



An Echo that Bounds: A Neo-Colonial Reading of Helon Habila's Waiting for an Angel

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Abstract

After independence, and the hope of having a better continent failed, African Writers no longer write to regain Africa's lost dignity or culture, rather they write about neo-colonialism and how African nations have remained impoverished due to greed and selfishness on the part of our leaders. African writers in their various works echo their penchant to expose the social and political ills that are prevalent in their countries; their thematic preoccupations center on the torture, disillusionment, dictatorship, war, revolution, tribal hatred, human right violations, decadence and above all, life of disenchantment of the common man. Before now, African Literature used to be the medium for celebrating the heroic splendor of the African past; later it became a means for anti-colonial struggle and presently, it is a great channel for the portrayal of post independence disillusionment that has ravaged the African nations. Therefore, this paper makes an attempt to explicate Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* as a contemporary African fiction, showing how Habila successfully unmasked the frightening and excruciating existence of the masses in his immediate society and of course, the possible solutions on how to put an end to some of these monumental injustices and subjugation meted out to the masses. Therefore, this study focuses on neo-colonial discourses to capture the disenchanted African society, particularly Nigeria. Showing our leaders involvement in amplifying: poverty, divide and rule, ethnic and tribal wars, hatred, injustices, despair, alienation and the like which are colonialists brainchild.

Keywords: Disillusionment, Neo-Colonial, Dictatorship, Contemporary and Africa

Introduction

Most African writings are historical in the sense that what constitutes the main stream of African writing till date is derived from historical events or social conditions. As we look at the

contemporary writings, we recognize the close connection between African imaginative writing and significant historical events. It is also evident that the stories of African Literature both contemporary and old are sourced from historical accounts such as slavery, colonization and neo-colonization. Narrowing down to Nigeria, we have the history of the Nigerian civil war 1967-1970 and the Military era. It is observed that contemporary Nigerian writers seek not only to explain the African past in a historical and simultaneously comment on the process of this evolution. Also, contemporary Nigerian fiction embodies the historical experience to which the nation has passed through, and contemporary Nigerian fiction of the past decades can be described as 'historically conditioned'. It is then discovered that these historical conditions are the root to a disillusioned country as in the case of Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* which depicts the disillusioned situation of Nigeria in the 1990's under the military dictatorial rule. It is against this background that history, politics, culture and socio-economic indices intrude into the specialty of contemporary Nigerian fiction. The contemporary Nigerian fiction is that of rage or outburst of emotion and nothing less, even when one considers the socio-historical background of the works as Onukaogu and Onyeionwu (2009) affirm: "our novelists have proven to be very good historians and chroniclers of experiences that have been strategic in the history of the Nigerian nation" (122).

For this reason, an effort is made in this paper to examine Habila's viewpoint on the deplorable state of the nation and the predicament of the masses in neo-colonial African societies as depicted in his novel thereby, using the past as an impetus for political struggle of the present. Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2007) is a novel of post- independence criticism; it emphasizes his involvements regarding the thematic preoccupations of alienation, injustices, pain and disillusionment in the author's immediate society and the African continent at large. Furthermore, it is extensively acknowledged by literary critics that the muse of every work of art comes from the historic-social realities of the author. This gives credence to the view of Hugh Webb (1980) on the reliance of literature on historical and social events, as he holds that each work of art arises out of the particular alternatives of its time. Contemporary Nigerian fiction depends on history for its various constituents and reconstruction, it is discovered that the writers of this period do not spare any aspect of the Nigerian historical process; pre-colonial times and culture, colonialism, the world wars, the Nigerian civil war, military dictatorship and postcolonial disillusionment. In *Waiting for an Angel*, Habila tends to de-emphasize the significance of history unlike the early historians like; Achebe, Soyinka, Okara, Amadi and Ekwensi, where they passionately narrate the life of individual

who lives through it. It is also discovered that what history means to contemporary writers like Habila is different from what history means to historians like Achebe, Soyinka, Ike, Okara, Amadi, Ekwensi. In trying to reveal the level of human right infringement, corruption, injustice, oppression and poverty that have taken over the country, these 21st century writers, deviate from the traditional mode of narrating history. Onukaogu and Onyeionwu (2009) posit that these fundamental differences between the style of contemporary historians and the early historians is that: “many of the 21st-century novels explore the labyrinthine history of Nigerian post-civil war politics, especially as punctuated by a brutal, perennial military dominance, although our new novelists have demonstrated their artistic distance” (125). More so, these contemporary writers in trying to expose the ills in the society do so with rage thereby deviating from the traditional style of narrating history. They also express what *Metrolife* refers to as ‘artistic freedom. This also gives credence to Aijaz (1992) that; “all third world texts are necessarily national allegories” (101). Also, Attah Patrick (2010) confirms this style of contemporary writing during “Creative Writing Workshop” in Abuja where he maintains that the first thing to notice in Habila’s work is his exquisite use of language. Second, his generous use of irony”.

Echoes of Post-Independent Nigeria

In *Waiting for an Angel*, the reader experiences a realistic fiction on Nigeria’s past history (Military regime). It is set in Lagos city, in 1990s, during the despotic leadership of General Sani Abacha, whose major project as the head of state was the accumulation of wealth for himself and members of his immediate family. Adekanbi (1998) affirms that in his time, “several major state contracts were awarded to his children and other relatives who reaped huge incomes when in most cases they did not execute the contracts” (14). Also, Muhammad (1998) confirms in an article that during his regime, he indiscriminately transferred state funds into private accounts acquired extensive property, and had business interests in virtually all the states of the federation (3).

Habila makes the reader think and ponder on the fragility of democratic institutions which we take for granted. He describes how the slow erosion of rights can lead to the rise of dictators who seize absolute power to continue their rule. The novel's emotion is provoked by the reader’s identification with the characters and the ability to understand that these people are not different, these are people who through no fault of theirs have become victims of circumstance and the power of military controlled by one man. Also, *Waiting for an Angel* is a powerful defence of the freedom

of the press and a celebration of the lives of those courageous writers who have refused to be silenced, even when faced with death. The novel discloses that betrayal and injustices are some of the major problems of the postcolonial African societies. According to Ifidion Ehimika (1999), “every society is heterogeneous, and conflict is a feature of interaction among its components (147). Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* unlocks an opportunity onto a world in some ways familiar to the reader with its intensively depicted streets, student life, and vibrant local characters yet ruled by one of the world's most fraudulent and tyrannical regimes, which ultimately drives Lomba to take a risk in the name of something greater than himself. Habila captures the: energy, sensitivity, despair, and stubborn hope of a new African generation. However, Habila presents these episodes in random order, depicting the families, everyday life, and hopes and dreams of the participants, the reader easily imagines what life must have been like during this time and can envision what his or her own life might have been under the same circumstances. Griffiths Gareth (2002) quoted in Ayo Kehind (2004) agrees with Habila's style of storytelling saying that his “deviation from the traditional norm of African fiction gives him room to paint a vivid picture of decadence ravaging the African societies”. Throughout the novel, the importance of words is made manifest in the writings of the prisoner Lomba, the shutting down of Nigeria's newspapers, the restriction on freedom of speech at the Poverty Street demonstration, the silencing of Lomba's roommate Bola, and the hanging of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. This confirms the postulation of Aijaz (1992) that “all third-world texts are necessarily national allegories” (101).

Focusing primarily on Lomba, a journalist and frustrated novelist, who, in the opening chapter is a starving political prisoner in a Lagos jail, Habila jumps back and forth in time, introducing us in succeeding chapters to the lives of ordinary citizens of Lagos, men and women, including Lomba himself, living on Poverty Street, trying to be optimistic in an increasingly hopeless world. Lomba, jailed for two years without a trial.

Consequently, like many other postcolonial African novels, *Waiting for an Angel* records the fate of a powerless and voiceless majority; it exposes the atmosphere of fear, hate, humiliation and an aura of repression in form of arrest, exile and execution. It expounds the dictatorial and oppressive tendencies of the neo-colonial African leaders. In the words of Josaphat Kubayanda (1990) “common issues in postcolonial literary works include tyranny, corruption and other forms of oppression” (5-12) and these are evident in *Waiting for an Angel*. We can see how Habila observes

the picturesque view of his society and fictionalises it as it is. Habila is able to achieve this by painting a picture of frustrated and pained University of Lagos students to who are seen boycotting lectures to revolt against the oppressive government which Sankara, the student leader championed in so doing, he reassures his fellow students with the words of Martin Luther King saying: "it is the duty of the citizen to oppose the unjust authority... (41). This shows that Nigerian youths are tired of waiting on our leaders to make things right, they are ever ready for change.

Also, Obasanjo (1998) agrees to the the dictatorial and oppressive tendencies of the neo-colonial African leaders as he has this to say about Abacha: "Abacha used everything against the Nigerian interest, against the Nigerian people, and only for himself, his family, and his cohort. Not just the security apparatus, even the political system, the economic system, everything that was there was used for him, his family and for his accomplices" (10). Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* focuses on the frightening and excruciating existence of the poor people in the postcolonial Nigeria. In the novel, whenever there is any form of threat against the Military government either from the masses or a coup on the part of fellow soldiers, there will be restrictions of normal life activities. Kela complains: "soon the streets will be taken over by the Military tanks and jeeps. People will lock up their doors and turn off their lights and peer fearfully through chinks in their windows at the rain-washed, post-coup d'état streets" (37). On the other hand, there are consequences of engaging in conflict with ones society, whether peaceful or violent. The peaceful demonstration of the University of Lagos students is intercepted by the police on their way to the government house. This explains Ngugi's opinion against the Military for taking over from the colonisers under the guise to fight human right violations, instead of protecting the masses. In "Writing Against Neo-colonialism", Ngugi holds that:

...Military men intervened at the prompting of the West or in response to what they genuinely saw and felt as the moral decay. But they too did not know what else to do with the state except to run the status quo with the gun held at the ready- not against imperialism but against the very people (cited in *Anthology of Criticism and Theory* 2007:160).

However, the riot marks the beginning of Lomba's problems, his dreams of becoming a writer dashed, as his poems and short stories are destroyed by the police men. Habila (2008) in an interview points out the level of despair, anguish and hopelessness as effects of the legacy colonialism left in the minds of hardworking individuals who wait endlessly for their dreams and

aspiration to come to fruition. In the novel, Lomba laments: "...I felt the imprint of the boots on my mind; I felt the rifling, tearing hands ripping through my very soul (58-59). Habila added in his interview that in this endless waiting, "a lot of lives have been wasted, a lot of talent lost, there are some things that just cannot wait". More so, the riot incident and Bola's death bring Lomba to the state of disillusionment. These incidents resonate with most if not all the youths in Nigeria where as a young person full of hopes and aspirations to better your life and in turn better the lives of others around you and suddenly, due to the uncertainty and selfishness of the leaders, their dreams are cut short, leaving a void in their hearts which eventually leads to misery, dejection and eventually, depression. That is why he (Lomba) did not respond to Adegbite's hopeful goodbye: "I stood and watched him cross the road and get on a bus. But I was not coming back here, I know that deep inside" (61).

The post-independent African countries are rife with corruption and oppression. However, *Waiting for an Angel* exposes these ills that are prevalent in Nigeria while showing how resilient Nigerian youths are. The reader notices how Lomba in the midst of all the corruption and oppression which seem to be the order of the day tries to maintain a human dignity even as one by one those he loves and cares for are battered in one way or the other by the brutal regime. He decides to go to James Fiki, The Dial editor who once promised him a job after schooling, but in this case, he is not a graduate but a drop-out. Nevertheless, James promises to give Lomba a job on the grounds that he has to write an article on politics which will satirise the Military government because, in James' words: "in this country the very air we breathe is politics you can't escape it" (83). Here, James' point validates Wilson and Dutton (1992) that "texts of all kinds are vehicles of politics insofar as texts mediate the fabric of social, political and cultural formation" (3). Jean-Paul Satre (1967) puts it thus, "every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics" (14). Also, Sly Cheney Coker (1981), cited in Nyi Osundare (2007) affirms that "the very existence of the African writer is a political statement; he therefore cannot help being committed" (8-9). Osundare further cited Chinua Achebe (1975) as he argues that "the African writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-educating and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front" (9). James further convinces Lomba by showing him some realistic pictures, pointing out the irony of situation in the country, James says: "look out there, see the long queue of cars waiting for fuel. Some of them have been there for days. And we are a major producer of oil" (84). The irony depicts the present-day Nigeria, the people's disillusioned hope of

independence, where masses hoped that with independence, they will have better standard of living but reverse is rather the case. While collectively fighting for independence who would have thought that sixty-four (64) years down the line, there would still be unending cues at fuel stations as major producer of oil? James emphasizes that:

This is just one instance. If you care to look, you will find more: ethnicity, religion, poverty. One General goes, another one comes, but the people remain stuck in the same particular details of their wretchedness. They've lost all faith in the government's unending transition programmes. Write on that, the general disillusionment, the lethargy, you can be as imaginative as you want to be, but stick to the facts (84).

The pep-talk from The Dial Editor, James where warns Lomba to be imaginative but stick to fact shows that *Waiting for an Angel* is a "realistic fiction" according to James Tar Tsaaio (2005). In his categorization of some African and non-African texts, he posits that "realistic fiction has historical sweep with verifiable elements... (37-38). This means that readers can easily identify some of the historical and cultural facts that are laced with fictitious representations. Consequently, Habila reveals in *Waiting for an Angel* how unpleasant and depressing life can be in the city for the masses. In the novel, the houses described in Morgan Street is typical of houses in Lagos slum houses popularly known as face-me-I-face-you, where people are crammed in one narrow building, made to share rest rooms and kitchens (85). The dilapidated schools and substandard teachings were not left out of the description (93).

Also, through Lomba's article for *The Dial*, Habila continued to satirise the city of Lagos which was the capital city of the then Nigeria, bringing out all the issues that deprive people from having a good standard of living as an independent country. As a writer who is out to make a remarkable change, he acknowledges in his interview with Ike Anya that he had to be in Lagos to be able to create a believable and relatable story. Thus; "historically, artists have always gravitated towards the metropolis, away from the fringe, because art needs patronage and infrastructure, for production and dissemination. My case initially was similar, Lagos was the metropolis and to achieve my dream of becoming a writer, I had to be there, in the mix, as it were". However, as Lomba is on his way home, after the approval of his article with *The Dial Newspaper*, he witnesses a realistic outrage of housewives described in his article, as they bring down the billboards, split it for firewood and thereafter, share it into small bundles. He gloats thus, "...I used the kerosene-

starved housewives of Morgan Street. I make them rampage the streets, tearing down wooden signboard and billboards and hauling them away to their kitchens to use as firewood” (87-88). He goes on to explain to a passenger, who thinks the women are mad, “they are just gathering firewood”, “it’s my writing acting itself out. And James thought I had laid it on too thick. I wished he were here to see reality mocking his words” (89). To support the claim that some writers see the future and this is also a way of them proffering solution to the problems and not just for the sake of art, Osundare (2007) added, “a book leaps into life when read. Only then does the reader’s dialogue with the writer begin, only then begins his historic discovery of the writer’s hidden future, the sharing of his torments, of the modalities of his prediction, of the certainties and doubts of his expression” (6). Osundare explains further by quoting Sartre (1976) saying, “only when he is read a writer’s job begin. Only then the alpha of this effective journey. The journey never thrives on a ceremonial exchange of courtesy between writer and reader....” (29). Correspondingly, the coup incident in *Waiting for an Angel* is similar to Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, where he writes about a coup, and some weeks later, the fictional coup becomes a reality, where General Chukwuma Nzeogwu seized control of the Northern region of the country as part of a larger attempt. Commanders in the other areas fail, and the plot of the novel answers the military crackdown. This justifies Ngugi’s assertion that: “... the age of independence, became the era of coup-d’états whether Western-backed or in patriotic response to internal pressures” (quoted in *Anthology of Criticism and Theory* 2007:160).

Post independence has been traumatic to the masses; the pervading socio-political climate is covered with hopelessness and lack of fulfilment, starvation, disenchantment, alienation, despair, moral decadence and the like, people resort to jobs that are most times detrimental to their lives. Ayo Kehinde (2004) expresses his disappointment by citing (Griffiths 2000) that, “Living standards are steadily deteriorating under neo-colonialism; wages are insufficient to provide for the people’s basic needs, and there are a large number of unemployed that the incipient earners have to support” (231). In the novel, Habila shows the reader the effect of dictatorial government on the ordinary people is seen in the characters that Habila made to gather at Brother’s shop (91). The shop can be seen as a place of succour where they go to unburden. The friendly banter between Joshua, his friends and Brother (who lost one of his legs to the soldiers in the post-June- 12 riot (97-98) shows that as a revolutionary writer, Habila aligns and makes himself an integral part in the economic and political struggle for survival. Also, he confronts himself with the language

registers of the people whom he represents (102-103). This gives credibility to Ngugi (2007) cited in *Anthology of Criticism and Theory* that writers like Habila: “Will have to rediscover the real language of struggle in the actions and speeches of his people, learn from their great heritage of orature, and above all, learn from their great optimism and faith in the capacity of human beings to remark their world and renew themselves” (164).

Furthermore, psychological trauma and social trauma are evident in *Waiting for an Angel*, Kela's Aunt and Hager are seen trying to navigate through the tangle of excruciating pain and physiological exertion. Like Adichie, Habila brings to the reader's consciousness the effects of the civil war on the masses, the death and displacement of loved ones. Aunty Rachael's mental health becomes unstable as she resorts to drinking due to the loss of her two husbands- one, during the civil war and the second, burnt by the Military in his car during the Abiola riot (111). Through Hagar, alienation, frustration and dejection are vividly depicted in *Waiting for an Angel*. Habila reveals one of the major problems in the post-independent African countries how the weak suffer alienation from the government and even from family members. Hagar's predicament is as a result of her mother's second marriage: “things started falling apart when her mother remarried...” (113), the drunk of a stepfather makes life miserable and uncomfortable for Hagar, he molests and abuses Hagar, her mother turns a blind eye and in order to save her marriage, she throws Hagar to the streets thereby sending her into prostitution (114). Hagar represents young and promising girls who are also victims of bad government and bad parenting. They trade their bodies in exchange for material gains for survival. In so doing, they expose themselves to all forms of health hazards and untimely death, while in this situation, these girls see themselves as outcasts in the society. Hagar acknowledges, “...I belong to the past. I am like an appendix: useless, vestigial, and even potentially painful” (117-118).

Evidently, corruption and vestige of power in the hands of the wealthy few, violation of human rights, oppression and suppression are some the reasons that make some writers shy away from expressing the actual truth through writing. During the Military regime, writers are censored and targeted for vicious attack by the system. This is another effort to close other channels for raising the consciousness of the people. In the novel, the reader notices how Lomba goes from student to failed novelist, to journalist, to political prisoner trying to retain his dignity despite the corruption and violence that has contaminated every part of Nigerian society. Lomba broods thus: “I was writing a book, a novel. It was like a dream, a hallucination. I thought I could cure all the world's

ills through my stories, my book was suspended before me” (126). Micere Githae Mugo stresses in “Exile and Creativity: A Prolonged Writer’s Block” that:

A lot of writers have landed in detention, in prison (usually on trumped up charges), or have been subject to police harassment or army brutality or all of these and more- for denouncing the gross abuse of rights and individual liberties that is characteristic of our neocolonial existence. Where writers have not actually been locked up, they have been kept under the kind of censorship and surveillance that makes freedom under oppressive environments a farce. These writers have remained inmates in the large prison of society, metaphorically living behind bars and inside the barbed wire of suffocating repressive institutions that seek to fetter their imaginations and lock up their creativity (cited in *African Literature: an Anthology of Criticism and Theory* 2007: 147).

Also, as Kela asks to know how the novel is progressing, Lomba responds; “someone told me that even if I finished it, no one would publish it. That is true. Here in this country our dreams are never realized; something always contrives to turn it into a nightmare. But that should not stop us from dreaming, should it boy? (126-127).

Shushing and trying to contain the creative minds by the government or the powerful have been an age long battle. This is not only evident in African countries but also in developed world. Osundare (2007) puts together list of writers who have been tortured, striped of their dignity and even killed; “Thomas Kyd was tortured for writing an orthodox paper; Christopher Marlowe’s friend was burnt to death for his opinions, Daniel Defoe was pilloried and his ears slit for writing *The Shortest Way With Dissenters*; Thomas Paine had to escape to America to avoid prosecution for *The Rights of Man*; Cobbett was jailed two years and fined for denouncing army flogging (Laureson and Swingewood 1971: 129). In the same way, Osundare lists names of some of the African writers with the same fate. In his words: “Denis Brutus was jailed, tortured, shot at, and exiled for, proclaiming the inhumanity of apartheid; Soyinka was incarcerated for opposing the Nigerian Civil War; Ngugi wa Thiong’o was detained for attacking the neo-colonial strangulation of Kenya; Ahmed Fouad Negm “the poet”, was frequently in and out of man-of-peace, Anwar Sadat’s jail” (8). He (Osundare) added that “For the foregoing writers and many more, literature is martyrdom. But the clash has to continue, for from the sparks generated by it emerges the fire which illuminates the paths to change (8). Significantly these measures are aimed at breaking the victims, and according to Mugo, turning them into “neurotic psychological wrecks who are so

intimidated by their insecurity that they are pressured to surrender...” (*African Literature: an Anthology of Criticism and Theory* 2007: 147). Achebe concurs in his essay, “The Novelist as Teacher” that: “...a writer or an artist lives on the fringe of society wearing a beard and peculiar dress and generally behaving in a strange, unpredictable way. He is in revolt against society, which in turn looks on him with suspicion if not hostility. The last thing society would dream of is to put him in charge of anything” (quoted in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* 1975:42).

Habila through the protagonist-Lomba reassures the reader thus, “a worthy writer who is out to make a change cannot be discouraged” (127) and Moore (1980) calls this mindset “the primacy of change”. Moore went on to append that as “we encounter the oppressed, not with tear-glazed eyes, but struggling, fighting to overcome their oppression to change the world” (cited in writer as righter (2007:33). However, as Habila says in the afterword to this novel: “There was nothing to believe in: the only mission of the military rulers is to systematically loot the national treasury; their only morality was a vicious survivalist agenda in which any hint of disloyalty was ruthlessly crushed. Every hint of dissent and every suspicion of democratic thinking by many of the country's most gifted writers and thinkers were wiped out by the military government of Sani Abacha. The disenchanted lives of writers in neo-colonial Nigeria, especially during the military regime, are exposed. In the novel, Lomba gets jailed, beaten and bullied into solitary for two years without trial (14-18). Also, Dele Giwa, Ken Saro Wiwa and Kudirat Abiola's untimely death show the height at which the political class can reach just to protect their selfish interest. During the military era, advocates of change and true democracy are silenced. Dele Giwa died through a parcel bomb (150), Ken Saro Wiwa -sentenced to death by hanging, kudirat Abiola –assassinated and the husband who is the true winner of the June 12 election, imprisoned. These names however will definitely resonate with the reader. Therefore, Habila's intentions of using real names and real life situations in a fictional work are to educate the reader on the history of the country, how our neo-colonial leaders are the actual problem and not necessarily the colonial masters and most importantly, prepare our minds for the change ahead. This is why this paper sees Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* as fictional reality in the sense that it foregrounds the interpretations of fictional and factual elements. Tsaaio (2005) agrees to this opinion saying that texts like *Waiting for an Angel*: “are strung intricately and delicately with psychological explorations, journey motifs and others with bildungsroman tendencies. Their fictionality hyphenated by reality and their reality violently yoked with fictional details” (39).

In *Waiting for Angel*, Habila's role to James is to fictionalize real political activists and writers like Dele Giwa and Ken Saro Wiwa who lost their lives. James' fate is made to look like that of Dele Giwa and Ken Saro Wiwa though in this case still alive (154), we are able to feel the different emotions of fear, disappointment, uncertainty and the like just like the fallen heroes before their demise. In that succession, the military boys burned down The Dial building and destroying people's works, the fire service could not intervene because they are also acting on instructions. Lomba on seeing the raving fire breaks down in tears saying: "these very ashes could be from my pages" (154). This shows that Abacha's targets are the journalists, campaigners for democracy and Arinze (1995) agrees: "like a typical patrimonial ruler, Abacha did not tolerate any manner of opposition to his regime including activities that could affect the regular inflow of revenue into the state coffers" (10).

During this period, the least a writer could do is to embark on self exile. In his solitary, he will be able to speak for the common man and also condemn the government, remaining at home is a more acute exile because the purpose and meaning of a writer's mission according to Osundare is to: "help the people through his vision and inspiration to demolish the chains and dungeons of the king and rout his taskmasters, and to disperse the clouds of mystification tormented by the pontiff between the people and the firmament of social awareness" (7). Therefore, embarking on self exile prolongs the writer's life and also protects him in situations where state terror is the rule of law. In the novel, Emeka encourages James to go on exile, for staying back in the country will be a living hell for him. Emeka says to James: "you may die, but not in chains. Here, even if you don't die, you'll be chains..." (167). Writing on the issue of exile, Micere Mugo emphasizes that: "In the first place, remaining at home is a risk to one's life. Second, it is a sadistic version of self-supervised extended arrest. Third, it is psychological self deportation, even as one is seen to be living among other free people" (Cited in *An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* 2007:148).

On the other hand, Habila leaves us a chink of hope, just as he leaves space for irony, love, heartbreak and humour. In the novel, we see Emeka Davis, Lomba and his boss James in a relaxed mood and catching up on the dismal situation of the affairs of the nation while paying tribute to lost colleagues. Thus: "Every writer in Lagos is here today, we are having a reading for two young poets who were arrested yesterday. Akin and Ogaga. You've heard about them, of course" (163). He goes on to read the poem dedicated to lost colleagues in the race for political stability: "the title

of my poem is 'Now is Time'. It is dedicated to Akin, Ogaga, Dele Giwa and all brothers and sisters in the struggle" (164).

When the situation degenerates into a kind of hell, the next step to take in order to remain human is revolution. This justifies Stephen Greenblatt's assertion that: "subversion precipitates power in order to contain it, thereby precluding the possibility of radical transformation" (1981:57). In the novel, on hearing of the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa, Ojukutu, also known as Mao, thunders: "This country is in dire need of a revolution. We have to utterly destroy the status quo in order to start afresh..." (121-122). Mao advocating for revolution makes it clear that Habila is one of those writers like Achebe who do not only expose the ills in the society but he also gives you ideas on how to go about the solution to the problem which in so many instances in this novel has suggested revolution which turns out to be the last resort for any oppressed person to take back what belongs to him. According to Leje in *The Chattering and the Song* cited in Osundare (2007) posits that "for this category of writers, literature is a process and a forum of education, a means of opening the eyes of the audience not only to the world as it is, but also as it is capable of being. In the controlled torrent of dialogue that often sweeps the pages, epigrams and revolutionary maxims swim up and down like fertile fishes" (51).

In opposition, Joshua disagrees with Mao's view of revolution because the end point revolution is war. This shows that people have different ways of fighting for freedom. Some prefer a peaceful dialogue to a protest or revolution which can lead to a bigger war that will leave people devastated. Joshua expresses his yearning thus: "in a normal country there wouldn't be a need for revolution; there wouldn't be Poverty Street, well, not like ours anyway. People like me would be able to teach in peace and ... maybe fall in love and marry and have kids and die old" (123). Joshua stands against Mao's radicalism and militancy because the masses can not engage in a fight with armed Military men. To Joshua, it would only cause more death and tragedies (123). Joshua's stance relates to the present day Nigeria and the END SARS protest of 2020 which started in Lagos and then trickled down to other states of the federation and for once, every well meaning Nigerian seem to have one voice for a common purpose. It started as a peaceful protest but as soon as the Nigerian government noticed the involvement of international bodies coupled with the backings of Nigerians in the Diaspora to support the END SARS movement, they did what they know how to do best which is to use the presence of Police and army to oppress the protesters. There were incessant shootings which left most protesters injured and many dead. The shooting at the Lekki

Toll gate has also gone down as part of the history of Nigeria. Again, this asserts that the neo-colonial leaders are indeed our major problem; they use every opportunity to create disunity, pain and the feeling of hopelessness in the minds of the common man. Therefore, for Nigeria to experience a new nation free of oppression, killings, tribal wars, injustices, hunger, recycling of old politicians and the like, there must be a total overhaul of the political class and it can only be achieved through revolution. In *Waiting for an Angel*, Habila makes his readers to see reasons why it is good to stand up against corruption and injustice no matter the consequence through the eye of the protagonist Lomba by making him visit the museum. His visit to the slave museum at Badagry (127) becomes a big eye opener, Lomba is made to see the different tools used by the colonial masters against the captured slaves, how they are parked together in a narrow passage with their hands and feet chained and their mouths locked to avoid any form of communication that can make them revolt against their masters. The worst is the irony of the SLEEPING AREA which obviously no one in that situation can sleep (149-150). Ngugi supports Habila's intentions towards Lomba in his essay, "African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics", that the African writer: "notices the conflict between the emergent elitist middle class and the masses were developing, their seeds being in the colonial pattern of social and economic development. And when he woke to his task he was not a little surprised that events in post-independence Africa could take the turn they had taken" (cited in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 1975:44).

In the novel, we see Joshua who initially kicked against the protest due to his fear of the consequences, made to see the essence of one standing up against oppression. He is eventually heard as the voice that championing the protest (131-132). This shows that Habila is an advocate of change. James also persuades Lomba to go on and cover the revolution: "The time has come when a few bruises, even deaths, don't matter anymore... (147-48). James adds: "every oppressor knows that where ever one word is joined to another word to form a sentence, there will be revolt. That is our work, the media: to refuse to be silenced, to encourage legitimate criticism wherever we find it. Do you now understand?" (150). This echoes Mugo's assertion that: "Revolutionary or progressive writers take sides with individuals and groups who are denied a voice in naming themselves and the world around them by the violation and suffocation of their imagination, as well as through exclusion from the production process. Using their writing as vehicle for the affirmation of humanity and life in general, such writers are dedicated to creating the visions of

hope and limitless possibility to which human beings can and will reach out if given the opportunity” (cited in *Anthology of Criticism and Theory* 2007:146-47).

In conclusion, it will be noted that contemporary Nigerian fiction embodies the historical experience to which the nation has been subjected. Since the inception of written fiction endeavour in this country, the authors, one after the other, have had to contend with the burden of history in their writings. Their works expose the ills of polity and offer prognosis. The novel represents the spirit and temper of contemporary Nigeria and an avant-garde negotiation and exploration of Nigeria's historical experience. Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* depicts the disillusioned African nations, where the anticipated independence turns out to be a curse to the common man. How can the hard-gotten independence be the root of constant anger, hatred, sectionalism, divide and rule, hunger, injustice, human right violation, police brutality, narrow ethnicism, opportunism and even elitism among Nigerians? In Habila's words, “these are left to us by the colonialists and then amplified by our neo-colonial leaders due to selfish interest. Ngugi (2007) expresses: “...it was independence with the ruler holding a begging bowl and the ruled holding a shrinking belly. It was independence with a question mark. The age of independence has produced a new class and a new leadership that often was not very different from the old one (160). Thus, Habila's characterization, tone and language in *Waiting for an Angel* are proof that he belongs to the voice of a different category of African writers who are confident of the place of art as a weapon in the revolutionary struggle. In the novel, he is able to confront social issues with single mindedness exposing the situation of Nigeria in the 1990s where: Poverty, injustice, starvation, disease, lawlessness, violence and above all, human right violations are the order of the day. Habila therefore makes the reader see certain phenomenon as fact, digs into the past in order to remind the people of their past mistakes and how important it is to avoid a future occurrence of such mistakes.

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