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# **When silence is not golden**

The rise of intellectuals in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*

What is the responsibility of intellectuals to their people when the government has been dominating and oppressing its people instead of securing their liberty? In February 23, 1967, US academic Noam Chomsky published an essay entitled “The Responsibility of Intellectuals”, in which he stated that: “It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies” (par.4). Chomsky’s article was written about 40 years ago, but it seems to have lost none of its persuasiveness in answering the question today. Intellectuals do have the responsibility to speak out. Several Nigerian writers have also addressed this question in their writings in terms of writers and society. Chinua Acheba, Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan all express in their articles that African writers should serve as public intellectuals and their literary work should function as social and cultural resources rather than a means to individual self-realization (Edoro 4).

Since the country’s liberation in 1960, Nigerian Literature has grown dramatically in quantity and in recognition. Modern Nigerian literature began with writers like Chinua Achebe between 1952 and 1970. The second generation of novelists emerged after the Nigerian Civil War (1967 – 1970) with remarkable writers like Ken Saro-Wiwa. The third and fourth generation only started to emerge in the last two decades. As a third generation writer, Helon Habila continues the search for answers to the question of the responsibility of intellectuals. In his novel *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Habila takes us back to the 1990s when Nigeria was under the cruel control of military government. The writer himself explains this period of time in the afterword of the book as “a terrible time to be alive, especially if you were young, talented and ambitious – and patriotic” (223). The whole nation was under pure old-fashioned terror<sup>1</sup>. Intellectuals especially suffered from the persecution of the Abacha government.

For Lomba, Joshua, and other intellectuals in the novel, it is not only the ‘official’ killings, arrests and kidnappings that worry them. It is the atmosphere of despair hanging over the

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<sup>1</sup> Compared with the ex-president General Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) who mainly used methods of threatening and intimidating, Abacha preferred the old-fashioned assassination and killing.

country indicating that something has gone terribly wrong. But Lomba, as well as Joshua, doesn't shoulder his responsibility at the very start. Both of them are extremely reticent about politics in the country. But when the time comes when they can no more bury their heads in the sand, the two stand up for the poor and the illiterate as leaders of a demonstration.

This essay will address Lomba and Joshua's development in the novel and more specifically their gradual realization of their responsibility as intellectuals. Furthermore, the essay will argue that the characters' choices to be silent and to speak out are related to Nigeria's post-independence chaos of the 1990s, when the novel is set.

The theories used to analyse the novel are post-colonial criticism and historical criticism. The novel *Waiting for an Angel* is a piece of historical fiction. Habila also states in the afterword that the book contains some recognizable historical facts and incidents. Thus, it is necessary to look into the history, into the specific time and place where the characters live. But just as Habila suggests in an interview, a "writer reacts to his times" (Everything Follows: An Interview with Helon Habila 4). *Waiting for an Angel* is inevitably classified as post-colonial literature because the time Habila reacts to is deeply influenced by the former colonial culture. Though Nigeria had declared its independence more than 20 years earlier (if we look at the time of Nigeria in 1990s), the decolonization of the newly-built country had just started and had a long way to go. Habila himself, as a young intellectual in the country, has taken up the responsibility of telling the truth and exposing the lies. So it will be fruitful to close read the novel from the perspectives of historical and post-colonial criticism.

After explaining the general situation of the novel, the essay will have the following structure: first, Lomba's refusal to be associated with politics and Joshua's initial hiding from politics will be addressed. Then, the question of whether the characters have historical counterparts and why the generation of intellectuals held such attitudes towards the country's politics will be discussed. Characters like Mao and Big Brother will also be discussed as a

contrast to the intellectuals. Then the changes, especially Lomba's gradual realization and Joshua's acceptance of his role, will be addressed. This will then result in an suggestion to the question Habila is trying to resolve in the novel: the social role of intellectuals (in this case, Lomba as writer and Joshua as teacher).

The Responsibility is not something the intellectuals are born with. Instead, it is they, whom under certain circumstances, are trusted with the social role of being the ones who stand up. Their role is constructed and performed within particular times when powerful forces bend people to their rule and will. "To speak the truth and expose the lies" involves three factors of post-colonial discourse: language, truth and power. The theory can very well explain why intellectuals are chosen to fulfil the responsibility. Just as *The Empire Writes Back* argues:

Truth is what counts as true within the system of rules for a particular discourse; power is that which annexes, determines, and verifies truth. Truth is never outside power, or deprived of power, the production of truth is a function of power [...]. Power is inverted in the language because it provides the terms in which truth itself is constituted. (165)

Language can define truth. It can create the boundary between what is true and what is wrong. And because of their ability to handle language, intellectuals have the power to fight the oppressing force. It also explains why in the novel, Lomba the writer and Joshua the teacher of English literature, rather than some lawyers or bankers, are chosen as more refined representations of intellectuals. The realization of their social roles is a mark that somehow Lomba and Joshua are aware of the relationships between language, truth and power. But awareness of one's power alone is not enough to fulfil the social role. There are men with the pen as their weapon who become complicit with the dominating and oppressing force, and some even become part of the dominating and oppressing class themselves. To fulfil the social role, one also needs to know who one is speaking and fighting for. In this case, the intellectuals are supposed to speak for the dominated, the oppressed and the poor.

The idea that intellectuals have a responsibility is not taken for granted in the novel. It is presented gradually as the characters struggle over the choices they must make. In the novel, there is a reference to the story of the messenger in Kafka's *Great Wall of China*. Though the story is meant to describe Alice's situation in the hospital in front of her mother's bed, it can be read as more:

He often compared her state to that of the messenger in Kafka's *Great Wall of China*: the Emperor, on his deathbed in his innermost Chamber, has summoned the messenger and whispers a very important message in his ear, a message to be conveyed immediately to the remotest part of the empire. No one knows more than the messenger the absolute futility of his mission – first he has to get out of the innermost chamber with its thousands and thousands of courtiers impeding his progress, and after that there are a thousand outer chambers to traverse, still filled with courtiers; and though he is able to get out of these chambers (it will take him years), how can he manage to elbow his way past the millions of people waiting in the courtyard? (96)

This piece of description can be interpreted together with the historical context of *Waiting for an Angel* as the trials of Nigeria on the road to Democracy. Lomba, Joshua, and real-life intellectuals like them in the Nigeria of the 1990s, are just like the messenger in the story. What they are trying to spread to the remotest part of the country is that the country needs true Democracy.

If we take a look at Nigeria in the 1990s, we can see that it is a truly terrible time. Nigeria's attempt to set up a democratic country was shattered again by Abacha's regime. When the colonial emperor finally recognized Nigeria's Independence in 1960, there was a moment of joy and hope. People who had long been oppressed and colonized were actually looking forward to building up their brand-new country. But the road to a democratic new Nigeria was blocked by domestic chaos in politics and ethnic issues, as well as the economic sanctions placed by foreign forces (which is believed to be of the dominating methods of neo-colonialism). There are voices saying that "the net effect of independence had merely been to substitute a black top for a white one on the colonial bottle" (Lazarus 53). Military forces entered Nigerian politics and brutally tyrannized the country. The Republic was ousted time

and time again. The way the intellectuals and political elite in Nigeria tried to push their way to Democracy is just like the way the messenger is trying to get out of the chambers. From a post-colonial point of view, what the intellectuals and political elite had been promoting is part of something they got from colonial education – the system of government and the ideology of Western democracy.

In a microcosmic sense, the story of Kafka's *Great Wall of China* can also be interpreted as Lomba's (and Joshua, and other intellectuals alike) personal struggle to fulfil his heroic social obligation. Since his University years, Lomba has been struggling to choose between literature and politics. He has always dreamed of becoming a writer of novels and poems. But after the riot and the closure of the school, Lomba is forced to choose between his dream and real life. The dream of being a writer could not bring him necessities for life. But he was offered a job on the journal *The Dial* years ago because of a political article he once wrote. Lomba still thinks he could combine his dream with reality. He thinks that he can take the job as a journalist to make a living and write the novel and poems he loves as well. Then there comes the demonstration on Poverty Street. Lomba is again facing the choice between being a journalist of literature and art and a journalist of politics. It is through these events and choices that Lomba finally realizes in this country "the very air they breathe is politics". He is entrusted with the responsibility to speak the truth. But his initial refusal to be associated with politics shows he do not realize the mission.

Joshua, another major character in the novel, shows his hesitation about getting involved in politics when he talks to Kela, a child character in the novel, about what his life should be in a "normal country":

'In a normal country there wouldn't be a need for revolutions; there wouldn't be a Poverty Street; well, not like ours, anyway. People like me would be able to teach in peace, live in peace and...' he turned to me<sup>2</sup> and smiled, 'and maybe fall in love and marry and have kids and die old.' (159 -160)

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<sup>2</sup> This part of the novel is written in first person. The narrator is a child character Kela. Joshua is tutoring him.

In this quotation, words like “normal” and “peace” are very important to the understanding of Joshua’s feeling. What he calls “normal” and “peace” is something far beyond his reach. According to Hagar, Joshua is “so into politics” (152). He wrote many essays on social and political issues when he was young. Normally there should be no hesitation about him being activist in politics. But when Mao and other people urge him to lead the demonstration on Poverty Street, Joshua is unwilling to. Some other words by Hagar give us more clues, “They want him to go into politics when democracy returns” (152). Joshua loves politics. But it doesn’t include dirty politics that could get him killed. The country is in a state of chaos where everything can be bent for the selfish gains of certain people. And that is what Joshua hesitates at – the abnormal politics for a self-selected few.

To Joshua, a “normal country” is as far away as the United States of America on the other side of the ocean. The ideal “normal country” for Joshua has always been America. When Joshua and Kela sit by the beach, watching the great ocean between Nigeria and America, what Joshua is looking at are really the great gaps between the two countries. America is a model for all the post-colonial countries in Africa. Though it is hard to relate the word “colonized” to the strong and mighty America of today, the country did go through some post-colonial years and apparently has done very well with the decolonization. When Joshua says “if the vast ocean were magically shrunk into a tiny brook, or a narrow river” (125), the ambitious man is drawing a picture in his mind that one day Nigeria will be as strong and flourish like America. But the vast ocean will not shrink. The great gaps between Nigeria and America will not magically disappear. To build the nation, there is a long way to go. Joshua hesitates because he also knows the way is going to be bloody. The politics and power are in the hand of desperate politicians and military forces. He is, like Lomba, disappointed in the current political situation in Nigeria.

As early as in his time at university, Lomba had already shown his lack of interest in politics:

I was the only one in the crowd who was not jumping up and down and gesticulating and urging Sankara on. Not because I didn't agree with his words; I did, but I was not moved. I felt cold; I felt like an imposter, out of place, and my ears deaf. Bola, beside me, was throwing punches in the air and shouting. Before me was a group of girls screaming themselves hoarse, their wigs bobbing and sinking like boats in a storm as they jumped up and down. One staggered backward and stepped on my toes, all the while giggling. Suddenly I felt trapped among the hundreds of jumping, shouting and sweating bodies. (48 – 49)

While other students are “jumping up and down”, “urging” and “shouting” (appear to be dynamic and active), Lomba is “not moved”, “cold” and “deaf” (relatively static and inactive). All the other students are mentally and physically involved in the movement, but Lomba feels indifferent from head to toe. Even when some girl staggers on his feet, Lomba, the first person narrator here, uses an almost emotionless tone to describe her clownish appearance (the wig) and acts (the screaming, jumping and giggling). The contrast between the crowd and Lomba emphasizes Lomba's indifference and lack of interest in politics.

According to the context, we can deduce that this piece of quotation is set in 1993, around the time when the country was in an uproar over General Inrahim Babangida (IBB). The students at Lomba's university are on a boycott because of the 1993 election. IBB had been the head of the state since 1985. On January, 1993, the country scheduled a democratic election to choose its own legal president to assume office. The presidential elections were held as scheduled in June. However, an application was filed to the High court to extend military rule. The election results were released in defiance of the court order. Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola was chosen as the winner. But the election was annulled by the National Defense and Security Council (NDSC), whose president was General IBB. Later NDSC also issued regulations that banned Abiola and his rival candidate from taking part in a new election. In August, General IBB “ ‘stepped down’ as president and handed power over

to a non-elected interim national government, dominated by handpicked Babangida loyalists” (“Nigeria” par.5).

The events that happened in the 1993 election almost led the country to another war. It is easy to understand the students’ anger when Sankara, the leader of the boycott, says, “we are tired of phantom transition programmes that are nothing but grand designs to embezzle our money!” (49), or when Bola says, “They play with us, as if we are puppets. [...] It is our duty to push him out.” (50). Of course Lomba understands the fact that IBB has used the trick of interim many times to fool the country and protract his presidency and that he should be pulled down. But just as Lomba says in this passage, he is not moved. He is not moved because it is not only the phantom transition that is letting people down; it is the government, the military force behind it and the corrupted political environment in the country.

In the novel, Lomba also mentions his presentiment “of something dark and scary lurking in the shadows, inching its way on to the forestage” (48) of their lives. This presentiment could also explain Lomba’s indifference to the boycott, or in a larger sense, his refusal to be associated with politics. When describing Bola, Habila uses expressions such as “with the enthusiasm of a kid at a birthday party” (50). These words indicate that many of the students in the boycott do not know what is happening. They think they can get IBB out of the Presidential Villa by boycotting lectures in University but they do not know it only causes bloodshed in campus and the closure of the school. That is why Lomba feels out of place. He clearly has a better vision of who the military forces are and what revolution means. Revolution is not a party someone should get excited about. Lomba’s presentiment and vision also tell him that it is true IBB should be pushed out, but in this chaotic political environment, one IBB down will only make way for another IBB. And Lomba’s presentiment proves to be right. Shortly after IBB comes Abacha who is even more brutal and outrageous than his predecessor.

Adeoti Gbemisola states in *The Military in Nigeria's Postcolonial Literature* that “the soldiers were celebrated initially as messiahs who rescued the polity from corrupt politicians, they became vampires in the 1980s and 1990s after plunging the nation into political turmoil and economic tribulation” (7). It seems there was nothing left for the Nigerians to believe in especially if we look deeper into the country’s history since its independence. Independence means a lot to all the colonized countries in Africa because it is not just the end of colonialism but also a start of new life. Everyone was expecting something good to happen. People looked forward to “an era of unity, strength and humanity” (Lazarus 51) because the politicians who took over the country after the colonialists’ departure promised so. But as a matter of fact, what people would see afterwards, was “the exact opposite: fragmentation, weakness and social violence” (51). They were promised a bright future, but what they got were civil wars, poverty and tyranny.

This was when the real-life intellectuals like Lomba and Joshua realized the problem that the liberation they had been celebrating was for a minority of people. It was for the upper class formed by bankers, lawyers and military officers, who ran Nigeria’s government and controlled the country’s economy. There was a feeling of disappointment and betrayal in the hearts of the intellectuals that the ones who once promised to lead the country became the new dominating and oppressing class, whereas the ones who had long been oppressed stayed in their old misery. The politicians and the military both deserted their initial quest for improvement and nation-building. They created lies that after colonialism everything would be fine. But then people realized that things were going the wrong way. The situation in the country actually became worse after the departure of the colonists. The politicians could no more use people’s patriotism by saying “it is foreign dominating force versus us”. Because of the government’s corruption, the civil wars caused by ethnic groups fighting for power and

Nigeria's isolation from the world all indicated to the people that some of "us" had become "them". Lomba is surely among those intellectuals who pick up the indication.

In an interview by Frank Bures, Habila implies that the novel draws a lot from his own experiences. The character Lomba is created as a journalist and aspiring writer like himself (Bures 2). In a way, Lomba tells the story of those struggling third generation writers. If the character Lomba is supposed to have any historical counterpart, it would most likely be the third generation writers representing the intellectuals of Nigeria in the 1990s. Many of the early Nigerian writers were at the same time activists. Different from their predecessors, the third generation writers perceive Nigeria in a new perspective, where there are not just people "going about naked and speaking in proverbs" (Bures 5). Their eyes are not only fixed on what was happening in colonial days but what is happening at the post-colonial present.

On the subject of the third generation writers, Biodun Jeyifo explains that:

The first two generations came into their own in the epoch of the high tide of decolonization while the last two generations have been confronted with the spectres of arrested decolonization, failing or collapsed states, economic stagnation, widespread autocratic misrule and the delegitimation of the grand narratives of emancipation which held that the liberation of African peoples in the modern world is indissolubly linked to the liberation of all the oppressed people in the world. (3)

The first two generations and the third generation were facing quite different problems. For the first two generations of novelists, writings were more about the search for the identity of the new nation. They were "in the epoch of the high tide of decolonization", almost every motif of their writings was connected with decolonization, the search for the identity. They sought after the theme of identity and location of the new nation, and they joined in politics enthusiastically. Concerns for identity still exist in the third and fourth generations' writings, but are "necessarily less prominent than more specific and immediate matters of race and personal and communal freedom under an intransigent and repressive white regime" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 26). The economic and social stagnation they have

experienced in real life become part of their writings as well. The more they think about the social and economic stagnation, the clearer they realize the malfunction in the country's political atmosphere. Politicians are fighting for power rather than for the people they represent. It eventually comes to a point where politics itself is mistrusted and despised.

To know why Joshua and Lomba, the intellectuals, are chosen as the heroes to lead the demonstration, we have to look at some other social groups that are quite the contrary, the political elite and the illiterate. Antonio Gramsci claims in his *Prison Notebooks* that "all men are potentially intellectuals in the sense of having an intellect and using it, but not all are intellectuals by social functions"(3). The political elite are highly educated people in some sense, but in the case of *Waiting for an Angel* (or Nigeria in the 1990s), they do not function like the writers or the journalists.

Cyril I. Obi suggests in the research report *Nigeria: Democracy on Trial* that the leaders of the real-life political elite in Nigeria "had travelled and seen the world, and were inspired by the ideals of democracy and freedom, Pan Africanism, the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and the debates within the students' movement" (8). In *Waiting for an Angel*, we can find characters like Mao fitting the description. Mao has been to somewhere in the Niger Delta to do his one-year compulsory youth service. And he is deeply influenced by stories of the revolution in China and Russia. Another reason Mao is classified as the political elite is the fact that his revolution concept surely has its audiences. "Mao always came with an entourage: sometimes two, sometimes three shadowy characters who wouldn't utter a single word throughout the discussions" (156). Revolution is on Mao's lips every day. But his insights into revolution are blinding. He has no clear vision of the future or any broad social project to continue with. Even during the demonstration, Mao hasn't realized that the revolutionary strategy of confronting the violent government with violence is not suitable at that time. When Mao says "we'll break down this place to get him out if we have to" (168), Habila uses the word

“cocky” to describe him. The political elite in Nigerian history are characterized by “political opportunism, lack of principles and poor leadership” (8). There is not enough information in the novel for us to decide whether Mao is the kind of opportunistic political elite who will collude with the military forces for selfish gain. But his lack of vision suggests poor leadership. It may explain why he is not the best person to lead the demonstration.

Another character who stands beside Joshua at the demonstration is Brother. He is one of the many illiterate people living on Poverty Street. What matters in his life is money. He may know that the country is in a mess because the Military Generals steal the country’s money and leave people dying of poverty and disease. But the solution he can come up with is “if to say I get money” (126). When he is offended by the writing of “Poor Man’s Paradise” on the wall, all his anger is focused on Nancy, the waitress girl who is in the same poor condition as he is. His thoughts are confined to individual interest. His fantasy about “if I get money” may be a consolation to his weary life, but it is definitely not the way out of misery.

Neither Mao nor Brother is the ideal person to fulfil the great mission, but they are the ones who stand beside the intellectuals when the moment comes. Edward W. Said says in *Representations of the Intellectual*, “the intellectual always stands between loneliness and alignment” (16). It may be true that no one other than the intellectuals themselves can shoulder the heavy social obligation of uncovering the truth, but once they find the side they belong to, “the same side with the weak and unrepresented” (17), they find their alignment.

In fact, Joshua’s acceptance of his role has a lot to do with other people’s anticipation of him. Joshua could abandon the calling of social obligation and run with Hagar. But he chooses to answer the call because some people at the demonstration really understand him, and know what they are demonstrating for. People on Poverty Street respect him and attach their hopes on Joshua. He tells Kela: “And I couldn’t let them down,” (178). He has to stand up to represent the sufferings of these people. And as discussed before, Joshua seems to have

the ambition to build Nigeria strong and mighty just like America; it is his task as well to testify the travails of the new nation's coming into being.

Lomba's gradual realization, on the other hand, has much to do with his mentor James. The very first influence James exerts on Lomba is when he says "You can't escape it. In this country the very air we breathe is politics" (108). Edoro argues that Lomba insists he is not political because "he desires the possibility of securing the sanctity of his individuality through writing". He has a strong desire for "artistic separateness from society" (44). Lomba is struggling between three factors: art, life and society. He always dreams of making the art of writing his life, and in the meantime he doesn't want his dreaming life to have any connection with the brutal society he lives in. However, James brings him the ugly truth that one cannot separate his life from the society and the country – the Nigerian society they live in – has everything to do with politics. It helps Lomba realize that his art dream conflicts with real life. Therefore, he accepts James's advice of prioritizing life by taking the job as a journalist, because "life is short, but art is very long" and "what matters right now is life" (114).

But accepting the job as a journalist does not mean compromising his artistic principles. Lomba thinks that on his road to becoming a writer, he can work as a journalist. When James asks him to cover the demonstration, Lomba insists that he is a journalist on "arts and literature"(191). We can see that inside Lomba's heart, the strong urge for artistic separateness from society still exists. Lomba still wants to "cure all the world's ills" (164) through his stories. And he wants to keep the sanctity of his stories from the dirty politics of this country. But James shows him the reality that the Nigerian society does not have the elements for his pure literature dream to come true:

You won't find a publisher in this country because it'd be economically unwise for any publisher to waste his scarce paper to publish a novel which nobody would buy, because the people are too poor, too illiterate, and too busy trying to stay out of the way of the police and the army to read. And of course you know

why paper is scarce and expensive – because of the economic sanctions placed on our country. (192)

They do not have the human element<sup>3</sup> because people are too poor, too illiterate to read. Neither does the material condition in the country allow them to publish books because the economy is so weak that they cannot even afford paper. Human element and material condition are all parts of the social quality of literature. Before literature takes effect on people and “cures all the world’s ills”, some of its social quality should be met.

On the subject of the this social quality of literature, Ainehi Edora explains in *Waiting for an Angel: Refashioning the African Writing Self* that, “[Literature] does not change lives, transform selves and cultures, or catalyze resistance against power because of some eternal literary essence but through its interaction with the structural and human elements of society” (22). In other words, literature only makes sense when people read and think about it. But Lomba’s literature will not have readers at all. His dream is broken.

But his mentor James shows Lomba what he can do in reality to make life worthwhile – assume the responsibility of intellectuals. He takes Lomba to the slave museum and shows him why he should cover the demonstration:

It was in the ships that the mouth-locks were used, so that they couldn’t console each other and rally their spirits and thereby revolt. To further discourage communication, no two persons of the same language were kept together [...] You see, every oppressor knows that wherever one word is joined to another word to form a sentence, there’ll be revolt. That is our work, the media: to refuse to be silenced, to encourage legitimate criticism wherever we find it. (195 – 196)

James’s words inspire into Lomba the thought of the intellectuals’ relation with language. Language is restricted because of the power it has. This power has been recognized by many scholars. Chinua Achebe talks about it in *Language and the Destiny of Man*, stating that “Unquestionably, language was crucial to the creation of society.” Achebe also further explains that the society here means “a community where man is ‘doomed to be free’”. And

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<sup>3</sup> By human elements here means people’s education condition, their willingness to purchase and read literatures for leisure.

the power of language enables men to challenge their destiny “with even chance of wresting from it a purposeful, creative existence” (87). As we can see in *Waiting for an Angel*, people in Nigeria have been deprived of their right to speak ever since the slave trade started. Though after the independence, the colonialists were gone, it is all old wine in new bottles to the people who live in the bottom class of the society. Between 1960 and 1990, the ruling government of the country changed quite a few times, but one measure they used to dominate and oppress the Nigerian stays the same – discouraging the freedom of speech. Because the dominating class also learned that once the oppressed and dominated get control of language and speech, they will be ready with the power to alter their destiny and create a new society.

In Jerome Rothenberg’s anthology *Shaking the Pumpkin*, there is a poem called “Magic Words”, depicting the power of word and human’s relationship with it:

That was the time when words were like magic  
The human mind had mysterious powers.  
A word spoken by chance  
might have strange consequences.  
It would suddenly come alive  
and what people wanted to happen could happen –  
all you had to do was say it.

The poem was written by some Eskimo people. In a way, it shows that in relatively small societies, it is easier for people to verify truth. As we know, Eskimos usually live in small groups where everyone knows almost everyone and everything. Because of this familiarity, it is usually easy for people to verify whether the speaker is telling the truth. In other words, it is also easier for the speakers to gain people’s trust. As long as he is telling the truth, people will believe in what he said. Thus his words gain power when he speak out. So the process from will to power only takes one step – say it. But as society grows big, it becomes harder and more complex for people to verify the truth. So certain people are delegated by others with power to make the decision. Basically, the process from will to power is divided into two steps. First will to truth and then truth to power. The intellectuals are the ones delegated to

deal with truth and power. Since language has the power to create a new society, it becomes the tool the intellectuals use to verify truth and speak truth to power.

James also mentions the responsibility of the media. In *Waiting for an Angel*, the media is actually a reified definition of the intellectual. When talking about the media, Edward W. Said says that language today tends to “more general, more collective and corporate forms” (21). He illustrates the tendency with the case of journalism:

In the United States the bigger the scope and power of a newspaper, the more authoritative its sound, the more closely identified it is with a sense of a community larger than just a group of professional writers and readers. (21)

So Lomba finally realizes that his ambition to “cure all the world’s ills” could still be fulfilled if he works as a journalist. And considering the conditions of Nigerian society, it is more practical for him to assume his responsibility as an intellectual in the position of journalist than as a writer. He finally chooses journalism over writing. It also indicates his final realization of his social role as an intellectual.

At the end of the story, both Joshua and Lomba answer the call of their obligation and show up at the demonstration. But Joshua ends up losing the love of his life – Hagar and Lomba ends up in jail. And their fates are quite uncertain. Their choices are just like the one James made when he decides to stay in Nigeria despite the fact that he is the next one to be persecuted by the government. It is their decision to assume the difficult and principled position rather than avoiding it and turning away that makes them real intellectuals. And as Said argues in *Representations of the intellectual*, “Real intellectuals are never more themselves than when, moved by metaphysical passion and disinterested principles of justice and truth, they denounce corruption, defend the weak, defy imperfect or oppressive authority” (5). Despite the unfavourable outcome of the revolution, neither Joshua nor Lomba regret being part of the demonstration. Joshua decides to defend the right of the poor and illiterate on Poverty Street by denouncing the corruption in the government system. And Lomba decides

to support Joshua, to encourage him and show him that he is not alone, by being at the demonstration, covering the whole event.

Indeed, it is complex enough for the intellectuals to live of a time when brutal political conflicts shatter people's dream and life. But after all, the intellectuals are no more than human beings. Fears are understandable. Limitations on one's individual forces and capacity are sometimes inevitable. It is thus quite realistic for people to simply or blindly overlook the crimes committed by their government and bustle around for individual life. But to Joshua and Lomba, the title of intellectual comes with more moral and social obligation. The intellectuals Habila presents in *Waiting for an Angel* do not only show how insightful and right they are. Both Joshua and Lomba know that the military government is formed by desperate people who are willing to create bloodshedding events to cover their crimes. They know very well that being at the demonstration could be a matter of life and death. But they still go for it, because it is their social obligation to promote "the recognition of rights" and show people that "democratic freedom is established as a norm for everyone, not invidiously for a select few" (Edward Said 74).

To speak truth to power is no easy thing. The tragic demise of both of the two most important characters is Habila's way of presenting this point. We, the readers, witness the gradual change of Lomba and Joshua and accompany them to the demonstration with a heavy heart. But a tragic ending does not necessarily give readers the impression of gloomy. There is nothing more depressing than to die in silence. It is Lomba and Joshua's willingness to fight and their refusal to be mute that break the tragic atmosphere. From the failure of Joshua and Lomba, hopes rise – hopes that democracy and freedom will no more be trampled.

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