

# The Embattled Homeland in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*

Akporherhe Friday & Udi Peter Oghenerioborue

*Department of English*

*University of Delta*

*Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria*

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## Abstract

This paper explores Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* to show how the Diasporic writer displays his mastery of creative literary ingenuity in interrogating experiences and challenges of the homeland, and the issue of displacement exhibited by certain characters in the novel. The literary text was carefully chosen based on its thematic relevance to the purpose of this paper. The authors adopt Postcolonial theory that focuses on literary works produced in nations that were formerly colonized. The study found out that Diasporic literature has been greatly influenced by African cultural heritage and experiences as portrayed in several Nigerian writings from abroad. Though Diasporic writers stay permanently in foreign countries, they are very much abreast of issues threatening the peace and national unity of their homeland. As envoys of peace and socio-economic transformation, they strive to publish literary works that would help in ensuring a country devoid of chaos and political unrest, corruption, repression and denigration.

**Key words:** Diaspora, fiction, disillusionment, post-independence, peace.

## Introduction

Diasporic literature has witnessed massive output of writings from new generation writers who are determined to sanitize their homeland through their works. Literature, to them, is life and the experience man goes through in life has always been the subject matter of literature; a people's myth, legends, history and cosmological experience (Owolabi & Owoye, 2013:27). The experiences of the Diasporic writers majorly encompass the socio-economic and

political turbulence that appear to be suffocating a larger proportion of the citizens of their countries. The foregoing excruciating predicaments resulted in forceful migration of Africans to foreign countries with a view to seeking greener pastures and comfort. Kehinde and Mbiom (2011:62) regrettably state that the attainment of independence has not automatically portended the realisation of the cherished dreams of freedom, responsibility of self-government, socio-political and economic satisfaction. A new reality however unfolds, maimed by anarchy, chaos, coups, disillusionment, injustice, betrayal, poverty, social unrest, hunger, oppression, corruption and war. The scenario of the ailing Nigerian state painted above by Kehinde and Mbiom did not only shatter the dreams and aspirations of her citizens but also led to the massive migration of people to foreign land. This paper will therefore explore the embattled homeland in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) from the Diaspora, and also the issues of displacement and migration of characters in the text.

Diasporic literature is a distinct Postcolonial literary genre that interrogates aching issues and experiences of migrants including the Africans in foreign land. Diasporic fiction writers have crossed border and so their works reflect socio-cultural, political, economic, and religious experiences of the globally dispersed population. According to Anupama (2015:1) the word "diaspora", is derived from a Greek word that means "scattering or dispersion". This implies, "human migration and movement away from a perceived homeland". Asghar and Sharjeel (2020:25) note that "diaspora is the voluntary or forced movement of people from their homelands into the new regions. It has also arrived in anew geographical and cultural context which serves as the meeting place of two cultures; the migrant and the host." In the opinion of Rajeswari (2009:1), 'Diaspora', 'exile,' and 'migration' are forms of dislocation that are associated with postcolonial literature and they could be used synonymously. The scholar also notes that, "Diaspora as a concept is regarded not only as a singular phenomenon but as historically

varied and heterogeneous in its aspects. The transnational mobility of people may be the result of forced or voluntary migration, of self-exile or expulsion. Refugees, people *in transit*, are the product of war, ethnic conflict and natural calamity" (Rajeswari, 2009:1).

In a broad sense, most diasporic writers found themselves mostly in the United States as a result of forced or voluntary migration. This emanates from their determination in increasingly explosive confrontations with the rulers; some have in fact suffered great privation - torture, arbitrary arrests, detention, internal deportation, forced exiles, and threats of physical liquidation (Kehinde, 2008:336).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The relocation of literary writers including Helon Habila to foreign land has created opportunities for them to continuously interrogate contentious issues through their literary productions. As a radical crusader of societal transformation, he exposes the economic backwardness of Nigeria, the traumatic experiences of her citizenry and follies of the government under military regimes. Though Habila stays in foreign land, his narratives centre on Nigerian cultural identities and postcolonial disillusionment and his determination to flood the literary market with issues particularly from Nigeria brought him into limelight. These are evident in his narrative, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002). In this paper, the authors examine the chosen text with a view to interrogating experiences and challenges of the embattled homeland. This shall be carried out using headings. The literary work was carefully selected based on its thematic relevance to the purpose of this study and qualitatively analyzed since there are no numerical data involved in the discourse.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is underpinned by the theory of Post-colonial theory that focuses on literary productions from countries that were formerly under the dominance control of the stronger and more powerful

nations like British and France. Post-colonialism and postcolonial theory are often used by literary scholars to foreground their discourse. Rukundwa and Aarde (2007:1171) state that, "the term and the field of post-colonialism have been subjected to thorough and extensive criticism from the perspectives of literary, political and religious studies." Apart from the areas indicated by these scholars, critical evaluation has also been carried out in socio-economic and cultural domains of society by researchers across the world. Channells (1999:110) in his submission states that, "Post-colonialism is concerned with the worlds which colonialism in its multiple manifestations, confused, disfigured and distorted, reconfigured and finally transformed." The researcher also notes that "the effects of colonization are felt from the moment of the first colonial impact and Post-colonialism constitutes as its subject the way colonized societies adjusted and continue to adjust to the colonial presence: sometimes that presence was regarded as genuinely enriching; more often it was seen as demeaning and impoverishing" (110).

The colonized people over decades have been struggling to adjust to the flaws, societal foibles and moral decadence inherited and created by themselves in their colonized nations. All these informed the writings of most literary writers both those living in the Diaspora and the homeland. Kehinde (2006:94) notes that, "the ugly period of colonialism in Africa has affected the people's language, education, religion, artistic sensibilities and popular culture." The scholar sees writers as people from the colonized societies who are determined to reconstruct the human mind and the territories that were formally bastardized by the colonizers by creating the binary markers identified above. In view of this, he asserts that, "the average African novelist responds to the urgency and inevitability of this historic mission; he or she needs to put the record straight and illuminate the threshold between past and present, thought and action, self and other, and Africa and the world" (94).

The study of Tyson (2006:427) reveals that, "most postcolonial critics analyze the ways in which a literary text, whatever its topic, is colonialist or anti-colonialist, that is, the ways in which the text reinforces or resists Colonialism's oppressive ideology." The scholar argues that a text can reinforce colonialist ideology through positive portrayals of the colonizers, negative portrayals of the colonized." In illuminating the above point of view, Tyson emphasized that, "Analogously, text can resist colonialist ideology by depicting the misdeeds of the colonizers, the suffering of the colonizer, or the detrimental effects of colonialism on the colonized" (427). While clarifying the concept of Colonialism, Bhat (2015:7) asserts that, "Colonialism was the imperialist expansion of western countries, especially Britain and France, into the rest of the world to dominate other countries as their colonies and influence the local people educationally as well as, culturally." Rukundwa and Aarde (2007) acknowledged Bhabha (1994:171) who argues that, "postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geographical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic "normality" to the even development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, peoples."

Most scholarly works that originated from the colonized in the past were based on the themes of resistance, re-assertion, redemption and projection of their cultural heritage and values, to mention a few. Through literary productions, the writers reacted strongly against the colonial dominance, political ideologies, negative effects of colonialism, capitalism, exploitation and injustice. However, there has been a shift from writings against the colonizers to the internal colonialists, the present African corrupt leaders and oppressors whose actions have aggravated the impoverishment of the citizens after political independence. Based on the above, Kehinde (2006:116) asserts that, "the colonial period signals the end of the beauty, communality and reciprocity characteristic of African

culture. In the post-colonial era, it is the task of African literature to reclaim that which has been misappropriated and to reconstruct that which was being damaged, even destroyed." The attempt to actualize the foregoing view informed the postcolonial writings of which the diasporic literature is also connected.

### Literature Review

Diasporic literature has received great attention from scholars in the past decades because most of the writers are conscious of the challenges that characterize their homeland, their experiences in foreign countries and other reasons. Bhat (2015:6) notes that the term, "Diaspora" is employed to cover "all kinds of exiles, expatriates, migrations and writers who live in other countries away from home. With the beginning of industrialization and scientific development in Europe came the necessary evils of imperialism and colonization." The scholar further disclosed that "in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans, particularly the British and the French almost spread all over the world as colonizers-cum-rulers and they sent many of their colonized subjects of Asia and Africa to many places as indentured labourers" (6). The diasporic writers therefore relocated to other countries either voluntarily or forcefully due to certain conditions. They have consciously recreate happenings in their homeland and those in the foreign societies where they found themselves in their literary works.

Studies have shown that writers of Diasporic literature orient themselves primarily towards their host society and contributed to the nation's literature, while at the same time maintaining their contacts with their various home countries. They are mainly attracted to areas with significant developments as indicator of economic prosperity (Willis qtd in Ajadi, 2011). In a clear term, people migrate abroad to improve their economic prospects, ensure a more secure living environment, re-unite with their family members, or avoid persecution in their country of origin (Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2008:2). Some of the Diasporics are attracted to advanced countries

because of employment opportunities, standard educational system, improved healthcare facilities and special social welfare schemes for all citizens, among others. Aderonmu (2007:3) notes that, "many of the reasons are associated with our pains and frustrations with the way things are going on in Nigeria including new (or old) experiences and encounters." Literary writers are the moral consciousness of society and it is the duty of the writers of the present day to guide the country to attain an environment free of corruption, intimidation, exploitation, manipulation, subjugation and denigration. Writers ought to be activists whose gallantry and radical efforts will see to the end of several vices that bedevil us (Asika, 2011:288).

Researches of different scholars have revealed that the manifestations of discrimination, violence and xenophobic hostility towards diasporic writers have dramatically increased in many parts of the world. The situation has become worse because migrants must survive despite all odds. In actual sense, the cruel realities of rough work in miserable conditions, and empathize with those seeking to improve conditions as well as those workers who are so desperate for work, dared not support labor-organizing efforts for fear of losing the poor jobs they had (Sherry, 2002:22).

In the same vein, studies have also shown that diasporic characters are facing the challenge of cultural identity. These are people who came from diverse cultural backgrounds with already formed cultural identities. Cultural identities interact as people who have migrated come into contact not only with people of the majority culture but also with immigrants of both similar and disparate cultures. Resultant feelings of a sense of belonging and comfort or a sense of alienation and distress may occur (Dinesh, 2004). In addition to the above challenges, there is the problem of authorship in literary works written by migrants. In the opinion of Cielam (2014), diasporic or migrant literatures have as chief characteristic the capacity to produce a vast cultural translation of one field into another, whether the writer

has adopted the language of the host country and performs the transfer process himself/herself, or whether he/she still writes in his/her own language and the work reveals that of the translator.

It is worthy of note that diasporic characters are equally facing the issue of hybridity. In recent time, the question of where diasporic characters belong- between homeland and foreign land- when considering African or Nigerian writers for national awards, has generated a lot of controversies in postcolonial literature. Some literary scholars are of the opinion that writers who reside fully in foreign land and produce literary works that reflect their immediate social environment and experiences should be considered. However, some scholars are of the view that only writers who reside in both foreign countries and their homeland, and as well portray the socio-cultural, economic and political happenings in their nations are qualified as Nigerian diasporic writers. Therefore, diasporic characters encounter the problem of alienation in our contemporary society. In corroborating the foregoing, Sousa (2019:43) acknowledged Eyitayo (2012) who asserts that migration will continue to influence the path of African literature as writers continue to strive to endogenise what is known as African literature. More stories will be developed and told, more will be disturbing, yet more will soothe. The migration writer may face the crisis of identity and acceptance but in his writings, he can always be assured that his African roots are established.

Based on the above submission, writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, Helon Habila, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and so on, nostalgically reflect on their oral traditions and homeland experiences in their literary works. This affirms the view of Brah (1996:190) that, "diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide,



reassemble and reconfigure." In this study, our focus shall be on Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and how the Diasporic writer displays his mastery of literary productions and the ingenuity in portraying the experiences and challenges of the homeland.

### **Habila's Narratives from the Diaspora**

Helon Habila, in his works often examines the African society and the driving forces behind its retrogression from the Diaspora. His debut novel, *Waiting for an Angel* was informed by the horrible military regimes in Nigeria particularly those of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. He wants readers to introspect and also become abreast of the horrible experiences that characterized the nation in the 1990's vis-a-vis the economic and political turbulence that marred the period. Through the fictional characters, he condemns the actions of the despotic military rulers.

The narrative centres on a Lagos based journalist Lomba, the protagonist who is sent to prison for the crime of observing and reporting an anti-government demonstration during the military era of darkness. Lomba intended pursuing a career as a novelist but the editor of *The Dial* magazine changed the orientation of this idealist young man. He joins the struggle to liberate the masses from the shackles and strongholds of military dictatorship which landed him in detention. The ugly experiences of Nigerians under the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha are the focus of the novel. In this study, the researchers attempt to present the post-independence turbulence that characterizes Nigeria as portrayed by Helon Habila under various sub-headings.

### **Political Instability and Dictatorship**

In the literary text, Helon Habila explores Nigeria in the dark era of military dictatorship. This period was marred with coup and counter coup, a situation that resulted in political turmoil and excessive human rights violation. After the indiscriminate arrest and detention of suspected enemies of the military dictators, several of these

political detainees are transferred to other prisons where their release would be a forgotten issue. The novelist reports this through Janice who witnessed one of the scenarios, thus; "A lot of those already in detention were transferred randomly to other prisons around the country, for security reasons. Lomba was among them. He was transferred to Agodi prison in Ibadan. From there he was moved to the far north, to a small desert town called Gashuwa. There is no record of him after that" (p.32). Habila through this character condemns the inhumanity of the military juntas to the Nigerians who they saw as threat to their unpopular government. They do not only incarcerate law-abiding citizens indiscriminately, they also transfer them to areas where they will languish and perish in no time. According to Janice's observation; "A lot of these political detainees died in detention, although only the prominent ones made the headlines-people like Moshood Abiola and General Yar Adua" (p.32). Habila in the text focuses on the military dictatorship and the reactions of the masses towards issues that are inimical to their fundamental human rights and wellbeing.

Human rights activists and the press often champion the struggles for justice and improved condition of living for the masses as shown in this narrative. However, the military government considered agitators as enemies of the state that must be arrested, summarily tried and executed. Prominent among the victims of the Nigerian military terror led by General Sani Abacha as evident in the novel was Ken Saro Wiwa. According to the narrator; "He was the only one who understood the economic aspect of the struggle. It is the money. He told Abacha, I know how much you and the foreigners are making-the billions you are drilling out of our soil. Give us some of it. They killed him because he threatened their monopoly..." (122). The novelist portrays extra judicial killings that characterized military regimes especially the evil periods of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. Also, in the novel, Habila captures one of the cases of military usurpation and the reactions that greeted this development: "It is a coup!" the barman shouts, raising his hand for

silence. The words pass from mouth to mouth round the room. Everyone falls silent, pressing closer to the radio on the counter. Martial music wafts out of the box to hover on the air above the sweating faces (p.37). It was the tradition of military dictators, after a successful coup to make a nationwide broadcast with the constitution suspended and fundamental human rights such as freedom of movement, press and publications, peaceful assembly and association, among others expunged. In the novel, for instance, the narrator observes that: "After the martial music a parade-ground-voiced general makes a lengthy announcement in which only the words 'dusk-to-dawn curfew' make any visible impact on the room. Suddenly, everyone is scurrying out of the bar into the light rain outside" (p. 37).

Habila imaginatively reveals that democracy as a form of government is preferable to military rule which is marred with repression, protests and injustice. As could be seen in the narrative, the military deploy massive security personnel with arms to public places in order to suppress agitators. The omniscient narrator reports that; "Soon the streets will be taken over by military tanks and jeeps. People will lock their doors and turn off their lights and peer fearfully through chinks in their windows at the rain-washed, post-coup d'etat streets" (p.37). The masses as portrayed above are so suppressed and intimidated that they sought cover whenever the military took over in the past. The novelist painted a scenario where the citizens of Nigeria lived in apprehension and anxieties because of the bestial nature of the military dictatorship.

### **Socio-Economic Debacle**

The novelist shifts the focus of Nigerians from plights of the elite to those of the downtrodden, revealing their impoverishment in the midst of abundant resources. Through the character of James Fiki, *The Dial's* Editor, Lomba became aware of the socio-economic dire of Nigeria and its adverse effects on the citizenry. The Editor points out an ugly scene of economic hardship to intimates Lomba thus;

“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. One General goes, another one comes, but the people remain stuck in the same vicious groove” (84). The statements of the Editor are to activate the consciousness of the writer about the miserable condition of the people due to government insensitivity. Habila portrays the press as a media house that plays significance roles in promoting socio-economic growth and development of society.

It was also revealed through the narrative that, “Nothing ever changes for them except the particular details of their wretchedness. They’ve lost all faith in the government’s unending transition programmes (84).” The novelist deeply reflected on the economic turbulence of the dark era in Nigeria. He presents the plight of the Nigerian populace who has been languishing in abject poverty and perpetual wants. In the novel, Habila vividly captures girls from Mayfair Hotel who were actively in the rally, “The girls raised their placards and joined us; even the married women, who hated the girls like death, cheered and embraced them. They were about twenty of them, their faces caked in inches of make-up, their impossibly huge wigs tumbling massive waves of hair down their shoulders. All of them were in jeans and T-shirts and canvas shoes” (p.130). The inhabitants of Morgan Street symbolize the Nigerian citizens who are victims of the economic hardship. After several futile attempts to salvage their impoverished condition, they staged a public protest to correct the abnormalities:

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 and we have to go to other streets to fetch water; our schools are overcrowded, and our children have to buy their own seats and tables because the ones there have not been replaced since the schools were built ten years ago! (p.132)

The above scenario depicts the post-independence Nigerian society where governments at all levels squander the commonwealth of the nation while a majority of the populace languishes in abject poverty. There is infrastructural decay which has further worsened the condition of living of the people. The novel also chronicles intimidations and suppressive mechanisms employed by security agents against protesters. This ugly experience of the citizens of Nigeria is recounted, thus; "There was nowhere to run to. The police were in two groups, on the north and south of the gathering; with the high Secretariat wall on the west, the only, but risky, avenue for escape was the busy road on the east...the Inspector turned and whispered to his men, and just as Joshua reached him, he did a curious thing" (132). Like the military, the police also join in suppressing the masses even though their intention is to stage a peaceful rally to seek a redress over their untold socio-economic deprivation. In the novel, Joshua reports the reaction of the Inspector that led a team of policemen thus: "He raised his right hand and brought it down sharply. And his men charged. I could imagine the surprise, the puzzlement on Joshua's face before a baton hit him on his head and went down. They trampled over him, like stampeding cows, and rushed on us" (p.134). Protests often precede agitations and demands for better life. In the novel, during the planned protest organized and led by Mao and Joshua, the former categorically states their purpose of staging the rally;

We are here to protest against this neglect. Where the subsidized drug programme promised us from the Petroleum Special Trust Fund? We need it now, because our children and our wives are dying from disease. We are dying from lack of hope. And this is why we are here today to protest. And this is the way we feel we ought to express our displeasure (132).

The military government which was tagged "corrective regime" could not restore hope and confidence in the Nigerian populace as expressed above. The Petroleum Special Trust Fund (PTDF) which

was established to improve the general well-being of the Nigerian citizenry could not be attained. This has adversely affected the health of the masses. One can state without mincing words that Military regime was a total failure; a situation that did not only worsened the problem of the nation which it claimed to redeem. Corruption, foreign manipulation, strike actions, demonstrations, embezzlement, looting and intimidation which it claimed to eradicate only flourished the more and poverty was ushered in the more into the lives of many citizens (Asika, 2011:280). Habila in the narrative portrays the postcolonial Nigeria as a 'political wilderness' because economic activities and political system were grounded to a halt following the massive looting and maladministration of the few opportunists that governed the country.

### **Protest, Repression and Resistance**

In the novel, Habila particularly focuses on the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, and unfolds their leadership failures that triggered massive protests which led to destruction of lives and indiscriminate detention of citizens. The maltreatment Nigerians received from the despotic leaders made them perceive human existence as worthless and degrading. This is evident in the novel where Bola saw revolution as the only way out of the military enslavement. At this juncture, he became impatient and reacts thus; "Can't you see what is happening? The military have turned the country into one huge barracks, into a prison. Every street out there is crawling with them; the people lock their doors, scared to come out. They play with us, as if we are puppets" (p. 41). The generality of Nigerians saw the military government of Babangida as deceitful since they never intended to hand over power to a democratically elected government. This is noticeable in Bola's comment that, "Yesterday they changed the transition date again. IBB is deceiving us, he has no intention of leaving. It is our duty to push him out. We have decided to boycott lectures from tomorrow, all Federal Universities..." (p.41). The novelist through this art introspects into the past experiences of the masses which were

traumatizing and degrading. These are flaws that characterized postcolonial societies particularly Nigeria which writers interrogate in their literary works.

Habila also psychologically reflects on one of the antics of the military governments to sustain their sit-tight syndrome in power and their strategies to resist revolution. Habila artistically unfolds this in the novel as Bola recounts his bitter encounter with policemen during an anti-government protest: "My eyes and mouth ran with fluid, my sweaty skin was pepperish with dissolved tear gas. But I could see through the mango leaves. The people, scared witless, hemmed in on all sides, stupefied by the choking tear gas, ran out in all directions, like quails beaten out of their hiding places, coughing and falling" (p.135). The peaceful demonstration organized by the people to express their neglect and displeasure met a Waterloo as they were disrupted by security agents, the police. The demonstration turned violence when the government unleashed the police on the armed-less and innocent demonstrators who sought a redress over their ugly condition in a lawful manner. They were not only beaten up with clubs, they were smoked with tear gas. This is affirmed by Nwagbara (2011:8) who states that the military in Nigerian politics employs violence and militarisation of operation to sustain itself in power. The military in this sense see might as right and coercion as a substitute for democratic principles.

As a historical novel, Habila presents a Nigeria-nation held hostage by military tyranny of which opposition is seen as treason while a large number of those who act as conscience of the people were made to either flee the shores of the country-went into self-exile, or face forced unlawful arrest and incarceration. According to the narrator; "They 'll continue subjugating us, killing all dissenters, one by one, sending them into exile, till there is no competitor left to oppose them" (p.122). This was the case of Ken Saro Wiwa, an Ogoni born environmentalist who was gruesomely murdered by the Abacha government. The period under review chronicled a large number of

unlawful arrest of political and human rights activists who bent on frustrating the efforts of the military dictators.

Habilain the novel also retrospectively presents how detainees suffered during military dictatorship. Through the panoramic angle of Lomba, the novelist recounts the Nigerian society where there were clampdowns on any form of opposition. Lomba attests to the case of a political detainee who “was transferred to Agodi prison in Ibadan. From there he was moved to the far north, to a small desert town called Gashuwa. There is no record of him after that. A lot of political prisoners died in detention, although only the prominent ones made the headlines - people like Moshood Abiola and General Yar Adua” (p.32).

According to Kehinde (2008:336), political writers constantly engage in increasingly explosive confrontations with the rulers; some have in fact suffered great privation - torture, arbitrary arrests, detention, internal deportation, forced exiles, threats of physical liquidation. In a nutshell, the writers' attacks on the problem of misrule in the nation are brutal and direct, indeed verging on Naturalism. This is the fate of Abiola and Yar Adua presented by Habilain narrative set in the military era. Despite the dictatorial tendencies of the military juntas, the masses did not relent in their struggle against the unpopular military regimes with their obnoxious laws, policies and violation of human rights. Through the character of Lomba, the novelist captures the efforts made by the military suppress the press which they perceived could truncate their government. As Lomba reports; “we were going there to stage a peaceful demonstration that was all. They appeared from nowhere in their trucks, shooting tear gas and rubber bullets at us. At first we scattered, but we rallied ourselves and returned. They were not many, just a truckful of them-about thirty persons” (59). Habila employs the cinematographic technique to narrate the conditions of the masses in the novel. Also, he vividly paints the picture of events using concrete imagery to make the experiences memorable to reader.



The novelist imaginatively recreates the resistance of demonstrators who never yielded to initial repressive attempts of security agents until they reinforced and stormed the venue of the protest. According to Lomba; "We broke their windscreen with stones, and we also seized their truck...but the bastards followed us to the hostels, chased us to our rooms. The air was so thick with tear gas we couldn't breathe" (p.59). Military dictatorship is still believed and upheld by many as the worst thing that has ever happened to the politics of our nation as well as many African nations once held under the claws, brutalities and tyranny of these 'khaki' leaders (Asika, 2011:278). In the novel, the intended demonstration became violence as law enforcement agents began to shoot tear gas and bullets into the air. The narrator presents a reportage of the situation thus: "The street was like a fucking war zone, filled with smoke and darting figures and fire and gunshots. One student died. He was shot in the head-a chemistry student. The Area Boys captured a policeman and doused him with petrol and set him ablaze" (p.60). The novelist through this literary text activates the consciousness of reader about the predicaments of the Nigerians. It also reveals the immeasurable contributory effort of the press towards the sensitization and enthronement of good governance in post-independence society. In the narrative, James Fiki, *The Dial's* editor tells Lomba to focus on articles and reports, not a novel. This depicts the moment of conscious awakening for Lomba who painstakingly observes the physical world of the masses. According to him;

my eyes snapped open as the rickety Molue bus came to a sudden stop in the middle of the road. I leaned out of the window with the other passengers to see what was causing the block. There was a loud, angry murmur of voices in front. Women's voices. The women appeared, crossing the road. Housewives in a large body, some with infants strapped to their backs. They were all carrying hoes and axes and machetes (p.88).

The socio-economic backwardness of the Nigerian state has become so insufferable that the masses resolved to resist the maladministration of the military juntas. The scene painted above vividly portrays responses of the masses to our pains and frustrations. Like Habila, Nigerian writers ridicule most of these things but in reality, they feel disappointed and hurt by the system in Nigeria (Aderounmu, 2007:3). The masses did not only express their dissatisfactions verbally through their "loud, angry murmur of voices" as could be seen in the text, they also carried, "hoes and axes and machetes" for physical confrontation since they had no access to arms and ammunition to attack their common foes, the military dictators.

### **Conclusion**

This paper explores Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and how the Diasporic writer portrays his homel and experiences in his literary later. In retrospection, Nigerian frontline writers such as, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Tanure Ojaide, Buchi Emecheta, and so on, in the time past wrote from the Diaspora to condemn the socio-economic and political turbulence that engulfed Nigeria during the military rule in the 1990s. The likes of Ben Okri, Sefi Atta, Helon Habila, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, though reside in foreign countries, also consciously presents challenges confronting their homeland in their literary productions. In narrating homeland from the Diaspora, Habila through the characters in novel explore the experiences of Nigerians political instability, military dictatorship, socio-economic debacle as well as protest, repression and resistance which were the basic characteristics of the period. He vividly and artistically presents several thematic preoccupations that characterized his homeland in his literary text. The novel reveals the tremors of anguished citizens who lament the fate of their great nation, Nigeria degenerating into a paltry midget due to the dictatorial and ineptitude of the military leaders. This consequentially resulted in the unending agitations, clampdown of innocent citizens and unavoidable migration to foreign countries.

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