



## Postcolonial Conflict: Colonising and Decolonising Violence in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at discussing the postcolonial conflicts engendered by the imperialist oil process of Nigeria and the postcolonial reaction of nationalist movements. Despite the official independence of Nigeria since October 1, 1960, it is however observed that her economic riches like oil are still controlled and thieved away by the superpowers of Europe. These superpowers work in tandem with the local government to operate this neo-colonial crime. If, vis-à-vis this neo-colonial conspiracy some Nigerians remain supine in fear of military repressions, others have the nationalist courage to use the same colonising instrument of violence against their colonial tormentors for true decolonisation to take shape. This is what postcolonial Nigerian writer Helon Habila depicts in *Oil on Water*. In the text, the author portrays the exploitation of the Nigerian oil by western oil multinationals in connivance with the Federal Nigerian government. This neo-colonial exploitation is faced with the decolonising nationalist movements organised in guerrillas in a view to decolonising themselves and repossessing their hijacked oil dividend. The paper predicated on the postcolonial theory to postulate that the natives are bound to make recourse to nationalist violence to wrench their lives free from the shackles of imperialist and colonialist dominationism. The analyses from the text permit us to infer that in *Oil on Water*, Habila depicts postcolonial conflicts between neo-colonisers and nationalists and encourages the re-colonised post-independent populations to keep their nationalist endeavour on till real freedom is obtained.

**Keywords:** Neo-colonialism, Colonising Violence, decolonising Violence, Economic Malaise and Nationalists.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the coloniser and the colonised has always been ridden by violence since the immemorial colonial encounter. Since the exploration, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the post-Berlin colonial epochs up to the neo-colonial era. European colonisers, in a view to lubricating the route to colonial occupation, have always employed colonial violence. Fanon (1963) corroborates this as he holds: "Colonialism cannot be understood without the possibility of torturing, of violating, or of massacring. Torture is an expression and a means of the occupant-occupied relationship" (p. 35). This suggests that violence is inherent with the dominationist schemes, the exploitative mechanism of colonialism. Arguably, colonial violence is the conditions and processes which physically, psychologically, socially and economically jeopardise the wellbeing of the colonised. In response to the colonial oppression, the colonised subjects grow nationalist. They patriotically support their nation and defend her interests against the foreign oppressors and their local colonial agents who manipulate the State apparatus. This is why "nationalism has been a movement openly declaring its hostility to Western imperialism" (Said 1979, p. 299) and internal colonisation. Violence is dynamically concocted, tailored and schematised by the imperialist engineer to control the socio-political and economic fabrics of the colonised world and its natural riches. This is denounced by Said (1993) in these lines:

Class, political upheavals, shifts in economic patterns and organization; war: all these subjects, for great authors like Cervantes, Shakespeare, Montaigne, as well as for a host of lesser writers, are enfolded within recurrently renewed structures, visions, stabilities, all of them attesting to the abiding dialectical order represented by Europe itself. (p. 47)

This explains the reason why the decolonisation of most formally colonised countries is just in papers; in practice, they remain paradoxically colonised, economically exploited and dominated via the subduing instrument of violence. This has engendered what is termed as postcolonial condition. The concept is used to describe the common plight of the officially freed peoples who paradoxically continue to suffer from the legacy of colonialism. Owing to the incessant socio-economic and political domination from their former colonial masters, such dominated peoples are plunged into economic malaise. Economic malaise is originally relevant to the USA's economic crisis characterised by the stagnation or recession in the 1970s. It is used in this exercise to paint the economic ordeal of the colonised peoples who are deeply exploited by the capitalist powers. This continued colonialist exploitation during the independence period is referred to as neo-colonialism. For WaThiong'o (1993), neo-colonialism is all about the "military and political interference of Western interests in the affairs of African countries with the active co-operation of the ruling regimes in the same countries. . ." (p. 69). Because of this the so-called independent nations have fallen again into the cold hands of colonialism. For the scholar, neo-colonial practices have led to "wider imperialist interests" (p. 69). This is typical of the dystopian colonised world described by Habila in the novel under consideration. In this text, the natives' oil is exploited by oil multinationals, to the detriment of the aboriginals. The latter react through nationalist movements to recuperate their riches and obtain their freedom. For the analyses in this paper, we intent to use the postcolonial theory introduced by Edward Said in 1979 through his seminal work entitled *Orientalism*. It is a body of ideas and concepts used to denounce imperialism, colonialism and all the related socio-political, economic and psychic legacies undergone by the colonised. The paper anchors on postcolonial theory to suggest that when the masses are invaded by colonial forces, they must wrench themselves free from the domineering machinations of imperialism and colonialism through postcolonial nationalism. For the discussions in this work, we will, in the one hand examine the colonising violence perpetrated by the government's military force, mandated by the State (in collaboration with the foreign multinationals), on the other hand we shall discuss the postcolonial reaction to this by the postcolonial guerrillas.

## **2. THE COLONISING VIOLENCE**

Many post-independent nations across the globe are still victimised by the plot schemed against them by their puppet government under the pressure of the former colonising empire. As a result of this, the national riches and opportunities are looted and pirated, the natives and their environment damaged and destroyed. This tragedy is consubstantial with the destruction of the vital socioeconomic domains such as health, market and education. In fact, Habila opens the novel with this destabilising colonial violence orchestrated by the officials of the oil multinationals sent by the European super-powers in connivance with the Federal Nigerian government. Such government selfishly and subserviently plays allegiance to their colonial masters. Following this, the native lands and waters are poisoned with oil pollutants and chemicals which jeopardise the human lives and the biodiversity at large. Habila discloses the criminal effects of such colonial tragedy as follows:

So, yes, there was an accident, a fire. An explosion in the barn with the oil drums. The fire flew on the wind from house to house, and in a few minutes half the town was ablaze. Many people died, including John's father. They say he died trying to save my sister, Boma, and if it wasn't for him, she'd have died. My father was imprisoned. He doesn't smoke anymore since that day. My mother returned to her parents' village, where she still lives. And my sister burned, and my family disintegrated. . ." (p. 1)

The fire which has terribly destroyed people and disintegrated families is the emanation of the oil exploitation. The disintegrated families like Rufus' are pitifully reduced to wretchedness, homelessness, trauma, social scourges such as prostitution, drug addiction, thievery, school dropping etc. It is worth observing that this new imperialism functions like a spiral which ensnares all in its passage, from the poorest to the richest, from the chiefs to the subjects. In this respect, Chief Malabo, the guardian of people's customs, tradition and culture is inveigled and conned into selling his village. Being rather a patriot who opposes siding with the oppressors, he calls "the whole village to a meeting" (p. 42), and overtly denounces colonialist gimmicks in these terms: "Well, they had made an offer, they had offered to buy the whole village, and with the money—and yes, there was a lot of money, more money than any of them had ever imagined—and with the money, they could relocate elsewhere and live a rich life." (p. 43). But he cautions his people against falling into such colonising traps, patriotically arguing that it is "their ancestral land, this was where their fathers and their fathers'

fathers were buried, they'd been born there, they'd grown up there, they were happy there, and though they may not be rich, the land been good to them, they never tacked for anything. What kind of custodians of the lands would they if they sold it off?" (p. 43). In reaction to this, the oil bureaucrats, in collaboration with the local administration tailor a new strategy. They send their troops "patrolling, sometimes openly sending their men to the village take samples of soil and water" (p. 43). And as "the village decided to keep them away by sending out their own patrols over the surrounding river, in canoes, all armed with bows and arrows and clubs and a few guns" (p. 43, Chief Malabo is accused of "supporting the militants and plotting against the federal government and threatening to kidnap oil workers. The list was long." (p. 44). All these unfounded allegations should be interpreted as the colonial machinations aiming at eradicating Chief Malabo who has acted as a deterrent against the imperialist profits. Fanon (1964) states in this regard:

The patriot is arrested and taken to the local judicial police headquarters. He is asked no question for, at this point in the investigation, "we do not know what direction the questioning is to take and the suspect must not suspect that we do not know." The best way is to break down his resistance by using the so-called "conditioning by example" method. (p. 69)

Being thus terrorised by the government's military force, the colonised live in permanent fear, move from place to place, in earnest search for tranquillity. Habila discloses this colonising terror in the lines that follow: "THEY ARE HERE! The soldiers are here! They came out of the sheds and houses and passages, wielding whips and guns, occasionally firing into the air to create more chaos. A man ran out of a hut and came face to face with a soldier. . ." (p.13). This man is so torn by fear that "he raised his hands high in surrender as, in single motion, the soldier reversed his rifle and swung the butt at the man's head. The man fell back into the doorway and the soldier moved on to another target" (p. 13). This, additionally is indicative of the colonising terror aiming at paralysing the natives' reaction against the thievery of their economic wealth, their oil.

It is worth indicating that the village has been rendered empty because of such terrorising violence inflicted upon its native inhabitants by the repressive force of the Nigerian government. The fact that villages are rendered void testifies to the fact that the populations are internally displaced or exiled owing to the militarised atmosphere which has replaced their peaceful brotherhood. This is why, to Rufus' question as whether the natives are happy or not, the answer is: "we'd lived in five different places now, but always we'd had to move. We are looking for a place where we can live in peace. But it is hard. So your question, are we happy? I say how can we be happy when we are mere wanderers without a home?" (p.45). This instability is the result of military violence coupled with the nationalist violence. It is worth indicating that Nigeria incarnates the neo-colonial society which, although officially independent, remains colonised, bearing the hallmark of socio-political and economic violence. For WaThiong'o (1993), such a re-colonised nation is "a repressive machine. Its very being, in its refusal to break with the international and national structures of exploitation, inequality and oppression, gradually isolates it from the people. Its real power base resides not in the people but in imperialism and in the police and the army" (p. 71). Nigeria is thus re-colonised although officially independent since 1960. The Nigerian society sadly is entangled by the European colonising structures, especially the oil multinationals and the local colonising structure which is Nigerian government.

Due to this, in the modern landscape of Nigeria there are signs of military destruction by munitions. In an old independent country wherein one should see ultramodern developments, one still sees the horrible signs of violence, buildings with "big holes through which strong sunlight fell" (p. 9). This is more vividly narrated in these terms:

The Major sat on a field stool, the type made by unfolding the top of the swagger stick, his rifle on the muddy ground by his foot, talking into a radio. Seven men knelt facing him under the trees in the central clearing, their hands tied behind them, all wearing the same abject expression on their faces. They looked dirty, their skin was flaky and reptilian, chalk-white, as if they had been dragged through an acreage of ash. (p.57)

It must be recalled that violence is the colonising method the colonisers use to keep the exploited natives subdued. They contain them in fear and terror in order to process their lands, exploit their natural resources, fauna and flora without their reacting against them. The sad episode continues as follows: "The Major stood up and pointed at the kneeling men with his swagger stick, shaking his head to show his disappointment in them. He hadn't looking in my direction yet. The boy started

crying and held his father tight went the Major went over to them” (p. 57). For the colonisers the natives are just their economic deterrence to be pitilessly and wantonly eliminated, which explains the reason why their military thugs treat them accordingly saying: “You call yourselves freedom fighters? To me you are just crooks and I will keep hunting you down and shooting you like mad dogs. This country is tired of people like you. Sergeant bring the watering cane!” (p. 58). Once the cane containing the oil is brought to the tormenting soldier, it will be heartlessly poured upon the poor colonised knelt down for hours. It should be noted that because of such wild and deeply dehumanising violence unleashed unto the colonised they will be psychically damaged. Rufus, the witness of such violence recounts relevantly that, “I witnessed the stoic and anticipatory posture of the kneeling man. I witnessed the brutal anointing in silence, smelled the reek of petrol hanging in the air, pungent, and I wondered how the men could stand it” (p. 60). This highly and deeply traumatising and dehumanising colonising violence will have as aftermaths mental diseases such as trauma and schizophrenia. Rufus testifies that, “I felt sick and dizzy from the fumes. I had never liked the smell—it brought up memories in me, memories I would rather have kept down” (p.60). This untold tragedy is not just inflicted upon the poor colonised Nigerian people; even the fauna, one of the major economic assets is destroyed alongside. Rufus carries on in this regard:

Behind one of the houses we found a chicken pen with about ten chickens inside all dead and decomposing, the maggots trafficking beneath the feathers. We covered our noses and moved on to the next compound, but it wasn't much different: cooking pots stood open and empty on cold hearths, next to them stood water pots filled with water on whose surface mosquito larvae thickly flourished. It took less than an hour to traverse the little village, going from one deserted household to the next, taking pictures, hoping to meet perhaps one accidental straggler, one survivor to interview. (p. 9)

This testifies to the gravity of the economic consequences of colonial violence with its bleak image of destruction spread everywhere in the colonised milieu. It has emptied it of its human populations and biodiversity. Rufus gives once more this testimony: “The next village was almost a replica of the last: the same empty squat dwellings, the same ripe and flagrant stench, the barrenness, the soil slick and the same indefinable sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above the punctured zinc roof” (p. 10). The killing of humans and animals by the oil toxins and military power exposes the masses to more destabilising poverty given that animals are an important branch of economic riches. To this fauna destruction should be added the flora elimination. Habila adds that, even the mangroves where are concentrated the water riches with its breathtaking sea creatures, the fertility of the soil, the sustainable force of the biodiversity are turned “foul and sulphurous; insects rose from the surface in swarms to settle in a mobile cloud[. . .]. The atmosphere grew heavy with the suspended stench of dead matter” (p. 9). It should be indicated that this huge ecological bankruptcy leads to the economic calamity of the local populations as they can no more gain abundantly from fishery, livestock and gardening. The natural milieu with its pure air and water is so polluted by oil chemicals and arms that “over the black, expressionless water there were no birds or fish or other water creatures—we were alone” (p. 11). The natural symbiotic relationship is replaced by a hotbed of military violence wherein can be seen dead bodies resulting from military violence or water pollution. Rufus carries on his macabre description in these lines:

In the village center we found the communal well. Eager for a drink, I bent under the wet, mossy pivotal beam and peered into the well's blackness, but a rank smell wafted from its hot depths and slapped my face; I reeled away, my head aching from the encounter. Something organic, perhaps human, lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with that unmistakable smell of oil”. (p.10)

This is the result of the imperialist oil process. As oil exploiters do not have any concern for fauna and flora, oil chemicals and pollutants exterminate nature them, decimate humans. This is why, the place is turned so uninviting. When one looks around, one sees a disgusting melange of dead human bodies concatenated with carcasses. The narrator relates: “. . . a dead fowl, a bloated dog belly-up with black birds perching on it, their expressionless eyes blinking rapidly, their sharp beaks savagely cutting into the soft decaying flesh” (pp. 37-38). This shows the desecration of human value and dignity in the colonised world as a result of colonial violence. Some human bodies are even cut up, pieced and spread everywhere. In this respect the narrator discloses: “Once I saw human arm severed at the elbow bobbing away from us, its fingers opening and closing” (p.38). This shows the heartlessness of violence perpetrators who do not have any respect for human value and dignity. Because of this, the



native inhabitants are on the move. In their place, one sees rather, “pipelines flying in all directions, sprouting from the evil-smelling, oil-fecund earth. The pipes crisscrossed and interconnected endlessly all over the eerie field. We walked inland ducking under or hopping over the giant pipes, our shoes and trousers turning black with oil” (p. 38). The implantation of pipelines in the natives’ lands not only unsettles the colonised but also corrodes their sense of ancestral belonging as place has a deep spiritual significance in people’s life. This is what generally balkanises the colonised place and furthermore breeds divisions and fratricide conflicts given that family and ethnic ties and bonds can thaw out when the close family members or ethnic groups are no more together, do not culturally celebrate together. It should be understood that all this occurs to the colonised because of neo-colonial machinations concocted by the capitalist world. Owing to this, the colonised world is economically, mentally and politically affected by “the continuing success of the imperialist project, displaced and dispersed into more modern forms (Spivak 1985, p. 243). Because of this new colonial form “the age of independence, became the era of *coups d’état* whether Western-backed or in patriotic response to internal pressures (WaThiong’o 1993, p. 66).

While some run away from the oil pollutants and the military threat, “pretend to be deaf and dumb and blind”(p. 37), others take up arms and fight courageously the invading colonising force.

### **3. DECOLONISING VIOLENCE**

The above imperialist conspiracy is fortunately fought off by Nigerian nationalists. Nationalists are people who advocate for the socio-political and economic independence of their nation. Driven by postcolonial spirit, they use violence as a means to save their society from “the abasement into which colonialism drives them” (Memmi 1974, p. 61). Emboldened by the patriotic élan to set the natives free, they do not let things “go the way intended by the oppressor” (WaThiong’o 1973, p.71). Following this postcolonial logic, Nigerian nationalists take to arms, use the same argument of force to decolonise themselves from the metropolitan monster and their own Federal Government. As the white colonisers and their black colonisers use violence to pirate away their oil riches which not only plunges them into immiseration but also poisons their health with the oil chemicals and pollutants, they respond with the same degree of violence: kidnapping the colonisers or their family members, asking huge amount of money as ransoms, punishing those who refuse to collaborate with them or betray them. As they have realised that “they have been robbed of all. . .” (Fanon 1963, p. 74), that the oil exploited by European petrodollars does not give them any economic advantage, but, rather, destroys a “huge number of plants, animals, and crops as well as building methods gradually turned the colony into a new place, complete with new diseases, environmental imbalances, and traumatic dislocations for the overpowered natives” (Said 1993, p. 225), nationalists feel that they must urgently react, lest they are overpowered by their heartless invaders. And in their postcolonial tactics, they use the same instrument of violence used by the colonisers to wrench themselves free from the colonising shackles. Secured in the knowledge that, if they give in, they degrade themselves and they are no longer men at all; shame and fear will split up their character and make their inmost selves fall to pieces (Fanon 1963 p.14), some of the colonised overcome their fear, take to arms and face their tormenters and exploiters. This courageous postcolonial action is highlighted by WaThiong’o (1993) in these words:

Fortunately things will never go the way intended by the oppressor for the simple reason that the dominated have always resisted and will always resist. [ . . . ]. In the particular case of Africa, people struggled against the slave trade and slavery; against the colonial invasions and occupations by forces armed with the latest technologies; and today they continue that titanic struggle against neo-colonial encirclement. (p. 54)

So, like these Africans who have always resisted against the oppressive force of imperialism, the Nigerian nationalists must fight against the foreign oil robbers and their local supporters. As underlined above, the post-independence society symbolised in the novel by the Nigerian population, (especially those inhabiting Niger Delta where the oil) is encircled by neo-colonial forces. And, in the novel, they relentlessly maintain their titanic struggle against the neo-imperialist exploitations. The postcolonial crusade in *Oil on Water*, is launched by Nigerian nationalists known as militants operating in four different groups namely: Black Belts of Justice, The Free Delta Army and the AK-47 Freedom Fighters (pp. 34-35). Thus, being politically exploited and economically marginalised in their own lands, the natives are obliged, as holds Said (1993) to create “nationalist identities, and, in the political realm, the creation of associations and parties whose common goal was self-determination

and national independence. [. . .] there was always some form of active resistance” (p. xii). In their nationalist and patriotic pride, the re-colonised should not permit “a handful of Western nations [. . .] dominate various other nations. Hence the experiences of national liberation and even the internal social struggles of many nations might be shaped in a similar way by the fact of their being aimed against the practices of a common enemy” (WaThiong'o 1993, p. 13). In the text, the nationalist movements mainly react against the colonising intruder by kidnapping the colonisers or their family members, terrorising the non-collaborative populations and the traitors. The most illustrative case is the kidnapping of Mrs Isabelle Floode, the spouse of an influential “oil-company worker, British, petroleum engineer, his wife had gone out by herself and she never came back, believed to have been kidnapped by militants” (p. 31). This kidnapping which is preceded by another, “that of a seventy-year-old woman and a three-year-old girl” (p.31) is a nationalist act aiming at restoring the thieved economic riches of Nigeria. This is explained in the lines that follow:

. . .it wasn't even kidnapping; I'd just be collecting payment for all the pain these people caused to me [. . .]. And another point, the money wasn't even coming out of his pocket: the oil company pays the ransom . . .the money came from our oil, oil, so we would be getting back what was ours in the first place. Well, I started to really think. This was the chance of a lifetime. (p. 220)

In their violent postcolonial resistance, the postcolonial nationalists therefore grow heartless like their own colonisers, using the same *modus operandi*, torturing and murdering. If in “terms of the structures of domination, subordination” (WaThiong'o 1993, p. 13) colonialists use new methods of imperialism, signing, renewing treaties and alliances with the subservient local government to economically control the non-industrialised nations, a resistance, a common global experience is emerging in the colonised area to counter these re-colonising schemes (WaThiong'o 1993, p. 13). And this common global anti-colonial experience is the fierce and fearless resistance against the common enemy of the natives. And, in their new postcolonial approach, the Nigerian nationalists are as heartless as their own oppressors. Those who venture into resisting or escaping are shot dead. This is the case of another kidnapped oil official, “a desperate Filipino contractor, perhaps doubtful of ever regaining freedom, had suddenly bolted and attempted to get away in one of the speedboats waiting to take the reporters back to Port Harcourt, but he didn't get far” (p. 51). As he struggles to escape, the violent postcolonial guerrilla, the “militants in black overalls, their faces covered in masks made of green leaves, fired wildly, and afterward there men lay dead on the pebbly beach. One was the Filipino; the other two were the reporters Max Tekena and Peter Olisah” (p. 51).

Having been marginalised and pauperised for long, the exploited Nigerians have noticed that “only violence pays” (Fanon 1963, p. 61), that their “liberation implies the use of all means, and that of force first and foremost” (Fanon 1963, p. 61). Said (1983) buttresses it as he argues: “If power oppresses and controls and manipulates, then everything that resists it is not morally equal to power, is not neutrally and simply a weapon against that power” (p.246). Thus, the nationalists, being committed to the urgent liberation of their nation, use even unethical means to achieve their objective. In this case, they are not only eager to kidnap and torture their white colonisers and internal black colonisers but also terrorise their native fellows who oppose collaborating with them, thus acting as a deterrence to the natives' liberation. These nationalists have understood that to liberate their nation from the chains of neo-colonial domination, “everybody will have to be compromised in the fight for the common good. No one has clean hands; there are no innocents and no onlookers. We all have dirty hands; we are all soiling them in the swamps of our country and in the terrifying emptiness of our brains. Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor” (Fanon, 1963, p. 199). This is why, when a nationalist surprises a man who “was giving away information to the soldiers, he screamed at him and called him a traitor, then he took out his gun and, boom! He shot him and said, throw him into the water for the fish to eat. Just like that” (p. 216). This is indicative of the cruelty of the nationalists' violence. Their plan which is apparently demonic as it suggests that they are bloodthirsty individuals, devoid of every human sense is nonetheless patriotic. They fight against the backdrop of the natives' true liberation. This is shown when for example Rufus, as a journalist interviews one of the nationalist. He reveals the patriotic nature of their insurrection in these lines:

We are not the barbarians the government propagandists say we are. We are for the people. Everything we do is for the people, what will we gain if we terrorize them? I am speaking for myself and my group, of course. I am aware that, out there are criminal elements looting and killing under the guise of freedom fighting, but we are different. Those kind of rebels, they are our enemies. That is

why I am letting you go, so you can write the truth. And be careful, whatever you write, be careful. I am watching you. I have people everywhere.

This proves the patriotic quality of nationalism misconstrued by the population and demonised by the neo-colonial State. The nationalist enlightens once more Rufus on the patriotic necessity of their actions as he argues: "Tell them about the flares you see at night, and the oil on the water. And the soldiers forcing us to escalate the violence every day. Tell them how we are hounded daily in our own land. Where do they want us to go, tell me, where? Tell them we are going nowhere. This land belongs to us. That is the truth, remember that. You can go" (p. 232). So, nationalists have the burning desire to rearrange things in their society turned into pandemonium by neo-colonial forces. It is a world wherein the pauperised natives are bound "to blaspheme, or rob a bank, or join the militants" (p. 95-96), families are torn and reduced to tears and trauma, parents and children lock "themselves up in the toilet when the shooting began. . ." (p. 189), reign "panic and confusion" (p. 205). Conclusively, it is a world of anger as argues Rufus, the protagonist: "I had seen that kind of anger before in many of my friends, people I went to school with; some of them were now in the forest with the fighters, some of them had made millions from ransom money, but a lot of them were dead" (pp. 95-96). This is the pandemonium the nationalists strive to turn into a normal society (of freedom and development) via their nationalism.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

From the above, it is worth noting that "the modern world is a product of both European imperialism and of the resistance waged against it by the African, Asian, and South American peoples" (WaThiong'o 1993, p.4), and that "national liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (Fanon 1963, p. 34). This warrants the reason why in the postcolonial literature and postcolonial theory both born in the colonised terrain, "gradually a vocabulary of concepts of domination and revolt become part of a shared intellectual tradition" (WaThiong'o 1993, p. 13). And it is within the framework of this "shared intellectual tradition" that *Oil on Water* is produced. It denounces the continued socio-political and economic exploitation of the so-called independent nations by the imperialist world, proving that colonial violence (which is one of the worst imperialist artillery) is still in vogue to subdue the officially freed societies and thief away their riches constituting their economic fabric. To this end, Habila, in *Oil in Water* lays bare the exploitative diplomacy the colonising world continues to entertain with the colonised world. The Nigerian oil and its huge economic dividends being dangerously pirated by the European oil businessmen is the trope of the novel. If their oil and lands are thieved manu militari, the natives will have to respond by the same modus operandi to restore their vandalised wealth so as to forge their true decolonisation. By stressing the postcolonial violence used by the colonised on decolonising grounds, Habila predicates that, in the neo-colonial era, violence must be used to stop violence. This is corroborated by WaThiong'o (1981) who illustrates it by the nationalist victory of his own Kenyan fellow compatriots in these terms: "During the Mau Mau war for national independence, the guerrillas set up underground clothing and armament industries in the cities and upon the mountains. People who only the other day were just carpenters, plumbers and bicycle repairers, now turned their skills into manufacturing pistols, rifles and bombs under very difficult conditions. And they had triumphed" (p. 64). And even though victory is not clearly won by the postcolonial Nigerian guerrillas being described in the novel, we should nevertheless admit that such postcolonial nationalism is a significant process of true decolonisation, granted that freedom is a long process for which colonised nations must continue to relentlessly fight.

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