

HISTORY AND FICTION IN HELON HABILA'S *WAITING FOR AN ANGEL*

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between history and fiction in Helon Habila's debut novel, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002). Drawing on Anyoku's (2008) assertion that Habila's works illuminate "the incessant traffic" between historical and fictional discourse, the research employs conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) and mind style analysis (Fowler, 1977; Semino, 2002), together with narratological frameworks of the implied author (Genette, 1988), to analyse how Habila interweaves fictional characters with historical figures—including MKO Abiola, General Shehu Yar'adua, Dele Giwa and Kudirat Abiola. The analysis identifies three key strategies: the documentary anchoring of narrative through named historical figures, the symbolic transformation of individuals into icons of democratic struggle, and the moral framing of military rule through conceptual metaphor. The study reveals that the novel functions as a site of collective memory construction, combining fiction and non-fiction to bear witness to Nigeria's military era. The findings show that Habila's work belongs to the tradition of the socially conscious Nigerian novel, while demonstrating how his particular blend of history and fiction creates a mode of writing that does not merely represent the past but actively shapes how it will be remembered.

Keywords: Historical fiction, Nigerian literature, military rule, Helon Habila, collective memory, conceptual metaphor, mind style, implied author

1. Introduction

When Helon Habila published *Waiting for an Angel* in 2002, Nigeria was only three years removed from the end of military rule. The regime of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998) had left deep wounds: assassinated journalists, imprisoned activists, a population terrorised by state security forces. In the aftermath of such trauma, societies face a critical question: how will this history be remembered? Who will tell the story, and in what form?

Habila's novel enters this moment as both literary artefact and historical intervention. It tells the story of Lomba, a fictional journalist and aspiring writer, whose experiences intersect with documented historical events: the imprisonment of political figures, the assassination of pro-democracy activists, the crackdown on the press. Throughout the narrative, fictional invention coexists with references to real people—MKO Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled 1993 election who died in detention; General Shehu Yar'adua, imprisoned for alleged coup plotting; Dele Giwa, the editor killed by a letter bomb; Kudirat Abiola, assassinated on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway.

This blending of fact and fiction is not merely a narrative technique. It represents a particular stance toward history and memory—a claim that fiction can bear witness to trauma in ways that documentary record alone cannot. As Anyoku (2008. p.42.) argues, in Habila's works we understand "the relationship between history and fiction determined by the intrinsic properties of the narrative genre, which account for the incessant traffic that takes place between them". This "historicist cast of minds," as Anyoku terms it, is discernible throughout Habila's fiction and deserves sustained stylistic analysis.

Existing research on *Waiting for an Angel* has predominantly focused on thematic interpretation through analysis of character, narrative structure, or surface linguistic features (Akun, 2011; Anthony, 2012; Edobor, 2013; Ughu, 2014; Pat, 2018). However, the specific mechanisms through which Habila negotiates the boundary between historical fact and fictional invention remain underexplored. This study

addresses this gap by investigating how Habila integrates historical figures into his fictional narrative and with what effects, drawing on conceptual metaphor theory, mind style analysis, and narratological frameworks.

The research examines references to MKO Abiola, General Shehu Yar'adua, Dele Giwa, and Kudirat Abiola, analysing how these figures are represented within the novel's fictional framework. The study demonstrates that *Waiting for an Angel* functions not merely as a representation of history but as an active constructor of collective memory.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Historical Fiction and the Nigerian Novel

The relationship between history and fiction has long been central to African literary studies. In the Nigerian novel specifically, this relationship is particularly intense in works addressing periods of political crisis, where writers must negotiate the competing demands of historical accuracy and narrative imagination (Anyoku, 2008.).

Griswold (2010. p. 223) locates Habila within "the tradition of the socially conscious Nigerian novel that bears witness to Nigerian social experience". This tradition, stretching from Chinua Achebe through contemporary writers, understands the novel as a vehicle for social commentary and historical documentation. The novelist, in this tradition, is not merely an entertainer but a chronicler—someone who records and interprets the experience of a nation.

Newell (2006. p. 16) extends this framework, arguing that Habila's writings reveal "the complex ways in which colonial history continues to shadow daily life in West Africa without fully dominating or dictating it". This observation suggests that Habila's engagement with history is nuanced: neither simply documentary nor purely imaginative, but a complex negotiation between past and present, fact and fiction. The colonial past "shadows" rather than dictates, implying a relationship of influence rather than determination.

2.2 Narratological Framework: The Implied Author and Historical Representation

The concept of the implied author, developed by Wayne Booth and defined by Genette (1988), is crucial for understanding how Habila's historical representations function. According to Genette, the implied author's voice represents the original author's views and opinions, mediated through the narrative structure. Leech and Short (2003) maintain that real authors address readers through the implied author, who may or may not be identical to the historical person.

For a work that blends history and fiction, the implied author serves a particularly important function. It is the mediating consciousness that selects which historical figures to name, how to frame their actions, and what moral stance to adopt toward them. Readers do not encounter "Helon Habila" directly in the text; they encounter an implied author who has made specific choices about how to represent Abiola, Yar'adua, Giwa, and Kudirat.

Raheem (2018) argues that the implied author is shaped by hegemony—the ideology that the author, knowingly or unknowingly, is affiliated with. The implied author thus represents a fusion of the historical author's consciousness with the ideological forces of their era. In Habila's case, to portray the military as "cruel, repressive, visionless and corrupt," the implied author selects and arranges historical facts without strict adherence to chronological precision, shaping them into a morally coherent narrative.

This framework is essential for analysing *Waiting for an Angel* because it acknowledges that the novel's representation of historical figures is not neutral documentation but ideologically inflected reconstruction. The implied author mediates between documented fact and narrative purpose, transforming historical individuals into symbols that serve the novel's broader project of witness and remembrance.

2.3 Conceptual Metaphor and Mind Style Theoretical frameworks

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980 and

2003), fundamentally transformed the understanding of metaphor. Prior to their work, metaphor was widely regarded as a purely linguistic phenomenon—a decorative device used primarily in poetry and rhetoric. Lakoff and Johnson challenged this view, arguing that metaphor is instead a fundamental mechanism of human thought and cognition.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (p.5). This means that human beings systematically understand abstract concepts (such as love, time, argument, or political oppression) in terms of more concrete, physical, or embodied experiences (such as journeys, containers, or warfare).

Conceptual metaphors are conventionally represented in small capital letters using the formula: TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN. For example:

Conceptual Metaphor	Target Domain (Abstract)	Source Domain (Concrete)
Argument Is War	Argument	War
Love is a Journey	Love	Journey
Time is Money	Time	Money
Life is a Container	Life	Container

These conceptual metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions but cognitive structures that shape how speakers of a language perceive, reason about, and act upon the world. When an English speaker says “Your claims are indefensible” or “He attacked every weak point in my argument,” they are not consciously employing a metaphor; rather, they are thinking about argument through the cognitive framework of war (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003: 4-5).

2.3.1 How Conceptual Metaphors Work

Every conceptual metaphor involves a cross-domain mapping—a systematic set of correspondences between the source domain and the target domain. For the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, the mappings include: Source Domain (War) Target Domain (Argument)

These mappings are not arbitrary; they arise from recurring patterns of embodied human experience. Human beings experience physical conflict before they engage in verbal argument, and the structure of physical conflict provides a template for understanding the abstract domain of argument.

Lakoff and Johnson (2003, p.7) emphasize that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” This experiential basis distinguishes Conceptual Metaphor Theory from earlier, purely linguistic theories of metaphor.

2.3.2 Conceptual Metaphor and Mind Style

The connection between conceptual metaphor and mind style was first systematically explored by Semino and Swindlehurst (1996) and later developed by Semino (2002). Mind style, as defined by Fowler (1977), refers to the distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual's mental self—the cognitive worldview projected by a text.

Semino (2002) argues that systematic patterns of conceptual metaphor provide direct evidence of an author's or character's mind style. Because conceptual metaphors reflect underlying cognitive habits, analysing them reveals the conceptual structures through which experience is filtered and interpreted. In her analysis of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Semino demonstrates how the distinctive metaphors used by narrator Chief Bromden project a mind

History and Fiction in Helon Habila's ... Y.I Isa, A.M. Gadanya & J.Ahmed Particular understanding of power relations.

For Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, analysing conceptual metaphors reveals how the author conceptualises the military regime, political imprisonment, and democratic resistance. The systematic use of war metaphors (crackdown, enemies, battle) constructs the military

as actively hostile. The use of container metaphors (prisons swelling, bodies piling up) constructs state violence as impersonal accumulation. The use of sound metaphors (loudest voice) constructs journalistic resistance as auditory presence. Together, these metaphorical patterns constitute Habila's authorial mind style—his distinctive cognitive way of apprehending and representing Nigeria's military era.

2.3.3 Application to This Study

This study employs Conceptual Metaphor Theory to examine how Habila's descriptions of historical figures shape readers' understanding of Nigeria's military era. The analysis attends to:

1. Source and target domains: Identifying what concrete domain (e.g., sound, container, accumulation) provides the template for understanding an abstract domain (e.g., political influence, imprisonment, massacre)
2. Systematicity: Identifying recurring metaphorical patterns across multiple extracts to reveal consistent cognitive habits
3. Conventional vs. creative use: Distinguishing between metaphors that reflect shared cultural understanding and those that reflect Habila's individual cognitive style
4. Contribution to mind style: Demonstrating how metaphorical choices cumulatively construct a coherent authorial worldview

The following analysis applies this framework to extracts from *Waiting for an Angel*, revealing how conceptual metaphor functions as a tool for historical representation, moral framing, and collective memory construction.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design within the framework of cognitive stylistics. The data consists of extracts from Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) that reference historical figures and events. Extracts were selected from passages where the omniscient narrator speaks, as Genette (1988) argues that the implied author's voice most directly represents authorial perspective in such passages.

Each extract is analysed for how it represents historical figures and events, attending to:

1. The naming of historical figures and the context of their mention
2. The linguistic choices through which they are described
3. The relationship between fictional narrative and historical documentation
4. The conceptual metaphors that shape their representation

The analysis proceeds extract by extract, building toward a synthetic understanding of how Habila negotiates the boundary between history and fiction.

4. Analysis

4.1 Extract 1: Abiola and Yar'adua

There is no record of how far the superintendent went to help him regain his freedom (1). But, as he told Jenice, there was very little to be done for a political detainee especially since about a week after the meeting, a coup was attempted against the military leader, Gen. Abacha by some officers close to him (2). There was an immediate crackdown on all pro-democracy activists (3). And the prisons all over the country swelled with political detainees (4). A lot of these political prisoners died in detention, although only the prominent ones made the headlines people like Mashood Abiola and Gen. Yaradua (5). (WA, 31-32)

This extract performs multiple functions simultaneously. At the narrative level, it advances Lomba's story, explaining the difficulty of securing his release. At the historical level, it anchors the fiction in

documented reality through reference to "Gen. Abacha," the coup attempt against him, and the subsequent crackdown. At the memorial level, it names specific victims: "Mashood Abiola and Gen. Yaradua" ensuring their presence in the novel's imaginative world.

The mention of Abiola and Yar'adua is particularly significant. Both were prominent figures whose deaths in detention became symbols of the regime's brutality. Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled 1993 presidential election, died in 1998 under circumstances that remain controversial. Yar'adua, a respected military officer and politician, also died in custody in 1997. By naming them together, Habila links their fates, inviting readers to understand them as twin martyrs for democracy.

The phrasing "people like" (Sentence 5) is crucial. It presents Abiola and Yar'adua as examples of a category of prominent prisoners who died in detention, while acknowledging that many others shared their fate without receiving similar recognition. The phrase "only the prominent ones made the headlines" performs a dual function: it memorialises the famous while gesturing toward the anonymous masses whose stories remain untold.

The expression prisons swelled with political detainees (Sentence 4) operates as a conceptual metaphor. The source domain is that of containers expanding beyond capacity; the target domain is political imprisonment. The verb "swelled" suggests uncontrolled, pathological growth, constructing the regime's detention policy as something excessive, unnatural, and overwhelming. This metaphor backgrounds the fact that non-political prisoners also filled Nigerian jails, focusing attention exclusively on political victims. This selectivity reveals the implied author's ideological commitment: the novel is not a neutral record of prison conditions but a focused testament to political persecution.

Through this selective framing, Habila constructs the military as persecutors and pro-democracy activists as victims. The masses are positioned as those who suffer, the military as those who inflict

suffering. This moral framework, established early in the novel, shapes readers' evaluation of every subsequent event.

4.2 Extract 2: Dele Giwa

Dele Giwa was the founding editor of News Watch magazine and the loudest voice against continued military rule in the country (13).
(WA, 197)

This single sentence accomplishes remarkable conceptual work. Habila describes Dele Giwa as "the loudest voice against continued military rule," a metaphorical expression that integrates sound volume with political influence.

The conceptual metaphor VOICE IS SOUND draws on the source domain of auditory phenomena. "Loudest" activates measurable sound intensity, suggesting that Giwa's opposition was dominant, impossible to ignore. However, this surface metaphor embeds a deeper conceptual structure: ACTIVISM IS AUDIBILITY. Giwa is represented synecdochically: voice stands for the whole person, and by extension, for the entire project of journalistic resistance.

The metaphor operates through a conceptual integration of two domains. The source domain (sound) contributes elements such as voice as medium, loudness as intensity, hearing as reception, and silence as absence. The target domain (political activism) contributes opposition to military authority, public expression, influence on consciousness, risk of assassination, and legacy beyond death. These domains are integrated to create a new meaning: "loudest" comes to mean most influential, most impossible to ignore, most courageous in speaking truth to power.

The historical context intensifies this meaning. Dele Giwa was killed by a letter bomb on October 19, 1986—the first journalist assassinated in Nigerian history. His voice was silenced by the very regime he opposed. Habila's description, written years after Giwa's death, performs a double movement: it resurrects that voice while simultaneously marking its silencing. "Loudest" carries tragic irony. The

voice was silenced precisely because it was loud, because it could not be ignored, because it posed a threat to military rule.

Through this metaphor, Habila accomplishes three functions:

1. **Memorialisation:** Giwa is remembered and honoured within the fictional narrative

2. **Symbolisation:** Giwa becomes representative of all journalists who risked their lives to oppose dictatorship

3. **Testimony:** The novel bears witness to the cost of speaking truth to power

The metaphor also activates the concept of legacy. Giwa's voice continues to resonate beyond his death within the novel, within Nigerian cultural memory, within the reader's consciousness. The metaphor thus constructs journalistic resistance as transcending individual mortality; the voice may be silenced, but its "loudness" persists.

This analysis demonstrates how Habila's mind style employs conceptual integration to transform historical figures into enduring symbols. The integration of sound and activism does not merely describe Giwa, it constitutes him as a figure whose meaning exceeds his historical peculiarity, inviting readers to understand his death as both tragedy and inspiration.

4.3 Extract 3: Kudirat Abiola

Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, wife of the business tycoon and politician, Chief Mashood Abiola, was shot dead today by unknown assassins on the express way (19). A loud murmur follows the announcement (20). Everyone was talking at once (21). The bodies keep piling up (22). (WA,)

This extract moves from specific documentation to metaphorical generalisation. Sentences 19-21 report Kudirat Abiola's assassination in language that mimics news reporting: the passive construction "was shot

dead," the official-sounding "by unknown assassins," the detail of location "on the express way." The presentation is starkly documentary. Sentence 22 shifts register entirely: "The bodies keep piling up." This conceptual metaphor has a source domain (corpse) and a target domain (massacre). The verb "piling" activates the image of corpses treated not as individual human beings but as undifferentiated matter, stacked without dignity or care. The passive construction backgrounds any agent, focusing instead on the inexorable increase in the number of victims.

The metaphor serves multiple functions. First, it contextualises Kudirat's death within a pattern: she is not an isolated victim but one among many. Second, it critiques the regime's dehumanisation: victims become "bodies," objects rather than persons. Third, it suggests the regime's indifference: bodies "pile up" because no one stops the killing, because the killers act with impunity.

The progression from named individual (Kudirat) to anonymous accumulation ("the bodies") is significant. Habila ensures that Kudirat is remembered as a person—wife, activist, specific human being—before she becomes part of the accumulating toll. The metaphor thus balances particularity and generality, insisting that we remember both the individual and the pattern.

Kudirat's inclusion alongside Abiola, Yar'adua, and Giwa creates a constellation of martyr figures. Each represents a different facet of opposition: Abiola the politician, Yar'adua the military officer turned democrat, Giwa the journalist, Kudirat the activist wife who continued her husband's struggle after his imprisonment. Together, they construct a comprehensive portrait of democratic resistance spanning different sectors of Nigerian society.

4 The Tradition of Witness

Throughout the novel, Habila's narrative strategies position *Waiting for an Angel* within what Griswold (2010. p.223) calls "the tradition of the socially conscious Nigerian novel that bears witness to Nigerian social experience". This tradition, exemplified by Chinua

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, understands fiction as a mode of historical testimony.

The novel's combination of third-person and first-person narration is central to this project. The extracts analysed in this study are drawn from third-person passages, where the omniscient narrator or implied author speaks. This narrative choice has significant effects: it grants the author control over textual meaning while creating readerly closeness to the authorial perspective. As Simpson (2021) notes, authors employ different features to make their work distinctive; in Habila's case, the interplay between narrative voices becomes a "signature" feature.

Newell's (2006. p.16) observation that Habila's writings reveal "the complex ways in which colonial history continues to shadow daily life in West Africa" finds confirmation in these passages. The military regime, in Habila's portrayal, inherits and extends patterns of authoritarian control established during colonial rule. Yet the regime is also distinctly postcolonial, a Nigerian phenomenon rooted in Nigerian political dynamics. History "shadows" without "dominating" a precise description of Habila's nuanced engagement with the past.

The book is a combination of fiction and non-fiction where different incidents from the military era are narrated. This generic hybridity is not merely formal but functional: it enables Habila to claim the authority of documentary while exercising the freedom of imaginative reconstruction. The result is a work that speaks with the urgency of testimony and the resonance of art.

5. Discussion

5.1 History and Fiction in Habila's Project

The analysis reveals that *Waiting for an Angel* employs three interconnected strategies for negotiating the boundary between history and fiction:

First, documentary anchoring. The novel names specific historical figures (Abiola, Yar'adua, Giwa, Kudirat) and references documented events (the coup attempt, the crackdown, assassinations).

These references anchor the fictional narrative in verifiable reality, grounding Lomba's story in the actual history of Nigeria's military era.

Second, symbolic transformation. While anchored in history, these figures are also transformed into symbols. Abiola and Yar'adua represent political martyrdom; Giwa embodies journalistic resistance; Kudirat symbolises the human cost of assassination. Their historical specificity is preserved, but their meaning extends beyond the individual to represent broader patterns of democratic struggle.

Third, moral framing through metaphor. Conceptual metaphors: prisons swelled, the bodies keep piling up, the loudest voice shape readers' moral evaluation of events. These metaphors construct the military as persecutors, activists as victims, and assassination as dehumanising accumulation. They do not simply describe; they judge. Together, these strategies constitute a mode of writing that does not merely represent historical events but actively shapes how they will be remembered. This mode claims for literature a truth-telling function that complements and extends documentary record.

5.2 The Implied Author and Historical Consciousness

The concept of the implied author illuminates how these strategies cohere. The implied author of *Waiting for an Angel* is not identical to the historical Helon Habila but is the consciousness constructed through the novel's stylistic choices. This implied author: Selects which historical figures to name and which to leave anonymous, frames events through metaphors, positions readers morally through narrative voice, and constructs a coherent worldview in which military rule is cruel, activists are heroic, and witness is imperative.

This implied author exhibits what Anyoku (2008) calls a "historicist cast of minds" a tendency to understand individual experience as always already historical, shaped by and illustrative of larger political forces. Lomba's imprisonment is not merely personal misfortune but an instance of systematic political detention. Kudirat's assassination is not an isolated crime but part of a pattern of state violence.

5.3 The Work of Collective Memory

Waiting for an Angel functions as a site of collective memory construction. By naming the dead within a fictional narrative that reaches readers who might not encounter their stories elsewhere, Habila ensures their remembrance. By framing their deaths through metaphor, he shapes how they will be understood. By connecting individual fates to broader patterns, he constructs a narrative of democratic struggle that transcends any single life.

The novel's selective focus on political victims, while backgrounding non-political imprisonment, reveals the ideological dimension of this memory-work. Habila is not constructing a neutral record but a partisan testament—one that centres democratic struggle in national memory of the military era. This selectivity does not invalidate the novel's witness function; rather, it clarifies the novel's commitments. *Waiting for an Angel* remembers the past in a particular way because it hopes for a particular future: a Nigeria where democracy prevails, where activists are honoured, where the dead are not forgotten.

5.4 Implications for Understanding Nigerian Literature

This analysis contributes to broader understanding of Nigerian literature's engagement with history. *Waiting for an Angel* exemplifies a mode of historical fiction that emerges in the aftermath of authoritarian rule: a move that seeks not only to represent the past but to process it, to mourn it, to transmit it to future generations.

Griswold's (2010) characterisation of the "socially conscious Nigerian novel" finds specific instantiation in Habila's techniques. The novel is socially conscious not merely in its themes but in its formal strategies: its naming of the dead, its metaphorical framing, its construction of an implied author who bears witness. Form and content work together in the service of social memory.

Newell's (2006) insight that colonial history "shadows" rather than dictates West African lives also resonates. Habila's military regime is distinctly Nigerian, yet it echoes colonial patterns of authoritarian

control. The novel captures this complex inheritance without reducing contemporary politics to colonial determinism.

6. Findings

The analysis of historical reference in *Waiting for an Angel* yields the following findings:

1. Integration of historical figures: Habila integrates documented historical figures—MKO Abiola, General Shehu Yar'adua, Dele Giwa, and Kudirat Abiola into a fictional narrative framework. Their named presence anchors the novel's representation of military rule in verifiable history, connecting Lomba's fictional experience to actual events and persons.

2. Symbolic construction: The novel constructs historical figures symbolically rather than naturalistically. Abiola and Yar'adua represent political martyrdom (Extract 1); Giwa embodies journalistic resistance and the cost of speaking truth to power (Extract 2); Kudirat symbolizes the human toll of state-sponsored assassination (Extract 3). Each figure's historical specificity is preserved while their meaning extends beyond the individual to represent broader patterns of democratic struggle.

3. Moral framing through metaphor: Through conceptual metaphors such as "prisons swelled with political detainees" (Extract 1), "the loudest voice" (Extract 2), and "the bodies keep piling up" (Extract 3), Habila frames the military as persecutors and pro-democracy activists as victims. This metaphorical construction shapes readers' moral evaluation of the regime, presenting state violence as impersonal accumulation while individualizing victims through named recognition.

4. Fiction as witness: The novel's combination of fictional narrative with historical reference positions it as a work of testimony. By narrating actual incidents (assassinations, detentions, deaths) within a fictional framework, Habila claims for literature the function of bearing witness to historical trauma. The implied author mediates between documented fact and imaginative reconstruction, creating a mode of writing that serves collective memory.

5. Selective memory construction: The novel backgrounds non-political imprisonment to focus attention exclusively on political victims (Extract 1, Sentence 4). This selectivity reveals Habila's ideological commitment to centring democratic struggle in national memory of military rule. The author constructs a particular version of the past—one in which pro-democracy activists are heroes, the military are villains, and ordinary Nigerians are victims deserving of remembrance.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined how Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* negotiates the boundary between history and fiction. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory, mind style analysis, and narratological frameworks of the implied author, the analysis demonstrates that the novel employs three interconnected strategies—documentary anchoring, symbolic transformation, and moral framing through metaphor to construct a mode of writing that bears witness to historical trauma while actively shaping how it will be remembered.

The findings reveal that Habila's integration of historical figures serves multiple functions: it anchors the fiction in verifiable reality, it memorializes specific individuals, it transforms them into symbols of democratic struggle, and it constructs a moral framework within which readers evaluate the military regime. The implied author, mediating between documented fact and narrative purpose, exhibits a "historicist cast of mind" (Anyoku, 2008) that understands individual experience as always already historical.

This study contributes to understanding the role of literature in post-authoritarian societies. In the aftermath of trauma, societies face the challenge of constructing collective memory—of deciding what will be remembered, how it will be understood, and who will do the remembering. *Waiting for an Angel* offers one answer to these questions: literature can remember the dead, testify to their suffering, and transmit their stories to future generations. It can do so not by

choosing between fact and fiction but by mobilizing both in the service of memory.

Future research might extend this analysis to Habila's other works, investigating whether the strategies identified here persist across his oeuvre or shift in response to different historical subjects. Comparative studies might examine how other Nigerian novelists of the same generation negotiate the boundary between history and fiction, contributing to a richer understanding of literature's role in constructing national memory.

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