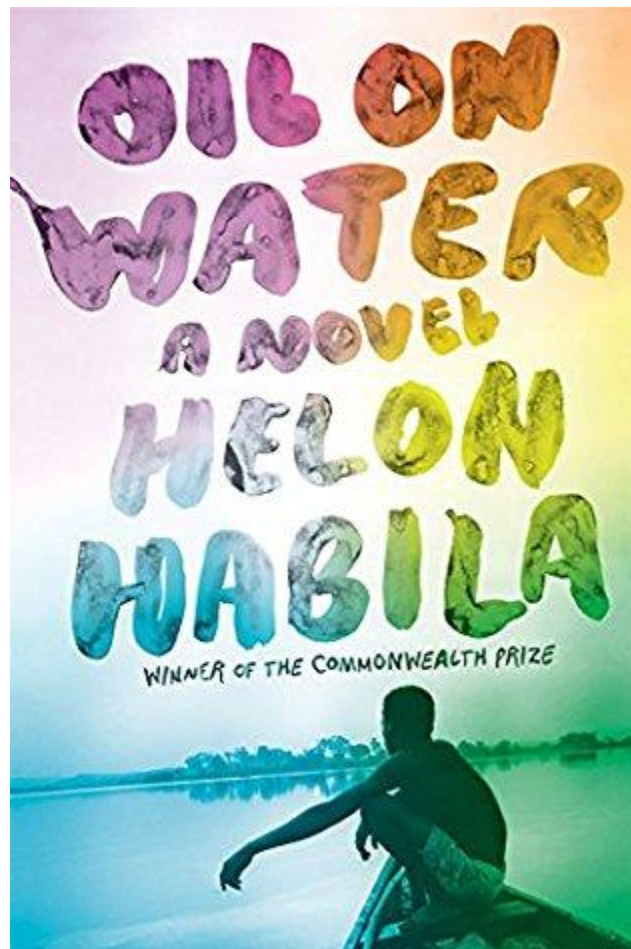


**The Long-Term Impact of Global Market Challenges and Oil Pollution on the Environmental Systems of the Niger Delta Regions in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water***

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the environmental perspectives of the Nigerian author Helon Habila and analyses how his literary text *Oil on Water* function as demonstrative example to showcase

his documentation, criticism, and personal opinions on the ecological structures that had stamped their mark of significance in the cultural and traditional systems of African countries. It also serves to exhibit Helon Habila's vision in the process of environmental degradation brought out through human activities to the environmental constructions of Nigeria thereby creating alarming levels of imbalance in the original fabric of the ecological system. Also, this paper presents the ecocritical vision and perspectives of Helon Habila with respect to his novel *Oil on Water* where he emphasizes the complicated network of global environmental problems such as environmental degradation, ecological imbalance, and habitat deterioration that are brought about in the environmentally rich regions of Nigeria due to the evolution of a postmodern world which gives much importance to corporate enterprises, business administrations, corrupted political systems, and covetous leaders who are concerned only about their own welfare.

### **Introduction**

The writers of contemporary Nigerian fiction have always attempted to institute the conventions and practices of their native civilization in order to establish the meaning and significance of ancient experiences and beliefs. Their works of art tend to capture the impalpable or intangible essence of African tradition while placing huge importance on the destructive effects of colonialism and its subsequent cultural, social, economic, and political consequences. These African writers resist foreign encroachment and European or white hegemony, and endeavour to register as accurately as possible the African way of living and the characteristics of its existence.



Helon Habila

Courtesy: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helon\\_Habila](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helon_Habila)

Helon Habila is one such contemporary Nigerian writer who constantly strives to illuminate the contemporary mode of African living by evocatively delineating the cruel and overlooked effects of globalization on the developing world. He evokes through his novels the alarmingly accelerating levels of ruthlessness and inhumanity raised by modern global development in a postcolonial era of capitalism. He vehemently satirizes the unequal economic and political systems of Nigeria as the country's trade and industry are sustained by free enterprises and private ownerships that engage in power politics in an attempt to hold on to its privileges. Habila asserts that such distinct and prominent demarcations between the rich capitalists and the working poor leave behind a world that is as dark and corrupt as the one that existed during the colonial era.

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

Helon Habila's phenomenal work *Oil on Water* has been widely acclaimed by many critics as representative texts of the postcolonial era; it captures, quite tentatively, the general cultural phenomenon that has been in vogue in a colonially ruptured decadent society ever since the advent of mass capitalism and hybrid identity, both of which are structured around power politics. While the novel lay its emphasis on the pernicious cost of Nigeria's power politics

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which has somehow managed to surge its way into the realm of ordinary affairs by displaying a total disregard to public welfare, it can also be interpreted as a work that operates on a deeper metaphorical and ecocritical level for it tends to analyze the detrimental effects of power politics on nature and its habitat by illustrating environmental concerns.

### **Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism has evolved significantly as a theoretical approach over the last one and a half decades to draw attention to the cultural value of nature writing and environmental literature. Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature.

There has been a progressive grandeur in the domain of ecocriticism ever since it facilitated the point of its concern to illuminate the idea that the occurrence of environmental crisis implies not only the corporeal destruction of nature's habitat but is also a symptom of the troubling material expression of modern culture's philosophical assumptions, epistemological convictions, aesthetic principles, and ethical imperatives.

Ecocriticism in literary studies explicates the real and imagined boundaries between nature and culture without denying nature's physical existence and also examines the articulation and investigation of nature as a concept that challenges established cultural, political, and ethical standards.

### **Kidnapping of British Oil Engineer's Wife**

Helon Habila's masterly third novel *Oil on Water* (2011), explores the intricate and often deadly politics of oil in Nigeria in which the poor working class is exploited and where environmental abode is demolished. The oil industry of Nigeria has been closely linked with several economic and social issues such as corruption, violence, and bloodshed, conducted by those dishonest or fraudulent people of power. The story focuses on the events that lead Rufus, a journalist and the protagonist-narrator of the novel, to embark on a journey to the oil-rich regions of the Niger Delta along with Zaq, once an inspirational and reputed journalist par excellence but who now has his own demons to fight as he succumbs to alcoholism and its resultant ill-effects. The two recruited journalists commence their courses of action to interview the militant gangs, headed by a terrifying leader known only by his nickname "the Professor", who have kidnapped a white woman, the wife of a highly influential British oil engineer, Mr John Floode. The two journalists, Rufus and Zaq, are assigned to this mission to ensure that the captive, Miss Isabel Floode, is still alive so that ransom negotiations could be made swiftly.

### **Environmental Degradation**

Helon Habila's novel *Oil on Water* could be interpreted, evaluated, and theoretically analyzed as a text that focuses extensively on the aftermaths of a politically independent country, Nigeria, which lays its superfluous power on the development of a technologically empowered society at the cost of environmental deteriorations and ecological breakdowns.

Helon Habila portrays the real-life tragedy of the Niger Delta by means of a writing mechanism that is similar to the tradition of the classic detective novel in nature but which also serves as a coming-of-age narrative that exposes the social and political problems of a newly independent nation which struggles to come to terms with its own economic and political strategies. The corrupted leaders of the society behold the oil rich regions of their country as opportunities or means that could specially favour the attainment of their own personal desires and interests unmindful of the fact that such personal success could only come at the cost of the nation's environmental depletion and economic collapse.

The initial stages of apprehension that the protagonist-narrator of the novel *Oil on Water*, Rufus, feels at the first few pages are vindicated and substantiated because of the certain deliberate clever strategies used by the novelist Helon Habila to systematically model various streams of environmental or ecological images in an attempt to record the miserable existence of the people living at Niger Delta regions with only limited means of survival.

The image of the 'fog' that rises over the memory of the protagonist-narrator Rufus when he recalls the events and incidents that has led to his unwelcomed and unexpected expedition to the oil rich regions of the Niger Delta are in fact images that are intended to reveal the concealed canopy of the dark, and lost regions of the country that have been left to decay and deterioration due to the setting up of large oil industries and business enterprises under the overpowering grip of blatant capitalism. "A fog rises and covers the faces and places, and I am left clawing about in the dark, lost" (Habila 3).

The utilization of the environmental image 'fog' symbolizes not only the obscured memories of the narrator when he tries to recall incidents of his past but might also be regarded as a significant overshadow that has turned a once beautiful and enriched place of civilization into an insignificant hazy swamp that is not suited for survival of any living organisms, not even fishes and chickens, but which is only fit for the intensified growth of decomposing, grey matter.

The pollution that has been aggravated because of the inevitable degradation of environmental structures, the roots of which could be indicated by the economic and political problems of their nation, stands as a vivid testimony to the extinction of the fishing and farming communities of the Delta regions mostly because of the fact that the oil industries promote an era of brutal state capitalism and economically privatized enterprises driven by the forces of corruption, self-centeredness, and scandalized ownerships in which goods and services are distributed according to price mechanisms which make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The more widely better communications, the possibility of travel and ostentatious consumer goods have become available in the Niger Delta, the more the villagers who live above the oilfields have noticed the difference between their circumstances and those of the people who exploit their natural riches. As the venality and corruption that envelop the industry become clear for all to see, it is hardly surprising that the local battles for Nigerian crude have become

increasingly gangsterish. All this makes Nigeria a brittle motor of twenty-first-century capitalism. (Peele xvii)

The economic and political problems that reiterate the depletion of natural renewable resources in the Niger Delta regions, besides the fact that it acts as a stimulating mechanism endorsing the incessant growth of multinational oil companies, finds its most striking admonishment or disapproval in its absconding attitude towards its role in the welfare of its ecological community: it ignores the pragmatic approach of analyzing the situation which, if that were to be registered as a case of crime as it legally should, might put such internationally reputed companies in charge of restoring the damages that it had inflicted upon the environment by means of disrespectfully establishing a condescending arrogance over the natives of that region and thus turning its back onto the entire revival of the damaged atmosphere; they rather prefer to look at the oil rich regions as profitable appliances which might help them to better their own financial ends.

Thus in *Oil on Water*, Helon Habila investigates the environmental crisis of Nigeria due to the inhumane or merciless activities of the corrupted leaders who have forgotten their own obligations or indebtedness towards that very same piece of land which had prompted their own growth and success by bestowing upon them the well-directed route to greatness in terms of supremacy, hierarchy, affluence, efficiency, wealth, and riches.

The land remains an unforgotten mess of marshy swamp, filled with polluted water that runs as dark as a foul-smelling or noxious sewer and as infectious as a stinky gutter. It is littered with insects, and other malicious or deadly infections that thrive on the dirty waters of the oil regions, thereby providing a mammoth obstacle to the idealized image of the tamed landscape tended by the gentle farmers of the community. The village which had once flourished with signs of human civilization is no longer inhabited; there are no signs of human inhabitancy across many areas, and what would have once been an infiltrated area filled with human population and droned with everyday routine or mechanical action now stands as a derelict society encompassing thousands of acres of abandoned lands that are a sheer reminder of harmonious life in luscious housing structures stocked with beautiful, charming, and elegant open parks and green spaces.

The oil industries has deprived them of their legal rights to live in a clean environment for no matter where the protagonist-journalist of the novel Rufus turned he encountered an abandoned society plugged with chicken pens that had dead and decomposing chickens inside, and water pots filled with water on whose surface mosquito larvae thickly flourished.

There would not have been much sympathetic or compassionate feelings involved in the hearts of the visitors, had those disheartening images not been a mournful reminder of the beautiful life that had once been lead in those same surroundings, but the comparison that could be brought about between now and then is not just dreadful and monstrous, but is also indicative of the reason why such illegalized oil industry corporations must be curbed of their power to wipe human and animal existence or survival from the very face of a harmonious and civilized

community. The deserted villages now cry a more desperate need than ever to keep the inflation of environmental pollution or ecological crisis under control, and the only method that could accomplish such a tremendous task would be the curbing of political affluence and corruption in social or economic institutions.

The imminent pain of sadness at the loss of an ecological balance is etched on the faces of the journalists who spend hours traversing the abandoned villages, one after the other, with them becoming aware of the fact that there are no beautiful sights to behold but deserted houses that make the entire scenario look as if a deadly epidemic had swept through the entire community.

Helon Habila captures vivid and vital details about the impact of a highly unstable ecological structure that has to cope with the hazardous effects and the destructive processes of water pollution; he stands out distinctly and significantly in terms of accuracy and preciseness of details close to reality by displaying minute and vivid attention to the flipside of the nation's abuse of power, and squalor on the sustenance of ecological systems, thereby publicizing and reflecting on the unsophisticated and worldly activities that have led to an ambivalent dynamic of the ecological resources which can neither be considered as pure nor could it be ignored as unessential. The fact that it is impure and decayed but nonetheless highly essential and indispensable forms the major core of the ecological study on the oil rich regions of Niger Delta for it brings to public notice the adulterated versions of their once luxuriant environmental assets and ecological riches.

Helon Habila draws out a realistic situation, which could have as well been taken from pages or contexts of real life, when he sets his protagonist Rufus and his journalist-companion Zac to traverse the meshes of a dense mangrove swamp despite the harsh conditions of environmental dangers that had worked its havoc on the foul and sulphur infused waters which bred several swarms of insects and mosquitoes. "The atmosphere grew heavy with the suspended stench of dead matter. We saw in front of us dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fishes bobbed white-bellied between tree roots" (Habila 9).

The novel might include within its context several detailed and most elaborate descriptions of the ecological crisis that had inflicted the heart of the Niger Delta ever since the organization of multinational oil companies but one should never ignore to acknowledge the fact that the setting of the novel provides a much greater depth to the holistic concept of ecological preservation for it harbours at its base the barrier between urban development and the world of nature, by drawing public attention to the contrast between eco-friendly remote villages and huge oil companies where oil pipes wended like submerged snakes, leaking crude, fatal, and toxic liquids and gases into the green and luscious environments of forests, water reservoirs, and mangroves.

The author recounts the impact of ecological crisis that had instigated a powerful degradation in the quality of drinking water due to the strongest affluence of oil industry corruption by narrating an incident in which the protagonist of the novel, Rufus, out of a

desperate desire to quench his thirst makes a rather futile attempt at drinking water from a communal well. The author describes how the wet, mossy pivotal beam which had served as a structure outlining the walls of the village communal well wafted a rank, greasy, and a highly unpleasant smell that seemed to be emerging from its hot depths, slapping the face of Rufus with its nasty odour and making him to reel further away from the well with a severe headache that he seemed to have begotten from the encounter. “Something organic, perhaps human, lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with that unmistakable smell of oil” (**Habila 9**).

The **atrophy or disintegration** of ecological resources includes not only the erosion or deterioration of water reservoirs but also the destruction of natural grasslands which had bordered or outlined the river banks. “The patch of grass growing by the water was suffocated by a film of oil, each blade covered with blotches like the liver spots on a smoker’s hands” (Habla 9). The commercially marketable and economically progressive regions did not hold within their terrain the simplest and most defining promise of vibrant birds, colourful fishes, or other exotic sea creatures – the journalists who had to embark on a trail in those eroded regions were left alone to fend for themselves and even when they did arrive at a residential location where people existed only with craters of limited comforts which did not afford them the luxury of a clean, green and luscious environment replete with vibrant and exotic animal life, there was not a beautiful sight to behold except the welcoming traits of a group of young children who glanced at them with shouts and curious stares.

The fact that social and communal improvements are impossible within the framework of an economically thriving region when it marks an illogical emphasis on its overly grounded rejection of the ecological structures of the status quo is best illustrated in the novel by means of an incident in which the journalists, soon after they have registered an overall look at the ill-fitting residential location of the community, become convinced that the houses of those regions rightfully belong to the wilderness and could be more in communion with the trees and forests which surrounded their structures rather than they did to a domestic human settlement.

The novel asserts the ideology that natural resources of one’s society must be safeguarded as a rich and affluent treasure. The author illustrates it with an example that draws influence from a highly apt situation which points out the idea that while the region’s credibility of comfort zones, availability of products and resources, and attainability of social, economic, educational, and other provisional standards, instead of being elevated, remain strictly stunted which therefore deliberately creates a rather complex situation for human existence, the domestic standards of living in an ecologically impoverished and degraded society would prove to be a much more difficult task to get through.

Therefore one should consider a perfectly assembled ecological structure that promotes a balanced ecological unity as the most important and ultimate necessity for the construction of a society, just as one would consider food, clothing, and shelter as the basic commodities without which it would be impossible for human existence to thrive.

The task of having no other way out but to live in a community that had the entire village on stills, because of the infiltration of black, polluted waters from the industries into the



mainstream rural lands is not only lamentable and pitiful but also contemptible and more so when one takes into account the harsh reminder of an underdeveloped civil life lead by an underprivileged community in, quite ironically, an economically enriched society that has earned its reputation as the leading exporter of oil to other major countries around the globe.

The water pollution becomes so deplorable in those regions that the village, in which there is hopefully still the slightest trace of civilization, appears to float above the dull, polluted, and oil fused greasy waters of the Niger Delta: “narrow passages of water divided one row of huts from the next, like streets. The whole scarecrow settlement looked as if the next strong wind or wave would blow it away” (**Habila 15**). While the degradation of the renewable energy begotten from the misuse of natural environmental habitats and the water resources of the region demonstrated the terrible and haunting truth of ecological crisis by modes of evidence drawn out from various instances in the novel, it also puts into effect the conclusive evidence of economic and social downfall by delineating the claim that destruction of ecological structures would signify an impetuous and unpreventable attack on the staple or major occupations of the nation such as fishing, farming, and cultivation – the kind of jobs or occupations that promote or yield only small scale profits in zones that demand tremendous doses of industry and mechanical power but which nonetheless respond as forces of key development in the rise of human civilization and stable economy.

The unbalanced ecological systems were one of the most pivotal factors that had dramatically impaired the welfare, income, and financial assistance or support to poor or underprivileged families, especially those who had stamped their identity and industry on the wages benefitted from carrying out arduous manual labour such as cultivation and fishing. The dwindling stocks of fish in the river becomes the most scandalized topic of that time-frame, the important talk of the town in which everyone had an idea to contribute to the curbing of its abhorrent and malicious essence; and the rising toxicity of the water becomes a common ensemble of misery defined through the process of not just linking all the members of the community together but also by awakening them to the harsh truth that they might inevitably have to leave their homes to move to a place where the fishing was still fairly good.

The journalists who had to drift aimlessly along the lines of the opaque, misty water in search of the kidnapped British woman held hostage by members of the militancy regime involved in preventing further bouts of ecological crisis in the country, had difficulty in comprehending the frayed nature of the polluted waters that was just as not just twisting and fast and toxic as a poisonous snake emitting a rather nauseating foul smell of the swamp but on also which strange objects floated past them:

A piece of cloth, a rolling log, a dead fowl, a bloated dog belly up with black birds perching on it, their expressionless eyes blinking rapidly, their sharp beaks cutting into the soft decaying flesh. Once we saw a human arm severed at the elbow bobbing away from us, its fingers opening and closing, beckoning. In my dreams I still see that lone arm, floating away, sometimes with its middle finger extended derisively, before disappearing into the dark mist. (Habila 34)

While the novel asserts that there is a very important need for the sustenance of ecological structures by demanding ecocritics and other literary and social theorists to analyse the extent of untold damage inflicted onto the environment because of the dismaying actions of capitalist systems that are driven fiercely in a highly motivated hunt for easy attainments of quick profits, it also recommends to the country-folk of the Niger Delta a sense of responsibility which demands them to awaken themselves to the obvious and absolute fact of the need for the creation of an utopian green landscape environment, and quite particularly, the creation of one that could facilitate the commencement and the smooth functioning of other provisional areas such as occupation, civilization, harmony, socialization, and legalization. It is true that the inhabitants of those regions are necessarily farmers, cultivators, vegetable vendors, or fisher-folk who, after the passing of a rather long and industrious day, can afford nothing of richness or grandeur but are only capable enough to make their ends meet in terms of gaining affordable food, simple clothing, and a stable shelter.

While the men-folk contributed to the development of the familial and communal organizations by engaging themselves in agricultural and fishing occupations, the women-folk also derived a lot of work, force, energy, and livelihood from the benevolence of the rather sparse and polluted ecological systems by catching beach crabs and selling them in the markets. Pollution and its related hazardous effects do not only curb them of their occupation, money, and livelihood but also mitigates the opportunities and the benefits of an independent source of livelihood for spinsters, young widows, and married women in general.

The land now stands as a vain, futile swamp polluted beyond repairs by the organization of the oil industrial policies and inhabited by only a sparse rural population that has no indulgence in the era of globalization but the environment still acts as a reminder of what had once been a landscape of the imagination that shifts from water resources to mangroves and dense forests which roughly occupy the total area of the Delta region, thereby making it an amazingly complex framework of extraordinary biological, ethical, and environmental diversity. Such haunting and pertinent transformations to the landscape of the Delta regions only ensure the ideology that if changes for betterment are not made, then the whole region must inevitably face environmental catastrophe which would further destroy the remaining beauty and exterminate the very few species of flora and fauna still visible in the wastelands and they would all become unpardonable sacrifices made just for the sake of man's selfish and greedy race for wealth, power, and position.

The village that had once resembled a paradise where people lacked for nothing, be it fishing or hunting or farming or watching their children grow up before them, happy, now seems like a technological setting taken right from the advanced layout of a sci-fi movie; it hardly resembles a village anymore for "the meagre landscape was covered in pipelines flying in all directions, sprouting from the evil-smelling, oil fecund earth (**Habila 34**).

The polluted atmosphere also affects the quality of living harmoniously and peacefully in one's own native land for the natives find themselves being awakened quite rapidly and instantaneously to the apparent realization and knowledge of their present situation which lays

bare the bitter truth that one cannot expect a massive change in the existing mode of human existence on this oil-rigged polluted landscape, and thus in an attempt to ensure that their children do not suffer the same agony and pain that they undergo in their own hometowns, they are even ready to send their children off to foreign places by envisioning the supposition of a secured life, clean environment, and standard education.

When the old man begs the protagonist-journalist of the novel, Rufus, and his colleague Zac to take his son Michael with them to their place of residence at the capital city of Nigeria, far away from the corrupted systems of the oil-rigged regions, he wastes no time in letting them know that he loves his boy very dearly and would not have decided to send him away had not their fishing, hunting, and cultivating activities been swindled and overturned into such unfortunate, doomed, and ill-fated occupations which bear no significant results or outcome. “But see, what is he going to do here? Nothing. No fish for river, nothing. Daily throwing in a line and hoping, always hoping that something would bite” (**Habila 36**).

Similarly the futility, uselessness, and unproductivity of the vast stretch of fertile but highly contaminated landscapes that are found along the river banks of the Delta regions prove to be such a repulsive but inevitable phenomenon of reality so much so that the journalists traversing the oil rigged plains deliberate upon their opinion of facing problems and thus reaching the conclusion that a worse tragedy could never befall them: when the old man informs them of an apparent problem overhead, the tired journalists try their best to just ignore it and brush it off, for they had already given up on their expedition with the feeling that nothing could be worse “than this barren landscape, or our aimless search, which was becoming as murky as the convoluted water over which our tiny vessel bobbed and shook, as if impatient to be gone from here” (**Habila 35**).

The growing social concern among the local villagers who felt that the ecological balance of their native homelands had been unrightfully robbed away from them due to the manipulative infiltration of modern technologies in the guise of a corrupted and adulterated oil-company establishment led to the emergence of an increasing group of extreme militant rebels which promoted an adjoined concentration to the conservation of ecological resources by means of adopting extreme methods of violence to restrain the hitherto dominant powers of capitalist organizations that brought forth ecological crisis.

The violence or mutiny against their hometown ruination implemented by the horrible schemes of oil production, involved the capturing and trapping of individuals who were directly or indirectly employed by the oil corporations, and also lashing out violent methods of cruelty against them as an act of punishment for their actions rendered toward the welfare and elevation of such entirely corrupted oil enterprises. “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” (**Habila 54**).

The punishment lashed out by these rebels as an act of vengeance for the destruction of their natural, raw, environmental habitat included the vicious act of brutally anointing the

captured oil executives and labourers with the extremely costly, highly precious and explosively corrosive liquid, petrol, onto their heads till it touched every pore of their skins; torturing them so devilishly until the point of psychological and emotional breakdown for these labourers with them feeling that they would not be able to handle it anymore.

Helon Habila records how there were significant changes in the ecological resources of the Delta regions, especially those which have become vulnerable to the exploitation processes of oil companies, for they were no longer tended to remain calm, resilient, and comforting to the development of oil enterprises. He concentrates on the flip-side of the castoff remains of obsolete technology that promises an overall development of livelihood only to curb mankind off of its power to live a carefree, independent, pure, and happy life that is in communion with the beneficial prospects of nature.

Helon Habila asserts that the primary production of an important and globally required energy resource often has environmental implications that are far reaching, trans-boundary, and that which could also be severe in its adverse environmental impact depending on the level of unsustainability in its exploitation. The author drives home the point of the deceptive nature of ecological pollution, which usually is suppressed under the guise of an endearing and well preserved environmental entity, by the process of incorporating into his novel a significant incident which sees the major characters being attracted to an enchanting chain of islands, in their downcast journey on the trails of a trafficked woman: the journalists, after spending hours and hours on a boat while trying aimlessly to locate the missing woman, were happy to locate the vast chain of lands – the first sign of land after a rather tiring and disappointing journey, resembling almost a tropical paradise for it was replete and furnished with beautiful beaches, calm turquoise waters, snow white sand, tall oil palm trees, fruit bearing trees, and a jungle for greenery.

But what had attracted them most to the ecologically decorated group of islands, much more than the exquisite beaches, palm and fruit trees, and the favourable promise of pure green scenery, was the fire burning on the beach which they mistook for a beacon signal welcoming them to enjoy the luscious fruits of the beautiful islands.

We passed the first island and as we approached the second one, we saw a fire burning on the beach, right by the water. At first we took it for some kind of beacon light meant for us, but, as we got nearer and could see past the trees, more fires appeared, and they were random and out of control. The whole island was aflame. (Habila 68)

If modern technology had been deceptive in its approach in luring man into its meshes only to rob him off of his legal rights to live in an ecologically privileged environment, it had also worsened the conditions of human existence quite terribly by destroying the natural habitats that were already available, in this case, by inducing a toxic smoke onto the charming beaches and making it vulnerable to the squandering activities of the corrupted oil enterprises. “Inland, the smoke rose like a tornado into the sky, high over the savaged, seared trees” (Habila 68).

The island which had once served as an economically prospering region which improved the commercial productions of those as well as the adjacent regions, by serving as a midway stop where traders met to pick up supplies, and to buy and sell, is now deserted and littered with chicken feathers, pots and pans, that have been left behind by those who must have escaped after the island had gone aflame. If the sight of decomposing and decayed chickens had revolted the journalists from the otherwise attractive beaches, they were further disgusted when they chanced upon a decayed human body in the swamp clearings, “half covered by bamboo leaves so that the torn stomach was only partially visible, but even that was too much” (Habila 70).

The ecological crisis is no longer a memory that threatens them with its menacing power to prevent their future access to essential raw-materials needed for the sustenance of life such as fresh air, and clean water; nor is it only a device to further subdue the comfortable mode of harmonious human existence with nature; it has become an integral part of the lives of the people who had to lead a shabby existence surrounded by matters of dead and decay, far away from the comforts of their own past, reminded of a time when their environment had been pure and evergreen. Thus when all the other journalists, soon after they had landed on the islands, decided to venture further into the inland in their quest to find a suitable and comfortable shelter for the night, Rufus finds himself rejecting the plan and decides to stay by the waters because he was convinced that the midges and mosquitoes would be fewer by the seashore for the sea breeze would chase them away.

However it should be noted that his decision was made almost unconsciously; ecological crisis has become such an integral and intrinsic part of their lives that they have now begun to think rationally with a constant reminder of the ecological imbalance; but the ecological imbalance has been grasped so firmly in the minds of the people and it has become so robust that thoughts are constructed without even guided by a careful deliberation. The need to preserve nature seems far more imminent and dangerous now, than it has ever been, for conservation of ecological resources is no longer a concept intended for the future generations but an urgent consternation that motivates people to preserve what they have acquired from their ancestors at least for their own generations without tampering or wasting it.

## Conclusion

Helon Habila creates in his novels a manifesto which attempts to expose certain retrospective characteristics of fiction, especially those which he believes must be a part of every postcolonial fiction. His novels carry within their essence the zeitgeist of the postcolonial era in terms of their linkage to ecocritical theories, linking the two predominant waves of ecocriticism into a central sphere, which contains within its hemisphere the magnificent and glorious aspects of nature’s chain with other social, political, and economical systems, and which also includes within its structure a foreboding or a premonition of ecological crises at the near future if man’s destruction of natural atmosphere were to continue at a regular pace.

Helon Habila is an idealist for whom writing has always been the representation of possible social issues and realistic situations, and hence it becomes essential for him to reveal a didactic or moralistic principle in an often subjective tone with lots of emotions involved in his

message so as to guide people purposely towards the preservation of the harmonious civilization of Nigeria which he believes could be maintained if and only if the relationship between man and nature is kept intact.

Helon Habila demonstrates the emotional desolation of the writer who must come to terms with the devastation of his own land being demolished before his very eyes and he therefore mourns over the loss of ecological balance and ethereal transcendence in an age of postmodern connotations; it is an expression of his passionate concern for the protection of human and environmental survival for it illustrates his pity for the erosion of humanity in a world that lays its significance in materialistic prospects rather than in environmental prosperity or spiritual well – being.

Further research in Helon Habila’s novels could be done in the areas of new historicism, capitalism, the social struggles related to class, race, and gender, militancy in Nigeria, and could also be an analysis of the therapeutic values that his novels bestow in the promotion of one’s ethical principles in society.

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