



## FATHERHOOD: A PORTRAYAL OF SINGLE PARENTHOOD IN HELON HABILA'S *MEASURING TIME*

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### Abstract:

Single parenting has become a challenge in the African society today. A single parent could be a male or female who for some reason is having the sole responsibility of taking care of children in the family. There have been various literary studies on single parenting, however, most of these studies have focused on the dilemmas of single mothers. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate the experiences of single fathers. This study examines the portrayal of a father as a single parent in Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*. This was to enable the researcher to identify the effects of single parenting in the selected text and to explore the coping strategies of both the father and the children. The study employed the tripartite model of father involvement to do a textual analysis in order to assess the effectiveness of the protagonist's role as a father. The findings of the study revealed that the cause of the protagonist's single parenthood is widowhood. His fathering styles have both negative and positive impacts on himself as well as the children. The study further discovered that, the father, Lamang, performed his fatherly role of providing the basic necessities of life for his children but could not provide care, love and attention. To cope with their situation, the father involved other family members to take parental responsibility, while the children also sought love, care and attention from family members. The study concludes by encouraging fathers to be fully involved in the care of their children irrespective of the situation, to avoid the risk of waywardness. The traditional role of fathers as breadwinners should be complemented with care, love and attention.

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## 1. Introduction

Fatherhood refers to the process associated with designating specific men as fathers, thereby holding a gendered parental relationship with individual child/ren. It refers to broad institutional structures. Pleck (2010) asserts that fatherhood is used in two different ways in scholarly writing. The first is where researchers use the term fatherhood as a parental status; which can be interpreted in a narrow sense as fertility status, thus being a biological father or not. It can also be interpreted in a broader sense to include men who function as "social fathers" to children who are not their biological offspring, but could be through adoption, stepparent or taking parental responsibility of a child in other ways. Pleck Further asserts that scholars also use "fatherhood" in a second sense to refer to fathers' parenting of their biological or social children. This is conveyed by the term, "fathering". Fathering could mean either to beget a child or to engage in a set of activities around the care of children.

Ideally parents are expected to stay together and to cooperate in the care of children. However, unexpected situations such as divorce, separation, births out of wedlock, death of a spouse and migration could make the burden of parenting be on the resident parent. The single parent is burdened with the demanding duties of parenting. Single parenthood is a phenomenon that has existed as a challenge to child nurturing. (Olaleye & Oladeji 2010 cited in Ekpenyong & Udisi 2016; Stack & Meredith 235).

Single parenting is a situation where there is only one biological parent raising up a child or children. *Collins English Dictionary* defines a single parent as "a person who has a dependent child or dependent children and who is widowed, divorced, or unmarried." It also defines a single-parent family as "a household consisting of at least one dependent child and the mother or father, the other parent being dead or permanently absent." In the same vein, Adelani & Ogunbanwo (2008) quote Politt (1994) in their definition of single-parent family as "a household in which only one parent lives with a child or children." From these definitions it could be deduced that single parenting involves one partner taking full responsibility of the care of children without the other partner's contribution. The affected partner could be male or female.

Single parenting, which almost always involves women have recently increased drastically and it is gaining a global dimension (Ekpenyong & Udisi 2016; Kail & Cavanaugh (2017) and Feldman 2003). According to U.S Census Bureau as cited in Kail & Cavanaugh (2017) roughly 70% of births to American mothers, 40% of births to Latina mothers and 20% of births to European American mothers are to unmarried women. These statistics reveal that single parenting is on ascendency in European countries. In Africa, Clark and Hamplova (2010) did a survey across five countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, -Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Their findings revealed that, there is the likelihood of women becoming single mothers at the age of 45 through divorce, death or premarital birth. However, some single parents are men. Dacy &

Travers (2004), estimate that 12% of all single parents are fathers most of who are divorced.

In Africa, single parenting is one of the issues that places challenges on parents, children and the society at large. Single parent-families are likely to face economic, psychological, educational and health challenges. Researchers have examined the effects of single parenting and have concluded that single parenting has adverse effects on the victims. Single parenting can lead to economic hardships, loss of parental support and supervision, life stress and instability, emotional and psychological effects and effects on psychosexual development of children (Abudu and Fuseini 2013; Cavanaugh & Formby 2012; Ekpeyong and Udisi 2016; Kerubo & Kibera 2019; Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke 2014; Park 2008).

Single parenting reflects in literary texts of both male and female African writers, such as Ama Darko's *The Housemaid* (1998), Binwell Sinyanwe's, *A Cowrie of Hope* (2000), Gracy Ukala's *Broken Bond* (2001), Tendai Huchu's *A Hairdresser of Harare* (2006), Nadifa Mohammed's *Orchard of Lost Souls* (2014), and Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007), the text selected for this study. The parents in the texts mentioned, are portrayed as men or women taking sole responsibility of their children for various reasons. In Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (MT), the single parent is a father. The emphasis of this study therefore is on the male single parent.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the tripartite theory of fathering developed by Lamb, Pleck, Charnou and Levine in 1998. According to Palkovitz and Hull (2018), it is a conceptual model of father involvement. Lamb et al posited three distinct components of fathering, which are accessibility, engagement and responsibility. This is a tripartite model that scholars apply in the treatment of father – child relationship hence its suitability for the analysis of fathering in *Measuring Time*.

Accessibility is a father's presence and availability to the child, irrespective of the nature or extent of interaction between father and child. It refers to times when a parent is available for interaction with the child. It captures the extent to which the father is both physically and psychologically available to his child. Engagement refers to a father's experience of direct contact and shared interactions with his child in the form of care taking, play or leisure. Responsibility denotes a father's understanding and meeting of his child's needs, including the provision of economic resources to the child and the planning and organizing of children's lives. Thus, taking ultimate responsibility for ensuring the child's welfare in terms of clothes, food and shelter (Pleck, 2010)

Initially when studies on father involvement appeared in the academic literature, researchers focused on the effects of fathers' physical presence or absences in the family environment (Cia 2009) as cited in Santis and Barham (2017). Father involvement now comprises the number of hours fathers spend directly interacting with their children and being accessible to their children, as well as fathers' investment in the parental role and associated responsibilities. Habib (2012) opines that fathers have a role to play in the

upbringing of their children. These roles if adhered to will have an impact on the children

### 3. Synopsis of Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*

*Measuring Time* is Helon Habila's second novel which tells a story of the struggles and survival in a small Nigerian village called Ketu. It is narrated through the story of the twin brothers, Mamo and LaMamo. They lost their mother in childbirth and had to live with their widowed father, Lamang. Their father pays less attention to them. They are therefore united in hatred towards their father. As a form of revenge, they put scorpions in his shoes and later under his pillow.

They decide to run away and join the army but Mamo's ill-health prevents him from embarking on the journey. LaMamo, the youngest, embarks on the journey together with their cousin, Asabar, who later returns home after a month. LaMamo is recruited in the army and fights in Chad, Mali and Liberia. The twins for many years could only communicate through letters.

Mamo becomes a school teacher in the community school headed by his uncle, Iliya, and later becomes a local historian. Their father, Lamang, is a wealthy businessman who later becomes a politician. He is bent on carving out for himself prestige in his political career. He plans to bring water to the village through a process called "reverse Osmosis". He aspires to be the chairman of his party, but he loses the election. He becomes frustrated after the election; he is arrested for indulgence in an attempt to rig the election. He suffers from a stroke after his release and dies as a result.

LaMamo comes back to fight for the freedom of his people but dies in the course. As stated in the blurb, *Measuring Time* is a story of recent history of Nigeria narrated through the eyes of a single family.

#### 3.1 An Involvement Appraisal of Fatherhood

*Measuring Time* depicts Lamang's single parenthood as widowed-single parenting. His wife, Tabita, the mother of the twins dies fifteen months after her wedding. She dies at childbirth without knowing she had given birth to twins. Lamang, the husband had been waiting anxiously in the next room to receive the news of his wife's safe delivery. Unfortunately, he is disappointed by the death of her wife after delivery. The cries of the babies move him to the place. The narrator says:

*"The shrill cries of the babies above the rain and thunder brought Lamang from the next room, where he had been pacing, waiting. He stood at the entrance, his eyes taking in his wife's sprawled motionless figure on the bed, the petrified midwife whispering, 'She is dead, she is dead.' And the twins in Auntie Marina's hands... With one last look at the sweaty, still figure on the bed, he pushed open the door and walked out into the rain."* (MT, p. 15)

This shows that Lamang could not stand the sight of her dead wife, hence he moves away from the scene. Tabita was a very beautiful but sickly person in Keti. She was born to a wealthy man who thought of the happiness of her daughter. He marries her off to Lamang, a popular young man who every young woman sought to marry. To ensure her daughter's happiness he gives Lamang various gifts including cattle. Lamang's marriage to Tabitha makes him a rich person, especially when five months after the marriage, his father -in- law dies leaving him all his property.

The twins are sent to Lamang's relatives, Uncle Illiya and his wife, Amina. They take good care of the children. The twins develop an affection for them as their parents. Three years later, Lamang picks the children from his brother. This makes them develop hatred for their father.

### 3.2 Engagement

A father's engagement with his children is an essential element in father-child relationship. Lamang, the single father is portrayed as indifferent to his children. He leaves them in the care of Auntie Marina, who had been staying with him after the breakup of her marriage, and the widows who occasionally come to help in the housework. Lamang does not marry again but he flirts with the widows. The children grow up with the notion that their father does not care about them. It is expected that fathers, apart from being breadwinners, are to be engaged with their children. The expectations of fathers today are to be emotionally connected to their children, be involved in their lives, more egalitarian in their gender role expectations and more willing to be principal provider of care for their children. (Doherty et. al 1998), cited in Eggebeen, Knoester & McDaniel (2013). The twins' hatred for their father stems from his negligence of duty as a father to show them the care they deserve. Consequently, they plan to run away from home without informing anyone. The narrator says:

*"Saying goodbye to their father was not a part of their plan. By now the distance between the twins and their father was at its farthest, and because of that, they realized that there was really nothing they could do to hurt him."* (MT, p. 48)

Unfortunately, Mamo who has a sickle cell anemia goes into crises at their point of transit. He had to return home. It was a week after Mamo's return, that Lamang now asks him where they thought they were going. Mamo explains that they *"wanted to travel ... by boat ... on the Niger, like Mungo Park ... but in the opposite direction, from Bussa up to Bamako, then by land to Timbuktu"* (MT, p. 57).

Lamang is not concerned about the safety of the boys but his self-image. He rather thinks of what people would have said about him if they had died out there. Ironically, he thinks of how people would have blamed him for not caring for them. In anger, Lamang asks *"is there anything I haven't provided for you and your brother?"* Mamo answers: *"We have everything, except your love"* (MT, p. 38). Mamo realizes that his father is not concerned about his son's life. He therefore hides from his father all the letters that his brother writes to him. The narrator says, *"Mamo did not show his father the letter. As far*

*as he was concerned, his father had not shown any sign that his son's absence was a cause of pain to him"* (MT, p. 68).

Lamang's lack of interest in his children's affairs is further exhibited when Mamo writes an essay on the local history of Keti which is showcased by Pastor Mela. Lamang is engrossed in his political activities and neglects his parental responsibility and care. While everyone including Uncle Iliya and the editor, encourages Mamo on his writing career, his father does not. Uncle Iliya upon reading the essay says:

*"No one in this village has done this before. This is great. You have put us in the international map. Now you have to go on and write a book. 'We'll make a copy and put it on our notice board. I'll also send a copy to the local government chairman and to the Mai's palace. This will show them the calibre of teachers we have here, and if they are smart, they will see how important education is to the village"* (MT, p. 160).

Uncle Iliya encourages Mamo to continue writing. Meanwhile, when Mamo shows the essay to his father, Lamang, he only flips through the pages and puts it on the table, claiming that he would later look at it. He does not have time to interact with his son nor to acknowledge his son's achievement.

Finally, when Lamang is down with stroke and he is dying gradually, Mamo shows his father the kind of love and care that their father could not give them. He often has to carry him to his room and lay him on his bed. Mamo now had to write his father's letters to his business partners and his former party colleagues. For the first time, Lamang compliments his son. Mamo confesses about the letter he wrote to the police, but his father relieves him of his guilt, informing him of the letter in his custody. Mamo now releases his brother's letters to his father who is also surprised as he sees the dates on the letters. There is a reconciliation between father and son. Unfortunately, Lamang dies the next morning.

### **3.3 Accessibility**

Accessibility is another major fathering principle that fathers need to adhere to. A father's presence and availability are essential to the proper development of his children. Lamang's fathering is synonymous to an absent landlord. He is not available to his children. He travels frequently so his sons do not see him to discuss issues. The narrator says:

*"He only spent about 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."* (MT, p. 48)

If a father is not able to distinguish between his non- identical twins, it tells of the frequency of his stay at home with the children. There are times when Lamang is at

home but would not be accessible to his children. He is either with the widows or his party members while Mamo alone will be in his room.

### 3.4 Responsibility

Lamang performs the traditional father role of being the breadwinner though he does not show much interest in his children. He picks the twins up from his brother when they are only three years. Due to his busy schedule, he ensures that there is somebody to take care of them. In the following lines, it is seen that, "*Lamang, for his part never took much interest in his children; he left them in the care of their aunt Marina*" (MT, p. 16). Auntie Marina, therefore, plays a motherly role in the lives of the children. She had a duty of making them quiet when their father needed peace, to wake them up when they overslept and to make them sleep when they stayed up late. They are provided their own room. Lamang provides his children the basic necessities of life – food, clothing and shelter.

Furthermore, at age four, Mamo was discovered to have sickle cell. Lamang played his fatherly role of meeting his children's needs. He brought into their home, a medical doctor, Dr. Shangle, to take care of Mamo. This is seen in the following lines:

*"The door opened and my father came in, there was a man with him- he was a real doctor, not the village quack, Dr. Shangle- he had a stethoscope around his neck. He came and put his hand on my forehead. I shrunk away. He smiled. He lifted my eyelids and peered into my eyes and then he patted my cheek. "You will be fine," he said and rejoined my father by the door."* (MT, p. 18)

Lamang discusses with the doctor on how best they could handle his son's situation. The doctor's explanation of the disease encourages Auntie Marina to teach Mamo on how best to live with it. It is also evident that while Mamo was in the university, he came home only when he needed money for his medicine. These testify that, Lamang provided healthcare for his son.

To further prove his responsiveness of the basic needs of his children, he angrily asks Mamo after his return from the attempted journey if they lacked anything in the house. He says: "*Tell me, is there anything that you lack in this house? Is there anything I haven't provided for you and your brother? Then Mamo replies, we have everything except your love*" (MT 58). Mamo's reply proves that Lamang is performing his fatherly roles of providing the basic needs of his children.

### 3.5 Parenting Styles and Effects of Single Parenting in *Measuring Time*

The effects of single parenting could depend on the parenting style adopted by the single parent. Parenting can be described in terms of two general dimensions. The first is the degree of warmth and responsiveness towards children. Parents who are often warm and affectionate respond to the emotional needs and spend considerable time with their children. On the other hand, there are parents who are relatively uninvolved with their children and sometimes even hostile towards them. These parents seem to

focus on their own needs and interest rather than on those of their children. The second dimension involves control. Dictatorial parents try to regulate every facet of their children's lives. Other parents also exert little or no control over their children, so the children do what they like, without asking permission from parents. Kail & Cavanaugh (2017) quote (Baumrind 1975, 1991) as stating that, the combination of the dimensions of warmth and control produce four prototype styles of parenting. They are, authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and uninvolved parenting.

Authoritarian parenting style combines high control with little warmth. Such parents lay down rules and expect them to be followed without discussion. Authoritative parenting style combines a fair degree of parental control with being warm and responsive to children. These parents explain rules and encourage discussion. Permissive parenting style offers warmth and care but little control. Parents in this category generally accept their children's behaviour and punish them infrequently. Uninvolved parenting style provides neither warmth nor control. These parents provide for their children's basic physical and emotional needs but little else. They minimize the amount of time spent with their children and avoid becoming emotionally involved with them.

In the text, Lamang appears to demonstrate uninvolved parenting style which leads to some negative effects. The role of fathers in shaping the lives of their children is very important. Jeffrey and Brown (2003 p.44) believe that *"a father's unique interaction is critical to balanced social and emotional development in a child."* A child whose father is physically present but emotionally detached is like being fatherless. Lamang's inattention to his twins has a behavioural effect on them. They are recalcitrant and morally deviant though Auntie Marina teaches them good morals. According to Whitehead (1997), a survey by the National Center for Health Statistics found that children in single-parent families are two to three times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioural problems. These effects are exhibited in the twins.

The twins conspire and poison the old witch's dog and rub the rheum from its eyes into their own, thinking that they will be able to see ghosts. Their attempts become futile. They are rather tortured through nightmares. In addition, Mamo has eye infection and LaMamo falls from a tree and has a fracture on his left wrist. Through all these pains, they never confessed their deed. Their behaviour can be attributed to Lamang's non engagement with his sons. If he had, their behaviour could have been better.

As a result, the children did not have any emotional attachment for their father. Therefore, in all the letters that LaMamo wrote to his brother while he was away, he never asked of his father. Mamo's hatred for his father intensifies. The father/son relationship is marred by the father's lack of interest in his son's affairs. Mamo repeatedly says that his father does not care. Mamo plans to frustrate his father by writing a letter to the Keti Police Commander about the intent of his father and his cousin to rig the election. He gives the letter to a young boy who takes it to the policeman behind the counter. The police attack Asabar and his colleagues, two people are killed. Asabar is shot but he survives in the hospital and Lamang is detained in the



police cells. Mamo expresses his hatred for his father when he confesses to Zara, his lover, *"Once I hated him so much, I could have killed him. Now I feel sorry for him"* (MT, p. 180). This exhibits the destructive effect of a father's negligence.

Another effect of Lamang's single parenting attitude leads to loneliness on the part of Mamo. Lamang does not provide the companionship that Mamo needs after his brother travels. This makes him miss his brother whom he was much attached to. His brother promised to write to him but no letter had yet arrived. *"He missed the letter even more now that he didn't have the school library to ease his loneliness"* (MT, p. 66). His father also seems to be much closer to Asabar, and this makes him feel jealous and lonelier. He once witnesses a scene that makes him feel jealous and neglected. The narrator states:

*"Mamo, returning from work, decided to go straight to his room to escape the noise. His father was in the living room, talking to Asabar- they were standing in the centre of the room, their heads close together, whispering. Lamang had one hand on Asabar's shoulder and they looked so close, so intimate, that Mamo couldn't help feeling a twinge of jealousy as he thought that if things had been different between him and his father, he would have been the one standing there, with his father confiding in him."* (MT, p. 153).

Furthermore, Lamang's negligence has an effect on the children's education. The twins did not receive the necessary attention they needed from their father. Though LaMamo had supposedly completed Senior High School, his letters to his brother were full of grammatical errors. The narrator states that, *"LaMamo's letter finally arrived. It was full of disconnected ideas and bad grammar"* (MT, p. 66). This can be attributed to their father's inattention to their studies while they were young.

Lamang's negligence is further heightened when Mamo gains admission into the State University to study a degree in History. He stays in the school even when they are on vacation. Parents came to pick their wards home but Lamang never bothered. So, Mamo and other stragglers stayed back in their hostels. During an examination period, Mamo had one of his severest crises, he therefore had to be brought home that night in a chartered taxi. The students did not inform the exams office of his condition, neither did Lamang also officially inform the school. Subsequently, he was withdrawn from the University. If Lamang had performed his fatherly role well, this would not have happened.

The father is not exempted from the effects of his parenting style. He reaps the effect in the form of embarrassment as a result of his children's deviant behaviours. In one instant, when Lamang is with the widows, Mamo comes out from his room and passes by them. The women make endearing comments about him and he smiles politely in response. While outside he overhears his father saying, *"His brother is my spitting image, taller, strong. He is right now in that army, abroad, a fine young man not like his brother...weak... too weak"* (MT, p. 78). He does not take kindly to his father's words, he replies unmannerly. *"I am actually taller than LaMamo.' The words came painfully, a ball of air raking his chest. He was facing his father defiantly, unblinking. 'He is five-nine, and I am five-eleven.'"* Lamang is surprised at his son's behavior. *"He turned to the women and*

*laughed out loud and long, as if trying to cover his son's lapse in manners"* (MT, p. 78). Lamang has not had enough time to train his children, so he reaps the effect in a form of disgrace and embarrassment.

Another effect on the father is seen in the hatred the children develop for him. They see him as different from his brother, Iliya. They dislike his questionable behaviour. They grow up and hear stories of their father's maltreatment of their mother and their hatred for their father heightens. They decide to make him pay as the narrator says:

*"They had decided long time ago to make life hard for their father. He had broken their mother's heart, and though the twins had not been born then, some women in the village still hum the song, popular many years ago, about Lamang's philandering before and after he had married their mother."* (MT, p. 13).

Their hatred for their father is manifested in many ways. They drop a scorpion into his shoe. Lamang's foot swells and forces him to stay home for a week. Sometimes, they misplace his car keys so that he cannot go out. They further put another scorpion under his pillow but fortunately, he escapes from the bite. They even plan of poisoning their father but later change their minds.

In spite of the negative effects discussed, there is however a positive impact on their situation. Feldman (2003) asserts that, the impact of living in a single-parent family is not invariably negative or positive. He further contends that, *"the ultimate consequences for children depend on a variety of factors that accompany single parenthood such as economic status of the family, the amount of time that the parent is able to spend with the child and the degree of stress in the household"* (p. 370). In this family under study, they are not economically handicapped. Lamang is a successful businessman and a politician and so he does not have time with his children. The situation of the twins toughens them to struggle for a better future for themselves. They mature early. Though their father is unconcerned, they are able to take decisions on their own future. LaMamo survives in the army in spite of all the challenges; Mamo ends up as a local historian who is employed to write a biography of the Mai.

Lamang can however not be fully blamed on his uncaring attitude since societal expectations also dictate fathers' behaviour. African tradition has stereotypical roles for mothers and fathers. It is assumed that the role of women is to cook, clean up and look after babies while fathers play remote role which is characterized by little interest in children. Fathers however are expected to assume the provider role. This could account for Lamang's uncaring attitude.

### **3.6 Coping Strategies of the Single-parent Family**

Single parenting with its numerous effects can be successfully managed depending on how the victims react to it. In *Measuring Time*, both the father and the children adopt some coping strategies to lessen the negative effects. Lamang, the father on his part, gives the twins to his brother, Uncle Iliya, and his wife, Auntie Amina, to give them the

needed care as babies. This lessens his burden of having to take care of the babies without the needed nourishment. The children are well catered for by the couple, so the children believed that they were their parents. The narrator says:

*"The twins stayed with their uncle Iliya for the first three years of their lives believing him to be their father, his wife their mother, and their cousin Asabar whose meals they shared, their brother"* (MT, p.16)

It is after three years that Lamang picks up the twins. Though he is not able to take full care of them, he ensures that there is someone available. He leaves the twins in the care of Auntie Marina who also does her part as a surrogate mother. She trains them up in a Christian way. Though the twins do not fully adhere to her Christian principles, yet they are comfortable with her. Mamo thinks that her stories kept him alive. This is evident in his imagination:

*"He imagined the stories insinuating themselves into his veins, flushing out the sickle-shaped, haemoglobin - deficient red cells that clogged the nodes in his veins and caused his joints to swell painfully. It was the stories and not the folic acid tablets that he swallowed daily, or the green vegetables and liver that were staples in his sickler's diet, or the special care not to be bitten by mosquitoes; it was his Aunt's stories slowly working their magic in his veins, keeping him alive."* (MT, p. 19)

Mamo now thinks that his aunt's stories are a source of cure to his ailment, he is inspired by her aunt's presence.

One other coping strategy of Lamang was to engage himself in his business and politics so that he would not have time to brood over his wife's death, which could eventually make him moody. He gathers himself up as a man and faces his challenges. It is through hard work that he is able to provide economic support for his family.

Apart from the father, the children also adopt some strategies to alleviate them of their challenges. They plan to run away from home to avoid their father. One aspiration of the twins was to become famous as soldiers. So, when they see an advertisement of recruitment in the army, in a hidden newspaper their father brought home, they decide to run away and join the army in the state capital. LaMamo is successfully recruited in the army and Mamo who is not able to go because of ill-health later enrolls in the university. Upon his withdrawal, he later finds a job to relieve him of boredom and loneliness.

Another way by which the twins reacted to their situation was the development of love for Auntie Marina. The twins especially Mamo had love and affection for Auntie Marina. They see her as their real mother and she also reciprocates the love. Mamo sees her as his saviour when he says:

*"Auntie Marina saved me from early death, she taught me how to live with it, how to deride it even. She did this in a very simple way. She was a magician, a witch with words."*

*she could conjure up mountains and undersea kingdoms with words. I stayed alive from day to day just to hear her next story. She was Scheherazade, I was the king, but she told stories to save my life, not hers- at least that was how I saw her."* (MT, p. 18)

This is a woman who is always available to give them care, hence their love. Mamo becomes attached to her that he follows her to the church to watch drama rehearsals. Their love for Auntie Marina relieves them from the challenges with their father.

Furthermore, Lamang's non-interactive attitude drives Mamo to have an intimate relationship with Uncle Iliya. He turns to his uncle to discuss pertinent issues with him. He craves to his uncle as a father who he discusses issues concerning his future. His uncle encourages him to take up a job as a history teacher in the community school. When Mamo is faced with the challenge of writing a biography of the Mai, he discusses it with his uncle who in turn gives him a sense of direction. He faces some challenges with the Waziri and he goes to the uncle for advice. Mamo finds in his uncle a substitute for his father.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study has examined the male single parent in Helon Habila's *Measuring Time*. It identified that the cause of Lamang's single parenthood is the death of his wife during childbirth. He becomes a widower with the responsibility of taking care of twins. Lamang's uninvolved parenting style has both negative and positive effects on the children and himself. The negative effects on the children include, deviant behaviors, emotional effect, loneliness and unsuccessful education. However, the twins become independent in the early stages of their lives. They are able to take good decisions about their future. Lamang also encounters disgrace and hatred from his children but he is successful in his business. These effects support the notion that, living in a single-parent family does not automatically guarantee a successful or unsuccessful future. It depends on how individuals react to their situations. It could be said that, while single parenting is not the best, it could have some positive effects. The children in this context were successful to an extent.

Assessing Lamang's single parenting through the tripartite model of father involvement, it is realized that, he does not fully engage his sons neither is he accessible to the children, hence, their deviant behaviours. He however provides his children the basic necessities of life. It is worth concluding that, provision of basic needs is not sufficient in fathering, but most importantly care, love and attention. Fathers are encouraged to be fully involved in child care through the complete process of accessibility, engagement and responsibility.

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