AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF SUBJECTIVITY IN HELOM HABILA’S

OIL ON WATER AND KAINÉ AGARY’S YELLOW-YELLOW

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late parents, Aisha and Adamu, and to my foster parents, Salihu and Hussaina: may their souls rest in perfect peace. To my family: wives Mariya Ladan Idris, and Amal Abubakar; my beloved sons, Arafat Salihu, Muhammad; daughters, Ummu-Aimana, Maryam, Aisha, and Rukayya. May this work inspire them in their intellectual growth.
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Back home, I am beholden to my employer, Bauchi State University, Gadau, Nigeria (BASUG), which granted me a scholarship and support, making this programme possible. I especially acknowledge the effort, support, and inspiration of my Dean, Prof. Sadiya Muhammad. My special gratitude goes to my brother, Shehu Hamisu Abubakar and my colleagues at the Department of Literature for their encouragement and moral support. Finally, I may never find the words to express
my gratitude to my family for their steadfast love, patience, prayers, and forgiving acceptance of my prolonged absences from home in my search for education, knowledge and understanding.
ABSTRACT

The objective and impetus of this study is to investigate the representations of postcolonial subjectivity and the portrayal of ecological devastation in Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* and Kaine Agary’s *Yellow- Yellow*. Both texts succinctly capture the exploitation and struggles of the inhabitants of the oil rich Niger Delta. They also portray the causes and consequences of the characters’ fight against these injustices. This exercise has sought to study ecological destruction and how it has influenced the characters in the two texts. The study also has interrogated the manner in which the exploitation of oil by multinational oil companies has affected the subjects and natural settings, and how this has led to the displacement and disenfranchisement of the characters out of homes and natural resources. The characters in the texts are marginalised and resort to violence against the government and the multinational corporations as an expression of disaffection and to create an avenue through which they can alleviate themselves from political disenfranchisement to economic emancipation, environmental development, and the protection of their cultural values. Employing the postcolonial theory and an ecocritical approach, the study has addressed itself to the various forms of subjectivity and ecological issues raised in the texts. It has adopted a qualitative research methodology employing the close textual analysis technique to interpret the primary texts. Library materials, articles and journals have been used optimally to interpret the data acquired from the primary texts in a bid to meet research objectives. The findings of this research show that the exploration of oil has far-reaching consequences on the human social- cultural fabric, whilst, on the other hand, oil spillages have devastating effects on human, animal, and aquatic life. The study concludes that the forces of subjectivities are responsible for the denial of fundamental human rights and the collapse of infrastructure in the Niger Delta region. The study, therefore, has recommended that further research be undertaken on texts that show the consequential destruction of species, impact on life and the decadence of culture within the region.
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### OPERATIONAL TERMS

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agency</strong></td>
<td>The act of resisting against political control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anthropocentric</strong></td>
<td>Human self-centeredness to natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biodiversity</strong></td>
<td>The different forms of life in the Niger Delta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecocriticism</strong></td>
<td>The theory of literary discourse that is earth centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecolit</strong></td>
<td>An expert in Ecocritism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hegemony</strong></td>
<td>The way multinational exert external control on the Niger Delta people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hybridity</strong></td>
<td>The combination of two cultures; local and foreign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subaltern</strong></td>
<td>People who stand against control and speak for their freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subjectivity</strong></td>
<td>The means of being controlled by a system, culture, or politics</td>
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The world is caught up in a wave of cultural, economic, and ecological interdependence. This interdependence is unequal and this dissonance quite naturally results in even more complexities. There is, therefore, a clarion call to address the troubles that face our world. One of the direst predicaments is the widespread and seemingly relentless destruction of the environment. While the United Nations lists environmental sustainability as one of its Millennium Development Goals, achieving this objective has not been possible not until the quandary of environmental degradation is dealt with. The reality, therefore, is that environmental sustainability is far from being attained. This should not, however, be construed to be the tolling of the death knell, but should serve to highlight the urgency with which environmental concerns must be addressed.

Rachel Carson in a narrative poem “A Fable for Tomorrow” avers that the American environment and its ecological changes marked the beginning of environmentalism and green studies (10). The poem suggests that in the past, the American environment was harmonious and pastoral until industrialization came in and wreaked havoc with the ecology, sweeping lives and livelihoods away with its pollutants. This does not negate the fact that other parts of the world too engaged in the environmental issues in their own ways and with the same results as depicted in regional literature; what it serves, instead, to best highlight the anxiety and ambiguities of migrations, to conquer the ‘Brave New Worlds’, to expand the empire, colony building and the resultant exploitation of the other lands and the dispossess of the aboriginals. This poem is an example of how literary writers
have attempted to interrogate the question of environmental destruction from a fictional perspective.

The enormous demand for crude oil to fuel Europe and America’s rapid industrialisation led to drilling of oil in other places. Some colonial masters during this 18th century industrial era, did exploit oil reserves within their respective colonies with impunity. Nigeria, being one of Great Britain’s colonies, was found to have rich oil deposits along its coastline. The consequent exploitation of the Niger delta oil deposits led to a massive displacement of the inhabitants of that area, a miscalculation whose effects would have far reaching implications for generations to follow. Before the exploitation of oil commenced, the chief occupational activities of Niger delta inhabitants included fishing, farming and harvesting salt. Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa reiterates that: “Fishing and salt boiling were natural occupations of the salt-water delta zone, and farming, along with fishing, in the freshwater region. But communal hunting seems to have served as a means of adding meat as variety to a fish diet. However, oil drilling has altered this” (191). The oil industry has had a profound impact and has contributed greatly to the destruction of the environment globally. One of the most disastrous environmental catastrophes ensuing directly from oil drilling activities and their resultant risks was witnessed in the Nowruz oil fields during the Gulf war. Rinkesh Kukreja estimates that between 240 and 336 million gallons of crude oil flowed into the Persian Gulf during that period.

The two Mexican gulf coasts cataclysms which occurred on 3rd June 1979 to 23 March, 1980 on the Ixtoc 1 rig and the April 20, 2010 catastrophe within the BP- operated Macondo prospect, onboard the Deepwater Horizon oil rig are
memorable and identical oil spill disasters. The former came about when the Sedco 135 drilling tower collapsed following a fire in the rig, spewing some 3 million barrels - 130,000,000 US gallons of oil. The latter took place in similar fashion with the rig consequently sinking on April 22nd and disgorging some 4.9 million barrels - 210,000,000 US gallons into the sea. In 2010 alone, there were six oil spills in the United States of America. Outside of the United States, oil spills have occurred in Canada, France, United Kingdom, China, and Nigeria (np).

Oil exploration and related environmental degradation in Africa is not a new phenomenon, but that goes back to the colonial era. Oil was discovered in Nigeria in 1953 and drilling in earnest begun in 1956 in the Oloibiri area of Bayelsa State (Joe, 199). Nigeria and oil, therefore, share an uncanny history because oil is entwined with the nation’s colonization and its consequent nationalistic and decolonizing processes. To appreciate the effect on the environment and impact on the people, an investigation of the ‘postcolonial’ legacies of oil in Nigeria is crucial. This research sought to examine the two selected texts to determine their treatment, representation and interrogation of oil drilling and its consequences with the aim of testing the hypothesis that the aforementioned consequences have a critical link to postcolonialism. Alan Lawson points out that “post colonialism is a politically motivated historical-analytical movement (which) engages with, resists and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural-political, pedagogical, discursive and textual domains” (153-9).

The majority of inhabitants of the oil rich Niger Delta region live in abject poverty and long-lasting squalor despite the abundance of natural wealth around them. To these people, oil is more of a curse than a blessing. The
exploration and exploitation of oil opened a Pandora’s Box of political, ecological, and social conditions that cursed the region with a plague of human and environmental decadence of epic proportions. Prior to the discovery and exploration of oil and natural gas resources in the area, life was simple with the people’s mainstay primarily being fishing and farming. The government, whose principal responsibility is the well-being and welfare of its citizens, has failed in its mandate. There is a chronic dearth of state institutions such as administrative and security structures, schools, health care facilities, churches, and other social amenities. This unfortunate failure by the administration to imprint its presence in the region is a missed opportunity to inject the ideology of compliance into the minds of its citizens - which is how governments avert civil strife.

In an essay titled “Ideological States Apparatuses”, Louis Althusser suggests that societal mechanisms, such as civil institutions, must be put in place to create obedient and compliant citizens. If his assertion is correct, then Althusser’s proposal could be applied to the situation in the Niger Delta. Nevertheless, for tangible results to be achieved, the government and related stakeholders must recognize the importance, and invest in the interests of the public. In the selected texts, the government chooses to (ab)use military might to force the citizenry to compliance. However, this, as Althusser points out, is bound to fail since: “Coercion or force is counterproductive and breaks the strain of society. One tacitly learns the practices of obedience to authority, for example, in church, school, at home, in sports teams etc., a dominant social order would not survive if it relied only on force” (qtd in Norton Anthology, 1477).
It is, therefore, very important to explore other means through which the
government and multinationals should endeavour in order to create an acquiescent
populace. This study has examined how the characters in the texts have been
subjected to abject poverty manifesting into societal ills such as militancy,
kidnapping and pipeline vandalism.

Jeanne Kay declares that “nature is God’s tool of reward and punishment,
and its beneficence depends on human morality” (214). The verdict here is that
man’s attitude, handling and exploitation of nature can either result in rewards or
ominous repercussions that will negatively impact human beings, flora, fauna
and the environment. The (ab)use of resources, as represented by Kay, calls for
a decisive scrutiny of environmental devastation and the question of social
injustices. This is achievable through ecocriticism and so, in order to validate the
assumptions and objectives of the study, this researcher explored an ecocritical
reading of the selected texts.

Literature is the society’s mirror; it reflects the extent to which human
beings have damaged their environment in a thoughtless and unbridled quest for
survival and maximization of profits. It does not stop there, it goes on to suggest
solutions to human and ecological problems. Available literature calls for checks
and balances on how human beings treat and utilize natural resources, by telling
and retelling stories that change human perceptions and whose relationship with
nature is touching especially on practices that have an adverse effect on the
environment and consequently on humanity.

In her speech at World Forum, Lille 2008 - VO, Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan
environmentalist, said: “The biblical narrative of man having dominion over the
earth has prompt misconceptions - {By this she meant that ‘dominion’ does not equate the right to destroy, emphasis mine} - Man is a custodian over the blessings of the earth” (YouTube). In *The Challenge for Africa*, Maathai said that whereas the United nations agreed on eight basic issues as part of the millennium development goals (MDGs) to be met by 2015, her personal emphasis on the seventh issue; ‘to ensure environmental sustainability’. This suggests a concern to be met which requires the commitment of the policy makers and Non-governmental Organisation. She said:

Achieving each of the eight MDGs depends heavily on healthy ecosystems, but this fact is often overlooked, and the seventh MDG has not received as much attention as the others. In my view, however, it is the most important, and all the other goals should be organized around it. What happens to the ecosystem affects everything else (239-40).

This study is not in itself an examination of the harm done to the environment by oil, its exploitation and by products. It is, rather, an analysis of how the concerns of environmentalists, like Maathai and others, find expression through fictional texts such as these works by Habila and Agary. The rationale for this is based on the premise that literature being the peoples’ voice should echo both their, and the environmentalist’s reservations. It is gratifying to note that what started out as a nagging disquiet has developed into an evolving debate as environmental degradation and its consequent threat to humanity rapidly turn into major concerns. Lawrence Buell submits: “Environmental criticism today is still an emergent discourse. It is one with very ancient roots. In one form or another, the ‘idea of
nature’ has been a dominant or at least residual concern for literary scholars and intellectual historians ever since these fields came into being” (2).

To Buell, nature is such an important and central subject that scholars of diverse disciplines have both studied and borrowed heavily from while publishing many articles and essays in the process. Ecocriticism in literature took its trajectories from multidisciplinary discourses such as anthropology, environmentalism, ecology and cultural studies among others. These wider concerns of literature, environment and life are critically interrogated in this study.

One cannot talk about subjectivity without taking a retrospective snapshot of conditions in the Niger delta in the pre-colonial era. By so doing, we can subsequently illustrate a more lucid contrast of the quality of life of the inhabitants of the region before and after colonialism.

The picture drawn of life in the pre-colonial period is one of freedom where the common person controls his/her farm land. The region was independent exercising its autonomy without direction or subjection to any external forces. Farming and fishing were the basic means of livelihood. People moved and cultivated farm lands governed only by tradition and cultural values until the pursuit for raw materials by the early European traders afflicted the region.

Subjectivity in this context connotes the denial of rights followed by disenfranchisement and subjugation. It arises when people of a region have no access to necessities of survival and are invariably removed from empowering economic and political activities and opportunities. We can say that economic and political reasons and interests of a government may lead to the ‘subjectivisation’ of a particular people. Therefore, subjectivity as defined by Tim Kelsall is political:
“A matter of subjugation to state authority; moral, (as) reflected in the conscience and agency of subjects who bear rights, duties, and obligations; and, (as) realized existentially in the subjects’ consciousness of their personal or intimate relations” (655-56, see also Werbner, 64-5).

Mansfield Nicholas in Subjectivity: Theories of the Self posits that “subjectivity is the type of being we become as we fit into the needs of the larger political requirements of the capitalist state” (64). It requires us not only to behave in a certain way, but also to be certain kinds of people. Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth says that the subjectivity of the colonised people is viewed as a direct product of the colonial system. He says that it is the coloniser who has brought the colonised into reality and preserves his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, his property, to the colonial system (28).

With the above quoted viewpoints in mind, this study sought to investigate the philosophies of the multinational oil companies and the government in an attempt to uncover indications in their reasoning or actions that might imply the belief that the inhabitants of the Niger delta owe their existence to them.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The 1956 - colonial era - discovery of oil in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria was supposed to be a godsend, a boon to the region and the nation’s economy. Instead, the alliance between the agents of a government sworn to uplift the lives of its people and the multinational oil companies brought destruction, desolation and untold suffering to the region’s populace and environment.
This factual note on the region is represented in the novels where the activities of the multinationals oil companies backed by the government affect the lives of the characters and the environment in the selected literary texts. It is on this note that the study sought to investigate the forms of subjectivities resulting from drilling activities which have led to ecological destruction in Habila’s *Oil on Water* and Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow*.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

i. Examine the emerging forms of postcolonial subjectivities in the selected texts.

ii. Explore the impact of oil drilling on the characters and the environment in the two texts.

iii. Identify and elucidate the stylistic devices employed by the authors in articulating environmental destruction.

1.4 Research Questions

The research sought to answer the following questions:

i. What are the emerging forms of subjectivities in the selected texts?

ii. How does oil drilling affect the characters and the environment in the two texts?

iii. What are the stylistic devices used by the authors in articulating the environmental destruction?

1.5 Assumptions of the Study

The assumptions of this study were:
i. Subjectivities perpetrated by the military and the multinational oil companies oppress the people and lead to violence and ethnic conflicts.

ii. Oil drilling and its subsequent spillage have not only affected the characters, but the entire environment as well.

iii. The authors employ several stylistic devices to illuminate the scourge of environmental destruction in the Niger Delta region.

1.6 Justification and significance of the study

The choice of these texts for this study was deliberate. The two works showcase postcolonial subjectivity through the interactions between the main characters, the environment, the multinationals and government agencies. This study has investigated the human nature inter-relationship before and after oil drilling as depicted in the two texts.

Although, the Niger Delta wrangles have received multi-sectoral international attention, scant consideration has been given to studies that examine the interpretation and portrayal of this conflict in literary works. An ecocritical exploration of the subject with emphasis on how the environment suffers in this crossfire pitting petrodollars against bullets is overdue. The study is justified since it has probed the fictional link between environmental destruction and neocolonial exploitation through the multinational oil companies. The selected texts have been given preference because they are set within the geographical locale of the Niger Delta. They also aptly capture the consequences of oil drilling on the environment and the resultant effect on the people.
This study has sought to widen the understanding of the ecocritical theory and its application in African, and more specifically, Nigerian literary works. The study is also a contribution to environmental consciousness with the aim of giving attention to environmental conservation for a better planet. This study has endeavoured to augment the existing literary knowledge of works centered on the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, an area of literature that has not been explored as intensely as that of other regions of the country.

1.7 Scope and Delimitation

As captured in the title “An Ecocritical Reading of Subjectivity”, this study delimited itself to the critical interrogation of postcolonial subjectivity and ecological destruction in the selected texts. The study, thus, has delimited itself to Habila’s Oil on Water and Agary’s Yellow-Yellow.

Habila has authored many novels including Measuring Time (2007), Waiting for Angel (2004), Prison Stories (2000), New Writing 14 (2006), Dreams, Miracles, and Jazz: An Anthology of New African Fiction (2007), The Granta Book of the African Short Story (2011), and The Chibok Girls (2016). On the other hand, as of the time of this study, Yellow-Yellow (2006), was Kaine Agary’s debut and only novel. The two authors and their works were selected because the two texts represent the environmental destruction of the Niger Delta and the effects of postcolonial subjectivities on the people of the region - issues that were relevant to the study and the issues under probe.

The study assessed the effects of oil drilling on the regions environment and people as depicted in the selected texts which also proved to be a critical insight into the relationship between environmental destruction and subjectivity.
1.8 Review of Related Literature

In order to present a concise depiction of the study’s pertinent issues, the first section of this review of related literature has focused on discussions related to ecocriticism and postcolonial subjectivity found in Nigerian works of fiction. The second part has focused on Agary’s and Habila’s works and their suppositions in relation to the study.

The scope of environmental conservation in Africa is disheartening. The irony is that although she is arguably the wealthiest continent in terms of natural resources, Africa plays a largely insignificant role in the rapid global industrialisation and modernisation characteristic of this century. Ogaga Okuyade explains that even though summits and seminars on the environment and environmental degradation are held regularly to sensitise people to the fact that the fate of humankind is directly linked to the environment, there is still a lack of collaborative fashioning [and implementation of] pragmatic policies that will ensure the preservation and sustenance of the environment (Okuyade, ix). According to Okuyade the problem boils down to politics which he says explains why rich mineral deposits fail to translate to better lives and a stronger economy. He blames governmental misrule, bureaucratic incompetence, and corporate greed (Okuyade, x). It is these concerns that spurred this study to interrogate and expose environmental issues as explored in the selected texts.

Since African literature is necessarily utilitarian, Okuyade avers that it is pertinent to note that within the tradition of African creativity, environmental concerns are inevitably part of the ‘cultural construction’ of any given text (Okuyade, xii). He further observes that although Africa has been marginalised, but
at the same time exploited, it would not be true to imply that the continent’s literature does not contribute to the goals of ecocriticism — on a larger scale, involving all humanity — for the fate of all humankind is tied to the environment. Therefore, to “theorise […] and invoke different strategies as a means of bridging the frightening gap between humans and the environment” (xiii-xv). An ecocritical reading of African literature should also pay attention to the ways in which power is exercised and how people exercise their freedom in relation to their environment. Thus, the study has achieved this through its interrogation of subjectivities.

Tiui Speek in *Environment in Literature: Lawrence Buell’s Ecocritical Perspective* proposes that Ecocritics’ perspectives examine the dual accountability of representations of non-fiction and fictional works and how culture mediates natural phenomena (162-6). He draws the conclusion that both works are an indispensable medium in which pastoral ideas can be appreciated and, consequently, give birth to the rise of green consciousness. These positions are relevant to this study because they showcase fictional works interrogating natural phenomena. What makes this research different is that it has deliberately attempted to establish the scope of ecological devastation as an outcome of oil drilling in the Niger Delta and the possibility of restoration of pastoral life as a means of minimizing environmental degradation, thus improving the chances of restoration of the ecology and sustainability of humanity, flora and fauna.

Alali Tamuno in *The Legal Roadmap for Environmental Sustainability in Africa* dwells on legality and justice as they relate to the activities of multinational corporations and the environment of oil producing African countries, and Nigeria in particular (26). While this study has limited itself to the effects of oil drilling in the
Niger Delta without necessarily taking the legal discourse tangent, it refers to Tamuno’s work where necessary.

Kramer, K.E. Helena in *The Imagery of Nature in the Prose Works of K. Paustovsky*, uses ecocriticism to analyse ecological imagery (6 -7). As she does in her dissertation, in which she centers on the role of nature in Russian prose spotlighting ecological issues to address nature conservation, this focal point of this study is the role of nature in literature. The insights derivable from of Kramer’s reading are relevant to this study because of the shared interest in the twin features of ecocritical ideology in prose and conservation of the natural environment. Similarly, both have universal traits in terms of nature and humanity. The study sought to use the indexes of nature to explore the damage meted on the environment.

From the works and discussions, the researcher realised that very little attention had been given to the impact of oil drilling in the Niger Delta region. This study sought to fill this lacuna through an interrogation of ecological destruction and the negative effects it has on human and nonhuman life in the selected fictional works of Helon Habila and Kaine Agary. Furthermore, this study has sought to suggest and explore other ideological means of curtailing violence and agitation from the region.

1.8.1 Helon Habila

Most critical works on Habila’s *Measuring Time* and *Waiting for an Angel* deal with historical issues, the (ab)use of military dictatorship and the position of women in the public service. During this study, no research has been conducted covering postcolonial subjectivity and ecocritical aspects of the novel under study.
Wenzel Jennifer in her review *Behind the Headlines* states that Habila juxtaposes idealistic notions of the journalist’s duty to witness history in the making with a peculiar cooptation of that function in the Niger Delta. The ecological representation of the region is viewed through the eyes of a kidnapped British woman (13-14). However, to limit the investigation of the impact of oil drilling based to a single character is tantamount to neglecting the core issues that led to her kidnap. This study, therefore, has gone deeper into the causes of violence in the region fuelled by a military hegemony and the unabashed exploitation of the people by the oil drilling multinationals.

Akung E. Jonas in his article “The Military as a Motif in the Nigerian Novel: Helon Habila’s Waiting for an Angel” posits that the military cannot be viewed as a corrective mechanism in modern Nigerian society, as it has been labelled by some critics, but must be seen as a tool responsible for the corrupt practices that flourish in all aspects of civil life (55). This resonates with Althusser’s ideology of coercion as necessarily creating chaos and conflict. However, this study has explored and suggested other ideological means of curtailing violence and agitation within a troubled enclave.

In his essay “Helon Habila: Narrating a Post-colony with Its Dysfunctional Baggage” Chijioke Uwasomba reiterates that there is ample demonstration of a continuity of a creative struggle by this Nigerian writer for nationhood building which Habila demonstrated in Waiting for an Angel and Measuring Time. He suggests that both novels, demonstrate the ideological motif of a writer’s consciousness in building his society through what he calls a collective socio-political struggle. This recurrent motif of nation building is consistent in Habila’s
vision. Taking a cue from this premise, this study has investigated Habila’s vision from an ecocritical perspective seeking to unearth all traces of subjectivity in his novel. Further to the foregoing, Uwasomba declares:

Since independence, African states have been marked by one form of self-inflicted debility or another, manifested in social decay, immiserization of the people, planlessness, slummization, thievery of all stripes and hues with dire consequences for development. The military have worsened the situation in their well-choreographed relay race with their civilian collaborators and have since then denied the fruits of independence to the hapless and harried African peoples (61).

Uwasomba’s views buttress this study as they investigate the various subjectivities that arise out of military relationships with Africa’s civilian populations especially when viewed as agents of multinational companies. His views are used to support the arguments on subjectivities interrogated through an ecocritical reading of the selected texts. In the course of the survey, however, this study noted that Helon Habila’s work centered on military regimes and their consequences on civilians and subsequently accorded the environment less attention. This endeavour has viewed this oversight as a staid faux pas and has sought to address the gap.

1.8.2 Kaine Agary

Akung, Alloeje. J.E. in his “Kaine Agary’s Yellow-Yellow: A Study in Ecocriticism” examines the relationship between ecology and literature. He deals with Nigeria’s political ecology and examines the place and position of women within that bionetwork. He concludes by stating that environmental pollution is responsible for moral decadence. Eye-opening as this study is, it is only limited to women and the natural balance. In contrast to Akung’s treatise, this study took a more universal and all-embracing point of view, encompassing the general effect of environmental pollution on humanity and nature.
In his *The Displacement of the Father-figure in Kaine’s Yellow-Yellow and Alice Walker’s The Color Purple*, Ignatius Chukumah looks at the major characters through a psychoanalytical lens and his focus is on how the male father-figure character has been evacuated. His study addresses the absence of patriarchal functionality in a family and how it affects the family structure. While in no way diminishing or disputing the essence and indispensability of a father to the welfare of the family and society at large, this study has been primarily interested in the featured text’s portrayal of the displacement of the characters due to the adverse effects of environmental destruction, ethnic conflict and harrying by the military.

In conclusion, this exercise has established that substantial research and literature on the issues of ecology and environmental destruction vis-à-vis environmental conservation exists. The study also benefited from this volume of reviews which it espouses and narrows down to Helon Habila’s and Kaine Agary’s novels. The perspectives of the Niger Delta on ecological devastation that were portrayed under the hegemonies of insatiable multinational oil corporations and amenable military forces, have depicted the consequential impact on humanity, flora and fauna.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This study conceptualises its ideas from two theories: Ecocriticism and Postcolonialism. Ecocriticism started in the United States of America and eventually spread to Britain, mainly from the need to uncover and study environmental non-fiction known as ‘nature writing’. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm in *The Ecocriticism Reader* describe ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (xviii). One of the
most significant goals of this approach is the recovery of professional dignity for what Glotfelty calls the “undervalued genre of nature writing”. On the other hand, Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism as: “[a] study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist practice” (01).

The study of nature writing has developed immensely from its modest beginnings to embrace a large anthology of literary works that draw the attention of critics across the globe. The main proponents of ecocriticism include, but are not limited to: William Rueckert, Patrick D. Murphy, Lawrence Buell, Racheal Carson, Greg Garrard, Cherryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm.

Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory* (1995) cites the major assumptions of the ecocritical theory, such as the re-examination of major literary works from an ecocentric perspective whilst paying close attention to the representation of the natural world. These hypotheses correspondingly pay special attention to the canonical emphasis of writers who foreground nature as a major component of their subject matter, such as the American transcendentalists, the British Romantics, the poetry of John Clare, the work of Thomas Hardy and the Georgian poets of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is also by extending the range of literary critical practice by placing new emphasis on relevant 'factual' writings; especially reflective topographical material such as essays, travel writing, memoirs, and regional literature (169), that ecocriticism is broadening to cover concerns of human needs verses environment.

Ecocritics reread literary texts from earth-centered approaches and promote teaching and researching of environmental non-fictional works. They re-
examine major literary works from an ecocentric perspective, with attention to the representation of the natural world (Barry, 169).

They are also interested in how logical conventions in fictional works enable and constrain our contact with the environment and place, how much place informs representation, and how the means of representation informs our sense of place. They examine significant tropes and myths that shape our environmental imagination and action (Barry, 165). In this study, certain instances have been selected and have facilitated the investigation on the imaginative representation of the environment by the authors of the selected texts as well as unveiling the myths that shape the characters’ psyches.

Ecocriticism creates awareness regarding the destruction of nature through human activities. This study has concerned itself with ecocritical presentations in the selected texts and thus, has explored ecological destruction and its consequences on the natural environment and the people. Timothy Clark in *Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Environment* suggests that ecocriticism finds its most striking ethical challenge in the question of animal suffering. However, the challenges of eco-activism are not limited to animal suffering but extend to the extermination of species within the ecosystem. Ecocriticism upholds the voices of the nonhuman ‘other’ which includes animals and plants in the environment. Clark quoting James Rachels states: “We kill animals for food; we use them as experimental subjects in laboratories; we exploit them as sources of raw materials such as leather and wool; we keep them as work animals” (180). The concerns of ecocriticism thus, intersect with those of postcolonialism in terms of the ‘othering’ of animals and plants which are tied in with the inequalities among humanity.
Although the pace of environmental degradation is disquieting globally, Europe, in their own capacity are working greatly to reduce the unfair treatment of the environment which include the animals, through the policy of environmental sustainability proposed by MDGs. This is mostly due to the efforts of civil and animal rights activists who advocate for civil liberties and adherence to environmental justice and conservation, but it is also attributable, perhaps, to the fact that the more developed countries are, by proxy, exploiting the less developed through their indubitable correlation with the tenuous multinational mega corporations.

In the Niger Delta, for example, multinational corporations are particularly environmentally irresponsible. In their thoughtless rush to maximise profits whilst cutting costs, they think of nothing as they carelessly dispose chemical waste on the land and in water bodies destroying plant and animal life in the area. Among other things, this study has assessed the relationship between industrial development and environmental destruction in Africa.

Since ancient times, cultures the world over have used such universal, but concurrently, place-specific metaphors as garden, wilderness, virgin land, desert and swamp to describe and understand their relationship with land and nature. What Ecocritics do, in short, are attempts to discover nature as absence, silences in texts, and construe environmental representation as a relevant category of literary, aesthetic, and political analysis in conjunction with a focus on gender, class, and race issues in literary texts. In Africa’s literary landscape, representation of nature and human beings has been, and still is, prevalent in prose and poetry as seen in the works of Chinua Achebe, J.P Clark, Okot P’Bitek, Asare Konadu and other
notable writers. Nevertheless, in most cases nature was/is not presented in the light of industrial destruction, rather as a source of solace and appeasing the gods. This study has, therefore, interested itself in the inquiry of environmental representation and the consequences of human activities on nature or the ecosystem in the wake of heavy and rapid industrialization.

The second theory that this research has employed is the postcolonial theory which interrogates the systematic polemics that were posed by colonial masters of various regions of the world during the 19th and early 20th centuries and the resultant cultural, political, and social effect on the colonized peoples. The postcolonial theory examines the origins, effects, and both the immediate and continuing political, cultural, and social results of Western colonization of different peoples and countries of the world through the study of assorted literary fiction which portrays, sometimes celebrates, critiques and ridicules the act of colonization (Saylor, 27).

The postcolonial theory attempts to re-read, re-write and re-right the epistemic violence that was meted out on the colonized. Other definitions of Postcolonial theory suggest that it is a literary theory or critical approach that deals with literature produced in countries that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries. It may also deal with literature written in or by citizens of colonizing countries that employs colonies or their peoples as its subject matter. The theory is based around concepts of otherness and resistance (Lye 1). However, this definition of former colonies has often led to an impasse considering America. Is it a former colony and therefore a post colony? (See Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back).
The postcolonial theory principally focuses on the colonising culture and how its literature distorts the experiences and realities of the colonised people, simultaneously inscribing inferiority on a people attempting to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past's inevitable dehumanization. It also deals with the way in which literature in colonising countries adapts the language, images, scenes, traditions and so forth of colonized countries. (Lye 1; see also Bhabha, *Location of Culture; Said, Orientalism*).

The major theorists include Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Salman Rushdie, Jamaica Kincaid, and Buchi Emecheta (Siegel, 7). The study has concerned itself with the concepts of hybridity, alterity (othering) of Homi Bhabha as espoused in his works and Fanon’s concept of violence.

The basic tenets of postcolonial theory include; *alterity*, which implies a lack of identification with some part of one’s personality or one’s community, differentness, or otherness. *Eurocentrism* fosters this, and *suggests* the ideas, practices, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on the European and western concerns as the center and discourses from *other* regions as peripheral. Similarly, local customs and values are praised at the expense of *other* cultures. *Hybridity*, another important concept, refers to the creation of new trans-cultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 108). In another words, the assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, effectively, a cross-fertilization of cultures, can be viewed as positive, enriching, dynamic as well as oppressive (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 7). What this means is that no culture is pure. According to Bhabha, the contact between cultures affects and
influences each other, though to different degrees (83-90). Hybridity may take many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial among others. Linguistic examples include pidgin and Creole (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 108). This form of linguistic hybridity is informed by some characters in the texts under study.

The British Empire was at the center of the colonization of Africa and Asia. During what came to be known as the scramble for Africa, the continent was ‘partitioned’ at the Berlin conference of 1884-5 chaired by German Chancellor, Otto Von Bismarck (Boahen 19-30). The conquerors not only dominated the physical land but also the ideology of the colonised peoples.

This study has examined the effects of colonisation and how they are still being felt in the physical setting of the two novels through the continued activities of imperialism now morphed and cloaked in the form of multinational oil companies. This study, therefore, has uncovered the fact that hegemonic forces that are still in play affect people’s subjectivities as portrayed in the texts. According to Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins in *Post-colonial Drama*:

Postcolonialism is often too narrowly defined. The term, according to a too-rigid etymology, is frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept meaning the time after colonisation has ceased, or the time following the politically determined Independence Day on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state (2).

Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins go on to state that postcolonialism is much more than a narrow confinement to politics, encompassing an engagement with contestation of colonialism’s discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies. The arguments for the etymological significance of the ‘post-’ in post (-) colonialism, and the presence or absence of the hyphen are various and varied,
but what all the debates agree on is that the effects of colonialism affected both the
coloniser and the colonised in ways neither has recovered from yet. This is what
Edward Said aptly demonstrates in his Orientalism and Frantz Fanon discusses in
Black Skin, White Masks.

Postcolonialism is much more than the celebration of ‘independence’. The
legacies of postcolonialism, which are positive and negative in the making of the
colonies, have shaped the language of literature, culture, education, religion and
artistic consciousness and sensibilities (see Loomba; McClintock; Fanon). These
practices within postcolonial spaces and their consequent effects were an
ambivalent enterprise. Thus, these spaces have also created room for new writers to
artistically articulate the effects of exploitation on humanity and the environment.
This is what formed the basis of the research analysis. Thus, the
socioeconomic, cultural, political and religious lives that were /are shaped by the
postcolonial legacies are some of the concerns of this study.

Postcolonialism examines the manner in which evolving societies deal with
the challenges of self-determination and how they incorporate or reject western
norms and conventions, such as legal or political systems that are left in place after
direct administration by colonial powers ends. In truth, however, this direct
administration was never really undone, but simply morphed, taking the form of a
subtler colonialism in which, the former master still exploits the formerly colonized,
only this time with the collaboration of a small clique of elite indigenes.

Ironically, most proponents of postcolonial studies and denouncers of
Western norms are situated in the very heart of the West marketing the margin
(Huggan). Contemporary studies focus more on the effects of postcolonial
globalization and the development of indigenous solutions to local needs. This was the foundational role of the Subaltern Studies Collective. Environmental destruction and exploitation are some of the legacies of colonization that this study has interrogated.

Characteristically, as Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory* suggests, “Postcolonial writers evoke or create a pre-colonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the colonial status of their countries” (128). These writers continue to suggest possible solutions to the impending problems affecting their people and they artistically write, not in obscured language, but in a manner that attracts and holds both their local and foreign readerships. It has become cogently obvious that there is no unifying narrative of an all blissful past to go back to. The important thing is to learn from the past, unlearn its harsh lessons and steadfastly tackle the problems of the day. This study has deconstructed the pre-colonial version of the local people in the Niger delta and subsequently explored the effects of the colonial status on their lives.

Postcolonial Literature in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. Many Nigerian scholars have documented the effects of colonisation and its continuing pressure on the local people, notable figures are Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, and Ken Saro Wiwa to mention but a few. In many of their works, the populace is portrayed as a people struggling with the negative effects of the colonial period after attaining independence. These effects include, but are not limited to the exploitation and hegemony of a rogue military, disenfranchisement by activities of the oil corporations and cultural subjectivities among others.
Independence did not bring with it the dual rights to be heard and to self-determination that the general populace had believed would be theirs bit instead, an indigenous select few stepped into their colonial master’s shoes to become collaborators and agents of the invaders and furthered their legacies (See Fanon, Wretched of the Earth).

The disruption of normal life by the ‘new’ African government and its association with foreign companies left the general populace in dire straits and with no alternative but to conjure up alternative, and sometimes extreme, means of survival. This has, for example, led the youth to embark on vandalising oil installations and youth kidnapping in the Niger Delta region to eke a living. This study has investigated the reasons for, and grievances behind these desperate measures.

Ecocriticism and postcolonialism have, therefore, been fused by scholarship into the interpretations of literature, although since its origination, ecocriticism has been accused of being inattentive to the complexities pertaining to nature and environmentalism that colonialism poses. On the other hand, the postcolonial discourse has also been accused of being so immersed in theoretical questions of naturalism and identity, that it becomes abstract and fails to take the material realities of postcolonialism into consideration (Loomba, 16-8; McClintock, 11). Scholars in ecocriticism such as Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt have proffered various scholarly treatises to establish that ecocriticism and postcolonialism must be understood as parallel projects, if not facets, of the very same project that suggests a struggle for global justice and sustainability (Roos and Hunt, 3-4).
In Nigeria, colonialism crept in through the southern region where the oil wells are concentrated (Utuk, 6). Their setting up fomented enormous environmental pollution, devastating lives and livelihoods, a trend that, sadly, has continued to foment well into independence and has been made worse by the entry of a proliferation of global corporations whose amorphous extraction makes it difficult to hold any one foreign country accountable. It is precisely these circumstances that spurred writers to examine the preponderance of the effects of postcolonial forces and subjectivity on the ecological system and the lives of the people of the affected region.

The theoretical framework highlighted above is relevant to this study because it addresses each major concern raised by the respective theories. The postcolonial and ecological discourses conceptualized in the background to this study are both applied in the analysis of the two texts. Furthermore, the various forms of oppression and ecological devastation are closely scrutinized, analysed and accorded appropriate remedial recommendations.

1.10 Research Methodology

This study employed the qualitative research method. Textual analysis was used to analyse Oil on Water and Yellow-Yellow, the primary texts. Christine Findlay defines textual analysis as “the close study of a text, or extract from a text, using the skills of analysis (A) and evaluation (E), to show meaning (S), to explore effects and to assess effectiveness of the writer’s stylistic techniques” (9). In this study, the selected texts were vigilantly examined to bring to light issues touching on environmental destruction and subjectivity of people as forced upon them by the powers that control them. Articles, journals, online resources, and other
materials were used as secondary sources to bolster and validate the data acquired from the primary texts. These additional sources also served to ascertain objectivity and reliability.

1.10.1 Target Population

This study target population is interested in literary works related to environmental destruction. These include *A Month and A Day, Love My Planet, Forest of Flowers, Service to Country, Day Dream of Arts, The Eye of the Earth, Oil on Water, Tides, Poetry in Prose, Yellow-Yellow, Things Fall Apart* and many more. These texts that were identified formed the target population of the study because of their inclination towards its subject matter.

1.10.2 Sampling Procedure and Size

The study utilized purposive sampling as a criterion for selecting the primary texts for analysis. Out of the ten novels listed, two narratives were selected as elemental to the study. They are *Oil on Water* (2011) and *Yellow-Yellow* (2006). These two works were purposively selected for their focus on environmental destruction and postcolonial subjectivity, the core subjects of the research. The two books form the source of the study’s primary data.

1.10.3 Data Collection

As stated above, the primary data was obtained from the selected novels, Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* (2011) and Kaine Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow* (2006). The former treatise provided the analysis with an abundance of illustrations revealing instances of ecocritical devastation, postcolonial subjectivity, and the relationship between the people with their environment. *Yellow- Yellow* (2006), on the other hand, took the study into the depth of the psychosis brought on by the discovery of
oil, the ensuing ethnic conflicts and the inevitable consequential affliction visited on societies, most vulnerable are women and children. It reveals the irony of being blessed. The discovery and exploitation of oil should be an exceedingly lucrative enterprise for any nation. The revenues so created should ostensibly benefit the public, but in Africa, oil has become a curse: the obliterator of the environment, families, and livelihoods. Relevant secondary sources were used to enrich and validate the findings. These resources included books, e-books, published scholarly articles, journals, essays, the internet, and other published materials.

1.10.4 Data analysis

A qualitative evaluation approach was adopted when carrying out this research. Primary and secondary data collected was analysed using subjective methods. The selected novels were read critically in order to identify the characters, characteristics and issues pertaining to the research.

Secondly, in order to achieve its objectives, the study relied on; ecocriticism and the postcolonial theories which are part of the extrinsic elements that constituted the representation of postcolonial subjectivity of the enclave, representation of aspects of nature, the environment and the relationship between nature and human beings. In its findings, the study has indicated that the stated objectives have been ascertained.

1.10.5 Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability of the data collected, the researcher read all selected texts concurrently recording the various pertinent observations. Conformity to the objectives of the study and research design and its logical relation to the theoretical framework were the key propositions considered to

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determine reliability of the data collected. Primary data was derived from reading the novels and carefully applying the stipulated theories across all three objectives of the study. Secondary data obtained from various sources was then critiqued to ascertain validity. All data was verified through comparison and cross reference with other relevant resource information for the study. This methodology ensured the validity and reliability of the collected data making it a foundation for the postulation of the various arguments in the study.

1.11 Helon Habila

Nigerian novelist, Helon Habila was born in 1967 and worked as a lecturer and journalist in Nigeria before moving to England to become the African Writing Fellow at the University of East Anglia.

Habila’s first novel was Waiting for an Angel, and since then, his writings have won many awards including the Caine Prize in 2001. He served as the Chinua Achebe Fellow at Bard College, New York between 2005 and 2006, during which time he also co-edited the British Council Anthology New Writing 14. His second novel, Measuring Time, was published in 2007 followed by a third novel, a thought-provoking depiction of environmental pollution and degradation in the oil-rich Niger Delta - aptly named Oil on Water, being published in 2011. His anthology The Granta Book of the African Short Story was published in September 2011. Habila studied at the Universities of Jos and East Anglia. He was a Chevening Scholar at the University of East Anglia and now teaches creative writing at George Mason University, Washington D.C.

Habila is a founding member and serves on the advisory board of the African Writers Trust, a non-profit entity which seeks to coordinate and bring
together African writers on the continent and Diaspora to promote sharing of skills and other resources, and to foster knowledge and learning between the two groups (Oyegun, np).

1.12 KAINÉ AGARY

Agary grew up in Port Harcourt, Nigeria and was a first time hit with her debut novel, Yellow- Yellow in 2006. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Economics from Mount Holyoke College, USA and a Master’s degree in Public Administration with a specialisation in public policy from New York University’s Wagner school of public service. She won the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) prize for literature in 2008 and has done a lot of research, writing on women in Nigeria, and in the Niger Delta in particular, for academic institutions. She lives in Lagos, where she is the editor of TAKAii Magazine

Before the publication of Yellow-Yellow, Agary did not regard herself as being a creative writer. Her interest in literature developed out of a distaste for the mendacious stereotypes promulgated by media propaganda totally misrepresenting the plight of the people of the Niger Delta. Her initial goal was to write a short story depicting the general aspects of the Niger Delta in a nonconfrontational story. Her novel is set between 1977 (a year after Ken Saro Wiwa was hanged) and June 9th, 1998, and is set in three distinctive locations; a rural Ijaw village, Port Harcourt, and Lagos. It is noteworthy that the Ijaw village, where the main character hails from, is a microcosm of the entire rural land mass of the Niger Delta (Kwakye, np. See Umaisha, np).
CHAPTER TWO

THE EMERGING FORMS OF SUBJECTIVITIES IN THE SELECTED TEXTS

It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native. (The Wretched of the Earth, 29)

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the conceptualization of the emerging forms of subjectivities in the two novels, *Oil on Water* (2011) and *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) and interrogates the cause and effects of subjectivities. The discursive tool is pegged on the theory of postcolonialism. Under subjectivity, displacement and violence are strategically selected as key points that are used to buttress the arguments. Furthermore, important questions are raised and addressed; do these fictional works deconstruct the concept of subjectivity on the characters? Is it represented as a mere form of domination within the narratives or is it a creation of pathetic consciousness by living entities in order to commiserate with their predicaments? Do the agents of these forces achieve their objectives in the remote villages? What are the consequences of their violence on the characters and the environment?

The epigraph from Fanon serves as a torchlight through which we can see the amount of violence and oppression that has been meted out by the forces of subjectivities on the people. Subjectivity is an authority’s control and denial of freedom by and from a given society. This chapter limits the discourse of
subjectivities to four major types: multinational, military, militia and cultural. These forms are relatively interwoven. Textual analyses of the texts are used as a methodology to support the analysis.

2.1 Postcolonial Literature in Nigeria

Very many debates have been conducted by scholars of postcolonialism on the prefix ‘post’ in postcolonial. These arguments go as far as discussing the difference between the terms “postcolonial”, without hyphen, and “post-colonial”, with a hyphen. It seems that the slippage of the concept of colonialism becomes even greater following this prefixation since ‘post’ can always denote a possible ‘postness’ or posterity in relation to colonialism (see McClintock; Loomba;).

This becomes particularly poignant when the label ‘postcolonial’ is applied to the literature of settler-invader colonies such as Canada and Australia and in African countries where the coloniser and the colonised relationship can also be multiplied from colonialism within. In other words, the colonial subject can be both “oppressor with respect to the indigene and oppressed with respect to the metropolitan colonising culture” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 175), whereas, by the same token, indigenous peoples of Africa and other colonized nations can be either once or twice oppressed by the colonizer (Polak, 136).

The definition with or without hyphen, of the term ‘postcolonialism’ suggests that the term is used to represent the post-colonial state which had a clear chronological meaning and referred to the period following independence though such post-colonial nation-states have usually been “coterminous with the boundaries of the colonial administrative units” (Ashcroft et al. 193) or remained economically dependent on the mother country. But from the late
1970s critics have been using the term ‘postcolonial’ to discuss various cultural/political/linguistic effects and experiences triggered off by colonisation which gave rise to the so-called colonial discourse theory.

Charles E. Nnolim has contributed a scholarly critique and direction in the new millennium of postcolonial Literature in Nigeria. Nnolim suggests to new writers to focus on current issues that are bedeviling Africa rather than literature of lamentations on colonial legacies. Shija reports that:

Nnolim says African writers began by weeping for the loss of their culture, dignity, religion and general heritage through slavery and colonialism and have continued to blame the Europeans for everything wrong that happened to their society. This stigmatized view of subservience and self-abasement is noticed too in the literature written after most African nations won their political independence (14).

These observations hold true when one quickly surveys the literature produced thereafter; Ayi Kwei Armah’s The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born, Chinua Achebe’s No Longer at Ease, Ngugi wa Thiongo’s Petals of Blood, Dambudzo Marechera’s The House of Hunger and Shimmer Chinodya’s Harvest of Thorns.

Nnolim’s assumptions are also reflected in the current democratic dispensation in which bad governance leading to uncountable forms of social, economic, environmental and political violence are the order of the day. In his argument, Nnolim invites new writers and critics to stop as ascribing all the blame on the colonial masters and address pressing issues in postcolonial African states. The new writers in Nigeria today have positively responded to this and do not only painstakingly articulate the effect of poor governance, but also motivate us to think critically in different ways about many issues that are negatively affecting
African countries such as power tussles among politicians, identity crisis, debauchery, gay/lesbian rights, popular culture, prostitution, gender (in)equality and ecological issues.

In lieu of the above, this study examines how nature and the environment are treated in the two texts. Such examination is intended to establish that, while the pre-colonial African society lived in an inviolate state of, and with nature, the doors for the exploitation of its resources were opened during the colonial period, in total disregard for the place of importance and deep significance that nature and environment held for the indigenous African populace. The end result is a polluted continent, denuded of its rich natural environment and the subsequent dehumanization of its people.

In postcolonial literature, one frequently reads the recurrent motifs of postcolonial fragmentation, alienation, exile, migration, displacement, and identity crisis to mention but a few. Chinua Achebe’s works, for example, are replete with paradigms of exile and dictatorship in politics. Chimamanda Adichie’s fiction depicts violence, alienation, exile and identity crises very well. In Oil on Water there is a migration of the characters from the creeks to the hinterland and alienation from socioeconomic proficiency to poverty. The subordination of environmental issues in literary discourses, however, appears to be rampant. Issues affecting nature and the environment are given proportionally scant attention vis-à-vis, politics and corruption.

Is oil, more of a curse than a blessing to the continent’s ecosystems and the lives of the African people? Western oil producing nations like Canada (3.92 million barrels a day) and the United States (10.59 million barrels a day) have never
faced the predicaments bedeviling Africa and the Middle East, and the pertinent question is why? Countries like Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, and Liberia where oil reserves were discovered in the 20th Century during the colonial era are reeling in the throes of the negative consequences of oil exploitation encompassing poor governance, poverty, rebellion, militancy, terrorism and ecological destruction. In the recent past, Niger, Uganda, Ghana, and Kenya among others, have also discovered, and are in the process of commencing the commercial exploitation of oil. While it is not currently apparent in these nations, it is more than likely that the conflicts that afflict countries that discovered oil on the eve of their independence will come home to roost and hound these 21st Century oil nations as well.

These problems have become the focus of the new crop of literary writers upon whom it is now incumbent to educate the general populace on the veiled perils and minefields of oil exploitation and conscientiously propose feasible solutions to address the problems bedeviling Africa in the 21st Century. Padmini Mongia posits that the term “postcolonial refers to texts, practices, psychological conditions, and concrete historical processes” (1), whose premise is predominantly depicted in the texts under study — the novels; Oil on Water and Yellow-Yellow.

The quest for oil leads to the concept of subjectivity which is an important term in postcolonial discourse. Subjectivity suggests a process of placing the people of a nation under control. The concept of subjectivity is well articulated in the selected novels in which the characters occasionally face and often collide with the forces of subjectivity. In simple terms, subjectivity refers the total control of a society or nation by an authority which denies the dominated populace freedoms through use of brute force. Conversely, the term refers to the condition or status of
being subjugated to a state or controlling authority. It also refers to the type of
*being* one becomes as he fits into the needs of the larger political imperatives of the
capitalist state (Mansfield, 64). In simple terms, the word ‘subjectivity’ is the
refutation of access to basic necessities, marginalization, both socio-economic and
political, and the denial of rights to a social grouping that finds itself under the
control of a government, subjugator or system.

In the narratives of *Oil on Water* and *Yellow-Yellow*, the characters resist
control, seeking instead, to escape from subjectivity revolting against the
government and the corporate repression of the oil companies. While some take
up arms to defend their space, their environment and sources of livelihood, others
like the boy and Baba in *Oil on Water* remain seemingly impassive to the
prevailing strife. They are neither open supporters of the militants nor agitators
against their adversaries - the oil companies and the government. This, however,
does not mean that they have no qualms about their present circumstances, what
they want is a better life. Although they appear to support an ideological revolution
that will inherently change their current socioeconomic and political situations,
they, are skeptical of ever attaining it because of the privation that the government
and oil company’s immoderation perpetuates, on the one hand, and the suffering
consequential to the actions of the rebels. In *Yellow-Yellow*, Bibi and Zilayefa
believe that the course to freedom is through education, not violence. As Albert
Memmi argues in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, there are only two conduits
out of colonial subjugation; assimilation or revolt (52). The disenfranchised
characters of the two novels are portrayed as being enslaved under the military
regime and their only exit from torment and their final resort is insurgency. Their
revolt is directed at and against any form of hegemony be it economic, religious, land ownership or political rights.

A subaltern revolt that leads to violence and civil strife against the authorities is predominantly sociopolitical and economic. It is not merely a revolt with aggression for violence’s sake, rather the violence herein is cathartic - a violence which Fanon observes cures the disenfranchised of their inferiority (35-95).

2.2 Postcolonial Subjectivities

The term ‘postcolonial’ basically refers to a people colonized by European imperial powers. The semantic basis of the term suggests a concern only with the national attitude, culture and social fabric after the departure of the colonial power. It has occasionally been employed in some earlier works to distinguish between the phases before and after independence. However, the term covers all the cultures’ facets affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2). The preceding statement implies that there is continuity of the colonial’s dominant culture on the colonized long after he has figuratively gone. Enduring residual tentacles of the colonizer’s culture, a culture established by imperial incursion solely for the exploitation of the resources found within their colonies, have persisted well into the postcolonial epoch. Postcolonialism has its own forms of subjectivities. These incorporate snippets of the colonizer’s cultural, political, economic and religious control over the subjects. The historical process of imperial incursion and aggression is recorded and remembered through the literary works of scholars from the region. Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958), is a pioneer work that
effectively characterized the effects of British colonialism and the consequent resistance of the indigenous peoples towards colonial domination in eastern Nigeria. The novel is a depiction of the African culture and a strong rejoinder to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1995) in which the author paints Africa as dark and evil and Africans as cultureless brutes deserving extermination and who must, therefore, be controlled.

This situation has morphed and resurfaced in the form of agencies of pillaging such as the oil corporations, politicians and the local elite who defend their insatiable greed by misusing the military. It is a pattern that also always serves the interests of the (former) colonial masters. At the bottom of this pyramid is the local populace, in this case, the people of the Niger Delta.

The ruthless plunder of natural resources and oppression of the locals by the multinational corporate entities aided by their unquenchable indigenous lackeys has made the lives of the people unbearable. The proliferation of oil rigs, pipelines and refineries on their farmlands and fishing grounds, the subsequent restrictions on movement and access to these areas and the general contamination of everything by these enterprises has meant that people must travel long distances to find fish, fresh water and cultivate farm lands. In a radio broadcast in *Oil on Water*, Rufus narrates how the inhabitants of one of the surviving villages found themselves in impending danger of starvation and poisoning as a result of waterborne pollutants which were killing off fish stocks and contaminating the land, forcing them to consider moving away from their ancestral home. He says: “I imagined they were speaking of the dwindling stocks of fish in the river, the rising toxicity of the water and how
soon they might have to move to a place where the fishing was still fairly good” (16).

Habila is critical of the ecological feasibility of the apportionment of rights to resources, previously owned and sustainably managed by the community, to a few individuals such as the oil corporations and their avaricious indigenous turncoat collaborators. The author suggests that the forced seizure of primary resources such as rivers and waterways from the collective control of indigenous communities is a crucible invitation for conflict and a definite trigger of ecological crises.

The situation of the ecology also establishes that the people will most certainly encounter a shortage of food and displacement soon. In the text, this quandary does eventually befall these people leading to their migration to other places. In this context, migration is one of the negative legacies of postcolonialism. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, place and displacement are a major feature and concern of postcolonial literature. It is here that the special postcolonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place (8). This suggests that displacement is no longer treated as the mere relocation of populations from one place, region, country, or continent to another. It is now, generally, representing several social phenomena, with broad economic, political, and environmental implications emanating from a complex web of issues. Most displaced persons are poor, homeless, oppressed or victims of war, with little or no income, employment, or survival opportunities in the areas from which they were displaced, usually by circumstances beyond their control (Salih, 37).
Water pollutants in the rivers of the Niger Delta are among the ecological crises that emanate from oil drilling. The spillage of oil on land triggers a chain reaction of vicious events. It releases deadly pollutants that kill fish and other riverine flora and fauna. When people are forced off their ancestral lands, they must, of necessity, move somewhere. Their movement and settlement in other regions invariably cause conflict with those whom they find already settled. The cycle of strife is, therefore, unending with the problems of the neighbour spilling into and affecting the surrounding communities. These conditions are responsible for breeding militia syndicates in the Niger Delta. These ruthless mobs have in turn spawned turmoil, lawlessness and severe hardship in the region.

2.3 Multinational Oil Subjectivity

The presence of multinational oil corporations in the Niger delta is a quest to feed their mother countries, and is actually just a replacement and upgrading of the lucrative 18th century palm oil trade in the region. It is instructive that the dominant oil exploration and exploitation players in the region are the British oil corporations, which goes on to bolster the postcolonial hypothesis, since Britain was Nigeria’s colonial master. British oil engineers explored for oil by surveillance in the creeks and villagers. In Oil on Water: “The oil company boats were patrolling, sometimes openly sending their men to the village to take samples of soil and water” (40).

In Habila’s view, the oil explorers’ provocative act of sending strange men into proudly autonomous villages, digging around and taking samples was a dangerous catalyst, and one that was likely to trigger resistance from the villagers.
As Carson puts it: “It is the soil that controls all forms of life on earth and without soil, terrestrial plants could not grow, and without plants no animals could survive” (53). Indeed, the soil [land] plays a significant role in ensuring its own sustainable utilization and conservation for future generations. This brings us to the idea of Agency. Agency refers to the ability of postcolonial subjects to initiate action by engaging or resisting imperial power (Ashcroft et al, 6), and in numerous instances, the youth have been pushed to resist control over their resources - resulting in skirmishes with the oil workers.

Agency in postcolonial theory interrogates whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed (6). The oil workers with their overbearing demeanor towards the locals and their resources ventured annoyingly into the local communities’ creeks and lands with hegemonic attitude of exploitation of both labour and resources. This formed the genesis of conflicts in the region.

When the oil prospectors established that the region was oil rich, they then connived with the local political class to assist them in consultations with the village chiefs in a bid to purchase land, a process that failed miserably. The narrative and spirit of the bargain are captured in the following passages: “Well, they have made an offer, they had offered to buy the whole village, and with the money - they could relocate elsewhere and live a rich life” (39). It is quite clear that this offer will never be accepted by the communities, but because the oil corporations must make a profit from the land on which these communities live, they consequently threaten the villagers to accept the offer or lose it all. When the village head rejects their
offer, they arrest and imprison him and he eventually dies in prison. The following narrative in *Oil on Water* is a case in point:

The following week, even before Chief Malabo had been buried, the oil companies moved in. They came with a whole army, waving guns and looking like they meant business. They had a contract they said chief Malabo had signed in prison before he died, selling them all of his family land, and that was where they’d start drilling, and whoever wanted to join him and sell his land would be paid handsomely, but the longer the people held out, the more the value of their land would fall (41).

This is a well-calculated move meant to oppress people and forcefully make them yield their land. The community does not stand a chance against the pooled machinations of the state and the corporations. A village with a chief has all the valour and vigour of its culture and values to hold it together, but one without a head is bound to crumble.

The land is a vital resource, serving as both a source of livelihood for the people and as the platform upon which the integrity of biological systems depends. The indigenous communities cultivated the land, growing maize and cassava for *garri* flour, and supplemented these crop foods by fishing and hunting wild game. For these communities, allowing the oil corporations to take over and control the land was akin to a death sentence. Colonial land laws were anchored on an economic imposition informed by the desire to control and exploit indigenous land for the fuel it held. The manner in which oil corporations invaded community resources bolstered by an armed military was an attempt to re-order and re-define the local landscape and then take control of it. In *Oil on Water*, the narrator describes the idyllic pre-oil exploitation conditions as follows:
Once upon a time they lived in paradise. It was a small village close to Yellow Island. They lacked for nothing, fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children growing up before them, happy. The village was close-knit, made up of cousins and uncles and aunts and brothers and sisters, and, though they were happily insulated from the rest of the world (38).

A paradise is a symbolic representation of a nirvana - a state of absolute happiness which suggests lack of want. Thus, families are united and enjoy the natural endowments like creeks, rivers and the forests, which play a major role in the community’s life. This contentment in which people appreciate and practice their culture is undermined by the unwelcome activities of the oil companies. The paradise they once lived in is reduced to stories and allusions of a treasured and sadly missed past. The villagers are now firmly in the crutches of the agencies of oil companies, the military, politicians and the militants and they were literally being driven out of their homes. Caught in these insufferable circumstances, the villagers prefer to pack up and leave rather than to sell their properties because of the cultural values and ties attached to the land. Now disenfranchised, they are forced to wander from place to place in search of succour.

The oil companies use carrot and stick strategies to subjugate and control villagers. One of these ploys is the dangling of awards of foreign scholarships to children of cooperating families. This deception dupes many villagers into accepting the oil companies’ offer to sell their lands in the delusion that their children would be offered scholarships to study engineering in Europe and return to become oil company executives in the future. Naturally, all these lies eventually turn out to be dreams in futility. The narrator notes: “Some of the neighbors were even bragging that the oil companies had offered to send their kids to Europe and America to become engineers so that one day they could return and work as oil executives in
Port Harcourt” (39). They spread their propaganda by advertising these so-called scholarships in the media, but predictably, none of the villagers ever benefit from them. The following excerpt from Yellow-Yellow captures these failed promises: “We heard that oil companies had educational scholarships for Niger Delta indigenes. The problem was that we never got more information after that announcement. Nobody told us where we could go to apply for them. Nobody told us what exactly we needed in order to qualify for one” (11).

They use this propaganda to hoodwink the international community and local authorities that they have welfare packages for the benefit of the displaced villagers, which, of course, is not the case. Being the shrewd businesses that they are, the multinationals systematically exploit villagers by dolling out infinitesimal monetary handouts. All offers made are at the expense of the village’s ignorance. Similarly, all neighbouring communities occupying land with commercial quantities of crude oil, and who prove not to be cooperative, are methodically conned or coerced until they eventually lose it all. From their actions and demeanour, it is easy to perceive the degree of contempt the oil companies had for the indigenes. Their recurrent forays onto private property taking soil and water samples at will and without so much as the pretext of acquiring the owner’s consent, speaks volumes.

The strategy of using the military to instill terror, coupled with the oil multinationals impunity by taking advantage of their victims’ ignorance, and the assassination of their chief cow the villagers. Consequently, although they could sue the oil companies for breach of their rights, the villagers are so terrorized that they do not dare try to do so. Zilayefa says that the oil companies use the army as
their private security to terrorize and kill innocent villagers who questioned the inequity and (in)equality of their situation, forcing them to continue living in squalor while the oil workers and Nigeria’s elite enjoy the fruits of petrodollars from the crude oil (158). Left without hope, displaced and wretched, these people are primed for militancy. This brings us to the subject of military subjectivity.

2.4 Military Subjectivity

Military forces are security agencies whose raison d’être is to protect and defend a nation’s territorial integrity and to stifle any civil strife (conflict) within the country in situations where, for one reason or other, the regular police force cannot maintain peace and order. All said and done, security forces are not only intended to defend their country from external intrusion and invasion, but also serve as agents of internal peace. Unfortunately, in the Niger delta region the military is used as an agent of brutality and subjugation. As Fanon notes: “it is obvious here [in Africa] that the agents of government speak the language of pure force” (29).

This study concurs that government security agents exhibit the language of “pure force” but it also finds that what all this misadvised brutality does in the short term is to temporarily oppress and dominate, but culminates in the introduction of violence into the lives and minds of the people. This has been the situation in Nigeria, although it has also been true of many other African nations from independence to date. Because of this wanton desire to dominate, there have been many power tussles within the Nigerian military echelons, a circumstance which has inevitably, led to coups and counter coups. In some Nigerian literature, the military is used to portray dictatorship, power tussles and political scandals. This
is particularly true where civilian regimes fail and the military takes control through a coup.

This research concerns itself with the extent to which military force has been unleashed upon the Niger delta populace, and especially in regions where the oil rigs are located, where it becomes a tool used purely for economic gain, serving as a collaborating agency working in cahoots, and on the behest of the multinational oil companies. Naturally, this is an untenable situation and it has created myriad social problems for the region. The incessant hounding, injustice and derision rained on the residents by a military purportedly intended to guarantee peace will inevitably breed resentment and dissent. This inequitable situation coupled with resentment and the lack of employment among the youth becomes a powder keg waiting to explode into militancy.

It begins slowly, escalating in phases. Gangs of youth begin stealing oil from the pipelines for survival, and gradually morph into proletarian gangs for hire. Sooner or later these squads find themselves on the payrolls and in the service of local unscrupulous criminals and the political elite. In time, their *modus operandi* transforms from merely vandalising pipelines, small time bombing, threatening to blow up oil installations to kidnapping and murdering oil workers and their dependants. In *Oil on Water*, the militants always remain in hideouts and conceal their camps. They: “Never strayed too far from the pipelines and oil rigs and refineries, which they constantly threatened to blow up, thereby ensuring for themselves a steady livelihood” (6).

The birth and proliferation of these gangs in the region necessitate the deployment of more government forces to systematically search for them from
one village to the other. In one of their searches the soldiers brutalise the villagers and arrest a suspect whom they believe to be the militants’ informant. The suspect, Karibi, is later found to be innocent of any wrongdoing. He is, in fact, the village blacksmith and had decided to remain in the village despite frequent calls from his kinsmen to move away. In *Oil on Water*, Rufus says:

They are here! The soldiers are here! They came out of sheds and houses and passages, wielding whips and guns occasionally firing into the air to create more chaos … over ten soldiers surrounded the smithy, facing the silent, defiant men. One of the soldiers, a sergeant stepped into the shed and pointed his rifle at Karibi - you, come with us (12).

Unless, of course, the objective is to pacify and create panic in the peoples’ minds, the military — with all the state resources at its disposal — does not have to flex its muscles and create this massive racket and commotion to simply arrest a single suspect. They can come quietly and simply pick their target. In this case, however, the strategy is to instill as much terror and trepidation over the petrified villagers as possible in order to guarantee total physical and psychological control over them. This form of military subjectivity and interference with the local people inversely affects their economic activities as it curtails the cultivation of their farms, the operations of their local markets and the education of their children. Demographically, women outnumber men in these villages and constitute a major facet of the village economy. They are mainly the market women, farmers or paddlers of small canoes, venturing out to the creeks and rivers to catch fish and other riverine fare. Military strategists are aware of these women’s niche as pillars of village economy. They also view women and children as the weakest link in the resistance chain, and plan operations that target these two vulnerable groupings for special terror treatment, thus, forcing them to live in perpetual dread. As a result,
numerous members of many households have moved away to avoid the harsh conditions at home.

2.5 Militancy or Militia Subjectivity

Chris Uchenna Agbedo refers to militancy as any action or activity that is grievance- motivated, adversarial, confrontational, and collectively carried out. Militancy is ‘grievance- motivated’ in the sense that it is neither solely recreational nor solely opportunistic, but is rather motivated in some large part by a desire to protest something and / or to press demands for change. A militant’s action is ‘adversarial’ in the sense that its targets are not treated by the protesters as potential allies or partners, open to being convinced or won over, but rather as intransigent adversaries, to be pressured and if possible defeated by means of submission. Militancy is ‘confrontational’ given that, rather than avoiding conflict and seeking accommodation and compromise, it seeks to initiate or intensify conflict (160).

A militant is an individual who is aggressive or violent or intensely active usually for a cause in which he believes. Most causes are economically and politically motivated. The word militant is derived from the 15th Century Latin term ‘militare’ meaning, to serve as a soldier, and hence, gives the idea of a defensive group which is at odds with an invading one that threatens its independence or their well-being. However, the modern definition of the term ‘militant’ implies an individual who utilizes vigorous and extreme means to achieve an objective which is usually political. Nevertheless, they do not always use physical violence or combat to attain their goal (Uchenna,160).

Militias and their operations rose in the Niger delta region driven by political objectives geared towards the realization of economic control of the region
by its original inhabitants who had been marginalized and disenfranchised of their lands by the oil multinationals. According to Agbedo the militants operate in four different modes; symbolic defiance, physical confrontation, property destruction and institutional disruption (160). These tactics are used in order to intensify conflict and to compel the government to dialogue and bring about meaningful social change.

Destruction of property as a tactic includes the bombing of pipelines, police stations and public utilities and the theft of fuel. Saboteurs also engage in institutional disruption by terrorizing oil workers, kidnapping them and forcing their families and employers to pay ransom. They also demand access fees from the companies to allow them to continue drilling for oil. Government institutions such as schools, health centers, markets, and the activities of non-governmental organizations are similarly targeted, disrupted and terminated.

The militia’s physical confrontation entails physical engagement with the Army. This development has led to the abandonment and destruction of many villages in the region. These militia groups are funded by politicians to achieve given objectives, habitually with extremely violent outcomes and very often operating out of their paymaster’s control – a scenario very well illustrated by the group led by Ani Wilson, popularly known as The Professor in Oil on Water. This Militia group, whose members view themselves as freedom fighters, becomes extremely troublesome and uncontrollable in the region:

...a secondary school dropout, a backstreet thug and bully who went to jail for the first time at fifteen. When he came out at twenty he became a party thug in the pay of his local government chairman, who was up for reelection. He was convicted of murder at the age of twenty-two and sent to prison for life. He broke out of jail at thirty, by which time he
had realized there was no future in being a petty thug and hired gun. Luckily for him, his politician godfather had reinvented himself as a pro-environmentalist and won a seat in the senate. But they parted ways when Ani was bought by a rival politician, who paid him to kill his erstwhile godfather; the assassination attempt was foiled, and his godfather called the police on him, and that was when he moved into the swamps and joined a rebel group that specialized in kidnapping foreigners for ransom (emphasis added, 148).

Historically, politicians have always taken advantage of misguided drop-out youth like The Professor, misusing such miscreants to achieve their self-seeking goals. A jobless secondary school leaver desperately trying to find a job and self-worth will find it very difficult to resist the sensation that proximity to wealth and power affords. He has scant grasp of the intrigues and the filth of politics, and as such, he can be easily swayed to commit great atrocities for tokens and drugs.

Agary in Yellow-Yellow paints a very vivid depiction of this exploitation by featuring Admiral as championing the interests of the Ijaw nation, the dominant tribe of the Niger Delta region. He attains his political goals by paying the militants to do his dirty work - but as seen in the following excerpt, such arrangements will sometimes come back to haunt the paymaster. Zilayefa notes:

The so-called youth groups had become well-oiled extortion machines, all in the name of the struggle. They stole, blackmailed, and vandalized for the progress and development of the Ijaw Nation, the Niger Delta. Some days I appreciated their efforts - bringing focus on the suffering of the Niger Delta people - but I could not help but feel that they were holding ransom (sic-of) one of their own. If Admiral did not give them money, then he was not doing anything for the Ijaw Nation – at least that would be their version of the story (158).

The youth are pawns used by politicians to make money. In this case they are used to initiate and escalate violence to compel their adversaries to allocate funds to the region, but predictably, the money ends up in the politicians’ accounts.
The cycle is completed when the same youth are then blamed and made virtual fugitives for usurping the funds allocated for the development of the region. Based on the narrative of the characters in the two novels, it could be said that politicians and the militants have a malevolent serendipitous and symbiotic relationship, parasitizing off each other. They are a well-oiled extortion syndicate cloaked in the so-called struggle for the emancipation of their people from the exploitation of the government and the oil companies.

The region’s inhabitants live in abject poverty. Many of them flee their homes and those that remain are in a dilemma not knowing what to do or who, between the military and the militia, to support - their lives are vulnerable and they live in constant fear, caught up in an impossible situation in which they must warily steer a middle course and not appear to support or upset any militia group, some of whom are mentioned in Oil on Water — “The Black Belts Justice, The Free Delta Army and, The AK-47 Freedom Fighters” (31) - but try as they might, nothing can save them from the spillover of aggression between the military and the militias.

When Rufus asks the old man to ask his brother, Chief Ibiram, whether he knows the whereabouts of the missing woman and her kidnappers, the chief impulsively says no for fear of finding himself in the militants’ bad books. For these communities living in peace means keeping off the militants’ affairs. “Communities like this had borne the brunt of the oil wars, caught between the militants and the military. The only way they could avoid being crushed out of existence was to pretend to be deaf, dumb and blind” (34).
The story of the old man and the boy in *Oil on Water* exposes several underlying issues, such as dismay, optimism, dissonance and collapse of family structure. The two join Zaq and Rufus – reporters, who were embarking on a search for Isabel, a kidnapped British woman and wife of an oil engineer - on Irikefe Island where the journalists had been stranded for five days for lack of a guide. The old man and his son voluntarily offer to lead them on their quest to talk to and negotiate Isabel’s release with the militants. In the narrative the son is simply referred to as ‘the boy’: “The boy looked no more than ten years old, but he might have been older, his growth stunted by poor diet; his hair was reddish and sparse, his arms were bonny like his father’s” (5). The old man and his son’s descriptions illustrate a state of malnutrition and poverty - a corollary of their deprivation. Despite the collateral danger, the old man sees a prospect that could get them out of the dilemma affecting their region. For him, this is an opportunity to assist the journalists in their quest and be rewarded thereafter. They navigate them through the creeks:

The old man and his son paddled the canoe from village to village. The first one was deserted; a victim of war between the militants and the military. The second was a replica of the first - the same empty squat dwellings. These villages were long abandoned, decaying, covered in oil and littered with corpses left behind after the clashes between the military and militants. When the search party arrived at a certain village, the reporters asked him if there were any more, to which the old man replied: ‘No, no more villages’ (9).

The old man takes his clients to a riverside village to visit one of his old friends, a blacksmith called Karibi. Once there, he suggests that they should spend the night there and continue their journey the next day. It is this Karibi that the military suspects to be an informer to the militants and this riverside village upon which they pounced on, firing guns in the air and causing mayhem and pandemonium
when they come to arrest the blacksmith. The next village upriver was the old man’s village, and he advises the reporters to take a break and continue the following day. “It was the only place we could be sure of food and lodging for the night” (13). They are welcomed warmly by the chief, and were given food - “boiled cassava and fish with palm oil and ground pepper” (15).

As the old man and his half-brother, Chief Ibiram sit resting and listening to the radio they hear bad news about the “future of the dwindling stocks of fish in the river and the rising toxicity of water” (16). The following morning the old man and his kin go fishing but they do not catch much. Rufus tells the old man: “When I was a boy, me and my sister we used to catch crabs. They look at each other. (The old man and the boy) and he says “No crabs here now. The water is not good” (26). This representation of the creek as being threaten by the toxicity of the oil drilling is the core concerns of ecocriticism in literary works. It also depicts the dismay contended by the Old man through a contrast purview of his past which is full of means of livelihood and the present that is threaten with shortage of foods. These common foods are on the decrease every day. He is therefore optimistic if the journalist will consider the ugly picture and rescue the future of his only son.

Although he had told the journalists that they would leave that day, the old man spends the entire day trying to catch fish and crabs without much luck. Zaq is very angry with him. He had planned on moving on and felt they were wasting time hanging around this village. Knowing that this is not their final destination. They had been contracted as journalists, to search for the kidnapped British woman, negotiate her five-million-dollar ransom and interview the militants. He angrily tells
off the old man: “You should have told us you were going to be out all day. We’ve wasted a whole day now. I thought your job was to be our guide, we hired you” (26).

At this point Rufus reminds Zaq that technically, they had not hired the old man “he had simply appeared out of the night and become our guide, he and his son” (26). The old man apologizes and says: “You no well, sir, that’s why. I think say you go stop here rest small before we go. Tha’s why” (27).

The old man has been a straightforward and good-mannered guide, patiently waiting to reap the benefits of assisting the journalists achieve their quest. Before continuing their journey, the following day, Rufus asks whether they could pay Chief Ibiram for lodging in his house, but the old man quickly rejects this offer saying they cannot pay because they were brothers and they were hosting the visitors of their free will: “No, no pay. Na my brother Chief Ibiram” (33).

The old man and his son have been the journalists’ guides, paddling their boat from one riverside village to another, steering them through the creeks and rivers until they reach the fifth village. Although it too appears abandoned, this village is different from the others in that, the pipelines exhibit no evidence of sabotage or destruction. The old man takes Rufus to the edge of the field and shows him the oil rigs. They are intact. Zaq walks up to them and comments: “Oil rigs, so why haven’t the militants bombed the pipelines here? Because the oil companies pay them not to do so, or perhaps the oil companies paid the soldiers to keep the militants away, or that. Yes…” (35).

This is the turning point of their relationship and the juncture at which the reporters understand the motivation behind the old man’s volunteering to guide
them. The old man begs the reporters to adopt his son telling them that there is no future for him in this troubled area. His pressing need is to rescue his little son from the social decadence and destruction surrounding him. It is also at this stage that the reporters get to know their names. The old man is called Tamuno and his son is Michael: “My name na Tamuno, but people call me papa Michael” (37). This narrative suggests that the journalists were not so much interested in the bigger picture depicted by the Old man as they navigate through the villages. They were only concerned with the contract given to them and as such they were not interested in knowing the predicaments of the poor Old man and his son.

Alternatively, he calls his son to come and show the journalists that he can write his name hoping to demonstrate that the boy is intelligent and should they adopt and educate him further, his future would be much brighter with them than it is here in the debris of these villages where there is no state apparatus or rule, save for the oil companies and the military. Louise Althusser suggests that if there are established state institutions in a given society, there will be peace, development, and compliant citizens.

The unfolding episode epitomizes the magnitude of the dilemma faced by the characters whether to join or not to join the militants. None of these choices offer the predicated an explicit assurance of peace and security. It resonates the famous idiom — the devil’s alternative, you are doomed if you do, and doomed if you don’t.

The old man who has witnessed both the pristine past of his people and the present distress and can advise the youth on a third way, a path out of this quandary
with prospects of a better future. If Zaq and Rufus turn down Tamuno’s plea and decline to adopt the boy, his future will most certainly be doomed. The old man implores them in a pidgin dialect predominantly spoken in the region: “But see, wetin he go do here? Nothing. No fish for river, nothing. I fear say soon him go join the militants, and I no wan that. Na good boy” (36).

He is telling them that, if they refuse to adopt the boy, Michael’s life will be doomed as he will have no option but to join the militants. The old man is a representation of linguistic hybridity. He speaks for the subaltern characters that are heterogeneous in Gayatri Spivak’s submission that one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous (271-313). The various groups agitate with different tones but are all centered on economical alienation. The human agency may agitate but this has been a problematic issue for both postcolonial and environmental studies as in the anthropocentric version of this problem ‘others’ may speak but their speech is often pre-positioned so as not to be heard by those in power (Spivak, 271-313). This is because of the economic impulses that exist in different colonies; in this case the main interest is to exploit the oil and control the people and the resources of the region.

The dilemma of the villagers is worsened by constant visits and harassment by the militants who come to establish whether, or not the villagers are leaking information to the military about them and their hideouts and to scare them to silence. One of the popular militia groups locked in mortal combat with the military is led by Ani Wilson -The professor, who it is alleged arbitrarily tagged random villagers as traitors and informers. The following quotation from Oil on Water qualifies this:
…he {The professor} gathered everyone into the worship hut and said he wanted all the worshippers to swear allegiance to him. When Naman, the priest said that wasn’t really necessary, the man placed a gun on his chest and told him to shut up. Then he said he had discovered that traitors, informers, had been giving information to the soldiers (159).

The allegations made by the militant, though false, are a deliberate ploy calculated to create an aura of suspicion between the worshippers and their tormenters. This distrust, the resultant fear and the ever-looming threat of imminent reprisal keeps the worshippers and the village as a whole bound in dread and vulnerable to the hegemony of the militia. This constant state of trepidation has led some of the populace to desert their homes and migrate to the city and a semblance of security. Others never settle down but keep wandering from place to another, displaced and disenfranchised. These situations from the text concur with the global causes of migration, mostly from civil wars and terrorism — one of the legacies of postcolonialism.

2.6 Cultural Subjectivity

Wangari Maathai in The Challenge for Africa defines culture as “the means by which a people express themselves, through language, traditional wisdom, politics, religion, architecture, music, tools, greetings, symbols, festivals, ethics, values, and collective identity” (160). Maathai’s definition is, in essence, the sum total of a people’s way of life. It is this totality that the study is interested in and its dislocation through the forceful control of those cultural rights by an intruding force called ‘subjectivity’. The dislocation of the people’s culture is discussed from the following positions: One, erosion of the people’s culture due to the following colonial influences; formal education, religion, technology and brainwash. Two, the removal of the people from their ancestral homes, disconnecting them from their
defining values, cultural spaces of worship, features, rivers, all these have been deconstructed from the texts.

Issues surrounding cultural values and their destruction cannot be comprehensively discussed without mentioning the effects of colonialism and what it has done to Africa. In her article titled “Post-colonialism: The unconscious Changing of a Culture” Zandra Kambysellis suggests that the turning point of the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries was an imperial power from Belgium, England, Portugal, among others, which being hungry for gold, oil, ivory, trade, or perhaps even more power, invade countries like Nigeria, Congo, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and many others. The indigenous people must forthwith struggle with this newly arrived culture with all its beliefs, values, habits and traditions that have now become entangled within their own lives. They must evaluate which part of that change brings benefits and a stimulation of the economy through trade, increased awareness and self-sufficiency through education, advanced medicine that may lead to the removal of disease and which part reaps harm such as loss of traditional culture, beliefs, and values. In many cases, the lines blur and the imposed change can be thought to have both positive and negative ramifications (1). Kambysellis further makes it clear that:

The term ‘colonization’ is more than just the struggle of a native people adjusting to a new culture. It comes with a more serious problem, namely, the suppression and oftentimes the complete obliteration of the colonized people’s former way of life and culture under attack by the entry of another who believes he knows almost everything. (Kambysellis, 1).

Colonial narratives as chronicled in African literary works, do not stop at adjusting the new culture but consciously go ahead to subdue and eradicate the
culture of the native through evangelism and a formal education which brings about a binary difference, (the colonizer and the colonized), and preps the ground for cultural exploitation. The colonizer believes his culture is superior and can and will use any means at their disposal to suppress the colonized culture to assert his superiority.

In the texts, there are depictions of resistance and reconstructions of native culture. Despite the damage caused by the colonial influences, forms of native cultural education and informal instruction are still practiced. Native culture, however, still suffers suppression from foreign influences that seek to control and even stifle it in its entirety. In Oil on Water, for example, the old man and his son represent a teacher and a pupil in an informal setting. The young boy is always by his father’s side learning how to paddle a canoe and fish. This is the classic informal practice of preserving culture and passing values to the next generation. Karibi, the village blacksmith is another example of this informal instruction model. Blacksmithing is an ancient ancestral vocation in Africa, with myriad myths and legends attached to it. Oral literature has aptly chronicled blacksmithing and its importance and its place in society is widely recognized. Before the arrival of Europeans and their technology, local blacksmiths manufactured all manner of tools for the farm, household and for warfare. These included hoes, cutlasses, knives, metal pots, spears, arrows and swords. Later, after studying European models they even crafted locally made guns. Karibi appears briefly in the text but his role has always occupied a very significant position in his society. He has a shed in a strategic place in the village where he practices his craft and trains his apprentices. In Oil on Water we read: “In the center, squatting before a blazing hearth stocked
with metal, was a young man who looked up at us briefly before returning to his chore” (10).

The villagers respect and value him very much. “Karibi na important man for dis village” (11), unfortunately, the incursion of colonialism deals traditional blacksmithing a mortal blow. Wowed by the ‘imported’ tag and the shine, refinement and polish of factory products, society deserts locally produced tools and equipment from the blacksmith, en masse, effectively killing a bastion of African culture. Storytelling as a medium of instruction is another form of informal education used to pass on cultural heritage to the next generation which is also abandoned. In *Oil on Water* Rufus says:

...I could hear voices of children and women. The women were standing in an open shed around a hearth, probably smoking fish… I opened the first door on my right and saw a group of children, about five of them, all about the same age, seated around an old woman; she was telling them a story (24).

Through these stories, elders inculcated their communal belief system into the minds of the children. The curriculum is broad ranging from myths, legends, heroes and heroism to gender roles, all learned through storytelling. The inculcation of the place and value of gender roles in the village was vital for village survival. Girls were trained to smoke fish, tend the house and sell commodities in the market while male children went to the river with their fathers to catch fish. This informal way of inculcating their values are captured in the following: “Most of the houses were empty, the men out fishing and the women smoking fish in the shed I’d seen earlier” (25).

In the texts, despite the existence of colonial influences the villagers are struggling to hold onto their belief systems. Rufus and Zaq, both of whom have
acquired formal education are not exempted, they still hold to some beliefs such as the influence of the gods on fortune and misfortune. Rufus notes: “Events were always a step ahead of us, as if Eshu the trickster god was out to play with us” (27).

Whilst Christianity, a Western belief system, took some roots in the region, it failed to eradicate the significant grip of native religious beliefs on the people of the Niger delta, and to this day local traditions are still a fundamental facet of society. All these elements are well documented in the Oil on Water, where storytelling, the gods and the traditional religion headed by Naman, its chief priest are well recorded. The Shrine which contains old and new sculptures has existed for over a hundred years and, contrary to the Christian faith, it determines the course and tempo of the village. The villagers are depicted as spiritually connected to the shrine and carry out the ordinances of the priest, thus: “The villagers were all connected to the Shrine by religion, and the chief priest had authority over the whole settlement” (108).

Despite the fact that they know a lot about Port Harcourt, a city that had a significant confluence of Christian denominations, through contact with the crew of the lorry that came through the village once a week, many villagers are ignorant of Christianity which, therefore, remains irrelevant to them. They remain stoic traditionalists despite the crisis in the region. The shrine also serves as tourist attracting place that adds values to the traditionalist either in kind or cash: “The shrine was the main industry, and after it came fishing. Sometimes outsiders visited the shrine and took pictures of the sculptures” (133).

In fact, no mention is made of the church, not even in the villages that are destroyed in warfare between the militants and the military; all the same, the
shadow of Christianity still exists in some parts of that region manifesting itself in the influences of postcolonialism. These influences, which include imports such as Christianity and formal education, have left their mark on Niger Delta culture by eroding certain aspects of its social fabric. According to Bill Ashcroft, the effect of postcolonialism begins “from the very first moment of colonial contact” (177).

The West seeks to dismantle anything ‘African’ by subliminally indoctrinating the ‘natives’ through its education and religion. This strategy has had its successes. Over the years it has snared some socially significant converts who have then been singled out for special coaching and inculcation with western culture to produce indigenous carbon copies of westerners. These individuals are then placed in positions of authority and used as agents of the imperial power to subdue their countrymen and prepare the region for the exploitation of its resources. Even though to the so-called enlightened natives, the gods, shrines, sculptures and oral traditions have over the years become objects and destinations for tourism, certain aspects of colonial culture have always been viewed with a suspicion which is why modern Africans still adhere to facets of their culture. It is, therefore, clear that as long as African culture and traditions remain living ghosts that linger on in the minds of villagers, there will be no end to cultural conflict in former colonies of the erstwhile imperial powers.

Brainwashing is a time tested and effective strategy used to pressurise a group of people or an individual to adopt radically different beliefs from those originally or traditionally held. As it suggests, the term, ‘brainwash’ means to ‘clean out’; to indoctrinate, condition, re-educate, influence or propagandize.
The strategy is applied either forcefully - literally being beaten into the subject, or very subtly through insinuation. Mesmerised by the glamour of the moneyed and flashy lifestyles of politicians and clansmen who work in the oil fields, more and more villagers seek employment with the oil companies where they earn substantial incomes even though they are not educated and work as casual labourers. The new jobs give them a false sense of superiority and they rapidly discard much of their culture and traditional occupations.

When some of these oil workers, including Rufus’s father, are retrenched and replaced by experts, the fickleness of their situation finally hits home. Rufus’ father doesn’t want the same fate to befall his son and plans to send him to the city to learn a trade and he responded positively to his father’s advice and got for himself a job, but the future remains uncertain. Rufus narrates:

The plan is my father’s; he has lost his job, just like half the town. They all worked for the **ABZ Oil Company**, and now the people, once awash in oil money, watch in astonishment as the streets daily fill up with fleeing families, some returning to their hometowns and villages, some going on to Port Harcourt in the hope of picking up something in the big city…Get a trade, my father said, get something you can do with your hands, and this will never happen to you (62).

In the end, forsaking one’s culture for a new job and way of life has turned out to be a mirage, an illusion. The oil companies assure the inhabitants of the Niger delta that what they offered, formal education and employment, would guarantee them a better life, but that does not happen. The damage has been done. The old cultural way of life is over and cannot be brought back due to the extent of the ecological devastation of the creeks, rivers and farm lands. As a result, the locals end up itinerant in their own country, slaves of a new foreign culture which they don’t
understand and misguided venerated over their own. This brings us to the second point: removal of the people from their cultural homes.

The dislodgment of the local people from their ancestral homes and defining values was a direct result of oil exploration and exploitation as chronicled in the texts and is achieved through violence meted out at the instigation of the amorphous multinationals through compromised agents such as local politicians, corrupt governments, militants and the military.

Ever since the incursion of ‘western mores’ into Africa, the African culture has been under constant attack. The subjectivity of African traditional culture is not an *ad hoc* occurrence. It is, in fact, a meticulously planned and methodically executed plot to dislodge and relocate an entire people from an area identified as being oil rich so as to free it for exploitation for the sole benefit of the imperial power and its agencies. The scheme is consummated with calculated precision.

The first step is to threaten the older, more vulnerable generation represented in the texts by the chiefs, the old man, and Karibi. This is followed by the brutal oppression of the general populace; arresting and executing real and perceived antagonists with such impunity that many residents flee their homes giving the raiders a free hand.

Culture gives people an identity and sense of belonging but the people of the Niger delta region are denied this right. Zilayefa is called ‘yellow-yellow’, a classification applied to her in the village because of her mixed heritage and the erosion of culture that should have embraced her. She is now in a crisis, and finds it difficult to fit in. Her predicament deepens when she leaves the village and goes to the city where she meets Admiral, a man from her Ijaw tribe who she naively
clutches onto as a father figure, trusting that he could help her resolve her identity issues. Unfortunately, he has other plans. He sees a naïve, beautiful and vulnerable young woman and preys on her disconnection from culture to satisfy his lust. He becomes her sugar daddy. She later laments bitterly when she sees young girls with white men because she knows they will end up producing children who will someday end up in her predicament:

I had wanted to understand what it was besides money that made beautiful twenty-year-old girls look at their short, fat, ugly fifty-eight-year-old white husbands with so much affection. Maybe then I could understand better or with less anger why there were more and more of my kind - “African-profits,” “born-troways”, “ashawo-pickins”, “father-unknowns”, - running around the slums of Port Harcourt. Maybe then I would not hide from the facts of my birth that my yellow skin and curly hair put on display (171).

The erosion of culture leads to all manner of social problems such as promiscuity, debauchery, crime and lack of respect for family structure, marriage institution and customs. Culture is a common denominator safeguarding its practitioners against these predicaments by according them commonness and the opportunity to live together in harmony within their physical and spiritual environments. This is what forms the basis for their fulfillment and personal peace.

Mapped onto the masses, this personal peace translates into societal peace. When people are disconnected from their heritage they become subject to social ills which, if not checked, lead to violence and even an uprising against the government. For example, dissension between the militants and the military led to the destruction of many villages and loss of lives. The forced purchase of land from the villagers and the lackadaisical spillage of hazardous waste from the oil wells that effectively killed the rivers and farm lands and the callous retrenchment of oil...
workers have all contributed to the displacement of the populace which invariably impacts negatively on society.

At this juncture one must ask how the foregoing ties in with Wangari Maathai’s definition of culture. Where is the collective identity of these characters as portrayed in both texts? To answer this question, we need to revisit Maathai’s definition of culture to realize that their collective identity has been battered so completely by their displacement and wandering in other places. The growth of any given culture is inherently attached to land. People need the dual sense of belonging and possessing their land to practice their culture freely. Where an individual or a group from a given cultural background are displaced and find themselves emigrants in a foreign land, they will always find it difficult to practice their culture effectively and in its entirety, a fact that consistently truncates the growth of their collective identity. In relation to this, Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College in London avers a pertinent definition of culture as follows: “The word ‘culture’ derives from a French term, which in turn derives from the Latin ‘colere’, which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nature. It shares its etymology with a number of words related to actively fostering growth” (np).

In both texts, cultural values and their growth have systematically been devalued. First, by a colonizing power with its belief systems and culture and later by the intruding oil corporations aided by their self-interestedly accommodating political agents and military enforcers. Traditional institutions that represent cultural heritage and serve as custodians of societal norms and values have been methodically muzzled and blocked from exercising their mandates and freedoms.
The characters in the texts are given little option concerning the purchase of their land. The government and oil companies are prepared to apply force when pretense at dialogue failed.

In *Oil on Water*, for example, Chief Malabo does not give consent to the oil company to buy land for the very simple reason that it was not his to sell in the first place - it is communal property. To him this is a major affront demeaning his culture and ancestral heritage. He quips: “What kind of custodians of land would they be if they sold it off?” (39). Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov state that: “In daily conversations, in political discourse, and in the media, that feed them, alien cultures are often pictured in moral terms, as better or worse. Yet there are no scientific standards for considering the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of one group as intrinsically superior or inferior to those of another” (25).

Relatively speaking, cultural groups, feel, think and act differently. There is no philosophical evidence or scientific standard for considering one group as superior to the other. Unfortunately, this shadow of a superiority complex lives to date. When one looks at the distrust, disdain and contempt that exist in intra African cultures today - even among neighbouring tribal groupings, one can begin to appreciate the amount of harm colonial domination brought to the former colonies. This supremacy creed has led to a class distinction where one individual considers himself as being superior, wealthier or more educated than others - even among his tribal grouping - and expects them to recognize this as fact and treat him accordingly. The superiority dogma is a topographical barrier that defines the colonized as the ‘other’ whose culture is undermined and as such, the colonizer
holds the rights and privilege to exploit any and all resources of the African continent at will.

The fact that the culture of the original African coastal dwellers was permeated and diluted through their contact with visiting Europeans sailors is depicted unequivocally in Yellow-Yellow. Bibi, the mother of the protagonist, finds herself caught in a cultural dilemma because of her association with sailors who have come to buy oil from the Niger Delta. She thinks of and holds Greek sailors as special human beings, and her relationship and affairs with them bring her untold cultural abuse, disconnection and hardship. She eventually withdraws from her self-inflicted quandary and focuses on training her daughter, Zilayefa to become a cultured and responsible woman. But her efforts are an exercise in futility. Frustrated by the insurmountable barriers of cultural disconnection brought on by the socio-economic and cultural displacement into which her society has been thrown, Zilayefa never realizes her mother’s dreams.

It is important to note that one of the offshoots of a cultural melt-down is the phenomenon of father-figure displacement, or the absence or absconding of fathers from homes leaving women to function as single mothers. Out of shame, Bibi tries not to reveal Zilayefa father’s identity, but her daughter’s physical appearance is clear evidence of her heritage and this fact, in the society’s eyes, makes Bibi a woman of questionable morals. The prejudice does not end there. Her peers in the Women’s Association despise her for the same reasons and she eventually quits the society to concentrate on bringing up her daughter, inculcating in her moral values to ensure that she never goes through what her mother has had to endure.
Abject poverty has become the bane of the inhabitants of this region. Their dreams and aspirations as a people have no chance of ever being achieved, and although regimes have come and gone, there has never really been any serious incentive or political will to resolve their problems. The region’s avaricious politicians somehow always hijack and scuttle the citizens’ march to the ‘Promised Land’. This is because the route to peace and prosperity is culture and it has inescapable connection to land. What the characters were rewarded was a subjectivity that denied them from exercising this biological right.

2.7 Conclusion

Human engagement with the environment is inevitable. In fact, man derives his culture and source of living from the environment he lives in. The cultural background of the people is pristine in nature and fits in with the heritage and objectives of their ancestors which included unity, communal and cultural values, beliefs and myths which served as an impetus keep them in harmony with the spirit of the land. Land epitomizes the socio-economic wellbeing of a society and forms the base for traditions and norms from which the various cultural values such as songs, drums, dance, food, hero and heroism stem. Sadly, these defining pillars that give a society its identity has been sapped away from this society.

Most importantly, from what is experienced in the narratives of subjectivities, man has been truncated from his natural right to resist or to revolt against any form of attack or violence to liberate himself. As a result, one can conclude that the region is deliberately permitted to plunge into turmoil by the socio-political forces that make it possible to plunder its wealth at will.
Similarly, the narratives are deliberately constructed to present the reader with a vivid topographical mapping of a nation held hostage by the forces of hegemony. In this chapter, we sought to establish subjectivities as explored in Habila’s *Oil on Water* and Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow*, and the study has effectively showcased how the forces of subjectivity are responsible for the denial of fundamental human rights and societal development.
CHAPTER THREE

THE IMPACT OF OIL DRILLING ON THE CHARACTERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

3.0 Introduction

This chapter seeks to establish and analyse the impact of the oil drilling exercise on the environment and the characters in the texts. This is accomplished by conducting an ecocritical examination of the two components. Characters of interest include the journalists, the general public, the military and militants.

The warring between the military and the militants informs the negative impact of oil drilling on the people. The characters’ views and beliefs on the environment are also discussed. All queries seek to paint a picture of and the characters’ interaction with the environment as presented in the novels. The inquiry also helps to shape our understanding of environmental destruction from the writer’s point of view.

3.1 The Impact of Oil Drilling on the Characters

The future of the environment has become a global concern, as it directly impacts on the survival of human, plant, and animal life. Man’s relationship and interaction with the environment has been a volatile one. His profit focuses on aggressive exploitation of natural resources while he forgets to take into cognizance the negative effects such denuding activities would have on nature and humanity. The literary imagination employed in the selected novels allows us to delve into, and witness the upshot of this caustic relationship. The properties of the textual representation and their mediation by ideological and other socio-economic and historical factors are issues key to the understanding of the people’s agitation. These
fundamental issues further translate into the aftermath of oil drilling represented in the texts as being mutually negative to both the characters and the environment. The novels ecocritical perspective becomes heart wrenchingly painful because apart from the people being denied their freedom of expression, a sense of belonging and their civil rights, they are also condemned to live in abject poverty. The novels also portray the region’s elite as trans-positioning western ideas of the human/nature relationship; the dichotomies of the ‘other’: human/non-human lettered/unlettered, urban/rural, military/militant, and other elements connected to the business of oil exploitation that end up impacting negatively on the people. These negative consequences include poverty, diseases, fear, displacement, and oppression.

3.1.0 Poverty

Poverty is a disconcerting condition that seems to affect every character in the novels. Before the exploration of oil in the region, people live happily devoid of want. They have no reason to fear being endangered or being saddled with ecological problems. Their land and rivers are healthy and unpolluted which enable them to cultivate substantial cash crops like cassava, yam, cocoyam, egusi, vegetables, palm oil, and maize. When the oil companies come and commence oil drilling, lives immediately begin to change. Farmers feel the first effects of these changes when the oil spills begin to affect the fertility of the soil. In Oil on Water, Rufus notes: “Once upon a time they lived in paradise. It was a small village close to Yellow Island. They lacked for nothing, fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children growing up before them, happy…” (38).
This description of the peoples’ pre-oil exploitation life paints a blissful existence in their idyllic village before the scourge hit. War between the insurgents and the army, the second cruel offshoot of the discovery of oil in the region, forever shatters the tranquility of villages like Irioke Island, leaving them destroyed. The two texts illustrate a delightful portrayal of unperturbed tranquility with people enjoying a simple, peaceful and rewarding way of life until the oil curse shattered it. Well-head oil spills lead to toxicity in the rivers which in turn affects farmlands leading to dramatic shortages in agricultural production and river fish levels. This sets off a chain reaction of destruction. Angered by the imposition of the multinational oil companies whom they view as raiders coming to steal and poison their land and heritage, the local youth revolt forming gangs which begin to vandalise the oil pipelines as an expression of their displeasure. Their insurgenge turns counterproductive and exacerbates the situation, further the gushing oil simply leads to the destruction of even more farms.

In *Yellow-Yellow* Zilayefa states that during her secondary school days, one of the crude oil pipelines that ran through her village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land including her mother’s farm. This is a very significant event in her life because it consigns her and her mother to landlessness and food shortages since forthwith they can no longer produce their own food. She decries: “My mother lost her main source of sustenance. However, I think she had lost that land a long time ago, because each season yielded less than the season before” (4). This is an instructive assessment of the insensate attitude and approach to the management of pipelines by the oil companies in the region - a negligent attitude that resulted in an incomprehensible ecological disaster and the uncalled-for suffering, disenfranchisement, and dislocation of millions of people. Man’s
insatiability, self-indulgence, and aggressive impulse to pillage anything valuable from the environment for his own selfish ends, and as cheaply as possible, consigns the whole community to poverty, and pushes the community’s young men into militancy, kidnappings and pipeline and oil installation bombings. Displaced, desperate, and disillusioned, young girls delve into prostitution in major cities like Port-Harcourt, Abuja, and Lagos.

Considering Ecocriticism as an earth-centered approach that examines the human - environment relationship; Glotfelty and Fromm believe that we have reached a disconcerting period of environmental restrictions, a time when the consequences of human actions are demanding the planet’s basic life support systems. We are there. We either change our ways or face global catastrophe, obliterating much beauty, and destroying countless animal and plant species in our reckless race to apocalypse (10).

Habila’s rendering confirms that the pervasive impulse of the oil companies backed by their sidekicks, the militants and military, is to reap the maximum profit possible from the oilfields with no consideration to ecological damage or the poverty and/or related hardships that their activities might pass to the community. As we read the two novels, we realised that the oil companies’ methods of oil production are unethical and injurious to the ecosystem of the Niger delta.

These multinational firms’ unabashed objective can be summed up in two words; exploitation and profiteering, and they will achieve these at all costs aided by their self-seeking local agents. The combination of their blatant greed, brutality and lackadaisical approach to environmental concerns and oil drilling ethics lead to
innumerable oil spillages, gas flare-ups and other ecological disasters all of which have contributed to rendering the land noxious and unsuitable for food production and the survival of the communities that depend on it. Sadly, the Niger delta crisis is merely a microcosm of the true scope of this dilemma. The dilemma is a global phenomenon and urgently requires a concerted, uncompromising and lasting solution. Donald Worster says:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them (27).

Literary scholars, many of whom are selected and are quoted in this study, help us understand the imperativeness of acquisition and application of ethics in our anthropocentric interaction with nature. Worster suggests an environmental reasoning by applying ethics to the resources without which the rising population and the demand for resources will not only lead to degradation but to poverty.

3.1.1 Disease

Disease carrying germs and viruses thrive in and spread through polluted water and soil. The communities in the texts have no access to clean water and food and whatever medical services they have are insufficient. Famine and starvation rack the entire region and because they are left unattended, many people fall ill and die. It is major issues like these that motivate ecocritics to advocate for the rights of the environment. The environment as a premise of living space constitutes both the human and non-human other. If the environment is vulnerable, it follows that the entire ecosystem is endangered. Complete human populations have been, and can
still, be wiped out by disease and famine and reckless human interaction with the environment is arguably the chief cause of this scourge.

In Oil on Water, Habila introduces Dr. Dagogo Mark and Nurse Gloria, medical personnel sent by the government to this troubled area. Mark works hard in taking care of the villagers and saves many lives, including that of the military officer commanding the troupe stationed there, a man simply known by his rank, Major. He also attends to Mr. Zaq, one of the renowned journalists contracted to search for and negotiate the ransom for the kidnapped British woman. Zaq is taken ill during the search and is diagnosed with dengue fever. Unfortunately, he dies in Irikefe Island and is buried there: “Zaq had been buried in the empty grave he and I had once dug up in the dead of the night… A wooden cross-standing at the head of the grave and attached to the cross was a simple inscription: ZAQ. JOURNALIST. AUGUST 2009. RIP” (225). This tragedy exemplifies how the healthy are exposed to early death in the creeks of the Niger Delta without having achieved much in life. Zaq is buried and forgotten whilst searching for the big story he had alluded to in the first chapter of Oil on Water. Dr. Mark tirelessly treats all who come to see him, be they villagers or soldiers.

When they can no longer beat back the aggressive militants, the government soldiers retreat and pull out of the region completely, leaving the community in rubble and devastation. Dr. Mark’s nurse, Gloria, tells Rufus that she too had been kidnapped and released by the militants. When she comes back to the island, she finds the soldiers pulling out. Rufus says:
She told me Zaq was dead. He had died before the militants brought Gloria back to Irkfe, setting her free on the shore. I let her words sink in, not interrupting. *When she came back she found the military pulling out*, and the villagers, led by Naman, who was now the head priest, engaged in rebuilding the shrine and the huts and salvaging anything that they could (emphasis added, 223). 

This account is a clear indicator that the military has failed in its quest to contain the militia and ease matters for the oil multinationals. Dr. Mark Dagogo relentlessly warns the villagers against the dangers of the noxious pollutants in the environment highlighting their dangers to man and nature. He particularly warns against the danger of gas flare ups, unfortunately, many villagers do not listen to him. In fact, gas flare ups that illuminate the village soon replace candles and lamps and nocturnal communal activities such as selling commodities in the market place, meetings or just passing time are all carried on under the light of the gas flares. The sad upshot of all this is that people, livestock, and crops became affected and died. Before the tussle between the military and the militants’ flare ups, the villagers are healthy as confirmed by Dr. Mark: “I soon discovered that the villagers’ chief discontent was not over their health; they were a remarkably healthy people, actually” (143). Their problems are conflict induced. Many people are injured in the fracas, children malnourished because of the resultant food shortages and women forced to struggle to provide for their families. A knowledgeable, health conscious and compassionate man, Dr. Mark endeavours to do the best for his patients:

When people started dying, I took blood samples and recorded the toxins in them, and this time I sent my results to the government. They thanked me and dumped the results in some filing cabinet. More people died and I sent my results to NGOs and international organizations, which published them in international journals and urged the government to do something
about the flares, but nothing happened. More people fell sick, a lot died (145).

A disappointing common denominator of most post-colonial governments is the apathy they have shown towards their own citizens’ afflictions and predicaments. When Dr. Mark takes samples to the government for analysis this is what he encounters: “They thanked me and dumped the results in some filing cabinet” (145). The excerpt above portrayed how committed the medical doctor was to his patients but without support and funding to health sector by the stake holders, people are bound to contract fatal diseases. In reference to this phenomenon Greg Garrard states: “From the fifteenth century onwards, new territories discovered by European explorers were granted to national governments and their agents by charters, patents, and Papal Bulls, with little concern for the rights of indigenous peoples” (177). The assertion by Garrard is true when compared to the health condition of the characters in the novels. They were given little concern on health and other basic needs.

Similarly, International bodies like the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, and United States Agency for International Development did not come to the aid of the communities as they are mandated to do, and they are left on their own to suffer and die of famine and disease.

3.1.2 Fear

Fear is a theme that recurs in literary works and it assumes many forms. One of the principal fears that the characters show or profess is the terror of death, and it is a universal apprehension. The fear of death resurfaces in literature more than any other and can be traced back to antiquity in canonical works, on through
fantasies, like J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1937), to the modern day. The dread of death takes many forms; the fear of our own deaths, fear of family members or close friends dying, fear of children preceding parents or the death of an entire culture.

Fear is a sensation that originates from the discernment of imminent danger and is a concept that has been used by persecutors to deny people their freedom by constantly pouring a barrage of threats to keep them in a constant state of alarm and hysteria. In *Oil on Water*, Habila avers that under the prevailing situation, Tamuno sees no future for the next generation in the community and fears for his son, not wanting him to join the militants. He also fears for his clan being pushed into exile to seek refuge within a different community where hospitality is uncertain.

The degree of duress must be very grave to elicit the foregoing reactions among these villagers because they are not portrayed as being cowards. They quake in fear of the militants and live in an area where the military are known to torture any person they so much as suspect to be a militant or an informer working for the militants, and their variety of torture is brutal. Still in *Oil on Water*, many villagers abandon their homes and run for their lives. On Irikefe Island, worshippers fear for the death of their ancestral religion. Later, after the war, they are shown as being fearful of rebuilding their shrine and restoring the sculptures that had been destroyed.

### 3.1.3 Displacement

The turmoil fuelled in the region by the consequences of oil drilling has led to the displacement of many villagers. The military brutalises the villagers whom they believe have a hand in the sabotaging of oil rigs and pipelines and by giving
information to the militants. The militants, on the other hand, are suspicious of the villagers who they imagine are siding with the military. Being caught in up the middle of these suspicions and conspiracies has brought about untold suffering to the masses.

In the military camp the Major sets up a special area where he locks up his captives and dishes out indescribably atrocious punishment. Habila depicts the condition of some of the captives through his protagonist, Rufus who says: “Most of the men were lying on the floor, some with faces turned toward the wall. I didn’t know how long they had been the Major’s prisoners, or what other punishment they had endured in addition to the petrol-drenching, but they all looked exhausted and dispirited” (152). This kind of brutality is not just counterproductive - it causes the civilians to abhor the military - but it is also dehumanizing and indicative of the military’s disregard for human life and rights in their quest for what, in their eyes, is to bring peace and stability to the region.

Every person in the region is affected in one way or the other and the militia, who claim to be the representatives of the indigenous people of the region, maintain that they are merely fighting for their rights. Dagogo, the community’s medical doctor laments bitterly that the fighting between the militants and the military and the toxins from oil spillages are affecting everyone in that region in very strange ways. According to him, the environment has now become a death trap for all forms of life in the region. This is the reason people leave their beloved homes and flee to places that are less violent. In Oil on Water Habila typifies Chief Malabo’s community as an example of a community that continually moves from one location to another in search of that extremely rare commodity - peace.
The tension and apprehension built up by the description of the citizen’s repression in the Niger Delta is extremely distressing, and there is no comic relief for the villagers. Rufus who risks his life to search of the kidnapped British woman arrives in a desolate village where he finds some villagers and asks them of the whereabouts of Chief Ibidam. They respond in Pidgin English saying: “Chief Ibidam don go e no dey here anyone. E say e no wan stay here anymore, because of so so fighting and because of bad fishing” (182). Because of the violence and toxins that kill all the fish in the river, the chief and his people had relocated further north to an area where they can experience a semblance of peace and eke out a livelihood. It is worth mentioning that the three tiers of government, local, state, and federal, that constitute the Nigerian system are not mentioned in the texts as having lived up to their expectation and responsibility to the people. The military who are part of the federal system and whose responsibility is to maintain peace and order, fails miserably in its mandate. Instead of mediating and listening to the grievances of both sides and resolving the conflict between the youth and the oil companies, they become agents of oppression and violence. As Fanon posits in a discourse of violence and how it operates on the people: “The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to guide the dominations” (29).

The imposition of domination on the people by the oil companies, the militants, and the military is seen very clearly. All three forces prefer to intensify the tension and occupy the territory of the oil rich zone for their own economic gain leaving the larger society disenfranchised and vulnerable.
3.2 The Effects of the Oil Drilling on the Environment

The Niger Delta is oil rich, blessed with huge commercial quantities of oil deposits. After the prospectors discovered these deposits, the oil companies moved in swiftly claiming, enclosing and locking up the region for their own selfish gains. Robert. P. Marzec, an Ecocritic describes the term “enclosure” as the turning of open, communal land into private property (17). This attempted enclosure of communal land into private property by the oil companies deviously aided by the national government leads to many social and environmental hitches. In her article in which she postulates that postcolonial criticism of literary works remains inadequate without taking into consideration ecocritical perspectives, Tejoswita Saikia goes on to say that while colonising a race or people, the coloniser also colonises the land, thus, turning both the land and its people into resources to be exploited for economic profits (1). This summation aptly describes the Niger Delta situation where one of the negative upshots of postcolonialism is the exploitation of the land and the people. The region in this modern period is depicted as wobbling within the ambits of the egotistical exploitation of the land and its people without due consideration for the morality factor.

The public’s attitude towards the communal possession of a utility is extremely important. The citizenry and the governing authority must respect the ‘commons’ before the environment can be conserved and protected. In this light, Garrett Hardin places morality as one of the key factors controlling human behaviour towards the earth’s ‘commons’. He suggests in his article: “The Tragedy of the Commons” that the immoral exploitation of resources will always put the environment in jeopardy. Thus, until human attitude toward the use of ‘the common’ is controlled, the environment will stay endangered. This moral element
is essential and it is exactly this that was the missing component in the interactions between the oil companies and national government, on the one hand, and the people and environment of the oil rich zone of the Niger Delta on the other.

During the brief period of legitimate commerce, which falls soon after slavery is abolished and before the scourge of oil exploitation afflicted the land, the Niger Delta region was blessed with palm oil, a product that was used to lubricate British steam engines. Demand for the product grew exponentially leading to an excessive exploitation in the eighteenth century, a phenomenon that has resurfaced and is being experienced once again, only this time in the form of drilling for crude oil.

Toyin Falola and M. Heaton state that in between the slave and oil exploitation phases, palm oil was the primary commercial commodity sought after by European traders in the southern region of Nigeria. The shift from slave trading to palm oil production was a transition that brought about socio-economic reforms during the nineteenth century (61). This transition does not actually stop but morphs into the exploration and exploitation of crude oil. As with the abuses witnessed during the slave and palm oil trade eras before it, the exploitation of crude oil by the multinational companies brings its share of pain and destruction on human beings and the environment alike.

In Yellow-Yellow, there are numerous instances of the interwoven effects of this damage on the environment and humans. Agary uses her protagonist, Zilayefa to expose the extent of that destruction. The narrator describes the scene thus: “The water that flowed with streaks of blue, purple, and red, as drops of oil escaped from the pipelines that moved the wealth beneath my land and into the pockets of the
select few who ruled Nigeria was the same water I drank” (39). The economic, social, and political privileges that by right belong to the people are denied to them, while all the time the powerful might think this only affects the common citizen, the truth is that the blight on the land affects everyone; both the rulers and the ruled together. The poisoning of the land and rivers destroy livestock, plants, and human lives as discussed in 3.1. Zilayefa says that farming and fishing, the main stay of her people, no longer yield returns and the region began witnessing unprecedented devastating floods.

Constant industrial oil spillages, exacerbated by the incessant vandalism of oil pipelines by militia groups who inadvertently and unwittingly aggravate the crisis by spilling even more oil onto the land and rivers adversely affects soil texture. Crude oil contamination alkalizes the soil, badly affecting its fecundity and structure and leaving it prone to erosion. When it rains, these destabilized soils are swept away in the ensuing floods, badly eroding the once lush, productive landscape. The destruction of the environment means a drop-in food production and consequently, famine.

The imagery used in the pages of Oil on Water to describe the desolation of the environment is both stirring and horrifying. The gas flares, oil spillage and broken pipelines have unleashed death and devastation on the countryside. Rufus states:

We followed a bend in the river and in front of us we saw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots...we were as soundless as a ghost ship, the roar of our motor muffled by the saturated air. Over the black, expressionless water there were no birds or fish or other water creatures- we were alone (8-9).
All life had been killed by the toxins emanating from the crude oil. This, in an area beset with creeks, islets and waterways is particularly devastating. Most villages in the region are described as islands or as tiny riverside villages. They are all dependent on the water and the rivers are their food resources. Rufus jots down his experiences on their journey through the villages: “I wrote down all that I had witnessed since we left Irikefe (island); the abandoned villages, the hopeless landscape, the gas flares that always burned in the distance” (23).

3.3 Representation of the Environment by the Characters and the Conservation of the Niger Delta Land

On Irikefe Island, the characters are described as worshippers of a traditional religion and their head priestess was viewed as a goddess. Naman, the priest is always at the scene of rituals, addressing issues and disseminating the ordinances of the chief priestess. The people of Irikefe have their own view and representation of the earth. Their shrine is full of sculptures believed to be over a hundred years old and despite the advent of colonialism and the introduction of Christianity, their status as a community of adherents of a traditional religion remains intact and inviolate: “The worshippers, that’s what we call ourselves. Some of these figures go back almost a hundred years to the founding of the shrine. The sculpture garden is the shrine to which this whole Island is dedicated” (85). The Irikefe Island community is widely recognised and respected by the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages. This is captured as: “The villages were all connected to the shrine by religion and the chief priest had authority over the whole settlement” (108). The worshippers believe that if people conserve and respect it, the earth and its atmosphere have healing powers capable of curing many diseases. Although the government had sent a nurse to this community, they felt that they did not
necessarily need her services, and so when Zaq falls ill on the Island, the priest tells
Zaq: “We have a nurse here and she will attend to you. But perhaps you will not
need her. The air alone will heal you. I have seen it happen” (86).

The worshippers deem the earth to be a mother; a mother who cares for her
children and their welfare. One who protects and feeds them. In order to perform her
duties efficiently, however, this ‘mother’ must be accorded her due rights and
respect. To them, the spirits of the earth are emissaries of good and bad omens.
Those who sin against mother earth cannot have peace. Bloodshed, profanity and
pollution are considered crimes against mother earth. The priest is quoted as saying:
“Of course, we believe in spirits, good and bad. The bad ones are the ones who have
sinned against mother earth and cannot find rest in her womb. They roam the earth,
restless, looking for redemption” (107). This viewpoint appositely illustrates the
reciprocity of the relationship between man and earth and how the wellbeing of the
two entities is intertwined and interdependent. Within this community any
transgression committed against mother earth must be atoned for by an act of
purification within the generally accepted precepts and rituals conductible by
worshippers. If the appropriate rites of atonement are not performed, the wrath
of mother earth will be unleashed on her children. When Zaq and Rufus dig up a
grave which they believed to be the tomb of the kidnapped British woman, the
worshippers become very angry at them. Naman, the priest accompanied by two
other unnamed priests warn them saying:

You have committed a grave ill. By going to the burial
ground and digging up a grave last night, you have
desecrated the place, and now - well… our head priest died
this morning. And now we cannot bury her because your
activity last night has disrupted the balance of things. A
purification ceremony has to {must, sick} be carried out
(164 -5).
Other than this, the Irikefe community is depicted as being a righteous one; a community that has been keeping the ordinances of mother earth. They have lived a peaceful life and are, therefore, the ones saddled with the responsibility of restoring the shattered peace of the earth and conserving nature and its blessings. The priest says: “We are a holy community, a peaceful people. Our only purpose here is to bring a healing, to restore and conserve” (130).

From studying the worshippers’ beliefs, it is clear that African society subscribes to the concept of environmental conservation long before the advent of colonialism. Africans respect nature. There are certain taboos in the African culture that if desecrated and not atoned for, will bring about calamities such as disease and famine on a community - rivers will dry up and the land will not yield crops.

African societies have a moral obligation to preserve the earth and they must maintain a healthy relationship with nature. By their narrating community traditions meant to safeguard the environment, the two authors are in effect suggesting an alternative to the oil company’s destructive tendencies. They are proposing that age-old African values and attachment to the environment should be juxtaposed concomitantly with oil exploitation to promote a return to a situation of healthy and balanced ecosystems.

3.3.1 The Militants

This group is presented as an armed band engaged in an economic and political struggle to emancipate its land and people. They are portrayed as people who are denied access to the resources of their region. Some of them had been employed as casual workers by the oil companies but are later retrenched.
Among the grievances labelled against the oil companies by this group is the wanton destruction of the environment through irresponsible oil drilling practices in the region. Their objective is to take control of the exploitation of their oil resources and reverse the damage caused by the oil companies.

They argue that their adversaries have oppressed and marginalized them and their people have been economically and politically usurped of oil revenues. They have consequently intensified the war against the government. In *Oil on Water*, Henshaw, is the leader of one of the militia groups. He has been captured by the military and caged in a cell in one of the military camps on the Island.

While interviewing him, journalists Zaq and Rufus ask him whether he knows of the whereabouts of a British woman. His response was telling: “Is that all you want from me, to tell you whether some foreign hostage is alive or not? Who is she in the context of the hopes and ambitions being created and destroyed? Can’t you see the larger picture?” (154).

To Henshaw, the journalists have totally missed the point. They are interested in the wellbeing of a mere foreigner and not the harm that the culture she represents has wrecked on the people. The journalists are focused and concerned solely with their contract and cannot see the real story - the tragedy taking place right before their eyes - the annihilation of a people and their land. The very fact that the journalists were asking about the British woman was vindication for his group’s tactics. The militants’ resort to kidnapping to get the attention of their oppressors is evident in the narrative. It affords them a platform to air their grievances and the plight of their people.
Henshaw reprimands the journalists, telling them that his group’s objectives go deeper than just kidnapping. Kidnapping is a shock tactic geared towards the fulfilment of their objectives. When the journalists further ask him if his group has a name, his replies is as thus: “We are the people, we are the delta, and we represent the very earth on which we stand…Sit tight. Wait. This land is ours, after all” (154-6). This statement is a pertinent summation of the spirit of resistance against invasion and domination by an unwanted and unwelcome external subjugator. To the militia, the idea that the land and its resources rightfully belong to them is central to the struggle. They view their land as a place full of dreams and aspirations, and they want them back. They also know that the trespasser and his greed are the roadblock to the fulfilment of their desires. They will do what it takes to redeem what is theirs.

Similarly, Professor’s band of militants is relentless. They will not stop fighting until the military pulls out of the region. Habila chronicles Professor’s resolution as follows:

I am a soldier, I know how to fight and will never stop fighting till I achieve my goal. By this time tomorrow, one of the major oil depots will be burning. I want you to write about it, tell them I am responsible. I can’t tell you more than that, but I can tell you the war is just starting. We will make it so hot for the government and the oil companies that they will be forced to pull out (220).

This group succeeds in sabotaging and thwarting the government’s efforts to stop and disband them. The military is forced to pull out from the region in defeat. The oil companies have no choice but to follow suit and close shop, abandoning many oil installations. In the text, this group proved to be the real freedom fighters - the ones who freed their people and lands from forceful occupation and devastation.
The same cannot be said of other groups operating within the Niger Delta, however. In *Yellow-Yellow*, Agary writes: “The so-called youth groups had become well-oiled extortion machines all in the name of the struggle. They stole, blackmailed and vandalized for the progress and development of the Ijaw nation, the Niger delta” (158). Agary showcases the impact and predicaments that oil brings on the indigenous populace through a communal conflict that erupts between the two major ethnic groups, the Ijaw and the Ishekiri. The tribal clash continues for a very long time resulting in the displacement and uprooting of many people who are forced to relocate to cities and other neighbouring communities to avoid becoming casualties. The struggle pitting the militias against the government is very well documented in *Oil on Water* where their numerous conflagrations are vividly detailed.

### 3.3.2 The Journalists

The journalists as portrayed in the novel, *Oil on Water* are central to the story. Many aspects of the Niger Delta, its politics, conflicts, damage to the environment and social calamities are exposed through them. Rufus is the first-person narrator through whom all village stories are narrated. He hails from one of these villages, but the conflicts have internally displaced all its inhabitants forcing them to relocate to a place called Junction. While Rufus and Zaq are also concerned with the environment, they have been contracted to search for the British woman, and for now, this is what is important to them. They do, however, eventually give a full picture of the impact of the oil story on the environment and people.

The character of Dr. Dagogo Mark interacts extensively with the other characters in the novel in a professional capacity: The Major, the soldiers, the
villagers and Zaq all pass through his capable hands. Through him we get to know the dangers associated with chemical waste and how it affects livestock, plants, and human beings. Narratives associated with him point to his tireless efforts to inform the oil companies, NGOs, international organizations, and the government about the toxins that are released into the environment and how they are killing the ecosystem.

3.4 Conclusion

The impact of oil drilling on the characters and the environment provides us with an insight into the plight of the people living in the affected areas of the Niger Delta, creating an environmental and ecological consciousness in the reader in the process. That there is a need to conserve and safeguard the environment goes without question; and the responsibility falls on everyone, because anything that negatively affects it will without a doubt affect us all in one way or the other.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE STYLISTIC DEVICES USED IN ARTICULATING ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the study investigates the writers’ stylistic strategies as a literary form with the objective of critiquing its efficacy in depicting the severity, scope and damage of the environmental devastation bedeviling the Niger Delta. Some of the major stylistic techniques employed by the two authors include language, figurative expressions such as irony, flashback, diction, metaphor, personification, rhetorical questions and simile. These devices are used very effectively to deconstruct environmental issues that impose adverse socio-economic and political effects on the lives of humans and non-humans alike.

4.1 Language as a Tool of Communication

Language is an essential tool for communicating a writer’s message. Literary works, whether written or spoken, use language creatively to convey meaning. A writer’s creativity informs his/her style and it is through this literary technique that he or she communicates meaning and artistic vision to his/her readers. It is the writers’ artistic imagination and ability to articulate it vividly and persuasively that grasps readers’ perceptive senses. The ability of a written narrative to evoke critical imagination and re-evaluation of beliefs in a reader is achieved through the choice of language, themes, plot, and characterization employed by a writer to communicate his or her discernment of societal realities to the reader.

Societal realities incorporate sociopolitical, economic, religious and cultural inclinations. In this case, the writers have noted and are concerned that these
phases of life are packed with social ills fused with historical realities and injustices. What each writer then does is to use his/her creativity to evoke tension and curiosity through conflict and comic relief devices.

In light of this, an artist’s articulation technique in a work of art serves as a guide to both the development of a community and the social strategies of the society in which he lives. Similarly, in literary works, the social vision provides direction to a writer’s strategies and goals when addressing societal ills. The writer, as a product of his/her society, uses the resources available to address its realities in an aesthetic manner. These realities include, but are not limited to, bad governance, crumbling or non-existent infrastructure, human rights abuse, war, ecological destruction, famine, hunger, diseases, and poverty. A writer also rejoices in, and celebrates all that is humane and just. A writer cannot be indifferent to his societal ills; neither can he be blind to the goodness therein. He must, instead, assume a position of responsibility towards his people. It is these issues, among others, that the writers of Oil on Water and Yellow-Yellow have attempted to identify and interrogate in their respective works. Mwihia M. Joki and Collins Ogogo posit that:

Literature is a product of the writer’s artistic imagination. The writer accurately observes the happenings in his/her society, both contemporary and historical, and communicates to the readers using vivid imagination and a creative use of language. His/her aim is to communicate and have an aesthetic impact upon the reader. Writers, thus fuse history in their creative works. Indeed, literature gets shape and direction from society. The shape is derived from society’s experiences in terms of the raw experiences of the society. These raw experiences also dictate the kind of literature; in terms of the techniques and styles that the writer uses to communicate his/her vision (63).
According to these two scholars, one cannot deny the fact that history and creativity are juxtaposed in writers’ works. The same holds true in Habila and Agary’s fiction - both historicize the Nigerian and Niger delta’s story under a military regime. Their perspectives are basically centered on contemporary issues, like environmental degradation. The characters in both texts are the vehicles through which the writers communicate this phenomenon. The issues identified herein have been raised and are among concerns stridently voiced by activists going back to the time of the military regime led by General Sani Abacha, which is when the prominent environmental activist, Ken Saro Wiwa from the Ogoni Land of the Niger delta was brutally murdered, to the present.

Although the two authors have highlighted this form of environmental activism, they have also shown how the struggle ends up being hijacked by the political class of the Niger Delta region. A writer’s literary prowess is measured by his/her ability to match and merge craft with socio-political issues. The two writers project the happenings of their society in such a way that history and contemporary issues merge and reinforce each other.

4.2 Representation of the Environment and the People

Habila yearns for a utopian society, one that is geared towards salvaging the people from destruction. He uses his protagonist, Rufus to unravel the entanglements of the sociopolitical happenings of the society, especially those mostly associated with the economic issues of oil drilling and the interactions of the characters with the environment. Rufus, a journalist, narrates the background of the people through cultural and sociopolitical issues that marginalized them from the economic environment as a result of the forces of subjectivities that control
them. Habila uses his other characters to inform his readership about further aspects of the life of the community. These characters represent various institutions confined to the region. They show how oil exploration has influenced and shaped their perceptions of the realities around them. Chief Malabo, for example, could be said to represent the traditional institution, the military represents the government, and the oil company represents the multinational companies whose objectives are selfish and economically geared toward exploitation and the maximization of profit.

The militants represent the aggrieved and frustrated youth who stand up to the perpetration of injustices against the most vulnerable component of the community, namely, the women and the children. Habila uses Dr. Dagogo to highlight the consequences of irresponsible oil drilling on the health of the region’s flora and fauna. As qualified medical personnel and practitioners, Dagogo and Nurse Gloria, can authoritatively expound on the subject of oil toxins on the environment and community. Considering the importance of the environment to people and nonhumans, Dagogo purposes to document the scenarios in book form when he finally leaves the area: “It’s the oil and the fighting. It affects everyone in a strange way. I’m going to write a book on that someday” (142).

Through this narrator, Habila tells the reader that this is not simply a story being told, but is a chronology of facts worth documenting for future reference and which might avert a recurrence of such disasters. According to Chinua Achebe “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership…The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility” (1). At the time, Achebe was advocating for the eradication of
military regimes and its replacement with a democratically civilian elected
government. Sadly, despite the change to civilian rule, subsequent governments
have not done much to bring about any tangible positive changes in the lives of the
public.

Habila demonstrates his ecological conscience and consciousness not only
through the narratives of the landscape of the region, but by also historicizing these
accounts through his major characters, Rufus and Dr. Dagogo. Rufus documents
the environmental destruction throughout the search for Isabel and at one point
rhetorically questions Mr. Floode’s anomalous attitude toward his wife’s
kidnapping: “Shouldn’t he be out there in the jungle with Zaq, instead of here,
drinking cocktails, watching TV, sleeping with the maid...Wasn’t he in my country,
polluting my environment, making millions in the process?” (101). Habila’s
metaphorical statement - ‘polluting my environment’ is a clear indictment of the oil
operatives against the environment and on the socioeconomic exploitation meted
out on the people and the environment. Habila’s commitment to the environment
and the people is evident as portrayed by his central characters. It is also quite clear
that he longs for sociopolitical change and conducts himself as an environmental
activist or ecolit.

Mr. Floode’s contracting of journalists to trace his wife’s whereabouts
smacks off suspicion. It has the aura and misgivings of a foreigner taking
advantage of indigenous people, and risking their lives - a remnant of the racial
prejudices informed by a binary order that existed between the whites and their
servants in colonial Nigeria.
Speaking through her protagonist, Zilayefa, Agary proffers views that are very similar to Habila’s. She achieves this by correcting the misconceptions labeled against the Niger Delta people, most of which is media propaganda. She demonstrates her literary prowess in this novel by showcasing her concerns for her people and the environment. As a new female novelist, writing on controversial contemporary matters like environmental destruction, militancy and women in the Niger region, Agary has proven that she can champion the challenges and difficulties faced by the people and can retell her stories in a manner that attracts critique from both seasoned and fresh scholars. Agary chooses to express herself to a larger audience by writing a novel centered on oil drilling and its negative impact on people and the environment. In the notes, she disputes media propaganda regarding the problems afflicting the Niger delta and its depiction and relegation of the region’s activist youth simply as miscreants.

Multinational oil companies drill for, and exploit oil reserves with profit maximization as their only goal. Agary seeks to highlight women’s vulnerability in light of the innumerable socioeconomic problems that proliferate in the wake of these operations on the environment. She starts her story with the explosion of an oil pipeline, underscoring the ubiquitous danger of the impending catastrophe upon the people. To register her empathy with the people, she chronicles their reactions detailing how they approach their chief imploring him to intervene with the oil companies and demand for compensation. As one would expect under the circumstances, however, their efforts end in futility as their pleas fall on deaf ears.
Agary advocates for the peaceful coexistence of all ethnic groups. She says that this will be possible if the youth stop and think for themselves instead of being misled by politicians. She gives the example of the Ijaw and Itsekiri ethnic groups in Warri, and the Eleme and Okrika in Port Harcourt all of whom have been in a tug of war for decades over oil resources. Ifiye, a character in Yellow-Yellow, speaking in Pidgin observes that: “No mind dem; na so dem dey do. Dem no sabi do anytin wit sense” (156).

Loosely translated Ifiye is saying that the youth should start thinking, make a living for themselves and stop wading into political conflicts. These senseless ethnic conflicts have claimed very many lives and must be ended. The author showcases her mastery and sense of aesthetics by interweaving the characters with the environment. She paints a cogent portrait of the agony endured by women in an environment devastated by the wanton and callous oil spillages. Agary believes that to have some safe and healthy environment women must participate in decision making. Women, she argues, have an intimate understanding and appreciation of the environment and its problems because they sustain and support their families through the cultivation of agricultural produce.

4.3 The Stylistic Devices used to articulate Environmental Destruction

Style in literature is often referred to as the way a piece of literary work is articulated through the voice and tone of a writer. It is as essential to a piece of work as it is to plot, setting, theme or characterization. When one reads a piece written by one writer and then picks up another written by a different writer, the reader can tell that they are the products of two separate individuals by the
uniqueness in which each employs various stylistic techniques in their writings. Literary style is essentially an artist’s signature. It is his/her voice etched on paper. It is, thus, the quality that makes an artist stand out amongst his contemporaries or reach out beyond the emotional effects of a work and connect with his readers imaginatively.

According to Richard Nordquist, style is the way in which something is said, done, expressed or performed: style of speech and writing. Narrowly interpreted as those figures that ornament discourse; broadly, as representing a manifestation of the person speaking or writing, and therefore, all figures of speech fall within the domain of style (np).

Going by this prologue, each novelist has a unique writing style. It is their hallmark, and through it, we can discern and analyze their ecocritical consciousness and the awareness they create in their readership. In the study texts, each author employs a simple style and diction to effect, successfully debunking the misinformation generally fed to the *hoi polloi* by the media regarding the cataclysm that is the Niger Delta’s human and environment situation. Raymond Chapman explains that literary critics and commentators on the quality of written language have made us so familiar with a certain conception of style that it may be necessary to make a deliberate change in our thinking (12). In the selected novels, authors use language in such a way that as we read the novels, our thinking and attitude towards environmental destruction and the consequent negative effects it has on the ecosystem are changed for good.

The authors use the language spoken in the immediate community. This simplicity of diction is important because it not only addresses a wider audience, but
also speaks directly to the most affected population in the language they understand best. This strategy is in harmony with Chapman’s submission that literature does not, and cannot exclude any aspect of language; individual writers must instead, use all available potential language resources to communicate the intended message (24).

In the selected texts, the writers make good use of both traditional grammar and the pidgin idiom to uncover and expose the region’s socio-ecological problems. In this chapter, the study identifies the various stylistic devices used by the authors to articulate their perspective of the endemic environmental destruction of the Niger delta.

4.3.1 Irony

According to J.A Cuddon, although most of the major forms and styles of irony had been explored, identified and classified by the end of 19th Century, it is still not possible to ascertain a clear cut or precise definition of irony. Its ambiguity, imprecision, and indistinctness, the use of the terms such as ‘seems’ instead of ‘it is’, are some of the characteristics of irony that distinguish it as a unique technique. This quality of imprecision and/or elusiveness is one of the main reasons why irony attracts so much inquiry and conjecture. No definition will serve to cover every aspect of its nature, just as no definition will explain and describe mirth and why we find some things risible and others not (429). The two basic types of irony commonly used are verbal and situational. Verbal irony is saying what one does not intend, while situational irony or structural irony is when an action contradicts its reality.
The two authors of the selected texts use both situational and structural irony in their work. In structural irony, the author relegates the occasional use of verbal irony, introduces a structural feature that serves to sustain multiple meanings and assessments throughout his work, instead. This type of irony resurfaces in the selected texts and is centered on ‘oil’. Depending on the type and source of ‘the oil’, oil is characteristically used for food, cooking, medicine, sacrifice, in lanterns for lighting, or rubbing on the body after a bath or before gymnastic exercises. Oil symbolizes God’s blessings, vitality and power. Oil becomes a curse when it becomes a ‘spill’. In Michael Ferber’s words: “When the oil spills or is used up, the lamp goes out. That fact becomes a representation for human life and death” (144).

The novels narrate the story of oil and its consequent spillage, presenting it as an irony that brings suffering to the people. Habila uses dramatic irony on the character of the military Major who injudiciously underrates the strength and resolve of the militants. The Major is portrayed as being grossly inept and totally misconstrues the tangible facts and genesis of the situation on the ground [marginalization, lack of basic infrastructure, and underdevelopment among others] that lead the militia groups to become what they have eventually turned into [violent, thugs]. The fate that awaits him in the jungles turns out to be his dramatic Waterloo. He marches his troops there with the intention of wiping out the militants but ends up being literally wiped-out himself. The Major is the novel’s naïve hero. Habila embodies him as a perpetually blunder prone persona. He comes through as an arrogant and ignorant government official who has allowed the power he wields to go to his head and become a serial abuser of human rights. Major is simultaneously the judge, jury and executor and is known to decide who is a
criminal without trial, drench his captives in petrol and kill militants arbitrarily. Major does not give his victims a hearing. The narrator quotes him as 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 can” [A can containing petrol to drench his victim with] (55). It is actions such as these that harden the resolve of the militia to drive them out in order to get even with the military. Major’s statement speaks volumes. In a single outburst he demonstrates his arrogance, proves his brutality and disregard for the law and exposes his ineptitude as a military strategist who totally misreads and underestimates his antagonist’s compulsion and staying power. Major is a study in ‘dramatic irony’.

There is more irony when Agary introduces her protagonist in Yellow-Yellow. Zelaya can be seen as the embodiment of irony in the Niger delta oil. The broken pipeline that runs through her mother’s farm is a symbol of a disaster in waiting, a disaster about to spill onto the family and the community at large. Admiral represents the oil tycoons who exploit the virgin lands of the region for their own selfish interest, indifferent to the fact that they are ripping peoples’ livelihoods in the process. Zelaya is defiled by Admiral, just as the oil companies have and keep doing to the land. Both tragedies symbolize the irony that is the hardship that comes from the promise of the wealth in oil, until it is spilt. Irony is not a new phenomenon in Zelaya’s life. She becomes cynical about love whilst still in the village dating Sergio, her boyfriend at the time, when she realizes that their relationship is just puppy love - an illusion experienced by juveniles growing into the reality of life. She says: “I had thought that when I met my someone special, I would feel butterflies in my stomach, lose touch with reality, and we would be
riding together into the sunset. None of that happened” (23). It is not easy to achieve individual aspirations in a social condition where a person cannot hope for a tomorrow nor have faith in his own abilities. Sergio is no exception. He too is a victim of the social climate and lacks the ability to help anyone. Zilayefa had hoped that he could give her happiness, but it becomes clear that he is an illusion of glory.

4.3.2 Flashback

According to Cuddon, the term flashback refers to any scene or episode in a play, novel, story, or poem which is inserted to show events that occurred at an earlier time. The term is most probably derived from the film industry and is today a devise frequently used in modern fiction (321). Both authors employ flashbacks to sustain stories within stories. These flashbacks as used by the authors impart direct consequences on the narrative. In *Oil on Water*, for example, Major becomes a brutal and aggressive tyrant to the militants because: “They say he became like this after his daughter was raped” (56).

We are informed through flashback that Major is not naturally a bloodthirsty bogeyman, but is a creation of circumstance; an ordinary father whose daughter is only eighteen years old and an undergraduate when she is raped. After this traumatic experience, he becomes a different and unrecognizable man. The flashback, further, informs us that Major eventually takes revenge on his daughter’s rapists, he is found out, arrested and court- marshalled by the military. As punishment, he is posted to the creeks to fight and wipe-out the militants. This punishment is, of course, an ill-advised sentence for such a traumatised man and is indicative of the military’s lack of professionalism and discernment of human
psychology. It is inconceivable that a federal body of the gravity of the military
would post such an obviously disturbed individual like the Major to tackle a civil
strife situation. In his unstable condition it is not plausible for ‘displacement’ or
‘transfer of aggression’, one of the human minds defence mechanisms, is to kick in
as suggested by Sigmund Freud (Ghone, 2). He should, instead, have been confined
to the military officers’ mess [barrack] for a period as a reprimand. We can now
understand why Major acts as he does, and why he comes across as a naïve hero
who lacks the acuity of being fair and just to his wards and captives. Habila
introduces similar flashbacks that inform an ecocritical consciousness. An example
is in the worshippers’ shrine where Gloria, says: “These islands used to be a big
habitat for bats; now only a few dozen remain here and there, the narrator further
says: she wordlessly turned and pointed at the faraway sky, toward the oil fields -
Gas flares. They kill them. Not only the bats, other flying creatures as well” (120).
This flashback reveals that the islands used to be a lively ecosystem for many
species of birds before drilling for oil commenced and the emission of gas flares
became a rampant occurrence. Since then, many of these birds are either dead or
dying. In another riveting flashback, in Oil on Water, Habila relates the genesis of
the shrine in the islands:

The shrine was started a long time ago after a
terrible war - no one remembers what caused the war -
when the blood of the dead ran in the rivers….and the
dead bodies of the warriors floated for miles on the
river…It was a terrible time. The land was so polluted
that even the water in the wells turned red. That was
when priests from different shrines got together and
decided to build this shrine by the river. The land
needed to be cleansed of blood and pollution (121).

This flashback reminds us that although traditional village life is simple and almost
idyllic before the white man and the oilfields comes and disrupts it forever, it is
not without its tribulations. This passage talks about a war - a terrible war. A war so
terrible that the blood of the dead ran in the rivers and even pollutes the wells! It is a
major ecological disaster with the hint of a curse from the gods as a result of the
community having violating some taboo, but what is even more interesting is the
fact that the local people have an ancient way of addressing environmental
problems through divination and appeasing the gods. In Yellow-Yellow, Agary
introduces a flashback to highlight the negative consequences of oil exploitation on
the people’s socioeconomic wellbeing, leading young girls to move to cities in
search of a life. Zilayefa says: “Admittedly, when I was in the village I believed
Sergio was the key to the door that would lead to a world of opportunities and
dreams fulfilled [...] however, I had been lucky in port Harcourt [...] In my eyes,
with people like Sisi, Lolo and Admiral in Port Harcourt, [...] I did not need Sergio
in the same way anymore” (170). This flashback exposes the negativity of social life
in the cities. Young girls always believe that when they finally make it to the cities,
the sky will be their limit, but they usually end up being vulnerable to social vices.
For Zilayefa, the city is an illusion that can truncate one’s dreams. Agary makes this
clear when she introduces a simile that expounds such dashed expectations: “I had
allowed myself, like an empty canoe, to drift along with the flow of the river”
(emphasis added, 178). Zilayefa regrets coming to the city where her dreams are not
realized because social and political structures do not cater for the younger
generation.

4.3.3 Diction

In general, diction refers to the vocabulary or the choice of words used by a
writer. Broadly speaking, an author’s style is the ingredient that influences the
reader’s impression of the text itself. Style includes diction. When selecting the
style to apply, an author must take into consideration the format of presentation that works best for both the readers and the intended purpose of the writing. The writer must also observe consistency because switching from one style to another can distract the reader and diminish the appeal or pleasure of the piece. The authors of the selected texts choose the most proficient style and words to inform their readers of the ecological destruction meted on the region, and its effects on the inhabitant’s lives and living conditions. They also illustrate how their disenfranchisement and oppression by outsiders leads to the unrest in the Niger Delta. The writers use simple formal diction to loop in a wider readership. Their works have diverse target audiences which encompass the public, government officials and the international community. The examples cited in the following paragraphs are excellent examples. In *Oil on Water*, Habila writes:

His shirt was wet under the arms and at the back. He was still fighting the sudden fever that had dogged him since we left Port Harcourt, and the more his health had deteriorated, the more he had taken to philosophizing over almost anything: a bat flying overhead, a dead fish on the oil-polluted water, a gathering of rain clouds in the sky (4).

Here, the writer utilizes simple diction to narrate an aspect of the two-journalist’s journey. The lexemes he employs are very simple. In the following excerpt, he gives foreground information in anticipation of an impending appalling scene. The dead fish and oil polluted waters are indications of an ecologically distressed area. Habila goes on: “The atmosphere grew heavy with the suspended stench of dead matter. We followed a bend in the river and in front of us we saw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots” (8). In this second illustration, the words ‘grew and dead’ are normally characteristics associated with living things such as
human beings, animals, birds and plants. This is therefore a personification of this inanimate environment and implies that the atmosphere is so devastated by the refineries’ chemical toxins and the burning of crude oil discharging from vandalized pipelines that it is no longer viable for the support of nature. It has turned deadly, noxious to living things. This is an image of the destruction of the environment, the source of fresh air; oxygen and nitrogen, elements vital to the survival of all living organisms.

This unpleasant depiction of oil spills and gas flares that are very rampant in this region has caused the death of flora and fauna. Upon reading the narrations, a reader will easily perceive and comprehend the inarguable destruction and negative effect of oil on the environment and the region’s animal and plant life. Habila depicts the pollution of water sources as follows:

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. At the other end of the village, a little river trickled toward the big river where we had left our boat. The patch of grass growing by the water was suffocated by a film of oil, each blade covered with blotches like the river spots on a smoker’s hands (8-9).

In the above example, the village is abandoned either because of the oil spillage or as a result of conflict between militants and soldiers. People are killed and thrown into the communal well. The smell emanating from the well is personified to embody the festering cadavers inside. The soil is barren, so polluted by the spilt contents of the vandal destroyed pipelines that grass can’t grow, and the air is acrid, reeking of oil. Rufus explicates: “We were as soundless as a ghost ship, the roar of
our motor muffled by the saturated air. Over the bank, expressionless water, there
were no birds or fish or other creatures – we were alone” (9).

In this case, Habila uses personification and simile to capture the funereal
mood. We see a simile ‘as soundless as a ghost ship’; the journalists are quiet and
filled with trepidation uncertain of the unseen dangers and treachery lurking in and
surrounding. The air is saturated with choking carbon gas flares from the oil rigs.
The phrase ‘expressionless water’ is a personification of the river which signifies
the absence of life - it has been turned into a dead river by the persistent and
unimpeded disposal of acidic chemicals into its waters effectively killing all
aquatic life. In that situation, how, then, can a human being survive? For the most
part, the people of the Niger Delta are riverine settlers and cannot live far from the
river (Joe, 199). By stating ‘we were alone’, the narrator draws us into the two-
journalist’s position. The surreal silence in this bleak and desolate setting is
alarming. It is suicidal and insane to embark on such a journey into this death zone
without any form of protection; a police or military escort or a weapon. Elsewhere,
the doctor is quoted as saying:

Do you know I saved his life, that’s how I ended up here
as the doctor, yet even I can’t be sure of him at any
time? Mercurial, that’s what he is. Unpredictable. It’s
the oil and fighting. It affects everyone in a strange way.
I’m going to write a book on that someday. I’ve been in
these waters five years now and I tell you this place is a
dead place, a place for dying (142-3).

Habila details the horrors that engulfed that region and how they distressed the
residents. The word ‘mercurial’ has been used metaphorically to expound
on the unpredictable behavior of the people. The oil nuisance coupled with the war
has left an indelible effect on the peoples’ psyche. The narrator continues:
How did she manage to escape, coming so far, only to discover the fighting at Irikefe? But why didn’t she go to the soldiers? I looked outside at the forest and the abandoned boats on the water, the few thatched huts, and I thought, what could fate possibly want with her on these oil-polluted waters? The forsaken villages, the gas flares, the stumps of pipes from exhausted wells with their heads capped and left jutting out of the oil-scorched earth, and the ever-present pipelines crisscrossing the landscape, sometimes like tree roots surfacing far away from the parent tree, sometimes like diseased veins on the back of an old shriveled hand, and sometimes in squiggles like ominous writing on the wall (182).

In the above described scenario, the author uses rhetorical questions to validate the argument, that a person can use any means available to him to save his life. In spite of all the danger around her, Isabel tries to escape, but it seems like ‘fate’ and ‘destiny’ had taken over and she loses her life in the jungle in the hands of the militants. Habila also uses descriptive words to create a mental picture of the environment and similes to expose the devastation wreaked by the oil companies in their quest for oil.

Agary’s Yellow-Yellow has similar examples of ecological issues explained in simple diction. She purposefully simplifies the subject matter so as to amplify her target readership. As mentioned in previous chapters, Agary uses her protagonist, Zilayefa’s, travails to showcase the plight of women in this devastated environment. Below are a few examples of simple diction in the novel: “During my second to last year in secondary school, one of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village broke and spilled oil over several hectares of land, my mother’s farm included” (3).

The author begins with these expressions in order to establish and underscore her central theme, the scourge of oil spillage in the Niger delta. It is a forewarning that the region is about to experience a tragic calamity. Zilayefa,
whose mother’s farm is among those destroyed in the disaster is the most affected character in the novel, and by extension, her dilemma represents the plight of the entire community. In another example, the narrator says: “I watched as the thick liquid spread out, covering more land and drowning small animals in its path. It just kept spreading and I wondered if it would stop, when it would stop, how far it would spread” (4). Once again, Agary describes how the oil spillage has rapidly spread over a wide expanse of land tilled by peasant farmers resulting in famine and the death of many of the areas inhabitants and animals. In reference to the oil spill, it is disheartening to note that it was not clear ‘how far it would spread’. What is clear, however, is that this damage to the farms will cost the villagers dearly as they will automatically lose their main source of livelihood. Agary further writes:

Sometimes, when I would sit outside with boys and girls in my age group, we would listen to the radio, and sometimes we would hear an Ijaw person, living in Port Harcourt or Lagos, speaking about how the oil companies had destroyed our Niger Delta with impunity. They would discuss how the Ijaws and other ethnic groups were suffering and even dying while the wealth of their soil fed others. They would proffer ideas about what the oil companies and the government had to do (9).

In the above scene, the author uses her protagonist as a mouthpiece to raise awareness of the oil destruction reigned upon the idyllic rural settings by the callous oil multinationals. She feels that the companies ought to have shown a sense of corporate responsibility and compassion for the inhabitants of the affected areas and take all the necessary precautions to limit the likelihood of oil spill or chemical emission pollution. Secondly, she believes that with the huge profits oil companies generate from the dealings, they should contribute to, and improve the villagers’ livelihoods by providing such necessities as clean drinking water, health care,
education and electrification instead of leaving them to wallow in abject poverty. The picture portrayed by the protagonist is in a simple diction retrospection; a serene rural environment that is experiencing an ecological change every day and is yet to be addressed by the stakeholders gives a nostalgic picture.

Another sore example of the injustices visited on the people is that despite the nation being one of the leading oil producers in Africa, Nigeria suffers chronic fuel shortages. Where does the crude oil go? Agary observes:

The street commentary on the petrol shortage was extensive. How could a country that exported crude oil have petrol shortage? How could a country that housed four refineries be exporting petrol when its residents were suffering without petrol? And on and on. What was the Minister of Petroleum doing? Despite being a man from the Niger Delta, there he was, sitting and feeding fat at the same table as the devils of government and oil companies and forgetting the starvation in his own home (111).

Agary pinches a very raw nerve - the irony of fuel shortages and scarcity in a nation that is one of the leading producers and exporters of petroleum products on the continent. She poses several rhetorical questions: Isn’t the minister for petroleum from the oil-rich region? How can the people of the prosperous Niger delta lack anything, everything, “whet ‘the man of the people’ is in charge? And so on.

This is exactly what is happening in postcolonial Africa. The successors of the colonial masters have turned out to be worse than their forerunners. This is reminiscent of Achebe’s contention, which is also the title for one of his books, The Trouble with Nigeria quoted tongue-in-cheek above. He manifestly says that Africa’s problem is simply its leadership (Achebe, 1983). African leaders lack commitment in discharging their responsibilities. The minister for petroleum in
Agary’s book represents the gross mismanagement and failure of the economic sector of the country as well as the zoning system of federalism in Nigeria. He clearly lacks managerial skills, a vision and qualms about his people and their suffering. Agary gives us Admiral’s skewed point of view on the workings of the oil companies and government:

Think about it, my dear, a man comes into your father’s house. He has paid his rent to your father, and then, tomorrow, your brothers go to him to demand more money for rent. The man has an agreement with your father, not with you. If you feel he is not paying enough rent, then go to your father to review the rental agreement….that is the problem with the oil companies? The government that should be enforcing the laws to protect us in the Niger Delta is in fact putting our heads on the chopping block for the oil companies to finish the job. We, too, must take responsibility for some of our problems. See, that is why you must go to school and get your degree so that no one has an excuse not to give you an opportunity in life (137).

Agary makes it clear that Admiral’s dealing with his people is hypocritical. He uses the youth for his own profiteering. Ironically, he suggests that Zilayefa should go back to school and get a degree, but turns around, seduces and impregnates her and promptly abandons her, effectively killing any opportunities she might have hoped for in life. Admiral plays with the peoples’ minds, telling them one thing and doing the exact opposite. He uses the oil companies and the government’s failure’ cliché as a smoke screen to divert public attention.
The youth, who should be at the center of positive change in any given society, are portrayed as being vassals used by corrupt politicians for their own selfish interests. In this regard Agary reiterates:

The so-called youth groups had become well-oiled extortion machines all in the name of the struggle. They stole, blackmailed, and vandalized for the progress and development of the Ijaw Nation, the Niger Delta. Some days I appreciated their efforts - bringing focus on the suffering of the Niger Delta people - but I could not help but feel that they were holding ransom one of their own. If Admiral did not give them money, then he was not doing anything for the Ijaw Nation - at least that would be their version of the story (158).

Through her protagonist Agary tells how the political leaders of the Niger Delta are playing politics with the peoples’ lives. Admiral and the Petroleum Minister represent this category. These privileged leaders hold double-standards and never address their constituents’ core issues. In truth, the youth have no direct access to the government and are forced to go through people like Admiral. When this fails, they realize that their grievances will only be broadcast in the media if they engage in anti-social activities like, oil theft, vandalism, political agitation and other related vices. Admiral is in an excellent position to help his people, but it is not in his purview to do so. He uses the youth as a political tool to divert public attention whilst he and his cronies cozy up with the oil companies and government.

4.4 Conclusion

The two authors demonstrate a sense of sociopolitical, economic, and environmental consciousness in their works. Both writers’ stylistic usage of language as a tool and literary techniques such as irony, flashback, metaphor, diction, simile, and personification are envisaged to inculcate moral values to the people in terms of preserving the environment and standing against any form of
injustice to the people. Their style of writing is like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in terms of simplicity and addressing social, cultural, and political issues. The major difference found in Habila and Agary works is in their tackling of environmental destruction. Writers, it can be presupposed, are liberators whose task is to salvage the people from any form of destruction. The authors prose works resonate with Achebe’s submission that: “The role of African writers in contemporary times is to bring out issues that lie beneath their social fabric” (Achebe, 91-103). These two authors have shown their commitment to the modern issues bedevilling postcolonial Africa with the Niger Delta of Nigeria being a special case in point. We have argued that their social vision could help environmental activists, international bodies, and the government to address ecological problems and form a framework for ways and means of helping the affected people of these regions and to underscore the urgency for the need to actively rehabilitate any land that has already been polluted.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

In the course of this study, an attempt was made to analyze the ecocritical reading of subjectivity in Habila’s *Oil on Water* and Agary’s *Yellow-Yellow*. This chapter reiterates the findings of the research and assesses whether or not the study has achieved its objectives. The chapter then concludes with some recommendations for further research by future interested parties.

5.1 Summary

The study set out to examine the extent of the ecological destruction and the various forms of subjectivities imposed on the Niger Delta region situated in the south-southern part of Nigeria. It aimed at exploring the impact of oil drilling on the environment and its effect on the human population. To achieve the above goals, the study, in part, examined the different forms of coercion imposed on the people by the military and the extent of the devastation of the environment by the oil companies. The exercise also scrutinized the expectations of the military and oil companies’ and sought to establish what hinders them from achieving these goals. One of these turned out to be militancy which is a reaction to the perceived injustices done to the locals by the oil companies and the federal government. It also examined the authors’ social visions of the Niger Delta society and mineral rich African countries at large.

This exercise is divided into four chapters. Chapter one provides the foundation to this study, with the background section exploring the literary environment in which the two texts were written. The texts informed the theories
and contents of the study under the main subdivisions; ecocriticism and postcolonialism, assumptions, objectives and methodology.

Chapter two focused on the forces of subjectivities such as postcolonial compulsions, the military, militancy, the oil companies and culture. Initially, the cultural form of subjectivity is portrayed as a positive one, but later its achievements are negated by the influence of the other four forms. These postcolonial elements are deconstructed from the selected texts. The chapter further discussed the connection between military regimes and colonial hangover influences both of which were characterized by dictatorship and exploitation. The most observable consequence of these subjectivities on the characters is destitution, food shortages, poverty, and displacement.

In chapter three, the study dwelt on the ecocritical reading of the texts. The settings were portrayed as desolate, bleak and ruined by oil spillage. These oil spills did not just affect the environment, but some plant species originally only native to the region have been reported to have been rendered extinct. Noxious pollutants in the oil spilling from ruptured pipelines render the land unproductive before they flow into the rivers and waterways and poison those too. The lethal fumes emitted by the gas flares poison the air wiping out entire species of plant, animal and bird life. The chapter also discussed the fact that local people were aware of the need, and knew how to conserve the environment from degradation. This is proof of the sub consciousness of an afroecocriticism.

Chapter four discussed the authors’ choice of stylistic devices to showcase the environmental destruction wrought upon various communities in the Niger delta region. This chapter examined some vital findings, like political decadence, social
ills, historical antecedents and contemporary concerns to propose solutions to resolve the plight of the people and restore the fecundity and vista of the environment whilst simultaneously corralling the readership into environmental consciousness. The chapter further explored the following stylistic devices used by the authors to communicate their message: irony, flashback, personification, simile, diction, and allusion within the narratives.

This final chapter provides a summary and proposes recommendations for further studies. Analysis of the texts show that the oil companies’ lackadaisical destruction of the environment, militia activities in the Niger delta and their consequent subjugation of the people remain serious problems that remain unaddressed. These festering problems continue to breed new crops of militants, and need to be addressed head-on if the people are going to have any hope of ever living in harmony.

5.2 Findings

The findings of the discussion of the two novels selected for this ecocritical study show that significant bio-diversities have been affected or out rightly destroyed by oil slicks and chemical waste poisoning land and waterways. In some instances, these occurrences have also led to outbreaks and spread of fatal diseases affecting human, animal, and aquatic life within the Niger Delta enclave.

The study explored the authors’ portrayal of the activities of the military, government agencies and multinational oil companies as agents of exploitation. Instead of playing its role as the people’s protector, the military became the adversary and the trigger for chaos and conflagration. It used its might to coerce and displace the populace, an action that only served to fuel an escalation of violence
between itself and the insurgents. This standoff prompted the militia groups to change tactics and resort to kidnapping oil workers and sabotaging the oil drilling and conveying activities. All these factors were analysed under the ambit of postcolonial subjectivity. The study also examined the authors’ use of stylistic devices such as irony, metaphors, and flashback to expose the true scope of the environmental destruction and create environmental consciousness. It also suggests steps that need to be taken to remedy the situation.

Helon Habila and Kaine Agary have been selected because of their portrayal of the effects of oil drilling and its destruction on the settings of the Niger Delta. The two novels succinctly portrayed the destruction of the area and the displacement of the people, unlike other novels by Helon Habila such as Measuring Time and Waiting for an Angel that dwell on the turbulence of military regimes and the myriad political scandals in Nigeria.

Kaine Agary’s debut novel also provided the study with an insight into the travails of the region’s women resulting from unscrupulous oil drilling processes and the results of espionage by the militants.

5.3 Recommendations

The scope of the study was limited to ecological destruction and subjectivities. Hence, the study recommends further literary studies through ecocritical theory in the following areas:

i. It is evident that studies set in the Niger Delta have not dealt with the people’s culture fully. Further literary research could look at the decadence of culture from an ecological perspective.
ii. Irresponsible and unethical oil drilling practices have undeniably perpetuated an ecological catastrophe that has brought a lot of social ills and hardship to the people of the Niger delta. Further literary research should be conducted to determine its true impact on other species within the region from other genres of literature.

iii. Research should be conducted in other literary texts on the psychological effects these problems have had on the populace with special reference to male-female relationships, which this research could not delve into but referred to.
Works Cited


Maggio, J. “Can the Subaltern Be Heard?” Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and


