

Character Relations, Functions and Plot Dynamism in Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*

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Abstract

In contrast with former African writers' generations, the latest generation is more interested in the aesthetics of literary works. H. Habila is in line with this new trend to refresh African literature. Literary elements are then more emphasised to show the beauty of the literary text. Therefore, this study addresses characters in H. Habila's novel *Measuring Time* in order to point out how writers use them as symbols to convey meaning. In this perspective, Structuralism and Semiotics help shed light on the aesthetics of the literary text to decipher meaning. Interestingly, both literary theories are interrelated because semiotics is a branch of structuralism. Then, close reading and Greimas' actantial model governed by the principle of binary opposition offer the appropriate literary tools for understanding H. Habila's use of twins as protagonists in the story to criticise some ills in modern African societies.

Keywords: Characters, *Measuring Time*, Structuralism, Semiotics, Actantial Model.

Relations et fonctions des personnages et la dynamique de la trame dans l'œuvre *Mesuring Time* de Helon Habila

Résumé

En contraste avec les générations précédentes d'écrivains africains, la dernière génération s'intéresse davantage à l'esthétique des œuvres littéraires. Helon Habila s'inscrit dans cette nouvelle tendance qui vise à renouveler la littérature africaine. Les éléments littéraires sont mis en avant pour montrer la beauté du texte littéraire. Par conséquent, la présente étude aborde les personnages dans le roman *Measuring Time* de H. Habila afin de souligner comment les écrivains les utilise comme des symboles pour transmettre un sens. L'étude se

propose d'utiliser le structuralisme et la sémiotique pour explorer l'esthétique littéraire et déchiffrer le sens. Ces deux théories sont interconnectées car la sémiotique est une branche du structuralisme. De plus, la lecture attentive et le modèle actantiel de Greimas, régis par le principe de l'opposition binaire, offrent les outils littéraires appropriés pour comprendre l'utilisation par H. Habila des jumeaux comme protagonistes dans la trame, afin de critiquer certains maux des sociétés africaines modernes.

Mots clés : personnages, *Measuring Time*, structuralisme, sémiotique, model actantiel.

Introduction

Born in the late century from strong political, economic, social and religious quest for freedom from colonial burden, African literature like its counterparts, mirrors daily happenings in the society in which it is produced. In this respect, earliest men and women African writers concern themselves with people's aspirations. Therefore, it can be said that writers address issues related to their era. Literature is then an art and as late C. Achebe (1976, p. 26) says, "art is, and was always, in the service of man." Not only does the writer depict reality in his fictional narrative but he shows the right way people can survive together for a better social cohesion. This is what the Ghanaian poet, novelist and essayist, K. Awonoor, quoted by C. Achebe (1976, p. 24) means when he states: "An African writer must be a person who has some kind of conception of the society in which he is living and the way he wants the society to go."

Allying with this, the latest generation of writers chronicles the woes of their community in their narratives. However, in contrast with the former generation, the latter is more interested in the aesthetics of literary works. H. Habila is in line with this new trend to refresh African literature. Literary elements are then more emphasised to show the beauty of the literary text. Among other elements, characters are one of the most important, for they are the ones to whom and around whom things happen. Etymologically, a Greek word meaning a stamp or impression, characters are representations of people in fictional narratives. Characters are then used as symbols to convey meaning in a fictional story. In that respect, Semiotics, as a science of signs, best sheds light on the interpretation of

characters. Indeed, Semiotics recognises three classes of signs: index, icon, and symbols, which L. Tyson (2006, p. 218) explains as follows:

An index is a sign in which the signifier has a concrete, causal relationship to the signified... An icon is a sign in which the signifier physically resembles the signified... A symbol is a sign in which the relationship between signifier and signified is neither natural nor necessary but arbitrary, that is, decided on by the conventions of a community or by the agreement of some group.

For semioticians, characters are used as symbols because they are conventions decided by each writer to convey meaning to the reader. As Semiotics emerged from Structuralism, the text itself is then the raw material from which this meaning is constructed. In this vein, J. Eder et al. (2010, p. 5) in concluded on both approaches:

Structuralist and semiotic approaches... highlight the very difference between characters and human beings, focusing on the construction of characters and the role of the (linguistic, visual, auditive or audio-visual) text. They frequently regard characters themselves as sets of signifiers and textual structures.

According to structuralists, characters do not exist independently of the narrative context; that is to say, the successful combination of all elements of literature-plot, spaces, time, focalisation, narrator, characters, etc. In other words, the literary text functions like an engine that needs each element to convey meaning. For L. Tyson (2006, p. 220) in literature, structuralists call this association the *Langue* of the literary text or grammar because, as she explains, it governs the rules by which fundamental literary elements are identified and combined. In short, structuralism is not interested in what a text means, but in *how* a text means what it means. This study focuses on this relationship to scrutinise the Nigerian writer Helon Habila's construction of characters in his second novel, *Measuring Time* in which the narrator uses twins as protagonists to keep away from single protagonist stereotyped characters.

Many scholars have addressed some issues pertaining to this novel. For instance, Caleb Monday Jonah (2006) showed that diaspora must not be a criterium to deny this category of writers their Africanity/Africanness. As for C. Gbolo Sanka (2019), he analysed H. Habila's use of language to investigate moral corruption in *Measuring Time*. In short, the study of characters in *Measuring Time* is an opportunity to enlighten readers on the aesthetics of this novel. In this respect, literary methods like close reading and J. A. Greimas' actantial model are essential tools to better comprehend Habila's construction of characters. Close reading focuses on the specific details of a passage or text in order to uncover some deeper meaning present in it while the actantial model governed by the principle of binary opposition shows how characters function as pairs just as life itself. J. A. Greimas observes, as L. Tyson says (2006, p. 224), that "human beings make meaning by structuring the world in terms of two kinds of opposed pairs: "A is the opposite of B" and "-A (the negation of A) is the opposite of -B (the negation of B)." *Measuring Time* is the embodiment of J. A. Greimas' binary opposition since the elder, Mamo is not only a sickle-cell anemia sufferer but also the representative of people who believe in the power of the written words, whereas LaMamo, the junior, is the man of actions who dies like a hero for leading the revolutionary movement in Keti Community. Then, close reading and J. A. Greimas' actantial model offer the appropriate literary tools for understanding H. Habila's portrayal of characters to criticise some ills in modern African societies. Two main subdivisions rule this paper. The first, the actantial model, provides information on this reading technique to show its relevance. As for the second, it focuses on the different actantial models.

1. The Actantial Model

According to J. A. Greimas, as L. Tyson (2006, p. 224) reports, "almost all narratives' structure is embodied in the form of plot formulas, such as conflict and resolution, struggle and reconciliation, and separation and union. These plot formulas are carried out by means of *actants*, or character functions, which are slots filled by the actual characters (surface phenomena) in a given story." Simply put, characters play specific roles

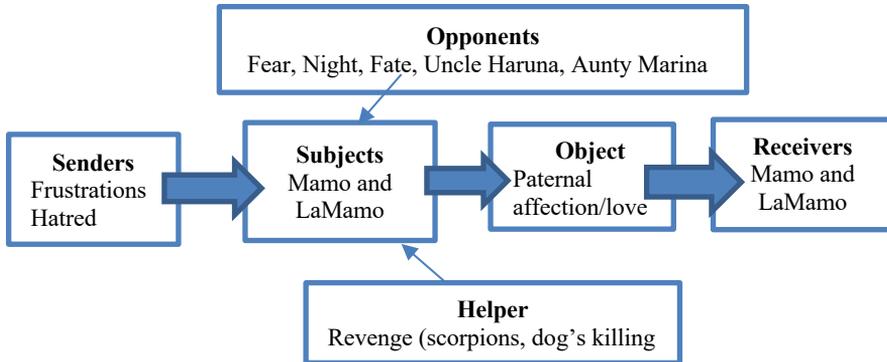
in the plot, which are called actants. And these functions are carried out in pairs. For example, the protagonist is the subject because he is the one who goes in search of something called an object on someone's request (sender) for some people's benefits (beneficiaries or receivers). During this quest, the subject encounters some characters who help him accomplish his action (helper) while others hinder his actions (opponents). Sometimes, some characters can carry out two functions like being the subjects and the receiver for example. Furthermore, J. A. Greimas deconstructs the traditional human dimension of characters by extending it to anthropomorphism; the attribution of human traits to animals and things in a narrative. L. Hébert (2011, p.73) shedding light on the nature of actant states that it may correspond to an anthropomorphic being (for example, a human, an animal, a talking sword, etc.), a concrete (such as a sword), inanimate element (such as the wind, the distance to be traveled), a concept (courage, hope, freedom, etc.). An actant may be individual or collective (society, for instance).

2. The Actantial Models in *Measuring Time*

The story in *Measuring Time* is set in the early sixties in the fictitious Keti community. Since the actantial model is a tool used to analyse the relationship among characters, it is necessary to relate their actions to the spaces where these characters are located, the type of narrator and focalization, and the other literary elements. Two main actantial models are identified and are under scrutiny in this article. Both are related to the protagonists, Mamo and LaMamo's trajectories in the story, even though, at one time, each of them uses a specific weapon to fulfill his mission.

2.1. Actantial Model 1: Hate Thy Father Make Him Pay

Through this first actantial model, the narrator questions father and sons' relationship in the absence of a mother. For this reason, the story mainly takes place in the subjects' paternal house and their neighbouring. The predominance of the heterodiegetic narrator testifies to the narrator's concerns with this situation.



In *Measuring Time*, both distance and one child's preference over another turn into "frustration" and hatred, which sends the subjects, twins and orphans (Mamo and LaMamo) to go in search of their father's love and paternal affection. According to J. A. Greimas, there is always a relationship between the subject and the object, which is either conjoined or disjoined. In the present model, the relationship between the subjects (Mamo and LaMamo) and the object is disjoined because the subjects' objective is to make their father pay for his disaffection for them. Owing to the nature of this object, the subjects are the only receivers (beneficiaries) of this struggle.

This quest is generated by their mother, Tabita's death and their father, Lamang's lack of interest in his twin children (Mamo and LaMamo), which creates a great distance between him and his children. Then the older the twins grow, the farther the distance between them and their father is.

By now the distance between the twins and their father was at its farthest, and because of that, they realised, there was really nothing they could do to hurt him. He only spent a week at home every month, and whenever he came back he'd look at them with astonishment, as if remembering suddenly that he had two sons. He always struggled to remember their names, and when, he did remember, he invariably mixed them up even though they were not identical (p. 48).

In addition, Lamang's preference for the junior twin, LaMamo, because he is stronger and healthier than his senior brother, Mamo, is the last straw that broke the camel's back:

just as LaMamo was Lamang's favourite. On the rare occasions that Lamang had deigned to notice his children; it was LaMamo he noticed. He'd sometimes brag to his friends about the striking resemblance between them. In the picture on the table, the only family picture in the house, taken when the twins were five years old, Lamng held LaMamo on his lap...From very early Mamo had learned to keep his sick and awkward body in the background, learned to observe from the sidelines. He often thought of himself as the real silent listener to every conversation (p. 58).

Binary opposition is used to explain how the twins function in the plot, as the narrator said: "They had been two parts of the same thing. LaMamo had been the leader who always came up with the wild, edgy ideas, which would then be reviewed and tempered by Mamo's less assertive, reflective nature..." (p. 66). The elder, Mamo, acts as the guide, the more experienced and perspective whereas the junior, LaMamo, is the performer. In the grip of revenge, their helper, they design some machiavellous plans like the use of scorpions and the killing the old witch's dog. The narrator's choice of this insect is an evidence that the protagonists' intention is just to harm their father, to make him feel the same pain his disaffection causes as the narrator says:

Not that the twins had the means to make their father pay, but they tried their best whenever he was back from his endless trip to the state capital and Lagos. They'd drop the occasional scorpion into his shoe, or misplace his car keys just as he was about to go out.... The first time they put a scorpion in his shoe, Lamang's foot had swollen to twice its size, forcing him to stay indoors a whole week... The second time, months later, the twins grew bolder. They went into their father's bedroom while he was in the bathroom and hid the scorpion-big, black, and pregnant- under his pillow' (p. 20).

The twins' fruitless use of the scorpion makes them kill the old witch's dog just to blacken their father's good name. The wicked aspect of their action is the material they use to kill this innocent animal radio batteries known as *Tiger Head Battery, For Long life* (p. 23). The most Machiavellian part of it is their use of *akara*, the most enjoyable food to trap the animal as it can be read: "...they carefully poured the black powder into leftover bean cakes they had found in the kitchen" (p. 23).

However, the subjects in their quest they clash with some opponents like their paternal aunt, Auntie Marina, Fear, Fate, Night, and Uncle Haruna's orations. Their extreme obsession for revenge is counteracted by fear which prevents them from poisoning him as the narrator points out "Once or twice they had contemplated poison, but some unclear terror had deterred them from that exigency. In any case, they preferred the death of a thousand cuts to the single bullet in the head" (p. 20). As for Auntie Marina, she stands for the mother figure for she is in charge of their home training. Her duty is to enlighten Mamo and LaMamo on the dangerousness of their mission. An illustration of this is her attitude to them when she discovers they have killed the old witch's dog:

Auntie Marina had asked them about the dog a day after the event: 'Nana Mudo's dog died yesterday, have you heard? she looked directly into their eyes when she asked them the question, as if she could see into their souls. 'No sin ever goes undiscovered,' she always told them. Now she said it with more frequency, especially in the evenings when she sat them down for prayers. 'Oh, Lord, have mercy on us sinners,' she'd shout in her strong breaking voice. The twins would stare at her closed eyes, and at each other, nervously (p. 28).

Space plays a significant role in the narrator's choice of the opponent. The concept of Fate is used as an address to illustrate a common saying in African rural communities: "Never bites the hand that feeds you." This is the reason why the big black and pregnant scorpion does not bite their father, they cannot find it either as it can be read: "They waited all night to hear the howl of raw pain from Lamang's bedroom, but nothing

happened. The next morning, he came out, looking refreshed, and left for the city. The twins frantically searched for the scorpion, but they didn't find it' they went about with apprehension, avoiding dark corners and overturning the cushions before sitting down (p. 20).

The narrator uses 'Night' and death as opponents to make them revisit their anger against their father. In fact, the night is the advisable period of the day when people are invited to think deeply about something. The narrator's choice of this period of the day is quite expressive and meaningful:

One night, lying side by side in the open field, grazing at the clear, dry-season skies, the twins saw a plane pass, its wingtips blinking with light.

'Who are they?' LaMamo asked idly.

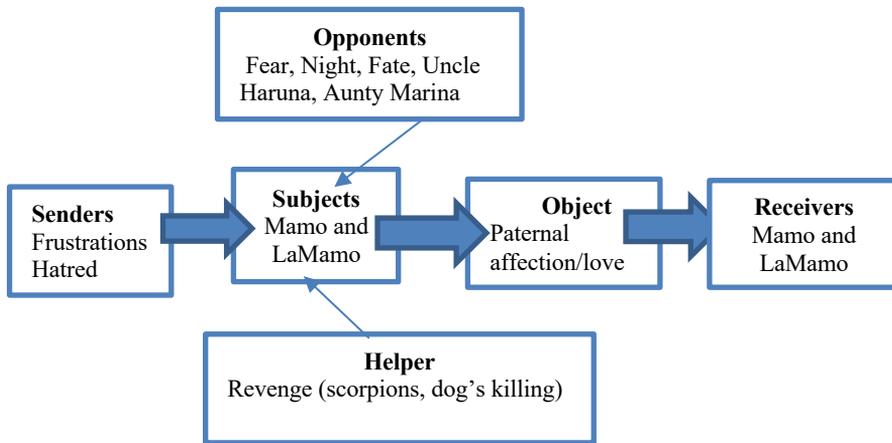
'Famous people,' Mamo replied.

We could be famous. That way people would remember us even after we are dead,' he whispered to LaMamo. From that day, CHEAT DEATH, BE FAMOUS became the second commandment in his mental diary (pp. 20-21).

As for death, it can be defined as the end of life on earth. A close relative's death can impact the other livings' life in the sense it makes them question their own priorities and objectives on this earth. Interestingly, this is what happens to the twins (subjects) at their Uncle Haruna's burial. As a Biafra war and a freedom fighter, his death makes Mamo and LaMamo not only revisit their first priority but they also change the direction of their quest: 'It was at the burial, listening to the graveside orations delivered by Haruna's friends and family, about his kindness, and his loyalty, and above all his dedication to his fatherland, that the twins finally decided on what to do. We could be famous as soldiers, they told each other' (p. 47). This change inspired by their uncle's orations sustain the new direction of the plot, which actantial model is the one below.

2.2. Actantial Model 2: Be Famous as Soldiers

This second actantial model is juxtaposed on the former as it works as its continuation. Both are interrelated and interdependent since they address the same subjects' struggle for salvation.



Immortality is constructed as Mamo, LaMamo and Asabar's sender on different battlefields to save their community from its oppressors in order to be famous. As already mentioned above, Mamo is the senior of the three and the decision-maker. Immortality is his response to his dreadful disease, a way people can remember him as the narrator says: "If he might never live to twenty-even that was being too optimistic; the two other cases of sickle-cell anaemia in the village apart from himself had both died before the age of sixteen- then quick fame was his only assurance of immortality" (p. 21). Immortality, for him, derives from fame as the narrator recounts:

‘We could be famous as soldiers,’ they told each other. And in their eager, fifteen-year-old minds they saw themselves on some distant battlefield, surrounded by dead bodies, some of which they had killed, and only themselves standing, masters of all they surveyed; and far away in the villages, which they had liberated from some evil tyrant, hidden by dusk and the smoke of battle- the villages all resembled Keti- the women waited to welcome them with garlands. Then, after achieving fame and wealth, they'd return to Keti as living legends (p. 47).

The axis of desire between the subjects and the object in this model is a disjunction because the three boys intended to free their community, to help Keti District get rid of their oppressors. This is the reason why the

narrator equips each of them with a specific weapon: soldiers. Etymologically, a soldier is a fighting man, one who serves in the army for pay. Today, a soldier can be a volunteer enlisted person, a non-commissioned officer. The three subjects of the present model fall in the category of the soldiers who volunteer themselves to save their community.

In their salvation quest, some concepts work as their helpers like information (the newspaper), runaway and escapism, mentoring, teaching and biography writing. The narrator constructs the newspaper in which they got the good news as a helper because it is designed to provide people with the right and relevant information.

But the months passed and still they waited, scared to take bold step of running away from home. They waited until one day when they saw an advertisement in a newspaper their father brought home, hidden somewhere in the centre. Mamo came across it as he idly turned the pages: the army was recruiting in the state capital. Accompanying the text was the picture of a young soldier, his uniform ironed to a crisp, his gun slung over his shoulder carelessly as if it were only a walking stick (p. 47).

The newspaper makes them stand up for their new challenge. In addition, the narrator's portrayal of the young soldier in the newspaper is quite meaningful. For instance, the phrase 'ironed to a crisp' to talk about the uniform, and the sentence "...his gun slung over his shoulder carelessly as if it were a walking stick" denotes that holding a gun is a mere game, which obviously impress the subjects. Having got the right information, running away and escapism become their solution to fame.

Both are best understood in literature as characters' response to a hostile environment to seek for personal liberation. In *Measuring Time*, the twins and their cousin run away to put an end to their monotonous life. For example, Asabar indulges in drinking to bear this monotony as he confesses: "But this is hell, Auntie Marina... Life in the village is hell...Tell her, Mamo...sorry, not you...you are sick...but LaMamo, tell her how terrible... I am tired of going to the farm...and ..." (p. 30). It is

then not surprising that LaMamo feels a great satisfaction in their successful runaway.” We used to dream about doing that someday, Mamo and me... We are free, there’s no one to stop us” (p. 61). It is important to mention that sometimes runaway teenagers return to their home under maturity. Asabar falls into this category since streetism makes him realise how much hard it is for adventurers to survive in the streets. Streetism is a concept that the narrator uses both as helper and opponent because it makes Asabar develop homesickness while it reinforces LaMamo’s thirst for adventures:

They stayed two weeks in kaduna, sleeping with the street boys in rough shelters at the bus station... Their money ran out very quickly and they survived by working as market hands, helping to load and off-load cattle and corn from trucks, cleaning the animal enclosures, and fetching water from the impossibly deep wells for the water troughs. It was the hardest work either of them had ever done in their lives, but they had no option. They ate once a day, in the evenings, buying millet porridge and akara at the roadside (p. 61).

Other circumstances like health can make runaway teenagers give up their adventures. In *Measuring Time*, sickness makes Mamo stop his adventure and go back to his homeland where his presence is necessary. LaMamo has to make war experience. H. Habila (2008, Interview): himself confesses it during an interview with I. Anya:

I created a brother for him [Mamo] who goes to these other places and sends back long, detailed letters of his adventures. But a mere brother isn’t enough; he has to be as close enough to Mamo, the elder twin who remains in the village, as possible. Because they need to see things alike, to think alike – so it had to be a twin.

Streetism allows the narrator elaborates on the importance of different encounters for the success of the subjects’ quest. Encounter functions like an opponent when LaMamo and Asabar meet the federal army recruiting agent who sends them away because of their age as he says:

So, you tink you fit come here waste my time, abi? You dey craze? We say we want eighteen years minimum, and you come here with with sixteen years minimum- you think say army job na for small pikin? Oya, get out before I count three. One...two... Are you still there? I go handle you' (pp. 60-61).

This army man's speech increases Asabar's homesickness and strengthens LaMamo's resilience. On behalf of this, the narrator sees to it that Asabar and LaMamo meet three other boys: Idrissa, Jabbo and Saleh. Idrissa, the most educated of the three, has the power to use words to convince other adventurers of the right choice they have made. For Idrissa, "the money in the army was good and the fighting minimal, and in any case it was not a life sentence, since one could desert at any time one wanted" (p. 61). In this vein, their encounter with the second recruiting agent, a scout, is understandable because he gives them the golden opportunity awaiting them. His statement reinforces Asabar's homesickness and LaMamo eagerness to be enrolled in the army. The conversation below between the two runaway teenagers and the scout is quite meaningful.

How old are you? was the first question he asked Asabar and LaMamo
Almost sixteen, said Asabar
Eighteen, 'said LaMamo. He wasn't going to be turned down again on account of age.
No problems. Is not how old you is, but how strong, the man said, smiling. 'Tomorrow we leaves. We goes to Chad, if you survives Chad, after many monthses, we goes to Libya for more trainings. Comes here by six a.m. (p. 63).

The three subjects' motivation centers on the future of their community. LaMamo is entrusted with the true role of army soldier fighting in battlefields like Liberia, Mali and Ouagadougou. The narrator uses these battlefields as spaces to address the hidden causes of widespread conflicts in Africa. The following statement is an illustration of the economic dimension of war as LaMamo confesses in a letter written in January 1990: "I've been in Liberia for over two years now...Samuel said in Liberia we

can fight for money and be our own boss...” (p. 129). It is not then surprising that there are too many rebel groups in Liberia. Some are fighting for political reasons and these are often the most powerful rebel groups. The small rebel groups include the lower classes fighting just to make ends meet.

However, on behalf of binary opposition, Mamo embraces a different career to achieve his fame: teaching and biography writing. Both are interrelated in the sense that they help broaden knowledge and arouse countrymen’s awareness. Biography is a non-fiction narrative about someone’s life. A biographer needs to conduct a survey and does a lot of research so as to write his text. The narrator uses this job to make Mamo a civil soldier whose inner mission is to unmask tyrants who govern his Keti community. This depends on a good mentoring, which the narrator addresses through Uncle Iliya. As a teacher and a freedom fighter, Uncle Iliya provides Mamo with the appropriate guidance by teaching him resilience through an animal tale as the narrator recounts:

He had then gone on to tell him the story of how birds go with their wings. He said at first all birds were created wingless and then the creator gave them a big hump on the back, but at first they found the hump too heavy to bear and they tried to throw it off. When they couldn’t, gradually they got used to it, and finally they realised that if they unfurled it and flapped it, they could fly (p. 72).

For Uncle Iliya, the reading skill is the best way for future generation to develop critical thinking skills and acquire wisdom. According to him, the younger generation is mistaken when it takes for granted whatever the old generation teaches them. This attitude of theirs is unworthy and he invites his nephew, Mamo, to avoid it as he says: “The worst thing you can is to ever accept anything at face value. Don’t agree with what a man says because he has lived longer than you, or because he claims that is our way, using history as evidence to back his claim” (p. 83). Under his guidance and awareness, Mamo’s fondness for books and critical thinking skills helps him find out Keti authorities’ bad ruling style and unmask

successfully these tyrants embodied by Waziri and friends' tricks against the Mai.

The opponents' function is mainly carried out by the corrupt and power drunk Keti Community rulers. In Keti, the ruler is known as Mai. For the sake of democracy, this ruler has Waziri, a high-ranking adviser or chief counselor to the Mai and for this reason he "is not supposed to be related to the Mai- this is to ensure that he does not use his position to influence the kingmakers after the Mai's death to become Mai himself. Only the Mai's blood relations can contest for the throne." (p. 258). Surprisingly, the current Waziri is an exception as Uncle Iliya explains:

he became Waziri at a difficult time- it was during the reign of Mai Hamdi, who reigned before this one. The Mai before Hamdi, Mai Kilang, had been killed brutally in his sleep, and everyone believed his Waziri had a hand in it, and so when Mai Hamdi assumed the throne he chose this Waziri as his vizier because he felt he could trust him, being his distant cousin. Of course, Hamdi himself later died of poisoning' (p. 258).

This quotation clears away the clouds on Waziri's need of a biographer to write about the Mai's life in order to ridicule The Mai during his anniversary. This Waziri is a wolf in sheep's clothing in the Mai's palace. In this perspective, he recruits Mamo to be the new secretary of the palace to use Mamo's talent as a good writer. Fortunately, Mamo's introduction to Kopi, a living library in Keti who is over a hundred years with a phenomenal memory despite his blindness, clears out the true origin of the current Waziri. Thanks to Kopi, the blood relationship between the last precolonial Mai and the current Waziri explains his hidden intention to overthrow the current Mai. In addition, it enlightens and confirms the relationship between Prince and Waziri as Uncle Iliya says: "If La Kei remarried while in exile, then the boy Prince might actually be who he claims to be, and that makes the Waziri his great uncle" (p. 260). This meeting with the old man allows Uncle Iliya to read the Waziri's devilish hidden plan:

All this does not make sense... Was it actually the Mai who hired you? I should think the Waziri was more instrumental in that... Let's look at the facts: the only way Prince, or anyone else, can become Mai is if the Mai is removed, or dies. I am not sure if you knew that this Mai has no male child. He has no direct heir; when he dies there is going to be a big fight for the throne, all the cousins and nephews will come out (p. 260).

Uncle Iliya's pieces of advice allow Mamo achieve his objectives since things have worked out as Iliya told Mamo. Mamo discovers the truth behind his recruitment as the court secretary and a biographer as he tells the Waziri.

Your plan is so clever because on the surface each phase of it appears to be separate - for instance, no one can see the connection between Prince and yourself, or between you and my book- they all appear to be separate. Unless, of course, one is in a position to see a pattern. And that person is me- i am in a good position to see the shape formed by these disparate pieces. And this brings us to the book. You want me to write the book that will apparently celebrate the greatness of the Bol Dok line, culminating in the present Mai. But the more I researched, the more I discovered there is nothing to celebrate. All my book can do is the opposite, which is to heap ridicule on the Bol Dok line by showing how it was the beneficiary of the violence on our culture by the colonialists, and therefore not a true representative of our people. All the evidence will be in my book (p. 283).

The riots that broke out in Keti community operate as the proper battlefield LaMamo needs to make his community benefit from his experience. As an experienced soldier, LaMamo clearly tells his senior brother, Mamo, who intends to stop him:

It is not a waste if people die trying to be free. Yesterday, when I came, I could see the hopelessness on the people's faces. There was no light of hope anywhere. I felt as if I had entered some crazy town where the sun never shines... I can't bear that. This is the right thing to do. My friend the professor once told me that all wars are unjust, except the one people fight to liberate themselves from injustice (p. 293).

As a true freedom fighter, LaMamo makes a self-sacrifice to free his community from its tyrants like the Waziri who is “killed instantly when he threatened the people with arrest and prosecution” (p. 294). As for the Mai, he has been spared because of his humility for he “rolled on the ground and begged for his life” (p. 294). LaMamo’s death symbolises freedom and the younger generation’s great attachment to their country and patriotism. Mamo’s letter to Bintou, LaMamo’s wife is quite expressive: “Do not mourn him too much... your pain will be eased by the knowledge that he died fighting not for himself, but for others. The people here will always remember him as a hero. The whole village turned out for his funeral...” (p. 301). Not only the twins become famous, but there is a new soldier to continue this fight. This new soldier is LaMamo’s child who is going to be born as he says while dying: ‘I... want you to know I am not scared of dying... Promise me you’ll send for Bintou when things are back to normal... I want my child to grow up here...beneath the hills, like we grew up. ... I know everything will be all right’ (p. 297).

While Iliya’s mentoring empowers Mamo, Lamang’s mentoring of Asabar proves to be destructive. His uncontrolled ambition leads him to be involved in election-rigging since he is appointed the leader of his political party’s Youth Wing. Unfortunately, he ends up in a wheeled chair for his ambition brings nothing but conflict to his community.

It would be sinful to silence female characters’ golden mission in the subjects’ achievement. Among others are Auntie Marina, Zara, Julie and Ladi. Auntie Marina is the mother Mamo and LaMamo lost at birth. She is the caretaker. Nonetheless, she plays a significant role in the riots through her arrest. As for Zara, she is the sweetheart whose presence helps Mamo find out his way as a biographer and revisit his relationship with his father at the end. Julie is one of those girls who are close to politicians from whom reliable information can be found. She is the one who helps Mamo discover who Prince actually is and how Waziri organises his expedition. Ladi, a sister of one Mamo’s former classmate, is the librarian.

Conclusion

A writer is an artist whose inner objective is to change his community positively. Such a change is not possible without people living in this community. This is the golden reason why most third generation writer like Helon Habila revisit characters' portrayal in their fictional in order to refresh African literature. Characters' study in Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* shows that the beauty of a text lies in the intrinsic relationship among all literary elements. Characters are the essentials tool that give life to this interdependence. Then, J. A. Greimas' actantial model is evidence that all characters are interrelated and none of their actions are isolated. According to Greimas, the world itself has a similar structure because all people living in the same community should rely on one another. Social cohesion stems from both their differences and similarities, joys and pains, quarrels and understandings. In contrast with the conventional readers' representation of the villain, for instance, as a hindrance for the protagonists (subjects), this technique illustrates its usefulness for the subjects' determination and resilience to achieve an objective (object). The subjects' desire gives birth both to sympathisers (helpers) who see to it that everything goes well and antagonists (opponents) whose banana peels contribute to the progress of the plot.

The story in *Measuring Time* is similar to human life which is centered on a permanent quest/struggle for a better future. Just as in real life, whenever someone stands against or denounce something, he/she always engages him/herself in a struggle for which he/she got both helpers and opponents. For social cohesion, a struggle must end up with a reconciliation. For this reason, the story has a happy resolution because Keti community has been freed from his oppressors. A new life has begun and his heroes are immortal. However, despite Habila's best endeavors, it is a bit regrettable that female characters are confined to mother, spies and sweetheart roles in the plot.

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