

1 The Writer as a Dreamer: Utopia and the Ideals of Utopianism 2 in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's the Presidential Handshake

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7 **Abstract**

8 Literature mirrors society and literary artists reflect the realities of lives in their various
9 societies through their literary works. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh is one of the Nigerian writers who
10 use their literary works to advance political goals all geared and targeted towards a more
11 humane and prosperous society. Utopia as a concept is coined from the two Greek words:
12 outopia which means ?no place? and eutopia which means ?the good place? and both words
13 combined together to mean ?the good place in no place?. This is the idea of a perfect world
14 that obviously conflicts with our real world of reality. Utopian novels, therefore, are the type
15 of novels where the writers create a perfect and beautiful world; a world where everything is
16 good and ideal, a paradise where people and society thrive in harmony and human
17 development and achievements flower at their peaks. This world is far from our world of
18 reality, our world of flesh and blood but writers create them perhaps to show a picture of an
19 ideal world and also to see if we can through constant effort and quest strive to model our
20 world to a greater extent in the form of the ideal world. This paper adopted the utopian
21 perspective in literary works as the framework for this study. The paper is interested in
22 determining the real life social "political and economic realities that obviously gave rise to
23 the issues in the novel under discourse.

24

25 **Index terms**— utopia, utopianism, dreamer, society, corruption, political disillusionment, disenchantment,
26 idealism, reformation.

27 **1 Introduction**

28 literature as a mirror reflects society and literary artists all around the globe reflect their societies in their literary
29 works. Writers across the world have embraced this unique gift of literature to express the socio-political,
30 economic, religious and even cultural milieu of their people. These writers, under the umbrella of literature have
31 created works whose goals are channeled towards the ideas of socio-political, economic, cultural and religious
32 reformation. This situation and its manifestation is made possible by the "inner-light" believed to be possessed
33 by any gifted writer with which may geared towards the better mind of mankind. According to Wole Soyinka:

34 The writer possesses an inner light not available to masses of his people and that it is his duty to use this
35 inspiration and insight to guide his society towards a beautiful future. (7) [3] Writers and literary artists have
36 embraced the genres of literature to preach, shout, satirize and mock in order to purge their societies of all the
37 canker worms that militate against positive and developmental inclination. As David Ker opines:

38 The writer is a member of a society and his sensibility is conditioned by social and political happenings around
39 him. These issues will therefore perforce be present in his work. (Literature and Society in Africa, 7) [4] No
40 devoted and patriotic writer can escape this task of social crusading, re-ordering, re-orientation, reeducating,
41 engineering and re-shaping that must be done in the society. In the views of Donatus Nwoga: "if it is necessary
42 to throw bombs in order to change the society, then a writer should recognize his obligation to his society and

4 III.

43 throw as many bombs as possible ?" (4) A writer ought not to be like the proverbial man who was busy pursuing
44 a rat while his house was on fire. A writer in a society is the moral conscience of his society and his art should gear
45 towards social issues and social rehabilitation. It is in tandem with this known fact about literature and literary
46 writers in the society that this paper attempts a sociological reading of Ngozi-Chuma-Udeh's The Presidential
47 Handshake with the aim of exploring the various socio-political and economic realities of our society that formed
48 the matrix of the work; and the writers viewpoint in the quest for a better and ideal society of our dream.

49 2 II.

50 3 Conceptual Framework

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

58 The term utopia designates the class of fictional writing that represents an ideal, non-existent political and
59 social way of life. It derives from Utopia, a book written in Latin by the renaissance humanist Sir Thomas More
60 which describes a perfect commonwealth; More formed this title by conflating the Greek words "eutopia" (good
61 place) and "outopia" (no place). The first and greatest instance of the literary type was Plato's The Republic
62 which set forth in dialogue, the eternal Idea or Form, of a perfect commonwealth that can at best be merely
63 approximated by political organizations in the actual world. Most of the later utopias like that of Thomas More,
64 represent their ideal state in the fiction of a distant country reached by a venturesome traveler. There have been
65 many utopias written since More gave impetus to the genre, some of mere Aracadian dreams, others intended as
66 blueprints for social and technological improvements in the actual world. (416) a) According to Charles Nnolim
67 Man writes utopian literature, it seems either as a personal revolt against the human condition (ie against
68 things as they are) or in his perpetual search for a heaven on earth-an earth that partakes of the kingdom idea,
69 namely: fullness, richness, manifoldness, satisfying individuality, paradise on earth. Utopian literature has always
70 expressed man's longing for things as they might or ought to be, for it is the aim of utopian literature to invite
71 the wretched of the earth to partake, even if vicariously, of the delights and satisfaction denied them in this valley
72 of tears. (64)

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

76 4 III.

77 Allied Literature: the Ideals of Utopianism vis-a-vis African Literature

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

82 Utopia, as a word and concept has its own peculiar history. The one major work preceding More's in the field
83 was Plato's Republic. Its influence on Utopia is said to be extensive and unmistakable. The central theme of
84 both Plato's Republic and More's Utopia is the search for justice. In the Republic, the rulers are to be a group
85 of intelligent, unselfish men called the guardians or philosopher-kings, who conduct public affairs for the good
86 of the whole nation. Gold and silver coinage is outlawed, and there is a rigid proscription against luxury and
87 ostentation. Life in the society is directed by a highly moral code of conduct. An educational system for the
88 intelligentsia is elaborately and idealistically designed. Equality of men and women is proposed in both works,
89 though with certain qualifications. There is allowance made in Plato's scheme for the practice of slavery, as
90 there is in More's. There are, on the other hand, departures from Plato in Utopia, some quite radical. The
91 Republic establishes sharply defined class distinctions -the ruling intelligentsia; the warrior class; commoners,
92 consisting of merchants, artisans, and laborers; and finally, at the lowest level, the slaves. Utopians recognize no
93 such gradations among their citizens. The religious beliefs and practices in the two books are, of course, quite
94 different. These are among the various areas of similarities and differences evident in the two works pioneering
95 the ideals of utopia in our various societies. Be it as it may, utopia in common parlance has come to mean an
96 impractical or idealistic scheme for social and political reform in our various societies. In the opinions of Bill
97 Ashcroft: Wherever utopias occur, three key contradictions emerge: the relation between utopias and utopianism;
98 the relation between the future and memory; and the relation between the individual and the collective. African
99 literature from its inception has embraced the ideals of utopianism as a veritable way of ushering in change and
100 bringing into the continent, the ideals and quality of life that are not in existence but yet, are highly essential
101 and are sine qua non in the collective struggle to build a new Africa. African writers infuse in their works, the
102 inventions of utopianism by creating a society that is larger than their immediate environment, a society that

103 is ideal, corrupt-free, prosperous and harmonious in many accounting. This is a society these writers believe is
104 obtainable and capable of replacing our corrupt society if only our bountiful human and natural resources, and
105 enviable economy will be prudently managed and our socio-political and philosophical ideology reformed for the
106 better. According to Craig Smith: Since its emergence during the nationalist years of 1945-60, African fiction has
107 persistently explored the dialectic between the promise of change and the pressures of compromise. The desire
108 to re-imagine the nation-to constitute it anew, at any and all scalesis the lifeblood of this literature?. Utopia
109 draws upon desire: desire for change, for escape both from the here-and-now and to what will be better, that
110 goal which Ngugi describes as "true communal selfregulation and self-determination ... through a real control of
111 all the means of communal self-definition in time and space." At their most powerful moments, the novels call
112 for the creation of something new: a social order that will heal the scars of colonization, either by returning to
113 pre-colonial values or by breaking free into a truly egalitarian polity. (81) a) The critic went further to posit thus
114 ?Yet at the same time that they envision this national rebirth, these works also inscribe the powerful resistance
115 to change of specific social collectivities and ideologies. Texts become sites of struggle for control of the nation's
116 imagination—the way it imagines itself to itself as well as to readers outside its boundaries. And the moments at
117 which texts fight these social struggles open up new possibilities for understanding how political consciousness
118 and literary expression work upon each other. (81)

119 The African continent has been a continent with a chequered history and unpleasant experiences. First is her
120 experience with slavery that robbed her of great men and women of enviable skills and manpower. Again, she
121 witnessed the inevitable colonialism that destroyed her culture and left her in pains of humiliation and perpetual
122 search for what is left behind that will guide her in the perfect direction and sooth her wounds forever. In the
123 views of Bill Ashcroft:

124 African utopianism?reverts either to an historic sense of pharaonic identity or embeds a sense of cultural
125 'Africanness' in a mythic consciousness that extends beyond any particular nation. The later novels of Ayi
126 Kwei Armah are particularly engaged in the recovery of an African classicism in the appropriation of Pharaonic
127 Egyptian culture to African history. Most commonly associated with the work of Cheikh Anta Diop in the
128 1970s? Ben Okri on the other hand generates a utopianism through an exuberant language that provides a richly
129 utopian view of the capacity of the African imaginaire to re-enter and reshape the modern world. It is not merely
130 a hope for African resurgence, but a vision of Africa's transformative potential. (7) The African continent by the
131 knowledge of her experiences is no stranger to misfortune, tragedies, backwardness and exploitation. Problems of
132 leadership, poverty, neo-colonialism, dictatorship, corruption, ethnic rivalry and all sorts of afflictions characterize
133 the map and identification of the continent, and though unarguably one of the richest continents in the world,
134 Africa still remains undeveloped and poor when compared with the rest of the world. In congruence with this,
135 Africa writers across the globe have taken it upon themselves the laborious task of addressing several nuances of
136 injustices and past errors in their creative works. Utopian literature provides an escape route in the miasma of
137 these socio-political and economic anomalies. It points at the way forward and serves as a beacon of hope and
138 faith in the glories of the continent yet to come. Some African writers create utopian literature first, as a means
139 of escape from the gory realities around them, second, as a form of elixir and consolation, third, as a symbol of
140 hope and continual belief in a glorious future yet to come and lastly, in demonstration of their collective dreams
141 as writers with visions and prophetic ideas of a new nation where peace and harmony, decorum and prosperity
142 is the order of the day. According to Charles Nnolim:

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

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

153 6 b) Nnolim went further to posit thus

154 Without this anticipatory inventiveness, countless possibilities would have remained lost to man and remained
155 unrealized. And where no anticipatory utopia is created to open up possibilities for man, we find a stagnant,
156 sterile present: we find a situation in which not only individual but cultural realization of human possibilities are
157 inhibited and remain unfulfilled. (65) All these are parts of the deep rooted beliefs and ideas of utopianism as
158 relates to African literature. This type of literature smacks of fantasy; highly imaginary and unrealistic but in
159 reality is apt and energizing in the face of the ever increasing need to search out for better ways to change the
160 fortune and physiognomy of the continent for the better. Also, to continue to ensure the unwavering nationalist
161 spirit that will help the Africans to work collectively to achieve the dreams of their 'African paradise' on earth is an

6 B) NNOLIM WENT FURTHER TO POSIT THUS

162 inclusive aim and venture.IV. Socio-Political Disillusionment in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's the Presidential Handshake
163 Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's

164 The Presidential Handshake is a sequel to her first novel, Teachers on Strike. The novel is a continuation of the
165 first novel where we had earlier met teacher Nebe. The story in the novel centers around a teacher named Nebe.
166 Teacher Nebe was described as a teacher with high moral standards and values for life. He is a great activist and
167 social crusader who always stands on the path of truth and what is right irrespective of what the leaders and
168 society think about it. That was the only reason he was still a poor teacher despite the long years he had spent
169 in the profession. He had rejected several avenues to enrich himself from bribery and ill-gotten wealth offered by
170 some political leaders. He is armed with the belief that teaching is a passion, a calling and not a money-making
171 venture. In Teachers on Strike, Teacher Nebe was a strong activist and the leader of the Teacher's Union who
172 wedged a long and drawn-out war with the then sole-administrator who had sacrificed the educational standard
173 of the state on the altar of politics, selfish and economic gains. In The Presidential Handshake, Teacher Nebe had
174 refused to let go his experiences during the strike actions and that led to his bitter disposition towards politics. It
175 was until the President, Supo visited his school that the anger was resuscitated and his hatred from the memory
176 of the strike and its effect on the education sector came alive again. The writer captured this in these words:
177 ? Supo's coming has brought so many bad memories to his soul. It had revived the ghosts of buried memory
178 of the long, devastating teacher's strike action against the non-payment of their salaries by the immediate past
179 District Administrator. It was a battle for life by the teachers. So many things were lost both physically and
180 psychologically. People withered and died as if they were flowers starved of water. It was a terrible carnage on
181 educational sector ? . ??24) This is the plight of Teacher Nebe as a result of the strike action in the first novel.
182 The strike left an indelible mark on the teacher, the society and the education sector as a result of a leader's
183 insensitiveness. The strike took a greater percentage of the teacher's life, and that made the hatred for politics to
184 take root and live with him. He hated the leaders and would wish to avoid them at all costs. The strike robbed
185 him a part of him. Teacher Nebe became a representative of many teachers who may still battle to get over the
186 psychological and traumatic experiences of the strike as the writer portrayed thus:

187 Since that strike, teacher Nebe had never been his real self. A very significant part of him went into the strike
188 action but at the end of the protest, not all of him returned and he had been trying for years, to figure out
189 which part of him that was still missing. He weighed his spiritual self, he weighed his physical and psychological
190 self. Yet, he could not lay his hands on any tangible component of his being that was missing but he was sure
191 something was missing. Another thing he was sure of was that the experience gathered from the strike action
192 had taught him that no politician was worth giving an ear. He had made up his mind to create a safe distance
193 from the politicking in the nation as he would give a hungry cheetah dangling gold in his claws. Politics was,
194 indeed for the teacher, a very dirty game, a game of the sheathed claws of monster ready to pounce and tear ?
195 (24).

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

205 Volume XV Issue II Version I 22 () knew him as a student full of wit, cunning and deceit and could use the
206 power of his wit to escape from any trouble and predicament he finds himself. Supo would have loved to see
207 his ex-student prosperous and doing well in the labour market if not for the side Supo had identified with in
208 the society. Teacher Nebe would have been happy and full of admiration and praise for Supo if he had been a
209 successful business man. But Supo was a politician and that drew the gap between the teacher and his ex-student.
210 His realization that Supo had succeeded in the game of blood to ascend to the pinnacle of politics and become
211 the president of the country was a noble feat but Teacher Nebe's hatred for politics would reign supreme and that
212 was why he took the decision not to honour, appreciate, regard or even identify with his former student who had
213 become the president of the country. He was much convinced that Supo will only be one of the politicians that
214 feed the masses with thousands of lies they have no hope of fulfilling. He would only feed on the gullibility of the
215 masses. He would make them promises that would never come true and amass their resources which are stashed
216 in foreign accounts around the world. This is why the applause for Supo's address which was still reaching him
217 many miles in the bush where he was taking refuge was a noise and irritation to him as the writer depicted thus:

218 The teacher wondered what this last ear-splitting prolonged applause was all about because it surpassed
219 the 'joy' of the visitor's presence among his 'people'. It almost uprooted the school from its very foundations.
220 Whatever it was, be it a promise to build a castle in the moon for his people, tar the roads with diamonds, water
221 the fields with silver, he vowed never to be moved like the rest of the gullible people around him. He sat put,
222 undaunted on the stomp of wood in Aristo's bare existentialist farm ?. (17) This is the personality of teacher
223 Nebe, a man who sees nothing in the ever delightful and promisefilled chants of our Nigerian politicians. Today
224 in society we are familiar with politicians making empty promises to the masses during every electoral campaign

225 period. Some of the politicians go as far as promising what civilization is yet to offer and this is an untold aspect
226 of the realities of the lives of the people in society. The society is used to having politicians who promised heaven
227 on earth and once elected, they begin to amass wealth and have no more business with the people who voted
228 them into power. Their interest will be on the number of houses and properties they would acquire abroad and
229 the millions of dollars they would transfer into foreign accounts before their dispensation will be over. Once their
230 tenure is over, the vicious cycle of another set of thoroughly corrupt and unscrupulous politicians who promise
231 all, but give nothing sets in again. They loot the treasury and squander the wealth of the masses. The once
232 disappointed masses continue to hope and pray with longing eyes and hungry stomachs for messiahs to come.
233 This is of serious concern to the teacher as the writer depicted thus: Teacher Emeka Nebe was not very happy
234 about this mid-day roaming in the school garden but his heart was heavy, very heavy. His physical heart seems
235 to have pains in it, as if small, sharp crystals were cutting into it. Everything seemed wrong to him, nothing was
236 ever right these days. It was not just the ordinary quandary or misunderstanding or the tiny injustices prevalent
237 in the daily National lives which majority of people feel pressing down on them. He felt rather serious brooding
238 or premonition that the country was weighing down on him. (26)

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

250 The teacher had passed through hard times in the country. He has towed the path of war with humiliating
251 governmental policies. He had been a major stakeholder in the struggles of the masses to rise above debilitating
252 governmental actions and decrees but the nation's quandaries seem to be growing in intensity instead of
253 diminishing. In his society, the poor are downtrodden, though they do not seem to mind it anyway. If they
254 do, they would not be shouting their heads off because a seeming oppressor came on a campaign tour ? (27).
255 This is the state of affairs of our society as captured by the writer in the novel. While Teacher Nebe was busy
256 running away from Supo and his presidential entourage, little did he know that the president had come solely for
257 him and to pull him into the politics he had avoided all his life. Just like the Biblical Jonah, Teacher Nebe was
258 to go to Nineveh against his wishes. Unknown to the teacher, the applause that rang greatest

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

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

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

287 captured Teacher Nebe's situation in this scene: "The teacher is back". A voice rang out from the roadside like
288 the panic of a mad herd of cattle, the crowd surged forward. Nebe just had enough time to wind up the window
289 of Dife's Jalopy before they mobbed the car? As the gate opened, the two men thought they were dreaming.
290 Nebe wiped his eyes thoroughly to make sure he was not having a nightmare in broad day afternoon? As he
291 alighted the car, he noticed that the compound was full of different types of commodities ranging from bags of
292 rice, heaps of yams to varieties of domestic animals, there were about fifteen cows tethered in the compound,
293 countless rams, each with gigantic horns, jars of palm oil? (??16) People from all works of life flooded Nebe's
294 house seeking one help or the other. Teachers, traditional rulers, bank workers, the students and youths, Alhajis
295 and market union leaders all came to Nebe begging for one selfish desire or the other. The fact that Teacher
296 Nebe continued to reject the gifts did not stop more visitors with more enticing offers for him. One of the most
297 peculiar and provoking episode worthy of note is the visit of the Traders of the under Bridge market. The market
298 was described as a death zone that has recorded and continues to record great numbers of dead people because of
299 the location of the market under a bridge. It was in the view of the increasing number of the people dying almost
300 on daily basis that the government decided to build an ultra modern complex for the traders in a rather remote
301 area far away from underneath the bridge. The idea is to the protect lives and property of the people since the
302 market is always flooded with buyers and sellers and can thrive anywhere it is located. But the leaders of the
303 trade union of the market did not want such change. The reason is in the selfish deal that they profit heavily from
304 the location of the market under the bridge. They had come to bribe Teacher Nebe with millions of naira to help
305 them convince the president that the market should not be moved. Despite being reminded about the worrisome
306 death tolls of people and the hazards in the location, the traders argued thus in advancement of their selfish
307 economic interest: "Yes, oga, Teacher, but death will come when it will, even when you are asleep in your bed.
308 We are only doing our honest business. If one person dies, the market will continue. Human life and the market is
309 the same thing. As people die, others are born. As one trader goes, another comes. Will a soldier refuse to go to
310 war because he may be shot? Do we because termites will eventually eat the body refuse to have our baths? The
311 pang of childbirth is great, but women get pregnant every day. The leader-trader philosophized to Dife's greatest
312 annoyance. (145) This is the view of the traders who would wish to remain under the bridge to maximize profit
313 rather than moving to a safe ultra modern complex the government built for them. The head bridge market is
314 real as well as the story surrounding it. It is located somewhere at Volume XV Issue II Version I 24 () Onitsha,
315 the River Niger Bridge that almost marked off the territorial boundary between Anambra and Delta States of
316 Nigeria. The above scenario and many others in the novel is a bitter exposure of the mindsets of people in the
317 society. As this continued to increase and the perversion in the society continued to be exposed in the demands
318 and actions of those who visit teacher Nebe, the teacher lamented bitterly: Why had the society reduced every
319 variable to money and nothing more? Money? money, that is what he got to hear every microsecond of the day,
320 money was valued far above human life, money was valued far above the human soul, and money was valued far
321 above the sanctity of the human spirit. Money! (147) This is the pervert mind of many people in our society.
322 This is what brings tears to the eyes of Nebe. It was not just the traders who would wish to advance their selfish
323 goals; even the youths came to Nebe to help them negotiate the sales of their voter's cards to the president.
324 Dife had advised in these words: "Do you know that these cards are your franchise and by selling them, you are
325 selling your right to vote in the leaders of your choice? You will have no rights to participate in the nation's
326 polity. Is that what you really want? These cards are the only power you hold over these politicians and if you
327 dispose of them, you have disposed of the only franchise you have to make a meaningful contribution to your
328 society. You will be selling away your rights to a broad egalitarian life for just twenty thousand naira? . ??154)
329 But suffice it to say that this was a mere sermon to the youth who left Nebe's house still burning with desires
330 to sell their voter's cards to a better buyer. There were so many other real life aspects of our society reveal in
331 the novel which was only a pointer that our social life and perception of politics is in a real mess. Our mindsets
332 need to be adjusted if we nurse any hope of building a harmonized and prosperous society.

333 8 V. The Way Forward the Utopian Dreams of the Writer

334 We have demonstrated earlier how writers use the avenue of their literary works to decry injustice, corruption,
335 bad governance among other forms of vices which have eaten deep into the fabrics of our society and militate
336 against our desired peace and progress. In The Presidential Handshake the writer sets out to expose the role
337 the masses play in ensuring that this cycle of exploitation, bad leadership and political exploitation continues
338 all around us. The problem, as we realize from the position of the writer in the novel, is not just with the
339 leaders but also with the society, the masses who support the leaders to exploit them. It was when Teacher
340 Nebe visited the president that he realized that the man was suffering. His ideas of politics was different from
341 what the people thought and he needed people like Nebe to help him make some positive changes and change
342 the people's view of politics. The president, Supo had lamented bitterly thus: ? Because I felt time has come for
343 necessary redirection of our people's mode of thoughts towards positivism. You see, teacher, it is not easy being
344 a public figure. Everybody has a wrong notion of you, including your closest of associates. Your people expect
345 you to bring back home all the money in the coffers of the government? they expect to go to bed and get rich
346 the next morning because the president is their kinsman. I found myself in a most bizarre situation and I had to
347 apply certain stringent measures one of which was to stay clear until I figure out ways of tackling the problems of
348 making our people come to full realization that nobody is the government. The government is everybody. (348)

349 The president was full of lamentation on the state of affairs of the nation and what the people expect of him.
350 From his perspective, it was the masses that in many ways push the leaders and give them room to exploit them.
351 That was the only reason he had invited Teacher Nebe to join him in the task of re-orienting the mindsets of
352 people in the society for effective and good governance. The president had confessed thus: Teacher, as I told you
353 before, the reorientation of our people is a task uphill which only the most dedicated souls could achieve and that
354 is where you came in. Our people were bearing so much erroneous grudges for me because I disappointed their
355 expectations of siphoning all the money in the economy back to the purses of my friends and relatives. I needed
356 someone to illustrate to them the falsehood of their impressions about the nation's politics. I needed someone
357 very intelligent and incorruptible to hammer real sense into their heads and you have started doing that. (348)

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

364 Realization dawned on the teacher that the problem in the country emanated from the erroneous perception of
365 the entire society and not wholly from the nation's polity. All had misconstrued the core essence of governance.
366 This misplacement of values had eaten so deep into the people and required very critical persistent modification.
367 The teacher knew it would be Year 2015

368 The Writer as a Dreamer: Utopia and the Ideals of Utopianism in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's the Presidential
369 Handshake A a long journey? this march for the redemption of the country but there was hope for emancipation
370 through a great deal of capacity building inductions for reorientation of consciousness. (351)

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

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

391 The artist has also an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become a neurotic. He is one who is
392 urged on by instinctual needs which are too clamorous. He longs to attain to honour, power, riches, fame and
393 the love of women; but he lacks the means of achieving these gratification so, like any other with an unsatisfied
394 longing, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and all his libido too, to the creation of his
395 wishes in the life of fantasy, from which the way might readily lead to neurosis. (61)

396 The above view and statement is necessary and apt here to demonstrate how a writer is a dreamer and how
397 his dreams inescapably diffuse into his literary works and formed part and parcel of his quest to achieve a new
398 order of things and events which in many ways conflict with the traditional ways these ideas and events have
399 been conceived and accepted. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh obviously as a writer, we can argue, is filled with dreams of
400 a beautiful society; a society where the leaders know their roles and the limits of their powers and the masses
401 equally recognize theirs. The writer dreams of a society where there is peace, progress and harmony. The writer
402 also dreams of a corrupt-free society where excellence, merit and qualification will count in all spheres of lives; a
403 society where the leaders serve and do not loot and all the basic amenities and infrastructures are well provided
404 for the betterment of mankind in the society. She dreams of a society where education prospers and economy
405 booms for the well-being of even the lowest citizen of the society. These are part of the dreams of the writer
406 which unconsciously formed the matrix of her literary work. In the novel, The Presidential Handshake, the writer
407 created a society where a president fully recognizes his role as a leader which is a call to serve and not to loot.
408 This is why it was impossible for him to amass wealth from the nation's treasury to enrich his people as they
409 expected of him in conformity to what is obtainable in society. Every leader once he seizes power is expected to
410 loot and plunder the nation's economy until his tenure is over. His family and relatives are not expected to lack
411 anything financially for life courtesy of money stolen from the nation's treasury termed the 'national cake.' This

412 was a practice, the modus operandi which Supo decided to challenge and uproot as a president. The writer made
413 President Supo to bear and fan the embers of goodwill and transformation needed in our nation's polity. Supo,
414 irrespective of his rather infamous background as a student in teacher Nebe's class was fast to change his mindset
415 the moment he became the president of the country. He was willing to institute positive change and he needed
416 selfless and incorruptible activists like teacher Nebe to assist him in the struggle and quest to build a new society
417 of our dreams. This is the dream of the writer as one can argue that such calibers of leaders are still nowhere to
418 be found in most of our African and Nigerian society today. If they ever exist, they are still encumbered and far
419 away from the corridor of power. But the writer's conceptualization of such idealized and long waited leaders,
420 the 'saviours' of our world shows in actual sense that they are capable of existing in our real world.

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

434 9 VI.

435 10 Conclusion

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

451 If the politician and activist could unite in one common cause like they did in the novel, we too could reconcile
452 our differences and only then would we be ready to build the desired socio-political, economic and academic
453 polity we are all in dire need of. But for now presently, we are hopeful dreamers like Ngozi Chuma-Udeh wishing
454 fervently that our utopia metamorphoses into complete reality as soon as possible.¹

¹()

455 .1 Year 2015

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