



## PETROPOLITICAL VICTIMIZATION OF NATIVE NIGERIANS: A CULTURAL MATERIALIST STUDY OF MBUE'S *HOW BEAUTIFUL WE WERE* AND HABILA'S *OIL ON WATER*

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### ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta has long been a site of significant oil exploitation, and as such, has become a critical site of enquiry into the connections between natural resources, culture, and the environment. This research examines the politics of oil in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, which detail the socio-environmental predation of oil corporations. While a growing body of literature addresses the politics of oil in the Niger Delta substantially, less has been produced on the politics of oil in the Niger Delta in the context of Cultural Materialism. This is precisely the gap this research seeks to address: the interrelationship among the politics of oil, culture, the environment, socio-economic distress, and the formation of counter-hegemonic practices in the chosen novels. Employing a qualitative and interpretive methodology, this study uses and closely examines Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism, enabling it to pierce the power relations, cultural shifts, and the tangible circumstances embedded in the politics of oil. The study shows that destructive oil extraction results in suffering through vicious cycles of environmental devastation, economic impoverishment, and the displacement of people. The oil-dominant novels showcase different scales of resistance, from defiant individualism to collective organization, attesting to the strength and agency of the oppressed. This study demonstrates and reveals the quotidian realities of the oil-igbo in the Niger Delta and how they integrate the Niger Delta's social, cultural, and environmental realities into the predatory veins of global capitalism in international oil markets.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and one of its largest oil producers, exemplifies postcolonial conflicts, environmental destruction, economic misappropriation, and sociopolitical instability. The country underwent economic transformation following the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in the late 1950s. Although oil became one of Nigeria's top economic contributors, the North's global oil companies' environmental and humanitarian crises were unprecedented and continue to affect the country's geopolitically vulnerable populations. Indigenous people in the oil-rich regions suffer from deforestation, air and water pollution, soil erosion, forced migration, the collapse of traditional subsistence economies, and profound cultural disintegration.

Literature has developed into an important instrument for documenting and advocating against these injustices. For example, Nigerian writers have abstracts that voice the criticism of neocolonial exploitation as well as the local elite collusion. Accounts of oppression are fictionalized, and the history of oppression is trivialized, as well as the oppressed's agency and the spirit of defiance. Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* and *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila are examples. Habila's novel, alongside Mbue's narrative on the exploitation of Nigerian oil, describes the devastation and withdrawal of the colonizers, as well as the conflict of neocolonial exploitation, and describes with simile courage and strength the exploitation of oil, which becomes recognition of the corporate and political devastation of these people.

The incursion of transnational oil enterprises has greatly exacerbated the socio-economic situation and the fundamental rights of the common people, particularly in Africa. While the oil finds in Africa may seem to provide potential avenues for the economic advancement of these countries, the unrelenting capitalist exploitation spawn destitution, alienation, and frustration. Furthermore, the cutthroat rivalry among these enterprises poses serious and, in most case, needless degradation of the ecosystem. However, the politically conscious Africans, rather than passively accepting the exploitative practices, demonstrate and resist profoundly the impacts of these International Relations practices on post-colonial Africa (Capers, 2019).

The systems of capitalism are transforming both the local and global spheres of politics as well. It reinforces class division, as employees in a capitalist society are inadequately compensated for their labour, since they are compelled to “sell” their labour to capitalists for much less than the full value of the commodities produced by their labour. It has privileged special people in all respects while depriving familiar people in all ways. This situation confines common people to a specific area, preventing them from relocating or migrating to other regions or colonies to improve their lives. The psychological and anxiety-related issues of people in these socio-cultural environments are changing through the establishment of factories and the invasion of multinational oil-extracting companies. Anxiety and frustration are psychological issues that people dealing with these multinational companies experience as well. This, in turn, leads them to begin fighting amongst themselves over profit while becoming utilitarian (Oso, 2001). The negative politics of such multinational companies are shaping the dire future of the people residing in the Niger Delta, especially the lower class. This explains the resistance of ordinary people in the Niger Delta region and why these issues are portrayed in the chosen novels (Fiorini, 2020).

### ***Oil on Water***

In *Oil on Water* (2011), Habila acts almost as an umpire, balancing the multiple contending parties and opposing factions within the context of the oil wealth the nation has depended on since its discovery. Habila reveals hidden truths and untold stories concerning the oil companies and the government's quest to exploit the nation's oil wealth. This condition has caused the Niger Delta people great pain, suffering, and enduring degeneration. The novel *Oil on Water* can be appreciated as a story situated within the socio-historical framework of late capitalism, resource imperialism, and internal neocolonial complicity. Habila's novel revolves

around two journalists who traverse the destroyed and militarised landscapes of the Delta to find a kidnapped white woman. Through this novel, Habila reveals the multinational oil companies' hegemonic domination, including the oppression of local communities and the cultural annihilation fostered by capitalism.

### ***How Beautiful We Were***

In the novel *How Beautiful We Were* (2021), the narrator claims that drilling for oil would bring something called civilization and prosperity. Pexton, the fictional American oil corporation, unveils the fictional dreams of progress by drilling the land. The ordinary rural indigenous folk of Kosawa (a fictional town in Africa) were lured by the crude mirage of progress and development. Yaya, a character who plays the role of the old woman, says that "all people from abroad are the same. International students are the same. So, Americans, Europeans, and the rest of the overseas people who have visited our country are all the same. The convergence of socio-environmental exploitation, socio-cultural defiance, and postcolonial identity politics remains a significant focus of concern in African literature, especially in relation to Nigeria's oil-producing areas. The Niger Delta, a resource-rich region, has become a region of ecological disaster, economic disenfranchisement, and socio-political turmoil due to the relentless oil extraction by multinational corporations in collusion with state actors (Okonta & Douglas, 2003).

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Capitalist mechanisms enable power and exploitation, which appear to condition men to dominate and assume overall control over creatures in the ecosystem. However, in the Niger Delta novels, the degradation of the earth and humanity demonstrates that human beings have lost control over ecosystemic and anthropogenic activities. The multinational oil companies do not fight the pervasive pollution they have introduced to the Niger Delta. As a result, the indigenous people of the Niger Delta are enslaved to a particular geographical locus. They cannot move or migrate to colonies for an improved quality of life. The psychological conditions and cultural anxiety of the Niger Delta people are changing due to the pollution brought about by the oil companies. This study aims to analyse the politics over petroleum that exploits the Niger Delta people and their environment and deepen the poverty of the Niger Delta. The negative future of the Niger Delta, and in particular the lower class, is being constructed through the politics of such multinational companies. Thus, the observed resistance of the people of the Niger Delta is the central idea of the novels selected for this study. This study examines the methods Nigerian fiction authors employ to depict opposition and defiance to these sociopolitical ideologies. Finally, this research analyses the geopolitical ramifications of petro-politics on the long-term future of the region's inhabitants, particularly in relation to oil extraction in the Niger Delta.

### **Research Objectives:**

The aims and objectives of this research are;

- To explore Petro-Politics as a threat to the culture and environment of Third-World Africans in the selected Nigerian Fiction.
- To trace the Resistance of common people of Niger Delta in selected Nigerian Fiction towards the policies of international oil extracting organizations.
- To determine the future of Third World Africans due to the destitution caused by Petro-Politics.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How is Petro-Politics a threat to the environment and the material conditions of the ordinary people of the Niger Delta in the selected Nigerian Fiction?
2. How do these selected Nigerian fictions show the resistance of the ordinary people of the Niger Delta towards the policies of international oil-extracting organisations?

3. How does the destitution caused by Petro-Politics shape the future of the ordinary people of the Niger Delta?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Existing literature serves to advance the discussion through the established frameworks. The retention of Resistance as a form of overt, symbolic, cultural, and social confrontation has emerged as a central characteristic of African literature whereby neocolonial extraction, socio-ecological exploitation, and authoritarian state power is critiqued. Resilience has also been the focus of numerous critiques especially as it relates to the survival of the indigenous disruption of the ecological continuum, collective the African literature Neo-colonialism is critiqued on the social exploitation and authoritarian state. This focus on resilience also serves to shift the narrative from a simplistic framework of victimhood to one where there is agency, intricate endurance and cultural hardship of the impacted communities (Nixon, 2011). Furthermore, the concept of environmental justice has emerged as a grave concern of literature, particularly in relation to the ecological violence inflicted by oil capitalism and the surrounding silence enforced on communities at the forefront of these battles (Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Watts, 2004). Such literary acts document environmental degradation but also serve as counter-narratives that affirm cultural survival and collective memory as acts of resistance.

Nigeria's economic transformation began with the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956. Environmental destruction, structural inequalities, and dependencies were some of the consequences of the sudden wealth accumulation from the oil industry which rapidly became the foundation of the economy, particularly in the Niger Delta region (Okonta & Douglas, 2003). Despite the oil extracting activities resulting in great wealth for the Nigerian state and the elite, it has not promoted the development of the Delta region and has instead aggravated the underdevelopment, environmental destruction, and political alienation in the region. The Niger Delta Crisis is a prime example of neocolonial exploitation as foreign elites continue to tightly control the region's natural resources while local people suffer miseries. Okonta and Douglas (2003) maintain that the Niger Delta is in a "state of siege" in that there is the environmental destruction of the region while concurrently there is the violation of human rights, exploitation of human resources and the obliteration of the culture of the people. The integration of the military in harassing and crushing movements such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) provides further evidence to support the argument that the extraction of oil inevitably conjoins with barbarism and state terrorism.

For African literature, the ecological havoc is not something to be brushed aside as a mere background, it is a significant narrative that characterizes the struggles, the identity formation, and the composite socio-political and economic crises of people (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015). In particular, the Niger Delta Literature reflects on the political silencing of the people through the description of the environmental destruction, oil spills, deforestation and gas flaring, and water pollution. To these, the indigenous people of the area suffer what can be referred to as a unique political and socio-cultural violence. An emerging area of study applies ecocriticism to African literature demonstrating how African authors evoke and stylize feelings of loss through historical and symbolic representations of eco-melancholy. Such views resonate with Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence." This type of violence refers to the incremental and chronic damage to the environment and the vulnerable because it is not sensational news. Unlike real-time violence, slow violence is protracted over a significant period, with decades not being out of the question. Because of this, slow violence is especially difficult to document in policy and media. However, Nixon contends that literature can "make the unapparent appear" (Nixon, 2011, p.15). These include the accounts of the Niger Delta, the slow violence of which is exemplified in the stories of the people's chronic and cultural impoverishment, the epidemics and the degradation of the economy and cultural continuities, and the loss of cultural memory.

Another key part of the existing discourse is ‘petrofiction’’, a term that Ghosh first introduced in 2021. He defined it as fiction that analyzes the narratives of oil and its socio-political and environmental consequences. Though Ghosh discussed the term in relation to the Middle East, it has since been applied to African oil literature by scholars such as Balkan (2021) and Priyanka (2022). Such works explore the ways in which oil is not just a commodity, but a complex socio-political problem, and a sign of, corruption and the national embezzlement, violence, and betrayal of national dreams. In the African context, resistance literature has always emerged in response to the colonial and postcolonial modes of domination, from nationalist writings during the anti-colonial struggles to contemporary critiques of neocolonialism and globalization. Authors like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka have utilized fiction, drama, and essays to assert cultural sovereignty, expose oppressive political and military regimes, and imagine alternative futures, often utopian. It is thus argued that the notion of African literature as resistance is inextricably linked to the struggles over the politics of language, cultural identity, and the right to self-representation.

Determining the shift from physical to symbolic, cultural, and environmental protest aligns with Raymond Williams's Cultural Materialist approach to the ideological nature of culture and its ability to resist and challenge hegemonic power structures (Williams, 1977). For this instance, literature serves far more than merely acting as a reflection of resistance, as it actually creates new forms of culture that engage with and change primary narratives, recasting them as pertaining to resistance and renewal. This change can be seen in *Oil on Water* and *How Beautiful We Were*. The authors record the theatrical and the non-theatrical, the encounters with the dominant and the softer, quieter forms of resistance in the preservation of memories and storytelling, ecological mourning, or intergenerational solidarity in the ravaged landscapes. In this regard, literature of resistance in Africa is best viewed as a living, mobile discourse that engages the combat of the present with its paradox of urgency and vacuity, paradox of voice and silence, despair and hope. This is the literary and theoretical framework within which this study is placed, foregrounding the imagination as a site of socio-political resistance, cultural defiance, and ideological subversion to the politics of oil and environmental degradation in Nigeria.

African literature grapples with issues such as indigenous resistance, cultural resilience, and politics, thematically and formally with each. Engaging with oral tradition, literature, and storytelling, gendered resistance, cultural memory, and ecology, literature also partakes in the ideological combat against neocolonial and environmental predations. A Cultural Materialist reading of the texts provides proof of literature as cultural survival and civil political tool and as literature of loss and survival. Repairing the harms of deep oil extraction in the Niger Delta region and the destruction of the environment and the humanitarian crisis costs of oil extraction in the region is perhaps the most important and unflinching contribution of Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* (2011).

Imbolo Mbue’s *How Beautiful We Were* has also sparked a significant amount of attention from critics in relation to the environmental justice discourse. The text has fittingly been discussed within postcolonial, ecocritical and diasporic literature, situating the fictional village, Kosawa, as both a specific local geography and a global geography representative of the ‘extractive’ injustice of the global economy (Nare, 2024). The controversy in *How Beautiful We Were* centres on the destructive impact an American oil company has on the environment and the community's culture, as told through the voices of elders, children, women, and activists. The destruction is narrated through a polyphonic structure and intergenerational storytelling. Such storytelling challenges the Western idea of linear development, which progresses through time, and instead favours indigenous memories, oral histories, traditions of resistance, and alternative ways of knowing (Mbue, 2021). As noted by Velu (2024), the novel’s structure actively resists a singular-voice account, particularly in Kosawa’s history and future. This is reminiscent of

Raymond Williams's (1977) concept 'residual and emergent cultures', which speaks of non-dominant traditions that continue to exist and evolve under a changing socio-political context.

Critics have noted the novel's symbolic and ideological roles of oil capitalism. The American oil company Pexton is representative of neocolonial capitalism, corporate imperialism, and globalist control at work. The village's conflict with Pexton and the national government that supports them illustrates the self-determination-versus-foreign-domination conflict in postcolonial theory. Mbue's illustration of female defiance and maternal care through Thula and the village women mothers also reflects the growing feminist ecocritical aspects of African literature. Balkan (2021) also outlines how the novel, among others, portrays the enduring and entrenched form of cultural defiance under socio-cultural oppression of the modern form whereby there is a marked and deliberate absence of legal and political structures. In *How Beautiful We Were*, the women empower themselves, not through militarised violence, but through other means including memory, education, global activism, and ultimately, narrative. This is what Nixon (2011) calls 'slow activism' which defiance is in the form of temperate, passionate, and profound involvement.

The intersection of capitalism, ecological decline, and ideology is crucial in postcolonial and environmental literary studies, particularly in relation to extractive industries in the Global South. These studies investigate how capitalist systems, particularly those founded on neoliberal globalism, trigger environmental violence and the forced removal of communities, coupled with the environmental violence and the forced removal of communities, coupled with the violence and the forced removal of communities, coupled with the violence and the forced removal of communities. Literature is not simply a passive reflection of these issues but, as Political Materialism suggests (Williams, 1977), cripples the ideology. The interrelation of capitalism, ecology, and ideology in African postcolonial contexts highlights the power of cultural production as a form of critique and resistance against global systems that perpetuate environmental exploitation. This research is rooted in Marxist, eco-Marxist, world-systems, and Cultural Materialist theories, which emphasise literature as a site where the material conditions of ecological injustices, are ideologically rendered. Through this, hegemony is confronted, and other frameworks of colonial defiance, ecological rebellion, cultural endurance, or resilient survival are imagined.

Although the research on the ecology, culture, and ideology interwoven with oil exploitation in Africa's environmental literature and post-colonial resistance reflects deep and nuanced thinking, there are still gaps, especially in the interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis and in the comparative literary analysis of these crises in intersectional frameworks. This is the focus of this section. Ecocritical literature on Africa remains untouched mainly by Nigerian oil and environmental conflicts, which begs the question of why Cultural Materialism, steeped in History, Politics, Ideology, and Cultural Production, as in the work of Raymond Williams, has been largely ignored. In terms of transnationalism, the existing research on Nigerian literature is often organized along a diaspora-continental divide, neglecting the intersectional concerns of *Oil on Water* and *How Beautiful We Were*. Another limitation of this literature comes from the tendency to define resistance and resilience as if they were distinct or even opposing phenomena.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural Materialism serves as an opportunity within the Post-colonialism scale to establish the relationship between material conditions and economic structures, and the cultural manifestations of African representations of petro-politics. Within this framework, one can investigate the influence and draw of the petro-industry, the draw and influence of African society's social and cultural organizations and power relations, and the impact of African cultures on the social and cultural organizations and power relations of African societies. It also

helps understand the relationships among economic interests, environmental problems, and the culture in which African petro-Fiction is portrayed. Cultural Materialism is the theory most often associated with the name of the famous cultural critic Raymond Williams. Even though his contribution does not formally follow the Post-colonialism theory approach, one can apply the Cultural Materialism approach to examine the cultural and material context of post-colonial societies within the broader framework of Postcolonial studies.

Cultural Materialism evolved as Raymond Williams intended: as an attempt to address the failures of historical criticism and historical cultural theory. Williams tried to adopt a materialist approach to studying Culture, focusing on the mutual relationship between Culture's practices and the socioeconomic environment, as well as on historical and cultural settings. His approach challenges Culture as something distant and separate, instead treating it as something instilled many times over within material circumstances in society. Raymond Williams views Cultural Materialism as the act of demystifying the relationship between Culture and society, in a bid to bring forth the material circumstances from which cultural manifestations arise. However, since Raymond Williams himself did not set out his entire approach in a single quote, one of the most scathing statements of his opinion is found in his book *Marxism and Literature* (1977). In this reading, Raymond Williams elaborates on the concepts upon which Cultural Materialism is based: "Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start. There is no ordinary human life which is not in part, in dynamic relation to social forms; all Culture is ordinary, in every society and every mind (Williams, 1977, p.24)."

This encapsulates the Cultural Materialist argument that Culture is natural and an inherent part of everyday life, as innate to social organization as it is rooted in it. Raymond Williams is eager to emphasize that Culture is not part of an elite world and does not exist in emptiness; Culture is among ordinary people. Such a theory of Culture rejects the truth that Culture pertains to and is practiced by specially defined classes or is confined to special activities. A dynamic relation to social forms emphasizes the changing and interactive nature of Culture within the broader social environment. Raymond Williams views cultural expressions as dynamic, subject to, and in interaction with the social structures and circumstances within which flows of knowledge and expression occur. And when Williams says that all culture is ordinary, as judged by all cultures and minds, he is suggesting the universality of Cultural Materialism. This is not exclusive to any particular culture or even to a specific time in history. Still, it is a method most people employ to establish the relationship between Culture and society in various contexts. The application of this initial idea of Cultural Materialism to the study's context elicits a dialogue on how the cultural expressions represented in the selected novels are innately linked to the daily experiences of the central characters and are mediated by material practices through petropolitics. It begs the question of how Culture, in its various forms, imports and exports, refracts, and reacts to the socioeconomic and political circumstances of the communities it influences.

Cultural Materialism emphasizes knowledge of a society's material conditions, including its economic systems, and class and historical relations. It marries those cultural phenomena, literature and art, and changes the material realities in the lives of people. Although material conditions play a significant role, Cultural Materialism has also recognized the importance of human agency in cultural development. It discusses the active ways in which Communities and people engage with pre-existing material structures and challenge them, resulting in a continuous dynamic between Culture and society. Williams did undertake an ideological analysis of Culture, seeking to identify implicit ideologies in literary and cultural works. It encompasses the study of how cultural representations reproduce and enforce dominant ideologies (specifically ideologies of power, classes, and social systems). Merging Cultural Materialism with the Post-colonialism means applying this concept to the explanation of the cultural products of a society, which experienced colonization. It allows observing how the explanation of cultures, accounts, and

cultural identities is influenced by colonialism and its legacies. In dismantling the materiality of cultural texts, the researchers reveal power relations, oppositions, and maneuvers within postcolonial groups.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The man, conditioned by the capitalist mechanisms of power and exploitation, appears to have always desired and assumed overall control over creatures in the ecosystem (Prasanth, 2018). But the degradation of the earth and its citizens, apparent in the Niger Delta novels, proves that human beings have not only lost control over activities in the biosphere but also over themselves. Multinational oil exploration companies fail to combat the pollution menace. Thus, ordinary people are bound to survive within the limits of those specific geographical boundaries and cannot migrate to colonies to improve their lifestyles. The establishment of factories and the invasion of multinational oil-extracting companies are changing the environment, and people belonging to these cultural conditions reflect their anxiety and psychological frustrations. Cultural Materialism is based on the acknowledgment of human agency to material limitations, discussing how characters maneuver and resist the effects of petro-politics, to generate an analysis of agency used by individuals and communities as a response to the conditions created by the petro-industry. Locating Cultural Materialism within Post-colonialism acknowledges African histories of colonialism and explores how petro-politics is intertwined with colonial legacies in the novels. This research examines how Petro-Politics operate in close relation to the ordinary citizens of the Niger Delta in the selected Nigerian fiction.

### **Petro-Politics: A Threat to Environment and Material Conditions**

This research focuses predominantly on the fictional accounts describing environmental geopolitics, questioning whether the representations of oil's exploitation in the Niger Delta are accurate. It also expands the inquiry to post Petro-Politics and the characters' socio-material conditions pertaining to the poverty and non-empiricist portrayals. This research goes beyond the primary superficial understanding; as part of the Politics and the Environment, and the African fiction goes on to depict the collective power of a community.

Mama and Papa cautioning me never to go near the big river is my first memory of life. Without their warning, how would I have known that rivers were not ordinarily covered with oil and toxic waste? Without our parents' stories about their childhoods in a clean Kosawa, their days spent swimming in rivers that ran clear, how would my friends and I have known that the sporadic smokiness that enveloped the village and left our eyes watery and noses runny was not an ordinary occurrence in the lives of other children our age? (Mbue, 2022, p.34)

In *How Beautiful We Were*, Mbue also warns of a change in the environment, with parents telling them that the river used to be clear, but now it gets dirty due to Petro-Politics. The use of the terms oil and toxic waste indicates aesthetic and ecological threats to the ecosystem and society. This changes material conditions, undermining the traditional practices. A degradation of environmental heritage, represented by parents remembering clean Kosawa as a loss of cultural heritage, brings out Petro-Politics as a threat to the environment and, by extension, a threat to the culture. Allusions to health risks and contaminated air highlight the dangers of the petro-industry, associating the consequences of environmental disturbances with the health of a specific community. When Petro-Politics rules, nature cry, says Safaeyan (2022), the material wealth of Africa is sucked away, leaving traces in the soil and a broken heart among people (Safaeyan, 2022). "The noise from the oil field multiplied; day and night we heard it in our bedrooms, in our classroom, in the forest. Our air turned heavy (Mbue, 2022, p.39)."

Mbue's description of the sound of oil fields multiplying, intruding, and disturbing bedrooms and classrooms by day and night represents the disruptive presence of the Petro-Politics. This heavy noise pollution is indicative of the heavy air pollution and its possible detrimental effects on our health. The air pollution and noise pollution are indicative of how



much harm Petro-Politics is doing to us and how much harm Petro-Politics is doing to our community.

Pexton was sending less bottled water with each passing year, knowing there was little we could do to make them keep their word. Our air was getting dirtier, despite promises. They spilled their oil on our land with recklessness; we spilled it in vengeance (Mbue, 2022, p.245).

Pexton's generalization of the quantity of bottled water indicates that the local water source that the community relies on is likely becoming scarcer. This is the result of the environmental consequences of Petro-Politics; oil spills and industrial pollution poison the local water source where the community draws water. The essence of a clean water source is a metaphor of a greater environmental threat. This is evident in the way the community is poorly served and the health of the community is put at risk. The oil industry is notorious for not fulfilling obligations and so it is significant that Pexton is sending these people fewer bottles of water than he promised. This refers to an act of broken trust and signifies the lack of responsibility of the people in positions of power regarding their social and environmental responsibilities. The unfulfilled obligations contribute to a sense of despair within the community and this is where Petro Politics becomes more than an adverse effect on the community; it becomes a threat to the community's socio-economic wellbeing. The community's poor health is the result of a lack of clean water. The presence of poorly visible air is a strong signal of potential industrial pollution. There is an evident example of petro- politics according to Guthrie (2009). Petro politics is to Africa an example of a Faustian bargain in which Africa sells material wealth for environmental health.

It's the oil and the 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 (Habila, 2011, p.124).

Habila (2011) relates this to the general sense of insecurity brought by oil and oil-related conflicts and the psychological disturbances and emotional suffering it causes. It suggests that Petro-Politics occurs also within the environment and harms it. Yet, also it extends to the geographical outcome and impacts the adaptive capacity of a population and the coping mechanisms. The appropriation of the site as a dead, dying place is a metaphor. Such an expression goes beyond the environmental literalness to a more chilling desolation and hopelessness. Such visualization, so to speak, leads one to think that Petro-Politics has rendered the place barren as far as the environment goes, and as far as the place is concerned, human habitation is of a wider, more vivid, positive context. The desolation brought by Petro-Politics is not to be taken lightly and essentially revolves around life in the given locale. Petro-Politics, in the words of Eismann, is a noxious drink that Africa is forced to gulp and in so doing, poisons the soil and the spirit of prosperity, the very prosperity that Africa so desires (Eismann, 2011). Oil-related activities and the associated environment have a damage that perpetuates the overall poor quality of life in so many ways, including, the availability of quality water, and availability of agricultural produce, health and general well-being.

The existence of a place to die suggests, yet again, the harmful effects of Petro-Politics on the lives of the people. One should be particularly concerned that he is writing a book on the positive and negative consequences of oil and warfare and is equally concerned with the subject matter. One should be particularly conscious of the dire need to document Petro-Politics and the numerous perils that accompany it, particularly from the perspective of the author. The story itself serves to activate the conscience of the people who, in turn, challenge the problems stemming from the environment and the materials. The story itself serves to activate the conscience of the people, who in turn challenge the problems stemming from the environment and the materials.

Maybe fate wanted to show her firsthand the carcasses of the fish and crabs and waterbirds that floated on the deserted beaches of these tiny towns and villages and islands every morning, killed by the oil her husband was helping to produce (Habila, 2011, p.156).

This phrase captures the immediacy and physical threat of Petro-Politics and the material conditions of the environment. The imagery of dead marine life on the beaches captures the profound ecological devastation embedded in oil production. Such devastation is also the loss of natural balance in the marine ecosystem. These dead bodies on the beaches symbolize the relentless onslaught of Petro-Politics on the natural world. The dead marine life also correlates the Petro-Politics of oil production to the economic conditions of dependent coastal communities who engage in fishing. The loss of their fishing income also humanizes the onshore oil production, placing the collective threat Petro-Politics poses on the community. This also reflects the everyday material burdens Petro-Politics places on the coastal communities and natural ecosystems. This thematic analysis examined the phenomenon of Petro-Politics as an evil looming over the Niger Delta people's ecological and material wellbeing as perpetuated by Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* and Habila's *Oil on Water*, which document the environmental consequences of oil mining and the material deprivation of the people.

### **Resistance of Common People to Oil-Extracting Organizations**

The economic interests of peoples residing in the conflict of the Niger Delta region have been the focus of much literature on the 'sacrifice zones.' Impacted people have been depicted, for instance, in the literature of the 'sacrifice zones' in the Niger Delta, in the literature of the 'sacrifice zones' in the Niger Delta, in the literature of the 'sacrifice zones' in the Niger Delta, in the literature of the 'sacrifice zones' in the Niger Delta; but the focus on the economic interests of the people in the conflict remains. The focus on the resistance of these people is where the literature focuses on the most. The detail of the construction of their resistance will, of course, relate most to the economic interests of the 'sacrifice zones.' The literature on the economic interests of the people in conflict is dominated by literature on 'sacrifice zones' and the Niger Delta. This has included grassroots campaigns, protests, and civil disobedience by ordinary citizens as they struggle to protect their land, resources, and way of life. It would examine the validity and adequacy of these resistance strategies and their presentation as legitimate modes of empowerment, or as a synthesis that occurs within an environment that undermines their effectiveness and sustainability.

The characters in the selected novels are most likely portrayed as rebels to the hegemony of the great oil corporations. Africans themselves are the first line of military resistance, the collective voice, the great shriek heard above the whirl of machines, insisting on attention and the preservation of the purity of their environment (Kroeker, 2022). It would examine the complexities of character agency and the manoeuvring of people within the ambiguities of the power system, legal procedures, and socio-political structures to contest the policies of international oil-extracting organizations. The causes, sacrifices, and outcomes surrounding such resistance activities may be central concerns. Regarding this, another insight drawn from the novels is the role of mass action and community unity in protesting the policies of two or more international oil-extracting organizations. The community-based analysis would also explore community members as strength in confronting foreign forces as a form of resistance, community grievances, culture, and a sense of belonging.

Imbolo Mbue narrates how ordinary people in the Niger Delta protested against the policies of foreign oil companies. The decision of an individual not to consume the products of firms such as Pexton is reported as a symbolic rejection of everything that is regarded as exploitative in oil mining. It is actually an act of resistance, and individual people are fighting against the economic interests of these oil corporations. It is necessary to mention that the character does not follow the social norms of oil addiction and requires another means of

transportation. This dialogue between the character and Papa points to a generational transition, with the youth desiring change and rebelling against the conservative approach to oil.

On the same day the story became public, the Restoration Movement people called the Pexton office and asked them for the truth: Did Pexton know what its oil exploration was doing to the village of Kosawa? Was Pexton doing anything to help the villagers affected by their spills and toxics wastes? (Mbue, 2022, p.166)

Imbolo Mbue here explains why ordinary people living in the Niger Delta are so opposed to the policies of foreign oil-extracting firms. It dwells on what the Restoration Movement did to probe Pexton, the oil company responsible for the environmental blowout in Kosawa. The novel is one form of resistance that raises awareness of the impact of oil processes. The enquiry at Pexton reveals an attempt to establish accountability, as the society seeks to be informed of whether the company knew of the problem and what it did to mitigate its impact on villagers. Such active action means community empowerment and the Restoration Movement demands its role when it is used against them. The interrogatives are more than seeking information; they challenge Pexton's receptivity and the will to do what he can to lessen the impact on the community, and are more of an objection to perceived wrongs. The text even refers to legal and social implications, suggesting that legal action or civil movements may be initiated if the corporation fails to respond to problems detected in the increase process.

Similarly, Habila's novel *Oil on Water* explores the diverse and multifaceted ways in which familiar people react to environmental pressures imposed by foreign oil-producing groups in the Niger Delta. "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 and dumb and blind" (Habila, 2011, p.36). Throughout his novel, Habila portrays how oil wars impact these people and how defenseless they are, being forced to be surrounded by militants and the military. The text states that in these life-threatening circumstances, normal men adopt survival strategies that are only described in symbolically silent and invisible terms to navigate the mazes and dangers that have been imposed on them. The above description transcends the physical description of conflicts. It is a broader context of systemic oppression in which approaches to struggle open to the community are limited, and their survival is expressed through coping mechanisms in the chaotic environment. The narrative highlights the intricacies of effort, perseverance, and the dilemma of an average citizen of the Niger Delta amid the multicoloured geopolitical and environmental conditions in the area.

Write only the truth. Tell them about the flares you see at night, and the oil on the water. And the soldiers forcing us to escalate the violence every day. Tell them how we are hounded daily in our own land. Where do they want us to go, tell me, where? (Habila, 2011, p.187)

Helon Habila discusses how novels facilitated the involvement of ordinary people in the Niger Delta in the popular resistance against the policies of the international oil-extracting institutions. Even in this context, the requirement to tell the truth solely highlights the disgust at manipulating and distorting the story. Water and soil pollution process, military pressure, and daily harassment are the stories of the community opposing the destructive impact of outside authorities. Another factor that contributes to highlighting the suffering of the Niger Delta people by drawing attention to the problem of displacement is the heartbreaking issue of displacement. That text summarizes the multidimensionality of resistance, just as citizens experience environmental, social, and existential paradoxes in resisting the action of global oil-harvesting businesses.

### **Destitution and the Future of Natives of Niger Delta**

The poverty of today casts a long shadow on the future of the everyday African, whose visions of wealth become the rotten fruit of destitution, as the promise of prosperity turns sour into the sourness of poverty since its discovery in 1969. In the selected novels, the authors create

a critical examination of the compound impact of the Petro-Politics on societies in the Niger Delta. Elements that affect the region's future include environmental impacts such as degradation and pollution, and how they are addressed. Cultural identities are shifting, and the future is resistant to assimilation into either a community or one that maintains its culture. Artistic direction is also very dependent on social connections and strength. The health implications of future exposure to pollutants in the region depend on whether risks materialize (based on the capacity to put in place the relevant health policies and community-based measures to curb them). Another critical factor in defining the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural connotation of the Niger Delta and its various strands and layers of the future is Petropolitics.

Niger Delta's petro-politics impact the political agency and opposition of the ordinary people. Grassroots activism is an essential feature of decision-making related to the region's future. The degrees to which local people claim their rights, challenge the status quo of power, and determine the political course is a key factor in defining the Nigerian Delta's development trajectory. Investment decisions, resource (allocation), and infrastructure developments associated with the petro-industry influence the physical geography of the area. The inadequacy of infrastructure, roads, schools, and hospitals impacts the health of the Niger Delta and its potential to evolve. Petro-politics holistically and hegemonically impact the future of the Niger Delta through economic systems, environmental sustainability, cultural identities, health standards, political agency, and infrastructural development (Becker, 2019). The complex integration of all these processes determines the course this region takes and necessitates presenting sustainable, community-oriented solutions to the problems caused by Petropolitics. *Hoe Beautiful We Were* highlights the intricacy of the consequences of petro-politics for the community's future in terms of economy, environment, law, and culture.

At the end of that first dry season, a pipeline burst and oil flooded the farm of the mother of one of my friends; her family barely had any harvest that year; some days, I had to share my food with her during recess. Weeks later, a new spill turned into a fire that ravaged the farms of six families, forcing mothers to go searching for new land deep in the forest, a trek that left many with little strength for toiling (Mbue, 2022, p.39).

An example of a direct economic impact on the community could be illustrated by the story of a pipeline rupture that flooded a farm with oil. Mbue highlights that petro-politics, in its oil-spill form, disrupts other economic activities, such as agriculture and livelihoods, by affecting harvests. The financial effect is evident, as food and money are issues, and the narrator, who has brought food to recess, is telling you about the immediate miseries of the directly affected people. It is the spills and subsequent fires, as stated in the passage that lead to substantial environmental degradation. This extraction of oil leads to petro-politics that, in effect, causes oil spills, which besides damaging farmland, pose a threat to the general environment. The fires add another layer to the destruction of nature and the ecosystem around it, impacting the local population and forcing people to seek new land, another burden on natural resources. The resulting spill leads to a fire that kills several farm animals, causing forced displacement. To find a land, Petro-politics decides what the people will be doing in the future; they drag families out of their places and lands and move them into the forest. The forced migration not only disintegrates communities that are formed, but also contributes to the wear and tear and physical strain on the mothers who are left to go through the daunting and rough journey across the otherworld.

The consequences of petro-politics are socialized through the communal tragedy of being less fortunate when the narrator is forced to share a snack with a friend during recess. Nobody is willing to help one another in society, and the misery of one family is transmitted to another. The misery and unity upon confronting external oppression forced upon the communal co-identity by the petro-political have to do, to some extent, with the shared experience of suffering. As evidenced by the regular spills in the passage and their impacts, the community is susceptible to

a recurring cycle. The current pattern of environmental disruptions and the subsequent attendant economies are epiphenomenal products of petro-politics. The outcome of this cycle is the determinism of the future of ordinary people since the circumstances of indefinite susceptibility and indecisiveness are cultivated. "The representatives told them that drilling for oil would bring something called "civilization" to our village" (Mbue, 2022, p.83).

According to Mbue, society and culture may be on a paying spree with civilization's promise and land loss. Veiling itself as development, the introduction of transformations by Petro-politics would alter the accustomed way of life, disrupt cultural practices, and community patterns. Loss of land and independence leads to a transformation of the community's social fabric. This rhetoric, evident in the drilling analogy as the origin of civilization, is rather a pointer to the tools oil companies and the government often use to defend their activities within the communities around them. Petro-politics is built in the name of development and progress to advance and develop the village. However, the real outcomes of such programs are often the reverse of the so-called good, and they cause adverse consequences on the population. "Every day land the size of a small village is lost, all because oil corporations have the liberty to do as they please and the government chooses to do little while its citizens watch helplessly" (Mbue, 2022, p.194). The fact that a piece of land larger than a small village is lost every day makes it possible to draw a clear picture of how petro-politics negatively affects the environment. Oil firms that appear to have the freedom to do, as they please, contribute to the loss of larger land areas. A physical displacement is not the sole way to measure this loss, as it also reflects the degradation of natural resources, including agricultural lands and ecosystems, thereby affecting the lives of ordinary people. Petro-politics demonstrates a balancing of power in which the government can choose to do nothing, in effect, allowing corporations to operate relatively freely. The sense of hopelessness among citizens is part of a larger issue: the citizenry being neglected and deprived of the protection and advocacy to which they are rightfully entitled. Along with the undermining of local autonomy, the freedom of oil companies to do whatever they want, and the government's failure to do anything about it, this is also part of the process. The future of petro-politics lies in ensuring that the decision-making power of local communities is subordinate to higher powers that may not always be interested in the community or its existence. Dispossession is a sign of a more general failure to manage and shape their lives.

The same empty squat dwellings, the same ripe and flagrant stench, the barrenness, the oil slick and the same indefinable sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above the punctured zinc roofs, unwilling to depart, yet powerless to return (Habila, 2011, p.16).

The image Habila creates in the quote depicts the extent to which petro-politics shapes the destiny of ordinary people in the Niger Delta. The frequent occurrence of oil spills and environmental degradation is a symptom of an underlying issue that affects the livelihoods of the communities hosting them. The feeling of a degrading living standard sets in when the authors talk of abandoned houses and a distinct smell of decay, and the feelings mix on the verge of an inexplicable sadness that covers the town. The ghostly community's metaphorical expressions offer a face of spectral displacement and powerlessness, the aggregate of all the community's endeavors to endure in the milieu of oil mining spillovers. The continued existence of the issues described in the quote can be characterized as a long-running effort to determine the community's future in such significant, multifaceted ways.

And just look at the other villages that had taken the oil money: already the cars had broken down, and the cheap televisions and DVD players were all gone, and where was the rest of the money? Thrown away in Port Harcourt barrooms, or on second wives and funeral parties, and now they were worse off than before (Habila, 2011, p.41).

The novel *Habila* is written about concerns the future of the ordinary people of the Niger Delta under the petro-political system. The existence of a village whose cash is being imported

through oil is a pointer that the economy depends on the oil industry and is shaping its future with oil as an income earner. But the following report of broken-down cars and breakdowns in consumer goods is an indication of mismanagement or misappropriation of oil earnings, with instant gains followed by delayed consequences. Tracing petro-politics in social and cultural contexts can be observed through expenditure decisions, such as on second marriages and funerals. Infusion of oil funds, it turns out, is a source of tension with social systems and ideals, leading to negative consequences for the community. Moreover, the development claiming to have become 'poorer than ever' from having assimilated cultivations, helps to further understand the negative effects on the economy, which keep the average citizen in a state of poverty and stagnation. A further development of social inequity in the society from the novel appears to be inequity of the wastes of money on several consumer items whereas some of the people of society suffer the wastes of money in the barrooms. The future as predicted from the novel is defined by petro-politics when further increases the inequality of economy and is a barrier on equity and sustainable development. The text therefore shows and elucidates the intricacies and impediments caused by the paradox of the oil wealth on the people of the Niger Delta of the social and economic impacts of the revenues from oil.

From several angles, the primary texts see the politics of oil as permeating every aspect of the oil industry as the ecocidal novels examine oil spills, gas flaring, and other manifestations of ecocide and reflect, therefore, the devastation wrought by the oil industry. All of these ecocides create crises of subsistence, water, agriculture, and lasting socio-economic devastation. The socio-economic devastation causes the loss of subsistence, mainly fishing and farming, communities disintegrate, and entire communities are socially fractured. Hence, the oil politics of the Niger Delta is illustrated as being in a precarious situation, socio-economically and environmentally, and the primary oil politics of the Niger Delta is depicted as being in a precarious situation.

Analyzing the data, the theme of 'Resistance' is prevalent in the two case studies. The defeatist attitude of individuals and groups is expounded upon, including civil disobedience and community organizing adjusted to acts of confrontation. These acts exemplify the will of the oppressed to retain agency and defy oppression on the corporate and state level. The cases show the ongoing conflicts of "non-violent" versus "violent" in the realm of civil disobedience and resistance, and illuminate some of the moral conflicts and tensions that lie in the activism of resistance. The depth of this activism is a direct reflection of the level of oil politics that determine the real conditions of the Niger Delta peoples' lives, including the politics and morals of their lives. In these cases, there is no doubt that character agency is of paramount importance. The characters challenged the power relations and oppressive systems in which they operated, attempting to protect their land, identity, and dignity. The characters and the people exemplified how ordinary people, when unified, can confront the most repressive systems of "order" in these oppressive geopolitical structures. The novels assert that resistance is as much a political and cultural expression as it is physical, derived from the people's memories and cohesive suffering.

## **CONCLUSION**

*How Beautiful We Were* and *Oil on Water* advocate for battling the predatory oil companies and the foreign oil antagonistic governments. The shown resistance of the characters and their communities, in their defiance and in their individual and collective activist engagement, is in direct focus of the narratives. This repeated pattern amplifies the heroes' collective spirit for the struggle towards empowerment to instate and articulate the inequities of systems predicated upon Petro-Politics. Concerning environmental degradation, the heroes represent the silenced majority and their struggle against socio-political inequities. Also, the Petro-Politics in these novels focus further on the social and economic aspects of the communities. The economic grievances, disparities, and socio-constitutional frustrations are

notable parallels in these two novels. Dominant socio-economic systems, as so captured in the characters' struggles, are created and sustained in "destitute" communities to survive the socio-political inequities of their system as so captured in the characters' struggles (Heise, 2010). This collection of popular themes in literature provides a snapshot of the extent of Petro-Politics within these characters.

In addition, the novels illustrate the connection between the global and the local. The realities of the Niger Delta are shaped and framed by the International Oil Corporations, geopolitics, the media, and the worldwide system. Each of them expresses global capitalism's infiltration into a specific local setting, and its consequences on the control of power, the distribution of resources, and the governance of poverty. These novels are focused on explaining power and resource imbalances and governance poverty outlining the intricate linkage of local and global, especially oil politics and the Niger Delta. They emphasize how the plight of the Delta is deeply entangled within the geopolitics of the world. The integration of Postcolonialism and Cultural Materialism enriched the analysis by addressing present injustices within a historical framework. Postcolonialism showed that the contemporary extraction of oil is a form of colonial exploitation, whereas Cultural Materialism highlighted the nexus of economic systems and the erosion of culture. The two perspectives depicted how the politics of oil interrupt the flow of culture, dismantle the integrity of societies, commodify their lands and resources, and deprive them of their dignity.

A detailed analysis of the selected novels has provided a structural analysis of the theme of Petro-Politics in the Niger Delta, thereby fulfilling the goals and research questions of the present thesis. The comparative analysis reflects the devastating nature of Petro-Politics, explaining its impact on the environment, communities, and lifestyles. It has shed light on the abysmal upheavals that the characters undergo. Moreover, the peculiarities of international relations depicted in the novels also reveal the non-autonomy of local and global forces, and the stories reflect their own perspectives on the actions of world actors, the media, and the aftermath of geopolitical processes. The conceptual framework supplements the research outcomes, reveals the highest level of structural unfairness in the accounts, and shows how the operation of historical objects and economic systems creates disparities and causes poverty.

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