

Helon Habila: Narrating the Dysfunctional Baggage of a Post-Colony

by

Chijioke Uwasomba
cjsomba@yahoo.co.uk
Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract

This essay attempts a critical reading of Helon Habila's two novels- *Waiting for an Angel* and *Measuring Time*. In these two novels, Habila narrates the history of Nigeria from the mists of antiquity through pre-colonial and colonial times to the post-colonial era. The essay highlights Nigerian history and demonstrates how it creates a novelistic tradition with a revolutionary imperative as its leitmotif; however, this revolutionary fervour is short-lived in these novels. The essay therefore suggests that the novels represent a continuation of the creative struggle by Nigerian writers to formalise a search for nationhood and show that writing is a powerful tool for collective action.

Keywords: Narration, Post-colony, Nigeria, Revolution, Poverty, Keti community.

Introduction

The writer, irrespective of his or her ideological persuasion has a duty to discharge to society and to self. This is because the writer is saddled with the social responsibility to communicate certain social and personal experiences to an audience. We can argue from the outset that all literatures, whatever their proclaimed orientations, serve one form of public purpose or another. The Romantics, in spite of the private nature of their writings, could be said to be supremely public as their personal concerns affect the public domain. In a letter to his friend Wilkie Collins dated September 6, 1858, Charles Dickens (arguably the father of the English novel), writes of the importance of social commitment:

Everything that happens (...) shows beyond mistake that you can't shut out the world; that you are in it, to be of it; that you get yourself into a false position the moment you try to sever yourself from it, that you must mingle with it, and make the best of it, and make the best of yourself into the bargain (1994:132)

Given the above, we can understand Chinua Achebe when he warns that “an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant” (1975:78). The “big social and political issues” are thus the Shenanigans, the stupendous level of corruption in most African states, the politics of survival and its consequences on the state and society and the dizzying quotidian realities African people are confronted with in their genuine struggles to survive. There is despair everywhere and responsible writers should but be counted in the search for the evolution of a society that is meaningful and well-governed.

Since independence, many African states have been marked by one form of self-inflicted debility or another, manifested in social decay, immiserization of the people, planlessness, slummization, thieveries of all stripes and hues with dire consequences for development. Second, military governments have worsened the situation in their well-choreographed race with their civilian collaborators that since denied the fruits of independence to the hapless and harried people of Africa.

It is with the forgoing background that we can understand the entry of Helon Habila into the narrative canvas of Nigeria, a country often misgoverned by its ruling forces. Hence, Habila belongs to a new generation/phase of Nigerian writing via the publication of *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) and *Measuring Time* (2006), and moreover, Anyokwu (2008:45) has shown that Habila in *Waiting for an Angel* like some of his compatriot contemporary writers Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun*), Sefi Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*), Chris Abani (*Graceland*), and Teju Cole (*Everyday is for the Thief*), he creates what we may term “faction” in which the events of the time period are reproduced as historical and factual realities that works to capture a post-modernist creative consciousness wherein the reader encounters lived experiences of Nigerian history in its stark and crudest realities to report on the people and places we know in real life which dominate the scenes and contours of the narration.

Thus, the story of the novel is told from the point of view of the narrator and Lomba. And although there are other important characters in the novel, Lomba, the young journalist living in Lagos during the Sanni Abacha regime illustrate the criminal activities of the regime and how it affected each of the character.

In spite of the episodic and almost disjointed narrative structure of the novel, the story is about Lomba; Bola, a colleague and a friend of Lomba whom he shared a room with in their short-lived University education days; Alice, an undergraduate student whose father is an Army General and who Lomba had a love relationship with; James, the redoubtable and nationalist-minded journalist and Joshua, the teacher-turned revolutionary who articulates the condition of the people and mobilizes them to change their decadent status quo. Other characters in the novel are Kela and his aunt, Auntie Rachael, (the owner of Goodwill Food Centre) where the people go to eat; Nancy, a wonderful assistant to Auntie Rachael; Brother, a driver – turned tailor; Janice, the prison superintendent’s mistress who is a teacher by profession; Hagar, the student-turned prostitute who dies in the wake of the people’s demonstration having been knocked down by a vehicle as she ran away from rampaging goons who came to attack and disperse the demonstrators. In addition, there are other characters in the novel who share the same burden and misfortune, and thus, most of them live in the Poverty Street (formerly Morgan Street).

Lomba experiences all kinds of sufferings. He drops out of the University, and according to him: “when school began to look like a prison, I had to get out” (*Waiting for an Angel*, 107) As a student, his University like others went through one closure after another. His closest friend and roommate Bola loses his parents, and his two beloved sisters in an accident. As a result Bola becomes disoriented, preaching like a pastor within a section of their neighbourhood against military dictatorship. But he gets a raw deal in the hands of plain clothes security men who give him the beating of his life. By the time Lomba comes back after two days from Bola’s house, soldiers had ransacked their hostels, destroying everything in sight, including his written works:

As I neared my block... my room was open, the door broken, hanging askew from the top hinge, 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: the mattresses were thrown on the floor; it was a poem, my poem. I picked up another; it was a page from one of my short stories...most of them was torn; covering the writing with thick, brown mud. I felt the imprint of the boots on my mind... (Waiting for an Angel, 71).

For two years Lomba is locked in his tenement house, trying to write a novel: “for my bread I taught English and literature an hour daily, minus Sundays, on a school certificate preparatory class run by a woman who always looked at me suspiciously, as if wondering what I did for a living” (*Waiting for an Angel*, 106). Thus, everywhere for Lomba is a prison- his tenement house, the University that he has withdrawn from. Therefore, even before his imprisonment, his entire life is like a prisoner. In fact, this claustrophobic environment, as seen in the dingy tenement and the entire Poverty Street affects other characters in the novel.

The heat in Poverty Street is such that everybody is gasping for breath. There are no trees in the streets. It is not only human beings that feel the negative impact of the heat. The entire environment is affected – dogs, chickens and other domestic animals feel the warmth. Poverty Street is one of the many decrepit, diseases – ridden quarters that dot the entire setting of the novel set in Lagos, Nigeria. Apparently, because of the inhuman condition of the environment, Lomba only lived there for one year. Hence, Brother (his real name is Mohammed) tells Kela: “Here na so so heat full everywhere. Heat and Soja. If the heat no kill you, soja go harass you” (*Waiting for an Angel*, 132).

The heat and complete aridity of the Poverty Street thus evoke the image of the setting of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* where everything is portrayed as static, sterile, immovable and demobilised. The only tree in the setting is lifeless, and the characters are stock to a place waiting for Godot who is nowhere in sight. The waiting game goes on and on to eternity. But unlike the Beckettian world of perpetual immobility and total helplessness, concerned people like Mao (Ojikutu) who are dissatisfied with the state of things in the country begin to meet in Joshua’s house to mobilise people for the revolution. The mobilisation becomes successful as can be seen in the demonstration at the Local Government Secretariat aimed at pointing government’s attention to the plight of the people. Agreed, government through its coercive agents maims and kills some of the protesters declaring the ringleaders as wanted; however, it is important to note that things cannot be the same again. The people’s movement for change has begun and with time, victory shall be theirs. The fact that the protest takes place and the people through the leadership of Joshua successfully change Morgan Street to Poverty Street indicates a huge step forward for the people.

At this point in our analysis, it is important to remember that as a student, and even many years after he had dropped out of school, Lomba said he was not interested in politics. Moreover, at every point that he was confronted on what he would like to be, he never wasted time by saying he wanted to be a writer. Even as a journalist he did not want to write on politics until James Fiki, his editor changed his mind. When asked by James if he could write on politics, Lomba’s response was: “I am not political” (*Waiting for an Angel*, 108). But James quickly reacted: ‘in this country the very air we breathe is politics’ (*Waiting for an Angel*, 108). In neo-colonial environments, politics is the decider of how things are shaped. Decisions and other outcomes of state policy are products of high-wired politics.

Later on after being arrested for covering the people’s demonstration, it dawns on Lomba that his life is suffused with politics. In the prison, given the effect of the imprisonment on his entire being, Lomba writes:

I write of my state in words of derision, aiming thereby to reduce the weight of these walls on my shoulders, to rediscover my nullified individuality. Here in prison loss of self is often expressed as anger (Waiting for an Angel, 3-4).

Here writing provides Lomba with an opportunity to let out the steam and reclaim his individuality which the prison has stifled.

The narrator (perhaps the alter ego of Habila?) allows Lomba to give an account of his prison experience. By doing this, Lomba's grim encounter with a decrepit prison system is vividly expressed, and its impact on the reader is palpable. Habila appears not to want a third party reportage because it will probably not show the kind of visible impact that the sufferer himself (Lomba) wants to communicate. Lomba is from his own account dehumanized, depersonalized, tortured, and disoriented, with his soul destroyed. By keeping a diary, he narrates his sordid prison experience, Hence, Lomba is empowering himself with a surfeit of data for future analysis and power over his tormentor(s). Here, according to Toolan, "narrators assert their authority to tell... To narrate is to make a bid for a kind of power" (Toolan: 1988:8).

This power is manifested in the prison superintendent's later attitude towards Lomba. The prison superintendent, who had earlier on seized Lomba's pencil and the sheet of papers he had written on after a beating, subsequently come to him covertly seeking knowledge as he realises the power of knowledge as contained in the written materials he had ordered destroyed. It is a poignant irony, but the reality of the human situation is that the prison superintendent who had destroyed the things written by Lomba is now seen secretly currying the favour of the latter to teach him how to write:

He bent forward, and clapped a hand on my shoulder. I realized with wonder that the man, in his awkward, flat-footed way, was making overtures of friendship to me. My eyes fell on the boot that had stepped on my neck just five days ago (Waiting for an Angel, 16)

The importance of knowledge and the quest for it are two key issues in *Waiting for an Angel*. The prison superintendent seeks this knowledge from Lomba so that he can become humanized and therefore acceptable to his mistress-teacher, Janice. Thus, Kela was sent from Jos to join Auntie Rachael in search for knowledge (it should be remembered that he had failed his school certificate examination). Yet, at Auntie Rachael's place, he becomes Joshua's student. In his context, it is not surprising that having attained reasonable awareness about their condition and the hypocrisy of those running their lives, the people decide to have their fates in their own hands by demonstrating against the injustices of the system. Armed with their new knowledge and in cahoots with intellectuals like Joshua and redoubtable editors with crusading zeal like James, the society could not be the same: hence, the brutality of the system is not sufficient enough to detonate the revolutionary pressure that injustice and corruption has created.

In like manner, in Habila's second novel, *Measuring Time*, the author continues with the narration of Nigeria's chequered history of great dreams deferred, signposted by the irresponsibility of the decadent class that has been running its affairs since independence. And as Anyokwu (2000:14) has correctly noted, *Measuring Time* "traces the historical tramlines of the fictional Keti community (and to some degree, Nigeria's history) from the mists of antiquity through pre-colonial and colonial times to the post-colonial era". In other words, Nigeria's dysfunctional history is masked in the fictional Keti community where all events of the novel take place. From all the indicators, the Keti community is ruined by its leaders who do not consider the important place of the people in the general scheme of things.

Hence, *Measuring Time* is the story of Mamo and LaMamo, a set of twin brothers whose mother dies after giving birth to them. Their existence is compounded by an unconcerned father, who is more known for his philandering activities than any noble concern. Their father's name is Lammang who inherits wealth from his father-in-law after the latter's death. The twins are almost thirteen years when they first hear the story of their father's early love life and their mother's heartbreak. Auntie Marina, their father's sister, narrates to them the story of their father, the death of their mother and other issues concerning their family.

Because of the no-love-lost relationship between the twins and their father, they begin to dream to escape from their house to become child soldiers. Asabar, their cousin, joins them but Mamo's ill health does not allow him to complete the journey as LaMamo and Asabar leave for Timbuktu and Asabar returns after one month and two days saying that LaMamo has joined the rebel army in Chad.

Meanwhile, Mamo has been offered admission to study History; his father joins politics with the decision of the military to hand over power to civilians after many years in the saddle. Yet, Mamo drops out of the University because of his ill health; Uncle Iliya (Asabar's father) offers him a teaching appointment at the Keti Community School with Uncle Iliya as the head of the school; Zara, whom Mamo and his twin brother LaMamo had fallen in love in their younger years, joins the teaching staff as a Mathematics teacher. However, the government in its policy of inconsistencies shuts down the Keti Community School, thereby rendering all the workers jobless. And thereafter, in an attempt by the teachers' delegation led by Uncle Iliya to get the Mai of the Keti community to intervene so that the school could be reopened comes to nought, causing Uncle Iliya to say: 'Our traditional rulers are like politicians, you can't depend on their words' (*Measuring Time*, 125).

Through letter writing, LaMamo (now in Monrovia) keeps in touch with Mamo. In one of his letters, he regrets about the conflict in Liberia and war in general. He has even lost one of his eyes in the war. As LaMamo is moving from Liberia to Guinea, fighting, his father Lamang is neck deep in the politics at home, changing from one party to another. Mamo busies himself with research activities leading to the publication of a review of Drinkwater's *A Brief History of the People of Keti* by the *History Society Quarterly*. Next, Asabar becomes the leader of the Youth wing of Lamang's political party and wishes that LaMamo comes back to join in the politics because according to him, "the party needs people like him at this time". (*Measuring Time*, 154).

In this mix, it is important to note that Mamo's review of Drinkwater's book on the Keti people becomes his launching pad into the politics of his community. Robert Wanga, the leader of the Keti Youth movement for a talk, invites him; the Waziri invites him to the palace wherein he is to replace the palace Secretary who has just died and expected to write the personal history of the Mai and his ancestors, which will be presented during the 10th anniversary of the Mai. Instead of allowing Mamo to do the work for which he has been employed, the cunning and corrupt Waziri want Mamo to interview him so that he will be included in the book. When Mamo, during the meeting of the Keti District Traditional Council, suggests that the people of the community be involved in the anniversary activities, the Waziri objects to it, questioning "What people?" (*Measuring Time*, 233). Thus, the Waziri is no doubt a wheeler-dealer who is trying to use the book project to document himself with a view to becoming the Mai. Consequently, Waziri is very condescending of the people and will always engage in projects and programmes that are for his self-interested that have no bearing on the needs and aspirations of the people of Keti.

Correspondingly, the idea of fund-raising suggested by Mamo is held with the governor in attendance, and therefore the governor appreciates the organisational abilities of Mamo. Accordingly, money realised from the fund-raising ceremony is to be used for the construction of wells that will provide water for the people. However, rumours are spreading like wide fire to the effect that the water engineers who have abandoned the site for the water well are said to have been hired by the Waziri and Mamo. When Mamo asks the Waziri about the work on the wells, the Waziri replies: "young man, you have done your part; the rest is in our hands" (*Measuring Time*, 250). From the way the Waziri carries on in the novel, it is clear that he is not a decent person. As the novel progresses, it dawns on Mamo that the Waziri is such a manipulative calculator who can do anything in pursuit of power, and the clash between the Muslims and the Christians offers an opportunity to Mamo to know truly that the Waziri is evil. In the conflict, many people are arrested, including Auntie Marina, and to get the police to release Auntie Marina, the Waziri insists that Mamo must do his bidding, that is to write the biography of the Mai in which the Waziri will enjoy an important presence, and secondly, to keep quiet on the millions of money realised during the fund-raising ceremony.

It is at this climactic point in the narration of the novel that the reader witnesses the arrival of LaMamo from the war front to the land of Keti brimming and bristling with revolutionary enthusiasm and concrete action. He warns his brother Mamo not to give into the Waziri's blackmail: "people like that must be opposed no matter what". (*Measuring Time*, 288). Thereafter, under the revolutionary leadership of LaMamo the people chase away the colluding and corrupt water engineers, killing one of them in the process. The drilling site is pulled down and the pick-up vans of the construction company set on fire. The Waziri is killed for threatening the people with arrest and prosecution but the Mai is spared for rolling on the ground and begging the people. LaMamo is shot and later dies, but before dying he has said thus to Mamo:

Promise me you'll send for Bintou when things are back to normal...I want my child to grow up here... beneath the hills, like we grew up...I know everything will be all right"
(*Measuring Time*, 297).

LaMamo's wish that his wife Bintou be made to come back to Keti is obliged by Mamo as he writes a letter to Bintou asking her to return to Keti. With the struggle of the people against the fascist tendencies of the feudal state represented by the Mai and his agents (especially the Waziri), things cannot be the same again. Thus, a new Keti is bound to emerge where LaMamo's child and others will lead a life of happiness and fulfilment, devoid of all the encrustations of the old order. Uncle Iliya is seen collecting signatures from the Keti people to be sent to the military governor urging him to reopen the Keti Community School, and it is expected that this school will train a new set of leaders that will bring to bear the wishes of LaMamo, so that his death cannot be in vain.

The struggle of the Keti people demonstrates sovereign will and power of the people over and above the state. A state which dehumanises its own citizens, delegitimises itself and puts its own sovereignty in dire jeopardy. The involvement of the police and their brutal display leading to the killing of the well-meaning citizens of Keti show the callousness of the police and lack of conflict resolution mechanism on the part of the Keti leadership. Here Habila tries to show in fictional terms that the brutality of the Nigeria police force, each time there is a misunderstanding amongst the people of the country, the police have become more of the enemy of the people, rather than their friends.

As can be seen from the foregoing, Helon Habila, with the story of the Lammang's family, weaves a bigger tale of a nation that does not consider the interests and aspirations of its citizens. Lammang is, no doubt a wayward father who displays historical irresponsibility to members of his family.

We are told that when Tabita's wife dies fifteen months after their wedding, Lammang is said to have: 'pushed open the door and walked out into the rain' (*Measuring Time*, 15). Meanwhile, three years after the birth of the twins, Lammang also shatters their illusion when he decides to take them away from Uncle Iliya's house, and were it not for Auntie Marina, the boys might have died very early in life, especially Mamo who is afflicted by sickle-cell anaemia. And so, the children's antipathy to their father can be easily understood, as Lammang is busy running after widows, travelling here and there, playing worthless national politics at the expense of his family.

According to Sullivan (2001: 71), 'the nation...constitutes itself through the will and the imagination of the citizens of the state'. Hence, the will and the imagination of a father is like a nation, yet an irresponsible father like Lammang proves incapable of running a home or a nation and it is no wonder that he loses out within the national political arena. He is a failed father and an incompetent state organiser, so a nation or home, if left in the hands of unimaginative characters like Lammang is bound to atrophy. Here it is likely that Habila is warning Nigerians through the *Measuring Time* to be careful not to allow the likes of Lammang to walk their way into the political arena because nation building requires men and women of high imagination and inventiveness. In the novel, despite all his moves from one party to another and the employment and deployment of high-level thuggery ably coordinated by Asabar his nephew, Lammang ends his life miserably. The lesson here is that to build a successful nation, a combination of characters like Mamo for their intellectualism and the LaMamos of this world is an irreducible minimum, because a nation requires an adroit combination of both intellectualism and robust action for its becoming.

In *Measuring Time* the place and role of Auntie Marina cannot be wished away. Beyond providing the novel with a rich feminine ambience, Auntie Marina's activities are extremely heroic and highly regarding. It is through her that the twins get to know a lot of things about themselves and their family and by extension the history of Keti. This also means that through Auntie Marina the twins and even the readers are taken into the heart of the malaise of Keti (contemporary Nigeria) with the story she tells of all that had happened in the past and their impact on the present. Auntie Marina reminds one of Nelly Dean, the old lady who retells the story of the events that had happened in the past regarding Wuthering Heights and Thruscross Grange in the Victorian novel titled *Wuthering Heights*. Auntie Marina is the people's griot who is unfortunately killed by the police in their raid against the people over their religious misunderstanding.

Again, one is tempted to think that even though Auntie Marina is a woman, she appears to represent Christopher Okigbo who is arguably one of Africa's greatest writers. Okigbo's life was cut short during a senseless war between Nigeria and Biafra. Perhaps the war might have been stopped but for lack of conflict-resolution strategies by the leadership of the Nigerian state. Gowon's police action response to the challenge of the state of Biafra was not able to weaken the resolve of the Biafran people and the war was fought for three years before the no victor- no winner declaration was established in January 1970 by the federal republic of Nigeria.

Habila presents us with a society that wastes its best: Tabita dies fifteen months after her marriage; Uncle Haruna who had fought in the Nigeria/Biafra war commits suicide; Lammang and the Waziri (though the two most despicable characters in the novel) die as a result of their disreputable and ignoble activities – Lammang for rigging election and the Waziri for daring the people; Asabar dies for recklessness; Auntie Marina is killed by the rampaging police and LaMamo the revolutionary is killed by the repressive forces of the state. It is true that at the end of the novel, Zara and Mamo have not died, but from all indications, they have become negated. Zara has not been successful in her marriages and the teaching job that would have given her succour is taken away from her with the closure of the Keti Community School by the government.

Overall, the setting of the novel is filled with ambitions that are not realised. All the genuine efforts of the people to enjoy a life of happiness and fulfilment become impossible because of the way the leadership of the community organises the society. There is no sincerity of purpose on the part of the leadership of the Kati community, and even if the Mai were to run an efficient and responsible administration, characters like the Waziri would not have allowed him the opportunity to do so.

One is not surprised with the level of negativities that buffet the *Measuring Time*. After all, the novel was set at a time when the military overlords in Nigeria were at the helm of affairs. In fact, a character in the novel known as Major Hamza is the administrator of the Local Government. He is Zara's former husband and is in the habit of organising parties every now and then. The narrator captures this, thus: 'There were more parties, mostly at the same venue, mostly with the same people, and mostly for the same reasons: birthdays for girlfriends' (*Measuring Time*, 250). This character reminds us of Major Hamza el Mustatpha who was sentenced to death for his involvement in the killing of Kudirat Abiola, the wife of Moshood Abiola who was brutally murdered by Abacha enforcers under the supervision and control of el Mustapha. This tragedy happens when there is a warm relationship between military officers and the traditional institution as it was during the military era of Nigeria. And after the criminal annulment of the 1993 election, many traditional rulers were falling over one another to support the annulment, thus, it is within this context that we can understand the relationship between the Mai and the entire palace of the Keti kingdom, with the government of the day wherein both the military and the traditional institution worked against the interest of the people.

In all, *Measuring Time* is a novel that reflects or mirrors the unique characterised experience of the nation – a nation rigged by its leaders. The Keti community (Nigeria) from all indications is racked by poverty and deepening economic inequality and misery. It is a roiling enclave of poverty and immoderation. The community is deeply divided along class lines - the Mais, the Waziris and their political friends and collaborators ranged against the poor in the Keti community.

The political forces are busy rigging elections and manipulating all the political processes to the disadvantage of the poor and hapless members of the community. In frustration, the youth join the political fray as thugs, killers, and election riggers; and Asabar's disorientation and perpetual drunkenness should be seen in this context because in his lack of direction, he attempts to join the army with Mamo and LaMamo (his cousins) as mercenaries but he fails in this endeavour only to return to Keti to become a dare-devil thug-in-chief and leader of the youth wing of a party that is corrupt and unresponsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the people of Keti.

The return of LaMamo within the canvas of Habila's narratology is, as Anyokwu (2008) has correctly noted, a simplistic over-dramatization of the concept of *Deus ex machina*. However, it should be noted that the sudden return of LaMamo from the pursuit of his war exploits/efforts quickens the revolutionary tempo of the novel. LaMamo's practical revolutionary leadership is so engaging and salutary that the devilish and corrupt Waziri is made to get his comeuppance, and the Great Mai is made to eat the humble pie by his cowardly and beggarly response to the people's raging ire after they have wasted the wily Waziri. It is not 'a mindless orgy of violence' as Anyokwu (2008:6) has asserted, if anything, it is a revolutionary violence with regenerative implications.

LaMamo makes the ennobling and deeply humanising self-sacrifice in defence of the people who have suffered all kinds of exploitations in the hands of the corrupt leadership of the Keti community. Like the aborted well project, the leadership and its collaborators are always in the habit of hijacking the projects and resources meant for the advancement of the lives of the people to suit their selfish ends.

In *Waiting for an Angel* the outcome of the people's resistance is uncertain as the revolutionaries are scattered by the state forces. In *Measuring Time* the people's movement to free themselves from the stranglehold of their exploiters is also vitiated, but the Keti community cannot be the same again. Consequently, there is no doubt that Habila is concerned with the condition of the masses and the manipulation by the forces that be. The revolutionary imperative appears to be the *leit motif* of his novelistic tradition, but sadly, his creative consciousness allows the revolutionary stirrings not to see the light of day, although, the reading community desires and deserves a sustained and sustainable revolutionary artistic order.

Habila's two novels provide proof to Josaphet's (1990:5) view that 'literary texts are interwoven with historical phenomena'. According to Kumer (1969:195) Henry James is said to have confidently proclaimed that the act of the novel depended essentially upon exact realism, with the corollary that the author's personal views and feelings ought to remain invisible. This is not so with Habila, his narration is visibly and clearly about Nigeria with its excess baggage of stifling contradictions. These two novels like some before them, by other Nigerian writers formalise the search for nationhood and demonstrate that writing is a powerful tool for collective action against social power. Hence, there are real historical dates, historical names and events within, especially in *Waiting for an Angel*.

In short, in reading Habila's two novels, it is tempting to suggest that his creative consciousness is animated and powered hugely by the Frankfurt School, conveniently based in neo-Marxist interdisciplinary social theory.

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