



# ADVENTUROUS AND TROUBLESOME JOURNEY OF THE JOURNALISTS IN HELON HABILA'S "OIL ON WATER"

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## ABSTRACT

Literature is nothing but the reflection of life. Life and literature resemble each other and it appears to be the twin sisters. Whatever is explicated in novels, stories, poetries and other literary works, the same thing is happening in people's life. Literature mould the readers to understand the fact about life and helps to find the truth hidden in life and often helps to decide the right path and also attimes solution to the problems can be provided through the literature. Literature appears to be the testimony which often tends to represent African reality and daring African culture. African writers produce vast of works that can be mentioned as the literature of revolt and it remain as the successful story of Africa. The Major themes of African literature include culture and tradition, racism, neocolonialism, corruption and Politics. Among African writers, Helon Habila comes in third generation writers and contributes many thematic works about Africa especially about Nigeria. Moreover, he comes forth with the intention to showcase the political activities and its impact in Nigeria. This paper mainly focuses about Helon Habila's work *Oil On Water*. It mainly explains the concept of adventurous and troublesome journey of the journalists.

**Key words:** reflection, resemble, testimony, represent, racism, neocolonialism, corruption, politics, adventurous, troublesome, journey, journalists.

Literature generally produces meaningful life for the readers and often appears to create the perfect guidelines for running the successful life. It easily captures the readers' mind through its theme and style. Literature has many distinctive features which can be revealed with different topics and it can be categorized into many types such as Indian literature, British literature, American literature, Canadian literature, African literature, Afro-American literature and so on. African literature is considered to be the attractive and repulsive literature which symbolises the cultural heritage of Africa. It occupies the major position in attaining the new voice of world literature by highlighting the notable abilities of the man of Africa. One of the best African writers is Helon Habila who comes forward with the motive of explaining the things that is foregoing in Nigeria through his works. He is regarded to be the best role model for other writers too in depicting the current situation of the people and the country.

Helon Habila has won many number of awards and prizes for his literary works. He works definitely convey the effective content which dwell in the minds of the readers. *Oil On Water* is Helon Habila's third novel which encompasses plenty of themes like bad governance and corruption, defects of oil exploration, sufferings and travails of the people, oppression and exploitation, the ecological and political consequences of oil conflicts and petrodollars, adventurous and troublesome journey of the journalists, worse situation by oil exploitation and so on. *Oil On Water* has been shortlisted for many awards such as Commonwealth Writers Prize (2011), Orion Book Award (2012) and PEN/Open Book Award (2012). This work proves to be the outstanding review of the journalists who undertakes the risky journey in order to save the kidnapped white woman.

*Oil On Water* contains twenty one chapters which mainly deals with the story of the journey of the journalists that starts from chapter one and continues till the end of the novel. Rufus is the young journalist who accompanies Zaq in the project of searching the kidnapped white woman. Continuous travel with no result makes Rufus to be in dilemma about his undertaken task and often thinks whether going to find her is wise. Zaq's motivational words make Rufus not to think about the return to Port Harcourt without completing the task. Zaq further says that what the journalists and reporters really seek is not them but a greater meaning. It is important to remember that the story is not the final goal. With the hope that everything will be fine, both Zaq and Rufus are continuing their journey and find it to be too tough during their travel.

Though Rufus has no notion of what Zaq means about the story and its meaning, he proceeds his journey with an aim to find out before the trip has been done. Rufus faces lot of danger when he crosses the village and as the journalist and a reporter, he tries his level best to capture what is happening in and around him but at many times, before his thought transform into action, things has began to change. Rufus regards Zaq to be his inspiration and great role model, so he follows with no objection of what Zaq says. During their journey, Rufus recalls the incident of meeting Zaq for the first time five years ago at the Ikeja School of Journalism in Lagos during Zaq's visit to deliver the annual graduation lecture. He remembers the motivational speech uttered by Zaq as follows:

“You couldn’t get the answer because the perfect headline is never thought up; it’s given to you. An inspiration, A revelation. You can make up a great headline by trying, but not a perfect one. The perfect one always comes to you after you’ve already published your story.”(22).

Rufus wishes to be respected like Zaq all over the country for his views and needs to come out with editorials that would be read with enrapture. Since they start the white woman’s trial, Rufus possesses the habit of updating the reporter’s notebook. Rufus then learns the reason for choosing this particular assignment from Zaq and moves on further in the villages facing many difficulties like no proper place to stay, no food to eat and so on. As journalists, both remain firm in learning the truth about the kidnapping, so they are ready to face anything. Zaq in spite of his illness never has the plan to skip the journey. In one of the villages they visit, they have learnt about the establishment of the oil companies and its worst impact upon the living creatures and feel sorry about it. Rufus thinks about how he gets the job in spite of heavy competition and he has made his mind to complete this assignment though he has a lot of troubles and adventures during his journey.

When Rufus witnesses the terrible situation like pouring the petrol on one’s head, he cannot control and as a journalist he questions about it and as there is no proper response he continues to show his interest in knowing what is happening. In many places, Rufus tries to pretend as he is bold enough and continues to say that he is a journalist and a reporter. By witnessing the fire power as the open show, Rufus and other reporters are in fear. Rufus after noticing the sick situation of Zaq finds the situation to be really hard to believe that Zaq is once considered to be the most famous reporter in Lagos. When Rufus and Zaq reach the island, it appears to be worse than the village and it entirely looks with the sign of carnage. There too Rufus encounters troubles and he is unknown with the things happening around him and he worries whether the kidnapped case of the white woman will give the answers for his questions. Zaq guides Rufus to go away as soon as possible from there in order to escape instead of being caught as the scapegoat between the soldiers and the kidnappers.

Unknown persons arrive and threaten them by pointing gun towards the reporters and the journalists. The one of the journalists comes out with the bold reply as follows when the militants ask them to wait literally for the boat: “We’re journalist, and we’re on side. We want to report the truth, how your men were brutally slaughtered today for no reason. We just want to ask you a few questions.”(81). Searching the kidnapped woman seems to be the challenging task for the journalists. Rufus then leaves Zaq and reaches Port Harcourt to meet the editor and there with the request of the editor he has gone to meet Mr. Floode (the husband of the white woman) to know several things about the white woman. He promises that he is ready to pay for everything. When Rufus returns to Irikefe Island to see Zaq, his condition is bad and when he hands over the money given by Floode to Zaq, he says, “That is what I call good journalism.”(116).

With the certain decision of finding out the implied truth, both Zaq and Rufus try their level best and enquire few regarding the white woman. Being the senior journalist and the guiding master, Zaq encourages Rufus by saying that their job is to find the truth even if is buried in the earth. Without any fear, they dig the cemetery too to find the truth but no evidence is found. At one situation, both Zaq and Rufus accept to be the prisoners among the other prisoners in order to find the truth. Both the journalists are in poor situation due to the order that they should not leave the place until the permission comes and they are in deep shock to learn that they have committed a grave ill by visiting to the grave yard.

To be back in island, both are caught in the hands of the soldiers. They face countless troubles and at last as per the plan of Zaq, Rufus alone agrees to go by wearing white robe. Rufus faints and loses his consciousness and when he gets up, he is in the hands of the villagers. The village people help him by offering food and to his surprise he learns news about the white woman and with the help of the people, he makes his further move to meet the white woman.

Determined mind of not giving up helps to achieve his goal after the long try. With the help of the Chief, he at last meets the white woman and prepares himself to look confident in front of her. Both have started their conversation and Rufus puts forth his doubt regarding her kidnap. The white woman explains everything in detail and says that she is expecting Rufus to use his judgement to know what to print and what to leave out. Before realizing the fact, the militants have arrived with speedboats and gunshots and points that they are in need of the white woman and her driver immediately if not all the boats will be sink and the fire will be set to the things.

Filled with fear in everyone's mind, no reply arise and when gun shot is heard, the white woman comes forward and ready to go with the militants. In order to make sure that no one have gone to the government soldiers to betray them, the militants are in need of some other person to accompany with them as a insurance. Finally, Rufus accepts to go with them. As a young journalist, Rufus faces lot of troubles and his trip really remains as the memorable journey in his lifetime. There Rufus tries to prove himself as the reporter and he makes it compulsory that he needs to meet the Professor immediately.

Rufus keeps conversing with the driver of the white woman and convinces him by saying that if Rufus knows, the story of the driver, the militants will not be dare enough to any harm to him as they know very well that if he knows out there, Rufus would definitely print it and the world will know about the driver's presence under the military rule against his will. Though Rufus has some fear, he pretends to be courageous and regains his effort. Rufus then gathers many interesting information about the kidnapping from the driver of the white woman.

Rufus then meets the Professor and learns the demand of him. The professor puts forth the demand that the white woman is safe at present and if they fail to receive any news from her husband within two days then they are not sure for her safety. Rufus plans to proceed faster in order to save the white woman from the hands of the militants. He is eager to put a full stop to the problem of the white woman by the decision of her husband. Undoubtedly, *Oil On Water* forecasts the adventurous and troublesome journey of the journalists as they encounter vast number of sufferings and it definitely helps Rufus to go ahead in his career with full confidence.

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