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JOURNALISM AND POLITICS IN NIGERIAN FICTION: ACHEBE AND HABILA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the interconnections between journalism and politics in the selected fictions of Chinua Achebe and Helon Habila. It shows that politics in Nigeria is exploitative and oppressive where the masses are used as the site of struggle between the elite. Using postcolonial theory, the essay carries out a comparative reading of Achebe's and Habila's works. It finds that, to assert dominance, the power elite use the media as an instrument of control and also intimidation and silencing as weapons to suppress independent and accountable journalism, while the journalists use their medium to create awareness, to resist silencing and to maintain agency. The essay concludes that the novelists use the characters of journalists to interrogate bad leadership and affirm accountable journalism as a means of enlightening and empowering the masses.

Keywords: Nigerian fiction, journalism, politics, postcolonial, Achebe, Habila.

Introduction

Nigerian writers have always paid particular attention to the social and political challenges in Nigeria as well as on the impact of bad leadership. Some writers see themselves as vanguards, as the voice of the oppressed and marginalized. Chinua Achebe posits that a writer has a social responsibility to teach, a task a committed writer must uphold. According to him, the 'writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done' (*Hopes* 41). The implication is that the writers' position in society requires that they engage with the issues of their time. Helon Habila, a third-generation Nigerian writer, not only shares a background in journalism with Achebe, but is also committed to writing as a social responsibility. However, their background seems to have influenced their portrayal of tensions between journalism and politics in their novels. Their novels, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* by Achebe, subsequently *A Man* and *Anthills*, and *Waiting for an Angel* and *Oil on Water* by Habila, subsequently *Waiting* and *Oil*, are used merely as representative texts due to their engagements with journalism and politics. In the novels, journalism is presented from different perspectives. It appears to be sensational, unethical and self-serving in *A Man* whereas in *Anthills*, *Waiting* and *Oil*, it is militant and appears to be in search of truth. Dale Jacquette notes that journalism, 'like science and history, is about truth-telling' (213). However, in a political structure that fosters dominance and oppression, it can be contentious and challenging, because the power elites often determine what is considered as truth and how it is represented.

The purpose of this essay in focusing on these selected novels of Achebe and Habila is to explore the interconnections between journalism and politics in Nigerian fiction to show that journalism can either consolidate or contest the dominant form of politics in Nigeria that is based on selfishness, exploitation and oppression. Those in power suppress independent and accountable journalism, because they can awaken mass consciousness. Moreover, the power

elite believe that informed citizens are potentially threatening since they are capable of resistance and self-determination. Thus, the elite use journalism as an instrument of control, because to control the media is to control the masses. Ultimately, the masses become the site of struggle between them and the journalists. Whereas the power elites aim at dominance, the journalists aim to inform, educate and create awareness since journalism is regarded as a social responsibility. As Greg Philo notes, an important aspect of the media is that it 'plays an active role in the development of social attitudes and beliefs' (407). However, these social attitudes and beliefs can be ideological and the means the political class assert dominance.

2.0 Literature Review

Achebe's and Habila's novels have received a lot of criticism. Achebe's *A Man* which was published in 1966 is a post-independent Nigerian novel which Simon Gikandi posits is a critique of the modern Nigerian corrupt political ideology. Gikandi notes that Achebe's literary ideology follows the 'Fanonist belief' that the African writer's fundamental preoccupation should be a fight for an independent African State since it is what 'makes the building of a culture possible' (102). Similarly, David Maughan-Brown approaches his reading of *Anthills* from an ideological perspective. According to him, in an interview, Achebe stated that *Anthills* was a response to issues raised in *The Trouble With* Nigeria. There, he unequivocally opined that the problem of Nigeria is '"a failure of leadership"' (n.p.). This essay affirms this notion and also connects the failure of leadership to questions of accountability in journalism and leadership.

In *Oil*, Maximilian Feldner examines the literary representation of the ecological, economic and social destruction of the Niger Delta. He posits that Habila's novels 'foreground questions of writing as a political act (519) and asserts that by highlighting the role of the journalist as observer and witness, the novel amounts to an act of literary activism (515). Similarly, Feldner argues that *Waiting* is about the possibilities of literature and journalism, and about the potential dangers of writing under an authoritarian or even totalitarian system (519). On the other hand, Solomon Adedokun Edebor asserts that Habila's work belongs to the class of writing which positions the writer as a 'righter' (24). From available literature, no scholar seems to have carried out a comparative reading of Achebe's and Habila's work to show the interconnection between journalism and politics.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In postcolonial Africa, the issues of hegemony and exclusion can be said to be dominant. Frantz Fanon had envisaged this development. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he posits that decolonization was unlikely to neutralize the power structure put in place by the colonial masters. He sees independence merely as a replacement of colonial rulers with the African bourgeois (153). Fanon, John McLeod affirms, wrote 'powerfully against the potential for newly-independent nations to replicate colonial rule by simply installing an indigenous bourgeois government which was as impervious and self-serving as the old colonial administration' (111). Thus, independence did not bring freedom from subjugation; rather, the elite class were as oppressive, exploitative and corrupt as the colonial rulers affirming Baba G. Jallow's observation that the colonial state 'lives on in postcolonial Africa' (8). However, whereas structures of colonial domination were racialized, in post independent Africa, the structures are elitist and exclusive.

Ideology allows for this renewed form of subjugation. Gary Day explains that the traditional meaning of ideology refers to 'the system of ideas used by the ruling group in society to justify its dominance' (114), a notion Antonio Gramsci's has extended in his concept of hegemony. According to M.H. Abrams, Gramsci's idea of hegemony states that 'a social class achieves a predominant influence and power, not by direct and overt means, but by succeeding in making its ideological views so pervasive that the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression' (207). These ideological views are not imposed on the masses since their effectiveness relies on the peoples' willingness to accept and own them as their own thereby subscribing to their oppression. Postcolonial theory comes into this inquiry not necessarily as effects of colonization on former colonized people, but as resistance to renewed form of subjugation under the post-independence Africa.

3.0 The Nexus between Journalism and Politics

The common link between journalism and politics is their interdependency. They are interconnected, because both the political elite and the media depend on each other for relevance. Kate McMillan, in "Media and Politics," explains the complex relationship between politicians and journalists. According to her,

> Politicians depend on journalists for publicity, while journalists rely on politicians and politics to provide them with news. Journalists can inflict damage on reputations, with sometimes devastating effects for the electoral prospects of politicians or parties. Disgruntled politicians can withhold information from journalists. The government can also alter the economic, legislative and regulatory environment within which the media operate. (teara.govt.nz).

This relationship has both positive and negative effects. Whereas government policies and regulations can stifle independent and accountable journalism, journalists, on the other hand, can check the excesses of the government and the politicians. Alternatively, they can engage in campaign of calumny. Mercy Ette, in *Journalism and Politics in Nigeria: Embers of Empire*, explores the intersection of journalism and politics in Nigeria as an effect of colonial experience. Her work, she asserts, 'traces the pivotal role of the press in Nigeria's political development and discusses the relationship between journalism and politics during critical periods in the country's political history' (5). Similarly, this article not only examines the link between journalism and politics, but also the centrality of the public in this symbiotic relationship since the people is at once a site of contention and a bind for the two.

Politics in Africa has continued to be problematic. The tensions and problems emanate from failure of state leadership that is often considered to have its root in Africa's colonial past. Rather than drawing a leadership template that is inclusive, the political leaders of newly independent African states retain the colonial structures that were autocratic, oppressive and exploitative. Baba G. Jallow notes that these leaders reject the idea of equality. According to Jallow:

> The idea of a struggle for freedom and equality was considered an alien and divisive aberration that had no room within the independent nation-state. The leadership and political aspirations of citizens were delegitimized; unquestioning subjecthood was routinized; citizens were denied the right to question the actions of their government or to freely support the political

> movements of their choice. Oppression became the preferred mode of governance. An imposed political uniformity smothered constructive dissent, stifled political creativity, and generated a culture of silent cynicism or anomie that has rendered Africa's populations incapable of effectively adapting to the endless challenges arising in their immediate environments. (4)

Most of these points highlighted by Jallow is evident in Achebe's *A Man*. In *Anthills*, *Waiting* and *Oil*, the military regimes did not fare any better.

3.1 *Politics, Partisan and Sensational Journalism in A Man of the People*

In *A Man*, Achebe exposes the challenges of a post-independent African state through the eyes of Odili, the first-person narrator, who acts as a witness, chronicler and participant in the unfolding of historic events in the new nation. In this new post-independent nation, the elite who are the custodians of the new democracy regard their position as a trophy and are prepared to go to any length to retain their hold on power. Ironically, the elites' sense of entitlement is supported by the people based mostly on tribal sentiments. This underscores the notion that people participate in their own subjugation through consent. Edna's father inadvertently provides a powerful image of the politicians in his allegory of power. He informs Odili that contesting the ministerial post with Chief Nanga is like the challenge of a tick to a bull. According to him, 'My-in-law is like a bull … and your challenge is like the challenge of a tick to a bull. The tick fills its belly with blood from the bull and the bull doesn't even know it's there. He carries it wherever he goes – to eat, drink or pass ordure. Then one day the cattle egret comes, perches on the bull's back and picks out the tick….' (106). This allegory of power reinforces the idea of dominance. The bull signifies absolute power. Like the tick, the masses are insignificant to those in power. They exist only to be exploited.

The novel raises the issue of democracy (politics) and press freedom. It shows thatthe journalists are offered what can be considered as *ideological freedom* since the idea of freedom appears to be in principle rather than in practice as the elites control public information. The narrator reveals that *The Daily Chronicle*, a major national newspaper, is an official organ of the ruling party. The implication is that the public is denied authentic and credible information. This affirms the notion that constraints in journalistic independence are injurious to public good. In *A Man*, the impact of this is felt in a major national crisis in Bori, a fictionalized version of Lagos, the then capital of Nigeria. Achebe appears to contend the question of vested interests by both the journalists and the elite. Although the responsibility of journalism is to provide verified information based on honesty and transparency for the interest of society, however, there are some journalists who allow themselves to be used as instruments of misinformation. For the journalists, therefore, adhering to principles of ethics or maintaining accountability depends, to a large extent, on a matter of principle or character. According to Stuart Allan, Joseph Pulitzer in a 1906 letter to one of his *Post-Dispatch* editors points out that apart from being fearless, independent, modest and fair, an editor must desist from being biased or partisan. He must 'rise above the mediocre and conventional' and must demonstrate courage as every 'issue of the paper presents an opportunity and duty to say something courageous and true' (xxviii).

However, in *A Man*, journalists are presented not as independent but as partisan, weak and self-seeking. They are unconcerned about principles or accountability but their needs. Needs

appear to triumph over all as what alleviates needs is finance not ethics. The Editor of the *Daily Matchet's* relationship with Chief Nanga is parasitic and exploitative affirming the notion that journalists can and do inflict injury on the reputation of politicians. There is the element of extortion and blackmail in the editor's desire to get '"dash"' (monetary gift) from Nanga (66). So long as he receives cash gift from Nanga, Nanga can do no wrong, but he is ready to defame Nanga's character if he gets nothing from him. According to Nanga, 'If I don't give him something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me. They say it is the freedom of the Press. But to me it is nothing short of the freedom to crucify innocent men and assassinate their character. I don't know why our government is so afraid to deal with them. I don't' say they should not criticize … but they should criticize constructively….' (66). Nanga is compelled to bribe the editor because he is capable of inflicting great damage on his reputation that can have devastating effects on his electoral prospects. This indicates that both the power elite and some journalists are corrupt and protect their selfish interests.

Similarly, the crisis involving the Minister of Finance shows the power relations between the political elite and the educated elite and the complicity of the press in promoting the political elite. In using sensationalism, unethical and partisan rhetoric, the newspapers distort the news, disempower the public by withholding knowledge thereby reinforcing their subjugation. The Prime Minister uses the dismissal of the Minister of Finance to inhibit questioning subjecthood. Through misrepresentation of the truth in the media, the Prime Minister and the media destroy the intellectuals in the eyes of the people. Sacking these intellectuals enshrine mediocrity and perversion. It portrays the leaders as unprepared for responsible, inclusive and servant leadership, because their emergence is accidental. This accidental leadership appears to be synonymous with autocracy, oppression, corruption and dominance, because there are no structures to check performance and accountability. Also, the print media may have contributed to the malaise by their over dependence on the politicians as their source of information without adequate effort at investigative journalism. W. Lance Bennett suggests that investigative journalism is the solution for 'the corrupting effects of power on public information' (113). In *Anthills*, *Waiting* and *Oil*, accountable and investigative journalism appear to be the basis of the conflicts between the journalists and the power elites.

3.2 Journalism, Politics and the Question of Control

The centrality of the masses in the relationship between the media and the political elite makes them the site of conflict. Unlike *A Man* that articulates the immediate aftermath of independence in a civilian regime, *Anthills*, *Waiting* and *Oil* reflect the military era in Nigerian politics and leadership and the tensions between the military elite and the press. Political leadership in these novels can be described as accidental, autocratic and totalitarian. The need to dominate public information by the elite is not for public good, rather, it is to display what Edward W. Said describes as 'dominance of crude power' (xii),because the leaders can be said to express 'the will to dominate for the purposes of control' (xiv). In these novels, journalism is majorly militant and acts as a 'watchdog', which Herbert J. Gans identifies as one of the four important functions of the media (97). Gans notes that as watchdogs, the media 'see it as their role to expose corruption, malfeasance, dishonesty, hypocrisy, scandal and the violation of other mainstream rules of behaviour' (97).The journalists try to resist silencing while focusing on informing, educating and creating awareness for the common good. However, *Anthills* and

Oil problematize press freedom in that the manner of gathering, reporting, interpreting and presenting information can have deadly consequences.

3.2.1 Dominance, Resistance and Social Transformation in *Anthills of the Savannah*

The character of Sam, His Excellency, in *Anthills*, shows political leadership that is as accidental as it is autocratic and totalitarian. His character can also be considered as a paradox, because, in him, fear and dominance form a binary. This duality is both internal and external. He is at once fearful of a crowd and supreme over them. His refusal to meet the people of Abazon point to this duality. His refusal creates in the Abazonians the sense of exclusion and un-belonging in Kangan. Abazon is also symbolic, because its unpredictable nature points to mass restlessness. The regime finds her potential to be combatant most challenging. His Excellency knows that to endear himself to the people, he must strike a balance between hegemonic power and his public image as the following excerpt shows: 'His Excellency had quite independently come to the conclusion that he could earn a few credits by reversing all the unpopular acts of the civilian regime' (41). This act is expected to cancel his image as a tyrant. The act also creates a meeting point for His Excellency and Ikem who represents the journalists. Ikem's editorial condemning public execution incidentally coincides with the promulgation of the law abolishing public execution. Ikem and His Excellency appear to have reached a consensus without a dialogue. Each aspires to promote public good for different reasons. The journalist aspires to awaken public consciousness about the ills of public execution while the power elite is consumed about image-building.

Ette points out that the Nigerian journalists' attempt to conform to normative standards of journalism during the military regime turned them into agents of stability and not of change for rather than champion change, they rather consolidated military dictatorship (6-7). However, in *Anthills*, Ikem's brand of journalism pursues public interest and functions as a watchdog to check the excesses of the military regime and, sometimes, the public. Also, his brand of journalism is a resistance to everything wrong with the nation. He uses his militant editorials to do this office. According to Ikem,

> Chris keeps lecturing me about the futility of my crusading editorials. They achieve nothing. They antagonize everyone. They are essays in overkill. They're counter-productive…. But supposing my crusading editorials were indeed futile would I not be obliged to keep on writing them? To think that Chris no longer seems to understand such logic! Perhaps I have been too reluctant to face up to changes in my friends. Perhaps I should learn to deal with him along his own lines and jog his short memory with the many successes my militant editorials have had. Except, there is a big danger in doing it. (37)

Chris no longer realises the usefulness of Ikem's editorials because he has become a member of the political elite, a commissioner in His Excellency's cabinet. However, the superintendent of police realises the power in Ikem's brand of journalism, that the 'pen is mightier than the sword. With one sentence of your sharp pen you can demolish anybody' (123). Chris wants him to become the communication branch of the state. For as Bennett points out, 'press organizations that become overly dependent on official sources for their raw material can end up being spun into communication branches of the state' (105). Thus, Ikem's insistence on militant journalism affirms Pulitzer's notion that "'character" [is] necessary to advance public

good' (qtd in Allan xxviii).His Excellency considers Ikem's engagements with taxi unions and students as capable of creating the sort of consciousness capable of provoking a revolution, a threat for which Ikem must be silenced. Ikem's silencing is gradual, procedural and seems to mimic the collapse of His Excellency's leadership. Ikem's death seems to mark the end of an era. Sam's, Chris's and Ikem's rise and fall can be used to chart the movement of the nation, from perceived innocence to guilt and reproach. The irony is that it was also journalists who were used to map Ikem's metaphoric death and to institute his physical death. By presenting the sensational headline: 'EX-EDITOR ADVOCATES REGICIDE' (152), the *National Gazette* destroys journalistic ethical principles by deliberately misinterpreting and misinforming the public. His Excellency will also be destroyed by the system that brought him into power. In the end, the 'three green bottles' (179), which can be said to represent the political elite, the educated elite and the working class, will be destroyed perhaps unable to realize the potential of transforming the nation.

3.2.2 Journalism and Social Responsibility in *Waiting for an Angel*

In *Waiting* and *Oil*, Habila uses journalists as major characters to chart the (hi)story of the Nigerian state as shown in the novel. Thus, the journalists present eye-witness account to validate and preserve the (hi)story for posterity. *Waiting* uses multiple perspectives from interconnected narratives to chronicle the people's experience under military dictatorship. Like the politicians in *A Man*, the military leaders are autocratic and corrupt. Criticism, whether constructive or not, is viewed as unpatriotic and an act of treachery. Any voice that rises against the regime even when the criticism is just is criminalized. One of the characters in *Waiting* captures the experience thus,

> 'Look, we are living under siege. …They hold us cowed with guns so that they'll steal our money. This is capitalism at its most militant and aggressive. They don't have to produce any superior good to establish monopoly. They do it by holding guns to our heads…they hanged SaroWiwa … because he threatened their monopoly…. Where is Abiola? In prison. They'll continue subjugating us, killing all dissenters, one by one, sending them to exile, till there is no competitor left to oppose them.' (*Waiting* 122)

If in the civilian government as seen in *A Man*, dominance is by the use of mainly ideology, dominance in the military regime is by the use of brute force. Any voice that opposes their dominance is silenced.

The journalists in the novel see journalism as a social responsibility. Awareness, education and knowledge enable the members of Poverty Street to organize a protest march in which they request for the presence of the media to make their demand, since the commonwealth is regarded as a collective inheritance, as belonging to all. They understand that, without the media, they have no voice. They are invisible and forgotten. It is hoped that the media will help to show the truth about their deplorable social and economic conditions to the nation. However, the military have an aversion to demonstrations, because resistance negates control. It confers on the people the power of speech, accords presence those who are conditioned to remain voiceless and invisible. Being present at the demonstration ground makes Lomba, the journalist, complicit in this act of resistance. Although the people are constrained to one location, Lomba's writing is perceived to have a far-reaching consequence for its capacity to

empower ordinary citizens and to provoke a revolution. Thus, to contain this threat, Lomba is incarcerated.

3.2.3 Journalism, Truth and the Quest for Agency in Oil on Water

In *Oil*, Rufus gives an account of the Niger Delta from an insider position; being from the region gives his account validity because he writes from an eyewitness position. He is called to make an impartial representation of the issues in the Niger Delta and, to show among other things, the relationship between the government and the militants, who represent the Niger Delta. A relationship which is like oil and water or oil on water, an imperfect combination and a metaphor for the region. Oil is a metaphor for light, for energy, while water symbolises life but, in the Niger Delta, light is destructive and the waters symbolise death. The war between the soldiers and the militants is presented from contestable positions. Thus, there is a need for fresh eyes and unbiased minds to tell it as it is. Since the government ignores the people of the region, the journalists are their last hope. Without them, the people are voiceless and invisible. As Zaq tells Rufus, "No one out there knows what is going on here. These people need help…. or… they'll start dying" (173). Improper representation and silencing are responsible for the lack of knowledge about the region.

Oil which can be described as an apprenticeship novel charts Rufus's growth from ignorance to full knowledge through the journey in the Niger Delta creeks. The journey motif is used to awaken his consciousness about this region and to empower him to undertake the higher mission Zak inspires him to pursue as a journalist. A mission that involves courage, truth-telling and accountability which must be pursued through investigative journalism. It is ironic that most of the journalists who are supposed to exercise the power of knowledge are ignorant of the Niger Delta whereas the militants are the ones with knowledge. If it is knowledge that kills SaroWiwa (*Waiting* 122), it is also the same knowledge that spurs the militants to take up arms. They have acquired consciousness about the damage of oil exploration to their ecosystem and to their source of livelihood. Their kidnap of the British woman underscores the issue of exploitation and dominance which is germane in postcolonial discourse. Because of this kidnap, the international media are now awake not necessarily to the plight of the Niger Delta but the safety of their own. This relationship of dominance and exploitation is sustained in the attitude of the oil companies. Thus, the militants invite the local journalists in order to assert their presence and voice in the global space.

Misrepresentation of the Niger Delta enables the government and the oil companies to sustain their exploitation and neglect the region. The government use their official media to intimidate independent journalism and to impede press freedom so that nothing is known about the environmental degradation of the region, and no one held accountable for it. Thus, the media presentation of the war between the militants and the military is opaque. The government prefers to keep things vague to create the illusion that the resistance is criminal and without justification. The soldiers have to demonize the militants to justify the war. The Major discredits what is said in the papers about the Professor, the militant whose group kidnapped the European woman. He claims that although the militants call themselves 'freedom fighters,' they are 'rebels, terrorists, kidnappers' (148) and responsible for the violence and the destruction in the villages. Since the military is in control of the narrative, the masses are compelled to accept the narratives as truth. In contrast, Professor sees himself as a liberator. According to him,

> We are not the barbarians the government propagandists say we are. We are for the people. Everything we do is for the people, what will we gain if we terrorize them? I am speaking for myself and my group, of course. I am aware that, out there, there are criminal elements looting and killing under the guise of freedom fighting, but we are different. Those kind of rebels, they are our enemies. That is why I am letting you go, so you can write the truth. … (*Oil* 220-221)

This truth is intended to rewrite the narrative about the Niger Delta by the government and to set the people free since there is deliberate absence or omission of the villagers who depend on the land and waters for their sustenance in the Niger Delta narratives. Another thing that is unrepresented is the waters which the doctor describes as the place of death. Thus, whereas the government tries to keep the people ignorant, the journalists try to awaken their consciousness. Habila uses images of death, ruin and environmental devastation to give realistic details of the waters. They have become poisonous and the breeding environment of diseases so that 'those whom the disease doesn't kill, the violence does' (146). Ironically, the people hungered for that 'fire that burns day and night' (144). The fire that produces riches and yet impoverishes the land and the people; the fire that burns and scars. This ambivalence characterizes the Niger Delta.

The kind of fire in *Waiting* is symbolic, ritualistic, and done to obliterate the truth but, despite the constraints, the media refuses to be intimidated. The foreign media reveals the ambivalent relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. News from the foreign media is usually regarded as authentic and valid indicating the relationship of power. Those in power are guarded and at the same time indifferent to them. Habila uses faction to show that it is through the atrocities of the military that Nigeria is thrown out of the Commonwealth of Nations (147). This news comes from 'the BBC' (147). The fact that knowledge can power revolution puts the leaders on edge. They cannot afford a knowledgeable and critical citizenry. Thus, Dele Giwa is killed (150), many journalists and literary writers are arrested, and the political elite deliberately burn down target newspaper offices as a deterrent and to destroy the voice of the people. Rather than being discouraged, all the writers, the 'brotherhood of the pen' (163), unite in solidarity to affirm their voice. They form a formidable force, because although they can be broken individually, they can never be overcome when united. Their united front affirms optimism in the face of tyranny and their resolve to empower the common man through knowledge. For Philo posits that journalism influences 'the construction of public knowledge' (414).

If burning in *Waiting* is to obliterate truth, in *Oil*, the militants intend to burn the pipelines to rewrite their story. If as Zaq points out that their job, as journalists, 'is to find out the truth, even if it is buried deep in the earth' (136), the pipelines will unearth the truth about the Niger Delta. In *A Man* and *Anthills*, the pipelines bring water to the interiors but, in *Oil*, they are metaphoric, symbolic and can also be said to be paradoxical. They bring wealth and destruction, good and evil. If in both *Anthills* and *A Man*, they are withdrawn as a punitive measure, in *Oil*, they will be set ablaze in defiance, as an act of resistance. For the militants, it is a statement not terrorism. If as a people, they cannot get the attention of the government and the oil companies, the pipelines will draw the attention of the whole world; it is to insist

on their right to exist as a people, free, without fear of extermination and Rufus is there as a witness to bring this truth to the world.

4. Conclusion

Achebe's and Habila's novels are used to show the interconnections between journalism and politics and to interrogate the issues of poor leadership in postcolonial Nigerian fictions. The article also explores the centrality of the public in this symbiotic relationship since the people are at once a site of contention and a bind for the two. In the novels, journalism is presented from different perspectives. It is sensational, unethical and self-serving or militant. Journalism is often compelled to do the bidding of the political elites, resulting in public accountability being compromised as seen in *A Man*. In *Anthills*, *Waiting* and *Oil*, the journalists are militant and stand for the truth. Drawing from postcolonial theory, the article asserts that the political elites ensure that the people do not aspire to knowledge and power in order to maintain dominance. The characters not only act as witnesses to posterity, they also aid in the construction of public knowledge and potentially in the construction of active and critical followers. Literary realism and faction enable the novelists to present realistic characters and setting, and the kind of story that people can own as their story.

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