

Imprisonment and Decadence in two selected Cameroonian novels by George Dobgima Nyamndi and Charles Alobwed'Epie

Florence Mbi Nchia,

Department of English Modern Letters, Higher Teacher Training College, The University of Bamenda

Abstract

*The paper, "Imprisonment and Decadence in two Selected Cameroonian Novels by George Dobgima Nyamndi and Charles Alobwed'Epie" is delimited to Nyamndi's *The Sins of Babi Yar* and Alobwed'Epie's *The Day God Blinked*. There seems to be much similarity in the presentation of prison injustice and decadence in the settings of the novels, with some characters exposed to ignominious inhuman treatment. The paper seeks to engage in a critical and comparative analysis of the imprisonment of the characters and forms of decadence in the texts. The study holds as premise that greed, the love of power, and fame are at the roots of the untold sufferings of the populace in the novels under review. The Postcolonial, Marxist, and New Historicist theories that have power as a common intersection will be of vital importance in the analysis and interpretation of the texts under study. Michel Foucault's conceptual framework on the maintenance and circulation of power in society will also be employed in this study.*

Keywords: Imprisonment, Decadence, Suppression, Power, Injustice

A. Introduction

Most Postcolonial writers in Africa could be said to be engaged in a textual representation of the foibles and decadence in their societies as portrayed in *The Sins of Babi Yar* (2012) by George Dobgima Nyamndi and *The Day God Blinked* (2008) by Alobwed'Epie. The abuse of power is most glaring in the imprisonment of the innocent and less privileged characters, while the main culprits use their money and fame to go free. Reading through *The Sins of Babi Yar* and *The Day God Blinked*, this researcher observed some trends of thoughts by the two

authors and decided to engage in a descriptive and comparative analysis of how the authors handle the themes of imprisonment and decadence in their respective novels. This paper looks at the imprisonment of innocent characters and forms of decadence in the text as portrayed by two different writers from two different Anglophone Regions of Cameroon. Imprisonment could take several dimensions such as physical, intellectual, emotional, or psychological. It could equally be self-imposed or caused by someone to another. In this study, the focus will be on the physical and psychological imprisonment of innocent and weak characters by the stronger or well-to-do characters. It is observed, that the imprisonment and cruel treatment that the weak characters received is a result of the greed and the desire of the influential characters to maintain their fame and positions to the detriment of the less privileged.

B. Theoretical issues

This paper will employ the Postcolonial theory as it handles issues of dispossession and marginalization, with a particular focus on Abdul R. Jan Mohamed's notion of 'alterity' that places the 'Other' in a less privileged position as opposed to the 'Self'. The Marxist theory will throw more light on the stratification of the society where the proletariat works for the gratification of the bourgeoisie, besides being mishandled. New Historicism involves the study of literature within a historical setting about power structures and it is suitable to this study because it does not only correlate the contexts and the texts but focuses on issues of power and dictatorship and intersects with Marxism equally on the issues of State power. The usage of known historical and geographical locations in the text will be deconstructed by Louis Montrose's doctrine on the literariness of history and the historicity of literature.

Louis A. Montrose (1989) in "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture" holds that "the writing and reading of texts, as well as the processes by which they are circulated and categorized, analyzed and taught, are being constructed as historically determined and determining modes of cultural work" (p.15). The New Historicism theory incorporates both the intrinsic; and extrinsic aspects of literature which include the sociocultural, political, religious, economic, and

psychological realities that constitute everyday realities in the society from which the writers originate which must have influenced their writings.

Being a comparative study of the works of two contemporary Cameroonian writers, the two novels will be compared and contrasted under particular headings, with a synthesis as the fruit of the comparison.

Power, as posited by Michel Foucault, is easily circulated in what people think, say, or do and this circulates daily in communities through apparatuses such as the military, prisons, refugee camps, hospitals, courts, political parties, the educational system, and the media. In *The History Of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault posits that power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, but that which at first instance constitutes a forced relationship immanent in the sphere in which it operates and which constitutes its organization, thereby forming a chain or system. (qtd. in Habib p. 771). This theoretical perspective by Foucault will also be adapted in the analysis of the texts under study. Even though Foucault sees power as both productive and repressive, this paper will focus on the repressiveness of power as portrayed and circulated through various institutions in the texts.

C. Extant literature

Our present world is overwhelmed with a lot of injustice where the weak, the poor, and those who dare challenge the status quo are unjustly imprisoned and poorly treated either because they do not have the capital to hire someone to defend their course or are deprived of following proper legal procedures by their persecutors making them helpless and confined for longer periods than the usual. Some political detainees like Martin Luther King Jr (1929-1968) and Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) were imprisoned because they opposed the oppressive systems in the U.S.A. and South Africa respectively. One of Martin Luther King Jr's famous quotes stipulates that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (Bowerman & May 2019) and a similar quote to King Jr's resonated in the Cameroonian House of Assembly by the oppositional Member of Parliament, Joseph Wirba (2016), when he vehemently opined that "when injustice becomes law, resistance becomes a duty" (Hustler, 2016). This speech was to shun the injustices and oppression experienced by the people of Southern Cameroons and

the failure of the government to treat them as equal partners over the past fifty years of independence. He refers to some lawyers and teachers who were unjustly detained in prison after a peaceful protest match meant to bring about a change.

For more than 7 years today, there has been shooting and killing of innocent civilians in the restive Anglophone Regions of Cameroon, Ukraine, and Russia with countless political detainees. The so-called veto power countries seem to turn a blind eye to the daily massacres experienced in Africa and Europe. No prompt action seems to be taken toward resolving the tussles as they undermine the unjust imprisonment and killings of innocent civilians based either on their individual or collective interest in one of the parties at war. Every day, news is reported and videos watched of victims of war trapped underground in Gaza and Ukraine, such that the abnormal is gradually becoming normal in the 21st Century.

On February 11th, 2024, many civilians were wounded while some lost their lives in a bomb blast that occurred in Nkambe Town, in Donga-Mantung Division of the troubled North West Region of Cameroon. Most of the unrest in some regions of the world is precipitated by injustice, deprivation, and dispossession of basic human rights of a minority or weaker party by a stronger one.

Literature and society are like two sides of the same coin, with one complementing and shaping the other. For Emmanuel Ngara (1985), as quoted by Henry Kah Jick, the content and form of works of art are influenced by the historical, political, and socio-economic conditions of the people. In like manner, some writers draw inspiration from their day-to-day experiences in their societies, and what they write also helps shape their societies. For Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Abacha's regime "was a terrible time to be alive, especially if you were young, talented and ambitious--and patriotic" (Afterword p.223). In the same light, a human rights analyst in *Waiting for an Angel* describes the state of affairs in Nigeria in the 1990s:

a roster of hundreds of political prisoners and others who have been detained arbitrarily by the military regime; the judiciary is in paralysis having [been] subjected to all manner of military interference, you

have prisons in appalling states and public services in a [state] of collapse, every element of the rule of law has been thoroughly undermined and comprised by Abacha. (p.223)

The prison injustice and deplorable treatment are alarming in the African Continent as observed daily in our society and as portrayed by some authors in their works. The rich and those in power take delight in jailing the weak and their rivals and go unquestionable. Where, therefore, is the rule of law if the very law is taken into a few hands who twist it to suit their whims and caprices?

D. Decadence in the Ministry of Justice and Territorial Administration

Nyamndi's *The Sins of Babi Yar* and Alobwed'Epie's *The Day God Blinkered* give a vivid picture of the degrading system of justice and the overview of decadence in Post-Colonial Cameroon with corruption and malpractice in almost every stratum of the society with those in power having an upper hand on the weak. *The Sins of Babi Yar* has two settings: Tole and Sanko, at the foot of Mount Cameroon in the South West Region of Cameroon, while *The Day God Blinkered* is set in Dande, the capital of Ewawa, a rich resourceful country from 1982 to 2007. This section portrays the dominant malpractices at the divisional, regional, and national levels of the two settings.

The two novelists depict the ministries as the core of decadence in the two societies, with the Ministry of Justice and Territorial Administration being solely responsible for the plight of the main characters. Shechem Nu'mvi and Levi Mu'tum are famous reporters with *The Chariot* in Nyamndi's *The Sins of Babi Yar* who are unjustly arrested and detained for years in prison without trial. The two men are imprisoned for writing about Motine Swaibu, the chairman of Tole Cooperative Union [TOCU], who embezzles huge sums from TOCU that renders it bankrupt, thereby frustrating the lives of the Tole indigenes. He bribes Justice Daniel Mowena of the Tole Magistrate Court and goes free because he can do and undo with his money.

1. Love of money and downplay of justice

In a conversation between Justice Mowena and Swaibu, the former states that the law is not about “blind straightness but more about interest” a lesson he quickly imbibed in the school of magistracy (9). Motine equally observed that Mowena’s predecessors; Ekosso and Mandiba, who “were straighter than a ruler”, could not excel in life (p. 9). The author in his stylistic device makes use of a glass-topped table with a massive black support of hardened iroko which symbolizes Cameroonian justice. Mowena tells his friend that the glass is justice objectified and made clean, while the black wood has “to contain the unchecked transparency of the glass top” (p. 9).

Stephen Greenblatt (1989) in “Towards a Poetic of Culture” holds that “literary criticism has a familiar set of terms for the relationship between a work of art and the historical events to which it refers: we speak of allusion, symbolization, allegorization, representation, and above all mimesis. Each of these terms has a rich history and is virtually indispensable . . .” (p. 11). The symbolism of the glass and iroko depicts the intensity of the injustice practiced. Justice Mowena, despite the oaths taken to exercise justice, is interested in the riches he can make in place of the justice he represents.

As concerns *The Day God Blinked*, the decadence of the prison authority is portrayed by the sale of drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and others by Setania to other inmates and her ability and freedom to leave the cell at will for illegal business with some top officials such as the Minister of Finance and the Director of the Central Bank. She spends most of her time outside the prison walls under the pretext that she is bedridden in the hospital and only comes to the prison when a major inmate escapes. When the police visited the prisons to investigate if Setania was there, it happened she and Lucia had gone out of the prison. The prison guards dig a hole through the wall and let them in. Setania emerges from the toilet giving the impression of having diarrhea. The guards ironically do what one would normally expect from prisons when escaping from their cells. Like Levi in *The Sins of Baby Yar*, Lucia is visited twice in prison by lawyers who are interested in buying her case more to their interest than Lucia’s. They do not succeed because she becomes intransigent.

2. Unjust imprisonment of weak characters by the strong

Other victims of the corrupt practices of the judiciary include Teacher Efuet who is wrongly accused of embezzling money from pupils in the primary school, while the Headmaster goes free after bribing the magistrates. In most of the cases, the hunter becomes the hunted. The authorial voice states that "we should be wary of regimes that intone the hollow song of peace when they should be practicing [sic] the ideal justice" because "Justice, not peace, is the pre-requisite for independence (p. 37). Justice is actually what brings about fairness, peace, and happiness amongst any group of people. This also explains why the absence of war does not symbolize peace, as many people could be undergoing a psychological war and tormented internally by the lack of justice in their society. Swaibu and the headmaster go free after embezzling huge sums of money, while the innocent Teacher Efuet is thrown into prison.

Similarly, when Mowena the magistrate illegally goes to fell trees in the forest with his sawman, Schechem Nu'mvi, a duty-conscious police officer, intercepts the whole process with his activists, thereby infuriating the Justice who "left his position at the forest edge and stormed in the direction of the chain and more fixedly in that of Nu'mvi" crying from a foaming mouth and wagging a stubby finger perilously close to Nu'mvi's left eye with a strong "You again!" and assures them "you and your gang will be hearing from me" (p. 3). The chain had not yet dislodged, when one of the policemen, in exhausted blue uniform, flashed the warrant at it, revealing the characteristic signature of Justice Dan Mowena of the Tole Magistrate Court. "Schechem and the activists offered no resistance as they were thrown roughly into the back of a Hino lorry and trundled off to custody in Sanko" (p.4). Mowena and Swaibu, sitting at the court verandah, throw a mocking hand at the lorry that drives past and Mowena reminds Swaibu, "The logging can proceed undisturbed now" (p.4). Those who violate the law are secured at their corners, while those who fight to maintain justice are thrown into prison like Nu'mvi and his activists. In Marxist Literary theory, the rich like Mowena and Swaibu own the nation's resources and they exploit and maltreat the less privileged to maintain their power and fame. As stipulated by Foucault, the prison is one of the institutions where power is circulated or enacted. By imprisoning Teacher Efuet, Levi, Nu'mvi and his activists, the Headmaster, Swaibu, and the

Justice feel more secure to carry out their corrupt practices unchecked. Powers are therefore manifested in what people think, say, and do as enacted in institutions and discourses. Kun is abandoned by Bertha, her mother, who is mysteriously lulled by Swaibu as a way of inflicting more pain on her husband, Nu'mvi when he is imprisoned. The question of the rich oppressing the poor is echoed in Chiamaka Cynthia Igboayaka's article (2020), where even the 'slave' wife Ibo is aware of the power she wields and her oppression of the so-called 'free-born' in the society given her wealthy background (16). The decadence in the society has its toll on members of the society.

In the same way, Lucia in Alobwod'Epie's *The Day God Blinked* is wrongly and unjustly accused and condemned to a death sentence by hanging following Ewawa's penal code against infanticide. Lucia believes in telling the truth as it happened without the help of a lawyer who would manipulate facts and logic to prove her innocence. According to Lucia, facts and evidence do not portray truth always. For example, the fact that she throws her baby into the lake and the remains are tugged out by frogmen from the bottom of the lake does not mean she killed her baby. Her sentence is based on the above judgment and the statement taken down by a drunken police. The difference between the two novels is that while the Justice receives bribes to distort the truth in *The Sins of Baby Yar*, nobody receives bribes in Lucia's case except that she suffers from a distortion of her statement which reads:

On 20th March 1999, at about 10:30 p.m. I killed my son because he was always sick and worrying me. I waited till 2:30 a.m. (when I thought there would be no people) to carry the body to the municipal lake. When I got to the lake I threw the body into it. Unfortunately for me, a police patrol caught me as I was leaving the place. (p. 28)

This, however, is not the true story. Lucia raised her hand to counter that public consensus, "but the Judge now too full of justice pronounced justice almost immediately" (28) sentencing Lucia to death by Hanging. This in itself is a lampoon on the judiciary.

Sebranek, et al. (1996), state that capital punishment should be abolished because "two wrongs don't make a right. To kill someone convicted of murder contradicts the reasoning behind the law that taking another's life is wrong" (p.108) and the most serious objection is that death is final and cannot be altered. Errors will always abound in the judicial system such that convicting an innocent person to death would be too grievous as errors made cannot be reverted when one is already dead. For these reasons, capital punishment should be replaced with a system that puts all doubt on the side of life and not death.

3. Deplorable prison conditions and poor feeding

The prison officials in both novels are insensitive to the needs and conditions of the inmates. The prisoners live in deplorable conditions: Lucia, the main character in *The Day God Blinked*, reports that she longed to be moved "to the prison to await trial there rather than in their overcrowded cells" (p. 10). But her situation was no better in the prison as they had to wait in the van for too long much so that she developed cramps in the feet. She paints a vivid picture of the prison condition:

For two hours the officer keeping the keys of the cells was nowhere to be found. Some criminals who had been locked up in the cells for two weeks were also to be sent to the prison to make way for scores of fresh ones At last, the fellow came stinking with alcohol. He staggered to the gate of the first cell and opened it. A solid mass of fetid air from the cell buffeted my face: 'Horrible! Are there human beings in there' (11)?

Lucia Ntang, wonders if human beings could be subjected to such inhuman conditions, but to her surprise, "twenty Ewawians limped out of a two by three-meter cell. All of them young men driven into crime by unemployment" (11). On their way to Bondange Central Prison, the girls had a nasty experience as "the boys stunk like rotten meat. Some of them had developed loathsome skin diseases. Some were sloughing, others were sore [sic] in the armpits. Stripped to bare pants and having had no toilet tissue to keep themselves clean after nature's call, they stunk with faeces" (p. 11). Despite their feeble conditions, the

administration exploits them by sending them to work on their farm, construct houses for the ministers, or do their household chores.

Concerning prison sanitation in *The Day God Blinked*, the toilets which are never in good repair are flooded by an inmate such that the old and the new content whirl up, “creating a vortex or faeces that gurgled for some time then ended up overflowing the bowl like boiling kuachah (corn beer)” (p. 13). When the inmates experience an outbreak of cholera, two days later, the prison authorities do not act promptly until when they have lost hundreds of inmates. The poor toilet conditions that caused the cholera outbreak were only repaired following Setania’s influence on the SSP.

Similarly, the inmates in *The Sins of Babi Yar* are subjected to disgusting conditions. For their sanitary amenities, they had “just a tin bucket tucked away in one suffocating corner” of their cell which they avoided using as much as possible since it was emptied only once a week. This made them keep “their remains in them the way a child would jealously keep a piece of meat until he could keep it no more” (p.28). When the bucket is filled up, “the floor took over as bucket and inmates pushed further and further away into space that dwindled with the onslaught of odour and baked, watery deposits, yellow for the most part, but also pale green and even hot red” (p. 29). Nyamndi paints a vivid metaphor in which he compares the act of stifling faeces to that of a child savoring a piece of meat. Nyamndi, like Epie, uses apt metaphors and eschatological images in describing prison sanitation which the reader finds nauseating. Writers like Ayei Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* employ such repellent imagery too.

Besides the poor sanitation, the detainees are always served beans poorly prepared and infested heavily with weevils. As regards feeding in *The Day God Blinked*, the inmates are fed on swine food because the money that is meant for their feeding is misappropriated such that they are sent on a regular outing. They live with infectious skin diseases from their poor feeding and as they keep inhaling the obnoxious stench from feces littered around them. Even though the inmates are subjected to torture and appalling living conditions, their exploitation by the SSPs is more glaring in Alobwed’Epie’s text than in Nyamndi’s

4. Prisons as extermination grounds

The Senior Superintendent of Prisons [SSP] is not only insensitive to basic human needs but equally hard-hearted. Imprisonment does not seem to be corrective and to transform the inmates, but sometimes a means to completely wipe out innocent and recalcitrant lives. When the SSP in *The Sins of Babi Yar* notices Levi partly alive in the cell where dead prisoners are dumped, he gives it a damn because an assertion of his being alive will jeopardize his position since nobody has ever been declared dead in the history of the prison was found alive. He closes the door on the helpless and innocent human being who is longing to come back fully to life with children and a wife to take care of. Lucia in Alobwed'Epie's novel is unjustly sentenced to death too.

Talking about the Self and the Other, Abdul R. JanMohamed states:

Faced with an incomprehensible and multifaceted alterity, the European theoretically has the option of responding to the other in terms of identity and difference. If he assumes that he and the Other are essentially identical, then he would tend to ignore the significant divergences and judge the Other according to his cultural values. If, on the other hand, he assumes that the other is irremediably different, then he would have little incentive to adopt the viewpoint of that alterity: he would again tend to turn to the security of his cultural perspective. (The post-colonial Studies reader p.18)

The notion of the Self/Other is so complex amongst the colonizers that their perception of the 'Other' is based more on a biased mind, than on a real difference. JanMohamed concludes, that "Genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the Self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture" (p.18). Since one's culture is what formed that being, it becomes impossible to negate one's very being. This explains why the validity assumption of moral superiority by the colonizers cannot be questioned by the colonizer himself or his society's formation (p.18) and thus, the tendency to look low on the other. The SSP

feels a superior being over the inmates and sees Levi as a mere object such that he would be more at peace knowing he is dead than alive. In Postcolonial theory, the 'Other' is a term used to describe the way the colonizer perceives the colonized about itself. The 'Other' is inferior to the 'Self'. Otherness, therefore, results from the process of othering by which imperial discourse creates its others.

In a discourse on the Cameroon Novel of English expression in *Perspectives on Written Cameroonian literature in English*, Ambanasom States that like their counterparts in other post-colonial societies, "the Anglophone Cameroon writers, having adopted the novelistic form and the English language, are imaginatively exploring, dramatizing and exposing the social problems that preoccupy Cameroonians" (p. 95). The Anglophone writing is a creative terrain for the assessment of post-colonial discourse because of the successive layers of colonial damage that have settled on the Anglophone consciousness leading to a collective experience. Postcoloniality, therefore, lends itself well to a criticism of Cameroon's situation where we observe the hegemonic class seizing the voice of the marginalized group, thereby silencing the aggrieved class, and articulating their problem from a wrong angle with the problem of misrepresentation setting in.

5. The forces of law and order

As concerns public security, the police force is portrayed as constituting criminals who ought to be in prison rather than those who are convicted innocently. When a barmaid in *The Sins of Babi Yar* prefers Tendo to a police officer in El Dorado, the latter sends two police sergeants who rape Tendo's eight-year-old daughter and wife in the night. Tendo succeeds in planting an axe in the lower column of the one who had opened the dance of rape and he is sentenced to life imprisonment while the surviving police rapist goes free.

Alobwed'Epie could be said to launch a real attack on the police through Lucia, his female protagonist, who narrates her story that begins in media res with the use of a flashback technique. The Assistant Superintendent of Police [ASP] she meets on guard after her arrest is drunk and found sleeping,

while the authority who takes down her statement distorts it and forces her to put her signature on it.

Post Coloniality, therefore, lends itself well to a criticism of the Cameroon situation where we observe the hegemonic class seizing the voice of the marginalized group, thereby silencing the aggrieved class, and articulating their problem from a wrong angle with the problem of misrepresentation setting in. According to Lucia, "The police force is the most irrelevant working force in the Republic of Ewawa. When the police are called upon to chase a thief, they abandon the chase halfway and chase taxi men" (p. 4).

In addition, when they "are called upon to investigate a crime they distort the evidence when the culprit bribes them" (p. 4). Besides, they set up clandestine tollgates and checkpoints all over like the one on the way to Etambeng village where the ASP, unhappy that the driver has all the required vehicle documents decides to molest him by demanding "le certificate de visite technique" (p. 96) to be given a 500frs. The police are either perpetrators or witnesses of state major crimes like the bombarding of the People's Congress Hall by a Secretary General, a one-time police top brass, while blame was directed to poor electrification. The prison administration and the police force are not duty-conscious as they are more interested in bribery and corruption. Their corrupt practices are more vividly elaborated in *The Day God Blinked*, even though they commit more atrocious crimes in *The Sins of Babi Yar*.

E. Social, economic, and political spheres

Besides the alarming deterioration in the Ministry of Justice and Territorial Administration in Sanko and Ewawa, other ministries like the Ministries of Public Health, Higher Education, Social Affairs, and the Family are not exempted from the decadence in the two settings as well as the church that is expected to stand out tall in her righteousness.

1. The Ministry of Public Health

As regards Public Health, Alobwed'Epie's novel is a satire on health services in Ewawa. Health units like dispensaries and hospitals do not always have vaccines against venom and tetanus. Lucia in her unconscious state is neglected in the hospital with open and bleeding wounds from police torture and

left on a dirty and unclean stretcher on which a woman had had a stillbirth the previous day. Worst still, Lucia notices that the cloth with which she was covered was the same cloth she had used in wrapping up her dead son.

The top health officials sell drugs and vaccines that are meant to be given free to patients and children in particular. It is quite shameful to see the nurse in Etambeng administering some concoction composed of drops of kerosene for Lucia's baby (Joseph) when attacked by measles. Most medical personnel compel patients to buy drugs from particular pharmacists based on their agendas with the pharmacists. Unlike his counterpart, Nyamndi only handles deplorable health issues to prison conditions.

2. The Ministry of Higher Education

Lucia is a victim of the decadence in her ministry and society. She is raped by Joseph-Marie Essene after offering her lunch in the Parliamentary Hotel. Her high moral values made situations difficult for her as she would pass all her written examinations and fail the orals for neither bribing nor going to bed with the authorities. Lucia who had been the best academic student is left jobless. Lucia and her friend, known in the University as Marys or strict girls wonder why they had no husbands and were suffering, meanwhile, their lost mates were all married and doing well. The pathetic and challenging situation only depicts a nation in shreds with no moral guiding principle. It is hard to hear about a young man being sexually assaulted by a woman at home or school, but the reverse is true for young girls. It is deduced that some awards and successes obtained in schools are not based on merits, but on sexual relationships between students and their teachers.

The issue of rape is handled by both authors with young girls as victims mostly, with the difference that Lucia is raped probably by one of her educators or secret admirers who lures her into drunkenness in a hotel room, while *The Sins of Babi Yar* presents the actual cruelty of rape, where Tendo's eight-year-old daughter and wife are raped in the night by two police sergeants as revenge for a barmaid preferring Tendo to a police officer.

3. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Family

In *The Day God Blinked*, Lucia in her desperate situation seeks help with the Ministry of Social Affairs, and she is told the minister is not on seat. Several others go there for one need or the other and are not attended to. The disgruntled individuals question why the minister was appointed if she has no time for the needy. Lucia arrives at the ministry after 10:15 a.m. when the ministry is not open. She wonders if it were a public holiday and some minutes later she observes luxuries pajeros trooping in, each worth 75,000,000frs. When she starts breastfeeding her hungry son in front of the ministry, she is told it is forbidden and she returns home with no support from the ministry.

In the same way, most of the money meant for the less fortunate is used up in the construction of fences with the minister's relations winning the contracts. This in Postcoloniality brings out the aspect of dispossession and marginalization, as well as the notion of the binary oppression existing at every level such as the center/periphery, white/black, the rich/poor, the superior/inferior, the colonized/colonizer, the oppressor/oppressed and so on. The Ministry of Social Affairs is adorned with expense pajeros with workers who come late to work and are careless about desperate social cases like Lucia, for whom they ought to have taken great care. Like Alobwed'Epie, Nyamndi equally presents social issues plaguing the society, when Bertha is strangely lulled by Swaibu and abandons her son Kun. One wonders what delight someone would gain by inflicting more pain on a fellow being if not of gluttony and cruelty.

4. The church and its leaders

As an institution, the church is seen as a custom or system of belief that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people as well as an organization with a particular purpose like bringing the faithful or believers of a particular religion nearer God. The church which is expected to be exemplary is no better. In *The Sins of Babi Yar*, the priest spits on Catechist Ezechiel Mu'tum and the shock causes his wife an instant abortion while his son, Levi, is equally affected adversely. The author's use of hyperbole portrays the intensity of the shock to have aborted a fetus.

Equally, the Parson in *The Day God Blinked*, asks Catechist Joseph Ntang of St John of God Parish to quit the presbytery

when Lucia, his daughter, becomes pregnant after being raped. The Parson makes Lucia's confession a public affair and does not still receive Lucia when she comes knocking on their doors following her son's critical condition. The Parson who is expected to welcome those rejected by society is the first to reject not only Lucia, but her entire family, which he evicts from the church premises due to her pregnancy.

The family is the smallest unit of the community's structure such that there is a bond that links the family to the state and the church. The two authors present the strange behavior of the clerics in their works and the catechists as victims of their unruly characters, with the Parson and the Priest having almost the same degree of crime.

5. The State and its leaders

Frantz Fanon (1995) in "National Culture" posits that "the national middle class who takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class" (156). Post-colonialism, which advocates voices for the voiceless, takes its rise at the rupture point where colonialism starts. Saul Kilcam is the leader of Ewawa State who takes over from the Old Man. During the latter's regime, the Ewawians knew peace and prosperity: University education was free with allowances given to students, while married couples and single parents with children received family allowances. Despite this, the Old man in power became an aching tooth even to the French for his twenty years in power. Everyone hoped that when the old tooth was pulled out, the new one would chew better.

On the contrary, Kilcam who "inherited the pregnant coffers of the Old Man" lost it all (60-61). "Since a fox doesn't know the cost of a foul, it eats one with no qualms" (60). Kilcam neither constructed, maintained, nor preserved anything. Instead, there was an increase in taxes, a high cost of petroleum products, and new vehicle plates, while salaries were reduced thrice with a price increase of all commodities. Registrations were introduced in universities with no allowances as in the previous years. Kilcam's regime is marked by corruption, extravagance, and poor leadership. Two regimes are presented in Ewawa, with the latter being a mess compared to the former. The setting, "Ewawa", is also used by Bole Butake (1990) in his play, *And Palm Wine Will*

Flow. The Day God Blinked could be considered a national allegory where the names of people, like Saul Kilcam who takes over from the Old Man as the Ewawian Head of State, the political situation portrayed, and places like the Municipal Lake, are easily identifiable. Though not an allegory per se, *The Sins of Babi Yar* equally presents known geographical locations such as Tole, Kumba where Amina resides, the Darfur, Yupogon, Rwanda, where they “engrave their ownership in blood as cited by Levi, and structures like and the TOCU and Ikeja Police Academy. Schechem makes allusions to Nelson Mandela when he states “Freedom is a way of feeling” as he doubts if Mandela was “quite so free as in his twenty-seven years on Robben Island” (p. 31). Doubting if they will ever come out of the prison alive, Schechem tells Levi to remind him about the *Anatomy of a Miracle*. Schechem is trained at the Ikeja Police Academy, and this explains why he decides to be just in all he does. New Historicism is suitable for this study because it does not only correlate the contexts and the texts but focuses on issues of power and patriarchy.

6. Authors’ usage of narrative techniques

In Marxist criticism as cited by Shadrach Ambanasom (2013), works of art are considered commodities with a “use value” that is determined by the pleasure or information one gets from them (p.13). Thus, this section of the study ties with economic issues, though literary. Concerning the usage of suspense in *The Sins of Babi Yar*, the author leaves the reader in great suspense as he/she waits to see Levi rescued after justice takes its course with Nu’mvi and Efuet released from prison, while Mowena and Swaibu take their places. The same suspense runs through in *The Day God Blinked* when the author does not tell the reader if Lucia was hanged or rescued by the Canadian Mission as promised by the Parson. It could be inferred, therefore, that a good number of culprits are parading the streets and state offices, while innocent citizens occupy their places in the prisons. Both authors make use of flashbacks, where the two texts begin in media res, leaving the reader in great suspense as he/she reads with charged emotions in a bid to reach the end and have a big sigh of relief which is not attained. One can infer from the texts, that injustice and corruption are the preoccupation of the authors who long for justice and a positive change.

Conclusion

This study had as its central thesis, that greed and the love of money are responsible for the unjust imprisonment and the decadence in the texts under review. The researcher adopted a comparative approach, where the two texts were compared and contrasted under particular headings and sub-headings that cut across the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the citizens of Sanko and Ewawa. It was discovered, that injustice and decadence were the order of the day in the various ministries of the two settings with the Ministry of Justice and Territorial Administration as the most corrupt of all the sectors examined. The main characters, in their diligence at work, are unjustly imprisoned for challenging the rich and those in positions of power, while others like Lucia are misjudged due to the wrong taking down of her statement by a drunken police officer. The prisoners are subjected to inhuman treatment and some die from poor feeding, infectious diseases, and like of care. The prison is presented more as a place for scores settling, and show of power, than for corrective measures and transformation, while justice is swapped with greed and money.

From the aforementioned analyses of the political, religious, economic, and social life of the various institutions, one is confident to state that the systems are in ruins and the fate of the citizens of Ewawa and Sanko is still to be desired following the corruption that is glaring in every stratum of the society. Power was circulated through institutions such as ministries, prisons, churches, the military, and the family. The titles of the works speak for themselves where *The Day God Blinked* could mean the day Lucia was raped while *The Sins of Babi Yar* could be referring to the Russian version of Auschwitz, where Anti-Semitism was planted under the Nazis regime with the Jews locked up in concentration camps and exterminated brutally and a symbol for absolute cruelty. Sanko in this light, could equally be said to be the Cameroonian version of Auschwitz.

Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (2007) posit that "Literature has a function, and that function is to serve society . . . [and] the dominant conception of literature is as a pathfinder for society, a deconstructive searchlight of truth against all the dark burdens that circumscribe the ability of the community to achieve

its best and realize its finest aspirations" (p. 101). In this light, the reader sees a ray of hope in the awareness created by the authors and their inferred yearning for a just and peaceful Utopian Sanko and Ewawa.

References

- Alobwed' Epie. *The Day God Blinked*. Langaa, 2008.
- Ambanasom, A. S. (2013). *A Marxist Critical Approach to African Literature*. Shiloh Printers.
- . (2012). *Perspectives on Written Cameroon Literature in English*. Agwecams.
- Bowerman, M, & May, A. (2019). *USA TODAY*. Martin Luther King Jr. quotes the 10 most popular civil rights leaders.
- Butake, B. (1999). *And Palm-wine will Flow*. Edition Cle.
- Fanon, F. (1995). "National culture". *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. Routledge.
- Greenblatt, S. (1989). "Towards a poetics of culture". *The New Historicism*. Ed. H. Aram Veesser. Routledge. 1-14.
- Habib, R. (2005). "Postcolonial criticism" *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present*. Blackwell.
- Habila, H. (2002). *Waiting for an Angel*. Norton and Company Ltd.
<https://www.usatoday.com>nation>
- Hustler, A. (2016). [Hon Wirba Joseph's speech].
<https://www.afrohustler.com>wirba>.
- Igboayaka, C.C. (2020). "The slave paradox and contemporary reality in Sam Ukala's *The Placenta of Death*". *The Griot*. 1(1), 16.
- Jan Mohamed, R.A. (1995). "The Economy of Manichean Allegory". *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. Routledge.
- Jick, K.H. ((2008). "Popular song as a vehicle for social and political commentary in post-colonial Cameroon". *Epasa moto*. 3 (2), 51-82.
- Montrose, A. L. (1989) "Professing the Renaissance: The poetics and politics of culture". *The New Historicism*. Ed. H. Aram Veesser. Routledge, 15-37.
- Nyamndi, D. G. (2012). *The Sins of Babi Yar*. Anucam.
- Quayson, A. & Olaniyan, T. (2007). "Writer, writing and function". *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Blackwell. 101.