

Postcolonial Aspects in the Novels of Helon Habila

M. VISHRUTI

M.Phil, English

Abstract

The Nigerian country has acquired its independence in 1960 from the hands of the British Empire. Nigeria comes under Postcolonial country after its independence from the British Empire and their writings were known as Postcolonial writings which focus on the themes of colonialism, liberation, racialism, a quest for the identity and displacement. Even though it became independent from the British Empire in 1960, it has experienced the Civil war from 1967 to 1970 and it was alternatively ruled by the civilian government and military dictatorship. The Nigerian civil or Biafra war has a great significance in Nigerian history it was fought between the government of Nigeria and secessionist of Biafra which includes Igbo people who would not tolerate the Northern- dominated federal government. The war gives rise to many political, economic, cultural and religious problems. The entry of the British indirectly in country's affairs from 1960 to 1963 gives rise to a Military coup, a serious of religious riots and a lot of Igbo people were killed brutally. They control the Oil production of the Nigerian delta for their needs and their improvement in Oil production economically among the other countries. The war gave rise to many issues like Poverty, Starvation and paved the way for the way for many illegal activities like kidnapping and stealing.

Keywords: subjugation, racialism, slavery, dictatorship, social and economic exploitation.

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The novels of Helon Habila *Oil on Water* and *Waiting for an Angel* happens in the period of the Biafra war and deals with the central issues like destruction due to foreign invasion and their indulgence in their country affairs, Oil exploration, the problem of Militancy, Military dictatorship, alienation, socio-economic problems and all Environmental issues like poverty and corruption. The characters of the novel have highly suffered and subjugated by the Government as well as by the Alien forces. The people of the country led a poor and the normal life was destructive with all kinds of social problems. The novels of Habila which are plain in narration deal with the life of the common people and their surroundings, these novels also take the historical background as a core concept and produced it with literariness. The blending of history and art together was one of the modern techniques among third-generation Nigerian writers, history which forms the basis of the work of art has been presented in a different form way from the restriction of any literary presentation; it is also associated with the modernism form of writing. In the novel *Oil on Water* where people suffer due to the Oil Company by the British economically and socially, they were dominated by the country's political power and military power and became slaves in their own country. In

the novel *Waiting for an Angel*, the people who belong to the poor society suffer under the military officials in their economical, political as well as social way of living. The characters of the novels denied of their rights; they were not given any recognition and left unheard. They were also killed brutally if they voiced against them they were made as birds in a cage as it has no way to be free. The British intervention in their countries affairs increased the tension in their country along with their country's issues. Some of the modern Postcolonial themes present in the novels are as follows

Economic Subjugation, In the novel *Oil on Water* the economy leads to many problems among the people of the society. The British required the Oil resources as it has scarcity in their country, and to improve their economic condition of their country through oil production among the other countries of the world. They also established Multinational Oil companies in Niger delta and built oil pipelines across their land. They also promised the people that the Company would provide them with a good life, but all ended in vain. Through the company, they increased the wealth of their motherland and the Nigerian people were made to starve and became jobless. In the jobless condition, many of the people started stealing oil from the oil pipelines across their land and sold it illegally like

Rufus's Father in the novel, who vandalize oil pipelines along with his friend Emmanuel illegally and sold it for the low price for the people who were in need; they were arrested by officials and taken to the prison for destroying their motive of selling oil and kept as the prisoner for many years. The people who stole oil from oil pipelines did not feel any guilt about it as it was their land and they were told by the government and Oil companies that oil pipelines were belonged to them, for their welfare and to fulfil their hunger. The people of Niger delta also learnt the illegal way of earning money like the kidnapping of Isabel Floode by her driver Salomon and Professor to improve their economic condition. Bribery becomes common among the officials and the people due to economic downfall they suffered a lot. The policeman got money from the person stealing oil across Oil pipelines and officials of the country got money from the British to run the Oil Company in the country.

On the other hand, the novel *Waiting for an Angel* revealed the economic subjectivity which made the People jobless and they were unable to get the job to run their life they lived in poverty as the description of people in the Poverty Street stands as the best example. The people would not be able to live a content life and eat good food, especially in the Abacha period. Corruption was a high problem in the country than ever in Nigerian History, followed by the pillaged of Economics and unemployed university graduates were present everywhere.

Social subjugation plays an important role in the novel *Oil on Water*. The British company who required the place for Oil exploration confiscated the land of the people living in the Niger delta villages. They were also made to displace from place to place to settle themselves. In their confiscated land, they built Oil pipelines which spoiled the fertile land of the people. The people of Niger delta highly believed in their own culture and community living, as the society and the culture has a close relationship with each other. People did not want to give up the duty of their Ancestors guarding themselves. The Fishing which was not only their occupation but also their culture, Even though the arrival of the British and their industrialization destroyed their land and water, they did not give up their cultural occupation fishing which is transferred it to their

children. The people of Niger delta considered their land as the sacred one even though they were displaced into different places. They build their own houses and gathering hall for all of their society members to gather together for all happenings around them, not in the villages of the Niger delta. The social life of the people in cities was highly westernized that they had night clubs and bars which led them to commit many crimes and illegal doings. Many of the young girls belonging to high society came to Port Harcourt and pursued their university education but their life had been changed brutally due to the social unrest condition exist in the country, they were raped and killed brutally some became destitute and pregnant and some were driven to prostitution leaving their studies. They were also made to live under the unrest condition as they were not having any freedom to act against the government rule and restrictions were imposed highly on them.

In the novel *Waiting for an Angel*, Social Subjugation is seen in the Morgan Street which was changed by the people as Poverty Street due to its poor condition, houses which were very old in condition and Auntie Rachael's Godwill Food centre was one of the food centres which provided food for the people in low price which was owned by Auntie Rachael, Kela's father's sister. Auntie Rachael was an unfortunate lady suffered more due to the social condition of the country, as she had lost her husband whom she married against her parents wish in war, and led a dull life and became secret drinker to overcome her sufferings. Auntie Rachael's relationship with Joshua was notable. When she heard that he was going to participate in the demonstration request to be cautious that due to this act of riots will bring great danger to the life and some have disappeared as unknown. Another road like Poverty Street is Olokun Road which was one of the oldest roads in the city. The houses in the street were very congested. Hagar, a former student of Joshua was forced to enter into prostitution when she was faced with poverty and homelessness. There was only one primary school named, Morgan Primary School and the secondary school named Morgan Comprehensive Day Secondary School were the only schools for the people residing over there, The Street was called as School Street due to the presence of the schools. The streets were provided only with a single pipe

and all gathered there to wash clothes and talked to each other and they also used the water in a required manner for other use. There was a church on the church road and also a mosque on the mosque road.

The description of Poverty Street shows how people were living in a confide society with only a meagre amount of basic needs. They were controlled by the government, their comforts and words should not go beyond rules. They were intentionally controlled from the knowledge of the outer world. Other social issues like students protest had a deep significance in the novel, Lomba and Bola were in higher studies in university it was the time of Military rule, and the students conducted the rally against the unjust government. The rally organized by the students shows that how the unrest condition of the government had kindled the emotion in many young people's mind and a few were not able to continue their studies as their institution was destroyed by the military forces.

The Military dictatorship was one of the major problems that existed in the Nigerian country and it was the cause of all social, economical and political problems. Military officials who entered politics to save the people from the distress of Biafra war, but later they drove politicians and took the government under their control. It paved the way to the military dictatorship in the country and the beginning of all disasters in the country, the peaceful life of the people came to an end. In the novel, *Oil on water* military officials were used to control the people and to obey the words of the government. The British government who required the land for Oil exploration confiscated the land from the people of the Niger delta; if they refused to surrender the land to them they used Military power to plunder the land from them. Military officials who used their forcible power like beating and gun firing rescued the land from them. They also instilled the everlasting fear of them in the mind of the common people. They would not understand that the power which they instilled on the people is a false power and they were destroying their motherland. They accused the people and helped militants to punish them severely by visiting the village where the people were residing. The Major, a high official in the military was in a frustrated attitude towards the society when his daughter did not get justice from the

law due to political power. He developed a cruel attitude towards the people in society and treated them cruelly and did not show mercy on their sufferings.

In the novel *Waiting for an Angel* military dictatorship was the major theme, the destruction of the country due to the military official was indescribable. The Military dictatorship during the period of General Sani Abacha and Babangida was a cruel and stubborn period where more political detainees were arrested and tortured in the prison followed by the corruption and bribery among the officials. At the beginning of the novel Lomba, a journalist was arrested as a political detainee for producing a report on the demonstration against the government and was taken to prison and tortured by the officials. After the death of Abacha and his five-year rule, during the period of General Abdulsalam Abubakar, the liberty gates were opened for the political detainees, Lomba was one among them. The writer Habila was also shot by the Military officials in arms, when he was waiting for his friend in the barroom and when he was trying to defend against them by throwing a chair on them. The Life of Bola, Lomba's friend and his family faced a great disastrous end due to the Military truck, as his parents and sister died in a car accident by hitting the damaged Military truck.

The history of the Nigerian country has a vast and many unerasable incidents that stand even after the century. They were people of high cultural values and customs with long-lasting sufferings. The people of Nigeria suffered not only in the hands of the British but in the hands of their government by wars and destruction was made to lose their peaceful life and made them as slaves in their own country. Despite all these sufferings and oppression the people of the country did not give up their hope. They fought until their last breathe for their rights and education which enriched the life and also did all of their best to revive their culture, which made them stand as the unique country among the other countries in the world and also made other countries to look back their strong nature even after long-sufferings.

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