature by their nature seem to have a basic and unavoidable reference to, and concern with reality. The relationship between literature and reality or the real world is a

major topic of interest in the study of literature. What is of interest to us in this study is the notion that literature is representative or imitative of reality. Literature therefore, provides a means by which the writer expresses his or her response to the reality of life experiences making the power of literature and its universal appeal the ability to bring the reader into some connection with real life. It is noteworthy though that the connection between literature and the real world or life is not as simple as it appears.

African writers have always had a fascination with history as a subject matter. History has, therefore, influenced the creative imagination of African writers as can be seen in Lewis Nkosi's critical study, *Tasks and Masks* (1981), which includes a chapter on history as 'hero' in modern African literary discourse. Writers like Peter Abraham in *Tell Freedom* (1954), Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Sembene Ousmane in *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), and Yambo Ouologuem in *Bound to Violence* (1971) have also made the subgenre of the historical novel popular. According to Ogaga Ifowodo, "The theme of a 'return to the past' constitutes a key trope of postcolonial discourse" (2013: p.ix). This would be the reason the trend of engaging with history is clearly evident through generations of literature in Africa.

Contemporary Nigerian writing, especially its prose fiction, continues with this tradition of engaging with history as its subject matter. The issues that contemporary Nigerian writers are grappling with, on the one hand reflect the present time, but are also largely informed by the Nigerian experience of military dictatorship in the 80s and 90s. As witnesses to this phenomenon, these writers do more than narrate a story: they evoke the past and link it to the present. Ike Oguine's *A Squatters Tale*, published in 2001, weaves a story around the notion of the pursuit of the 'American Dream' and the Nigerian experience of the 'brain drain' in the 80s and 90s. Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2005) deals with the experiences of a teenage protagonist in the Lagos of the 80s and 90s. The issues which these writers engage with are a reflection of the issues that defined the 80s-90s. Thus, because these writers use the era as the backdrop to the stories they tell, we notice an obsessive return by the writers to the era.

Other contemporary works include *Beast of no Nation* (2005) by Uzodinma Iweala, which is a story about war and child soldiers in a West African country. *Nine Lives* (2006) by El Nukoya

deals with the experiences of a male protagonist in the Nigeria of the 80s and 90s. *Yellow, Yellow* (2006) by Kaine Agary, which is set in the oil producing Niger delta, is a novel based on the challenges that come with the ‘curse’ of the black gold. *Unbridled* (2007) by Jude Dibia, *A Life Elsewhere* (2007) by Segun Afolabi, *The Thing Around your Neck* (2009) by Chimamanda Adichie, and *On Black Sisters Street* (2010) by Chika Unigwe all deal with multiple experiences of life in the diaspora. *Measuring Time* (2007) by Helon Habila is a story that moves back and forth between the past and the present of a community in Northern Nigeria. *Night of the Creaking Bed* (2008) by Toni Kan, *Lawless and Other Stories* (2008) by Sefi Atta, *Swallow* (2008) by Sefi Atta, *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2010) by Tracia Nwuabani, *The Secret Lives of Baba Shegi’s Wives* (2010) by Lola Shoneyi, and *Oil on Water* (2010) by Helon Habila, are novels that deal with the anxieties of life in the Nigeria of the 80s and 90s.

The authors of these works write on a variety of themes and concerns ranging from challenges stemming from migration, war, homosexuality, human trafficking, conflict in the Niger Delta, culture and tradition, advance fee fraud and polygamy. But the one thing that ties all these works together is the historical facts of the era of military rule and dictatorship in the 80s and 90s which form the bases of all the stories they tell. Indeed, some of the concerns these writers present in their works are seen to emanate from the challenges of military rule in the era under examination here.

Informed by Achebe’s suggestion that “every literature must seek the things that belong unto its peace, must, in other words, speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current, and its aspirations and destiny of its people” (1975: p.7), this study argues that the writers chosen for examination here make use of their experiences, memories and imaginations of a period which was characterized by military brutality and oppression, social upheaval, dire economic challenges and trauma, to testify to a bleak time in Nigeria’s history. The notion of history in this study, therefore, refers to real life occurrences that are connected to the experiences, memories and imaginations of the authors, especially given Priscilla Long’s observations that memories and imaginations are affected by one another (2011: p.27).

Memory and imagination give to us what this study chooses to identify as historical and artistic truths. History and art in this study complement each other in the manner they aid our understanding of issues especially those that emanate from the era of military rule in the 80s-90s. This study recognizes that the interface between history and memory is usually controversial and sometimes complex given that participants or witnesses of historical events can remember things differently. But the writers chosen for this study seem to remember the same things albeit narrated differently. This underlines the liberality of collective memory. We therefore in these narratives do not have overtly different versions of the historical events that emanate from the writers' memory of the Nigerian experience of military rule in the 80s and 90s. The writers of these novels tell stories that reflect a collective memory, shared history and national politics of dictatorship and all the issues that result from it.

The notion of experience is used in this study to refer to the knowledge gained by these authors through their involvement with, and exposure to, the era under study, particularly given that they view themselves as witnesses to the events of the 80s-90s.<sup>20</sup> Daniel Schacter suggests that memory "is constructed from influences operating in the present as well as from information [that has been] stored about the past" (1996: p.8). The notion of memory here therefore, refers to the process through which information is collected, stored and retrieved. Because an event is interpreted based on how it was encoded, thought about and remembered, our use of the term is in the sense promoted by Antonio Damasio's that it involves 'retro-activation' the process of returning to a previous perception or experience ("Time-lock Multiregional Retroactivation," 1989, online). Memory is relevant to the study of these texts as the authors draw information from the 80s and 90s that had been stored in the recesses of their minds and bring this knowledge to our consciousness. Because memory has a reconstructive character it is central to history especially as history is largely drawn from memory. The novels chosen for this study demonstrate the power that narratives which stem from memory have to bearing witness to oppression and traumatic experiences. These novels provide a counter-history to the official version of history.<sup>21</sup> Although these novels are not memoirs or autobiographies, they are recollections of lives: a complex tapestry that includes memories of specific moments and general recollections of a time (Schacter, 1996: p.89). The writer like the historian does

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<sup>20</sup> An extensive engagement with interviews given by the writers selected for this study reveal them as writing about the Nigerian experience of the 80s-90s from personal knowledge of the happenings of the time.

<sup>21</sup> We make the point in this study that these writers do this as a form of resistance.

essentially the same thing - tell a story. The difference lies in their intent, motivation and ultimate goal. The historian is expected to approach his narrative with as much objectivity as it is possible. The writers of the stories we examine in this study and which derive from history unlike the historian are not compelled to represent facts objectively.

These writers' use of memory in their narratives involves the incorporation of a variety of traumatic elements and narrative techniques that are crucial, on the one hand to their success in conveying their characters' traumatic experiences, and on the other hand, to our understanding of these experiences. The writers attempt to make sense of the present in their country by opening up and questioning a past that was traumatic and which this study examines. What these writers remember is important to us because it originates from, and is related to the trauma of military rule and dictatorship. Therefore, in order for us to locate the era of the 80s-90s in contemporary Nigerian fiction as either complicated or extending critical debates on the nation, it is imperative to engage with the military.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, highlighting the obsessive return of contemporary Nigerian fiction to the period, and the attempt to examine this return as an influential category for the analysis of the nation in this study means to engage with this fiction's representation of the military.

### 1.5 *Foregrounding the 80s-90s in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction*

The first major critical engagement with contemporary Nigerian writing was the compilation of essays by Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton in a special issue of the journal *English in Africa* in May 2005. There was a need to devote an entire issue of the journal to discussions of the writings of this generation of writers, according to Adesanmi and Dunton, because "little or no scholarship had yet been done on the rapidly expanding body of work" (2005: p.7).<sup>23</sup> The editors sought to "signal the entry of the new writing into the arena of African critical discourse" (2005: p.8). However, they did not stop there. In 2008, a second compilation of essays on the novels of contemporary Nigerian writers in the journal *Research in African Literatures* was again guest-edited by Adesanmi and Dunton. The critiques in these journals present to us one of the first preliminary records and insights on third-generation Nigerian writing.

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<sup>22</sup> We did this briefly earlier on in section.1.2.3 under the heading 'The Political Influence'.

<sup>23</sup> By 2005, there was little scholarship on this rapidly expanding body of work especially in the academy. Indeed, the major discursive and critical forums for the discussion of third-generation Nigerian fiction at that time were personal blogs, newspaper columns, academic and creative conferences and journal publications.

In Adesanmi and Dunton's first compilation of critical essays on contemporary Nigerian writing, the contributors engage with this generation of writing in the context of its history and emergence (Remi Raji and Maik Nwosu), its theoretical frameworks (Harry Garuba), the place of women's writing in the corpus (Heather Hewett), transnationalism in its fiction (Chielozone Eze), and its representation of the dynamics of incarceration and tyranny (Chris Dunton). However, these contributors, except for Chris Dunton, do not engage with the representation by third-generation writers of military rule, dictatorship and the socio-economic turmoil that, in our view, is central to work from this period. The present study sets out to join the conversation by examining an important idea that runs through third-generation writing and in the process extend the platform of scholarly discourse on this generation of writing in and from Nigeria.

In choosing the writers and texts for examination here, this study does not in any way imply that they are the sole representatives of contemporary Nigerian writing or of the Nigerian experience of the 1980s-90s. However, their distinct engagement with the narrative of the recent past presents a case for an examination of this era. This is critical to understanding how contemporary Nigerian literature is being constructed. Considering, that the novel, according to Richard Clarke, takes shape "at a particular historical moment in a socially-specific environment" (1981: p.2), Adichie, Atta, Habila and Ndibe, are presented here as writing from a particular historical experience in a social-specific environment, a period which was one of the most brutal military dictatorship and economic turmoil in Nigerian history. Indeed, Ike Anya during an interview with Sefi Atta in 2005 expresses excitement that the stories of his generation of Nigerians are being told in contemporary Nigerian writing.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, by speaking out against oppressive powers, these writers connect with and add their voices to the many voices found in the selected texts. This simultaneously helps to shape the social imagination and rewrite history from the perspective of the community (McCain, 2007: p.2).

By making this point we are not ignoring the separation of people into groups determined by class, superiority or inferiority and based on a range of criteria such as race, class, gender, ethnicity or religion. Robert Young refers to marginalized and less privileged people as the "subordinated classes" (2003: p.6). Gayatri Spivak refers to them as the 'subaltern'.<sup>25</sup> The basic

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<sup>24</sup> Ike Anya speaks with Sefi Atta for the online literary magazine *AfricanWriter*.

<sup>25</sup> The term 'subaltern' in postcolonialism and critical theory refers to the people who are socially, politically and geographically marginalized or oppressed.

claim the critic and theorist Spivak makes in her essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’(1988), is that western academic thinking is produced in order to support western economic interests. While this study does not out rightly examine the manner in which western cultures define other cultures based on universal concepts and frameworks, we agree on the one hand with Spivak’s assertion that the subordinated class cannot be spoken for because whoever speaks for them will do so with his own consciousness and values (2008: p.70). We do this because the characters in the novels selected for this study are the subordinated class and exist outside the power structure of the Nigerian military state. Also, in narrating the Nigerian experience of the 80s-90s in their novels, the writers selected here speak with their own consciousness and values. But on the other hand by speaking for the character with the consciousness of the writer, the novels that form our corpus make valid Mikhail Bakhtin’s argument that, “[...] although the novelist is from a given class [...], his/her novel necessarily also incorporates voices not belonging to his/her class” (1981: p.6). We are cognizant of the arguments that can arise from taking this stance. Indeed, Spivak would argue that there is no ‘people’s collective reality’ for writers to reflect on. But by incorporating voices not belonging to their classes<sup>26</sup> the writers for this study, do reflect the people’s collective reality and also represent the people’s way of looking at the world and their place in its making (Wa’ Thiong’o, 1997: p.5).

Contemporary Nigerian writers grew up in the 70s and the 80s and thus experienced the effects of and were influenced by the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. To say that they were influenced by this era is not to make a sweeping generalization regarding the works of these writers; it is to say that the novels chosen for this study grapple with this period in history as a consciousness, a condition and an experience. It is therefore against this historical backdrop that Adichie, Atta, Habila and Ndibe are writing and presenting their own experiences in the Nigerian literary landscape. Significantly, the experiences that come from having to deal with Nigeria’s troubled past are instructive in our examination of the issues these writers present in their works.

### 1.6 *Critical Framework*

The texts chosen for this study are written by writers who were born after 1960, the year Nigeria gained her independence from British colonial rule. The theoretical implication of this,

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<sup>26</sup> From our readings on the writers selected for this study, it is obvious they all had a middle class upbringing except for Helon Habila who had a lower class upbringing.

according to Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, is that we are dealing essentially, with texts published within the critical scope of the postcolonial (2005: p.15).

The concept 'postcolonial' is the subject of discussion in numerous critical studies (Williams and Chrisman, 1994; Mongia, 1996; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1998; McLeod, 2000; Young, 2001; Lazarus, 2004). Robert Young argues that.

Many of the problems raised by these discussions can be resolved simply by defining 'postcolonialism' as coming after colonialism and imperialism in their original meaning of indirect-rule domination but still positioned within imperialism in its later sense of the global system of economic hegemony. (2001: p.57)

The criticism and theories of the term 'postcolonial' therefore converge on the idea that postcolonialism involves an engagement with colonialism and its consequences in the past and the present as well as with global developments that are viewed to be the after-effects of imperialism (Quayson, 2000; Huggan, 2001). This study makes use of the term postcolonial in light of Robert Young's argument that:

Postcolonialism [...] has never involved a singular theoretical formation, but rather an interrelated set of critical and counterintuitive perspectives, a complex network of paronymous concepts and heterogeneous practices that have been developed out of traditions of resistance to a global historical trajectory of imperialism and colonialism. (2012: p.20)

In an article 'Postcolonial Remains', Young argues for the relevance of the postcolonial perspective in the criticism of social and political configurations in the present time a stance that this study adopts:

The Postcolonial has always been concerned with interrogating the interrelated histories of violence; domination, inequality, and injustice, with addressing the fact that [...] millions of people in this world still live without things that most of those in the West take for granted. (2012: p.20)

In attempting to assign a suitable theoretical framework for the analysis of our corpus, we are conscious of the problems of categorization and the limitations that can arise from choosing a framework that defines the texts primarily in relation to a particular experience. Indeed, like Nicholas Harrison, this study does not wish to assume anything about the place and ultimate significance or insignificance of works of fiction in the broad historical and ideological schemes with which postcolonial criticism connects them (2003: p.1). Because as Harrison further argues,

“this task is more intricate and multi-faceted than postcolonial critics generally allow” (2003: p.2). But the postcolonial theory offers a useful model for theoretical inquiry because the notions that we engage with in these novels emanate from conditions located in the postcolonial.<sup>27</sup> We also read these works through the postcolonial frame of reference because we are examining a particular experience related to a specific geographical location. This experience is influenced by a particular historic occurrence. Consequently, because the setting of the fiction under examination here is Nigeria, and its thematic concerns relate to Nigeria, the name Nigeria is significant in conveying a particular experience which the postcolonial frame of reference helps to delineate.

The four writers selected in this study deal with a particular period in Nigerian history in the stories they tell. Saying this does not mean that these works are exclusively historical. It means that that these works are influenced by the particular historical condition and experience of military rule which is a consciousness in the selected texts. Our reading of these writers’ works, therefore, requires us to examine the writers’ interpretation of this history. Indeed, Ania Loomba, in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* has suggested that literary criticism should no longer examine history as simply a background but as an essential part of textual meaning that is fundamental to the construction of culture (1998: p.40). Our examination of the era of military rule as represented in our corpus goes beyond mere historicization of events. History as it is presented by these four authors, and as it is examined critically in this study, is interpreted through the imagination, memory and experiences of the writers selected here. We do this with the consciousness that historicizing literary texts to reiterate Harrison is an intricate and multi-faceted task (2003: p.2). Indeed, He posits that, when confronting a work of fiction, postcolonial critics:

Encounter two demands that can be difficult to reconcile: on one hand, they must give adequate weight to the text in its individuality and ‘literarity’; on the other they must apprehend it in the socio-historical context from which it emerged and in relation to which it needs, at some level, to be understood. (2003: p.2)

But, he further explains that “when one brings together different forms and levels of historicization, or different modes of attention to fiction’s specificity, they may interfere with one another rather than combining into one definitive, richly historicized picture” (2003: p.2).

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<sup>27</sup> This term serves a dual role in this study. It signifies a reference to continuity with colonialism and its aftermath and it is understood as denoting the temporal passing of physical colonialism. These distinctions are important in underlining the continuity between colonialism and contemporary culture, and the term is used as a spacio-temporal signifier.

Bearing this in mind, this study examines not only the individuality and ‘literarity’ of the selected texts but also the socio-historical peculiarities of the era of the 80s-90s. This is important to our analysis given that a postcolonial reading of these texts is underlined by their representation of history, which is, central to the way the writers deal with the aftermath of colonization, resisting domination and imperial ideologies.

In periodizing post-colonial studies in his book *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, Neil Lazarus discusses the demands for de-colonization and self-determination by Third-World countries, and observes that there was an energy, dynamism and optimism during the decolonizing process and immediately after independence. Post-colonial regimes, he posits, undertook all manner of projects intended to improve the livelihood and welfare of their citizenry. But challenges related to the expectations of the people on the one hand, and the inability of the state, on the other hand, to meet these needs meant the sense of elevation and of regeneration the people felt was relatively short-lived (2011: p.4). The failure of post-colonial states to meet the expectations of the people after the attainment of political independence from the West brought about a widening of the gap that was already in existence between the state and the people.

The gap between the state and the people underlines the issues related to the Nigerian nation raised by our corpus. These writers’ present the state as more concerned with maintaining its power than with any concerns regarding the interests of the people. This notion is relevant to the way in which a postcolonial theoretical reading of the novels is constructed. Indeed, the failure of post-colonial leaderships to extend and democratize the momentous social advance represented by de-colonization (Lazarus, 2011: p.5) in the novels, invite a postcolonial reading of these texts.

Furthermore, the global economic crisis, which began in the late 60s and reached an all-time high in the 1980s, according to Samir Amin, is manifested in the return of high and persistent unemployment accompanied by a slowing down of growth in the West, the collapse of Sovietism, and serious regression in some regions of the Third World, accompanied by unsustainable levels of external indebtedness (1997: p.97). Postcolonial studies emerged as an institutionally specific, conjuncturely determined response to these global developments (Lazarus, 2011: p.9). This study’s aim to examine the era of the 80s-90s in contemporary Nigerian fiction involves examining the economic as well as the socio-political peculiarities of this period as represented in the selected texts. Given that “throughout the post-colonial world

over the course of the final quarter of the twentieth century, Structural Adjustments Programs were imposed” (Lazarus, 2011: pp.9-10) on weak Third World economies, this study examines the representation of this policy in our corpus within a postcolonial theoretical framework. This is done because, as Lazarus again posits, “the substance and trajectory of the work produced in postcolonial studies are strongly marked by this epochal reversal of fortunes [...] in the Third World” (2011: p.9).

The psychoanalytically conceived trauma theory, especially Sigmund Freud’s notion of *Nachträglichkeit*<sup>28</sup> also offers us a productive model for interpreting the post-colonial experience represented in our corpus. Trauma is evident in these novels which rearticulate the lives and voices of marginal people. As Anne Whitehead points out, “trauma fiction overlaps with post-colonial fiction in its use of intertextuality to allow formerly silenced voices to tell their own story” (1995: p.85). This study consequently examines the representation of trauma in these novels because a reading of the selected texts as trauma narratives further highlights postcolonial concerns. In our engagement with *Nachträglichkeit*, we draw on Cathy Caruth’s revisionist theorization of traumatic deferral or belatedness as a way of explaining the representation of the delayed impact of the trauma of military rule in the Nigeria of the 80s and 90s in some of the novels under study.

An idea that this study promotes is the argument that present day Nigeria as pictured in our corpus is haunted by the ghosts of the era of military rule and dictatorship in the 80s and 90s. The memories of these four writers testify to the unfinished business of decolonization. These novels therefore provide a space in which Nigeria can confront the issues that haunt her. Given that there are haunting elements in the experiences of the characters in the texts, this study attempts an examination of what has taken place and, in the process, fills in some of the gaps that exist between the historical and social realities we see in the novels. While Fiona Barclay’s study on haunting focuses on contemporary France, her argument can be applied to this study: “The ghosts and hauntings which provide the themes and foci of these literary texts are significant because [...] they speak to the contemporary realities of those affected by decolonization and its aftermath” (2011: p.xii). Indeed, an examination of the constituent elements which make up contemporary affairs often involve tracing the influence of the past, and the many unsuspected ways in which it emerges to disturb the present (Barclay, 2011: p.xx).

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<sup>28</sup> This word which has German roots, is translated as deferred action, retroaction or afterwardness.

The prominence of female writers within third-generation writing is central to the attention being received by the present generation of writers from Nigeria on the world literary scene. Indeed, for the first time in the literary history of Nigeria, her female writers are recognized as the new arrow-heads of contemporary Nigerian writing. Our discussion of literature in Nigeria would therefore, not be complete without a mention of the contribution of the female Nigerian writer, especially given that two of the authors chosen for this study are female.

### 1.7 *The Female Writer in Nigeria*

First-generation Nigerian literature as we have noted earlier on in this study, is generally accepted to have started with the recognition of the works of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, Christopher Okigbo and their contemporaries. These writers made their mark in the late 1950s and the 60s. Their creative productions contributed to the appeal of Nigerian literature, and set a series of benchmarks against which subsequent Nigerian literature has often been measured. There are four distinct markers of first-generation Nigerian literature: The publication of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the celebrated poetry of Christopher Okigbo, the contribution of Cyprian Ekwensi to popular and urban fiction and the achievements of Wole Soyinka in the genre of drama and of being the first Black African to win the Nobel prize for literature in 1986.

The achievements of these male writers obscured the significance of pioneering female authors: by the 1960s, Nigerian female writers such as Mabel Segun (*My Father's Daughter*, 1965) and Flora Nwapa (*Efuru*, 1966) had established themselves. Indeed, Nwapa's *Efuru* is considered a textual response to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as it presents the woman not only in her roles as a wife and mother, but also, as an industrious and productive member of a pre-colonial Igbo society. After *Efuru* was published, Nigerian female writers Buchi Emecheta, Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, Zainab Alkali, Stella Oyedepo and their peers, went on to publish works in which the voice of the female character started to become very visible. This established the presence of the female writer as a contributor to Nigerian literature and as a positive subject in the literature.

Pre-colonial Africa has a history of women in leadership roles: women who ruled kingdoms and led wars from the earliest epochs of human civilization. Thus, prior to the coming of the white man, women in Africa, though not on an equal social footing with the men, had a place of honour and respect in society.<sup>29</sup> One of the defining characteristics of colonialism was the unequal social relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This was extended to the relationship between men and women in colonial Africa. According to Florence Stratton, “feminist scholars in various fields have argued [that] colonialism is not neutral as to gender. Rather it is a patriarchal order, sexist as well as racist in its ideology and practices [...] what these studies indicate is that women’s position, relative to men, deteriorated under colonialism” (1994: p.7).

Carole Boyce Davies also observes that “Colonial policies in combination with indigenous attitudes operated to deny girls access to education” (1986: p.21). This suggests that colonialism afforded men the opportunity to be educated, which was key to their early literary development. But towards the end of the colonial era, literacy was gradually beginning to be accepted as a necessity for women, even though access to education for women was restricted to ‘Feminine Education’, that is, education in areas that emphasized women’s femininity, like nursing and teaching.

Early works by African female writers were initially assessed on the basis of standards established first by Western writers and then by standards set by African male writers. African female writers were often ignored or subjected to male ridicule and aggression, and also faced the problem of sexism in the publishing field. According to Stratton, this encouraged two things. Firstly, African women writers and their works were rendered invisible in literary criticism (1994: p.1), and secondly “works by [these] women writers were trivialized, distorted, and maligned as a result of their non-conformity to standards that are both euro- and androcentric” (1994: p.5). She further argues that “in characterizing African literature, critics have ignored gender as a social and analytic category; such characterizations operate to exclude women’s literary expression as part of African literature” (1994: p.7). Thus, as a result of their positioning

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<sup>29</sup> In pre-colonial Africa women were active participants in the political, social, and economic life of their societies. They were occasional warriors, monarchs and holders of high offices in their communities. The roles of the male and female in pre-colonial African societies were separate but complimentary.

in the social order when African literature emerged, the African woman writers' struggle has been a struggle on three levels: sex, class and race. In her analysis of this struggle, Ama Ata Aidoo argues that the only difference between the writing of African women and that of African men is the vast difference in the amount of critical attention paid to the men. She expresses her frustration with the situation and says "it is especially pathetic to keep on writing without having any consistent, active, critical intelligence that is interested in you as a writer" (1998: p.45).

Initially, Nigerian female writers were pre-occupied with the correction of misconceptions about women, womanhood and the problems of women for example, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), and Zaynab Alkali's *The Still Born* (1984). Although Nigerian female writers generally deny being advocates of feminism, according to Nereus Tadi:

They at various points in their writings have encapsulated some of the concerns of western feminist writers such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Juliet Mitchell, Elaine Showalter and the postcolonial feminist, Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak." (2010: p.60)

They, therefore, use their writings to underscore the oppression and discrimination women faced daily in phallogocentric societies. But, Juliana Makuchi and Nfah Abbenyi argue that:

This emphasis had the adverse effect of re-affirming women's subordinated roles [...] African women were virtually silent observers who simply fulfilled their destiny without questioning it or the structures that sanctioned the roles they were made to assume. (1997: p.5)

The change in gender portrayal characterized by the emergence of the female author in Nigerian literature further developed, especially in the late 1980s and the 1990s with the upsurge of female writers such as Toyin Adewale-Gabriel, Mobolaji Adenubi, Akachi Ezeigbo, Hauwa Mohammed and Angela Agali. At present, an interesting trend is emerging within third-generation Nigerian writing. Female writers are no longer marginal in the discourse of the novel in Nigeria, and are breaking through hurdles that had been perceived and known as barriers. Acknowledging the present centrality of the female writer in contemporary Nigeria, Pius Adesanmi makes the point that:

Women are central to what is going on in recent Nigerian literature and this, in my view, presents something extremely unique in modern African literature. Continentally, women were marginal to Negritude, marginal to the cultural

nationalism of the first-generation Anglophones, marginal to the neo-Marxist post-independence disillusionist writing of the second-generation francophone and Anglophones but now they are centered. (2008: p.108)

Present-day Nigeria is a global society and the female Nigerian writer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century inherits this landscape and reflects it in her writings. The Nigerian female writer has moved on from a pre-occupation with feminine concerns and has emerged on the literary stage with thematic concerns that focus on political and economic matters: Kaine Agary's *Yellow, Yellow* (2006), Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), Atta's *Everything Good will Come* (2006), and Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come To You By Chance* (2009). Moreover, these writers are gaining equal if not greater attention than their male peers both inside and outside Nigeria by winning various international and national awards. Indeed, going with what is happening at the moment with the literary achievements of the women in the present generation of Nigerian writing, the women are not waiting for anyone to give them anything, they have gone out and are taking the attention, the prizes, the awards and the applause in the production of outstanding literary works. In contemporary Nigerian writing it is obvious, to borrow the words of Ousmane Sembene that "the times were bringing forth [...] a new breed of women" (1975: pp.75-76)

Contemporary Nigerian female writers Chimamanda Adichie and Sefi Atta, whose novels form a part of our corpus, have carved out a space for themselves in the Nigerian literary landscape. These writers along with their female contemporaries have moved from the margins to the centre. They have done this by taking heed of Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie's call to the female writer in her article 'The Female Writer and her Commitment'. Leslie spells out what she considers to be the three-fold commitment of the female writer to her vocation: A commitment to her vision, a commitment to her womanhood and a commitment to the third world (1987: pp.10-11). Adichie, Atta and their contemporaries are doing justice to their art at the highest levels of expertise. They are not only delineating the experience of women, challenging prescribed modes of thinking and behaviours but are also showing themselves to be politically conscious. They offer their readers perspectives on issues that affect and shape their lives and historical destiny.

## 1.8 Chapter *Breakdown*

This study, which examines the persistent emphasis on the recent past of military rule in Nigeria by the present generation of Nigerian writers, is organized around the presentation of the notions of control, silencing, popular struggle and resistance, socio-economic woes, dictatorship, alienation and the trauma of everyday life in four contemporary Nigerian novels. These novels engage with post-colonial violence and trauma, and they represent a portrait of a people under military rule and oppression. In the representation of the post-colonial moment of the 80s and 90s, the selected writers for this study draw on history, memory and, through fiction engage with a traumatic past as a form of resistance. The study argues that the selected texts represent these writers' response to the socio-political and economic challenges that characterized the 80s and 90s. These writers go back to this past to expose the collective and individual experience of trauma and use their writing as a form of protest.

Chapter Two, 'Control and Silencing', investigates how Ndibe, in *Arrows of Rain*, presents the struggle for the performance space between the state and the writer. The state sees the nation as its performance area; it therefore, regulates it by controlling who performs in it, how they do so, when they enter the space, as well as how they leave it. Using the concepts of control and silencing, the chapter explores a number of ideas: The silencing of public and private voices through censorship, the physical and psychological prison condition and the physical and psychological rape of a nation. This chapter investigates the way in which a wounded body speaks in a voice that testifies to the collective's traumatic history, and calls for a form of justice albeit one that is impossible to achieve. The chapter foregrounds the struggle for the performance space as a definitive characteristic of the 80s and 90s, and argues that the military state at the time enforced silence on the people to prevent them from being a part of the discourse on power.

Chapter Three examines Resistance and Popular Struggle in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. This chapter, which takes its cue from Neil Lazarus' notion of 'deferred expectation', investigates how the failure of the post-colonial state to meet the expectations of the people led to civil disturbances. Habila makes a specific link between the deplorable state of the nation and the failure of the military state. He uses specific episodes of students and community protests in Nigeria during the 80s and 90s to raise awareness on the nature of the state-society relationship in Nigeria at the time. This chapter examines how Habila employs postcolonial resistance tactics by building his work on the foundations laid by other writers and in the process connecting

particular characters to larger metaphorical statements, and in the process, aligns his thoughts with resistance thinking. Protest and resistance are examined in Habila's novel on the premise that it is through the study of specific moments and sites of struggle that power relations can be understood or contested. This chapter suggests that, although resistance can provide the state with an excuse to further tyrannize the people, the willingness of the people to resist oppression proves they would rather take advantage of the agency available to them than be cowed into forced obeisance.

Chapter Four examines the representation of the effects of the economic policy of SAP (Structural Adjustment Program) in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come*. The chapter establishes a link between this economic policy and the adverse socio-political crisis of the 80s and 90s. It also examines how Atta explores and exposes the infrastructural and super-structural decay that ensued as a result of the social, political and economic 'costs' of adjustment. This chapter argues that the adoption of this policy gave rise to totalitarianism through military rule, which led to the near total collapse of the country's economic, social and political system.

Chapter Five, 'Dictatorship, Alienation and the Trauma of Everyday Life', examines how the character of the dictator and the picture of the nation in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* reflect the Nigerian state in the 80s-90s. The chapter explores the specific role the Nigerian state played in generating and sustaining dictatorship, alienation and trauma. It specifically looks at how Adichie draws upon the memory of military rule to allegorize Eugene Achike's household and to present it as a microcosm of the Nigerian state. We draw on Melvin Seeman's theorization of alienation which, he argues, encompasses the feelings of powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation in order to examine the nature of alienation in Adichie's novel. The traumatic experiences of Adichie's characters are evident in the occurring events which act as a haunting or possessive influence, and which returns and is experienced in its belatedness.<sup>30</sup> This chapter promotes the idea that, Adichie in her narration of the Nigerian experience military rule and dictatorship opposes hegemony and challenges authoritative powers that disempowers the oppressed.

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<sup>30</sup> Cathy Caruth suggests that the first reaction to the experience of trauma may occur as an absolute numbing to it and the survivor of trauma is only able to confront the reality of this experience later (1995: p.6). As the writers in this study do not engage with the trauma of military rule as it occurred, their engagement with it takes the form of belatedness.

The concluding chapter summarizes the findings of this study. The representation of the 80s and 90s by these writers is bound up in the notions of trauma and resistance illuminating the reality of post-colonialism in Nigeria. This connection illustrates the close relationship between the failures of the post-colonial Nigerian nation state, traumatic processes and resistance. The novels that form our corpus shed light on questions about the relationship between violence, history and memory and how these in turn can function to reinforce the need for resistance. The study suggests that contemporary Nigerian fiction's insistent representation of the violent past of military rule in Nigeria is a means of navigating the complex psychological and political processes of postcolonial trauma through writing as resistance.

Through the reading of literary representations of Nigeria in the 80s and 90s, this study contributes to an understanding of why contemporary Nigerian fiction has insistently returned to the recent past of military rule to engage with Nigeria. Because the return to this era by contemporary Nigerian writers is a defining characteristic of contemporary Nigerian fiction, this study hopes to create a space for dialogue on questions relating to the trauma of military rule in Nigeria in the 80s and 90s., and also hopes that the return to the era 80s-90s in contemporary Nigerian writing will develop as a significant discourse in the reading and criticism of Nigerian literature.

## Chapter Two

### Control And Silencing in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*

#### 2.0 Introduction

A writer according to Ngugi Wa Thiongo, tries to persuade us, to make us view not only a certain kind of reality but also from a certain angle of vision (1981: p. 6). The idea Ngugi promotes here is that the writer in reflecting reality attempts to persuade the reader to react to that reality in a certain way. Literature for Ngugi is thus not just art for art's sake. It is the expression of a writer's skill and imagination and also a form of socio-cultural engagement which to a large extent is directed towards making people aware of their socio-political formation. This suggests that any assessment of African creative literature should be done by paying attention not only to the writer's creativity but also the social environment from which the author's creativity stems. This is because the social context influences African creative art, and this is the reason Oladele Taiwo suggests that "For criticism to give a true reflection of the work of art, the critic must understand thoroughly [...] the socio-cultural circumstances surrounding the work" (1986: p.2).

African literature has to a large extent been engaged in a scrutiny of social ills. As Ngugi points out, "literature is more than just a mechanistic reflection of social reality" (1981: p.6). It encompasses everything that relates to human existence: it reveals the intricacies of life, man's relationship with man and with nature. It is a source of influence on one's feelings and attitudes to life and a form of recreation. Literature's ability to reflect a people's collective reality cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o again posits "No writer of imaginative literature from the very best to the modestly significant can really avoid the big issues of the day, for literature, to the extent that it is a mirror unto man's nature, must reflect social reality or certain aspects of social reality" (1981: p.74). The writer in Africa is, therefore, not an artist who only uses the literary form to express his imagination or ideas, but one whose work reflects the various struggles, political, economic, and cultural in society. This being the case, Chinua Achebe warns "An African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the

proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames” (1975: p.78). For African people, the major social and political issues that Achebe refers to are the stupendous level of corruption, the struggle to survive the failures of the postcolonial state, especially the manner in which this is manifested in crumbling infrastructure, political oppression and economic collapse. These societal woes, which have been prevalent since the time of independence, became magnified in the era of military rule. It is against this backdrop of military rule, great socio-political turmoil and rampant corruption that Okey Ndibe’s novel *Arrows of Rain*, which is the focus of our analysis in this chapter, is examined in regards to its engagement with the narrative of Nigeria in the era of the 80s-90s.

In *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, Ngugi argues that there is a contest between the state and artists for what he calls the ‘Performance Space’. The performance space for Ngugi is an arena of contention, where there is a “struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state - in short the enactments of power” (1998: p.12). The struggle for the performance space is mainly encouraged by the one-sided distribution of power between two parties (the state and artists), as well as the differences in opinion regarding the articulation of laws, formal or moral, and their transmission to the audience, so that they achieve their intended goal. According to Ngugi, given that the main focus of both art and the state in their performance is the people, the struggle between the two is for continuous access to the people (p.38). The notion of the performance space, for the artist and the state, is important to this chapter, because the state sees the nation as its performance area. The state, therefore, regulates the performance area by controlling who performs in it, how they do it, and when they enter the space as well as how they leave it.

In the previous chapter, this study provided an analytical framework within which the works chosen for this study will be examined. We also presented these texts as being rooted in historical fact. Given the foregoing, the issue of allegory in *Arrows of Rain* cannot be ignored, especially considering that Ndibe invites *Madia* to be read as Nigeria as we will see later on in this chapter. A relationship between allegory and history can be established if we agree that allegorical styles of reading and writing are involved in an engagement with the past. Indeed, Stephen Slemon posits that an awareness of the passage of time is at the heart of allegory; thus allegorical writing can be said to be inherently involved with the question of time (1988: p.158).

An engagement with the question of time, as Slemon suggests, requires the interrogation of past events, and seeking to understand what these events mean. Our concern in this study with the representation of a time in the past therefore goes beyond a description of past events; it involves an analysis of these events for their symbolism: the tool with which we do this is allegorical reading.

This chapter is primarily concerned with the examination of Ndibe's representation of the military regime's domination of the performance space of the nation through control and the imposition of silence. The novel exhibits a style that reveals the author's creative production to be influenced by the Nigerian realities of the time. Although *Arrows of Rain* takes its cue from real events, Ndibe's imagination and comments permeate the novel too. This gives the novel its fictional characteristic but also makes it difficult to reduce Ndibe's narration to a documentary recording of historical events.

The concepts of control and silencing allow this chapter to connect a number of ideas: the silencing of public and private voices, the prison condition of the nation and the rape of the nation. In *Arrows of Rain*, Ndibe mounts a critique of the nation-state by exposing its shortcomings. He proposes a political course of action that the people can adopt to redress the failure of the nation state, and in the process, assigns to the people themselves the task of challenging their collective abuse. He holds that the people, beginning with one person and represented by the character Bukuru, could be instrumental in leading to a change in the relationship between the people and the military regime. He proposes that instead of a direct confrontation with the state, the people can protest by being 'voiceless'. This voicelessness, he suggests, does not take the form of a structured, detailed, political/social program or solution, it is what Abena Busia defines as "a deliberate unvoicing, rather than any intrinsic absence of speech" (1990: p.87).

In seeking to examine how silence is conceptualized in Ndibe's novel, this chapter conceives silence as being multi-faceted. We identify two ways in which Ndibe engages with silence; in relation to its use as a means of control and imposition of fear, and in relation to its use as a device to challenge that control. In his engagement with silence, he exposes how the state

employs it to control the people. This, in turn pushes them to the margins, and because of this, for the character Bukuru, the choice of silence becomes an instrument of defiance and a form of exile from society.

One of the things the state does in a bid to impose silence is to make the nation an enclosure through the creation of literal prisons. Prisons are made to function with the sole purpose of creating minds and bodies that are submissive. This is because it is of the utmost importance to the state that it is not only the people's voices that are shut down, but also that their bodies and minds are subjugated. Under military rule, as Ndibe explains in his novel, the entire nation becomes one enormous prison where the people are not only physically but also psychologically controlled. In *Arrows of Rain*, Bukuru's imprisonment takes on a larger metaphorical significance as it reflects the prison condition of the nation.

This chapter also examines how Ndibe uses the idea of the rape of women and extends its representation to symbolize the rape of a nation by the military. By doing this, he examines both physical and psychological oppression. Thus, rape in this study is examined not just as a symbol, but also as a deeply wounding force of violence with a factual history in Nigeria. Indeed, with the exception of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, the rape of women as a metaphor for the rape of the nation permeates all the novels chosen for this study. We examine this notion in this chapter because Ndibe, unlike the other writers in this study, uses this concept alongside the idea of silence to emphasize the powerful repressive nature of the dictatorial military government of the 80s-90s. The notions of silence and rape take on the particular significance which indicates that the suppression of the voices of the people and the oppression of their bodies, are not only in their psychological and physical attributes but also in the attempt to be total in execution.

## 2.1 *Narrating a Nation*

Okey Ndibe's first novel, published in 2000, is set in the fictional African state of Madia under a military dictatorship. The novel tells the tragic history of the central character, a peculiar vagrant

known as Bukuru,<sup>1</sup> but also explores the excesses of a military that is beyond control under the ruler-ship of General Isa Palat Bello, whose history is intertwined with that of Bukuru.

The story Okey Ndibe tells in *Arrows of Rain* in gruesome detail opens with the discovery of the body of a dead woman at the beach on New Year's Day. At the beginning of the narrative, when the police arrive at the scene of the woman's death, we are immediately confronted with the story of oppression, the all too familiar canvas of corruption, and human rights abuse by despotic state machinery. Bukuru, who witnessed the woman's death, is presumed mentally unstable and promptly arrested when he starts to reveal that the woman had been raped and killed by soldiers. It is in the narration of Bukuru's story that the reader is guided through the political, judicial, social and moral landscape of Madia. The political class is presented as bereft of ideas on how to manage the affairs of the nation. The rape of the economy is examined vis-à-vis the physical rape of women. The judiciary, the police, the secret service and the military are tied to the impulses of the despot General Bello and, therefore, justice and the rule of law are dispensed in accordance with the dictates of the General.

In his presentation of the grave reality of Nigeria's military history, Ndibe dramatically recreates the brutal character of the state, and the challenges that were the lot of the people under the military. In his presentation of General Isa Palat Bello and President Askia Amin, Ndibe provides a compelling representation of an already established fact in regards to Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> He exposes the extreme corruption experienced on all fronts, whereby the wealth of the nation is squandered in a most reckless manner. This happens because of the careless attitude of the country's leaders towards the plight of the people, whereby the machinery of state power is mobilized at all levels to conspire against them.

The story, which is divided into three parts, is told by two narrators, Bukuru and Femi Adero. The first part of the novel is narrated in the third person by Femi Adero, and it deals with the circumstances surrounding the rape and death of a prostitute at the beach, Bukuru's arrest,

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<sup>1</sup> This character is one of the narrators in the novel, and is also referred to as Oguguamakwa, but will be referred to as Bukuru consistently in this study to avoid confusion.

<sup>2</sup> A disregard for the rule of law and corruption is widespread in Nigeria. Daniel Jordan Smith, in his book *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (2007) paints a vivid picture of this fact.

arraignment and detention, the insecurity of the common man, and the inability of the State security and judicial system to protect the common and helpless citizens. The second part, told in the first person by Bukuru, is the story of his birth, familial background, education, work and his journey to detention. Tied to Bukuru's story are the stories of Iyese, and General Isa Bello. The third part of the novel is the story of Femi Adero, a journalist working with a privately-owned newspaper, *Daily Chronicle*. Narrated in the first person by Adero himself, the third part of Ndibe's novel is the story of Adero's birth, his upbringing and his search for identity.

Ndibe's novel is a satirical and allegorical representation of Madia, a country in the grip of military dictatorship in the 80s and 90s. It is obvious though that Madia is a thinly veiled Nigeria. This is evident from the allusions that abound in the novel. At the beginning of the narration, the body of a dead prostitute is found at the B. beach. Femi Adero, who narrates the incident, describes the girl and says "Her face was hardy, but death made her seem older and sadder than twenty" (p.3). The presentation of the girl as being twenty years of age hints at the number of years that had passed from the first military coup in Nigeria to the one that ushered in the most repressive era of military rule. His description of the girl's face is symbolic of the hardship the nation (even at that time) had been through in the short period of twenty years (1964-84). Bukuru in his report to the police told them "that the deceased was raped by soldiers, specifically members of the vice task force" (p.33). This statement ties the prostitute to the nation, which she represents, and which has been violated by the military.

Continuing with his description of the prostitute, he says "A large copper earring dangled from her left ear. Patterned into the circle was the image of an eagle" (p.3). He connects the girl to the nation again by making reference to the eagle on her jewellery. Like the prostitute's jewellery, the Nigerian coat of arms is round with the image of an eagle placed right in the middle of it. Furthermore, the names of the police who turn up at the beach to investigate the death of the prostitute are also another obvious reference to Nigeria, given that their names are reflective of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, General Isa Bello Palat's goal of assuming life presidency in Madia echoes General Sani Abacha's quest in the late 1990s to continue from a military dictator to a civilian one. The enforcement of the decree "which made it an offence for

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<sup>3</sup> Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa are the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The names of the three police officers Lati, Okoro and Musa who arrest and interrogate Bukuru are representative of these tribes.

any editor to use a story whose length or prominence upstaged a presidential pronouncement or deed” (p.17) brings to mind decree No 4 that was put in place by the Buhari regime in 1984. The decree was drafted to punish writers and journalists who published statements and reports interpreted to be false because they exposed the Buhari administration or its officials to ridicule or contempt.<sup>4</sup>

Ndibe’s emphasis in this novel is on “telling”, the need to speak out in the face of tyranny and oppression. Silence and power are fascinating subjects for him. He questions why the community keeps quiet and refuses to speak up in the face of the tyranny of the state. In an email interview with this researcher in 2015, he notes that the line “The man dies in him who stands silent in the face of tyranny” from Wole Soyinka’s prison memoir, *The Man Died* (1972), changed him in a deep and radical way. He says “Ever since reading that book, I’ve been intrigued by questions of silence, and specifically, the causes and consequences of silence when speech is imperative”. As we will see in Chapter Three, the line from Soyinka’s memoir is one that Helon Habila also utilizes in the story he narrates in *Waiting for an Angel*. Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* presents a character Professor Okafor who refuses to speak out against wrong doing at the University of Nsukka because he would rather curry favour with the military government. Chaos breaks out, the university students’ riot and when Ifeoma’s friend states “It is what happens when you sit back and do nothing about tyranny” (p.238), we hear an echo of the quote from Soyinka.<sup>5</sup> From the examples above, it is evident that, for Ndibe and his contemporaries, the consequences of silence when there is a need to speak out are dire. These writers share a fascination with telling, with the need for the people to not only speak out, but to be the ones who tell their stories themselves. Doing this enables them to borrow Adichie’s words, to “own the story” (“In the Footsteps,” 2003, online), and also to move from lethargy to active resistance in the face of state tyranny.

My research seeks to understand Ndibe’s motivation for writing *Arrows of Rain* and I ask him about this in an interview. He says: “The motivation came from a longstanding fascination with power and silence, and the ways in which those who have (especially) political power mandate

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<sup>4</sup> The Buhari regime did not take kindly to criticisms from the press and this decree was the most dreaded and most repressive law enacted in Nigeria at the time.

<sup>5</sup> The writers selected for this study as we noted in Chapter One draw inspiration from generations of writers before them and layer their works unto the works of these writers who precede them.

or inspire silence and especially among those with an ethical or professional obligation to speak”.<sup>6</sup> The obligation to speak in the face of oppression is evident in the novel though in a different way, when Bukuru makes the statement:

I can't even say I fully understand my own motives in writing this story. Is it a desperate way of clinging on to a life that lost its salt many years ago? Or a way of confessing my sins to myself, forgiving myself? Once upon a time I would not have been able to tell this story without first being at peace with my motives. I would have agonized endlessly, the narrative dead in my hand. Alas, I no longer have that luxury. Even if my motives are self-serving I think there is still some good in relating these events. I am not afraid to admit it: the story is flawed, as I am flawed. But it is the story I have to tell. (p.54)

I also wanted to know if the novel was in any way autobiographical. Ndibe debunks the notion that Bukuru's story is autobiographical: “No, Bukuru's story is not mine. He's entirely a character of imaginative projection” (2015: n.p). But the choice of the narrative structure of the novel could have been borne out of the author's early career as a journalist. Indeed, he confesses, “There are always tiny flakes of the author in his/her text. There are resonances, some convergences. Bukuru, after all, is a journalist, worked on the editorial board of a newspaper - facts that correspond in some ways to my professional biography” (2015: n.p).<sup>7</sup>

Ndibe engages with the national narrative and, to borrow the words of John Elerius, “provides a specific form of social consciousness” (2000: p. 195) relating to the human cost of oppressive, incompetent governance and the need to protest against these. Ndibe does this because, as Elerius points out, “In apprehending observable reality and reflecting the findings in his literary creation, the African writer is not unaware of the real nature and objective of good literature which he sees as being largely determined by the needs of the society” (2000: p.195). Like the other writers whose texts form the corpus for this study, Ndibe uses a couple of interlocking tools to shape the ideas he presents to us in his novel. He utilizes history, memory and the imagination to reflect on the Nigerian experience during the period under study. He draws on

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<sup>6</sup> He says this in an email interview he granted this researcher in 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Okey Ndibe works as a professor at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island U.S.A. He worked as a journalist and magazine editor before migrating to the U.S.A. in 1988 to serve as the founding editor of the magazine *African Commentary*. He is a political columnist and essayist who has written for newspapers like *The Guardian*, *The Daily Sun*, and is a regular columnist for *Next*.

these notions to present to us, as we noted above, an allegorical narrative that reveals in grim detail the terrible effects of military rule.

Discussing *Arrows of Rain* vis-a-vis Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* (1970) and Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1973), Niyi Osundare examines how writers, like Ndibe make use of the trope of madness to tell a gripping story. He compares Bukuru to Armah's Baako and Head's Elizabeth and posits that their lives demonstrate how social evil inflicted on individuals can literally lead to madness. But Bukuru is not really a madman. The incidents he relates for example, the daily parties at Honourable Reuben Ata's place, his days at the newspaper, his encounter with Isa Bello at Iyese's place, his testimony at the court, the sexual orgies of the Cabinet Ministers and the Prime Minister himself on the day of the coup are not and could not be related by a disturbed mind. Bukuru's perceived deranged mental state is the result of his deliberate decision to project an image of a mentally troubled man. Most important, these incidents took place before the tragic event that led to Bukuru being imprisoned.

Ndibe draws inspiration from his Igbo ethnic background to symbolically construct the identity of his characters through naming. This applies particularly to the two narrators in the novel: Bukuru and Femi Adero. In Africa, meaning is the central consideration in naming (Arua, 2009: p.65): therefore, names are not given at random. They convey particular messages that can range from describing the circumstances that surrounds a child's birth, to the emotion of the parents at the time of birth, to the socio-political situation of the community into which the child was born. Oguamakwa, which in Igbo literarily means "the wiper of tears, a consoler, a vindicator and comforter" (p.185), is Bukuru's original name. However, the name becomes infused with a layer of symbolism and irony when it is shortened to "Ogugua," which means a harbinger of ill luck and deep-seated misfortunes. This notion is underscored by the sudden death of Bukuru's mother in childbirth. This ironic twist is repeated when Iyese names her son Ogugua too. Like his father before him, his birth, rather than comforting her, hastens her death as she is stabbed by her lover General Isa Palat Bello in a fit of anger.

As we noted above, Ndibe draws inspiration from his Igbo culture to construct the identities of his characters. He constructs these individual identities on a literal level but the meaning of these

names takes on a deep symbolism when it is related to the nation. The military, when they take over power, as the name Oguguamakwa suggests, present themselves as the wipers of the tears of the people. But they instead become harbingers of ill luck or deep seated misfortunes as the name Ogugua means. In this way, Ndibe constructs the identities of his characters to symbolically refer to the specific conditions of life in Nigeria under military rule. It would seem as Eldred Durosimi Jones suggests:

Although African writers draw inspiration from their particular ethnic bases, their ultimate vision is national, even global. The ethnic background offers them the metaphor for their vision. What the writers see around them as they survey their political and social environment since independence is a recurring cycle of misrule, mismanagement, corruption, violent upheaval and general misery. (1988: p.6)

Thus, Ndibe's construing of the name Oguguamakwa to mean ill luck, and misfortune acts as a metaphor for military rule in post-independence Nigeria. Just as the birth of a child is welcomed with pomp and gaiety, soldiers were initially celebrated as messiahs who had rescued the state from corrupt politicians, but that notion changed from the 1980s-1990s onwards after they plunged the nation into political turmoil and economic tribulation (Adeoti, 2003: p.7).

Ndibe also uses the motif of rain to create a symbolic image of the military. He illustrates the experience of military rule through the metaphor of rain and the recurring cycle of seasons, which he likens to the incessant succession of governments in Nigeria. Therefore, on another level, rain, like the military, becomes a foreboding of evil. According to Bukuru's grandmother, "Rain has two faces [...] It can give life, but its arrows can also cause death" (p.196). By sustaining the earth's plenitude and also being the harbinger of malaise, rain performs two paradoxical roles (p.195). This is similar to the roles the military plays. On the one hand, it is capable of ousting governments with ease in a bid to save the country, and, on the other hand, it also has a tendency to turn on the people it set out to deliver from bad governments.

An interesting parallel is therefore drawn between the military and the rain. Ndibe presents in these two, the conflicting concepts of deliverance/life and destruction/death. The military is at first imagined as a rescue platform for liberating a depraved country from the grip of its civilian

political elite. The military which is typified by unnecessary brutality and mass killing comes to be represented as having been transformed from a redeeming force into an institution which instils fear and perpetrates violence on the people. As was noted above, the military justifies its role in government with the explanation that it intervenes in the political affairs of the country to save it from the economic and political ruination brought on by the corrupt civilian governments. Ndibe, along with the other writers chosen for this study, disagrees with this stance and depicts the military as scavengers, who come to obliterate all that has been left behind by the displaced democratic government.

## 2.2 *When Silence is not Golden*

Sefi Atta, in an online interview with Ike Anya in 2005, makes the point that “Nigerians for the most part were silent during the time of military dictatorship in the 80s” (“Sefi Atta: Something Good,” 2005). All of the writers chosen for this study explore the culture of silence that developed during the traumatic period of military dictatorship in the 80s and 90s. This section investigates Ndibe’s fictional representation of this silence in *Arrows of Rain*. In the novel silence is imposed on the people by the military state of Madia to regulate their lives and activities. The state does this with the aim of controlling and marginalizing the people. Silence in *Arrows of Rain* is however also a device used by the people to attain power and agency as they negotiate their existence in the margins: that is, silence is not solely imposed from above but can emerge from below as a subjective strategy. Keeping in mind our observation at the beginning of this chapter that the struggle in Ndibe’s novel between the state and the people is for the performance space, this section begins with an investigation of how the state uses silence as a tool to prevent the people from entering the performance space. The sole purpose of preventing the people from entering the performance space, as revealed in the novel, is to control them and to exclude them from the discourse on power. We examine the reasons why the people embraced this imposition of silence, and note that silence for the people was firstly a means of survival as is evident in Bukuru’s contract of silence, but later on it becomes a tool for challenging the status quo and for a re-negotiation of the people’s identities.

Before we proceed, it is pertinent to briefly explain our understanding of the concept of silence in this chapter. The notion of silence, as used in this chapter, is tied to our understanding of it to be a tool for repression and disarticulation. According to Sarah Dauncey:

Silence is not a fixed category, it is not identified with a single unitary meaning over which there is widespread consensus, and it is inexplicably related to the issue of silencing. It is a mobile construct whose import shifts depending upon the discourse utilizing it and the context conditioning it. (2003: p.1)

Silence's function within fictional narratives is thus dependent on the context and the analytical method used to explain it. Bearing Dauncey's argument in mind, this study understands that silence is multifaceted. We therefore engage with it only in its fictional representation and its theoretical formulation in the novel under study, rather than in its more extensive and expressive philosophical attributes. We now proceed in the next two sub-sections to discuss the imposition of silence by the military regime on the people and the ways in which the people contest this imposition.

### 2.2.1 *The Employment of Silence as a means of Control*

Our argument on the imposition of silence on the people by the state proceeds from the perception of government-imposed silence as censorship. There are diverse experiences of censorship, but they all reflect instances of control and silencing. There is also an increasingly wide usage of the term and, the concept is therefore slippery. But the notion of censorship that we engage with in this chapter is influenced by the idea promoted by Helen Freshwater who notes that the "conventional conception of censorship focuses upon the external silencing of a resistant subject's speech or expression, which is understood to be free or hitherto uncensored" (2003: p.226). We adopt this idea of censorship because the representation of the notion in *Arrows of Rain* shows it as an institutional act of prohibition. Our examination of it is, therefore, in its most traditional attribute of being the intervention of a repressive state to silence the people to the point of exclusion.

In the history of the Nigerian press, the worst form of censorship is associated with the dictatorial maladministration of the military (Eribo, 1997: p.64). But, the press is known to have withstood the tyranny of Nigerian dictators and has gone above and beyond the call of duty to gather and disseminate news under extremely difficult circumstances and at great risk. The Nigerian press, which is bold in its criticism of bad governments, has been sustained by a no-holds-barred approach to matters of national interest. It has the capacity to oppose those it

considers guilty of wrong doing, and it faced its greatest challenges during the military era as the state attempted to make it subservient. Indeed, Reuben Abati states that “The Nigerian Press has faced several challenges [...] but no challenge has been more of a problem than the menace of military rule and threats to the freedom of press and the capacity of the press to fulfil its mission as the voice of the voiceless and defender of the oppressed” (1998: p.2).

Right from the beginning of the narration in *Arrows of Rain*, we are confronted with the reality of the suppression of the voice of the press. Femi Adero tells us that General Palat had brought into law a decree that made it “an offence for any editor to use a story whose length or prominence upstaged a presidential pronouncement or deed” (p.17). This decree is an example of one of the many gag laws which infringed on press freedom and was mostly experienced during the era of military rule (Nwanne, 2014: p.10). If we consider, as Ismail Aro suggests, that “the primary role of the journalist is being a watchdog of the nation” (“The Nigerian Press,” 2011, online), it can be understood why, as Ndibe illustrates in his novel, it was difficult for the press in Nigeria during the era of military dictatorship to fulfil its role.

When voices are interpreted as expressing dissent, especially by dictatorial regimes, they are suppressed. This is done through the promulgation of various decrees which places restrictions on the promotion or circulation of any news by any means of mass communication that is regarded by the military government to be detrimental to the interest of the nation. Thus, by refusing to allow voices perceived as oppositional, the dictatorial military state deploys what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as authoritative discourse, which demands the people’s unconditional allegiance:

Authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transition, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it: [...]. It is indissolubly fused with its authority - with political power, an institution, a person - and it stands and falls together with that authority. (1981: p.343)

Furthermore, as Ngugi points out in *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*, “In censorship, the state tries to control the distribution and consumption of the work of art. But when official censorship fails, the state may try to induce self-censorship through selective acts of terrorism” (1998: p.32). There are a number of wide definitional positions one can adopt in the usage of the word

'terrorism'. But we interpret Ngugi's usage of the word to mean "the organized use of violence to attack non-combatants or innocents (in a special sense) or their property for political purposes" (Coady, 2004: p.80).<sup>8</sup> Bearing this in mind, the brutal reign of General Bello in Madia, which is characterized by the silencing of alternative voices, physical assault on the people and the enactment of draconian laws not only crushes the hope the people have for the future, but is an act of terrorism.

Bukuru's deliberate withdrawal from society is induced by his fear of General Palat who is representative of the state. This withdrawal is not only physical but also takes the form of an internalised form of censorship which is governed by the logic of self-preservation. To understand Bukuru's form of internalised censorship, we draw on the ideas promoted by Sigmund Freud on censorship. Freud examines processes of censorious exclusion and promotes an understanding of censorship that is tied to a person's instincts which he says have been generated during one's early socialization. Freud claims that we function by unconsciously incorporating into our psyche everything that we perceive as good, and rejecting everything we perceive as bad. He goes on to say that the structure of our consciousness rests on a system of repression and our subconscious functions as an internal censorship mechanism which suppresses areas in our thought process, memory and experience that we find distressing (1989: pp.578-80).

Thus, afraid that he might end up a victim of General Bello's butchery, Bukuru starts to consider his own interest and safety (p.169). The awareness that his safety is paramount, ranking above, any feeling of loyalty he might have to friends or to the nation simultaneously triggers: both the instinct of self-preservation in his subconscious and his internal censorship mechanism. He represses the things he finds disturbing about the nation and the happenings in his immediate environment. Bukuru's self-censorship is tied primarily to external pressures that emanate from outside him which cause him to seek safety by withdrawing from society.

After his arrest at the B. Beach by the officials of the state, he realizes that in order to make sense of what is happening to him, he needs to speak out especially about things that had happened in the past which now haunt him. Bukuru who has been silenced by oppression presents the traumatic effects of his subjugation in the way he carries both personal and

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<sup>8</sup> This interpretation of the word terrorism applies to 'state terrorism' and not groups like ISIS and Boko Haram who spread terror through violence.

collective histories within him (Vickroy, 2002:p.xv). As he has pointed out, his life intersects with the wider history of Madia. His life has touched on larger events and it has been touched by them in return (p.54). His decision to speak out is therefore, an act of defiance, which is translated from the micro level of the individual to the macro level of the nation, especially given that by taking this stance, Dr Mandi and Femi Adero are also motivated to show their defiance against the military state (pp.49-50). The idea that speaking out is an act of defiance is instructive in our understanding of the resistance that Ndibe's characters show. These characters defy the power of the state with the aim of attaining agency, which the next section seeks to examine.

### 2.2.2 *Discarding Silence to Challenge Power and to Attain Agency*

By the time Major Isa Palat Bello had risen politically to the position of a leader, Bukuru had sunk low in the social ladder by assuming the identity of a madman wandering the shores of B. beach. In the ensuing silence that has become his life and which he struggles with, he wonders, "what was my life but a succession of silences, evasions, abdications" (p.222), and then he asks himself, "how much of Madia's misbegotten history could be traced to my silence about Iyese's death?" (p.212). He overcomes his silence by raising his voice to tell his story from behind prison walls, recalling the words of his grandmother: "stories never forgive silence [...]. I know that power dreads memory. I know that memory outlasts power's viciousness" (p.248).

Bukuru decides to break free of the silence of self-censorship so that he can narrate the brutality of the military in its assault on Nigerians. He tells us "I am here because many years ago, I fooled myself that the counterfeit coin of silence was good enough to buy peace of mind" (p.245). Central to this turning around is his encounter with Dr Mandi, a psychiatrist working for the Madian state and Femi Adero, a journalist working for the *Chronicle*. But, first, Bukuru readjusts his quest for a meaningful identity as a Madian by finding his voice. He retrieves his lost voice by choosing to engage with issues related to the nation and in the process, gets involved in political activism. Unlike Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* in which political activism has a strong communal dimension, Ndibe's novel promotes a non-heroic figure who acts out his activism in prison. Before we examine how Bukuru discarded silence to challenge the power of the state, we will firstly consider why his voice was important to be heard.

In the traditional Yoruba society of Western Nigeria, the writer or poet is believed to have magical powers and is, therefore, a sacred person, who cannot be touched even by a king (Kehinde, 2010: p.3). His position in society is, on the one hand, very special and, on the other, a burden. Firstly, he is the object of people's admiration: he is seen to be an enhancer of the well-being of the society as he defends it from its enemies through his craft. Secondly, he is a target of the people's ambivalence because he also has the responsibility of mediating between the governed and the rulers. In the first instance, his virtues and obligations are a burden, both personal and social - he is hated and feared because of his ability to expose the ills in society. In the second instance, he is an object of honour and love, for his positive roles. But he is determined in the performance of his craft, and heroically prepared to die in defence of the ancient rights of poets.

The writer or the journalists as we see in *Arrows of Rain* has similar responsibilities as the poet in the traditional Yoruba society. Bukuru and Adero's voices like that of the bard in traditional Yoruba society are special and carry the burden of being mediators between the governor and the governed. But unlike the Yoruba bard, who is revered, the press and journalists in Madia are censored in the discharge of their duties.

In the discharge of his duties as a journalist Bukuru is capable of moulding the opinions of the people. Indeed, journalists can be said to be in a privileged position, which enables them to appeal to the sentiments of the people through the things they write about or report. Hence, as the community has confidence in them and trusts their judgements, they also have the liberty to address the people and direct their thinking concerning a particular matter. This is the reason behind Bukuru's ordeals at the hands of the state. A cursory look at the story Ndibe narrates suggests that Bukuru is being hounded by Bello because of their shared relationship with Iyese. But Dr Mandi tells him "the reports by the foreign media are what Bello's most concerned about: he's trying to spruce up his regime's image. That's why you're in trouble. You can't publicise dirty secrets about the life of the President and hope to sleep peacefully" (p.73). Thus, the knowledge Bukuru possesses about the General's past is at root the reason for his woes. Bukuru's ability to influence or affect the people's thinking is coveted by the dictator. This is the source of the tension between the efficient press (represented by Bukuru and Femi Adero, in this text) and the totalitarian Madian State.

Thus, the press in Madia became a consistent target of governmental harassment with many journalists tortured and imprisoned, exiled or murdered (p.194). Any action of the press in Madia which is interpreted by the state to be an act of defiance, leads to a crackdown by the military. It is for this reason that Femi Adero says, “No editor trifled with the decree” (p.17). The suppression of the press by the dictatorial regimes in Nigeria as represented in *Arrows of Rain* is an attempt by the state to impose its voice on the people and to silence any alternative voice and in the process crush the people’s morale.

The travails of Bukuru are similar to those of the photographer Jeremiah in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1987). These characters’ ordeals depict the cat-and-mouse relationship that exists between the artist and repressive regimes. Writers, especially journalists in Africa, have a long history of being hounded and silenced by the government (both military and civilian), for attempting to challenge repressive authority. Many of them have been clandestinely murdered, completely silenced by the government, and those who refuse to be silenced live most of their lives in incarceration.<sup>9</sup> Okri’s Jeremiah, like Bukuru, had to disappear for a long time because of threats and attacks. His house is damaged and he is dismissed from a relative’s house when it comes under surveillance and he is forced to withdraw into isolation. Like Bukuru, who becomes a vagrant, Jeremiah becomes a tramp, leading a vagrant life, begging for food, as he can no longer practise his trade without molestation. But this is where the similarity between him and Bukuru ends. Unlike Bukuru, who retreats totally from society, Jeremiah makes nocturnal appearances despite being hounded; his courage and uncompromising will to expose the ills of the ruling elite are exemplary and impressive. He, therefore, continues to take pictures of market women fighting with thugs and those of policemen collecting bribes.

Bukuru might have chosen to be silent but other ‘voices’ understand that “stories never forgive silence” (p.248), and thus stubbornly refuse to remain silent in the face of corruption and military brutality. The underground opposition press in Madia paints a picture of the country

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<sup>9</sup> Nigerian journalists who were victims of the military regime’s campaign of harassment and imprisonment in the 80s and 90s include: Kunle Ajibade, Nosa Igiebor, Chris Anyawu, George Mbah, Ben Charles OBI, Babafemi Ojodu and Dele Giwa who was killed by a parcel bomb believed to have been sent to him by the military regime in 1986. Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe are notable writers known to be critics of the military in Nigeria. They are known to have had confrontations with the military which led to their arrest in the 60s. The most notable writer who was a critic of military regimes in Nigeria, especially that of General Abacha was Ken Saro Wiwa, who was executed by the military in 1995 for his role

under General Bello's leadership as grim and reminiscent of General Abacha's regime, in Nigeria in the 1990s. The period of Abacha's regime witnessed unprecedented suppression of political activities and fundamental human rights abuses. Indeed, Chris Ogbondah's statement that, during the Abacha era, "political activists and critics were arbitrarily arrested, detained, jailed, tortured or murdered by members of the late dictator's assassination squad" (2000: p.231), clearly describes the situation in Madia under General Bello.

Bukuru's deliberate withdrawal from society is an internalised form of censorship, which is a direct result of intimidation by the military. Describing the emotional torment he went through because of his fear of General Isa Palat Bello, after Iyese's death, Bukuru says:

Isa Palat Bello continued to haunt my mind. He was present in every soldier's face, eyes peering out at me, lustful and ugly. I began to dread the approach of night, for his face would loom up out of the dark. Whenever I heard footsteps behind me I whirled around. (p.185)

He only gains some reprieve and experiences a return to normalcy when he hears it reported that Bello is out of the country on a course. Bukuru's encounter with General Bello and his reaction to this incident reflect a traumatic experience. His ability to recall this encounter is important; not only because of what he remembers, but also because of how he remembers these incidents. Anne Whitehead's argument that "the traumatic incident is not fully acknowledged at the time it occurs and only becomes an event at some later point of intense emotional crisis" (1995: p.6) explains why Bukuru's arrest and imprisonment bring the traumatic past to the present. His previous experience of trauma is thus reflected in its belatedness and in its possession or haunting.

Whitehead examines the belatedness of the memory of trauma and says "certain experiences, impressions and memory traces are revisited at a later date in order to correspond with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development" (1995: p.6). Bukuru's memory of this traumatic experience is therefore relived through the pain of an event that keeps reoccurring and which also acts as a haunting or possessive influence that not only returns, but is experienced in its belatedness.

Indeed, the idea that post-dictatorship Nigeria is haunted is central to the arguments we make in this study, given that a recurring element used in the works under study here is the trope of haunting. Nigeria's historical trauma of military rule is the originating cause of these narratives, which are haunted by ghosts. In both the story he tells and the presentation of the character Bukuru, Ndibe's emphasis in *Arrows of Rain* is on the haunting nature of the past confronting the living. In the character Bukuru we encounter a simulacrum of a ghost - he disappears and reappears. Also, underneath the surface of official accounts of history, lie stories that have been silenced or erased, leaving only their ghostly traces which return and haunt the present. The centrality of haunting in Ndibe's narrative shows a preoccupation with a national repressed past, a past defined by unspeakable horrors and victims who are traumatized. *Arrows of Rain*, to borrow Fiona Barclay's words, "demonstrates powerfully that the past has not passed, and that history has created a society in which [...] the past can resurge without warning to interrupt the present" (2011: p.xxv). Indeed, the ghosts in Ndibe's narrative are significant in their form and outcomes as they speak to the contemporary realities of the Nigerian experience of military rule and dictatorship and its aftermath (Barclay, 2011: p. xii)

The experience of trauma in its belatedness and its haunting is evident in all the novels chosen for examination in this study. These novels foreground the experience of trauma at the national level in the depiction of their characters' mental distresses. In *Waiting for an Angel*, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good will Come*, the three main characters, Lomba, Kambili and Enitan, share the memory and experience of violence by soldiers. In these narratives, a character who represents the collective expresses a problematic socio-political situation. The experiences of these characters reflect the trauma of everyday life under the military and present an overhanging consciousness of the experience of psycho-physical trauma. The writers examined in this study see trauma as an indicator of social injustice or oppression and as the ultimate cost of destructive political and sociocultural institutions (Vickroy: p.x).

In *Arrows of Rain*, after Bello becomes the head of state of Madia, Bukuru's emotional torment turns into a desperate need to stay alive, especially when a photographer at the *Dial* dies after being attacked by soldiers. Relating his feelings now that Bello is in a position of absolute power he says:

Terrors I could neither name nor disentangle dinned in my head. This man whose cruelty I knew so intimately now personified absolute power. And I was his enemy! Throughout the night my body twitched, my teeth chattered. I slept only in short spurts, my rest haunted by bad dreams. (p.202)

The feeling that he had become an enemy of the state was not only in his head. It becomes real when the receptionist at the *Dial* tells him that two men had been to the office to see him but would not leave their names, only the message that they would return.

### 2.3 *The Prison Condition of the Nation*

Ndibe uses the literal prison experience of a character alongside the extended metaphor of the imprisoned condition of the people of Madia to examine both physical and psychological oppression. The story of Bukuru the journalist turned vagrant who is imprisoned on trumped up charges is tied to a specific historical condition in Madia - the larger imprisonment of the nation under a despotic military regime. This imprisonment of the nation echoes Nigeria under military rule in the 80s and 90s.

In an exchange of emails with this researcher in March 2015, Ndibe reveals the historical backdrop against which the plot of his novel unfolds. He explains that there is “no question, Abacha’s repressive tactics shaped my novel”. Helon Habila describes these tactics as “plain old-fashioned terror” (2002: p.171). Indeed, the tyranny to which Abacha subjected his people was, notwithstanding Nigeria’s long record of brutal military regimes, unequalled in its violence, reach and arbitrariness (Erritouni, 2010: p.146). Despotism as it emerges in *Arrows of Rain* is characterised by excess, evident in the pervasive violence and various restrictions which debilitate the novel’s characters, leaving them little room to negotiate the constraints of their bleak lives in Madia. Ndibe exposes the military state’s lack of sensitivity to human conditions in Bukuru’s graphic description of the deplorable state of the prison:

The prison compound was deadly quiet, bare and barren. Grass lay about the surface like sun-dried algae churned out by the sea. A criss-cross of concrete paths led to small detached buildings, each containing ten cell units. The cells were sunk in darkness. A horrible stench flowed out of each door we passed, the

stink of unwashed bodies mingled with the foulness of things that come from within them: faeces, urine, vomit, blood. (p. 47)

The prison yard, Ngugi says, “is like a stage where everything, including movement, is directed and choreographed by the state” (1998: p.56). Imprisonment, according to Niyi Akingbe, “constitutes one of the methods usually adopted by the military to weaken and dehumanise [...] in [...] post-colonial Africa” (2013: p.164). From the description of the prison, it is evident that the inmates are dehumanized and their dignity taken away from them. And, thus, this vivid description of the condition of the prison acts as a metaphor for the disregard for the value of human decency in man.

In Bukuru’s description of the prison experience, he tells us:

The four walls seemed to draw imperceptibly closer, threatening in time to meet in an embrace and crush me [...]. Death entered and stayed in my thoughts [...] at night different sounds intruded on my solitude: the swaying of trees, the chirr of insects, the croaking of frogs, the shabby shuffle of roaches, the low requiem of mosquitoes and the terrible braying of demented prisoners. (pp.67-68)

The prison wall is foregrounded, as a primary site of human rights violation. Bukuru’s feelings as they become evident, especially in his description of the sounds that permeate the prison, show fear. The description of the walls is a metaphor for the prison experience as well as acting as a synecdoche for the material violence that is evident in the excesses of the state.

As a telling embodiment of despotism, the prison system in colonial Africa was characterized by arbitrariness, corporal punishment, unchecked and sometimes lethal violence (Bernault and Roitman, 2003: pp.87-89). “Imprisonment is essentially a form of punishment” (Pete and Sarkin, 2008: p.40); however, its use as a specific form of punishment has changed in character from colonial times when it became widespread in Africa.<sup>10</sup> In the next section, we discuss the literal prison condition of the people as well as the psychological prison condition of the people. We do this to explore the kinds of oppression evident in *Arrows of Rain*. First, there is the literal,

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<sup>10</sup> According to Stephen Pete, “Although prisons have existed on the continent of Africa for centuries, the punishment of imprisonment became widespread in most of sub-Saharan Africa, with the notable exception of South Africa, only towards the end of the nineteenth century” (2008: p.44)

physical imprisonment of the people, and, secondly, there is the direct subjugation of the people, which places them in a psychological prison condition.

### 2.3.1 *Physical Imprisonment*

The novel as we have noted, opens with the death of a prostitute at the B. beach on New Year's Eve. Bukuru is arrested and imprisoned after being charged not only with the murder of this particular prostitute, but also with those of several other prostitutes on beaches spread across the city. At the prison, the homicide detectives and the prison guards subject him to physical torture. The punitive measures they deploy are revealed most saliently in the manner of his interrogation.

Although Bukuru is not subjected to unrestrained physical violence like Lomba in *Waiting for an Angel*, the manner of his interrogation is physically painful nonetheless:

An awful pain throbbled in my unsupported back. Fissuring, this pain moved in two directions: one branch of it crept down my legs, the other spread upwards to my shoulders. My neck was knotted into a taut hardness. (pp.60-61)

Lati, the chief interrogator, reveals that they treat Bukuru in this way because they have observed that he was "one of those who want to be tortured, but he can't stand much" (p.61). So they decide to give him "the mosquito treatment" (p.61). Bukuru was, subsequently, taken to a cell at the back of the prison:

The cell was dim and dank, its air warm with unflushed faeces. As I entered cockroaches scurried and disappeared under the mattress. A swarm of mosquitoes detached themselves from the walls and advanced on me like soldiers closing in on an unarmed target [...]. In the deep darkness, the mosquitoes attacked me in waves. I swatted at them until all my arms became numb [...]. In the morning [...] the mosquitoes had withdrawn to their perches on the walls, their bodies bloated. When I squashed them, they squirted my own dark-red blood. (p.62)

There is a lack of coherent rationale for Bukuru's arrest and subsequent detention. His interrogation and detention only expose the state's will to power. Indeed, the excesses of the state as evident in Bukuru's treatment at the hands of the prison officials are indicative of a

government that is fascinated with its power and, therefore, conceives of no limit to its operation.

On discovering that Bukuru will not cooperate and give them the confession that they try to cajole and force out of him, the state secretly plans to poison him. The plan is leaked to an international organization, Amnesty International, so the state drops the idea and comes up with another one. A psychiatrist is brought in, not to accurately examine him but to give the state a reason to get rid of him. The psychiatrist tells him:

Justice Kayode has asked me to examine you [...]. Examine is perhaps not the right term. It's more like an interaction, a, what's the word I'm looking for [...] a dialogue. My job is to have a dialogue with you. Then to advise the court on certain matters. (p.69)

The state's treatment of Bukuru instilled in him a deep sense of fatalism, a sense of foreboding, of the peril that lay in store for him. But Bukuru admits to himself that:

I know I am a man who ran away from duty and love. A man who must point a finger at fear and say: this is what drove me to do it, the dreadful god in whose name I slayed my voice. (p.248)

The prison condition of the people in *Arrows of Rain* is not only seen in the literal incarceration of Bukuru but also in the extended metaphor of the imprisoning condition of the people as apparent in the oppression of those who dare to speak out against the excesses of the military regime. He refuses to give the state the power to do with him as it pleases and takes his own life. Thus, although the state mercilessly takes away from Bukuru his freedom, we witness his agency in his insistence on the right not only to speak, but also when to speak and how to speak.

### 2.3.2 *Psychological Prison*

When the life guard Lanky, relates the story of the prostitute's death, it is obvious all that is important to him is the attention he receives from the people gathering to hear his tale. The agents of the state who showed up at the beach to investigate the incident are not interested in finding out the truth about the cause of the woman's death. They are only interested in finding

someone to blame for the incident. The people themselves are not interested in what happened to the prostitute, but are rather carried away by the antics of the life guard.

The death of the prostitute is directly caused by the military, but perhaps more importantly it is also a result of conditions influenced by the military. The discovery of the body of the prostitute on the beach at the beginning of *Arrows of Rain* introduces the kind of incidents that have become common place in Madia. The rest of the narration examines the specific conditions of life under military rule. The notion of being enslaved by the state is central to the cluster of concerns we examine in the novel. For instance, although Bukuru is physically imprisoned, he expresses a feeling of also being psychologically imprisoned when he says that he feels “like a fly trapped in beer. Drowning more and more each time I bat my wings to leap to freedom” (p.76). Dr Mandi, like Bukuru, admits realizing that he was unable to do what is right:

A gun was put to my head. Yes, I could have chosen to die for integrity and principle. Sometimes, believe me, I feel ashamed that I didn't. But what principle does a dead man defend? What truth does he espouse? (p.77).

These characters, as well as the state security agents, the police, the judge, and indeed the general populace are pawns in the hands of General Palat, and therefore unable to challenge the control of the military. Dr Mandi refers to the whole lot of them as “slaves of the system” (p.77).

#### 2.4 *The Rape of a Nation*

Ndibe links the rape of women in his novel to a larger metaphorical political statement: The rape of the nation by military regimes. The actions of the military in the Nigeria of the 80s and 90s stand as a metaphor for the defilement of the nation. The political malaise ravaging the country at the time is therefore tantamount to rape.

All four novels chosen for this study examine sexual violence. The aim of our discussion in this study is to situate this sexual violence within a broader discussion of power and control and, in the process; we connect these to the general conversation about the abuse of power during the Nigerian experience of military rule. Indeed, the vulnerability of women in these narratives relates to the wider social and political havoc unleashed on the country by the military. As Tony

Simoès da Silva states: “The bruising of human flesh [...] hints to the hidden layers of bruising that underpin the Nigerian national fabric” (2012: p.458). Although Pius Adesanmi’s comments are made in relation to Adichie’s writing, he reads sexual exploitation as a reflection of the ailing state of Nigeria during the era of military rule and says “I read the repeated acts of violence on the body of the individual [...] as a metaphor for a broader concern with the body of the nation” (2002: p.122).

In *Arrows of Rain*, the rape and murder of women are the bedrock on which the administration of General Isa Palat Bello is built. Iyese, a prostitute with whom Bukuru had a relationship, was brutally raped and murdered by General Bello, years before he rose to the position of President of the Federal Republic of Madia. Iyese had left Bini after the sad end of a marriage in which all her dreams were crushed and in which she had suffered in the cruellest way. Overcome with shame and in a bid to avoid the resentment and pity of her family, she moves to Langa. She had never visited Langa before, but was drawn to the city because she had heard that it:

Was a vast, strange human bazaar where shame had no odour because people lived anonymously, where some of the most beautiful people walking the streets were ghosts and some of the saddest were corpses waltzing to their graves.  
(p.157)

This absence of shame, which is a characteristic of the city that she is drawn to, is ingrained in Iyese’s conceptualizations of herself. She therefore attempts to fit into this space, which she perceives as a sanctuary, and to create a habitat of meaning and to negotiate her existence. But she ends up in a tragic situation.

Iyese’s repeated rape by General Isa Palat Bello is read symbolically. We read it as systemic violence and subjugation of the people by the military state. In Iyese’s story, we see how rape is symbolically intertwined with the ruthless abuse of power by politicians and those in authority. Also, Iyese’s body, similar to Kambili’s body in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, becomes a text on which violence is inscribed. If we place Ndibe’s representation of rape in his novel side by side with Sheri’s experience of rape in Atta’s *Everything Good will Come*, and the rape of the female university students in Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel*, it becomes obvious that the notion of rape Atta engages is rooted in the everyday violence that permeates urban spaces, while that of Ndibe

and Habila is symbolic of the ruthless power of the authorities. Collectively, these writers present the use of guns by the military to emasculate the people, stripping power away from them, and this is symbolic of the rape of the nation. Indeed, these writers deconstruct the relationship between political power and sexual violence to resist cultural repression and to bear witness to oppression (Vickroy, 2002: p.6)

### 2.5 *Memory as Resistance*

Ogugua's narrative in *Arrows of Rain* echoes the ambivalence of post-colonial Nigeria and the politics of remembering. The novel narrates a character's memories, which evaluates the role of the military in national development. *Arrows of Rain* is permeated with the significance of remembering what has happened, and Ndibe lays significant emphasis on Bukuru's memories. The things this character remembers shape the story he tells and in turn provide the push for the resistance he demonstrates. His narration is the means through which he communicates memory. Given that the narrative is the primary way through which memory is recorded, it thus acts, as Suzanne Nalbantain suggests, as a laboratory for the "workings of the mind" (2003: p.1). An examination of the workings of Bukuru's memories reveals the things he remembers and illuminates his conceptions of selfhood, national identity and historical knowledge. It is through these ideas that Ndibe uses the concept of memory to demonstrate its power as a tool for resistance.

The resistance we encounter in *Arrows of Rain*, though different in tenor and character from that which Habila explores in *Waiting for an Angel*, embraces political struggle none the less. If we consider resistance to be made of four inter related elements: the reason(s) behind the resistance, those affected by the reasons, the person(s) behind the reasons for the resistance and those resisting, we observe that the relationship that exists between these four elements is symbiotic. However, the protester's position in the equation is unique, given that the other three elements relate to him in a way they do not relate to each other. The protester, as is evident in *Arrows of Rain* is placed at the centre of the process instead of the issue which incites the resistance. As Ndibe's main concerns are presented from Bukuru's perspective, it is through this character's consciousness that the four elements which outline the character of protest are found in the novel. Bukuru, therefore, constitutes the centre of consciousness around which the political struggle in the novel is depicted.

Bukuru's narrative is also autobiographical.<sup>11</sup> What constitutes autobiographical memory is a source of debate for scholars (Vinson, 2010: p.5). According to Sarah Vinson, some scholars argue that autobiographical memory should include all forms of self-related information, while others prefer to limit the term to recollections with particular significance. These scholars, she says, stress the importance in autobiographical memory of certain key memories for the life story: momentous events, turning points or nuclear episodes, that is, "recollections of the most significant single scenes in a person's life" (cited in Neisser and Libby 2000: p.318). The general consensus, though, is that autobiographical memories are constituted by life experiences.

Bukuru's memory is interpreted here as autobiographical because of our understanding of the autobiographical to be related to things remembered. The historical accounts he narrates shape his notions of self, his sense of belonging in the society and the world in general. There is, therefore, a link between Bukuru's memory and his sense of self, given that it is through the memories he recounts that his identity is constructed. As Mark Freeman argues, one's concept of one's personal and collective identity is "bound up with" the stories we "tell about the past" (1993: p.12). Who we become as individuals and as remembering communities is tied to the stories we share and the various iterations of the past we personally or collectively tell, whether they are accurate historical reconstructions or wholly fictional accounts of our lives and the past. It is noteworthy though that autobiographical memory and by extension identity is a potentially changing construction, which is shaped through narrative.

Bukuru's narrative, which is a tale of his journey from the upper echelons of journalism all the way down to the low level of being a wanderer and vagrant, is also an evaluation of the role of the military in national development. This tale is drawn from the recollections of a past that had undergone deliberate suppression. His memory therefore, questions Nigeria's history in its struggle against the assault of the military on its social and political values. Bukuru's memory is a form of resistance, given that what is being remembered is subversive of the existing order. Thus, negotiated history and obstinate dissent merge in his experiences.

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<sup>11</sup> Autobiographical memory is not to be confused with the literary genre of autobiography. Autobiographical memory according to John Santrock consists of "A person's recollections of his or her life experiences (2000: p.196).

## 2.6 *The Question of Identity*

Bukuru acquires a new name, alters his personality and feigns madness in order to obtain a new identity. In the process, he gradually loses his personality at the B. beach. Ndibe employs the acquisition of a new identity by this character to examine how the shaping of identities can arise from conditions that are fundamentally political. Bukuru is transformed from the sane journalist Ogugua into the perceived demented vagrant at the B. beach, and this separates him from society. His aim of securing what he thought would be a peaceful existence is ruptured by his arrest, and the loss of his name shows an internal conflict which is traumatic.

Ndibe presents to us in Bukuru a person with multiple identities, each of which has some bearing on his political conduct and role in society. He is, therefore, a person for whom the space of personal identity is a site of struggle. He moves between one social place and context and another in a bid to escape the perceived threat that General Isa Bello has turned out to be by becoming a vagrant. He explains this threat when he asserts that:

I was beginning to see the situation in light of my own interest and safety. My anger at Isa Palat Bello and his minions was becoming mixed with fear for myself, lest I, too, fall victim to their butchery. (p.169)

But he does not find reprieve as being a wanderer has its own challenges.

In prison, Bukuru tells the story of his life in a letter to the journalist Femi Adero. In doing this, he breaks the ‘contract’ of silence he had gone into with himself:

I looked at myself with hard unsparing eyes, determined to pinpoint the very moment when renouncing everything that lay in my past, I took a strange turn on the road of life... I saw myself as a man who, forgetting where he started his journey was condemned to wander for ever, without destination. Parts of myself lay in the mists of the past, lost. (p.79)

Bukuru’s father was a journalist before him and he tells us he chose to be a journalist out of gratitude to, and in honour of, his father, who gave up his vocation as a journalist to teach. His father did this to devote more time to taking care of his son after his wife died (p.85). But Bukuru abandons his job and chooses the path of silence by convincing himself to believe that

the “counterfeit coin of silence was good enough to buy peace of mind” (p.245). This stance, as we will see below, was self-defeating, especially as his grandmother had consistently said to him that “the mouth owes stories the debt of speech” (p.245). Through the figure of the journalist, Ndibe stages a politics of identity. He places the character Bukuru at a cross road where he is forced to choose between being a victim of the excesses of the state or a vagrant. His identity becomes a place of crisis; he finds himself compromising, lowering his expectations and ambitions, and “making do”.

Bukuru’s discarding of one identity for another is done consciously because he deliberately denies himself access to a particular identity, that of a sane journalist, and creates a new one that of a drifter. If it is agreed that identity formation is the development of a distinct personality by an individual as he or she goes through different stages of life, then Bukuru’s transformation from a journalist to a vagrant is a process of identity loss. Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development underscores the significance of identity transformation through his examination of it as a virtue we acquire in life. In theorizing identity formation, he advocates that throughout a person’s lifetime, there is always an experience, crisis or conflict that a person has to resolve to progress to the next stage of identity formation (1968: p.47). The moment when Bukuru looked at himself “with hard unsparing eyes” was the point at which the beginning of the resolution to the conflict in his life occurred.

Bukuru saw his identity as singular and not connected to that of anyone or as belonging to a nation. This paralleled his lack of belief in the utopian narrative of change, causing him to choose self-censorship. His loss of belief in the possibility of change in the nation is evident in his actions which are characterized by inertia, complacency and silence. Bukuru was present but unnoticed and silent at Iyese’s apartment when she was murdered. Afterward he refuses to report the incident or take responsibility for the child she leaves behind - his own son. This is paradigmatic of the silence of many, muted in the face of tyranny. This is perhaps why, as Rita Nnodim suggests, “in the literary imaginings of space and identity in the city, the figure of the silenced writer and his/her quest for identity is a recurrent and significant one” (2008: p.325). In his presentation of this character, Ndibe makes the point that there is a mutually reinforcing interplay between identity and the pursuit of personal benefits. It is for this reason that Bukuru

literally takes to the street as a vagrant. He tells us “I was weak: I never wanted to be touched by anything that quickened the heart or made the soul sweat” (pp.48-49).

On the national level, the city of Langa becomes a site for a debate on what it means to be a Madian. The novel shows how notions of citizenship collapse under the general feeling of disillusionment in the face of military rule and tyranny. This study agrees with Rita Nnodim, when she suggests that this disillusionment is not unlike a more general postmodern mood. The loss of belief in utopian urban imaginings is related to an absence of loyalty to the post-colonial nation state and, by implication, to other grand narratives, metanarratives, and the very notion of a unitary self (2008: p.330). Thus, Pa Ata, the father of the Honourable Minister Reuben Ata, questions the identity of the Republic of Madia, and wonders why its past has left no mark on its present. He envisions a concept of nationhood that is open to change and reconfigurations of space (pp.122-23). This brings to mind the question Enitan asks in Atta’s *Everything Good will Come*: “What was the country I loved? The country I would fight for? Should it have borders?” (p.299). This feeling that questions one’s place in the nation shows a fundamental feeling of dislocation in these characters. A void, a fundamental notion of dislocation, is generated by the disillusionment that comes from received conceptions of nationhood. Questions related to their national identity are generated in these characters, and a mood of lethargy and complacency ensues. An absence of loyalty to the postcolonial nation becomes evident.

Ndibe’s novel explores multiple facets of the void that is generated in his characters. One facet questions the wisdom of the creation of the country Madia by the British. It encourages a feeling of despair at the failure of the state after independence to transform the dreams of the people into reality:

New-born Madia was welcomed with a swell of hope and expectation. Many outsiders predicted that Madia would grow into a bright dynamic youth, one of the new nations likely to assume the mantle of world leadership in the twenty-first century [...] Instead, something went wrong early and never let up. The nation we inherited from the English was placed in the hands of politicians who sucked its blood until it became dry and anaemic. (p.81)

Another facet is indecisiveness and inertia, demonstrated by Bukuru. When he discovers Iyese’s dead body, he runs away. He knows that Isa Palat Bello is behind the gruesome act but he also

shies away from reporting the crime. His excuse is that “The police won’t touch him. He’s a powerful emir’s son. And also an army officer” (p.183). Yet another facet is a general sense of personal disillusionment and failure, when characters experience their own identity as fragmented. For example, when Dr Mandi and Femi Adero go to see Bukuru at the prison, it turns out they all see themselves as powerless in relation to the state. The doctor and Femi apparently also considered themselves “losers in the brutal game of life” (p.49). These three characters admit that the thought of the personal cost of standing for what was right, and the fear of engaging in a fight with the state, made them keep quiet when they should have spoken up (p.49).

## 2.7 Conclusion

Ndibe under the guiding principle of the arrows of rain (rain sustains the earth’s plenitude but can also be a harbinger of malaise), and the notion of a story never forgiving silence, uses two journalists in his novel *Arrows of Rain* as narrators to bring out the tragedy of a failed nation-state. The figure of the writer and the practice of writing are central to the cluster of concerns we have examined in this chapter. The journalist and writer Bukuru embodies a non-heroic figure who decides to break his silence and give voice to the concerns of the people. Femi Adero criticizes the passive attitude of the media and becomes a part of the fight against the attempts by the dictatorial military state of Madia to curtail the people’s right to the freedom of opinion and expression. These two characters in their individual ways move beyond disenchantment, indifference and pretentiousness, to embrace the possibility of hope and change, simply by virtue of the act of telling their stories. Although Ndibe’s novel does not formulate new utopian perspectives or imaginations of the post-colonial nation, it explores a form of activism through which the main characters engage with concerns that are related to the nation.

Although the breaking of Bukuru’s vow of silence can be interpreted as a political protest, his move from inertia to the breaking of silence is not based on any heroic activism nor on any utopian political ideals. Indeed, he was resolute about getting involved in political activism before finally deciding to give voice to the prompting of his conscience by telling the world the truth about the leader of Madia. His protest, however, contains just a moment of empowerment - the moment of the telling of the story. Bukuru does not live to see the effect, if any, that his story had. Thus, whether his story achieved the purpose for which it was told or not is left to the

imagination of the reader. Indeed, the end of the novel submits that the exploitation of memory to recall the past opens one to violence by those who oppose such re-telling of the past for the purpose of avoiding indictment.

## Chapter Three

### Desperate Times, Desperate Measures:

#### Resistance and Protest in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*

##### 3.0 Introduction

An unnamed railway worker in Ayi Kwei Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, which was published in 1968, eleven years after Ghana had become the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain its independence from British colonial rule, asks the question "How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders?" (p.80). Asking a question like this so soon after independence appears a little bit premature, but it implies that it did not take long for the people to realize that the future promised to them during the decolonization process had turned out to be a disappointment. The despair that this character expresses because of the unfulfilled expectations of decolonization is a feeling that Habila's characters also express in *Waiting for an Angel*.

In Chapter One this study made the point that the military in Nigeria were initially seen as saviours who would save the nation from incompetent and corrupt politicians. This perception changed as the military did not prove to be any better than the politicians whom they ousted out from power. This chapter continues its engagement with the era of the 80s and 90s; informed by the idea that resistance and protest in *Waiting for an Angel* is motivated by the feeling of the people that something was promised them but was never fulfilled.

The era of the 80s-90s, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was characterized by control and silencing. The chapter in its analysis of Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* examined how the state restricted the active participation of members of society in the public sphere by control and silencing. The attempt to silence the people in the face of oppression and injustice pushed them to protest and resistance. This chapter examines why and how the people in Habila's *Waiting for*

*an Angel* worked together and took defiant action to challenge the military regime and the status quo in the 80s and 90s.

This chapter examines resistance and protest in Helon Habila's novel. It does this informed by the idea of deferred expectation that Neil Lazarus explores in his book, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction* (1990: p.2). Lazarus' book, despite its title, is mainly a study of Armah's works, especially his first three novels, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Fragments* (1970), and *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972). These novels represent Armah's literary portrayal of the situation in Ghana during the early years after independence. According to Albert Gerard:

Armah's novels provided the best fictional account of the despair that engulfed idealistic intellectuals in the late sixties when it became obvious that the great expectations generated by the fiery rhetoric of 'revolutionary' leaders were not to be fulfilled; independence merely led to an appalling display of general incompetence and overt corruption while the general population was driven into unprecedented misery. (1992: p.146)

Referring to the fiction of the 1960s, Arthur Ravenscroft observes that the best fiction from Africa at the time was marked by disillusionment (1969: p.122). The widespread sense that the great expectations of independence had been replaced by a feeling of betrayal because none of the promised benefits of independence were delivered is Lazarus' main concern in his book. There is a parallel between Armah's post-colonial pessimism of the 60s and Habila's Nigerian post-colonial pessimism of the 90s. Both writers highlight "the resistance of the major characters to despotism, the corruption, the collective demoralization, the economic decay and social oppression that have been the poisoned fruit of decolonization" (Gerard, 1992: p.147). Armah's novels like Habila's novel promote the notion that Africa's problems are caused by lack of moral direction of her leaders. Indeed, in the handling of their characters both Armah and Habila advance the idea that the writer in post-colonial Africa can place the responsibility of challenging bad leadership on the shoulders of the masses. Thus the actions of their major characters underscore the point that it is usually those who are found at the lower levels of the

nation's social structure - the unemployed, the petty traders, the peasants and the students - who wage protests against the state and the ruling class.<sup>1</sup>

On 6 March 1957 Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African nation to obtain independence from British colonial rule. Kwame Nkrumah in his speech on that day stated that Africans were going to create their own 'African Personality' and identity (Lazarus, 1990: p.2). The personality Nkrumah spoke of will come about by deep-rooted wisdom and dignity, respect for human life, and a love for humanity that is a part of the African heritage. This African personality will re-dedicate himself/herself to the struggle for the emancipation of other Africans from colonial rule and will move beyond an identity tied to slavery and colonialism and would be identified as African (not Ghanaian, Nigerian, Kenyan etc.). Africa will then unite under one government and thus, emerge as a great power.<sup>2</sup> However, the 'African Personality' that appeared after the attainment of independence are the leaders who took over the reins of power, but had no idea what to do with leadership after they had deposed the colonialists.<sup>3</sup> J.F. Ade Ajayi, referring to these leaders says they were "Much clearer about what they wanted to end than about what they wanted to put in its place [...] they had little conception of the kind of society they were striving to build outside of vague concepts of Europeanization and modernization" (1982: p.7).

According to Lazarus, these leaders preferred to build European-style nation states as against the pre-colonial African state model or the model proposed by Nkrumah whereby Africa came together as one united nation with one government and one destiny.<sup>4</sup> The new African ruling class therefore aspired to copy the culture of the bourgeoisie with whom it economically associated itself, and in the process exploited their own people. They embraced the colonizers' ways of doing things and regarded themselves as culturally superior to their own people. The

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<sup>1</sup> It appears that both Armah and Habila borrow this idea from the ideas Frantz Fanon promotes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001). Fanon in this book lays emphasis on the importance of the participation of the masses in revolutions (p.140).

<sup>2</sup> The ideas expressed here are borrowed from Kwame Nkrumah's speech during the Independence celebration in 1957 and from his book *I speak Freedom* (1961).

<sup>3</sup> We only make this claim in a broad sense. A number of African leaders amongst whom are Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Patrice Lumumba of Congo, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Hastings Banda of Malawi and Sekou Toure of Guinea played leading roles in the attainment of independence for their countries, and also formulated plans and took active steps for the development of their countries.

<sup>4</sup> Nkrumah believed that independence for African countries was not enough; only a united Africa would secure the total liberation of the continent from imperialism and colonialism. Believing that without unity Africa might not catch up with the rest of the world, he worked tirelessly for the realization of a United States of Africa until his death in 1972.

struggle against colonialism consequently became a struggle for the transfer of administrative rights into native hands and not a struggle for anything specific (1990: p.5). It was not “about realignment of social classes, redistribution of wealth or land, more equitable utilization of resources, or implementation of more participatory forms of political organization” (Lazarus, 1990: p.6).

Understanding the path that African literature took after independence requires that we grasp the significance that independence held for Africans in the years of decolonization. This is because, in order to make sense of the challenge of post-colonialism in African literature, we need to read the challenge as relating very concretely and immediately to the headiness of the initial expectations of independence (Lazarus, 1990: p.3). Lazarus describes two scenes marking the attainment of independence in Africa: the literal one that took place in Ghana (1957) and the literary one that is represented in Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). Presenting both scenes, Lazarus speaks of the excitement and happiness that were discernible in the people at the attainment of independence. He posits that beneath the joy and festivities of the ceremony there was also a mood of expectation, whereby everybody was waiting for something to happen (Lazarus, 1990: p.2). This mood of expectation is borne out of what the character Teacher, in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not yet Born* (1968) sees as the ‘promise’ which he says “was so beautiful” (1968: p.92).

The mood of expectation, Lazarus suggests, was a mood that permeated independence ceremonies across Africa during the era of decolonization. The notion of deferred expectation is therefore tied to how very few of the promises of independence have materialized for the people. Lazarus explains that “independence seems to have brought neither peace nor prosperity to Africa” (Lazarus, 1990: p.3). The expectations of the people “have not even come close to being fulfilled” (Lazarus, 1990: p.3):

The rhetoric of anticolonial nationalism and the dreams of what independence would bring seem misguided in retrospect, for what is common to many - if not most - of these societies is their failure to attain the hoped for social and economic freedoms for their peoples. What is to be found rather, is increasing division and oppression [...] the failure of the economy to provide even basic necessities, never mind prosperity, for the mass of the people; a lack of

democratic participation by the masses in the political sphere. (Lazarus, 2004: p.42)

Independence, therefore, did not bring the utopia expected by the people; rather they found themselves betrayed, as the new native leaders became enticed by the very things they had fought against and in the process turned against the people.

Langston Hughes, in his poem 'Harlem (Dream Deferred)', muses about a dream deferred and asks a powerful question, "What happens to a dream deferred?" (1990: p.221). Using graphic parallels to conjure the image of a deferred dream, he imagines it drying up, festering, stinking, crusting over and exploding. The images he invokes not only have a dark tone to them, but are also compelling enough to make the reader smell, feel and taste this discarded dream. Hughes does not refer to a specific dream, but the dreams of Habila's characters are specific: Lomba dreams of being a writer (p.83); Peju dreams of being a journalist (p.51); Nancy dreams of finding her man (p.108); Brother dreams of striking it rich (p.97); Joshua dreams of a future with Hagar and going to America (p.113), and the dream of the people of Poverty Street is for a better life (pp.131-132). These dreams do not materialize because the environment in which they live, which is controlled by the military, places limitations on them. Indeed, Lomba, explaining the situation, says "Here in this country our dreams are never realized; something always contrives to turn it into a nightmare" (pp.126-127)

The notion of deferred expectations in Habila's novel is, therefore, tied to a specific expectation - that the promises made by the military regime when they took over power from the civilians will be fulfilled. Like Hughes, we seek to engage with what happens to a dream deferred. Given that the expectations of the people crumbled in the wake of independence, this chapter interprets the people's disappointment as leading to the social unrest we see in Habila's novel. Therefore, the notion of deferred expectation in this chapter, which is foregrounded in resistance and protest in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, is related to the failure of the Nigerian post-colonial state to achieve any meaningful transformation of society after attaining political independence (Lazarus, 2004: p.43).

Vital to our analysis of Habila's novel is his intertextual approach to the writings of anticolonial writers and theorists. His representation of sites of protest produces a kind of realism that is both socially driven and conscious of the literary traditions that precede it. Christopher Ouma argues that:

As a postcolonial subject [...] the contemporary Nigerian writer is preceded by a literary history that constructs a genealogy of African literature within its repertoire of genres. But as writers of a contemporary time, it is difficult to locate themselves within this literary history they have inherited and also grapple with the socio-political economic and cultural fragmentation of their time. (2011: pp. 122-123)

Ouma acknowledges that contemporary Nigerian writing is preceded by generations of writing, but suggests that contemporary Nigerian writers have difficulty situating themselves within this literary history because of the peculiarities of their time. Ouma sees the concerns of previous generations of writers in Nigeria as being tied to the nation state, while for contemporary Nigerian writers, the nation state is just an implicit reference (2011: p.55). But contrary to Ouma's postulation, this study argues that contemporary Nigerian writers' engagement with the socio-political, economic and cultural fragmentation of their time locates them within the literary history they have inherited. Indeed, Habila's engagement with resistance, as we will soon see, stems from the layering of his work onto that of older writers to continue in a tradition that was started by these writers - an engagement with the conceptualization of post-colonial resistance.

There are a number of interrelated ideas in this chapter: the concept that the challenges of post-colonialism are related to the excitement at the initial expectations of independence; the notion that state-sponsored violence is the most conspicuous threat to the characters in *Waiting for an Angel*, the idea that the struggles of Habila's characters are inseparable from the broader socio-economic turmoil that ravaged the nation during the period under study; and the observation that the brutal repression by the state is connected to the characters' hopeless entrapment in poverty and violence. These strands converge on the idea that protest and resistance in *Waiting for an Angel* are informed by the people's response to the socio-economic and political crises in the nation at the time.

Protest and resistance in Habila's novel operate on a number of levels. They open new routes for remembering, narrating and reading the violence of the 80s and 90s in the manner they problematize the discourse of the Nigerian experience of military rule on the one hand and the conceptions of national history, memory and representation on the other hand. The questions that govern the novel; the failures of the military state, military tyranny and dictatorship, will also be examined in light of how Habila engages with them in his narrative of student and civil protest and the repressive state apparatus.

At no time in the history of post-colonial Nigeria have the levels of corruption, unemployment, widespread poverty, infrastructural decay and political repression been as pronounced as they were during the era under study. As Said Adejumo argues: "The political and socio-economic crisis experienced at the time hit virtually all the social sectors hard causing these sectors to enter a comatose state or to decline substantially in performance" (1995: p.31). The economic and infrastructural inadequacies at the time were evident in the government's increasing inability to provide basic services related to the maintenance of social services: education, health, food security, the safeguarding of life and property and the provision of power (Uwasomba, 2014: p.61). This situation provoked the intensification of different forms of group mobilization and consciousness and these led to confrontations between the people and the government in the form of protests, boycotts, strikes, rallies and riots which at times were violent, leading to widespread fatalities and damage to property. These confrontations are some of the issues that define the era of the 80s - 90s in the Nigerian socio-political landscape.

### 3.1 Examining Habila's use of the Imagination in *Waiting for an Angel*

Helon Habila's short story, 'Love Poems' which won the Caine prize for African writing in 2001, was taken from his collection of short stories, *Prison Stories*. At the time Habila wrote and self-published this collection, Nigeria was just coming out of a period of the most brutal and oppressive military regime in its history as a nation. It was common at the time for writers to self-publish their works because, as the character James states in *Waiting for an Angel*:

You won't find a publisher in this country because it'd be economically unwise for any publisher to waste his scarce paper to publish a novel which nobody would buy, because the people are too poor, too illiterate, and too busy trying to

stay out of the way of the police and army to read. And of course you know why paper is scarce and expensive - because of the economic sanctions placed on our country. (p.147)

After winning the award, Habila received a book contract with Norton to publish the collection as the novel, now titled *Waiting for an Angel*. The addition of the chapter 'Alice,' an 'Afterword,' and the removal of the short story 'The Iron Gate,' are the only changes made to Habila's original collection of short stories. The novel went on to win the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Novel (African Region) in 2003. As we mentioned in Chapter one, Adesanmi and Dunton, in their analysis of contemporary Nigerian writing, identify the phenomenal rise and near instant canonization of *Waiting for an Angel* along with Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004) and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006), as a key moment in the revival of the novel in present-day Nigeria. Indeed, they postulate that, because of the successes and positive reception of these novels and those of their peers, both in Nigeria and internationally, the novel has become the 'face' of third generation Nigerian writing (2005: pp.10-11).

*Waiting for an Angel* is a multi-vocal collection of seven short stories that form a single narrative. Although this is the case, this study argues that *Waiting for an Angel* should not be considered as a collection of short stories featuring the same characters; it is rather a text that tells a story from multiple perspectives with the aim of producing a single cumulative effect - the underscoring of the reign of terror orchestrated by the military in Nigeria, particularly the atrocities perpetuated during the eras of Generals Babangida and Abacha. Thus, although each part of the work is self-contained, the overall narrative structure qualifies the work to be called a novel given that the novel, as a form, makes it possible to have multiple narrative voices in dialogue,<sup>5</sup> The voices that populate *Waiting for an Angel* belong to the various characters who tell the stories in the novel, as well as those of the theorists and writers from whom Habila borrows some of the ideas he promotes. The presence of various voices within the text undermines the notion of power that the military oppressor tries to maintain.

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<sup>5</sup> It is for this reason the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin refers to the novel as a "genre in the making" (1981: p.3), and as a "genre of becoming" (1981: p.22).

In this novel, Habila uses the names of characters to divide the sections in the text. The stories are told by these characters themselves or by an omniscient narrator, and because the novel is structured in this manner, there is more than one voice speaking to the reader in the text. The novel is thus not structured chronologically and is fragmented in form. The narrative traces the life of Lomba a young man from Northern Nigeria who comes to Lagos to go to university. Compelled by the socio-political situation in the country at the time, Lomba drops out of school to write a novel and, in a bid to earn a living, he becomes a journalist at *Dial* magazine. Lomba's fate, from when he comes to Lagos up till his imprisonment, is tied to a particular historical condition in Nigeria, the general oppression of the people by the military.

According to Oluwole Coker, "The discourse of literature as satirical is said to be quintessential to African literature owing to its circumstances of cultural and political realities" (2014: p.146). Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, which can be read both as a prison narrative or as part of a larger corpus of works on political activism, fits within the tradition that Coker refers to. This is made evident right from the beginning of the narrative when we encounter the major character Lomba in prison. By engaging with the state of prisons in Nigeria in this manner, Habila highlights the decay not only of the prison, but the larger prison state of the country. He uses the character Muftau, the prison superintendent, to symbolize the instruments of brutality and torture used by the military against the people and also draws on the conditions of prisons in Nigeria, especially under military rule, to symbolize the deprivation that permeates the nation. Indeed, Niyi Akingbe argues that "the portraiture of the military in *Waiting for an Angel* is foregrounded in a semiotic of deprivation and destruction" (2010: p.28).

Roland Barthes suggests that "A text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the message of the Author - God), but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1967: p.146). In *Waiting for an Angel*, Habila projects the ideas contained in the works of other writers. Intertextuality is therefore central to the production of his novel. Evident in the novel is a continuous pattern of tributes to pre-existing literary works that engage with the resistance tradition of post-colonialism: Ngugi Wa'Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Ousmane Sembene.<sup>6</sup> This signifies the

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<sup>6</sup> Habila's intertextual linkages to other works is evident in the manner he draws from writers like: Franz Kafka (*Great Wall of China*, 1933) in page 76, Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 2001) in page 122, Ayi Kwei

permeability of texts and the particular type that Habila uses, in which echoes of voices outside the narration and from other texts are infused into the story shows his narration as being layered onto that of older writers. The way he makes references to other literary works in his presentation of the details of the lives of ordinary people shows there is a deeper meaning to the stories he tells beyond the expression of sentiment.

Making references to other works also open up the borders between his fiction and other fiction and as well as those between one narrative account and another. This resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogism which argues that a word (in text or language) is not a construal of fixed meaning, but rather a concourse of textual networks and surfaces.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between different texts and dialogue in these texts highlight the ideological or socio-political concerns of the authors. This is the case with Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* which, to borrow the words of Lara-Rallo, is a reflection of Nigeria's "post-colonial disillusionment as well as power abuse; and it is a product of [...] a plural productivity in which multiple voices - textual, socio-historical and ideological - co-exist and communicate" (2009: p.92). Habila therefore continues with the tradition of linking individual characters to larger metaphoric political statements by building his work on that of other writers, making his novel one amongst the many, voicing protest against oppressive structures.

Habila uses Lomba's artistic ability to illustrate how writing can be a tool available to the writer to fight oppression and in the process provides an example of the kind of creative forms of resistance available to the nation.<sup>8</sup> In an interview with Susan Tranter, Habila makes the point

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Armah (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, 1968), in page 132. Wole Soyinka (*The Man Died*, 1972), in page 40. Osmane Sembene (*Xala*, 1975) in page 142. Ngugi Wa'Thiongo (*Penpoints Gunpoints and Dreams*, 1998) in page 78. Although, there are direct and indirect references to these other writers, Habila mostly uses Wole Soyinka's experiences as described in his prison memoir *The Man Died* (1972) as a template for the character Lomba's experiences in prison.

<sup>7</sup> In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1972), Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the concept of Polyphony which he goes on to develop as Dialogism in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975). Bakhtin's theory of Polyphony/ Dialogism or Heteroglossia makes the statement that the novel contains many different voices, and not just the author's single standpoint. This concept which recognizes the multiplicity of perspectives and voices informs much of his work.

<sup>8</sup> Habila's presentation of writing as a powerful tool for collective action against an oppressive state power, promotes the ideas presented by Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka that the writer is a teacher and a social visionary respectively. Achebe in his essays 'The Novelist as Teacher' (1975), and 'The Writer and His Community' (1984), presents the writer as a teacher who uses his art to teach society in the mode of the village storyteller about social mores and cultural values, and discusses the expectations of the society from its writers and the intersections of writer, writing and the society respectively. Wole Soyinka in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), and in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (1988), constructs the image of

that “the beauty of the novel is that it can absorb as many styles and philosophies as one can throw into it and it gets the better for it” (“Writer in Residence,” 2007, online). This statement suggests Habila is referring to the genre of the novel in general, but he could also be referring to *Waiting for an Angel* in particular. The novel as a genre gives the writer space to explore multiple points of entry and exit, and Habila takes advantage of this in writing his novel. He, therefore, takes the significant moment of military rule and dictatorship in the 80s-90s, and explores this experience and the features that define it.

Habila engages with different perspectives on history in *Waiting for an Angel*, and when these histories are reconstructed, time does not add up. He brings together historical events that happened at different periods, merges them and presents them as having happened in the same period of time. For example, he places events that happened during the regime of General Babangida from 1985-1993, such as the assassination in 1986 of the journalist Dele Giwa of the *NewsWatch* magazine, within the reign of General Abacha which lasted from 1993-98. Other examples include the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections and the imprisonment of the apparent victor, Moshood Abiola, the coup that brought Abacha to power, the hanging of the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and the assassination of Abiola’s widow Kudirat. These events are all presented as having occurred under one regime, even though, factually, they happened under different regimes.

The point Habila makes by doing this is that time should not be measured and recorded as a dry sequence of events, but should be constructed to reflect the experiences of the people. Indeed, he tells us in the afterword to the novel that “Not all the events were represented with strict regard to time and place; I did not feel obliged to do that as that would be mere historicity. My concern was for the story, that above everything else” (p.229). The need to tell the story was, therefore, more important to him than accurately recording history. Thus, his concern, as Carmen McCain suggests, is “with providing entry points into historical events as lived by ordinary people” (“The Heroism of Ordinary People,” 2007, online). The power in Habila’s story is therefore rooted in one’s ability to challenge stories that have previously been told for you by telling them

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the writer as a social visionary whose aim is to break society from its cultural, social and ideological habits of the mind. These writers conclude that the writer in Africa owes a duty to his society and that African literature serves as a social and cultural resource and the writer functions as a public intellectual.

yourself. He relates historical events through the eyes of ordinary people, and by allowing the people to tell the story themselves, he gives them the power to own the story.

Furthermore, Habila blurs the boundaries between one historical incident and another and in the process underscores the distinctive repressive thrust of the dictatorial military governments of the 80s-90s. Indeed, the character James points out the parallels between Babangida's and Abacha's regimes when he states that "one general goes, another one comes, but the people remain stuck in the same vicious groove. Nothing ever changes for them except the particular details of their wretchedness" (p.84). The vicious groove James talks about is the seemingly unending circle of military rule, and the particular details of their wretchedness is linked to the presence of the military both directly and indirectly, in the people's lives. Presenting the deteriorating living conditions of the people and the manner in which the military corrupted the very rules by which society lives, Habila talks about infrastructural decay, undernourished children, lethargic winos on the streets and the lack of funds to keep businesses running (pp.87-88).

The prison experience of Lomba and the protest by the university students are narrated by Lomba. The protest on Poverty Street is narrated by Kela. These characters satirize and ridicule fellow characters Muftau, Sankara, Ojikutu and Joshua in their description of them. Lomba says Muftau, the Superintendent of the prison "looked like a cartoon figure: his jodhpur-like uniform trousers emphasized the skinniness of his calves, where they disappeared into the glass-glossy boots. His stomach bulged and hung like a belted sack" (pp.17-18). He describes Sankara as looking "exaggeratedly huge on the upturned drum; he was dressed in combat jackets and trousers; his wispy goatee hung like a comb from his chin" (p.40). Kela describes Ojikutu as "a huge man, with a thick beard and a balding dome [...] He growled as he spoke, pinning down his listener with his eyes. There was something comical in his exaggerated militantism" (p.122). He describes Joshua as having a head that "was bushy; he had a goatee that made his pointed jaw more pointed, like a needle and infinitely long" (p.94).

On an initial reading of these characters, it would appear that Habila treats these characters with derision as he gives them unflattering physical characteristics. Indeed, by using parody in his

description of these characters, it would appear that he deflates any sense of self-importance they might have. But when he presents the prison Superintendent raising a son alone and in love with a woman, he shows the human side of this character and depicts him beyond the intimidating appearance of power he seems to have around him. In the process, he breaks open the tough appearance of this man, who is symbolic of the military state, and we discover as Lomba says of him, “he was just a man. Man in his basic, rudimentary state, easily moved by the powerful emotions, like love, lust, anger, greed and fear, but totally dumb to the finer, acquired emotions like pity, mercy, humour, and justice” (p.31).

Habila’s generous use of irony in his narration and description of those characters who most exemplify the state or the rebel undermines any monolithic claim to authority or privilege they may have. In his other novel *Measuring Time* (2007), Mamo is hired to write the biography of the traditional ruler of Keti. Explaining what he would do in telling the story he has been hired to tell, Mamo states that the Mai’s story will simply be a part of other people’s stories. He says that history is really about the ordinary people and their lives no matter how we try to manipulate it. History is, therefore, the story of real people with real weaknesses and strengths and should not be written to give privileges to anyone. People who are seen as important should be placed on par with ordinary people (*Measuring Time*, 2007: p.225). In Mamo’s statement, Habila’s concern in his presentation of Muftau, Sankara, Ojikutu and Joshua become clear. His aim in treating them the way he does is to tell a story that does not cut details. His aim is to open a window into the lives of his characters, to show them both in their pleasant and unpleasant states, to tell the stories of “ordinary people who toil and dream and suffer” (*Measuring Time*, 2007: p.180).

### 3. 2 *Waiting for an Angel: Critical and Theoretical Context*

Critical responses to Habila’s novel examine the manner in which it has been crafted, and also suggest critical tools for its examination. Using Habila’s novel as a case study, Ainehi Egoro addresses the role of the writer in contemporary Nigeria and contends that, in their engagement with their craft, “third generation writers are strongly driven by the assumption that writers have a social role with serious consequences for collective action against social power” (2008: p.4). The notion that the African writer engages with the community in his craft is important. It implies that the writer thinks of his creativity in relation to society and sees it as a social and

cultural resource and not as a means for individual authorial self-realization. But, contrary to Egoro's suggestion above, the writer's engagement with the community is not enough for collective action against social power. This study suggests that intellectual activism is central in effecting transformation only if it raises the awareness of the masses about changing an unjust social order and compels them to move from lethargy to resistance. For example, the protest by the people of Poverty Street could take place only because the character Ojikutu compels the people to action through the information he gives to them which exposes their situation. It is through this character's knowledge, which was acquired from his training at school and personal education, that the people's collective will is stirred up to a protest.

Niyi Akingbe argues that the novel "orchestrates a shift of theme and concern, with the impact of colonization and historical past towards an examination of current socio-political problems of abuse of power by the ruling elite, corruption and widespread social inequality and justice in Nigeria's political landscape" (2010: p.27). Whether there is a shift from a concern with the impact of colonization and the historical past as argued by Akingbe depends on the level on which the story in *Waiting for an Angel* is read. It is our argument in this chapter that Habila's engagement with the socio-political, economic and cultural fragmentation of the era of the 80s-90s locates his writing within the literary history inherited from earlier generations of writers. A reading of Habila's novel in light of its examination of resistance and protest is simultaneously a reading of the author's investigation of a recent past and a commitment to concerns that emanate from colonialism. Habila's engagement with the past illustrates that he draws inspiration for his art from generations of writers who came before him.

Following the argument offered by Akingbe, Ali Erritouni takes the debate further by proposing that Habila:

Intervenes in the history of Africa in order to expose the abuses of despotic rulers. But he rejects the general view, held most notably by writers like Ngugi and Soyinka, that political oppression in the post colony is, to a significant extent consequent on the lingering effects of colonialism and neo-colonial exploitation. Neither does he - like African Marxists in general - have faith in revolution as a feasible instrument of change. For Habila, despotism in postcolonial Africa is coextensive with the will to power of the national rulers, and efforts aimed at

countering it through radical means cannot but prove futile given the incomparable means of violence available to the state. (2010: p.145)

Erritouni makes three main arguments here. Firstly, Habila rejects the views of writers like Ngugi and Soyinka about oppression in the post colony and its ties to colonialism. Secondly, Habila does not have faith in revolutions as feasible instruments of change, and, thirdly, Habila thinks it is futile to challenge despotism given the means of violence available to the state.

Firstly, this study does not agree with Erritouni's claim that Habila rejects the general views of writers like Soyinka and Ngugi about oppression in the post colony and its ties to colonialism. Habila's approach to history in *Waiting for an Angel* reveals that he considers despotism a vestige of the formations put in place by colonialism. The position he adopts is in dialogue with that of writers like Soyinka, Fanon, Cabral and Ngugi. If as Richard Clarke suggests "The novelist's view of reality is always already mediated by others' views thereof which he or she regurgitates at least to some degree in his or her own work and as a result of which his/her novel is not monologic but dialogic" (1981: p.6), then dialogism is the recognition of the multiplicity of perspectives and voices in any given work. The voices and perspectives in a text such as Habila's offer their own ideas but at the same time interact with other voices and perspectives in the texts from which he borrows. Habila along with the writers on whose works he has layered his novel, promotes the idea that there is a connection between despotism and global capitalism.<sup>9</sup> His novel support the ideas promoted by his predecessors, on the one hand, and on the other seeks to provoke a response from the reader which makes it combative as it resists closure or unambiguous expression.<sup>10</sup> He therefore depicts the problems with society the way he perceives them without suggesting how the situation can be changed

We re-iterate it here again; Habila's novel owes a lot to the experiences and ideas of these and other writers for the notions that permeate it. The idea of the necessity of resistance that we find

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<sup>9</sup> As M. Keith Booker notes, "For Ngugi, Achebe and Soyinka (and for Fanon, for that matter), European colonialism is the major culprit in the African legacy of violence, though contemporary western cold-war manipulations remain important here as well, especially in Ngugi" (2009: p.154).

<sup>10</sup> Habila leaves the ending of the lives of his characters to the reader's imagination. *Waiting for an Angel* therefore, does not have closure. Lomba might have remained in prison or he might have been released. James and Joshua might have gone into exile too or they might have been somewhere in the country hiding from the agents of the state. By ending his novel in this manner, Habila leaves the reader with a consciousness that borders on other consciousnesses.

in the novel is borrowed from Wole Soyinka's prison experience in his book, *The Man Died* (1972). Lomba's insistence on writing, which can be seen as a form of resistance, plays a role in keeping him from going insane. This is similar to George Mangakis's experience, which Soyinka quotes in *The Man Died* (p.12). Also Lomba's writing in prison is done between the lines of the works of other writers in the same manner Soyinka did his work between the lines of the works of other writers while in prison. Soyinka writes that "Between the lines of Paul Radin's *Primitive Religion* and my own *Idanre* are scribbled fragments of plays, poems, a novel and portions of the prison notes, which make up this book. Six other volumes have been similarly defaced with my writing" (1972: p.9). Furthermore, Soyinka in prison makes a request for books from the library which is denied. Lomba too requests books from the prison Superintendent. In fact, he specifically requests Soyinka's *The Man Died*. Just as Soyinka's request was denied, Lomba's request was also denied.

Many more references to Soyinka's book permeate Habila's narrative both directly and indirectly. For example, when the student leader, Sankara stirs up the collective will of the students to protest, he quotes Soyinka: "Remember what Soyinka wrote, the man dies in him who stands silent in the face of tyranny" (p.40). Furthermore, it is from Soyinka's prison experience in his memoir that Habila borrows for the experiences of the character Lomba. In addition, it is from Soyinka's presentation of the governor of the prison that Habila gets the idea for the character of the prison Superintendent Muftau and he goes as far as to imitate Soyinka's prison governor's speech and mannerisms in his presentation of Muftau. In Soyinka's memoir, the prison governor yells at the Igbo prisoners who are on hunger strike:

You are. Sabotagists. And therefore we keep you here. As such. And treat you. So how dare you come here again and make. Conspiracy. You are trying to conspire. You hold meeting yesterday! I know. Against me that, you hold meeting, you will refuse your chop today that is the meeting you hold. Do you know me? (striking himself on the chest) I maintain discipline. I can treat you like. Gentlemen but if you behave like hooligans then I will show you that I am a great. Hooligans than yourself. (p.103)

In *Waiting for an Angel* Habila adopts the prison governor's jerky monologue, and applies it to that of the Superintendent of prison:

So. You won't. Talk. You think you are. Tough," he shouted. "You are. Wrong. Twenty years! That is how long I have been dealing with miserable bastards like you. Let this be an example to all of you. Don't. Think you can deceive me. We have our sources of information. You can't. This insect will be taken to solitary and he will be properly dealt with. Until. He is willing to. Talk.... Don't think because you are political. Detainees you are untouchable. Wrong. You are all rats. Saboteurs. Anti-government rats. (p.20)

Further examples abound in Habila's novel of his seeming reliance on Soyinka for the recreation of the prison experience in his narrative.<sup>11</sup> Thus, if the character Lomba's experiences in prison are placed side by side with those of Soyinka in his memoir, it becomes apparent that Habila borrows the idea of the prison experience of the character, Lomba, from that of Soyinka.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo in his book *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* observes that "the prison yard is like a stage where everything, including movement, is directed and choreographed by the state" (1998: p.56). Given that Habila also borrows from Ngugi in his novel, we see his characters performing in the space of the nation as a prison which Ngugi suggests "is a metaphor for the post-colonial space, for even in a country where there are no military regimes, the vast majority can be described as being condemned to conditions of perpetual physical, social, and psychic confinement" (1998: p.60). It would appear that the writers Habila chose to layer his work onto make use of their characters as synecdoche for the nation. Soyinka in his prison memoir *The Man Died* is a synecdoche for the imprisoned Nigerian, whose main struggle is for survival, justice and integrity in the midst of victimization by the state. The Man in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) is a synecdoche for the people of Ghana who are seen as 'failures' because they would not take part in the corruption and economic relations based on intimidation, bribery and fraud that is prevalent in the country. The character Matigari in Ngugi's novel of the same name (1987) is a synecdoche for Kenyan freedom fighters who after the struggle for independence realize that their sacrifices seem to have been for nothing. Confronted with the overwhelming forces of neo-colonization and oppression, they find that nothing has really changed except the colour of the skin of their oppressors.

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<sup>11</sup>Indeed, the idea that Habila borrowed from Soyinka is also one that Maya Jaggi expresses in her online review of *Waiting for an Angel* when she says the novel "echoes Soyinka classic memoir of the 1960's *The Man Died*" (2002: n.p).

These writers are not the only ones Habila borrows from for his novel. When Aunty Racheal tells Kela in the novel that “we are like crabs in a basket, we pull down whoever dares to stand up for what is right” (p.142), we see a reflection, although in a different context, of the postcolonial disillusionment expressed in Ousmane Sembene’s novel *Xala* (1975). A character in this novel says, “We are nothing better than crabs in a basket. We want the ex-occupier’s place? We have it [...] The colonialist is stronger, more powerful than ever before, hidden inside us, here in this very place” (p.84). Similarly, when Joshua in *Waiting for an Angel* gives his speech during the protest and says “We are dying from lack of hope” (p.132), he echoes the view expressed by the character Teacher in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), who says “There were men dying from the loss of hope, and others were finding gaudy ways to enjoy the power they did not have” (p.81). The examples above show that Habila draws from Nigeria’s political experiences and also from a large body of African literature. Herein lies the power of his novel: it fishes out specific stories to recreate history to indicate that stories are not separate from each other.

Habila layers his work unto that of other writers as we have noted in the preceding paragraphs and in the process, contrary to Erritouni’s argument, ties oppression in the nation to the vestiges of colonialism. When Ojikutu states that the siege, aggression and the cowing of the people with guns is capitalism at its most militant (p.122), he is tying oppression in the post-colonial Nigerian state to the West. In his diatribe against the military, he suggests “we have to utterly destroy the status quo in order to start afresh” (p.121). The status quo that he talks about is the neo-colonial, capitalist influence evident in the Nigerian military state. Furthermore, if we consider, as Florence Bernault observes, that “the penal system the colonizers instituted in Africa regularly resorted to corporal punishment, including flogging, summary execution, hard labour and de-individuated prison space” (cited in Erritouni, 2010: p.149), then Lomba’s experiences in prison show a connection between post-colonial despotism and colonial sovereign power. Narrating his treatment at the hands of Muftau the prison superintendent, Lomba says:

All I felt was the crushing blow on the back of my neck. I pitched forward, stunned by the pain and the unexpectedness of it. My face struck the door bars and I fell before the superintendent’s boots. I saw blood where my face had touched the floor. I waited. I stared, mesmerized, at the reflection of my eyes in

the high gloss of the boots' toecaps. One boot rose and landed on my neck, grinding my face into the floor. (p.14)

Habila's graphic depictions of the levels of state-sponsored violence and the workings of the Nigerian penitential system, especially in the employment of inordinate violence in the discharge of duties, betray the fact that the penitential system in Nigeria especially during the era of the 80s-90s, remains shaped by colonial legacies.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, Erritouni contends that Habila shows no faith in revolutions. Habila's engagement with resistance and his reference to the revolutionary Amilcar Cabral, the activist and reformer Martin Luther King, and critics and scholars Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka are not only a reflection of his engagement with post-colonial resistance struggles, but also an indication that Habila shares these persons' concerns with political conditions in society, especially given that he does not think there is a distinction between his craft and political engagement. In an interview with Carmen McCain in 2007, Habila says:

There are no boundaries between what is purely political and what art is. Art becomes politics and politics becomes art. So I think people like me who find themselves in that tradition, and have the temperament, that awareness of what is going on, who feel that things shouldn't be the way they are, have a duty to speak out. ("Heroism of Ordinary People," 2007, online)

Therefore, his utilization of symbolic figures and images as we noted earlier on in this chapter, shows him aligning with post-colonial resistance thinking. Habila's revolutionary fervour is also evident in the narrative of his second novel *Measuring Time* (2007), especially in his presentation of the character LaMamo.

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<sup>12</sup> There are conflicting accounts about the year and the location of the first prison established by colonial authorities in Nigeria. Shajobi-Ibikunle states it was created in 1861 and located at Faji (2014: p.95). Orakwe identifies 1872 as the year it was established and Broad Street as its location (2016: n.p). These scholars agree though that it was located in Lagos and was supposed to be based on the then prevailing English penal practice. They also agree that the colonial prison was not designed to reform anyone given that there was no systematic penal policy from which direction could be sought for penal administration. This they say meant the prisons were poorly run, disorganized, and the officials callous and exploitative. These officials mainly served the purpose of punishing those who opposed colonial administration or cowering those who might have wanted to stir up trouble for the colonial set up, and as long as they served colonial interests of collecting taxes and providing labour for public works, they were generally left alone to run the prisons as they chose.

Lastly, Erritouni's postulation that Habila thinks it is futile to challenge despotism, given the means of violence available to the state, is flawed. Joshua talks to Lomba about the need for *The Dial* to cover the protest on Poverty Street and says the demonstration is "Something we have to do. All we want is to draw the government's attention to our plight" (p.146). Lomba wonders why Joshua would think it is that simple given that trouble could break out as the military government does not take kindly to such things. James makes the situation clear to Lomba when he says "They've decided to do it, Lomba. Our part is to cover it" (p.146). When Sankara, the student leader makes the statement that "We can't continue to be onlookers when a handful of gun-toting thugs are determined to push our beloved nation over the precipice" (p.40), it is evident that the students as social beings choose to take on protest as a social function knowing the consequences can be serious and, therefore, take nothing for granted. Indeed, when students are exposed to social reality through knowledge and training, especially at the tertiary level, they are encouraged to develop a critical consciousness which has far reaching consequences, as we often find in third world countries such as Nigeria.

This consciousness, according to Edwin Madunagu, always strives to express itself in concrete terms (1982: p.81). An example of a concrete term for students is the ability to challenge the status quo through means like strikes and protests, as we see in Habila's novel. This is because education can sometimes stimulate students towards what Madan Sarup refers to as 'practical de-reification' (1978: p.94), which is a meeting point between the engagement with and the application of ideas. Indeed, Frantz Fanon is of the view that school and education are arenas of political/ideological contestation which serves as an instrument of social change and human liberation.<sup>13</sup> It is our contention in this chapter that, given the role that Nigerian students played in the liberation struggles in the country, Habila's presentation of the protest shows that he shares Fanon's views. The characters Sankara and Ojikutu who are instrumental to both the students and people's protests make use of the knowledge they acquired from school to push for the protests. *Waiting for an Angel* therefore depicts the protests as the outcome of the realignment of ideas and social reality, which are informed by the disappointment of the people with the state which has failed to deliver on the promises of de-colonization.

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<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon in both *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001) and *Black Skin White Masks* (2008) promotes the notion that nationalism should be grounded in the social and political realities of the people. He posits that education plays an important role in bringing about this consciousness given that education can and does bring about shared collective consciousness and social action

Joshua in *Waiting for an Angel* is determined too to lead the protest of the people of Poverty Street, even though he was warned by Aunty Rachael to have nothing to do with it. He tells her “I understand what you mean [...] But it is too late to go back now” (p.124). Habila shows his characters’ social role as being constructed and performed in spite of the powerful, repressive forces ranged against them. The character Ojikutu tells his neighbours the reason why the military hung the civil rights crusader Ken Saro Wiwa:

He was the only one who understood the economic aspect of the struggle. It is the money. He told Abacha, I know how much you and the foreigners are making - the billions you are drilling out of our soil. Give us some of it. They killed him because he threatened their monopoly. Got it? Monopoly. That’s what this is all about [...] They will continue subjugating us, killing all dissenters, one by one, sending them into exile, till there is no competitor left to oppose them. (p.122)

Evident in this statement is the tie between the protests in the novel with neo-colonial exploitation making it apparent that the political oppression of the people as evident in the text is to a large extent brought about by the persistent influences of colonialism. Resistance and protest in Nigeria, as we see in Habila’s novel, emanate from a long history of strife between the ruled and the ruler and which the next section aims to briefly discuss as we proceed in our discussion on resistance in Habila’s novel.

### *3.3 Resistance and Protest*

From the late 1950s to the early 1980s most African nations struggled for and attained their political independence from European colonial powers. Independence signified for these nations the end of colonialism and established victory for the various nationalist movements for liberation. The promise of independence encouraged the people to imagine the past and the present as being transformed by struggle, violence and hardship into a future full of ‘big and beautiful things’ (Lazarus, 1990: p.3). But the road to independence was not smooth. It was a road rife with demonstrations, strikes, protest marches and in some cases armed struggle. Indeed Robert Young posits that colonised people contested their domination by the West through many forms of active and passive resistance (2003: p.3). The colonial response on the other hand involved detentions, arrests, deportations, torture and banishment. Independence was not easily achieved, but the courage, discipline and sacrifice of the people aided by mass mobilization and organization made it possible for colonialism to be challenged (Lazarus, 1990: p.4)

This section on resistance and protest again makes reference to the time of the attainment of independence because resistance and popular struggle, as we see in *Waiting for an Angel*, did not start during the military era but has its roots in the struggle for independence and was consolidated in the period after the attainment of independence, just before the Nigerian civil war from 1967-70. In fact, the three major events, which have significantly impacted Nigerian writing (the crisis of the 1960s, the Nigerian civil war and the impact of military rule), share the particularity of being events that were in one way or the other enmeshed in protests and civil unrest.

To make the point that Nigeria has a long history of resistance and protest is also to make the point that the events that define the 80s-90s to borrow the words of Fiona Barclay are “haunted by reverberations from the past” (2011: p.xiv). Indeed, Nigeria’s past history of resistance and protests lingers to the present and haunts it. Haunting in this study represents a condition that is suspended and which is indicative of a period that is traversing between the traces of a colonial history and contemporary forms of hierarchy and oppression. The emphasis on the haunting presence of the past in our corpus’ narrative of the era of the 80s and 90s stems from a recognition that it is imperative to return to a past that can be written out of history to understand the present. Stuart Hall lays emphasis on the retrieval and transmission of occulted histories. He posits that it is important to snatch from hidden places a place in which to stand and a place to speak from (1997: p.184). The idea that Hall promotes about a return to the past is important because it enables us to engage with ‘scenes of oppression’ to borrow the words of Homi Bhabha (1994: p 254). Habila’s engagement with scenes of oppression in his novel points to or identifies haunting whereby the past is reiterated and projected into the present. This belated temporality of history which finds its repressed subjects claiming voices and places in the contemporary context is a disruptive force which keeps the meaning of the past alive.

After independence in 1960, it became clear that the indigenous ruling elite had betrayed the trust of the people by failing to deliver the promises of the struggle for independence (Abubakar, 1996: p.154). The failure in delivering the promises of decolonization is made evident in the stagnation, social violence, fragmentation, and structural weaknesses that are now inherent in the nation (Ajayi, 1982: p.6). Thereafter, because the politicians abused their privileges, the people

became disillusioned and the political class became objects of ridicule. The situation worsened when the military, which cashed in on the failure of the politicians, proved not to be any better.

The 1980s was the time the high-handed and dictatorial tendencies of Nigeria's military leaders became evident. The Buhari regime of 1984-1985 was ruthless and extremely intolerant under the guise of instilling discipline in the people. But the Babangida and Abacha regimes from 1985 onwards clearly exhibited all the excesses and the antics of African dictators. In the face of this violence, anti-military groups and civil society organizations flourished by forging alliances across ethnic, religious and social divides. Hence, mass protests and anti-government rallies were staged to confront the military and denounce violations of human rights, lawlessness and despotic tendencies.

Ali Mazrui promotes four broad categories of protest in 'Postlude: Towards a Theory of Protest' (1970): Protest of conservation, restoration, transformation and corrective censure. The category protest of transformation, though broad, underlines an essential feature of both the students' and people's protests in *Waiting for an Angel*. Mazrui is of the opinion that protests of transformation emanate from a profound dissatisfaction with an existing way of doing things. Those who seek to alter the social arrangement are set against those who are obstinately upholding the status quo (1970: p.185). The protest of transformation clearly captures the basic characteristics of the students' and people's protests in Habila's novel. We therefore know where the people's disillusionment stems from, against whom the people are agitating, and what the people intend to achieve through the protest. The people's disaffection stems from the military regime's failure to deliver on the promises it made when it took over power from the civilians. The resistance is pitted against the military state which, according to Ojikutu, "continue to subjugate us" (p.122), and the ultimate goal of the protests is to challenge the socio-economic and political structure and "agitate against injustice, no matter the consequence" (p.127).

### 3.4 *The Students' Protests: Action Inspired by Knowledge*

The story of Nigerian students' protests and revolts has been examined in both critical and historical works (Madunagu, 1982; Ayu, 1986; Beckman and Jega, 1995; Adeyemi, *et al.*, 2010; Ige and Olowolabi, 2010). This is because Nigerian students have a long and well-documented

history of popular struggle and resistance against political misrule, unpopular policies and programs of the state. Habila draws on this national reality to explore the notion of protest in his art and in the process builds on a long tradition of African political art. Indeed, the ideas that pervade *Waiting for an Angel*, the concept of the power of the word and art, the metaphor of the military state as a prison, the ideology of protest as an instrument of change are not original to Habila. From the mid-60s to the 70s, the focus of writers like Soyinka and Achebe changed from a veneration of the past to an engagement with post-independence Nigerian reality. These writers were followed by a new set of politically conscious writers in the 80s such as Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Ben Okri, Festus Iyayi and their contemporaries. Habila's work is layered on the works of these literary forebears. In his examination of student protests in Nigeria, Habila questions the state-society relationship in his representation of the degree to which university students exercise agency in national politics through resistance, contestation and protest.

*Waiting for an Angel* is a narrative of social realism. As Mineke Schipper notes "The word realism [...] has been so randomly applied to all sorts of texts and literature that we must carefully define our use of it" (1985: p.559). Our identification of Habila's narrative as realist indicates that he has succeeded in producing work that reflects reality. This is not to mean that the story he tells is true to the facts. It is to say that because we can identify a definite historical situation in a real geographical location and in a recognized time frame, the story in *Waiting for an Angel* is realistic. Habila's approach to reality in his novel shows that the events he relates are taken from his knowledge of these events.<sup>14</sup> But whether the story he represents is objective or not depends on if one believes in the possibility of objective reality. This study can only argue that since reality can exist as an object of knowledge, it is possible to represent this reality as it is perceived in literature. After these preliminary remarks, this study now turns to Habila's representation of the student protest as a defining characteristic of the 80s and 90s.

The onset of the economic crisis in Nigeria starting from the early 80s saw Nigerian students launch an unrelenting fight for political and socio-economic reforms (Adejumobi, 2000: p.204). In *Waiting for an Angel*, the student protest is a response to the crises of the 1980s and 1990s. The student leader Sankara, while addressing the students prior to the protest, tells them: "We

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<sup>14</sup> As we have already noted in Chapter One, Habila makes it clear that the incidents of the 80s and 90s during the era of military rule in Nigeria were not related to him, they were events he witnessed personally.

are tired of phantom transition programmes that are nothing but grand designs to embezzle our money. [...] The military have turned the country into one huge barracks, into a prison” (p.41). The students’ actions are, therefore, directed towards problems related to corruption and the wastefulness of the leadership, economic mismanagement and political misgovernment, the deteriorating living standards of the people and problems in the educational sector.

The struggle for better living conditions which gave rise to the students’ protest in *Waiting for an Angel* touch on the social and political situation of the 80s and 90s. Habila’s concern in narrating the incident of the student protest is to engage with the challenges of the everyday reality of life in the lives of his characters, and the measures they take to overcome these challenges. As the material he works with reflects the everyday life of the people, there is nothing improbable about the incidents that took place during the protest. Thus, the rally, the student leader’s address, the reaction of the students and the act of the protest itself, as Habila describes them in his novel, are representative of the times in the Nigeria of the 80s - 90s. He pays close attention to minute details in the construction of scenes and the description of his characters:

Before me was a group of girls screaming themselves hoarse, their wigs bobbing and sinking like boats in a storm as they jumped up and down. One staggered backward and stepped on my toes, all the while giggling. Suddenly, I felt trapped among the hundreds of jumping, shouting, and sweating bodies [...] Sankara looked exaggeratedly huge on the upturned drum; he was dressed in combat jackets and trousers; his wispy goatee hung like a comb from his chin. The upraised, urging fists below him formed a plinth, supporting him. (pp. 40-41)

Habila’s attention to minute details is like the close up technique in film making which, Ian Watts posits, adds “A new dimension to the representation of reality” (1957: p.27), because it gives the impression that we are witnessing reality. The reality we witness in Habila’s novel is what Philippe Hamon refers to as ‘mega history’ (1973: p.420), that is the reiteration of history in a literary text which reinforces the perception of reality in the text. The reiteration of history in Habila’s novel is achieved quite directly through the mention of names (Generals Babangida and Abacha, Chief Moshood Abiola etc.), by referring to well-known events like the murder of the journalist Dele Giwa in 1986, and the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995 and in the mentioning

of specific places like the Maryam Babangida Women Centre. History's authenticity in *Waiting for an Angel* is therefore emphasized in the effect that reality has on the reader.

At the beginning of the section titled 'Bola', the character after whom the section is named wakes up "sweating and shivering" (p.39) from a nightmare. The day before, there had been a rally by students at the university with a view to boycotting lectures in protest against the military government's excesses and its refusal to honour its promises to the people. On an initial reading of the events that took place on the day of the student gathering, it would appear, as Lomba suggests, that the excitement of the day before had persisted into Bola's sleep like a residual current, making his dreams hyperactive and phantom-filled (p.39). But Lomba himself had "a strong presentiment of something dark and scary lurking in the shadows, inclining its way on to the forestage of our lives" (p.40). This feeling did not start in the morning after Bola woke up from a nightmare, but the day before at the rally as the student leader Sankara was addressing the students.

The student leader Sankara stands on an upturned drum and addresses the students. He impresses on them the need to boycott lectures to show their displeasure with the military who he sees as "determined to push our beloved nation over the precipice" (p.40). He says that the authority the military is wielding over the people is unjust, and accuses the military of toying with the people and of having no intention of handing over power to civilians and retreating to the barracks (p.41). He insists it is the duty of the students to push the military government of General Babangida out of power. Sankara layers his ideas onto statements made by Wole Soyinka, Amilcar Cabral, Martin Luther King and in the process, ties the ideologies of these activists to the voices of the people.

Edwin Madunagu talks about learning in Nigeria and argues that the education and training of students, especially at the tertiary level, makes them socially conscious and politically sensitised. As a result of this, they develop a critical consciousness that can be expressed through concrete actions (1982: p.81). Thus, when Sankara, draws from the ideas expressed by the writers, critics and revolutionaries mentioned in the preceding section, to stir up the students to protest, he is

invoking the critical consciousness discussed by Madunagu.<sup>15</sup> The university and education are, therefore, for Habila, arenas of political and ideological debates and struggles because he presents the university students as serving as instruments of change.

Sankara quotes Amilcar Cabral in his speech to the students at the rally and says that “Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor” (p.40). Lomba, from the outset, is not interested in the students’ protest and, although he is physically present at the students’ rally, he is mentally removed from everything that is happening around him. He describes himself as feeling “cold, like an impostor, out of place and my ears deaf” (p.40). He admits to experiencing a feeling of detachment and to a premonition that there is a dark lurking figure inching towards the centre of affairs (p.42). Later on in the novel, when his editor James at the *Dial* asked him to cover the protest of the people of Morgan Street, he declines. He argues “I am not very political” (p.83), but James points out to him that he cannot escape politics because “In this very country the very air we breathe is politics” (p.83). After being convinced by James of the need to deal with politics in his writing, Lomba covers the Morgan Street demonstration. The offices of the *Dial* are subsequently burnt down by the military, James goes into hiding and Lomba is arrested and imprisoned.

To cease from being onlookers, Bola quotes Martin Luther King and says, “It is the duty of every citizen to oppose unjust authority” (p.41). The students, concluding that it is their duty to push the government out, decide to start a boycott of lectures, which escalates into a riot. Habila captures the trend of these riots in his depiction of the violence unleashed on the students by the military, including the rape of female students at the university. Narrating the ordeals of the students at the hands of the military, the character Adegbite who is also a student states:

It began on Thursday [...] we were stopped in the streets, halfway to the military governor’s house. We were going there to stage a peaceful demonstration that was all. They appeared from nowhere in their trucks, shooting tear gas and rubber

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<sup>15</sup> This is an idea Adichie promotes in *Purple Hibiscus*. Ifeoma a university lecturer works diligently to develop the minds of her students, through the ideas she shares with them. But she is labeled disloyal to the university and harassed by agents of the state. This character is reminiscent of Patrick Wilmot a university lecturer at the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria who was abducted and deported by the military government of General Babangida in 1988 for daring to cultivate in his students the love of ideas and what they could achieve for their country if they applied these ideas.

bullets at us. At first we scattered, but we rallied ourselves and returned. They were not much, just a handful of them - about thirty persons. We broke their windscreen with stones, and we also seized their truck, but reinforcement came for them, this time with real bullets. One student was shot in the leg. When we saw the leg shattered and bloody we decided to call it a day. But the bastards followed us to the hostels, chased us to our rooms. The air was so thick with tear gas we couldn't breathe. They went from room to room, breaking doors and looting. When we heard the girls screaming 'rape!' our courage was rekindled [...] we soaked our handkerchiefs in kerosene and tied them over our noses to neutralize the tear gas. We made petrol bombs – then we advanced to the girl's hostels...they flushed us out of the hostels into the streets [...] The street was like a fucking war zone, filled with smoke and darting figures and fire and gunshots. One student died. He was shot in the head - a chemistry student. The area boys captured a policeman and doused him in petrol and set him ablaze [...] the school was closed. (pp. 59-60)

Quoting extensively from the novel, as I have done here, regarding the conflict between the students and the military may seem in the words of James, to be “laying it on a bit too thick” (p.88) but the scene, as described by Habila, was the Nigerian reality during the Babangida and Abacha eras. Indeed, Said Adejumobi posits that the frequency and intensity in the incidence of student as well as popular protests deepened, as the crisis in the Nigerian political economy escalated at the time (2000: p. 215). The National Association of Nigerian Students, the body governing the affairs of Nigerian students, in a press statement in 1992 stated:

The people of Nigeria have witnessed consistently and almost on a yearly and continuous basis, protests, demonstrations, and other forms of crises. However, none has been as endemic and perennial as the crises in institutions of higher learning [...] only an ostrich would argue that the crises in the educational institutions are not direct manifestations of the collapsing socio-economic structure of our time. (n.p)

As the character Adegbite narrates, the student protest is resisted by the authorities. The soldiers not only shoot at them with tear gas and rubber bullets, but also rape the female students in a bid to curb the protest. Prior to this, Bola had related to Lomba the decision taken by the students to boycott lectures until the military hands over power to a civilian administration. Lomba

expresses his reservations regarding the wisdom of the students' actions and says that it may take a long time for the change the students are agitating for to happen (p.41). Bola's response that the boycott will go on anyway can be interpreted to mean the students are not ignorant of the possible outcome of their actions. But this knowledge does not make them sit passively, waiting for circumstances to determine their actions. They make a move from lethargy to resistance.

The move from lethargy to imaginative resistance is reiterated in the actions of many characters in the novel. Rising above the despair and despondency reflected in their daily lives, Habila's characters, in particular Aunty Rachael, Nancy, Hagar, Joshua, Lomba and even the teenager Kela, move from being victims of oppression to figures of resistance, which prepares the way for physical change. The protest as Adegbite had narrated earlier on was met with stiff opposition by the military with casualties on both sides. On an initial reading of the protest and its outcome, it would appear that it failed. But the students' defiance in spite of the sheer might of the military by continuing with the protest is "at root, what the rest of Habila's novel reinforces on multiple levels: the necessity of [...] resistance even in the face of despair" (McCain, 2007: p.9). Habila's position on the student protest is quite clear. He is not so much concerned with the immediate outcome of the protest, but rather in making the point that, although the students do not have the power to resist the military, their willingness to protest is the beginning of change. Habila, therefore, challenges the idea of waiting to accept whatever life throws at you, and reinforces the necessity of taking action even in the face of further oppression.

### *3.5 The Need for Action: The Protest on Poverty Street*

Habila's focus in *Waiting for an Angel* is on the relationship between the state and the ruled. The people as presented by Habila are not passive victims who are at the mercy of the state, but rather people who question sites of power relations through struggle and resistance. Indeed, his engagement with the protests of the students and the people of Poverty Street shows the degree to which individuals and groups exercise agency through forms of resistance, contestation and protest. Our examination of the student protest and now the protest on Poverty Street is informed by the idea that it is in the study of the specific episodes and sites of struggle we find in *Waiting for an Angel* that the nature of the state/society relationship in the Nigeria of the 80s-90s can be understood or contested.

Habila evokes very concretely in his novel the poverty and dispossession of the people on Poverty Street. The mounting anger of the people towards the military government, whom they perceive as being behind their woes, is represented unambiguously. Evident in the gatherings in Joshua's room are the anger and restlessness of the people about the situation in the country (p.121). As the anger grows, it becomes inclined towards an agitation for a revolt, which, the character Ojikutu insists, is the solution to the myriad of problems the people are facing in their daily lives (p.121).

The sorry state of the people of Poverty Street and their response to the government's negligence by way of a protest is presented to us in Habila's novel through the teenage character Kela. It is therefore through this boy's eyes that we 'see' the squalor on the street; we 'feel' the heat of the weather and are drawn into an environment controlled by the military:

By noon the heat would really begin to show its hand: it would force the people off the main street and back roads, and since the heat was worse indoors, the people would sit out on their verandas on old folding chairs; they would throw open the shop doors and sit before the counters, stripped down to their shorts and wrappers, their bare torsos gleaming with sweat. Gasping for breath, they would stare through glazed eyes at the long, tarred road that dissected the street into two. By two o'clock, the tar would start melting, making tearing noises beneath car tyres, holding grimly onto shoe soles. (p.91)

This detailed description of the heat presents the weather as Kela perceives it, but, more importantly, in the context of Habila's novel, the heat and its effects represent the impact of the repressive state apparatus; the military and the police who are constantly exploiting the people. Indeed, when Kela continues in his description of the heat, on another level what becomes obvious is the reflection of the suffering of the people under the direct oppression of the state:

The heat would comb the defenceless street unchecked (like the policemen [...]), tearing into doors and windows, advancing from room to room, systematically seeking out and strangling to death the last traces of cool air hiding beneath chairs and behind cabinets, wringing out moisture from the anaemic plants that drooped in old plastic containers on window ledges. (p. 91)

What Habila does in illuminating the heat and its effect on the people is important to our understanding of the control, both physical and mental, that the state exerts over the people. The heat is not merely described in relation to the weather, but represents the suffering of the people under both the direct and indirect forms of oppression by the state. Habila, therefore, uses the heat as a metaphor for the influence of the state in the everyday life of the people.

The title of Habila's novel echoes the title of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*. In this 1953 play, two men are waiting for Godot on a bare road, on which there is a single almost lifeless tree. These characters are not situated in any particular place or in any particular time. In the two days we encounter them on this road, we see them argue, get bored and meet with a man and his servant and continue to wait. Beckett's characters are presented as stuck in a static situation, waiting endlessly and with great patience for this Godot who never comes. The plot is sparse and vague, giving one cause to wonder if anything is going to happen. Whatever meaning the reader derives from the play or life as it is portrayed in the play as a whole, depends on the reader.

Poverty Street in Habila's novel is devoid of any tree, unlike the setting of Beckett's play, it is full of the living. Those who inhabit this street; dogs, chickens, humans and other domestic animals, are also stuck in a seemingly unending condition of oppression and a life devoid of basic human needs. We therefore have in this novel intelligent and talented girls turning to prostitution to make ends meet; veterans who become destitute because of neglect from the government and all manner of people whose tales of woe are tied to the failings of the state. Although the people are humiliated by their poverty, they do not lose hope for a better life. When Brother looks out into the street from inside his shed and sees the abject poverty in the lives of the people, he sighs and wishes he could do something: "If to say I get money. If only I get money" (p.97) but almost immediately brightens up and proclaims "one day Allah go give me a million, I know it" (p.97). From the ongoing, Habila's characters are not satisfied with their condition. They refuse to accept their condition and prompted by Ojikutu come to an awakening through the realization that while they might not have the physical power to resist the oppression

of the state, they have the mental power to do so and so they decide to embark on a protest and in the process move from lethargy to action.<sup>16</sup>

The people of Poverty Street are presented as inclined to resistance, a people who feel exploited and complain about the fact of their dispossession. Ojikutu who is also known as Mao<sup>17</sup> presents himself as understanding the mechanics of this exploitation and also as having the knowledge on how to counteract it. He posits that life under military rule is tantamount to “living under siege. Their very presence on our streets and in the government houses instead of the barracks where they belong is an act of aggression” (p.122). Consequently, as we noted above, Ojikutu insists the country is in dire need of a revolution (p.121). Ojikutu, to borrow the words of Frantz Fanon, is “an awakener of the people” (2000: p.223). Indeed, Fanon identifies people like Ojikutu as belonging to “a party of intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles” (2001: p.175). Fanon advises that it is necessary for these intellectuals to mobilize the masses as a popular fighting force against oppression. Like Fanon, Ojikutu insists that it is the masses, whom he refers to as the “Lumpenproletariat” (p.121), who should lead the protest (p.122).

Curiously, though, Ojikutu does not offer himself up to lead the protest. The onus to lead the protest falls on Joshua. The choice of Joshua as the leader and spokesperson of the protest is grounded in the people’s belief in his ability to do so by virtue of his education and vocation as a teacher. These features that qualify him to lead the protest present him as an intellectual. Going back in time to the era of decolonization, we will recall that it was the intellectuals of the period who spearheaded the fight for independence from colonial rule. Indeed the African leaders who played pivotal roles in the struggle for independence like Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Jomo Kenyatta, Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere and their contemporaries were educated. By presenting Joshua as the leader of the protest, Habila makes the point that education and knowledge are important factors for mediating the struggle against oppression.

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<sup>16</sup> This action like the student protest fails but as we noted with the students’ protest, what is important for Habila is the people’s will to act instead of accepting their condition no matter the consequence.

<sup>17</sup> Habila’s presentation of this character suggests he has a Marxist view and disposition, but the ideas he promotes in regards to revolution are Fanonian especially Fanon’s argument for the use of violence in the struggle for independence that he promotes in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon is of the view that given that violence marks the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized and also marks their existence together, it is only by violence that decolonization can take place (2001: p.28).

As we noted earlier on in this chapter, the wretchedness of the collective lives of the people is foregrounded in a semiotic of deprivation and destruction (Akingbe, 2010: p.28). This is portrayed in the rot and dilapidation that demarcates the landscape of the slums in which the people live and this situation is precisely what the character Ojikutu insists the people are tired of: hunger, deprivation and a government that does not seem to care (p.122). The people of Morgan Street, like the university students, are ‘tired’ and decide to protest against the military government. Ojikutu explains the situation with the military in the country, and quotes Frantz Fanon: “violence can only be overcome by greater violence” (p.122). He tells the people that in order for them to start afresh as a nation, the status quo needs to be utterly destroyed, and thus the country is in dire need of a revolution (p.121). Urging his neighbours to start a protest against the government, he tells them to “start an uprising [...] no matter how small” (p.122).

Joshua gives a speech during the protest and identifies the various ways in which the people have been neglected by the government and the extent of their impoverishment. He starts his speech by stating that the people have a right to complain and that his address is an accusation against the entire regime:

We came to tell you, Sir, that our clinic is run-down and abandoned: we came to tell you that we don't have a single borehole on Morgan Street and we have to go to other streets to fetch water; our schools are overcrowded, and our children have to buy their own seats and tables because the ones there have not been replaced since the schools were built ten years ago [...] we are here to protest against this neglect. Where is the subsidized drug programme promised us from the Special Petroleum Trust Fund? We need it now, because our children and wives are dying from diseases. We are dying from lack of hope. And that's why we are here today to protest. And this is why we feel we ought to express our displeasure. (pp. 131-132)

The people bear the brunt of governmental irresponsibility and are therefore dying from a lack of hope. Joshua paints a picture of despair and presents a feeling of despondency that is bred in an environment in which dreams are continually crushed by the decay of the infrastructure, unemployment, poverty, and the neglect of social services which reduces the overall life expectancy of the people.

The people of Poverty Street are not ignorant of the consequences of their actions when they choose to protest. James meets with Joshua to discuss the protest, and afterward says to Lomba:

We are all in this together. That young man: I saw the doubt and uncertainty and fear in his eyes; of course he knows that in our country there cannot be a peaceful demonstration, the troops will always come, there will be gunshots, and perhaps deaths. He knows that, I am sure, but he is still willing to do it. The time has come when a few bruises, even deaths, don't matter anymore. That's why I think you should go [to the demonstration]. To encourage him and show him he is not alone. (pp. 147-148)

In making this statement, James implies that the demonstration by itself will not accomplish any significant political change. But, as he notes, Joshua is still willing to do it. Indeed, Joshua explains the risk in pursuing the path of revolution as is suggested by Ojikutu, when he says: "He'll get us all killed. He doesn't know what desperate people he is up against" (p.123). Also, Aunty Rachael warns Joshua against being involved in the protest: "Look around you, can't you see they are desperately looking for someone to shoot or lock up? Don't give them the chance" (p.124). Thus, in spite of the knowledge that the military in its desperation would crush any form of dissent, the people of Poverty Street go ahead with the protest realizing that "it is important to agitate [towards] injustice, no matter the consequence" (p.127).

The protest does not end well, even though the people of Morgan/Poverty Street believed in their cause, and demonstrated steadfastness in the expression of that belief. The protest fails because the military, using its might, crushes this movement for change. This is the reason Ali Erritouni interprets the failure of the protest to mean that "Habiba considers revolutionaries to be imprudently optimistic, unable to reckon seriously with the disparity between their inadequate means of violence and the military might of the post-colonial state" (2010: p.154).

The manner in which both the student protest and the protest by the people of Poverty Street end does seem to suggest that Habiba sees revolutionary acts as futile. But the point he makes in the presentation of the protests is that in times of repression, when other channels of free expression are closed or suppressed, civil society falls back on collective defiance to express dissent and to censure the authorities. Therefore, by drawing strength from their shared experiences, the people

of Morgan/Poverty Street demonstrate the necessity of community involvement in the move from lethargy to resistance, and in the process challenge the status quo.

### 3.6 *The Repressive State Apparatus*

From the time of colonialism, Nigeria has been plagued by political violence and the crude use of power by the state. According to Bernard Nwosu, “hegemony, capitalism and the politics of exclusion are the principal factors that have shaped this tradition, which underpins the logic of imperialism” (2006: p.24). Indeed, given that colonial Nigeria was shaped by conditions that were predominantly violent, the post-colonial Nigerian state is neither lacking in the crude use of power and violence nor coercion and hegemony in the execution of its grisly political objectives (Dirks, 1996: p.4). Consequently, since independence in 1960, subsequent administrations in Nigeria have used violence as a means of containing the people’s dissatisfaction as well as to muzzle opposition arising from the masses.

Resistance in *Waiting for an Angel* is expressed on two levels; the individual level and larger, more organized group protest. The novel opens with Lomba in detention for covering the protest of the people of Poverty Street for *Dial* magazine. The state regards this as a crime and arrests him. While in detention, Lomba secretly writes in defiance of the prison rules. The prison warden Maftau discovers this and interprets it as a brazen act of disregard for his authority. Bola loses members of his family in a car accident which occurs as a result of the carelessness of the military. Distraught with grief he gives a speech where he repeats word for word the speech Sankara had given at the student rally. Bola’s speech is an act of protest aimed at the state for the senseless deaths of his family members. On the larger, more organized level of protest, the university students and the people of Poverty Street demonstrate against the government. But these characters’ actions are brutally repressed. Lomba is thereafter assaulted, tortured and placed in solitary confinement. Bola is taken away by the authorities and severely brutalised. These examples remind us of the historical figures Dele Giwa, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Kudirat Abiola, who were assassinated by the state in the 80s–90s in order to silence their criticism of the military governments of the time.

The military regime does not react differently when the act of defiance is on the organizational level. When the university students demonstrate, soldiers come to the university and students are arrested, raped, rooms ransacked and the demonstrating students dispersed by the use of tear gas. There are casualties too. A student dies in the process. When the people of Poverty Street protest, it is the police that turn up. Describing the turn of events with the arrival of the police, Kela says:

The air below us was filled with scared wails and shrieks; women screaming the names of their children. But the dominant sounds were of batons on flesh, and boots on flesh, and tear gas popping out of projectiles [...]. The people were scared witless, hemmed in on all sides, stupefied by the choking tear gas, ran out in all directions, like quails beaten out of their hiding places, coughing and falling. Agile youths attempted to scale the high Secretariat wall, but they were swatted down by police batons, like mosquitoes, to fall into the open gutter, shaking and writhing with pain and terror. Those that were able to reach the top had their grasping hands cut to laces by the barbed wire on top. Others, mainly women and children, attempted to run across the road, only to be knocked down by speeding vehicles. (p. 134)

The government does not entertain the people's show of defiance, and the power of the state is used to crush the people's revolutionary activism. Dealing with the people in this manner is a display of the military government's lack of restraint and its tendency to exhibit a sense of arrogance in its actions towards the people. This is evident in Maftau, the prison Superintendent's retort to Lomba: "You think you are. Tough", he shouted. "You are. Wrong. Twenty years! That is how long I have been dealing with miserable bastards like you" (p.14). The government's use of unchecked power instils in the people a sense of resignation, what Lomba describes as "a state of tranquil acceptance [...] of the inescapability of your fate" (p.10).

The government also regards the bodies of its opponents as a site on which it can display its uncontrolled force. This is made most evident in the rape of female students at the University during the riots. Rape is an act of violence similar to other crimes of physical assault, but the meaning of this violence is unmistakably the demonstration of power over the victim. It is in the same manner that military coups, interventions and oppressive modes of governance are unmistakably a demonstration of power over a people. The rape of women by soldiers in both

Habila and Ndibe's novels as Carmen McCain notes "is not merely a physical violation but a loss of dignity that creates a deep wound upon the psyche" (2007:p.31). A rapist's action can threaten the victim's sense of security and instil in them a feeling of helplessness. This can make them feel that it is hopeless to fight against someone who has more power, authority or physical strength. But Habila's characters refuse to be intimidated by the seeming helplessness of the conditions of their lives under the military and challenge the order of things.

Bola, overcome with pain and grief at the loss of his family members, repeats the student leader's speech word for word to an audience of passers-by on the street. He is dragged away by the authorities, and brutally beaten. Placing Lomba's experience side by side with Bola's, it is evident that every act of defiance, whether real or imagined, leads to brutal repression. In his treatment of the military's reaction to being challenged by the people, Habila portrays the instruments of governmental brutality: the police, the state security service and the soldiers themselves, as brutal, unfeeling and antagonistic towards the people. But while the people seem to accept the inescapability of their fate, at the same time, the situation with the authorities teaches them "the craft of cunning. You learn ways of surviving [...] and each day survived is a victory" (p.10).

Habila presents the repression of the people at the hands of the authorities as comparable to physical imprisonment. He presents two prison situations in *Waiting for an Angel*, the literal and the symbolic prison conditions. Lomba, as we have seen, was locked up in a literal prison. Lomba's imprisonment symbolizes the larger imprisonment of the Nigerian state under a military dictatorship. Before his imprisonment, he was a student at university. He left university because he found it constraining. His description of the walls and gate of the university conjures up the image of a prison: "I turned and surveyed the gate and the fences beside it, I saw the fences suddenly transform into thick walls, standing tall, top-tufted with barbed wire and broken bottles, arms widespread to restrain and contain and limit" (p.61). The image of the prison is also made evident in the description of the window at the Mayfair hotel where Hagar the brilliant student now turned prostitute, resides (p.112).

The metaphor of the imprisoning conditions of everyday life is illustrated in the description of the long queues because of fuel scarcity; soldiers at the fuel pumps collecting bribes; infrastructural decay made evident in the poor state of roads. It is also illustrated in the lack of medication at the hospitals, and in the crisis of unemployment whereby characters like Nkem resort to theft as a means of making a living. The symbolic prison condition of the people is, thus, made evident in the wretchedness of their lives. This is illustrated in the poverty and disintegrating living conditions of the people. The military's direct involvement in the lives of the people is at the root of this poverty. Lomba's reference to "the ubiquitous gun and whip toting soldiers" (p.87) is symbolic of the presence of the military as a whole, especially since he points out that "the military have turned the country into one huge barracks, into a prison" (p.41).

### 3.7 Conclusion

In the afterword to *Waiting for an Angel*, Helon Habila explains that what he sought to do in writing this novel was to capture the socio-political situation in Nigeria from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, especially during the military rulership of General Sani Abacha. He posits that this period was marked by "plain, old-fashioned terror [...] there were more 'official' killings, arrests, and kidnappings in those five years than in all the other military years put together" (p.227). It is obvious that Habila believes it is possible to describe reality and sees it as his responsibility as a writer to put reality into words as it is. *Waiting for an Angel* is therefore a realist narrative in content and form as it depicts the Nigerian social reality of the period from 1985-98. Chidi Amuta's comment on the novel of social reality captures the character of Habila's novel: "The distinctiveness of the novel resides in its implicit adoption of a realist epistemology. The essence of realism is the fictional representation of a slice of social experience in a manner that reminds us through the laws of probability and causality, of everyday existence" (1986: p.83). Habila in his novel presents everyday reality in Nigeria's recent past by working with the material of everyday life of ordinary people.

A thread which runs through Habila's novel is the despair felt by the people because of the military regime's appalling display of incompetence in governance. The protests by the university students and the people of Poverty Street can be best understood as a demonstration against the oppression and economic despair brought on the people by this incompetence of the

military regime. This chapter ties the despair felt by Habila's characters to that felt by the people when the initial expectations of independence were not met by the crop of leaders who took over from the colonialists. *Waiting for an Angel* illuminates struggle as emanating from colonial hierarchies. Independence has not brought about a total disconnection from colonial socio-economic and cultural structures. Thus, for Nigeria, the moment of post-colonization is also the condition of neo-colonization. For Habila's characters, neo-colonialism looks and feels similar to colonialism. Habila, like his contemporaries, is informed by the political conditions in Nigeria, and the condition of neo-colonialism continues to perpetuate violence, both physical and psychic on the people. Indeed, the discourse of postcolonial studies which looks at the issue of power offers an excellent paradigm for examining the conditions of colonialism and neo-colonialism we find in Habila's novel.

*Waiting for an Angel* demonstrates that moments of protest can mark a site for the collective to challenge the status quo in an attempt to chart a socially progressive future through transformative processes. Habila's characters mount resistance to agitate for a better socio-political and economic structure, and he utilizes these specific episodes of students and community protests in the 80s and 90s, to raise awareness on the nature of the state-society relationship in Nigeria. Habila shows the degree to which Nigerian students and the community exercise agency in national politics through resistance, contestation and protest. The idea of non-violent resistance by the people against political oppression that Habila promotes has its roots in decolonization. He presents popular struggle as an act that involves will power and intellect. He posits that, although resistance can provide the state with an excuse to further tyrannize its unfortunate victims, the willingness on the part of the people to resist the oppression of the military in the face of "doubt and uncertainty and fear" (p.195) demonstrates that the people would rather take advantage of the agency available to them for agitation towards transformation, than be cowed into forced obeisance.

In the afterword to the novel, Habila says the period of the 80s and 90s "was a terrible time to be alive". What he tried to do in this novel was to "capture the mood of those years [...] the despair, the frenzy, the stubborn hope, above all the airless prison-like atmosphere that characterised them" (p.224). The novel reflects Habila's attempt at narrating the Nigerian experience of military rule in the 80s and 90s. The struggles of the people which are visible features in the

novel are associated with military rule; abuse, oppression, and infrastructural decay. The title of the novel suggests 'waiting', but the actions of Habila's characters emphasize the need for action, not waiting. Also, the angel of the title of the novel is the angel of death which is the military that haunts Habila's characters. But Habila's characters refuse to remain haunted and, thus, the students and the people resolve to protest regardless of the outcome. The people's defiance on one level seems pointless given the means the government has to power as Erritouni points out, but on the other hand, it is in taking action that hope can be built. Habila, in *Waiting for an Angel*, asserts the heroism of the common man and makes the point that people should not passively accept oppression no matter the cost.

The next chapter examines Sefi Atta's engagement with the effects of the socio-economic policy of SAP in Nigeria during the 80s and 90s in *Everything Good will Come*. Atta's novel is read as illuminating the socio-economic challenges that defined the lives of Habila's characters and which led to the two protests in *Waiting for an Angel*. *Everything Good will Come* illustrates another crucial moment in the socio-political and economic landscape of the 80s and 90s and which the next chapter aims to explore.

## Chapter Four

### The Economics of Oppression:

#### The SAP Experience in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come*

##### 4.0 Introduction

Speaking about her work in an interview with Chika Unigwe and five other people,<sup>1</sup> Sefi Atta avers that she writes about members of her generation whom she describes as having been “born in the 1960s [...]. I call us the oil boom generation. Our childhood was marked by the civil war, our adolescence by military coups and we graduated into a recession [...]. My motivation for all my works has been to chronicle our experiences in fictional form” (“Nigeria: A Chat with Sefi Atta,” 2012, online). An experience which has marked her generation and which Atta draws from for the story she tells in *Everything Good will Come* is the Nigerian experience of the IMF/World Bank sponsored SAP<sup>2</sup> of 80s and 90s.

The various struggles of the people in Habila's novel, examined in the previous chapter, culminated in protest and resistance. Joshua in his address to the Sole Administrator talks about lack of and deteriorating infrastructure, poverty, disease and an absence of hope as the reasons behind the protest. These conditions which pushed the people of Poverty Street to protest were defining characteristics of the socio-political landscape of the 80s-90s in Nigeria. The adoption of the SAP policy by the military regime of the time magnified these conditions. This chapter turns to Sefi Atta's novel *Everything Good will Come* to examine her presentation of the effects of the SAP policy on the people. Atta's novel is read as illuminating the socio-economic challenges that Habila's characters protest against, as it illustrates a crucial moment in the socio-political and economic landscape of the 80s and 90s. Our examination of *Everything Good will Come* in relation to this economy policy, is guided by Harold Scheub's idea of the ‘poetic centre’ in every story. Scheub, in *The Poem and the Story*, observes that “at the heart of every story is the engine [...], that which animates and motivates, that which provides the rhythmical flow of the story, that which elicits, controls,

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<sup>1</sup> Tade Ipadeola, Toni Kan Onwordi, Funmi Tofowomo-Okeola, Marla Kunfermann and Jide Bello.

<sup>2</sup> SAP stands for the IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Program that was implemented in Nigeria by the Babangida Administration in 1986. The acronym SAP will be used consistently throughout this study to refer to this policy.

and thereby shapes the emotions of the audience into metaphor - the poetic centre of the story” (2002: *Poem* 23). The poetic centre in a story according to Scheub is the moment that makes a story artistically engaging and emotionally evocative, and there can be multiple poetic centres in any story. Furthermore, Scheub observes that real-life experience is given meaning and context when fact and fiction are aligned in any given story.

It is the early 1980s and Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come* is working with a firm of solicitors in London. She is recovering from a failed relationship, and life in the United Kingdom has its challenges. But the news from home is depressing. There has been another military coup, the constitution is suspended, and the new military government is waging a war against indiscipline. Enitan is worried about what all these changes on the political landscape mean for her generation. Making a distinction between her generation and that of her parents, she states that her generation is “defined by the economics of their childhood” (p.76). This statement is the ‘poetic centre’ of the story Atta narrates in *Everything Good will Come*, and it guides our analysis of the Nigerian SAP experience she narrates in her novel.

By engaging with the factual experience of SAP in her novel, Atta fictionally draws her readers into the ‘presence’ of history. A real life experience is therefore transferred into the fictional world of the novel and, to borrow the words of Charles Nnolim, “the fictional characters interacting with actual historical personages through their actions give expression to the impact which the historical events have upon the people living through them, with the result that a picture of a bygone age is created in personal and immediate terms” (2010: p.145).

This chapter aims to explore a number of ideas. It will, firstly, seek to establish a link between the SAP policy and the adverse social effects of the policy on the population, as illustrated by Atta in her novel. It will do this by pointing out the causal relationship between SAP and the socio-economic challenges Atta explicates in her novel. In our examination of the impact of SAP on the socio-political and economic process, we examine how the policy brought about economic decline, promoted great political turmoil, and the most brutal military dictatorship in Nigeria’s history. Secondly, it will show the connection between the

policy, the authoritarian character of its implementation and the implications for human rights as presented in *Everything Good will Come*. We will examine how far the state went to repress the people in the process of carrying out the SAP reforms and show how SAP and human rights were inherently incompatible.

This chapter does not in any way wish to make an economic policy an over-determined consciousness in its analysis of Atta's novel. Therefore, although we engage with issues emanating from an economic situation, this study is purely a literary pursuit in which the idea of SAP is used to examine the peculiarities of an era. This chapter seeks to examine Atta's interpretation of the phenomenon that was SAP in Nigeria during the 80s and 90s, and the manner in which it informs the narrative of her novel. The idea of SAP enables us to examine what Eniola refers to as the economics of her generation and, at the same time, contextualize the economic peculiarity of the era of the 80s-90s as revealed in Atta's novel.

The narration in *Everything Good will Come* starts in 1971, immediately after the Nigerian civil war and at a time of military rule. Enitan who narrates the story is the main character in the novel. She is eleven years of age at the beginning of the narrative, and what this signifies is that she grew up in the period of military rule and dictatorship. The novel charts the coming of age of Enitan through three distinct stages: childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Each of these stages attests to particular phases in her journey to self-discovery. Through these stages of growth Enitan becomes aware of her environment and how it affects her. An awareness of her environment and how it affects her requires that she negotiates not only her identity as a woman but her identity as a Nigerian as well. The story Atta tells is about family, friendship, the nation and self-discovery.

At the time Enitan leaves Nigeria for the United Kingdom in the late 70s, it was at the peak of the oil boom but, by the time she returns in 1984, the oil boom had become a recession. Enitan returns to a country rife with political unrest, back-to-back military coups and in deep economic crisis. It is in this section of the novel that Atta's perspectives on the historical and socio-political issues in Nigeria at the time, which are of interest to us in this study, are made evident. We engage with these issues and in the process move away from the dominant

readings of *Everything Good will Come* as a feminist novel. It is of interest to this study too how economic issues inform the character of this historic period and also contribute to our understanding of why Atta like her contemporaries has gone back to the era of economic reforms of the 80s and 90s as a site for telling the Nigerian story.

The stories told by Atta and the other writers whose novels are under examination in this study are representative of the peculiarities of a particular era in Nigeria's history. Atta, like her contemporaries, narrates the story by drawing from her memories and her imagination of a time and a place. Atta, responding to Mirian N. Kotzin who sought to know what it is about the period of military dictatorship that draws her to the subject, says "it is the history of my childhood [...] my childhood was an epic time in Nigeria and I had all these personal connections to our political history" ("Back to Archives," 2010, online). Memory, therefore, in Atta's novel, reflects on history by bringing it to the present imaginatively. Memory can be unstructured as it entails an intentional selection of images from the past and also a selective reconstruction of those images in fictional works as we find in *Everything Good will Come*. It can therefore, be interpreted and translated from the form of unconscious images of the past into the present form of a text as Nicola King suggests (2000: pp.13-14). In an interview with Ike Anya in 2008, Atta posits that her long-term memory is better than her short-term memory. Thus, memory's narrative status, as we see in her novel, is not necessarily bound by chronology, especially as it relates to the representation of the fragmented subjects of contemporary Nigerian fiction.

Critics have examined Atta's *Everything Good will Come* and offer us a variety of readings. Florence Orabueze's analysis deals with female complicity in its engagement with what she describes as 'the prison state' of the Nigerian woman. Orabueze sees the woman under the control of the man as parallel to being in prison. She juxtaposes life under the man at the domestic level with life under the military at the national level (2009). Willem Smit who engages with the novel as a *Bildungsroman* argues that new avenues of identity negotiation and formation are being explored in various contemporary situations and the *Bildungsroman* serves as the vehicle through which Atta's characters articulate this new identity (2009).

Ogaga Okuyade builds on Smit's argument that *Everything Good will Come* is a *Bildungsroman* and makes the point that Atta uses a western and equally masculine oriented literary genre to give expression to the strategies her female characters employ to negotiate their identity in male-dominated spaces (2011). Kehinde and Mbipom posit that Atta betrays specific gender sentiments as she projects the female gender as the most unfortunate victim in the crisis that has bedevilled the nation in the post-colonial era (2011). Jonas Akung negotiates the feminist sphere, but builds on Kehinde and Mbipom's argument by pointing out how Atta makes use of the *Bildungsroman* literary genre to show the progression in Enitan's growth and the manner she becomes aware of her environment and how it affects her and also how she comes into her own as a woman and as a Nigerian (2012).

*Everything Good will Come* displays the conceptual influences highlighted by these writers. Indeed because the issues Atta fictionalizes are socio-politically realistic and connected to the Nigerian society she narrates, her novel criticizes the deplorable state of Nigeria in the 80s-90s. Atta paints a picture of the people suffering as well as their struggle to rise above the perils of the socio-political and economic chaos that characterize their lives. In its thematic preoccupations, Atta's novel can be read as nation-centred on the one hand, and female-centred on the other. This chapter sets out to establish a causal relationship between SAP and socio-political processes in *Everything Good will Come*. Atta considers the question of SAP and its legacy of repression and like her contemporaries represents the striving of a generation to remember the trauma of the past.

The socio-economic peculiarity of the 80s and 90s is a theme that permeates a number of contemporary Nigerian novels: for example (El Nukoya's *Nine Lives* (2006), Adaobi Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2010), and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Shegi's Wives* (2010). Indeed, the socio-economic challenges that characterize the lives of Atta's characters are evident in all the texts chosen for this study. However, this study chooses to engage with the reality of SAP in Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and to present a case for its examination, because it is a critical idea dominating the author's narrative. Atta's novel draws from several influences, and at the same time engages with the reality of SAP in its negotiation and articulation of the Nigerian experience.

This chapter therefore investigates a major period in Nigerian life in which Atta contributes to and participates in the discourse about the 80s and 90s. She interrogates the policies and mode of governance of the time, specifically the governments of Generals Babangida and Abacha. In the process, she exposes the social structures and shows how the political and economic spheres were organized and operated during the SAP period and how in Nigeria's particular case, the SAP experience has been implicated in the words of Halima Asekula "in the perpetuation of exploitation, repression, alienation and violence across the ethnic, class gender and demographic divide" (2005: p.1).

#### *4.1 SAP in Nigeria: An Overview*

The reality of colonization fostered on the African a culture of dependency in relation to the coloniser. The colonial state in Nigeria ensured the promotion of primary commodities for production and export, using what Attahiru Jega calls the "Indigenous commercial comprador class" (2000: p.16), and Frantz Fanon calls "the national Bourgeoisie" (2001: p.120). This group of people were those associated with the critical organs of state, such as the political class, the military and the bureaucratic-technocratic elite that had come to play a prominent role in the Nigerian political economy. Through these classes, the coloniser held a firm grip on the Nigerian economy. The role played by the indigenous elites in the colonization and the neo-colonization of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The British, who colonized Nigeria, did so using a system of indirect rule. This meant that many of the indigenous power structures were left in place, making local rulers representatives of the British crown. Fanon is of the opinion that the mission of these local rulers had nothing to do with transforming the nation; rather it consisted, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and capitalism [...] which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism (2001: p.122). Thus, the ruling class and the elites were willing partners of the colonial capitalists and protected their interests and investments right through to the post-independence period and they had the backing of the power that was available to them by their access to the state in order to do so.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and the continent's third largest economy, with well over 250 ethnic groups and it runs a federal system of government. However, since independence in 1960, Nigeria has undergone major economic, social and political changes that were brought about by frequent changes in government which have resulted in a near

collapse in all aspects of governance: the deepening of corruption, the collapse of education and health care, and a widening of the gap between the few elite millionaires and the desperately poor majority of the population, among other societal woes. The military has been a dominant force in Nigeria's political landscape from independence in 1960 to civil rule in 1999. Although military intervention was usually seen as a 'rescue' operation necessary to save the country from the incompetence of the politicians, the military proved to be just as bad as the politicians. The nation has had to deal with increasing levels of corruption, a decline in the economy, particularly under the structural adjustment programme (SAP), gross abuse of human rights, and strained relationships with other countries, especially the United Kingdom and the USA, bringing about general political, social and economic instability.

The early 1980s brought about a lowering of Nigeria's OPEC quota due to the collapse of world oil prices and a sharp decline in petroleum output. This laid bare the precarious nature of Nigeria's economic position. Two things left the country vulnerable to profound changes in the external environment at this time: rising and ill-directed government spending, especially in the 1970s and the neglect of the agricultural sector. The Nigerian economy was dominated by oil, even at that time, so this led to "recession and economic deterioration as manifested by fiscal crisis, foreign exchange shortage, balance of payments and debt crisis, high rate of unemployment, negative economic growth to mention a few" (Ogbimi, 1992: p.30). Indeed, starting from 1982, the country had become saddled with negative trends in all aspects of national life as indicated by large scale retrenchment, unfinished projects especially in the public sector, closure of factories, acute shortage of essential commodities and galloping inflation. The military coup of 1983 came about because of these worsening national conditions.

The new government under General Buhari strove to further tighten financial policies and introduce more administrative controls and some success was achieved. Inflation fell to a single digit and public sector employment grew, promoting migration into cities. But this also brought about new problems. Urban migration brought about ghettos and unemployment, making it clear to the nation's economic policy makers that short-term measures would not solve the problem. Ogbimi argues that "it was clear that there was the need to adjust to the

structural imbalances and external shocks” (1992: p.30). But an important question also needed to be asked: what type of adjustment was required? The government of General Babangida that took over from General Buhari had three options: Firstly, to maintain the status quo, that is, a continuation of the austerity measures of the governments of President Shehu Shagari and General Buhari, without structural adjustment reforms; secondly, to accept an IMF structural adjustment facility with all the conditions attached to it; or thirdly, reject the IMF proposal but adopt a modified variant of the traditional structural adjustment package that would be designed and implemented by Nigerians.

The government of General Babangida resolved that the decision on whether to accept the loan or not would be taken by the general public through a debate.<sup>3</sup> Although the consensus was that something needed to be done about the state of the nation, the majority opposed the IMF sponsored Structural Adjustment Programme; the government adopted the IMF/SAP anyway. Is’haq Kawu postulates that “the mid-1980s were the major turning point in our national life, with the implementation of structural adjustment policies [...] We lost the entire decade of the 1990s as a result of those policies” (2008: p.72).

The past thirty one years have seen the Nigerian state performing poorly in all spheres of life. As with every society, Nigeria’s political, social and economic success cannot be separated, the three are intertwined - good governance is essential to a country’s stability and economic growth. There has, therefore, been declining growth, increasing unemployment, galloping inflation, widespread poverty, and a debilitating debt burden. The apparent connection between these discouraging political, social and economic outcomes and the SAP, sponsored by the IMF, has led to questioning the motive behind the programme.

Established in 1945, the IMF is an international organization of 185 member countries. The purpose of the IMF was to promote international monetary cooperation, exchange stability and orderly exchange arrangements; to foster economic growth and high levels of employment; and to provide temporary financial assistance to countries to help ease balance

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<sup>3</sup> In 1986, the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida issued a referendum to gain support for austerity measures as suggested by the IMF/World Bank.

of payments through adjustment programs (“About the IMF,” 2005, online). The IMF’s work is threefold: surveillance, lending and technical assistance. The IMF monitors the economic developments of member countries and gives policy advice aimed especially at crisis prevention. The IMF lends to countries that are in financial difficulty and need a temporary reprieve with the aim of providing a lasting solution, especially poverty reduction. By providing training in its areas of expertise to countries in need, the IMF provides technical assistance. Tied to all three of these activities is the IMF’s work in research and statistics. The IMF is guided by the Article of Agreement which lays out the parameters for its operations. However, the activities of the World Bank and the administrators of the IMF have not all been noble. There are governments (USA, UK, and France) which seem to have complete control of the World Bank and have systematically used the Bank to circumvent one of its most important provisions - the exclusion of political and non-economic considerations in banking operations. The decision to grant or refuse loans by international financial institutions like the IMF/World Bank is a subtle form of control. Indeed, according to Damien Millet et al., “the huge foreign debt of developing countries has become a mechanism of domination and a means of re-colonization that prevents any meaningful development” (2004: p.64).

F.E Ogbimi claims that African leaders:

Accept SAP for two main reasons; dishonesty on the part of leadership and ignorance on the part of a large proportion of the population. Some unscrupulous African leaders accept SAP so that they can embezzle the external loans that come with the programme. They probably know that the program could ruin their economies, and increase the chances of chaos, but it appears they choose to destroy their national economies for personal gain. (1992: p.31)

The stated objectives of the Nigerian SAP according to Ogbimi were “to restructure and diversify the produce base of the economy, achieve fiscal stability and positive balance of payments” (1992: p.31). It was also to:

Set the basis for a sustained non-inflationary or minimal inflationary growth, and reduce the dominance of unproductive investments in the public sector, strengthen demand policies, adopt a realistic exchange rate policy through the

establishment of Foreign Exchange Markets (FEM), rationalize and privatize the public sector enterprise and adopt appropriate pricing policies for public enterprise. (1992: p.32)

The effect of mandatory FEM has been to erode the value of the local currency over time and, apart from the FEM, none of SAP's objectives has been achieved in present day Nigeria.

The economic implications of adjustment policies were obvious, yet there were less emphasized, but, nonetheless, equally crippling political and social implications of adjustment. Firstly, there was a crisis in governance. The government failed to manage public enterprises efficiently: there was a lack of accountability, transparency, and the rule of law. Secondly, corruption, which was high even at that time, had eaten deep into governance and the lives of the populace generally, and therefore the government lost the confidence of the people. Thirdly, and probably most importantly, Nigeria's instability made it almost impossible for the country to forge a semblance of national unity that transcended ethnic, regional, religious, and economic interests in spite of her attempt to forge a unified nation out of diverse regional, ethnic, and religious groups through a federal structure of government whose leadership changed more than twelve times since independence mostly through military coups.

The public debate on the IMF initiated by the Babangida government led to nationwide demonstrations in May 1989 to reject the IMF loan, and the IMF-type SAP being proposed. The protests were matched by "brutal state suppression that resulted in loss of lives and property" (Garba Ganger et al., 1998: p.101). The government of General Sani Abacha which came almost immediately after Babangida's did not deviate from the SAP policies it inherited. According to Ganger et al "the Abacha administration wholly adopted the SAP even though there were some policy interjections" (1998: p.106).

SAP was introduced to address problems in the Nigerian economy, but according to John Perkins it was not done to help the people, but rather, "it was one part of the struggle for world domination and the dream of a few greedy men, global empire" (2004: p.xvii). Explaining further, he writes "in many countries, economic growth benefits only a small

portion of the population and may in fact result in increasingly desperate circumstances for the majority” (p.xii). The implementation of structural adjustment programmes by the IMF/World Bank imposes conditionality on the already heavily indebted borrower country, and by insisting on politically difficult conditionality in the implementation of economic reforms, the IMF/World Bank sets the tone for authoritarian and dictatorial tendencies, causing regimes that were already pre-disposed to such excesses, to resort to even more repressive measures in carrying through adjustment reforms. The state, now desperate to meet IMF’s conditionality, turns against its own people. Claude Eke is of the opinion that “There is no way of implementing the structural adjustment programme without political repression” (1990: p. 62). Bonny Ibhawoh concurs when he asserts that “Irrespective of IMF/World Bank ideals, the reality in Africa is that a certain measure of repression and authoritarian rule is indispensable to its implementation” (1999: p.160). Indeed, Adebayo Olukoshi sums it up when he attests to the fact that “structural adjustment and the most brutal experience of military dictatorship in Nigeria’s history took place at the same time” (2003: p.7).

SAP, as implemented and experienced in Nigeria, was a failure. The living conditions of the common man rather than improve, deteriorated significantly. Said Adejumo states that:

At no time in the Nigerian post-colonial history has the level of the socio-economic crisis been as profound as under the regime of structural adjustment programme (SAP). Virtually all social sectors were hit hard, either entering a comatose state or declining substantially in performance. (2003: p.227)

To reemphasize Adejumo’s postulation, this failure was not just an economic failure but a social and political failure too, and because this failure encompassed all areas of Nigerian life, Parselelo Kantai refers to it as the “big sleep”. He is of the opinion that “the big sleep came in the mid-1980s when Nigeria took its first ‘austerity’ measures loan from the IMF. It precipitated massive job losses in the private sector and a sharp drop in foreign investment” (2007: p.27). Continuing with this line of thought, Abiola Ogundokun writes that “many countries that have been dangled with the IMF carrot hardly survive, even when they are healed, the scars remain” (2000: p.8).

Bad governance brings about a decline in the social life of the governed and this generally leads to social crisis and any people caught up in this crisis have their lives affected by it. Brian-Vincent Ikejiaku is of the opinion that “the policies of IMF’s SAP and the sovereign governments of the west have inflicted social/environmental damage, political unrest, conflicts, insecurity and sufferings on Nigerians” (2008: p.4). Indeed, it would seem that the turbulent history of the 1980s and the 1990s served as an impetus to third-generation Nigerian writing. The thematic concerns of the present generation of Nigerian writing, reveal the writers grappling with the social and political fallouts of SAP as outlined above by Ikejiaku in their exploration of the Nigerian experience.

This overview of the historical background of SAP in Nigeria is not geared towards an examination of the success or failure of the Nigerian state in implementing the policy. This study recognizes that good governance is a necessary prerequisite for effective economic reform, but our concern in this chapter is with identifying the social fallout of the SAP process as it is reflected in literature. We proceed in the next section to examine Atta’s presentation of the social fallout of the SAP experience, especially from the perspective of the aggrieved populace.

#### *4.2 The Perception of SAP in Everything Good will Come*

As we noted in the section above, General Buhari took over power from the civilian regime of Shehu Shagari in 1984. Buhari’s government like all military governments in Nigeria suspended the constitution and introduced some decrees. After the coup in 1984, Enitan says her father was wary of the new military government and when reports started coming in, it became obvious why. There were:

Floggings for jumping queues; squats for government workers who came late to work; a compulsory sanitation day to stay at home and dust; military tribunals for ex-politicians; Decree Two, under which persons suspected of acts prejudicial to state security could be detained without charge; Decree Four, under which journalists could be arrested and imprisoned for publishing information about public officials. (pp.77-78)

These dictatorial traits set the tone for the activities of the military regime. The government put some austerity measures in place and this made the economic conditions that were initially bad to become worse. General Babangida took over as head of state from Buhari in 1985 and he ruled the country with an iron fist. The socio-economic situation in the country took a turn for the worse after the military regime of Babangida adopted the IMF/World Bank sponsored SAP program.

The character Peter Mukoro in *Everything Good will Come*, introduces the discussion on SAP when he predicts the demise of the country under the military. He talks about the SAP matter of factly. He says the military is planning to devalue the naira, to scrap foreign currency regulations, and take the IMF loan (p.120). For Mukoro, taking the IMF loan and adopting the SAP reforms is a form of colonialism whereby Nigeria is giving up its independence by kow-towing to the dictates of the West (p.121). This is an argument Harold Nyikal promotes when he says that colonialism is not over as such:

There is merely a new form of colonialism, by the same western countries, masked under the pretext of economic support for Africa, directly enforced or institutionalized in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The policies enforced on poor African countries through these organizations have chained Africa to continued dependence on western economies for mere subsistence, by preventing self-help to the continent's economic problems. ("Neo-colonialism in Africa," 2005)

From the foregoing, the SAP provides obvious encouragement to the fostering of an indulgent, dependent capitalist development model whereby government retained very little control of the economy, which made it dependent on the mercy of 'advanced nations'.

Subscribing to SAP reforms, Mukoro says, will cause Nigeria to fail as a nation and her currency as valueless as toilet paper (p.121). This, according to Adaobi Nwuabani in her novel *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, made the naira "useless and powerless" (2010: p.17). In making this statement, Mukoro uses the toilet paper as a metaphor for a fragile economy. The economy becomes fragile because the government took the loan anyway and devalued the naira. The devaluation of the naira meant inflation was at an all-time high and the cost of living skyrocketed. The debilitating effects of the economic crisis and of SAP for

the majority of the population, especially in regards to social sector programs made essential services such as health care, power, education and access to water inaccessible to the people.

Enitan describes the situation and gives a grim picture: “People died because they couldn’t afford an intravenous drip. People died because they drank contaminated water. People died from hardship: no light no water [...]. People died because they got up one morning and realised they were ghettoized, impoverished” (p.182). Enitan’s statement echoes the speech Joshua gives during the protest in Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* where he says “our clinic is run-down and abandoned; [...] we don’t have a single borehole on Morgan Street [...] our schools are overcrowded, and our children have to buy their own seats and tables (p.132). Indeed, the novels under study here are replete with depictions of the deplorable state of the nation, and they tie them to the state of the economy during the 80s-90s.

Atta’s depiction of the impact of the SAP on the people is overt. Her style is straightforward, her ideas are well-expressed and her scenes vivid. Describing how bad things were, Enitan says schools were underfunded with classes teeming with children and lacking teachers. The classrooms were unpainted and some were without windows and doors (p.124) Indeed, Babalola et. al .(1999), in their study on SAP, observe that it had some devastating effects on education, especially on public expenditure, the purchasing power of teachers, quality of education, access to education and the gender gap in the provision of education at all levels (p.79).

Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* also gives us a picture of the downward trend in education due to challenges caused by the SAP. (p.76). Illustrating the level to which things had deteriorated Ifeoma talks about reduction in the funding of education in the national budget. This meant there was a decrease in research funding or some forms of research could not be undertaken, staff salaries when they were paid were not regular, and services that were the prerogative of the staff and students such as medical care and meal subsidies became non-existent. Adichie provides a two-part explication of the kinds of deterioration that are apparent here. First, there is intellectual deterioration and, secondly, there is infrastructural deterioration. Hence, because of the challenges staff faced in the discharge of their duties, many of them left for ‘greener pastures’ abroad. Students, on the other hand, take to strikes and protests to challenge the failings of the government (p.222). There were others like one of Ifeoma’s

students, who chose to get married because “when her fiancé learned of yet another university closure, he had told her he could no longer wait until she graduated, since nobody knew when the university would reopen” (p.228).

Thieves scale the fence into Sunny Taiwo’s house and steal the chairs in the garden. Relating the incident to Enitan, Sunny expresses anger at the occurrence. However, his anger is not directed at the thieves but rather at the military establishment whom he blames for creating a situation which pushes people to become thieves. He says his anger is “about what is happening to our country. Men who fish for a living becoming robbers. We are in trouble” (p.104). In narrating the theft, Atta explores the reality of the social woes brought about by the SAP in the 80s-90s. She presents an environment where people are forced to suffer under economic repression and poverty which makes them vulnerable to moral depravity as a survival mechanism.

The economic situation created a culture of dependency whereby people are financially dependent on others. Enitan’s mother was dependent on her husband for sustenance, although she was a trained secretary. Enitan had always thought her mother chose to depend on her father, because she wanted to, until she also finds herself dependent on him. He bought the car she drives and she lives with him because rent in Lagos was high. She could not afford to rent a place of her own on the salary she earned as a lawyer. She curses the “economy that didn’t give me freedom to sustain myself” (p.145). Sunny, in a conversation with Enitan tells her she is spoiled: “at your age, I’d bought my house already, I’d started my practice. I was supporting my parents. Yes. Not the other way around” (p.135). Enitan observes that:

At his age there was less competition for lawyers. At his age there wasn’t an economic recession in our country. It was easier to be a kingpin, and most professionals from his generation were. They substituted the colonialists’ sir-and-madamism for theirs, stood by while military men led us into a black hole. Now, we their children were dependent on them. (p.135)

From the foregoing, the SAP and its economic stabilization policies did not only worsen the living conditions of the people, but also created a dependent generation.

Atta presents the military as callous and as doing what they want regardless of how it affects the people because they have no respect for them (p.77). Wary of the military, Sunny expresses the general attitude of Nigerians when he states that “these military boys don’t care. They step in with one policy or the other; suspend the constitution, mess up our law with their decrees [...]. I am sure they’re deliberately trying to ruin the country” (p.104). Referring to the military as ‘boys’ suggests that like the character Mother of Prison, Sunny sees them as not having any “ounce of sense in their heads” (p.257). He refers to the military as ‘boys’ when he wonders how long the present regime would last before there is a coup (p.66). Atta creates an extended metaphoric structure deployed around the symbolism of childhood to show how bereft of a sense of responsibility the military was.

The next section seeks to examine how the government, because of its authoritarian nature, especially in its implementation of its policies, increasingly lost popular support which in turn encouraged it to use suppression rather than persuasion to stay in power in its bid to continue the enforcement of the SAP.

#### *4.3 The Repressive Nature of the Military during the Period of Adjustment*

As we noted in our introduction to this chapter, the Babangida administration, which adopted and implemented the policy, had initiated a public debate that rejected the SAP, but the government adopted it anyway. Therefore, from the outset the manner in which SAP was implemented in Nigeria was a challenge to the advancement of human rights, indeed, as we have also noted, SAP and human rights were inherently incompatible goals.

The character Sunny Taiwo in a show of contempt for the military says, “one hundred million of us, less than ten thousand of them and they want to run the country [...] like a club that belongs to them? [...]. Then they tell us [...]. Tell us we can’t talk? We can’t say anything, or we’ll be locked up?” (p.184). Sunny’s diatribe makes it obvious that the military operated outside of constitutional limits and exercised power that was unrestrained by institutional checks and balances. It thus becomes evident why he had concluded that the military “do whatever they want; the power of a constitution comes from the respect people give it. If they don’t, then it is words on paper. Nothing else” (p.77).

Another strategy used by the military governments of the era of SAP to ensure the continued marginalization of the people was the censorship of the press. The government's abuse of power and its arrogance, which is made evident in the moral depravity of the rulers and the powerlessness of the ruled, is particularly underlined in contemporary Nigerian writing's treatment of government's consistent censoring of the press. Atta like Ndibe, exposes how the state uses silence as a weapon of oppression in the public sphere. Whole arenas of national consciousness were silenced by the government in the manner that certain actions of the police or military, statements and writings by 'banned persons', and the activities of pressure groups and other organizations were made inaccessible to the people.

The journalists Peter Mukoro and Grace Ameh in Atta's novel either get arrested, or have to go into hiding to avoid arrest. The government, on the other hand, always falls back on either "Decree Two, under which persons suspected of acts prejudicial to state security could be detained without charge, or Decree Four, under which journalists could be arrested and imprisoned for publishing any information about public officials" (pp.77-78) to censor and control the press. Grace Ameh describes the situation:

Our reporters are being dragged in every week, no explanation given. They are kept in detention for weeks, questioned, or they are left alone, which I am told is worse. Nobody speaks to you in detention, you see. If you don't cooperate, they transfer you to a prison somewhere else, packed with inmates. Sick inmates. You may end up with pneumonia, tuberculosis, and you won't get proper medical attention. Jaundice, diarrhoea - food in Nigerian prisons isn't very good. (p.206)

The repressive nature of the military which is a challenge to the advancement of human rights is extended from the public to the private sphere. This is made most evident in the relationship between Brigadier Hassan and Sheri. Enitan describes him as a man who "collected ponies and women as young as his daughters" (p.100). The Brigadier is Sheri's 'sugar daddy'. He confines her to the apartment he rented for her, and imposes various restrictions on her to the point that "she limited her involvement in the family business to please her brigadier" (p.157). Enitan finds him to be "one of the military men who deprived her of my rights" (p.105). It is interesting that Enitan sees the brigadier as someone who deprived her of her rights, even though she did not have a personal relationship with him. The notion that the oppression of one person by the military is the oppression of all is the idea Atta explores in *Everything Good will Come* in her treatment of the brigadier. Indeed, this

idea permeates the novels that form our corpus. Ndibe's Bukuru, Habila's Lomba and Adichie's Achike family are synecdoches for the nation. These writers use their imagination as a site for the exploration of the idea that the individual's experience is that of the nation. This is because as Ngugi had said earlier on, "a nation's literature which is a sum total of the products of many individuals in that society is [...] both a reflection on that people's collective reality and also an embodiment of that people's way of looking at the world and their place in it" (1997: p.5).

#### 4.4 Conclusion

*Everything Good will Come* underscores the challenges created by the socio-economic condition of the Nigerian nation state in the 80s and 90s. It is a straightforwardly realist narrative which reflects the manner military authority interrupts and affects development. This chapter sought to examine Sefi Atta's novel *Everything Good will Come* and to establish a link between the military's economic policy of SAP and the adverse social challenges experienced during the era of military rule in the 80s - 90s. In this chapter's examination and evaluation of SAP, we have not made a distinction between the impact of SAP and external factors such as oil prices and Nigeria's debt burden. Firstly, this is because this study is solely a literary endeavour and although SAP is an economic issue, it is only examined in relation to its representation in literature. Secondly, this chapter sees SAP as an off shoot of these external shocks and, therefore, while SAP might not be the only contributing factor to the social crises experienced at the time, it is this study's contention that SAP brought about an increase in the infrastructural and super-structural deformities experienced at the time. Indeed, the adoption of the SAP is an example of how military regimes implement new policies without any regard for the people especially given the significant hardship government's actions can cause the people. The cumulative result of reading Atta's novel in this manner, therefore, allows this study to draw up some tentative conclusions about contemporary fiction as it is emerging in Nigeria, especially in its engagement with the nation especially in the period of the 80s-90s.

## Chapter Five

### **Dictatorship, Alienation and the Trauma of Everyday Life in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus***

#### *5.0 Introduction*

The novels chosen for examination in this study all engage with the traumatic recent past of the 1980s-990s, when Nigeria was governed by a series of military dictatorships. The writers chosen for this study deploy their craft to reflect their perception of society through the way they write about it, showing a connection between literature and socio-historical realities. These writers give expression to the despondency that has been the bane of the Nigerian nation state, especially during the 80s-90s. The novels, as we have seen thus far in the study, present social facts in the polity in their reconstruction of the atmosphere and reality of military rule in Nigeria at the time. What these writers do is show a “reflection of reality” (Wellek and Warren, 1963: p.239), as they reveal the “state of their society” (Lindfors, 1982: p.8).

According to Emmanuel Obiechina, “Out of every serious crisis in the life of a people, there comes a deepening insight into the true nature of man and human society” (1975: p.vi). The novels that reconstruct the military experience in Nigeria, for example Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), all stem from the tragic experience of military rule in Nigeria. Military rule and dictatorship are recurring themes in the novels under examination in this study and we see the writers engaging with these phenomena to give to us insights which permit an understanding of the legacies of colonialism, and the failures of national leadership.

Although the novels in our corpus engage with dictatorship, alienation, and the trauma of everyday life, we choose to examine these concepts in Adichie's novel for two main reasons. Firstly, we read Adichie's novel as an allegory. This gives us an opening to examine how she engages with oppression as emanating from the micro level of the home and translates it to the macro level of the state. The story in *Purple Hibiscus* is therefore, the story of the

Achikes, on the one hand, and the story of the Nigerian nation state, on the other.<sup>1</sup> These two stories show how the character of the dictator and the nation in Adichie's novel, are reflective of the Nigerian nation state during the era of the 80s-90s. Secondly, we argue that Adichie's novel brings more forcefully to us the trauma that underlines the narrative of the 80s-90s than the other novels that form the corpus for this study. This is made evident in the way Adichie's novel reveals the dynamics of power in the 80s-90s as it shows how specific relationships are marked by the socio-political environment and the ideologies that guide it.

Adichie's engagement with the Nigerian situation of the period is illustrative of her desire to use her work to examine the social fabric of the postcolonial nation state. Isidore Diala has argued that "The core of Nigerian literature, the various artistic modes of expression quite apart, is the lived experience of the people and thus the indispensable social commitment of the writer is the filter through which their peculiar image of the human situation is represented" (2011: p.5). The difficulties that Nigerians experienced from colonial times, and which continue through neo-colonial control, into the present time, are at the heart of contemporary Nigerian writing. Adichie, in her novel, uses specific ideological persuasions and certain aesthetic modes to capture the people's experiences under military rule. Thus, like her contemporaries, she has continued with the tradition of "writing back to the Empire in the classic fashion of postcolonial textualities" (Eze, 2005: p.110). Her focus on Nigeria during the era of military rule, highlights the harrowing socio-political environment of the time, and contests the power of the oppressor, as it aims to assert its authority over the oppressed subject.

In our engagement with the period under study, the concepts of history and memory are particularly important: dictatorship and alienation as represented by Adichie are tied to a particular time in history and are revealed through her characters and her recollection of the peculiarities of the period. The events Adichie relates in her novel are related to us through the experiences of the character Kambili, and the world she represents to us is a blending of familial and national experiences. We are, therefore, presented, on the one hand, with the story of the Achike family, who are held within the confining walls of their family home by a father who exerts absolute, tyrannical control over them, and on the other hand, we have a

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<sup>11</sup> The idea that the story of the individual is also that of the nation runs through this study. Characters are recognized as symbols, and synecdoche's of the nation.

corrupt military government exhibiting the same kind of control and influence over the people.

Critical responses to *Purple Hibiscus* invite a reading of the novel under various themes. Most notably, it has been read as a novel on childhood (Oha, 2007 Hron, 2008 and Ouma 2011), a coming of age tale (Tigner, 2007 and Okuyade, 2011), a novel on feminism (Andrade, 2011), a novel on history and ideology (Tunca, 2009, Ogwude, 2011 and Udumukwu, 2011) and a novel on identity (Smit, 2009). A reading of Adichie's novel as an allegory is not overtly evident in the critical works we have outlined above. This chapter therefore makes a case for Adichie's novel to be read as an allegory whereby the story of the individual is recognized as the story of the nation. We make the point that the Achike household is representative of the Nigerian nation and that the character, Eugene, epitomizes the nation's tyrannical rulers of the time. We do this because the situation of the Achike's mirrors Nigeria's struggle against the oppressive and corrupt military regimes of the 80s-90s. Indeed, as Anthony Oha, points out in his analysis of *Purple Hibiscus*, "the tyrannical trauma of the military and anarchical leadership is x-rayed beyond the micro setting of the family to the macro setting of the society" (2007: p.199).

Also, in its engagement with dictatorship and alienation, this chapter examines how the novel narrates the traumatic experiences that characterized not only the daily life of the Achike household but also that of the larger Nigerian populace. This study underscores the notion that the era of the 80s-90s was defined by the experiences of oppression, powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation. It was also a period of profound trauma brought on by the excesses of the military regimes of the time and this is particularly apparent in *Purple Hibiscus*. Trauma in this study is seen as an indicator of social injustice or oppression, as the ultimate cost of destructive sociocultural institutions (Vickroy, 2002: p.x). The examination of the ideas that inform this chapter follows the specific strands of argument delineated below.

Firstly, the chapter observes that by meticulous attention to the detail of everyday life in the Achike household, Adichie, to borrow the words of Walter Benjamin, "carries the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life" (2006: p.364) in her presentation of the hypocritical and draconian manner in which Eugene Achike rules his family. Secondly, as Julia Casterton suggests, "every society requires its witnesses: those

who are not afraid to render and preserve in words the range and scope of human experience for [a] time and [a] place” (1986: p.10). Adichie acts as one of the witnesses of her generation as she skilfully brings her own interpretations to the theme of political critique. She moves from an engagement with the micro-politics of personal relations to an engagement with the macro-politics of the state and in the process lays bare the complex intersections between the two. Indeed, as we shall see shortly, by engaging with Eugene Achike’s display of monolithic power and connecting it with that of the military during the 80s-90s, Adichie is simultaneously helping to shape the social imagination and at the same time engage with a traumatic history. She depicts the peculiarities of the period through her characters’ consciousness and we are guided through the narrative by her memory<sup>2</sup> of this time, which is reconstructed through her imaginations. This gives us access to an experience that was traumatic.

*Purple Hibiscus* critiques the violence associated with military rule and patriarchal domination. Its representation of oppression and suffering in a post-colonial patriarchal Nigerian context gives it the characteristic of being imbued with trauma. Trauma narratives according to Laurie Vickroy:

Go beyond presenting trauma as subject matter or character study. They internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures. They reveal many obstacles to communicating such experience: silence, simultaneous knowledge and denial, dissociation, resistance, and repression among others. (2002: p.3)

Bearing Vickroy’s observation in mind, our engagement with trauma in *Purple Hibiscus* involves an engagement with notions such as silence, belatedness, possession or haunting which are responses to trauma. This study identifies these as emanating, firstly, from Kambili’s reaction to her father’s excesses and, secondly, from the collective experience of oppressive military rule that we encounter in the novel. We examine, on the one hand, how the experience of trauma on the individual level damages the psyche and, on the other hand, how its consequences are destructive on the collective level.

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<sup>2</sup> Giving a talk in 2009, Adichie says “I grew up under repressive military governments [...] a kind of normalised political fear invaded our lives.”

### 5.1 A Reading of *Purple Hibiscus* as an Allegory

Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, tells his son Oduche that "the world is like a mask dancing, if you want to see it well you do not stand in one place" (1964: p.46). Like the mask dancing, an investigation of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* in this chapter will not be done "standing in one place". In considering a family as an allegory of a nation, this study aims to move to a vantage point where we can see more of the 'picture' in Adichie's novel. Our reading of the novel is done bearing in mind what she refers to as "the danger of a single story". In a TED talk in 2009, Adichie explains how impressionable and vulnerable we can be in the face of a story.<sup>3</sup> She argues that it is not possible to engage properly with any story without engaging with all the things that formed the story. The single story, she says, is "incomplete" and makes "one story become the only story". In pursuance of what Chinua Achebe calls a "balance of stories" ("An African Voice," 2000, online), this study posits that there is more than one perspective to the story Adichie tells in her novel. To come to a conclusion from only one perspective prevents us from making the most of all that the story can offer.

In his essay 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital', Fredric Jameson presents a case for reading third world literature as allegory. He argues that third-world literature is "necessarily [...] allegorical and should thus be read as national allegories". He further posits that "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society" (1986: p.69). We are cognizant of arguments by some critics that the 'the third world' is varied and culturally complex and, thus, there are drawbacks to this kind of position. Indeed, Aijaz Ahmad contradicts Jameson's postulation and argues that "there is no such thing as a 'third-world literature' which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge" (1987: p.4). He posits that there are instead fundamental issues of periodization, social and linguistic formations, political and ideological struggles within a field of literary production and these cannot be resolved at the level of generality (1987: p.4).

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<sup>3</sup> TED stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design. The Sapling Foundation through the TED.com, TED prize and TEDx events, run a number of non-profit set of global conferences annually to share ideas with the world.

However, despite certain problematic elements in Jameson's essay, the notion that third-world texts are allegorical in nature is helpful to this study and we draw on it to investigate the relationship between the individual and the nation, given that Adichie's novel invites such a reading. Indeed, throughout the narrative, there are references to real life events in the Nigerian nation state which connect with what is happening in everyday life in the Achike household: the curtailing of the rights of the people, the restrictions placed on their movements and activities, the imposition of fear, as well as the physical assault on the people. Eugene Achike parallels the despotic military leader; the members of the Achike household, Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili parallel the people of Nigeria; the Catholic Church as represented by the priests parallel the West; and Pa Nnukwu, Eugene's father, parallels the values of the past which have been rejected by Eugene. Therefore, Eugene Achike is conceived as a nation's tyrannical ruler, his household is a metonym for the nation and his family signify the dehumanised citizens of that nation. This approach makes the individual's experience the national experience as the former is interpreted to be national. As Ayo Kehinde argues: "*Purple Hibiscus* captures the socio-political foibles of a neo-colonial African country [...]. [I]t invokes the Nigerian political landscape powerfully" (2010: p.18).

As stated above, we read the individual's experience in parallel with that of the nation because the life experiences of the Achikes in *Purple Hibiscus* are constructed in such a way that they open out into the truth of the nation.<sup>4</sup> We are, however, mindful of the complex relationship between individual and national experiences. Indeed, as Smit, states:

The relationship between individual experiences and the truth of the nation is an intricate and complicated one. Analysing such a relationship in terms of a singular and all-encompassing theoretical framework might result in a misreading of a text's engagement with personal and individual becoming on one hand, and with national-political concerns on the other. (2009: p.21)

The linkages between the personal and the national are therefore investigated solely for the reasons stated above. Adichie's text invites being read as allegorical and her characters' experiences open up into the truth of the nation. As an allegorical reading of Adichie's novel

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<sup>4</sup> The study borrows this idea from Frantz Fanon, who in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, promotes the view that the individual experience is national and it opens out into the truth of the nation (2001: p.200).

is the platform on which this chapter is built, it is crucial that we define what the word allegory means and how it is applied to our interpretation of *Purple Hibiscus*.

Johan Goethe suggests that “allegory is a method of deriving the particular from the general” (cited in McGee 1992: p.151). Allegory for Walter Benjamin reflects a cultural situation in which “any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else [...] in the field of allegorical intuition” (1992: p.175). McGee, on the other hand, suggests that “allegory arises in a culture for which the real world has become meaningless, devoid of intrinsic value, fragmented yet mysterious” (1992: p.151). He further explains that “the allegorist merely arranges the fragments of this world, its images; in order to produce a meaning the fragments could not produce by themselves - a meaning irreducible simply to the intention of the allegorist but reproducing his or her relation to the given historical context” (p.151).

An initial reading of the story of Eugene Achike’s family that Adichie relates in her novel reveals the story of a family in distress. But there are fragments in *Purple Hibiscus* which, when positioned side by side, produce an image of Nigeria that is reminiscent of the historical period of the 80s-90s. It is only when the story of this family is juxtaposed with the story of the nation that the connections between the family and the nation become evident. We draw on the ideas promoted by Goethe, Benjamin and McGee because, in Adichie’s narration of the world of Eugene Achike and his family, a story emerges that is not only the story of a family.

Craig Owens claims that allegorical writing involves the doubling or reproducing of textual material since the allegorical sign always refers to a previous or anterior sign (1980: p.68). Allegory is enabled in what Paul de Man calls a “rhetoric of temporality” (1969: p.175); in other words, an awareness of the passage of time is at the heart of allegory (Slemon, 1988: p.158). Frank Lentricchia supports De Man’s reading of allegory as ‘rhetoric of temporality’, when he states that “it is the essence of the allegorical sign to refer to a previous sign which by definition is ‘pure anteriority’” (1980: p.293). Because of this, allegorical writing is understood in this study to be inherently involved with the interrogation of history. In paying

attention to the historical content of our text, we understand history as discourse, as a way of seeing, or as a code for recognition. By engaging with historical events we open history up to the transformative power of the imagination.

A reading of *Purple Hibiscus* as an allegory requires that we engage with three notions: fiction, history and the reader. We do this, firstly, because allegory in Adichie's novel is represented in a way that through fiction we are given access to history. Thus, through this fictional narrative, the reader is taken back in time to the period of military rule, dictatorship and repression. This is made obvious, in the way the excesses of the Nigerian military juntas of the 80s-90s are highlighted and symbolically represented in the rigid religiosity and brutal force we encounter in the Achike household. Also, given that the reader's interpretation of a text is central to its examination, the position of the reader is important in allegory. In fact, Maureen Quilligan goes as far as to argue that the reader is actually the central character in the allegorical text (1979: p.226). The reader in this study is, therefore, important given that it is sometimes through their viewpoint that we can identify angles that are different from the ones presented by the author.

## *5.2 Dictatorship and Alienation: A Definition*

*Purple Hibiscus* dramatizes the operation of power and also its precariousness. Centred on the high-handed and abusive character Eugene Achike and set during the rule of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha in the 80s-90s, the novel unmasks the intrinsic fallibility of power (Spencer, 2012: p.139). As a result of Adichie's ability in this novel to mimic the power and authority of the dictator in her presentation of Eugene Achike, this study reads *Purple Hibiscus* as a dictator novel. This genre, with roots in Latin American literature, exposes and challenges amongst other things the role of the dictator in society. One of the defining characteristics of this form of the novel and which is important to our examination of Adichie's text is that it has strong political themes. It also draws on historical accounts in critically examining the power exercised by an authoritarian figure. It is also important to this chapter how Adichie exposes the impossibility of absolute power by undermining the power of the dictator.

This study identifies dictatorship as outlined in Adichie's novel to be influenced by two factors: the legacies of colonialism and the failures of national leadership. Indeed, the character Ifeoma attests to this idea explicitly when, in reference to her brother Eugene, she says he "was too much of a colonial product" (p.13). To engage with the different ways in which undemocratic power manifests itself in Africa, how it is presented in its literature, and the diverse ways in which it is being resisted by the people, there is a need for a "forceful emphasis", to borrow Robert Spencer's words (2012: p.147), on the connection shared by the markers "colonialism" and "neo-colonialism". Spencer suggests that in order to understand dictatorship's prevalence in Africa, the pervasiveness and durability of colonialism should be the starting point (2012: p.149). The foundations on which dictatorship flourished were, therefore, established when the colonial state in Africa undermined pre-colonial institutions and appropriated powers to itself. Spencer posits that the legacies of colonialism are a form of dictatorship which has not yet been brought to an end. These legacies include:

Dearth of civic morality, the use of the state to control the populace and put down revolts, the weakness or non-existence of democratic institutions, the idea that politics is a squabble for positions of privilege, the subordination of the economy of get-rich-quick export schemes and the manipulation of ethnic divisions. (2012: p.149)

Alienation was a central feature of the early writings of Karl Marx, but in these present times, this term is referred to across a broad range of subjects such as theology, philosophy, sociology, psychology and psychiatry. Indeed, because alienation encompasses a wide range of meanings, the context in which it is used needs to be defined for it to be understood.

The theologian understands alienation to mean removing oneself from God, the philosopher sees it as shutting oneself away from the world, social critics may see it as rejecting the accepted traditions and customs of a society or refusing to participate in socio-political activities at any level and psychologists can interpret it to mean the splitting of the mind into conflicting components (Nwaegbe, 2013: p.17).

According to Richard Schacht, Karl Marx conceptualized alienation as the separation of the worker from ownership of their work, and he distinguishes three forms of alienation: alienation from the product of work, alienation in the process of production, and alienation

from society (2015: p. 178). Max Weber's treatment of the concept of alienation is similar to the one attributed to Marx; he views alienation as emerging from a perceived lack of freedom and control at work (1946: p.50). Emile Durkheim sees alienation as a consequence of the condition of *anomie*, which he sees as arising when there is a breakdown of the standards by which society is run, leading to a situation of normlessness (1951: p.100). Louis Horowitz suggests that alienation implies an intense separation first from objects of the world, second from people, and third from ideas about the world held by other people (1966: p.88). The core meaning of the concept of alienation has also been identified with a dissociative state or a sense of separation in relation to some other element in one's environment (Schacht, 1970; Kanungo, 1979).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that alienation as a concept has lent itself to various definitions and therefore has generated considerable confusion over its meanings and usage. The definitions of alienation we have examined thus far refer to it as an estrangement from the self, or allude to it as the sense of separation or dissociative state or disengagement from work, people, and some other elements in the environment. Since the most basic understanding of alienation involves a separation or estrangement and, given the varying targets of this separation, alienation is defined here as estrangement or disconnection from work, the environment or the self (Nair and Vohra, 2009: p.2). Melvin Seeman, in his seminal work 'On the Meaning of Alienation', identifies feelings that reveal alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement (1959: p.786). This chapter will incorporate three of these attributes of alienation, powerlessness, normlessness and social isolation as they aptly reflect the alienating conditions we find in Adichie's novel.

In the following section, we turn our attention to our reading of *Purple Hibiscus* as a novel on dictatorship. We examine the military state's attempts to control the nation, in parallel with Eugene's dictatorial control over his family, and present a reading of the novel that is built on its use of allegory, satire and parody, in its narrative form. Our reading of the novel demonstrates how Adichie's novel narrates the politics of a family while representing the story of a nation, and in the process systematically critiques and resists authoritarian rule.

### 5.3 Dictatorship in *Purple Hibiscus*

Contemporary Nigerian writing is preceded by an already established body of work on dictatorship in Nigerian literature. The most notable Nigerian dictator novel is Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), in which he narrates an experience of military dictatorship in the fictional West African country of Kangan. The narration is centred on three friends who after a military coup find themselves at the helm of affairs in Kangan and in the process lose their friendship. The dictator Sam, who is also known as His Excellency, is surrounded by an executive council that encourages his autocratic behaviour by instilling fear and suspicion in him. He turns his back on his friends Chris and Ikem and the people of Kangan. By demanding confirmation that forbids contradiction, he turns into a dictator and a tyrant. Achebe, in this novel, presents the problems of the post-colonial African nation state as emanating from "the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the brushed heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being" (1987: pp.130-131). Achebe, thus, places the responsibility for the deplorable state of the nation on the shoulders of the national leaders, whom he depicts as having abandoned the struggle for the liberation of the people from colonial and now neo-colonial influences in favour of conceited greed that reduces the nation state to the personal domain of the leader.

Our reference to Achebe's novel *Anthills of the Savannah* is highly relevant as Adichie pays tribute to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the opening lines of *Purple Hibiscus*, and also contributes to the conversation he starts on dictatorship in *Anthills of the Savannah*.<sup>5</sup> While this chapter does not seek to engage directly in mapping out the intertextual relationship between Achebe and Adichie, it finds it pertinent to make reference to *Anthills of the Savannah* in order to locate Adichie's position in the discourse on dictatorship in Nigeria.

Adichie's novel develops its potent critique of the mechanisms of dictatorial rule not only through its content, but more particularly through its form. The beginning of the novel, where Jaja defies his father Eugene by not partaking of the Holy Communion during Mass, makes it evident that the form of the novel mimics and deconstructs the authority of the dictator. The confrontation between Eugene and Jaja which chronologically belongs in the middle of the

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<sup>5</sup> Adichie has been described in Nigerian literary circles as the 21<sup>st</sup> century daughter of Achebe. Indeed, Adichie has acknowledged Achebe as a source of inspiration in her writing. Evident in her work, especially *Purple Hibiscus*, is a modelling of the character Eugene Achike on Achebe's characters Okonkwo and Ezeulu in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* respectively

novel creates the expectation of a direct challenge to Eugene's authority. This beginning is significant as the conflict between Eugene and Jaja pre-emptively colours our sense of his power. This exchange between father and son introduces the notion of hegemony, which this chapter identifies as a central idea in the discourse of dictatorship in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Adichie spins an in-depth tale of a family and the nation, which is related by a single narrative voice, that of the character Kambili. The temperamental Eugene is the domestic equivalent of the nation's tyrannical ruler and the rest of the family are his subjects.<sup>6</sup> The narrative is told in the first person through the consciousness of a child at the threshold of her teenage years. We are introduced to the military almost immediately in the text with the announcement of a military coup. Kambili tells us that "there had been a coup and that we had a new government" (p.24). Eugene reveals that "coups beget coups" (p.24), which lays emphasis on the vicious cycles of coups, especially their tendency to be bloody. He sees no justification for coups and claims that the military "always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk" (p.24). *Everything Good will Come* and *Waiting for Angel* present similar sentiments about the military. Sunny Taiwo, in Atta's novel, tells Enitan after the announcement of a coup that the constitution had been suspended because the military could do whatever it wanted. He talks about the floggings, military tribunals and a myriad of decrees (p.77). In the same vein, an unnamed narrator in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* tells us about a coup. He talks about the streets being taken over by military tanks and jeeps, people locking their doors, turning off their lights and peering fearfully through chinks in their windows at the rain-washed and post-coup d'état streets (p.37). The writers in our corpus in their narratives of the 80s-90s, express the same sentiment; the military operates on the basis that 'might is right'.

In the particular Nigerian experience of military rule during the 80s and 90s, the state became totalitarian in its attempt to regulate the public and sometimes private behaviour of the people. Indeed the Babangida and Abacha regimes were by nature dictatorships as they governed without the consent of the people. *Purple Hibiscus* captures social reality and, at the same time, the novel's central characters function as allegorical vehicles. There is no opposition, though, between realism and allegory in the novel, as allegory helps Adichie to capture social reality in a deeper sense by showing the distance between the reader and the

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<sup>6</sup> It is ironical though that Eugene opposes the regime given that in his treatment of his family, he is as tyrannical as the regime.

banal discourse promoted by the state (Gikandi, 2003: p. 238). The dictatorial regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha in the Nigeria of the 1980s-1990s, parallel Eugene Achike's control over his family.

The parallel between the actions of the military towards the people and those of Eugene's towards his family members is evident in the inhuman way the people and the family members are treated respectively. Eugene rules his household like a tyrant. Adichie juxtaposes this attitude with that of the tyrannical military head of state Abacha who was in power at the time the story is set. The activist Nwankiti Ogechi is murdered by the state and Kambili tells us "Soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in a bush in Minna. And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead" (p.198). Eugene's treatment of his children is no less inhuman. Relating an incident in which she was being punished by her father, Kambili says "I felt fear, stinging and raw; fill my bladder and my ears. I did not know what he was going to do to me [...]. He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it towards my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly" (pp.190-191). Both Eugene and the military are presented as unforgiving and vindictive. Given that entreaties had been made by Human Rights organisations for Ogechi's release, and Achike's children were not in any way at fault for the offence for which they were punished, it is evident that no degree of imploring would dissuade either the state or Eugene from inflicting punishment on the people or the family members for any offence whether real or perceived. Eugene's routine recourse to violent behaviour, like the typical African dictatorial leader, marks the beginning of the breakdown of the family.

Eugene Achike relates the socio-political events in the country to his family during 'family time' when they listen to the radio or read newspapers.<sup>7</sup> In the process, the excesses of the military, the brutality, corruption, re-occurring coups are noted. These occurrences, which should be seen as out of the ordinary, are rather seen as part of the everyday in the nation. Adichie presents Kambili as an innocent silent observer who reveals the realities in her home and society. But the things she reveals that border on the strange/unbelievable, are not seen as such. For example Kamibili sees her brother Jaja's defiance of their father as strange in comparison with the coup and the riots that took place in protest at the coup. She says "Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Auntie Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare" (p.15).

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<sup>7</sup> Eugene Achike owns a newspaper called *The Standard* which he uses through the editor Ade Coker to challenge the activities of the military regimes of the time.

Aunty Ifeoma's purple hibiscus represents the unfamiliar, and the coup takes on the dimension of the ordinary and what we have is a reversal of perception whereby the abnormal becomes the norm, in the macro nation space.

The government of the day is depicted as intolerant of any form of criticism or opposition especially in its consistent censoring of the press. The fictional character Ade Coker, the editor of the *Standard*, the newspaper owned by Eugene, is eventually killed (after a series of arrests and torture at the hands of the military) by a letter bomb in a way that is reminiscent of the actual killing of Dele Giwa editor of *NewsWatch* magazine in 1986 by the government of the time.<sup>8</sup> As we noted earlier, Nwankiti Ogechi, a character reminiscent of the social activist Ken SaroWiwa, is also murdered by the government in Minna, the home state of the Nigerian military dictator.<sup>9</sup> The contradictory nature of military regimes in Nigeria is conjured in Adichie's exposition of incidents reflective of those times. The government publicly executes three men for drug trafficking, but then it turns out that the head of state and his wife are involved in the drug trafficking business themselves. Thus, Nigeria's military dictators, like Eugene are a bundle of contradictions. Indeed, as this study has reiterated through the preceding chapters, the military in Nigeria always take over power under the guise of saving the nation from corrupt and incompetent politicians. But they end up being worse than the politicians they replace. In the same manner Eugene Achike sees himself as the 'saviour' of his family but he turns out to be the harbinger of their pain and woes by the ruthless manner he treats them.

The descriptions in *Purple Hibiscus* are dominated by images of raw brutality (pp.32-33, 51, 102, 188, 191 etc.). Eugene Achike is presented as a person who is intolerant of anybody's opinion except his own. This is particularly evident in the way he constantly muzzles his wife and children. He suppresses every form of freedom in his home; his wife is routinely physically abused for the flimsiest of reasons, causing her to lose pregnancies, and the children Kambili and Jaja are also physically abused, leaving them with visible scars and

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<sup>8</sup> Dele Giwa a Nigerian journalist was killed by a mail bomb at his home in Lagos in 1986. The government of General Ibrahim Babangida was suspected of killing him because he was known to be critical of the government, its policies and mode of operation.

<sup>9</sup> Ken Saro Wiwa a member of the Ogoni ethnic minority in the Nigerian Niger Delta region was an author; television producer and environmental activist. He was hanged in November 1995 by the military government of General Sani Abacha for the part he played in the protest against the decades of indiscriminate petroleum waste dumping in his Ogoni homeland.

deformities. Eugene's intolerance symbolizes the ugly side of the Nigerian state. Ironically, Eugene fights for justice and for the freedom and rights of the people through his newspaper the *Standard* in a way no other newspaper was doing at the time: "only the *Standard* had a critical editorial, calling on the new military government to quickly implement a return to democracy plan" (p.25).

Describing dictatorial regimes in their book *Personal Rule in Black Africa*, Robert Jackson and Carl Rosenberg suggest that these regimes are marked by inherent uncertainty and, therefore, the dictator's actions are discernible by fear (1982: p.27), what Robert Colson describes as "fear of change, fear of opposition, fear of embarrassment, fear of betrayal, plots and coups, fear of losing power and ultimately fear of an end" (2011: p.138). It is this fear that pushes Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* to physically assault Kambili when she comes back from Nsukka with the painted portrait of her grandfather Pa Nnukwu. When Eugene discovers the picture in her possession, we see his vulnerability as he panics and expresses fear that he is losing the grip he had on his family which he thought was firm. Relating the assault, Kambili says:

He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes [...]. The kicking increased in tempo [...]. The stinging was raw now, even more like bites, because the metal landed on open skin on my side, my back, my legs. Kicking. Kicking. Kicking. Perhaps it was a belt now because the metal buckle seemed too heavy. (p.206)

The mode of operation of the military, like Eugene's is utterly iniquitous. An earlier incident of soldiers physically assaulting women at the market place echoes his assault on Kambili:

We saw a small crowd gathered around the vegetable stalls we had passed earlier, the one lining the road. Soldiers were milling around. Market women were shouting and many had both hands placed on their heads in a way that people do to show despair or shock. A woman lay in the dirt, wailing, tearing at her short Afro. Her wrapper had come undone and her white underwear showed....I saw the soldier raise a whip in the air. The whip was long. It curled in the air before it landed on the woman's shoulders. Another soldier was kicking down trays of fruits, squashing papayas with his boots and laughing. (p.44)

Sefi Atta, in *Everything Good will Come*, presents a similar picture of soldiers assaulting a citizen. The character Enitan who narrates the incident tells us:

The soldiers jeered and lashed at cars with horsewhips. We pulled over to let them pass. A driver pulled over too late. Half the soldiers jumped down from the truck and dragged him out of his car. They started slapping him. The driver's hands went up to plead for mercy. They flogged him with horsewhips and left him there. (p.69)

The whip in both Adichie and Atta's narratives as Christopher Ouma suggests "can be read as a phallic symbol [...] meant to conquer and force subjugation" (2011: p.194). The military, like Eugene, uses the pretence of discipline to justify the use of violence on the people.

Eugene like the military is domineering and violent in nature. His disposition is hyper-masculine and his brazen use of power against Kambili is similar to that of the military against the women in the market. Consequently, Kambili could relate to the woman's experience: "I thought about the woman lying in the dirt as we drove home. I had not seen her face, but I felt that I knew her, I had always known her" (p.44). Although Kambili's upbringing and social status present her as upper class on the societal ladder, her ability to relate to the woman's experience with the soldiers is an indication that the oppression evident in the larger society and replicated at the domestic level does not to a large extent discriminate against different classes in the society. Also, because what is happening at the micro level of the home and what is happening at the macro level of the military nation state are connected, these incidents encapsulate significant aspects of allegory in *Purple Hibiscus*. The woman in the market like Kambili is on the ground helpless, in despair and at the mercy of one who should be a protector. Both Kambili and the woman are not protected, rather they are assaulted. The woman's wrapper, her covering comes undone and her white underwear is made public, taking away her dignity and showing her helplessness.

In Nigeria, fathers are generally viewed as moral leaders, breadwinners, protectors and active participants in all aspects of family life. Historical, cultural and familial ideologies inform the role fathers play in the lives of their children and also that of the quality of the father/child relationship. Eugene should be a covering, a protector for his family but by his treatment of

them, like the woman's wrapper at the market, he leaves them open, vulnerable and deprived of dignity. The image of a father and his children that we see in the Achike household is also the image we see in the relationship between the state and the people. The state represents a father who clamps down on the citizens as if they were defiant children, supposedly for their good and for the good of the nation.

As we noted earlier, Kambili is identifying with the woman when she says that she "thought about the woman lying in the dirt as we drove home. I had not seen her face, but I felt that I knew her, that I had always known her. I wished I could have gone over and helped her up, cleaned the red mud from her wrapper" (p.44). She does this because in the woman she sees herself and she sees her mother. Kambili identifies with the woman because the woman who should be protected by the government is instead assaulted and oppressed by her agents in the same manner that Eugene assaults and oppresses his family instead of protecting them.

Eugene Achike's high handedness and religious arrogance blind him from seeing how his actions wreak havoc on his home in the same way that the warped mode of governance of the military in Nigeria during the 80s-90s prevented them from seeing how they were turning the country into a failed state. The military in Nigeria at various times initiated a series of transition programs that were aborted before they came to maturity.<sup>10</sup> They callously dangled the fruit of democracy before the people, but made sure they were not able to taste it. A parallel can be drawn between the way the military treats the people and the way Eugene treats his family. He only allows his children brief and fleeting moments with his father Pa Nnukwu but denies them the privilege of having any meaningful relationship with him. Pa Nnukwu, on the other hand, exhibits love and acceptance in his relationship with his children and grandchildren, and, in spite of the way his son Eugene treats him, never ceases to pray for him. He is gentle, patient and dignified, everything Eugene is not but Eugene denies his children the privilege of experiencing this.

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<sup>10</sup> The government of General Babangida announced a transition program in 1986 that would hand over power to a civilian government in 1989. The transition lasted for a period of seven years (1986-1993). The transition was prolonged and it failed because at every stage the government came up with one reason after another why elections could not hold and also creating difficulties and outright cancellation of already completed parts of an election and this resulted in a nation-wide crisis which broke out in June 1993.

Beatrice Achike's repeated miscarriages also represent the various aborted and failed policies initiated by the military.<sup>11</sup> The policies like her pregnancies are announced with joy giving new hope to the people, as seen in Jaja's expression of hope when he heard from Kambili that their mother was pregnant. Jaja expected things would be different now because he tells Kambili, that "we will take care of the baby; we will protect him" (p.46). But Eugene, like the military rulers in Nigeria, through his despotic nature, made it impossible for anything good to come out of his relationship with his family; he physically assaults his wife Beatrice after accusing her of thwarting God's will by putting selfish desires first and not wanting to visit His servant after mass (p.32), and thus bringing an end to the pregnancy.

The dictator novel according to Robert Boyers works in two distinctive ways:

Often the dictator in these novels is a composite portrait modelled on various originals, with the result that the character is larger than life, so awesome in the range of his brutalities that he is less a person than he is a force of nature. Other writers work from a single model [writing] about an actual dictator, a singular historical figure. (2005: p.179)

*Purple Hibiscus* represents an attempt at the former type, portraying a composite of historical dictatorial characters that we have identified as Generals Babangida and Abacha. According to Robert Colson: "The composite-type dictator novels, with their larger than life/force of nature dictators, often resort to satire and parody as a form of critique" (2011: p.136). The recourse to parody or satire in Adichie's novel serves two purposes; it demystifies the figure of the dictator and it humanizes his character in spite of his seeming invincibility. This is evident in Adichie's presentation of Eugene after the death of Ade Coker. Kambili tells us she comes back from school and:

Papa was crumpled on a sofa in the living room, sobbing. He seemed so small. Papa who was so tall that he sometimes lowered his head to get through doorways, that his tailor always used extra fabric to sew his trousers. Now he seemed small; he looked like a rumpled roll of fabric. (p.202).

Indeed, Kambili goes on further to tell us that:

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<sup>11</sup> The Babangida regime introduced several policy initiatives in Nigeria from 1985 to 1993. Most notable are the regime's economic and foreign policies.

Weeks after Ade Coker died, the hollows were still carved under Papa's eyes, and there was a slowness in his movements, as though his legs were too heavy to lift, his hands too heavy to swing. He took longer to reply when spoken to, to chew his food, even to find the right Bible passages to read [...]. Some nights when I woke up to pee, I heard him shouting from the balcony overlooking the front yard. (p. 203)

Kambili's description of Eugene above undercuts the appearance of his supreme authority. In the process, Eugene is demystified and humanized, and this allows *Purple Hibiscus* to serve as a critique of the figure of the dictator.

#### *5.4 Tracing Alienation in Nigerian Literature*

Achebe advises that in narrating Africa's story, it is important to look back and try to find out "where the rain began to beat us" (1964: p.44). Our discussion in this section will proceed by taking heed to Achebe's advice. We do this by briefly examining the trajectory of alienation in Nigerian literature. This is done because, as Adiele Afigbo and Toyin Falola suggest, "the best way to know anything is to know how it began, what factors dictated its origin and what factors dictate its development as well as where it is heading" (2005: p. 489). Stepping back to examine alienation in this way allows us to proceed with an analysis of the concept in Adichie's novel as emanating from a conflict with cultural identity. Eugene Achike refuses to accept the practices inherent in the culture of his people, especially as practiced by his father Pa Nnukwu. Eugene holds on tenaciously to a radical form of Catholicism and, thus, finds himself unable to effect the change he desires in his family. This removes him from his roots and makes him an outsider to his people especially his immediate family members. It is from this struggle with cultural identity that the three dimensions of alienation we engage with in this chapter emanate. Although it is outside the scope of this study to trace every root of alienation located in Nigerian literature, for the purposes of placing our argument in context, we will briefly examine some socio-historical factors tied to alienation in Nigerian literature, especially as they apply to the issues raised in this chapter.

Nigerian societies had their own civilization long before any contact was made with Europe. They also had their own rich indigenous literature and culture. There were traditional formations of trade, inter-regional and intricately layered communities as we find in

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and these communities had well-defined systems of ethics in place that were necessary in keeping the society intact. However, this is not the present condition of contemporary Nigerian society and this is largely due to the infiltration of the influences of the West. Indeed, Afigbo sees the infiltration of western influences, especially starting from the nineteenth century, as transformative of Nigeria's political, economic and social institutions, marking a transition from the cohesion of the past to the fragmentation of the present (2005: p.4).

Owing to these historical and socio-cultural reasons, Nigerian literature show elements of alienation, which sometime serve as a basic theme or a recurring motif. Works such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) bear witness to changes on the national scene and show a concern for the socio-cultural destiny of the nation. Earlier depictions of alienation in Nigeria, therefore, were mainly socio-political in focus. The main aim of these writings was the demonstration of the potential dangers of the clash of cultures. Because this clash of two cultures results in the individual lingering between two cultures without belonging to either, the individual finds himself a stranger to both as is evident in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* (1969), where the character Eman epitomizes the predicament faced by some of the earliest educated Nigerians, especially in rural communities.

The three major factors which can be regarded as promoting alienation in the last five centuries and which are reflected in Nigerian literature include slavery (both domestic and international), colonialism and post-independence disillusionment. In regards to slavery, alienation is construed to be the physical removal of a person from his native community and the consequent denial of this person's rights and privileges of free citizenship such as we find in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977). Colonialism brought about a head-on collision between totally opposed cultures (African and Western), as is evident in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964) and it brought about social conflict in society that was both internal and external. The disillusionment felt by the more educated section of society, due to what they saw as the misrule of Nigeria after independence, is the third cause of alienation in Nigerian society. This idea is explored by Wole Soyinka in *Season of Anomy* (1972), where he exposes the Nigerian elite which had succeeded the white men as the new political leaders as corrupt, nepotistic, inefficient and often totalitarian. The failures of the new Nigerian leadership are portrayed in all of the different genres that encompass Nigerian literature (poetry, fiction, and drama) and by various Nigerian literary

artists such as Gabriel Okara in *The Voice* (1964), John Pepper Clark in *Casualties* (1970), Christopher Okigbo in *Path of Thunder* (1971), Femi Osofisan in *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1991), and Olu Obafemi in *Suicide Syndrome* (2005). These works depict the post-colonial Nigerian in search of a sense of direction, a search that has so far been unsuccessful. These writers are a part of the society and thus not excluded from the experience of alienation, and this is evident in their work. They relate this feeling of alienation in their work though, at a cost to themselves. Wole Soyinka for instance was detained for two years for allegedly supporting secessionist Biafra.<sup>12</sup> At the present time, a remarkable number of Nigerian writers are expressing their alienation by choosing to be migrants or exiles in the west, an existential response that has lamentably coincided with a brain drain within academia.<sup>13</sup>

Contemporary Nigerian writing deals to great extent with change in the socio-political and economic conditions of the people. As we have noted, Nigerian writers engage with their society as it has evolved over the past few centuries: from pre-colonial traditional life, through the period of the slave trade, to the era of colonization, to independence and to the present time. Each period examined in Nigerian literature has its peculiar type of change which exposes the problems that affect the individual's sense of well-being as well as the society's search for coherence and stability. In contemporary Nigerian writing, especially its fiction, this search for coherence and stability is tied to a sense of alienation; the situation of estrangement between the individual and society, and between individuals and groups such as we find in *Purple Hibiscus*. This alienation creates or is a situation of internal contradictions in society and is seen in the manner the military regime 'turns' on the people it had at first proposed to save (p.27). Alienation as manifested in the lives of Eugene Achike and his family is the type that occurs between individuals. This form leads to a form of disequilibrium as is evident in Achike's cruelty and high-handedness and it results in the breakup of his family.

### 5.5 Alienation: Powerlessness

Powerlessness, the first dimension of alienation as advanced by Seeman is interpreted to mean, "The expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks" (1959: p.784).

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<sup>12</sup> During the Nigerian civil war in the late 60's, Soyinka was accused by the government of collaborating with the secessionist Biafra. He went into hiding but was captured anyway and imprisoned for the rest of the war.

<sup>13</sup> Diasporic Nigerian writers are in the majority in the present generation of writers from Nigeria.

Devorah Kalekin-Fishman further advances Seeman's idea when she says that "a person suffers from alienation in the form of powerlessness when she is conscious of the gap between what she would like to do and what she feels capable of doing" (1996: p.97).

Kambili in Adichie's novel, wishes she could express herself with the clarity and playfulness that her cousin Amaka does, but her life, which consists of violence and silence, leaves her in a perpetual state of fear and awe of her father and thus unable to speak out. Overwhelmed with the feeling and an awareness of being powerless under her father's control, Kambili is a victim, to whom everything happens. She is, therefore, an antihero as she is depicted as being powerless.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the powerless state of the characters in *Purple Hibiscus* is evident in Kambili's account of events in the novel. An immediate reading of Adichie's novel reveals the extent of Eugene's physical abuse and maltreatment of his family members. Kambili initially keeps these veiled in silence, but as the narration progresses she admits it to her cousin Amaka. Eugene's authoritarian behaviour, which renders his family powerless, is internalized by Kambili to such an extent that it has become an unquestioned part of the way she experiences and interacts with the world (Bruce, n.d). Stylistically, the presentation of the novel's characters' feeling of powerlessness is conveyed through the author's use of the mechanisms of speech and the skilful exploitation of the indirect point of view.

When the right to choose their leaders is taken away from the people, especially when done by force as occurs in coups d'états, the people are rendered powerless. Powerlessness is generated when alienation occurs in the relationship between government and the people. This relationship is determined by two things: The degree to which the state is endowed with legitimacy and the degree to which the people understand and accept this legitimacy. According to Hajda and Travis, legitimacy in governance has two primary functions: formalizing authority by conferring the right to command and lending the system enduring meaning. The particular form of authority (monocratic, collegial, and populist) that legitimacy endorses depends on how the society defines the common good (1981: p.211).

Legitimacy grants governments significance, and when it is undermined, as is the case during coups, they become illegitimate. The Nigerian constitution states that "The federal government shall not be governed, nor shall any person or group of persons take control of

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<sup>14</sup> The antihero is an umbrella term which includes the fool, the clown, the criminal, the eccentric, the outsider, the scape goat, the sinner, the rebel without a cause and the hero in the dustbin (Johl, 1992: p.13).

the government of Nigeria or any part thereof, except in accordance with the provisions of this constitution” (1979: ch.1/2). When the military takes over government with disregard for the constitution, its authority becomes questionable and the common good is challenged. Illegitimate control is arbitrary and unjust. It rests on unbestowed power, relies on rules and principles which society does not accept and which rulers proclaim but clandestinely disrespect. When a people are subjected to illegitimate control, a number of things happen: the people perceive a profound discrepancy between the choices they would like to make and the choices government allows them to make. They also know they are being used and are mere objects of the government’s actions and this results in a feeling of powerlessness; the recognition of a relative inability to influence or control one’s social destiny.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili relates Eugene’s reaction to the news of a coup d’état and says, “He looked sad; his rectangular lips seemed to sag” (p.24). Eugene gives his family a history of the vicious cycle of coups:

Coups begat coups, he said, telling us about the bloody coups of the sixties, which ended up in civil war just after he left Nigeria to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk. (p.24)

This reaction to the coup stems from knowing, through experience, that whatever control the people had over their economic, political and social destinies is now lost. From the foregoing, the feeling of powerlessness that comes from military experience in Nigeria is, therefore, learned.

Eugene Achike’s control over his family is such that they are prevented from engaging with the world outside their home. Indeed, their contact with the outside world is fleeting. Thus, it is from Eugene’s sister Ifeoma that Beatrice is kept abreast of current events, while the children Kambili and Jaja know things from eavesdropping. Explaining the state of things at the university and in the country, Ifeoma refers to the military ruler as a tyrant as she tells Beatrice: “We have not had fuel for over three months in Nsukka. I spent the night in the petrol station last week, waiting for fuel. And at the end, the fuel did not come. Some people left their cars in the station because they did not have enough fuel to drive back home” (p.76). From the foregoing, the inability of the nation to move forward towards growth and progress is hampered by powerlessness, and the people are at a disadvantage.

We also see how the people sometime mistakenly accept this state of affairs as natural or even self-inflicted: for example, although the government does not pay the salaries of university lecturers after they had embarked on a two-month strike, they still go back to work (p.76). Kalekin-Fishman argues that powerlessness arises when a gap exists between what a person wants to do and what that person feels capable of doing (1996: p.97). It is this consciousness that compels Beatrice to go back to Eugene after he beats her and she ends up in hospital. She tells Ifeoma; “Where would I go if I leave Eugene’s house? Tell me, where would I go?” (p.245). It is also this consciousness that fuels Ifeoma’s frustration with the way things are at the university where she works.

A military administrator is appointed to run the university; lecturers are victimized, salaries are not paid, and the students are becoming restive. Narrating the incident where Ifeoma and a friend discuss the situation at the university, Kambili describes the issues raised: they talked about a list that is circulating of lecturers who are disloyal to the university, the danger of speaking the truth, the possibility of soldiers being appointed as lecturers and students attending lectures with guns to their heads (pp.217-218). Ifeoma, according to Kambili, had a blaze in her eyes that came from being angry as she talked with her friend. Her anger emanates from a feeling of powerlessness. The concept of alienation as powerlessness that permeates *Purple Hibiscus*, therefore, derives from Adichie’s characters substantially feeling a lack of control over the many influences that shape their lives.

#### 5.5.1 *Between the Mask and the Face: Social Isolation*

Kalekin-Fishman defines social isolation as “the feeling of being segregated from one’s community” (1996: p.97). Community, according to Max Farrar, “is one of the foundational social imaginaries of human society. It is the figure, the image, the form from which we construct our yearning for a meaningful, humane, and just social existence” (2001: p.7). Positioning the community in relation to alienation, Farrar again goes on to state that: “community, in this sense of the word, is the opposite of the alienation that Marx identified as the actual existence of the human being under capitalism, the opposite of what Durkheim identified as anomie, the opposite of Weber’s iron cage” (p.7). Adichie’s engagement with alienation in her novel incorporates two out of the three major facets of alienation: social and physical alienation.<sup>15</sup> The alienation that is experienced by her characters is, thus, explicitly

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<sup>15</sup> The three major facets of alienation are social, physical and economic alienation.

social and implicitly physical. Kambili and Jaja are forced to live in isolation and are disconnected from their environment, making them lonely. This loneliness is conceived as a type of alienation which this study interprets as key to social isolation.

In Kambili and Jaja's particular situation, they are alienated from the society in which they live by the restrictions placed on them and, also, because of the way their father treats them. They are, thus, unable to find any outlet for emotional connections with anyone, except with each other. Noticing how odd their behaviour generally is, their cousin Amaka asks her mother Ifeoma, "Are you sure they're not abnormal, mom?" She concludes that "something is not right with them" (p.141). Eugene keeps them away from any company outside their home, especially that of their grandfather Pa Nnukwu. Referring to his father as a heathen, Eugene would allow his children to visit the old man just once a year and only for fifteen minutes. Kambili and Jaja would not have had a relationship with their Aunt and her children if their Aunt Ifeoma had not stood up to their father. The concept of the self, which includes one's thinking pattern and language are constructed through interaction with the community. But 'community' starts with the family. Indeed, as Eyal Chowers notes, "the physical, emotional, and mental attributes of a person are shaped through family interactions" (2004: p.4). Therefore, Eugene's restrictions on his children not only deny them the attributes Chowers has listed, but also places them in a position that is marginal in relation to what is perceived as normal in the community.

Kambili in school, to use the words of Colin Wilson, is "The Outsider" (2001: p.57). Wilson uses the term "outsider" to refer to a lonely, alienated person. The outsider amongst other things challenges cultural values, creates his own rules and lives them in an unsympathetic environment. Kambili's ideological stance in *Purple Hibiscus* is influenced by Eugene's, and thus it is his principles she applies in all areas (church, school and home) of her life. It is because of this that we regard her as an outsider, given that she exhibits the characteristics of the outsider as promoted by Wilson.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the outsider, as Anna-Marie Bisschoff notes, is that he belongs nowhere; he does not fit into any group or family. And when he is taken into any group, it is nearly always against his wishes and is only a temporary situation (1992: p.50). Kambili is perceived by her classmates to be a backyard snob because she does not talk to anyone. When she is spoken to, she stutters or becomes tongue-tied and she comes across

as awkward (p.49). Ezinne, her class mate, urges her to socialize with the rest of the class and, says to her, “Maybe after school you should stop running off like that and walk with us to the gate” (p.51). But, socializing is not an option as:

Kevin had many other chores to do for Papa and I was not allowed to keep him waiting, so I always dashed out of my class. Dashed, as though I were running the 200 meters race at the interhouse sports competition. Once, Kevin told Papa I took a few minutes longer, and Papa slapped my left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on my face and ringing in my ears for days. (p.51)

Kambili is aware of being different and, thus, consciously creates a distance between herself and the rest of her class. The alienation which emerges from Kambili’s situation affects her personality as well as her dealings with her classmates and, by extension, her society. Kambili’s alienated state appears self-inflicted, given that the people outside her immediate family have no idea about what is going on behind closed doors in the Achike household, but it is not. It stems, rather, from Eugene’s treatment of his children, which has resulted in their being disconnected from the cultural and social values of their society. Their state of disconnection places them in the position where they are estranged from the social and cultural setting in which they live because it appears unacceptable and strange to them. Thus, Eugene’s dictatorial nature, which has been moulded and nurtured by religious narrow-mindedness, is the bane of his family, all of whom are subjected to severe physical and emotional abuse, which further adds to their feeling of alienation.

### 5.5.2 *Normlessness*

Seeman states that normlessness “denotes the situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behaviour” (1959: p.787). There are a number of critical debates regarding the nature of norms, and several theories have emerged (Collins, 1981; Coleman, 1990; Bicchieri, 2006). It is outside the scope of this study to engage with all these theories, but our engagement with the idea of alienation as normlessness is located in a concern with rational choice. We understand rational choice to mean that humans have the ability to be rational beings who can act rationally in any given situation for the attainment of a specific goal.

Publicly, Eugene presents himself as an upright, hardworking, loving husband and father. He is also perceived as an excellent provider who tirelessly works for the good of his family and society at large. His generosity seems to know no bounds when it involves people outside his immediate family. He makes the largest donations to his church, St Agnes. He provides everything; from a new wing for the St Agnes hospital, to the communion wine and the new ovens for the communion bread. His generosity also extends to his workers. Eugene gives his driver Kevin more money than he gives his father and also pays the school fees of his gate man's children but would not help his widowed sister Ifeoma pay the school fees of her children.

Eugene's generosity is two-faced, as the Christian faith, which he uses as the basis of his refusal to offer help to his father Pa Nnukwu and his sister Ifeoma, instructs him to give without reservations. The two live in abject material poverty and Eugene withholds help from them, even though his sister is a widow raising three children all by herself on a meagre university lecturer salary. Eugene treats them in this manner because he has declared his father a heathen and therefore cannot have anything to do with him. His displeasure with his sister stems from the fact that she refused to join him in condemning their father. Ifeoma insists that "Eugene has to stop doing God's work for him, God is big enough to do his own job" (p.95). She also refuses to accept Eugene's conditional gifts even if doing so will make life much easier for her and the children:

Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car, even before Ifediora died? [...] He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car, *nwunye m*, and I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima's trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things. (p.95)

According to Arthur Neal and Sarah Collas, "normlessness derives partly from conditions of complexity and conflict in which individuals become unclear about the composition and enforcement of social norms" (2000: p.122). Yet, as we see, Eugene's actions are in no way a result of lack of clarity in regards to the norms of society. Eugene acts the way he does because he has created his own norms, different from those of the church and those of his

society. Indeed, a cursory look at his religiosity would suggest a dependence on the church, but Eugene is independent of the establishment, which is unable to question his actions or curtail his excesses. He finds the church to be influential only in the sense that he uses it to hide the things he does.

Eugene does not seem cognizant of the fact that the Bible he so blindly misinterprets, instructs him to honour his father (Exodus 20:12) and also instructs him to provide for his family and further presents Christians like Eugene as worse than infidels (I Timothy 5:8). It is evident that Eugene adopts an un-African approach to life without really understanding this foreign stance. His actions are driven by an extremist brand of Catholicism. This causes him to act in ways that alienate him from his society and is the reason Simon Gikandi says, “The institutions and doctrines of Christianity were often represented as the forces responsible for the disruption of African social life” (2003: p.111). Indeed, it is Pa Nnukwu’s belief that “it was the missionaries that misled my son” (p.84). He says that Christianity’s teaching that the Father and Son are one is the reason “Eugene can disregard me, because he thinks we are equals” (p.84). Not only has the church lost its authority for Eugene, tradition has lost it too. Ruled by nothing but his own will and desires, his life is conditioned by normlessness.

The military regime’s experiment in dictatorial higher education administration, through the appointment of a sole administrator for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka presents another situation of normlessness in *Purple Hibiscus*. From the start of the narrative in the novel, we know that the country is in turmoil. Indeed, it would seem the military took over power because “the politicians were corrupt [...]. [C]abinet ministers [...] stashed money in foreign bank accounts meant for paying teacher’s salaries and building roads” (p.24-25). The deteriorating situation at the university, as Adichie illustrates it in her novel, is not solely generated by military rule. They were further made worse by the incursion of the military into university administration. Drawing our attention to the complexity and conflict that arises when people are unclear about the composition and enforcement of norms (Neal and Collas, 2000: p.122), Ifeoma says, “Where else have you heard of such a thing as a sole administrator in a university? [...] A governing council votes for a vice chancellor. That is the way it has worked since this university was built, that is the way it is supposed to work” (p.217).

This brings us to another aspect of normlessness identified by Seeman: “The anomic situation [...] may be defined as one in which there is a high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviours are required to achieve given goals” (1959: p.788). The military government, as Ifeoma explains it, resorts to force and outright brutality in a bid to improve the situation at the university, but the result of its actions brain drain, student riots, victimization and harassment of lecturers makes things worse. A military officer serving as an administrator of education in a Nigerian university accounts for one of the ironies in Adichie’s novel. This anomaly underscores the irony that is evident in Adichie’s narrative. Things are turned upside down, the abnormal is made the norm and this does not sit well with the standard structures of society.

When Kambili innocently asks why the governing structure at the university upsets her Aunt Ifeoma, her cousin explains that the administrator is “the equivalent of a head of state”, and this means that “the university becomes a microcosm of the country” (p.224). The Achike household and the university campus in *Purple Hibiscus*, therefore, mirror the nation. Eugene’s house is confining and so is the Nigerian nation state under the military. Furthermore, both Eugene and the military use force and coercion to get their way. This results in a breakdown of the values which govern society. Adichie’s characters, as members of the Achike household and wider Nigerian society, now move into a state of normlessness where they begin to exhibit behaviour that causes them to act in ways that are not socially acceptable in order to survive.

Normlessness also comes about with the loss of intrinsic and socialised values and security by the people who are now hopelessly disoriented. This loss would also be the reason the university students embark on a riot that was very destructive and violent (pp. 222-24). We observe from the riot that in the situation of normlessness, people no longer have any standards but only disconnected urges. This is to be expected if it is understood that the state of normlessness makes a man responsive only to himself and, therefore, responsible to no one. Indeed Robert MacIver posits that the anomic man “derides the value of other men. His only faith is the philosophy of denial. He lives in a thin line of sensation between no future and no past” (1950: pp.161-2).

### 5.6 *The Trauma of Everyday Life*

The experience of military rule in Nigeria as we have seen in the novels that form the corpus of this study demonstrates that different kinds of silence exist. In *Arrows of Rain*, *Waiting for an Angel*, and *Everything Good will Come*, we saw how during the era of military rule and dictatorship, certain areas of knowledge were kept out of the people's reach. The government used force to intimidate dissenting voices, arrest journalists, vandalize and shut down newsrooms to enforce silence on the people. The kind of silence we see in these novels is the type imposed by force. Adichie presents two kinds of silence in *Purple Hibiscus*: the general silence, which exists because the people are unaware that they can speak out against the excesses of the military regime and that which is imposed by the use of intimidation. In her presentation of these two kinds of silence, Adichie reveals the tension between the said and the unsaid, the say-able and the unsayable. These elements of dialogue underscore the notion of trauma in *Purple Hibiscus*, an idea this section seeks to examine.

Silence permeates the Achike household. Kambili describes it as, "the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch; the silence of reflection time [...]; the silence of evening rosary; the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterwards" (p.31). This silence comes from a place of trauma. Trauma occurs in the everyday aspects of life in the Achike household. 'Everyday' is used here in view of Michael Featherstone's description of it as "usually associated with the mundane, taken-for-granted, common sense routines which sustain and maintain the fabric of our daily lives" (1995: p.55). In this novel, Adichie narrates a story that pays close attention to the everyday world of the protagonist Kambili. She describes in detail the routine in the Achike household, with a keen perception, and a vivid attention to events often taken for granted such as family time, going to church, and going to school. Adichie engages in a detailed description of the things Kambili remembers about her family life, and in the process, the most disturbing experience of trauma is constructed and presented to us (see pp.206).

Eugene's expectations of his children especially academically are a form of mental torture which traumatizes Jaja and Kambili. Their lives are regulated by a schedule which puts great pressure on them and has in turn made them social misfits. This mental torture is mostly felt by Kambili, especially when she is ranked second in position after an exam in her class.

Eugene takes Kambili to school to make the point that the girl Chinwe Jideze who beats her to the first position “has one head too, she does not have two” (p.46). He is driven by the need to be in control and dictatorial in all spheres of family life. He is also emotionally cold and unaware of the fact that his home is not a conducive environment for any meaningful academic activity. Kambili, describing the need to excel academically as “a big load” says:

It was like balancing a sack of gravel on my head every day at school and not being allowed to steady it with my hand. I still saw the print in my textbooks as a red blur, still saw my baby brother’s spirit strung together by narrow lines of blood. I memorized what the teachers said because I knew my textbooks would not make sense if I tried to study later. After every test, a tough lump like poorly made fufu formed in my throat and stayed there until our exercise books came back. (p.52)

Adichie here plots her metaphors around visualisations that are a part of Kambili’s experiences. These help clearly present the picture she wants the reader to see. The extent of the pressure on Kambili to excel academically by her father is expressed through the image of a sack of gravel. It is further extended to the lump of fufu stuck in her throat. The experience of schooling for her is therefore like a big load, something that chokes. These metaphors of the sack of gravel and the tough lump of fufu reflect the experience of trauma as possession or haunting, whereby traces of past events resurface in the present. Kambili’s body, therefore, becomes a narrative of trauma. The narrative of Kambili’s body is concerned with human-made disturbing situations and is an implicit critique of the ways social, economic and political structures create and perpetuate trauma (Vickroy, 2002: p.4)

Discussing Kambili, Christopher Ouma states that: “Kambili is quite adept at speaking with a precocious naivety and this [...] allows us to see that her daily life entails a constant witnessing and experience of psycho-physical violence” (2011: p.67). Eugene’s children and wife are subjected to physical trauma and Kambili narrates these beatings and abuse in a manner of fact way. This matter of fact way is the reason Anne Whitehead argues that “a child is liable to notice details and is not always able to interpret what is going on around him [...] the limited insight of the child creates a hiatus in the text, which relies on the knowledge or imagination of the reader to fill in the gap and to make sense of the narrative” (2004: p.38). Although it is noteworthy that Kambili’s opacity in her narration does not in any way make

the incidents and experiences any less traumatic, it intensifies the experience of trauma. Adichie's presentation of Kambili's trauma goes beyond a surface engagement with trauma as a concept. She shows how Kambili internalizes the rhythms, processes and uncertainties of the experience and in the process reveal the many obstacles to communicating the experience: silence, denial, dissociation and repression among others (Vickroy, 2002: p.3)

Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, which is often translated as 'deferred action' or "afterwardness" (Whitehead 2004: p.6), can be applied to Kambili's reaction to the experience of trauma.<sup>16</sup> The temporally fragmented experience of a traumatic event in its Freudian belatedness (Ouma, 2011: p.69) is reflected in Kambili's reaction to the battering of her mother. When she started to hear the sounds coming from her parents' room, she knew what was happening, but tried to imagine it was something else. She tells us, "If I imagined it hard enough, then it would be true" (p.33). The extent of her trauma at the sound of the battering of her mother and the sight of her mother's blood is made evident when the 'red' of her mother's blood takes over everything she sees; the letters in her text book, the startling red hibiscus flower, the church altar which was decorated red, her mother's red wrapper, the priest's red robe (p.52). The everyday for Kambili, thus, consists of an existence defined by torture and trauma.

Kambili tells us that her memories did not start at Nsukka (p.16). We know, though, that it is at Nsukka that Kambili and Jaja learn to question their father's principles (Tunca, 2009: p.130). Kambili says, "Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up in your throat and come out as a freedom song, as laughter" (p.291). The experience of Nsukka brought about the falling apart of things. Jaja's provocation of his father was, therefore, deliberate and borne out of built-up resentment and a determination to protect his mother and sister. His actions set in motion a series of events that challenge Eugene's patriarchal authority and create a disruption in the family structure. The Christian Palm Sunday commemorates the triumphal entrance of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-9). In *Purple Hibiscus*, it commemorates Jaja's entrance into manhood. Thus, on that Palm

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<sup>16</sup>Critical to Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* is the argument that an event only becomes traumatic when the victim of the event is forced to relive the event by a subsequent encounter.

Sunday when things started to fall apart, Jaja's actions and their results set in motion a transformation, not only in the Achike household but also of the natural world:

Howling winds came with an angry rain, uprooting frangipani trees in the front yard [...] The satellite dish on top of the garage came crashing down [...] The door to my wardrobe dislodged completely. Sisi broke a full set of Mama's china. (p.251).

Eugene throws the missal, the symbol of his religiosity across the room in a fit of anger, and this result in the breaking of the figurines on the étagère.

The traumatic elements and narrative techniques in Adichie's novel take on the forces of social oppression. The females in *Purple Hibiscus*, individually and collectively, give direction to the other characters. They actually fracture the patriarchal social structure and demystify the idealized traditional images of the woman, especially in the African context. Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, exemplifies this. She is bold, hardworking and economically independent. Although she is pressured on all sides at work, by her late husband's relatives and by her brother Eugene, she remains unperturbed and refuses to succumb to male intimidation. She takes over the role of caring for their father, despite her financial limitations and, as was already quoted above, she declares that "I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things" (p.94).

It is Ifeoma who draws out Eugene's children Kambili and Jaja from the cocoon that the dysfunction in their home has them wrapped up in. She teaches Kambili to express herself verbally (p.168) and she imparts to Jaja her love of plants (p.142). It is at Ifeoma's home in Nsukka that Kambili learns to laugh out loud, to confidently relate with other people and to discover herself. It is also by her promptings, encouragement and acceptance that Jaja learns to take responsibility and to assert himself. The possibilities he sees in his interactions with his Aunt and her children cause him to regret that he did not take charge of things earlier: "I should have taken care of Mama. Look how Obiora balances Auntie Ifeoma's family on his head, and I am older than he is. I should have taken care of Mama" (p.282). Ifeoma is also the one who encourages Beatrice to stand up for herself against Eugene's tyranny. She tells her, "when a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head" (p.209).

Beatrice Achike does not challenge or question anything, but rather condones and makes excuses for Eugene's cruel treatment of her and the children. Beatrice is an anxious and depressed person who lives in constant fear of her husband's cruelty; a person who is cowed into forced obeisance due to her husband's tyrannical control. The abuse she suffers at the hands of Eugene has turned her into a traumatized person. She suffers a series of miscarriages as a result of the beatings she receives from Eugene and she relates one of the incidents, "you know that small table where we keep the family Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly [...] my blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes" (p.243). Beatrice's miscarriages parallel the collective failure of the socio-economic and political policies of the Nigerian state that has made it difficult for the nation to progress positively.

Beatrice, like her children, is silent and hardly smiles. Kambili says of her, "She spoke the way a bird eats, in small amounts" (p.20). Beatrice Achike is an insecure woman, one who because of an abusive and repressive marriage feels threatened and is afraid. When Ifeoma tells her to leave Eugene and his abuse she replies, "Where would I go if I left Eugene's house? Tell me where would I go? Do you know how many mothers pushed their daughters at him? Do you know how many asked him to impregnate them, even, and not to bother paying a bride price?" (p.245). She does not question Eugene's actions, orders or authority; rather, she makes excuses for him and accommodates his excesses. She tells Kambili:

You know after you came and I had miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper. The members of our umunna even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates too [...] but your father stayed with me, with us (p.20).

Up to this point in the novel, Beatrice is portrayed as a docile, weak and helpless woman. But finally, she is the one who, with the help of her house maid Sisi, takes the initiative to put an end to Eugene's excesses. She slowly poisons him which results in his undignified death. Beatrice's action is radical, and strongly embedded in a radical feminism that was previously alien to her. Radical feminism focuses on men as oppressors. Radical feminists are of the opinion that the oppression of women is the most fundamental form of oppression. That because oppression is entrenched in people's thinking, changes in the structure of society alone are not sufficient to overcome it. They insist that the attitude of men must be changed

and a state of equality made manifest in the power dynamics between men and women (Echols, 1989: p.3). This suggests that Beatrice believed that freedom from Eugene's oppressive and dominating control would only be possible if he were dead. Thus she employs the unethical, criminal means of poisoning him which results in his death to attain this freedom for her and her children.

Her actions, like those of Dikeledi in Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures* (1977) who kills an abusive and unfaithful husband, and Firdau in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) who kills an abusive lover in self-defence, make the statement that there is aggression hidden in every patient woman and that circumstances can drive her to violence to protect herself. Dikeledi and Firdau, like Beatrice, were only able to break away from oppressive husbands by killing them. They do this after coming to the realization that their situations had nothing to do with anything they had done or failed to do. Rather, it was their husband's masculinity that held them back. Françoise Lionnet, referring to characters like these, says "They are characters who come to feel that they are being denied the most elementary form of recognition and visibility and are ever thus driven to murder as a result of the 'inexpressibility' and cultural invisibility of their pain and dehumanization" (1997: p.211).

It is symbolic that when Jaja and Kambili leave Nsukka, they do not return to Enugu empty handed. Jaja leaves with the seeds of the purple hibiscus and Kambili leaves with the uncompleted painting of Pa Nnukwu. These items are representative of freedom from the rigid lifestyle of their father's world. We thus find in *Purple Hibiscus* a coming of age not only for Kambili but also for Jaja. Indeed, Kambili like Beatrice can be erroneously interpreted to be a passive character, one who is incapable of doing anything to change her situation. But she stands up to Eugene when he destroyed the painted portrait of Pa Nnukwu that she brought home from Nsukka. By this singular act of standing up to Eugene, Kambili asserts herself and moves from being a victim to being a participant in the drama that unfolds in the novel. *Purple Hibiscus*, as a trauma narrative, is Adichie's representation of the catastrophic effects of domestic abuse on the individual psyche and, at the same time, the novel highlights postcolonial concerns associated with social justice and oppression. These concerns are presented as some of the costs of destructive socio-cultural institutions.

## 5.7 Conclusion

Adichie deals with the issue of unresolved past events in Nigeria in *Purple Hibiscus*, an experience that was traumatic and which Whitehead describes as a form of “possession or haunting” (2004: p.6). The falling apart of Eugene Achike’s family is synonymous with the falling apart of the Nigerian state, and Kambili and Jaja represent the unresolved trauma of military rule in Nigeria that, even at present, resists being laid to rest. Nigeria has moved past military rule in the same way that Kambili and Jaja are moving past Eugene’s tyranny, but the wounds inflicted on them physically, mentally and emotionally, leave scars. A thought-provoking question for us as readers of Adichie’s novel as a trauma narrative is, can her characters survive the devastations that have caused them trauma? The answer to this question lies in Jaja’s comments about Ade Coker’s daughter reaction to her father’s death: “She will never heal, she may have started talking now, but she will never heal” (p.253). By this remark, it would seem Jaja is not only talking about Ade’s daughter but also about himself, Kambili, their mother and every other victim of trauma. Even though the ending of *Purple Hibiscus* suggests that Eugene’s death and Jaja’s prison term coming to an end, means the past can be resolved and forgotten. Nothing is further from the truth. Kambili makes this clear when she says, “there were painfully scattered bits inside me that could never be put back because the places they fit into were gone” (282). In the same manner, the end of military rule and the return to democratic rule in Nigeria has not made the past to be resolved and forgotten. What is clear from all of this is that, incidents of trauma can haunt the victim, making regeneration sometimes impossible even when the issues which caused it cease to exist.

Adichie uses the story of Eugene Achike’s household to explore the Nigerian state during the military era of the 1980s-1990s. The picture of Nigeria she presents to us in *Purple Hibiscus*, as reflected in the family life of Eugene Achike, represents the devastating effects of military rule. Adichie opposes hegemony and challenges the authoritative power that disempowers the oppressed. In the process, she counterbalances the distribution of power. Adichie’s novel is not so much interested in making philosophical statements as it is interested in presenting the plight of the alienated person. She, therefore, gives her characters the space to speak out and be agents of their own story and, in the process we see them move from the periphery to the centre as they take control of their live



## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

#### 6.0 *Contemporary Nigerian Fiction: Negotiating the Post-colonial.*

Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded or whether it continues albeit in different forms, perhaps. (Said, 1993: p.1)

Edward Said here captures the thematic concerns that this study has grappled with in its engagement with the era of the 80s-90s in contemporary Nigerian fiction. This study has examined the representation of the era of the 80s-90s in selected contemporary Nigerian novels. We have argued that third-generation Nigerian writing demonstrates an obsessive return to the time from 1985-1998 as a historical site in its narration of the Nigerian story. We noted that critics of contemporary Nigerian writing have largely failed to address this obsessive return to the recent past. The main purpose of this study has been to address this gap in the study of contemporary Nigerian writing. This research is important because it is an attempt to build on existing scholarship and at the same time address the gaps in the reading of contemporary Nigerian fiction. In doing this, it contributes to the dialogue on contemporary writing from Nigeria and opens up a platform for further discussion on this body of writing.

The first novel we analysed, Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, was studied in light of its engagement with the notions of silencing and control. We examined how these concepts allow the interrogation of a number of ideas: the silencing of public and private spheres, the prison condition of the nation and the rape of the nation. We drew upon the idea of the performance space that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o promotes in his book, *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, to examine how these ideas are connected to the Nigerian experience of military rule in the 80s-90s. The ideas we examined reveal how Ndibe presents the struggle for the performance space to be between the ruler and the ruled and also as defined by the unequal distribution of power between the two. We noticed how the military appropriates the nation state as its performance space, and attempt to make it as an enclosure where docile bodies

and docile minds are created and where voices are silenced. In the process, the country becomes a vast prison where people are controlled both physically and psychologically.

This study then interrogated the notions of resistance and protest in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. We sought to establish a link between these concepts and the experience of military rule in the 80s-90s. We read the novel in relation to Nigeria's violent military history as well as in its depiction of the people hopelessly trapped in poverty and violence. The physical and psychological prison condition of the people functions as the most conspicuous threat to the novel's characters. A mounting anger arises in the people from discontent with their poverty and dispossession. This anger is focused on the military state and becomes inclined toward a need for resistance which the people see as the solution to the myriad problems they face in their daily lives. We examined protest and resistance in *Waiting for an Angel*, informed by Neil Lazarus's idea of deferred expectation. The notion of deferred expectation, which is tied to how little of the promises of independence materialised for the people, allows us to see the connection between the failures of the military state and resistance and protest as presented in Habila's novel.

In Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will come*, we examined the socio-political and economic dislocation that was brought about by military rule in the era of structural adjustment in the 80s-90s. This study sought to establish a link between the IMF/SAP policy, the adverse social challenges of the time, and the authoritarian character of its implementation especially for human rights. In our examination of the manner in which the policy informs Atta's narrative, we were careful not to make an economic policy an over-determined factor in our analysis of the novel. The idea of SAP enabled us to contextualize Atta's perception of the economic landscape of the time, and at the same time, allowed us to see how a discourse on the economic peculiarity of the era of the 80s-90s in her novel is the product of contemporary Nigerian writing returning to the past in its narration of the Nigerian experience.

Adichie in *Purple Hibiscus* allegorically makes the story of Eugene Achike's household the story of the Nigerian state under a dictatorship in the era of the 80s-90s. The picture of Nigeria she presents to us in the novel as reflected in the family of Eugene Achike, is one of

oppression and pain. In her presentation of the Achike household and, by extension, the Nigerian state during the era of the most brutal military rule in Nigeria's history, Adichie exposes the socio-political realities of the period by interrogating the notions of dictatorship, alienation and the trauma of everyday life. She challenges the authoritative power that disempowers the oppressed both in the public and private spheres, by creating a space for her characters to speak out and own their story. In the process we see them move from the peripheries to the centre in the scheme of things.

This study is positioned as a reading of the postcolonial. The criticism and theories of the term 'postcolonial' converge on the idea that post-colonialism involves an engagement with colonialism and its consequences in the past and the present as well as with global developments that are viewed to be the after-effects of imperialism (Quayson, 2000; Huggan, 2001).

The choice to read the novels in this study within a postcolonial critical framework has been consciously made despite the problems of categorization and the limitations that can arise from choosing a framework that defines the texts primarily in relation to a particular experience. Indeed, like Nicholas Harrison, we reiterate again this study does not wish to assume anything about the place and ultimate significance or insignificance of works of fiction in the broad historical and ideological schemes with which postcolonial criticism connects them (2003: p.1). However postcolonial theory offers a useful model for theoretical inquiry into these novels because the notions that we engage with in them emanate from conditions located in the postcolonial.<sup>78</sup>

We read these works within a postcolonial frame for the reason that we are examining a particular experience related to a specific geographical location and which is influenced by a particular historic occurrence. Indeed, because the setting of the fiction under examination here is Nigeria, and its thematic concerns relate to Nigeria, the name Nigeria is significant in conveying a particular experience which the postcolonial frame of reference helps to delineate.

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<sup>78</sup> This term serves a dual role in this study. It refers to a historical political event that is the period after colonization, and it refers to an attitude of mind; a way of looking at the world, a way of reading.

This study examines not only the individuality and ‘literarity’ of the selected texts but also the socio-historical peculiarities of the era from which the stories that are told emerge. This is important to our analysis given that a postcolonial reading of these texts is underlined by their representation of history, which is central to the production of meaning we find in the texts. History as it is imagined by these four authors, and as it is examined critically in this study, is interpreted through the imagination, memory and experiences of the writers selected here.

The texts chosen for examination in this study are layered on to the writing that came before them. Current Nigerian writing builds on the writing that came before it as it shares with earlier writing an engagement with a defined political sphere. The continuity of the current generation with its forebears is manifest in its engagements with Nigerian history, Nigerian politics and the ethics of being Nigerian in a world shaped by complex structures of inclusion and exclusion. Third-generation Nigerian literature reflects continuity with the past and the past finds itself not simply succeeded by the present but incorporated into it.

### 6.1 Conclusion

This study took its cue from the argument promoted by the critic Christopher Okonkwo that *Arrows of Rain*, *Waiting for an Angel*, and *Purple Hibiscus* can be “linked ‘dialogically’ [...] that is, these are novels unconsciously in dialogue, they are talking about, conversing, and/or contributing discrete voices or perspectives on that subject of Nigeria’s post-war bleak epoch” (2005: p.4). We sought to develop on and extend Okonkwo’s argument and posit that, indeed, the works of Adichie, Atta, Habila and Ndibe are not only in dialogue in their discussion on the subject of the Nigerian state, but are also significant in examining the era from the mid-80s to the late 90s. We also sought to interrogate the argument the Nigerian literary critic, Charles Nnolim, advances that contemporary Nigerian writing has no thematic focus. Nnolim makes reference to the works of Adichie, and Habila amongst others, and claims that “Contemporary Nigerian literature hardly has a national concern or a central focus” (p.48).

Our findings reveal that the novels chosen for this study are linked dialogically. This is to say, these novels are conversing and contributing discrete but interwoven discursive voices and perspectives on the subject of Nigeria’s military era of the 80s-90s. These novels directly

address the phenomenon of military rule in Nigeria's recent past, therefore, the thematic content of all four novels explore the daily lives of the people in post-colonial Nigeria under the control of the military. This suggests that contrary to Nnolim's argument, the novels are, collectively and thematically, a critical illustration of post-independence disillusionment.

There are several lines meeting at crossroads in these works: literary lines, generational lines and ideological lines. The writers chosen for this study use the novel as their mode of expression and there is an obvious influence on their writing from the works of writers who came before them. These writers borrow stylistic and narrative models from their forbearers. They therefore gather ideas and styles from their predecessors and reconceptualise the texts from which they borrow. This demonstrates that these writers are avid readers of other writers. We see the influence of the older generation of African writers particularly in the works of Habila (Soyinka, Ngugi, Sembene, Armah etc.) and Adichie (Achebe). We also see their novels in dialogue with writers across regional and ethnic divides (Ngugi and Sembene). Intertextuality as seen in these texts shows an interplay of influence whereby the creative process of Nigerian literature is reproducing itself albeit in different ways over time. The writers layer their stories over those of other writers, creating a form of intertextuality that is driven by a consciousness of the literary traditions that precedes them. The novels therefore do not constitute a break from the tradition of writing against oppression by their themes. Indeed, as far as the literary themes are concerned, these novels like the ones that came before them are a reaction against the social and political norms of the oppressive post-colonial state.

The study also observed that writing against dictatorship is a defining characteristic of contemporary Nigerian fiction and this has enriched Nigerian literature in more ways than critics are currently examining. The elements that form the core ideas we examine in the discourse of the 80s-90s in this study are tied to military rule, dictatorship, alienation, control, silencing, socio-economic turmoil, trauma and resistance and protest. The study draws upon existing historiography specifically related to concerns with the nation to locate its corpus. The writers are located at points of intersection and departure in the representation and criticism of the discourse on the nation.

These novels are imaginative representations of military rule and dictatorship in the 80s-90s, and their formal structures revolve around the struggle between the ruled and the ruler. The authors underscore the various ways the Nigerian military regime has historically coerced and established control over the people through a culture of violence and intimidation. The writers raise awareness on the nature of the state-society relationship in Nigeria, by revealing that the challenges of the present have their roots in decolonization. They reflect the historical forms of oppression that were found in Nigeria under military rule. They oppose hegemony and challenge the authoritative power that disempowers the oppressed and demonstrate the agency available to the inhabitants of the prison state that was Nigeria in the 80s-90s.

The recreation of the era of military rule in these novels highlights the relevance of the past for the future. The writers in this study seek to make sense of the present through an interrogation of the past; their novels therefore contribute to a critical examination of the past, especially the workings of closure or the lack thereof. Their insistence on returning to the past occurs because they do not perceive it to be a completed action, no longer connected to the present and this explains the lack of closure in their texts.

The notions of history, experience, imagination, memory and trauma are elemental in the construction of the experiences we encounter in these narratives. The idea that these writers engage with a particular experience from a particular time in the past is tied firstly to an actual historical occurrence, and secondly to their experience of this occurrence. As they draw on history for their narratives through the use of their memory, it is through these memories that history is brought to the present. The historical element in their work is reflected in their obsessive return to the era of the 80s-90s as the site of their narrations.

The discourse of Nigeria in the 80s and 90s in this study is contextualized in the idea that the recent past looms large for the writers selected for examination and the texts as studied here are identified as realist in nature. These writers' intention as authors is quite clear: they attempt to show their perception of Nigeria in the 80s and 90s. As social realists they reflect the lives of ordinary people and their problems. In the framework of contemporary or immediate history, these novels refer to concrete events in the setting the characters move

around in. The writers portray their characters as individuals or social groups which are in opposition to the military state in the novels. Thus, we see for example the journalist Bukuru stand against the tyrannical military state in *Arrows of Rain*, or the university students/the people of Poverty Street versus the military state in *Waiting for an Angel*, or the people versus the state in *Everything Good will Come* and *Purple Hibiscus*. What all these oppositions show is defiance on the part of either an individual or a group who react to their situation of oppression. These writers write from the diaspora, but they re-inscribe themselves in the place they have left by fictionalizing what they have lived through. There is no questioning the fact that the politics of association inherent in contemporary Nigerian writing reveal these writers as committed to the belief that they have a stake in Nigeria, even though their work reveals an evolving multicultural awareness based on their being physically located in the West. We have identified this era as a period of military rule and dictatorship and these writers' perception of this phenomenon is reflected in the use of their imaginations to engage with Nigeria as a 'memory place'.

These writers' experience of military rule is also the experience of conditions that are traumatic. The writers, therefore, engage with the process of the reconstruction of historical events by revisiting these events from the trauma of military rule. These novels have been examined together because they represent individual representations of the past but at the same time are testimonial narratives that show a relationship between military rule in the 80s and 90s, and traumatic processes. To engage with trauma is to engage with a victim's or a witness' response to the experience of trauma. Our examination of the novels chosen for study here is an engagement with the response of third-generation Nigerian writing to the traumatic experience of military rule. The military regime in Nigeria of the 80s and 90s is therefore implicated as perpetrators of the trauma experienced by the people in the texts chosen. The writers in this study regard military rule as an instrument of oppression and deal with the trauma from this phenomenon as a collective experience, and respond to it by returning to it in their art as a form of protest. This study responds to these narratives which express experiences of trauma by exploring the connections between military rule and the traumatic conditions evident in the novels we studied.

This study foregrounds the era of the 80s-90s in contemporary Nigerian fiction as a category for discourse in the present generation of Nigerian writing. This study's engagement with contemporary Nigerian writing was not carried out with the aim of re-evaluating existing

readings in this field, nor to provide an alternative account of what makes the “third generation” distinct. Rather, this study seeks to enrich the existing critical discourse on Nigerian literature by offering a path for an enriching analysis of this corpus, expanding the perspectives offered by existing study and suggesting new readings in this developing field. The ideas we have reflected on here should initiate further study that will provoke new critical paradigms shaped by the postcolonial and the contemporary world with which contemporary Nigerian writing engages.

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