

DICTATORSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA: A STUDY OF HELON HABILA'S *WAITING FOR AN ANGEL*

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Abstract

Nigerian literature has come a long way with its unique history, and generations of Nigerian writers have exploited literature to address a plethora of issues peculiar to their society. Issues concerning politics, philosophy, history, migration, mysticism, sexism, gender, corruption, social injustice among others have found their expressions in Nigerian novels. Armed with this awareness, this study selected Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* as a fictional text embodying the diverse postcolonial issues in Nigerian fiction. With postcolonial and trauma theories as theoretical anchors, the study investigated dictatorship and human rights abuse in post-colonial Nigeria from the fictional lens of Helon Habila. A textual analysis of the novel was done using primary and secondary sources of data collection. Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* cast a cursory look at the dark moments of Nigeria's history in the 1990's under the sadistic military brutality, an era characterised by human rights violation of unimaginable proportion, thereby subjecting the masses to political and social trepidation. The study discovered that the postcolonial African state, Nigeria, as mirrored in Helon Habila novel, is a failed state marred with dictatorship, human rights abuse, repressive governance, corruption, suppression, leadership crisis, amongst others. The study concluded that Habila preaches total eradication of military men in the politics of the country. It shows the gains of literature as a voice against the dangers of dictatorship and human rights abuse with the hope of finding lasting solutions, to better the lots of the nation and make it habitable, irrespective of political, religious and ethnic affiliations.

Keywords: Dictatorship, Human, Rights, Abuse Postcolonial, Nigeria, Corruption, Social, Injustice.

Introduction

Literature mirrors society and literary artists harness its potentials to unveil various shades of realities in their given societies. As expected, literature has continued to fulfil its own unique function in national development. In the views

of Roshni Duhan, "literature acts as a corrective agent because it reflects society in order to make society understand its errors and make repairs. It portrays the characteristics or positive ideals that individuals should emulate in society. A literary artist is therefore a product of his society since his writing is a reaction to the life of his people both negatively and positively. He brings to light the strangeness and ugliness of his society. This is because to fully comprehend life, one must comprehend not only the bright side, but also the seamy and dark side. This is why literature's primary function is to instruct and entertain" (60).

Nigerian literature is roughly defined as the literary writing by citizens of the nation of Nigeria for Nigerian readers (foreigners and the diaspora) addressing issues peculiar to Nigeria within and outside the continent. Taiye Awoyemi defines Nigerian Literature as any creative work of art created by Nigerians, for Nigerians that deals with Nigerian themes and has the same sensitivities, awareness, worldview, and other features of the Nigerian cultural experience. In summary, for the literature to be regarded as Nigerian, a writer must reflect the ideals and experiences of Nigerians (318).

Nigerian literature has come a long way with its unique history, like literature elsewhere. In Nigeria, writers like Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Christopher Okigbo, T.M. Aluko, Cyprian Ekwensi, Onuoha Nzekwu, Elechi Amadi and a host of others, rank among the first generation of Nigerian writers. Taye Awoyemi attests that "with the publication of Tutuola's novel, a landmark had been scored for Nigerian Literature" (23). He traced the catalyst to this growth of the first generation of Nigerian writers to the establishment of the University College, Ibadan (UCI) in 1948 which produced the first generation of Nigerian writers in the English language. These writers, using the skill of the new language they had acquired, generated writings that addressed their own peculiar society. Though their writings were built on Western patterns, they no doubt used their writings to bring home the point that Nigerians had a veritable way of life before the colonial masters eroded their culture. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a quintessential example (Tayo Awoyemi 23).

After the first generation of Nigerian writers, a new generation of writers described by Awoyemi as 'experimentalists', emerged to occupy their place and are called the second generation writers. These writers include Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Niyi Osundare, Bode Sowande, Festus Iyayi, Kole Omotosho, and a host of others. In the views of Awoyemi, "these writers were born out of disillusionment that followed Nigerian independence. For them, the

First Republic had failed in its bid to rid the Nigerian populace of the shackles of colonialism; in its stead was the new monster, neo-colonialism. The old masters had not left; they had only metamorphosed into black-white masters...Similarly, the impact of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 left its mark on the young minds of these writers, now known as the second generation of Nigerian writers. These writers protested against what they regarded as the pessimism of their precursors, as well as their thesis that Nigeria's governance was the sole preoccupation of an individual. For them, Nigeria's salvation was (and is still is) the collective effort of all and sundry; this is irrespective of age, gender, class, religion, and ethnic leanings (33).

The third generation of writers which Awoyemi tagged "the contemporaries" seemed to raise more questions than answers on their collective identity, tenets, and literary styles informed by a wide array of themes that informed their writings. As a result, Awoyemi recognizes that questions have been asked here and there whether there is a third-generation of Nigerian writers and he concludes that it seems however that the third generation of writers is yet to emerge. This opinion is aired considering the fact that there has been no distinct new genre on the Nigerian literary horizon. However, one can see that contemporary issues have affected the turnout of themes and subject matters evident on the literary scene (54). In reality, aware of what the Nigerian literary landscape has achieved at the turn of the twenty-first century— the passion with which they wrote on an array of concepts touching on certain aspects of the Nigerian individual/experience— it is right to accord the new generation of Nigerian writers, the like of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Jude Dibia, Ben Okri, Helon Habila, Sefi Atta, Odili Ujubuonu, Chika Unaiigwe, among a host of other new writers, their deserving place in the hall of fame of Nigerian literature. Part of this realisation is the reason that informed the choice of the writer Helon Habila whose novel, *Waiting for an Angel*, was selected for study in this paper.

Conceptualising Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism as a branch of literary discourse is a product of colonialism and to fully underscore its tenets, one needs to understand the issues revolving around colonialism and its impact on the modern world. This is in consonance with James Anthony's argument that 'the postcolonial debates are born from the historical experience of colonialism. The postcolonial writers assert that their countries had a prestigious history, culture, heritage, government, politics, and tradition and they also depict the past from which

they have got the raw materials for their works. This discourse has ceased to be mere adaptations of the West” (12). Therefore, to fully underscore Postcolonialism, Imoh Imoh Itah et al opine that “variables and values of colonialism are important connections in re-evaluating the post-colonial state” (10). Chimamanda Adichie emphasises in her TedTalk “The Danger of a Single Story” thus: “Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story (video transcript 10:12). In the opinion of Imoh Imoh-Itah et al, “Colonialism is the pattern of relationship and the connections between the domination and exploitation of one country by the other as one occupies the other and imposes its whims and caprices” (14). Ikechukwu Asika supports that ‘the story of Africa as a continent will never be complete without the shaping influences of the long years of colonialism, oppression, and exploitation by the Europeans who first came as gods to salvage Africa from barbarism and primitivism. Many African countries experience colonialism in various dimensions and colonialism brought about the exploitation of human and even cultural resources (424). Ugwuanyi Maxwell agrees that:

The colonial experiences of most Africa countries have refused to go after many decades since the colonial masters left. This is as a result of the myriad of social, political and economic problems still facing the continent. Independence promised a lot of good things for the masses and this brought about their active participation in the struggle for independence alongside nationalist fighters in some African countries ... (218).

Literature in Africa, which has been described as functional and committed, has been used by various writers to reflect this ugly situation that most African countries have found themselves in (218). These are the issues many postcolonial African writers address, issues that form the crux of our argument in the selected writings of two Nigerian novelists in the light of postcolonial theoretical appearances.

The Nigerian Civil War

The Nigerian/Biafran Civil War began in 1967 after the declaration of the sovereign state of Biafra by Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu on May 30, 1967. This was one of the deadliest conflicts in the history of Africa. The two

major key players of the war were Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu on the side of Biafra, as the leading Commander, and General Yakubu Gowon, the Commander of the Nigerian Army. The immediate cause of the Civil War has been linked to various sources but it is majorly predicated to the coup and the counter-coup of 1966 which altered the political equation and landscape of the nation and destroyed the fragile trust trying to stem and survive among the major ethnic groups brought together to exist as one nation as a result of the 1914 amalgamation by Lord Lugard and the rest of the British colonial Lords.

The war, deeply bloody and deadly, has today come to be one of the defining historical events in Nigeria which have continued to generate opinions and counter opinions more than fifty years since a ceasefire was pronounced. The Nigerian Civil War has come and gone but the casualties and aftermaths of the war are still a subject of debate among concerned disciplines and institutions around Africa and beyond. The war, which was perceived at its outbreak as a war that will checkmate the marginalisation and exploitation of the oppressed Biafrans, and restore Nigeria to the path of a truly one indivisible entity ended up as an anti-climax that left only carnages, death, pains, trauma and casualties and further deepened the ethnic tensions with the tragic effects still linger. Onuoha (2019:1). Observes that:

The Nigeria-Biafra War foreshadowed many of the devastating conflicts that would threaten the survival of most post-colonial African states. To this day, it still raises questions about the complex challenges facing peacebuilding in Africa. Consolidating post-war reconciliation and building durable peace is even more challenging in African contexts where state and nation-building remains highly contested works in progress.... (1).

Echezona Ifejirika recounting the realities and tragedies of the war says that the war brought about a high level of insecurity to the extent that no one attended school openly for fear of being attacked by or bombed by enemy planes (26). The events of the period of the Nigeria Civil War have been copiously documented by Nigerian and non-Nigerian writers employing the modes of fiction and non-fiction. War as a theme in literature becomes important for the writer because it affords the writer an opportunity to create and recreate history by recalling the past to shape the present, predict and possibly influence the future.

Military Dominance/ Politics in Postcolonial Nigerian State

The story of post-colonial states in Africa and most especially in Nigeria will never be complete without a detailed discussion on the role of the military in most African states and it is this that leads to enumeration on the manifestation of crazy ascendancy of power and sustainability amongst African leaders. We cannot talk about the existence of the corrupt post-colonial Nigerian state without giving the notion of the ill interference of the military institutions in the politics of Nigeria.

Asika recounts that 'Nigeria passed through a very crucial event of her life, an event that changed her physiognomy and the course of her history forever. It was the first military coup that usurped the civilian government of Alhaji Tafawa Balewa on January 15, 1966. Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu who led the coup and was supported by others saw the death of the premier of the Northern and Western regions among other top military officers and senior politicians. Although the coup failed and the ring leaders apprehended, it saw Major-General J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi, into power as the first Military Head of State and General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Armed forces. This coup led to many counter-coups in the history of Nigeria's military rule. It also gave rise to the unspeakable Nigerian civil war (Biafra), and millions of people lost their lives in the three years of unstoppable gunfire and war. Coups beget coups, Asika stresses, and 'so the country became a land of coups.' According to Obikeze, Obiajulu and Obi, Emeka cited in Asika "It could not be wrong to call Nigeria a land of coups. The country has been ruled by seven military rulers and has had a much higher number of coups both successful, unsuccessful and "arrangee" ones" (276).

Significantly, the military played a big role in the destruction of the peace and security of the nation. It deepened the taproots of corruption and violence in the country and led to profound enmity between ethnic groups which finally culminated in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 which provided the needed setting for Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. The mismanagement of public funds with no sense of accountability, the establishment of weak and incompetent institutions incapable of discharging the function of their office, and the discredit of the social contract of the state are all legacies of military rule in Nigeria which has become a crucial and important subject to many postcolonial Nigerian writers and it is this that these issues that this study investigates in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*.

Postcolonial Theory as Theoretical Anchor

This research is anchored on two theories – postcolonial theory and trauma theory. The Postcolonial critical theory is propounded by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their canonical work on postcolonial studies, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* published in 1989. They define postcolonial as “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day” (2).

The Postcolonial critical theory deals with the postcolonial literary works that are produced as a reaction to colonial domination from the time of colonialism to the present day. This literary theory investigates the outcomes of the oppression of European colonialism on the oppressed indigenous people of those countries which were once under the control of the British Empire. Echezona Ifejirika quoting a critic on postcolonial literature attests that:

Post-colonial literature refers to a body of writing from Europe’s former colonies which addresses questions of history, identity, ethnicity, and language. The term is to date, the most convenient way of embracing the powerful and diverse body of literary responses to the challenges presented by decolonization and the transition to independence and post-independence in a wide variety of political and cultural texts...It is a form of literature that tilts more towards self-examination and evaluation of the state of affairs in the independent states after the formal withdrawal of the colonial masters (136).

To sum up, postcolonial theory reinstates the values and traditions of the African man and seeks to tell her own story as the new standard. It looks into issues of past experiences with the intention of avoiding or forestalling a new phase of distasteful experiences by ways of correcting, criticising, and sometimes bringing to the limelight, solutions. These ideas inherent in postcolonial theory will be apt in discussing military dictatorship and postwar trauma in Nigeria as gleaned from the novel of Helon Habila.

Trauma Theory

Another interesting theoretical anchor to guide this research is the trauma theory. Trauma theory is an offshoot of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. The writers in no doubt represented the traumas and experiences of the war on the casualties in different perspectives. According to

Nebeife and Kanu on the word Trauma says; "The word trauma" is used to describe experiences that are emotionally painful and distressing and which therefore overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless. Trauma has sometimes been defined in reference to experiences that are not normal for humans (92).

The concept of trauma, its source of critique, is generally understood as a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self's emotional organisation and perception of the external world. Trauma studies analyse the complex psychological and social factors that influence the self's comprehension of a traumatic experience and how such an experience shapes and is shaped by language. The formal innovations of texts, both print, and media, that display insights into the ways that identity, the unconscious, and remembering are influenced by extreme events thus remain a significant focus of the field (Mambrol 2018:1).

Trauma studies first developed in the 1990s and relied on Freudian theory to develop a model of trauma that imagines an extreme experience that challenges the limits of language and even ruptures meaning altogether. Through such psychological quest aided by Freud's postulations, the unseen pains and hidden agonies of the war, its lasting and lingering effects of oppressive governance and dictatorship will be holistically articulated in the effort to condemn dictatorship and repressive governance as core to the thematic concerns of the selected writer— Helon Habila.

Helon Habila as Postcolonial Nigerian Writer: A Review of Related Studies

Helon Habila is one of the most remarkable new voices among the third generation of Nigerian writers. Habila has published three major novels. They are *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), *Measuring Time* (2006), and *Oil on Water* (2010). According to Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, Habila belongs to: "A new generation of writers born after 1960, the emblematic year of African political independence from colonialism. This generation, the first in Africa to be temporarily severed from the colonial event... came to be identified as writers of the third generation in Anglophone and Francophone critical traditions" (14).

Through an artistic and subtle blend of facts and fiction, Habila artistically achieved great feats in an attempt to recreate and reconstruct history and place many historical figures in a better perspective in the historical evolution of the Nigerian nation. Olumide Olugbemi-Gabriel in his postcolonial anatomy of Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* agrees that "Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* is a rich addition to an existing collection of works of African writers

that interrogate the disillusionment that has become the order of the day in post-independence Africa. Postcolonial Africa, especially Nigeria, where the novel presents its recent history in graphic detail, is a basket of failure and disappointment" (1). Ikechukwu Asika further details that:

In the novel, *Waiting for an Angel*, Habila exposes the situation of terror, anguish, victimization, molestation, and slavery meted on the citizens of Nigeria during the military era in politics.... He pictures a time in the history of the country when people were willingly waiting for death - An angel of death to take them away from the shocking realities of their lives. Thus, the title-*Waiting for an Angel* -an angel of death... The title in another sense portrays the hope that kept the people alive and made many survive - The hope that an angel will come one day and redeem them from the claws of military dictatorship.

Nwagbara posits that 'As politics is reduced to a mere zero-sum game, in which the winner makes a sweepstake, leaving the loser prostrate, the political class in postcolonial Nigeria maintains that politicking by the wholesome tenets of democratic principles and the bettering of the condition of the masses are nothing short of sheer luxury that it cannot afford. Hence, the unbridled political schism and socio-economic exploitation in Nigeria characterise her politics: politics of violence, which the state furthers. (127). Due to its historical accuracy and directness, some critics like Akingbem Niyi contend that:

As a work of fiction, the novel makes it possible to identify with Nigeria's real world, the people, and the actual events depicted in the narrative. This identification with the real-life situation is one generic characteristic of the fiction which distinguishes it from other narrative forms which are considered fictional (31).

In consonance to these factual attestations regarding Helon Habila's novel, Courtois further adds that 'the appalling conditions under which people lived during the approximately thirty years of military rule gave rise to events that became a source of inspiration for Nigerian writers, moulding not only their writing but also the function of Nigerian literature. Poetics and politics thus converge in a country where to quote Lomba in *Waiting for an Angel*, "the very air we breathe is politics". (12).

Critics have devoted much deserving attention to Habila and his gripping novel, *Waiting for an Angel*. The result of this is that there are lots of scholarly ideas and opinions begging to be reviewed in this study. What we have done is to narrow the avalanche of critical commentaries to the salient criticisms that beam some green light on the scope and focus of this study in our foray on postcolonial concerns in the novel.

Dictatorship and Human Rights Abuse in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*

The novel, *Waiting for an Angel*, is a historical novel set in Nigeria of the 1990s during the reign of military dictators, precisely during the military regimes of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha. It was an era dominated and ruled by sadistic military brutality, and human rights violations of unimaginable proportions.

The novel tells the story of Lomba, a young aspiring writer, and a brilliant journalist. Regardless of the episodic and nearly incoherent narrative structure throughout the novel, the story revolves around Lomba. Even though there are other main characters in the novel, most of the depictions concern Lomba, a young journalist living in Lagos during the military administration of Gen. Sani Abacha. Almost every character in the novel is affected by the brutal events during the administration. While in the university, Lomba meets with Bola, a friend, colleague, and roommate during their momentary learning in the university. Following a riot by students, Lomba accompanies Bola home. Bola's parents and two sisters died in a car accident. As a result, he becomes depressed and confrontational. However, Bola gets a raw deal in the hands of plainclothes security men who give him the beating of his life and send him to a psychiatric centre. After two days, when Lomba returned from Bola's home, the military had already raided their hostel and destroyed everything inside including his written works. He says, "As I neared my block... my room was open, the door broken, hanging askew from the top hinge, and half blocking the entrance. And there were papers scattered all over the veranda and the steps... The room looked as if a battle had been fought in it" (71).

Accordingly, Lomba undergoes all sorts of distress, and consequently, drops out of the university. According to him, "when school began to look like a prison, I had to get out" (107). He was arrested as a young journalist who had gone to cover a peaceful demonstration against the sole administrator of a province. Lomba was imprisoned and for two years he was still awaiting trial.

The only hope of freedom for the likes of him is predicted by another coup or the death of the dictator. The military government erected more prisons all around the country to detain, without trial, anybody whose activity is against the government of the military leaders. The prison superintendent confirms this for Lomba in his archaic English thus:

These are your papers ... I read. All. I read your file again. Also, You are a journalist. This is your second year. Here. Awaiting trial for organising violence. Demonstration against. Anti-government demonstration against the military legal government. He did not thunder as usual (15).

Lomba is not allowed to see a lawyer or visitors and just like a dreaded criminal, he is abandoned to await a trial that the Superintendent knew too well would never come. This we learned through the Superintendent's girlfriend, Janice, as she reprimands her lover and laments the hopelessness of Lomba's confinement in prison: "And you know that he is never going to be tried. He would be kept here forever, forgotten'. Her voice became sharp and indignant. 'How can you be so unfeeling? Put yourself in his shoes. Two years away from friends, from family, without the power to do anything you wish to do. Two years in CHAINS! How can you talk of cigarettes and soap, as if that were substituting enough for all that he has lost?" (WFAA, 30).

In a bid to free his soul from the shackles of the unpleasant prison ambiance, Lomba resorts to writing poems which Muftau, the prison superintendent, finds appealing and poetic enough to charm the heart of his fiancée, Janice. Muftau knows too well that Lomba and other prison inmates are political detainees, who may never be tried, and whenever opportunity provides itself, in his usual braggadocious pose, he intimates Lomba about their realities as political detainees. He taunts Lomba in these words:

Do you complain? Look. Twenty years I have worked in prisons all over this country. Nigeria ... sometimes it is better this way. How can you win a case against the government? Wait. Hope! Now he lowered his voice, like a conspirator. 'May be there, I'll be another coup, eh? Maybe the leader will collapse and die. He is mortal, after all. Maybe a civilian government will come. Then, there will be amnesty for all political prisoners. Amnesty ... (WFAA, 15).

Against the backdrop of building a new nation and eradicating corruption, the military was determined to quell as many voices as possible and maim thousands in their wake if that is the only viable way to hold tenaciously to power and control the economic pot of the nation. During Babangida and Abacha's reign of terror, the media, which stood in the gap between the people and the government, and the military juntas were the most hit in the quest to silence their voices forever. The prison was the only reasonable end a patriotic journalist bent on reporting the truth saw ahead of him. In the end, while Lomba is later imprisoned, James goes into exile. James laments: "you can't write with chains on your hands.' James's voice is soft now, apologetic. 'Sorry, I had to be brutal – but you needed it. We are all in this together'" (WFAA, 148).

Further, through Kela, a fifteen-year-old boy, we learn more about the residents of Poverty Street, Lagos. The street was initially named Morgan Street but the inhabitants, having wallowed in much poverty decided to remain in 'Poverty Street'. Habila's portrayal of abject poverty is similar to Frantz Fanon's classic *The Wretched of the Earth*. The characters in *Waiting for an Angel* live on the side-line of society just like all marginalised people in the Third World and in Nigeria. It is doubtful whether certainly, the people depicted in the novel are not wretched of the earth: The houses were old and craggy and lichened. The place had the unfinished, abandoned appearance of an under waterscape. Crouching under the bigger or in their own clusters were hastily built wood and zinc structures that housed an incredibly large number of families: the fathers were mostly out-of-work drivers, labourers, fugitives convalescing between prison terms (97). Joshua leads the inhabitants of Morgan Street on a peaceful demonstration, which Lomba was meant to cover. Similarly, because the colonisers failed to convey the promised civilization as anticipated, the hopes of people crumbled in the aftermath of independence. The novel portrays dissatisfaction and complete disappointment resulting in the conflict and rebellion as Joshua, the demonstration leader, says:

We came to tell you sir, that our clinic is run-down and abandoned. We came to tell you that we don't have a single borehole on Morgan street... We are here to protest against this neglect--- we are dying from diseases. We are dying from a lack of hope. And that is why we are here today to protest. And this is the way we feel we ought to express our displeasure (131-132).

The soldiers mistake their peaceful demonstration for violence and non-conformity and unleash terror. Joshua escaped half dead; Lomba was picked up

and lodged in the prison where we first met him when the novel started. He was confined in the prison without trial, just like all other political detainees, and it was only through his poems and letters, that he drew hope and inspiration that was enough to help him survive the torturous and psychologically depressing prison experiences.

Habila paints a horrible picture of a society where the government has no iota of respect for human dignity as in the case of Lomba who seeks to restore his lost dignity. It represents a society where the masses wallow in abject poverty, protesting that the name of the street be changed from "Morgan Street" to "Poverty Street" as a means of letting the government understand their plight, poverty, and denigration. Nigerians were fighting on two fronts: the military and poverty. Courtois confirming the trauma of military dictatorship and abuse of human rights that pervade the entire novel attests that:

As to General Sani Abacha's regime (1993-1998), it was infamous for widespread human rights abuse, among which the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, triggering international anger and causing the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth (NP).

Nigeria in *Waiting for an Angel* is described as a failed state and an enormous disappointment to the aspirations and hope of its people as exemplified by students who were pushed to violence and negativism, frequently take on the influences that collaborate to hold them down, as is the case with Lomba's colleagues at the university. In universities, lecture boycotts and strikes are common: "The students, who should have been busy taking their baths and getting set for lectures, sat idly...discussing the boycott of lectures" (39-40).

Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* reflects on how Nigeria suffers from the aftermath of colonialism in the form of military domination, political and socio-economic failures, as well as human rights abuse. The story, through characters, exemplifies these repulsions of all postcolonial nations by depicting the everyday realities facing the colonised societies in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

Conclusion

Through the lenses of postcolonial and trauma theory, the study analyses a novel by Nigerian author, Helon Habila in *Waiting for an Angel*. By so doing, the situation of postcolonial Nigeria, its alarming political corruption, war and its traumatic effects, incessant military incursion, and immoral leadership were exposed.

Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* explores the military brutality from 1985-1993 involving the dictatorial and tyrannical rules of the likes of Ibrahim Babangida and the late Sani Abacha. Consisting of various themes that we come across in different stories, such as student life and protests, poverty, life in prison, journalist incarceration, and problems faced by writers, nevertheless, the central theme that runs through the narratives represents life under an autocracy in Nigeria where the narrative reconstructs intensely the military and police brutalization, insurgency across the nation, and human rights abuse.

Irrespective of the way one chooses to look at it, Habila occupies his place in the hall of fame of Nigerian vis-à-vis African literature, as one of the exemplary writers who saw what ought to be done and did it. His narrative in *Waiting for an Angel* will continue to inspire various discourses on the failures of postcolonial Nigeria regarding military dictatorship and human rights abuse cum independence disillusionment in postcolonial Nigeria.

To this end, the literary artists serve as a watchdog, a gadfly with rolling eyes monitoring the happenings in his society (7). Habila leaves a message that the hope for a viable postcolonial state will remain a mirage if proactive measures are not taken to redirect the ship of the nation, protect the rights of citizens and institute socio-political and economic measures to better their lots and make the nation habitable, irrespective of political, religion and ethnic affiliations.

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