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Eurocene and the Myth of Development in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an in-depth analysis of Helon Habila's Oil on Water and Chimeka Garricks' Tomorrow Died Yesterday. The study aims at showing the paradox of oil wealth in the Niger Delta. It argues that Eurocene and the myth of development intersect, in both novels, as an awful ideology of western corporations to get huge profit from exploitation, under the martial control of environment. Using a postcolonial ecocritical framework and qualitative textual analysis, the paper explores three major findings. First, Eurocene is not a distant epoch, but a current reality that links capitalism, ecological destruction, and social oppression. Second, the myth of development is rhetoric device to deceive local populations and legitimize ecological exploitation while enriching corrupt elites and western companies. Third, instead of prosperity, oil activities leave local communities with oil spills, gas flares, health hazards, the collapse of traditional livelihoods, worsening living conditions, and the displacement of entire communities. By dramatizing the social, cultural, and ecological costs of oil exploitation, Habila and Garricks contribute to a literary tradition that challenges oppression. The study concludes that African literature functions as a space of resistance, exposing the destructive colonial legacies, advocating, therefore, for ecological justice and for more equitable visions of development.

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1. Introduction

The study seeks to scrutinize how neo-colonial entities, such as multinational corporations and African corrupt governments, exploit the natural resources of the Niger Delta for their own gain, obviously at the expense of environmental health and communities' traditional livelihoods. Following this stance, one can be justified to stating that the Niger Delta stands as one of the most paradoxical spaces in postcolonial Africa because, being highly rich in oil, the region has become the theatre of poverty, violence, and ecological degradation. In this regard, Iortyer and Ntamu (2020, p. 19-20) aver:

> Oil companies [like Shell and Chevron oil companies] which are situated in the Niger Delta region have continued to wreak environmental, economic and social havoc in the region. Members of these oil producing communities have suffered untold hardship as a result of activities of these oil companies who have been exploring oil in the area for decades.

The assertion overhead suggests that western corporations are real perpetrators of the Niger Delta ecological ruin, showing the paradox of oil wealth which brings, instead of prosperity, "untold hardship" to the people living on oil-rich land. Salihu (2019, p. 71) contends: "forces of subjectivity are responsible for the denial of fundamental human rights and societal development." This postulation exemplifies the destructive dynamics at the heart of the "Eurocene" and the myth of development, where exploitation activities leave local communities with oil spills, gas flares, health hazards, economic erosion, and devasted ecosystems.

Since the discovery of oil in the late 1950s, successive governments and multinational corporations have promoted, in Niger Delta, the idea that oil exploitation would bring modernization and prosperity. Instead, the local communities continue to face insecurity, hunger, displacement, unemployment, and the loss of their traditional livelihoods. To better understand this contradiction, the concept of "Eurocene", coined by Grove (2019), offers a useful lens. Indeed, "Eurocene" is firstly "an epoch that is dominated by European colonialism (Levin, 2022, p. 95)" as Grove (2019, p. 7) testifies by considering it as "a neuro-geopolitics, (…) obsessed with hacking the brain as a new frontier of ecological and martial control." In the same vein, Juárez (2021, p. 65) writes that this notion is "the proliferation of a regime of violence wherein

the West brought the whole human species into its hegemonic model of being human." He reveals the specific role of European colonialism, imperialism, and capitalist expansion in shaping ecological and social crises. Juárez (2021, p. 67) once more opines:

> If the Eurocene is, as Grove remarks, the order which links "climate change, species loss, slavery, the elimination of native peoples, and the globalization of extractive capitalism", (…) the transformation of the world into the colony- plantation, and its ecological effects, is the beginning of the Eurocene as such.

From the above excerpt, one observes the awful characteristics of westerns' ideology since they impose a violent model of progress that transforms the world into a vast "colony-plantation", bringing, at the same time, horrible manners of environmental exploitation, slavery, discrimination, starvation, livelihoods collapse, and pollution. Their desire to be "superpowers" and "to exist in the first place" appears more a "libidinal economy" than a simple political economy of survival and wealth (Juárez, 2021, p. 70). These words confirm the affirmation of Tuck and Yang when they write: "settler colonialism fuels imperialism all around the globe (…) Settler sovereignty over [the] earth, air, and water is what makes possible these imperialisms (quoted by Juárez, 2021, p. 70)." Tuck and Yang try to show that western corporations have no limits considering land issues, with the belief that they can possess any land. Far from being limited only to European land, after atrocities they perpetrated during colonial periods, their logic of imperialism is yet rooted in the continuation of the latter indifferent colonial order, where multinational oil companies reproduce the same patterns of violence, dispossession, and environmental degradation under the guise of development.

From the forgoing, one can easily deduce that western corporations resort to the rhetoric of progress in order to settle and get profit of land exploitation without any empathy. This suggests that, for Eurocene to function, western companies need to go through deception, where development remains largely a promise rather than a living reality for the local inhabitants. Closely tied to the Eurocene, this myth functions as a mask, hiding the true nature of neoliberal culprits of dispossession. In fact, the notion "myth of development", as coined by Oswaldo de Rivero (2010), significantly refers to a misleading belief that economic growth, particularly through industrialisation, resource extraction, and integration into the global market, improves social, economic, and environmental conditions for all people in a given society. Here, the term "myth" means that none of the capitalist promises become true in practice, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable African communities. Instead, one assists to inequality, exploitation, and environmental degradation, while benefits go to a small elite and foreign investors. This means that "oil companies use carrot and stick strategies to subjugate and control villagers (Salihu, 2019, p. 44) since they consider the land more as "a source of their material welfare (Makosso, 2024, p. 485)" rather than a spiritual, social, and cultural entity that deserves respect, protection and attention even when exploiting it. Oswaldo de Rivero (2010, p. 92) accordingly brings more precision when he writes:

> During the entire second half of the twentieth century, we grew accustomed to hearing that development could be achieved, violence would cease, and history would be ended, all by changing our economic and social systems or structures. As we begin the third millennium of the common era, we must emphatically deny the truth of such beliefs. If the systems and structures continue to produce poverty and violence, it is because they are a reflection of the predatory nature of our own species.

In this vein, the myth validates the idea that industrial activities, such as mining, oil extraction, or large-scale agriculture, are the primary factors of development. It suggests that these activities will create jobs, generate infrastructure, and bring foreign investment, ultimately leading to modernisation and prosperity of communities. However, in many cases, such activities only produce the reverse of opulence, mainly environmental degradation, socio-economic inequality, violence, relocation, and other social crises. Safana (2025, p. 9) calls it "wokewashing" and defines it as "a practice in business that gives the impression of concern for social welfare without any real substance, (…) a tool to maintain power over colonial areas which leads to ecoapartheid." Thus, the so-called development becomes nothing more than a simple rhetorical device that legitimises exploitation while masking land grabbing. In the Niger Delta, it explains motives behind which oil wealth has turned into misery for the people, as promises of progress collapse under the weight of pollution, poverty, and violence.

It is a shared view-point that African literature has long served as a medium through which writers pinpoint and challenge the crises of postcolonial society. Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) and Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* (2010) are not spread of the mission as Fanon (1961) recommends it: "each generation must, in relative obscurity, face its mission: to fulfil it or betray it." Fanon joins Nwagbara's (2008, p. 233) vision of literature that he considers as a facet of social

institutions since it is "part of the machinery of change, education and ideological persuasion in a given environment." This is what propels Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o to write in *Homecoming*:

> I believe that the African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country and sing a song. (1972, p. 50)

What the author tries to convey is that, by aligning with the people's aspirations, intellectuals, be it through literature, can channel their knowledge and resources into organizing peaceful protests, raising awareness, and advocating for systems that empower communities. It gives reason to Habila and Garricks who dramatize the struggles of the Niger Delta, focusing on the human and ecological costs of oil exploitation. Taken together, their novels which decry ecological imperialism, serve as fictional and powerful critiques of the false development and the dangerous structures of the Eurocene.

There have been several works that previously examined novels under the scrutiny. The state of art is limited to a very few of them. As a sample, Simon et al. (2014), Akingbe & Akwen (2016), Iortyer & Ntamu (2020), Anwuri & Olanrewaju (2020), Kopdiya (2021), Abd El-Wahab (2022), in tackling the problematics of the environment in Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) and Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* (2010), assert that the degradation of the Niger Delta environment, through pollution, has constituted challenges for the people of oil rich region. They highlight how the ecosystem has completely been violated and destroyed, leading to reaction of the immediate communities by way of dialogue, demonstrations, trials, media participation, oil bunkering, kidnapping, vandalism, and militant confrontation. However, none of the previous studies above have examined in depth the imperialistic exploitation of the nature, making a direct with Eurocene. So, the present research differs from others to the extent that it considers Eurocene as the pathway to the myth of development which degrades the environment until damaging local communities' health, culture and traditional livelihoods.

Therefore, the textual analysis formulates two research questions to back up the objective: How do Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* expose the myth of development within the Eurocene framework? What do they reveal about the socio-ecological consequences of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta? From these interrogations, it may be assumed that both novels show that the rhetoric of development, promoted by oil companies and political administration, is a myth that sustains the Eurocene's logic of domination. For instead of bringing prosperity, oil exploitation produces environmental degradation, displacement, and deep socio-economic inequalities, while enriching a small elite and foreign investors.

2. Methodology

This study employs the qualitative method with reference to textual analysis of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* considered as primary sources. Here, Findlay (2022, p. 9) defines textual analysis as "the close study of a text, or extract from a text, using skills of analysis and evaluation, to show meaning, to explore effects, and to assess effectiveness of the writer's stylistic techniques." The assertion shows how textual analysis creates a space for readers to understand both the beauty and the complexity of the world through literary works, aiming to broaden the reader's understanding of an author's work by summarising, interpreting, and exploring its value. Therefore, relevant secondary sources are also used to enhance and validate major findings of the present analysis, including respectively books, published scholarly articles, journals, essays, and other important documents.

Furthermore, in order to achieve its objectives, and because literary studies are scientific studies that require theory (Ambarini et al., quoted by Safana, 2025, p. 10), this research conceptualises ideas from Postcolonial ecocriticism since ecological issues are often viewed as a complex phenomenon. Thus, postcolonial ecocriticism provides a framework for analysing the intersections between colonial history, ecological issues, and literary representation. This theory is a good-fit for studying how literature, from postcolonial contexts, addresses environmental degradation and socio-political oppression, which are often legacies of colonial exploitation. In this regard, Huggan and Tiffin (2010, p. 12-14) write:

> Postcolonial ecocriticism involves an aesthetics committed to politics with its historical understandings of the socio-political origins of environmental issues (...) always likely to transcend its categorisation as 'protest literature' (…). Accordingly, postcolonial ecocriticism preserves the aesthetic function of the literary text while drawing attention to its social and political usefulness, its capacity to set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world.

This approach helps illustrate how the current environmental crisis is linked to past and present imperialistic activities. In this vein, novels under consideration can be examined to show how multinational oil corporations sustain this type of imperialism in the Niger Delta, resulting in significant environmental damages and socio-economic disparities. This method clearly explains the "aesthetic function of the literary text" to address ecological issues rooted in neo-colonial hegemony forces.

Data collection from primary and secondary sources provide an in-depth analysis with essential illustrations which reveal instances of ecocritical of the myth of development, oil pollution, local communities' livelihoods collapse, worsening living conditions, and displacement. Consequently, data analysis opens an important section about result and discussion to single out major findings and possible perspectives.

3. Results and Discussion

The study shows that in both novels, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, the idea of development is presented as an illusion. Instead of bringing progress, oil exploitation produces pollution, disaster, poverty, corruption, and suffering for the local people. In what follows, the discussion provides more details with significant illustrations drawn from the corpus.

3.1 The Myth of Development

As far as the Niger Delta context is concerned, the myth of development is essentially evident. Multinationals, in collaboration with corrupt government officials, promote oil exploitation as a pathway to development, promising infrastructures, jobs creation, and wealth. However, the reality appears quite different: oil extraction leads to extensive environmental squalor, including oil spills and gas flaring, which damages local ecosystems and negatively impacts upon indigenous' health. Safana (2025, p. 15) argues that the ideas of promoting a certain prosperity "are just rhetoric to legitimize resource exploitation by ignoring the needs of local communities." Meanwhile, the socio-economic benefits, as promised to local communities, unfortunately fail to materialise, leaving them in poverty while a few elites and multinational corporations reap most of the profits. "It is because they are a reflection of the predatory nature of our own species (Rivero, 2010, p. 92)." In this regard, Simon et al. (2014, p. 384), quoting Amnesty, render:

> Widespread and unchecked human rights violation related to the oil industry have pushed many people deeper into poverty and deprivation, fuelled conflict and led to pervasive sense of powerlessness and frustration…Oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring are endemic in the Niger Delta. This pollution which has affected the area for decades, has damaged the soil, water and air quality. Hundreds of thousands of people are affected, particularly the poorest and those who rely on traditional livelihoods such as fishing and agriculture.

By inspecting the myth of development, through *Oil on Water* and *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* which expose these contradictions, one can better understand the tensions between the rhetoric of progress and the realities of inequality, exploitation, and environmental harm.

Postcolonial ecocriticism raises awareness about this myth, showing "the intertwined correlation among environmental violence, marginalization of the indigenous groups, and destruction of land by the neo-colonial agencies (Huggan and Tiffin, quoted by Musaib and Tania, 2022, p. 67)". It means that the myth of development brings violence, poverty and pollution in local communities. In this perspective, Musaib and Tania (2022, p. 67) furtherly write: "the responsibility of environmental injustices and calamities are on the shoulders of western upper-class agents. Hence, much of the human and ecological exploitation is a result of imperial colonizing efforts." In the same token, one can argue that the myth of development reflects both neo-colonial and environmental concern, unveiling a strong connectedness between the oppression of local populations and the pollution of the nature.

Chimeka Garricks, in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, captures the myth of development by showing the initial promises and subsequent disillusionments associated with the discovery of oil in Asiama Island. The character Tubo narrates: "Asiama also celebrated another important birth in 1970, a birth that would also become an important and inextricable part of our story. In 1970, oil was discovered in Asiama (p.52)." This quotation indicates that the discovery of oil represents a momentous event that guarantees substantial African economic and social benefits to the community. Through the lens of the myth of development, such a discovery is often depicted as an entrance of change, with expectations of increased wealth, infrastructure, and improved living standards. The phrase "a birth that would also become an important and inextricable part of our story" lays a stress on the anticipated positive impact of oil drilling upon the society's future, suggesting that oil has deeply become intertwined with the community's fate. Unfortunately, this discovery embodies the

beginning of a neo-colonial dynamic in African areas where the resources are extracted for the benefit of western actors, perpetuating historical rape and domination rather than fostering honest local development. Following this step of ideas, Anwuri and Olanrewa (2020, p. 6) maintain:

> Asiama has joined the new league of oil producing communities that will host oil companies and be developed soon. These are the hopes of the people. However, time soon denies them of any of these blessings, instead it unleashes hell on them as their land is pilfered and raped. Soon, corruption finds its foot in Asiama and the people met with a poverty they had never envisioned.

Yet, as the narrative unfolds, the expected benefits are set in opposition with the concrete realities of exploitation, the environmental degradation, and the socio-economic marginalisation faced by the local population. This disparity exposes the myth of development, where the projected prosperity is diluted by the actual consequences of oil extraction. To illustrate it, one can refer to Doye's account:

> These days, Papa did little fishing. His reason was that Imperial Oil chased away most of the fish when it laid pipelines in the river and the ocean. (…) This year there was also something that happened up on the Asiama River. We woke up one morning to see oil, thick and black, floating on top of the brown water of the river. The river became sluggish in its flow, as the oil gradually choked its life away. After school, I sat on the banks and watched dead fish, turned on their sides, slowly drift by. The river stank. Papa called it an oil spill. (*Tomorrow,* p.74)

Instead of bringing prosperity, the oil industry is, here, depicted as a force that profoundly harms the community's environment and social cloth, leading to privation, poverty and hardship. As Doye narrates, one sees how his father is prevented from fishing due to oil spills and toxic wastes which dump into the river, and consequently destroys the fortress of Asiama villagers. This shows how the myth of development is a liar which only brings its share of pain and desolation to both environment and natives.

Similarly, Helon Habila exemplifies, in *Oil on Water*, the hiatus which exists between the myth of development and the reality faced by the communities in the Niger Delta. Some passages of the novel call attention to the initial hope, the celebration that the discovery of oil brings, and the subsequent consequences of environmental ruin, social disruption, and cynicism. The character Rufus reveals Dr. Dagogo-Mark's testimony on what happens once the oil has been discovered two years after his arrival in the village:

> Yes, just on the edge of the village, by the water, there was oil in commercial quantities. The villagers feasted for weeks. They got their orange fire, planted firmly over the water at the edge of the village. Night and day it burned, and now the villagers had no need for candles or lamps, all they had to do at night was to throw open their doors and windows and just like that, everything was illuminated. (…) Village meetings, which used to take place early in the mornings on Saturdays in one of the school classrooms, now took place at night under the orange fire (…). A night market developed around that glow, and every evening women brought their wares. (*Oil*, p.117)

A close reading of Dr. Dagogo-Mark's narrative accentuates the villagers' excitement and festivity upon the discovery of oil, symbolizing a moment of joy and wonder. The "orange fire" from the gas flares is primarily perceived as a miracle, almost a divine event, that is a source of light and warmth that brings solutions to eradicate poverty. The villagers gather under the glow, holding meetings, selling goods at night markets where some people from the neighbouring villages come to deal with trade. As the story discloses, one can read furthermore:

> They'd dance, their faces raised up to that undying glow, singing their thanks and joy, their voices carrying for miles over the water. They called it the Fire of Pentecost. I don't know what that means exactly, but it made them very happy. They said it was a sign, the fulfilment of some covenant with God. (*Oil,* p.117)

The reaction of indigenous people reflects the myth of development. Their joyful attitude by engaging in religious celebrations until considering gas flare as the "*Fire of Pentecost*" means that the discovery of oil and the settlement of the multinational company are signs, a fulfilment of their dream, seeing a great possibility to solve their social problems. But the belief of a transformative event, promising prosperity, modernisation, and a better quality of life, makes them blind and

naïve, even when Dr. Dagogo-Mark draws attention about the dangers associated with the "quenchless flare"; "the people didn't listen, they were still in thrall to the orange glare (*Oil*, pp.117-118)"

Instead of bringing long-term prosperity, the discovery of oil, in contrast, leads to environmental disaster, health hazards, and socio-economic decline. The villagers' primary excitement turns into sufferings. The community is paying a heavy price for the development that was supposed to uplift them. With this regard, Rufus, the main character of *Oil on Water*, renders:

> The atmosphere grew heavy with the suspended stench of dead mater. We followed a bend in the river and in front of us we saw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots. (…) The next village was almost a replica of the last: 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. In the village center we found the communal well. (…) Something organic, perhaps human, lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with that unmistakable smell of oil. At the other end of the village (…) the path of grass growing by the water was suffocated by a film of oil. (pp.14-15)

This quotation provides a mirror of grim reality of environmental destruction, caused by oil extraction and hidden by the myth of development. Here, the author draws a sharp contrast between the present ramshackle state of the physical environment and the one kwon in the past viewed as an Eden. In this regard, the mortification of the nature by exploitation, beyond measure, destroys its paradisiacal image and tortuously signs its death. Taking example from real Niger Delta and oil companies, Iortyer and Ntamu (2020, p. 19-20) writes:

> Oil companies like Shell and Chevron oil companies which are situated in the Niger Delta region have continued to wreak environmental, economic and social havoc in the region. Members of these oil producing communities have suffered untold hardship as a result of activities of these oil companies who have been exploring oil in the area for decades.

This infers that the so-called development only serves the interests of outside actors, leaving local communities worse off than before. In this perspective, Huggan and Tiffin, quoted by Musaib and Tania (2022, p. 74) conclude that "Development primarily serves the political and economic interests of the west."

3.2 Pollution as Devastative Consequence of Oil Exploitation

3.2.1 Catastrophes from Oil Spills and Gas Flares

A close reading of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* helps understand the fallouts of environmental degradation, resulting from the unimpeded activities of oil multinational companies. In this sense, Alfred Crosby, quoted by Foster and Clark (2004, p. 186) talks of "Ecological Imperialism" that he describes as "the destruction of wrought on indigenous environments – most often inadvertently – by the European colonization of much of the rest of the world." This assertion underscores the European colonial legacy of considering the environment as a resource to be exploited rather than a vital component of cultural identity.

In *Oil on Water*, Helon Habila emphasises the catastrophic impact of oil spills and gas flares, listing how these horrifying events lead to the death of water bodies, land degradation, and the loss of a beautiful biodiversity. With this connection, he sprays a picture of environmental ruin, where once-vibrant ecosystems are now transformed into barren milieu, damaging the health and livelihoods of local people. The Niger Delta nature becomes toxic, representing the tragedy of a lost paradise. This can be seen in the following dramatic picture that Rufus, the protagonist of the novel, renders: "bat flying overhead, a dead fish on the oil-polluted water, a gathering of rain clouds in the clear sky (*Oil,* p.12)." In view of this, one sees how imperialistic powers, by exploiting local resources for profit, prioritize economic gain over environmental and human welfare, leaving behind poisoned water and devastated ecosystems.

When Edebor (2017, p. 42) writes that "physical environment has suffered untold hardships due to wanton exploitations of nature's resources and oil pollution", he epitomises that the exploitation of crude oil by the multinational companies brings its share of pain and destruction on the environment. Helon Habila, through the voice of Rufus, renders:

> It turned out this wasn't a village at all. It looked like a setting for a sci-fi movie: the meager landscape was covered in pipelines flying in all directions, sprouting from the evil-smelling,

> oil-fecund earth. The pipes crisscrossed and interconnected endlessly all over the eerie field. We walked inland, ducking under or hopping over the giant pipes, our shoes and trouser turning black with oil. (*Oil,* p.35)

Here, the picture of the landscape as resembling a "sci-fi movie" highlights the surreal, the unnatural quality of the scene, where the land is dominated not by nature but by industrial infrastructure. The following metaphors "evil-smelling" and "oil-fecund earth" emphasise the bribery and contamination of the environment, where oil, instead of nourishing local populations, has become a toxic presence. Rufus and Zaq's scenario, walking inland, symbolises how oil spills and noxious wastes which come from the corrosion of oil pipelines contaminate water. It suggests how western oil companies, through their aggressive practices, strip the African land of its natural vitality.

Likewise, in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, Chimeka Garricks describes how once-vibrant Asiama ecosystems turned into harsh environment due to air and water pollution. Edebor (2017, p. 42) helps understand the drawbacks of oil pollution on the atmosphere when he asserts: "the oil producing areas of Niger Delta are the worst hit by gas flaring with untold impacts on agriculture, food security, public health, and fundamental human rights." This passage echoes the severe environmental and social upshots of gas flaring in Niger Delta, where oil production leads to significant pollution and contributes to climate change. In the novel, the character Tubo jokingly calls gas flaring "hellfire" because it releases dangerous toxins into the air:

> Of course, it's hellfire (…). Has any of you seen that fire stop burning, even for one minute? (…) The pipe leads straight down to hell. If not for the fire coming out of the pipe, you can go down, go really deep and you will see the devil himself! (p.61)

The use of the irony advocates that the persistent fire from the pipe is a direct link to hell, symbolising the destructive oil company's practices. The imagery of the pipe leading to hell undoubtedly reflects the infernal conditions indigenous characters endure due to harmful pollutants from gas flares.

In addition, Chimeka Garricks underscores the negative effects of oil exploitation upon the river, seen as the first victim of toxic wastes. Though oil extraction is important for economic growth, but its bad exploration instigates the scourge which destroys the river. It appears credible to Ekpu's stance (1995, p. 62), when commenting on the degradation of aquatic life, to opine: "Aquatic life can be affected in more than one way. Oil, as many other pollutants in water, consumes dissolved oxygen during degradation, and a shortage of oxygen could be fatal to the living organisms in water." This comment highlights how oil pollution harms aquatic life. It reduces oxygen in the water, which can kill fish and other water creatures. In *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, the author shows how oil spills badly affects the Asiama River, a vital source of life for the local community, when the character Doye reports:

> This year there was also something that happened up on the Asiama River. We woke up one morning to see oil, thick and black, floating on top of the brown water of the river. The river became sluggish in its flow, as the oil gradually choked its life away. (…) Papa called it an oil spill. (p.74)

From this excerpt, one can argue that the river, traditionally viewed as a symbol of life and sustenance, becomes a source of death because of oil spills. Doye's moment of witnessing catastrophe joins Edebor's postulation when he (2017, p. 46) writes that "industrialization is gradually destroying our world, particularly with the daily emission of poisonous gasses." In this perspective, Agofure (2018:250) completes: "environmental destruction induced by capitalism, globalisation, exploitation of natural resources (…) have translated into the obliteration of Nigeria's ecosystem. (…) [and], the environment is not to be considered as static background but rather to be included as a dynamic factor in the lives of people." As such, Garricks' narration becomes ultimately a creative response to the disquiet in both Nigerian physical and psychological spaces.

3.2.2 Worsening Living Conditions and Livelihoods Collapse

It is crucial not to anchor ideas of ecological cataclysm from a single part of the environment, which evidently suffers from untold hardships, but to extend the same upheaval to local populations as well, populations whom Frantz Fanon (1961) called "the wretched of the earth". Here, Musaib and Tania (2022, p. 67) accordingly report the Swahili proverb which reflects that when two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers. For them, the proverb touches on a significant element of colonisation, highlighting the fact that "the environment suffers in conjunction with its colonized inhabitants." This statement shows that humans are part of the ecosystem, so any harm ecological awful forces cause to nature eventually affects them too. In this framework, Agofure (2018, p. 250) renders:

The ecosystem is an interconnected web, and all things therein interact with one another, the mistreatments, and cruelties on the environment also flow into the human system making it susceptible to different diseases and maladies. This, the harming of the environment is by implication the poisoning of humans. Prasanth Aswin explains that the destruction and depletion of nature is suicidal; it ultimately leads to the destruction of humanity.

This postulation is plainly shared by Kopdiya (2021, p. 25-29) who elucidates that "when humans degrade the physical environment, they lose their humanity and destroy themselves. (…) activities that harm the natural environment are equally harmful to humans." An ecocritical examination of novels shows that oil exploitation harms both the setting and the characters. Thereby, the novelists, using the cause-and-effect relationship narrative technique, explore how local communities that once thrived on fishing, farming, and other systems of livelihoods are gradually plunged into a quagmire as their resources become poisoned and their lands atrociously rendered uninhabitable.

In *Oil on Water*, villagers witness how rivers and lands deteriorate into barren landscapes, poisoned by oil spills and gas flares, stripping away their means of livelihood and making daily survival nearly impossible. The reader observes, as the same moment as Rufus and Zaq, the environmental devastation that leads to unpleasant living conditions and displacement for communities. The novel reads in these terms:

> The village looked as if a deadly epidemic had swept through it. (…) The houses began not too far away from the derelict platform. We went from one squat brick structure to the next, from compound to compound, but they were all empty, with wide-open windows (…) Behind one of the houses, we found a chicken pen with about ten chickens inside, all dead and decomposing, the maggots trafficking beneath the feathers. We covered our noses and moved on the next compound, but it wasn't much different. (Oil, p.14)

This description paints a haunting picture of a village abandoned in haste, devoid of life, as a landscape smashed by a deadly epidemic. The scene is filled with powerful imagery of decay, each detail reinforcing the sense of desolation. The novel provides further details about such place which "looked desolate: the only signs that a community had once thrived here were a few sticks jutting out of the water" (*Oil,* p.148) symbolizing the erasure of traditional life and heritage, leaving behind mere fragments of human presence.

The motif of a "deadly epidemic" resonates with the effects of oil pollution and environmental devastation, where pollution acts as a silent killer. Here, the character Dr. Dagogo-Mark "watched the whole village disappear, just like that (*Oil*, p.118)" since:

> More people fell sick, a lot died. (…) I've seen this happen many times in this area. A man suddenly comes down with a mild headache, becomes feverish, then develops rashes, and suddenly a vital organ shuts down. And those whom the disease doesn't kill, the violence does. (*Oil,* p.118)

In this context, the presence of oil industry is compared to a disease that spreads destruction, displacing families and dismantling traditional ways of life. The sentence "those whom the disease doesn't kill, the violence does" matches with what the character Rufus says: "It's the oil and the fighting. It affects everyone in a strange way. (…) this place is a dead place, a place for dying (*Oil,* p.116)." It expresses how local populations are plunged into a relentless cycle of suffering where most of them are killed either by pollution or perpetual conflict. Because of oil drilling, some villages have been transformed into "a community of ghosts (*Oil,* p.14)." For example, the novel describes Irikefe as the "abandoned villages, the hopeless landscape, [with] the gas flares that always burned in the distance (*Oil,* p.27)" as a result of environmental devastation and violent conflict which have created dirt and discomfort.

Helon Habila illustrates the economic erosion through the increasing waste dumps into the river which contribute to the complete disappearance of aquatic life, devastating the local fishing business, which had once been a crucial source of sustenance and income. Chief Ibiram, listening intently to the radio all night long, puts: "I imagined they were speaking of the dwindling stocks of fish in the river, the rising toxicity of the water and how soon they light have to move to a place where the fishing was still fairly good (*Oil,* p.21)." The passage describes how oil pollution not only destroys the natural ecosystem but also erodes the economic basics of these communities, which rely on fishing and farming for sustenance. In the novel, the reader comes across an old character's statement directed towards Dr. Dagogo-Mark: "I am not ill. I am just poor. Can you give me medicine for that? (*Oil*, p.117)" showing how oil activities strips local communities of their economic stability, leaving them in a state of destitution. In this perspective, Agofure (2018, p. 253) adds: "the devastation of the natural habitat of the Niger Delta has accelerated the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of peoples of

the region, hence, health hazards, conflicts and ecological disaster have become the order." This assertion epitomizes the degradation of economic stability in oil-bearing-villages, reflecting a cycle of environmental devastation that impoverishes communities, stripping them of their ability to prosper within their habitat.

In so doing, Eurocene, through the myth of development has killed the future of many young villagers. Tamuno, the old man who serves as a guide to Rufus and Zaq, pleads them to take his son, Michael, back with them to Port Harcourt as a way of making his future safe from environmental ruin and armed conflicts, both created by oil multinational company. He says: "He no get good future here… see, wetin he go do there? Nothing. No fish for river, nothing. I fear say soon him go join the militants, and o no wan that (*Oil*, p.36)." From this quotation, one clearly understands that western corporations are real continuation of colonial system as they bear hellish attitude towards ecosystems, mainly non-European ones.

In the context of unpleasant living conditions, in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, environmental drawbacks have a direct impact upon the health and well-being of local inhabitants. The reader comes across Oil Imperial's nasty methods which result in severe air and water pollution, contributing to broader health crises. The novel, in Doye's words, puts: "the companies use outdated but cheaper drilling methods which pollute the environment (*Tomorrow,* p.149)" through "gas flaring, pollution, acid rain, greenhouse gas emissions." (*Tomorrow,* p.198). Here, Ohagwam (2018:13) talks of "capitalist oil multinational companies and the unpleasant effects it leaves on the people's mind and bodily health, especially the youths and women", meaning that the myth of development brings more pain than prosperity.

As the story unfolds, the character Tubo furthermore relates that the most damning things, during trials again, Oil Imperial company, were the "pictures of black oil gushing into the lifeless river, dead fish, damaged nets and traps, and the haunted faces of some fishermen (*Tomorrow,* p.225)." This angle of vision, on which the story focuses, is far from being only a fiction since some experts on the ground testify the same situation. In this vein, Opukri and Ibaba (2008:174) accordingly report: "the collapse of local economics, induced by oil spillages, gas flaring, and other activities of the oil industry had displaced many from their occupations, without providing viable alternatives." From this textual snippet, one can assert that environmental degradation generated by oil industry has the potentials of exacerbating the tragedy of internal displacements of masses who flee the unpleasant living conditions imposed by oil pollution.

Garricks critiques the wider socio-economic neglect, suffered by oil-bearing-communities as oil spills, gas flares, and land contamination destroy the primary sources. Though they dwell in a resource-rich environment, unfortunately the people of Asiama remain impoverished due to an exploitative system that denies them access to the wealth of their own land. The novel x-rays how oil spills and environmental destruction disrupt local economies by rendering farmland barren and waters polluted. When the character Soboye argues: "my brother, poverty is the main problem (*Tomorrow,* p.68)", this emphasizes the central issue that local communities experience in oil-rich regions. Poverty is both an outcome of systemic neglect and a consequence of environmental degradation. The character Doye puts:

> This year there was also something that happened up on the Asiama River. We woke up one morning to see oil, thick and black, floating on top of the brown water of the river. The river became sluggish in its flow, as the oil gradually choked its life away. After school, I sat on the banks and watched dead fish, turned on their sides, slowly drift by. The river stank. Papa called it an oil spill. (*Tomorrow,* p.74)

From this quotation, one reads how the description reflects the devastating impact of industrial exploitation. The river, once a vital source of sustenance, becomes contaminated, killing fish and rendering the water unusable. This environmental disaster worsens the existing poverty, since traditional livelihoods, such as fishing, are ruined. The association of poverty and environmental dilapidation, in this description, exposes a vicious cycle that Doye witnesses after school. Oil spill, a symbol of corporate malpractice, not only destroys the ecosystem but, also roots indigenous in poverty.

Local populations of oil producing areas are the potential victims of industrial pollution, living consequently in dirty and unpleasant conditions. In this connection, Anwuri and Olanrewaju (2020, p. 2) aver: "this direct consequence of pollution from crude oil and gas waste has led to the impoverishment of the Niger Delta population and left the people with respiratory diseases, deprivation and hopelessness." From the passage overhead, one can easily infer that life is difficult in areas where oil drilling activities are undertaken beyond measure. It suits with Sule Egya's idea, cited by Kopdiya (2021, p. 27), that "earth offers humans existence and the continuation of life, and to injure earth in any form is to endanger the existence of humans." As living conditions worsen and resources dwindle, families have little choice but to abandon their ancestral homes in search of liveable environments. Here, Makosso, Loumbouzi and Mouzita (2022, p. 168) accordingly

write: "since oil production has worsened environmental degradation, the preference of people in leaving the polluted area finds credence."

4. Conclusion

The gist of this paper has been to show how Eurocene and the myth of development intersect, in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, as an awful ideology of western corporations to get huge profit from exploitation, under the martial control of environment. The textual analysis reveals the paradox of oil wealth in the Niger Delta where, instead of prosperity, oil activities leave local communities with oil spills, gas flares, health hazards, the collapse of traditional livelihoods, worsening living conditions, and the displacement of entire communities. Drawing from postcolonial ecocriticism, the paper argues that both texts unmask development as an illusion. It asserts that the rhetoric of progress is a stylistic device to deceive local populations and legitimize ecological exploitation while enriching corrupt elites and western corporations. Through depictions of environmental devastation and human suffering, Habila and Garricks dramatize how multinational corporations and corrupt political elites perpetuate a neo-colonial order that continues the dreadful logic of imperialism. Their works remind us that Eurocene is not a distant epoch, but a current reality that links capitalism, ecological destruction, and social oppression. Therefore, by analysing the myth of development alongside the ecological consequences, this study proves how African literature functions as a space of resistance, where authors like Habila and Garricks, compel readers to confront the urgent need for ecological justice.

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