

Natural and Imagined Ecologies: An Ecocritical Study of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ben Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the complex correlation between humans and their ecologies along with the role of literature in critiquing these relationships. The paper explores Helon Habila's novel *Oil on Water* (2010) and Ben Okri's collections of short stories *Stars of the New Curfew* (1999) as creative responses to the disquiet in the Nigerian social space. The study demonstrates that the selected Nigerian writers present the view that the Nigerian people and ecologies are exploited by the Nigerian elites in connivance with the corporate owners of technology for economic interests, leaving behind devastating ecological imprints on the flora, fauna and landscape. The contemporary trans-disciplinary approach called Ecocriticism which links literary criticism with ecological issues will be used to evaluate the selected literary texts. Taken together, this undertaking illuminates from an ecocritical stance the crises that accompany the environment and the far-reaching effects of environmental despoliation on the Nigerian space and the world at large. In view of this, the selected writers' signification of the deliberate degradation of the Nigerian landscape by the Nigerian ruling class in collaboration with multinational companies point to a trend in the postcolonial situation that puts power and authority at the service of the market and at the expense of public good.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecologies, Flora, Despoliation, Fauna, Postcolonial

Résumé

Cet article se concentre sur la corrélation complexe entre les humains et leurs écologies ainsi que le rôle de la littérature dans la critique de ces relations. L'article explore le roman de Helon Habila, *Oil on Water* (2010), et les recueils de nouvelles de Ben Okri, *Stars of the New Curfew* (1999), comme des réponses créatives à l'inquiétude dans l'espace social nigérian. L'étude démontre que les écrivains nigériens sélectionnés estiment que les élites nigérianes exploitent le peuple et les écologies nigériennes en connivance avec les propriétaires de technologie pour des intérêts économiques, laissant derrière eux des empreintes écologiques dévastatrices sur la flore, la faune et le paysage. L'approche transdisciplinaire contemporaine appelée écocritique qui relie la critique littéraire aux questions écologiques sera utilisée pour évaluer les textes littéraires sélectionnés. Dans l'ensemble, cette étude éclaire d'un point de vue écologique les crises qui accompagnent l'environnement et les effets profonds de la destruction de l'environnement sur l'espace nigérian et le monde en général. Dans ce contexte, la signification des écrivains sélectionnés de la dégradation délibérée du paysage nigérian par la classe dirigeante nigérienne en collaboration avec des entreprises multinationales montre une tendance de la situation postcoloniale qui met le pouvoir et l'autorité au service du marché et de la dépense du bien public.

Mots-clés : Ecocritique, Ecologie, Flore, Destruction, Faune, Postcolonial

Introduction

Critics have evaluated the Nigerian fiction as merely socio-politically inclined, so preoccupied with discourses on postcolonial disillusionment of diverse kinds oscillating from incompetent leaders, corruption, moral depravity to the repression of the masses. However, beyond the recurring motif of socio-political upheavals, resonates fundamental issues of environmental destruction induced by capitalism, globalisation, exploitation of natural resources which have translated into the obliteration of Nigeria's ecosystem. These have generated anxieties over ecological degradation such as, loss of biodiversity, erosion, global warming, desertification, flooding, oil pollution along with increased inequality, exploitation, and under-development.

Subsequently, taking into consideration, that 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. Thus, 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" (62). For Cheryll Glotfelty, natural disasters have not only compelled human societies to reappraise the significance of nature for human survival but have also brought them "... to the realization that any harmful human action against nature will yield destructive consequences for humanity" (xix). Therefore, Art is not immune to socio-ecological circumstances, but rather mirrors it. Against this backdrop, the paper eco-critically examines the post-colonial fictions of Helon Habila and Ben Okri's in *Oil on Water* and *Stars of the New Curfew* respectively and the writers' efforts to fictionally replicate ecological despoliation in their locales.

In recent times, the narratives of exploitation, ecological destruction and under-development are persistent happenings to which Nigerian rulers and multinational corporations have played crucial roles in the pillaging of resources and widening of the chasm between the centre and the periphery. Some comment that the atmosphere which once resulted in profit is now resulting in cost because of the expense to prevent the potential ruin of this vital source. The activities of over-exploration come with attendant problems of environmental degradation. These manifest in gas flaring, oil spillage, air pollution and other forms of despoilment. The effects of these on the environment and the general ecosystem are gruesome: as farmlands are submerged in layers of thick crude oil, rivers and drinking water contaminated with oil, aquatic life destroyed by the toxic oil spilling into the rivers, birds and animals are dying because of drinking contaminated water and poor health condition from air pollution. This has ignited militarism and tension in the Delta region in particularly and Nigeria at large as the youths take up arms to resist unjust exploitation by the Nigerian ruling elites, the multinational companies, and their cohorts. In this regard, Huggan and Tiffin claim that "human liberation will never be fully achieved without radically challenging [how] human societies have constructed themselves in [hierarchical] relation to other societies, both human and non-human" (214) as they insist on imagining new ways in which societies can be transformed to ecologically bond with the natural and more than human world.

For Ogaga Okuyade, “different media across the world continue to capture the turbulence in Nigeria’s Niger Delta, especially the face-off between the so-called militants and the government and the environmental disasters that oil exploration and exploitation have triggered in the area ... (115). The so-called progress of the past centuries has brought man into a situation where the basis of life on earth is seriously under threat. In this context, Eteng claims that what currently prevails in the Southern oil enclave is a specific variant of internal colonialism. There is a highly exploitative and grossly inequitable endowment/ownership between the Nigerian state and the oil bearing communities” (21). Taken together, an ecocritical reading of Helon Habila’s fictions *Oil on Water* and Ben Okri’s *Stars of the New Curfew* highlights the perception of mankind’s interdependence with the environment combined with the postcolonial phenomenon that man is critically threatened in an ecologically - degraded world. The selected works demonstrate man’s disregard for the air, water and soil that sustain him and thus, raise questions about man’s significant role in environmental ruination and the dire need for survival on the earth.

Ecocriticism as a Theoretical Framework

The study deploys ecocriticism as a theoretical framework to explore the wreckage perpetrated on the Nigerian natural environment. Ecocriticism explores the symbiotic relationship between literature and ecology which centres on how the ecosystem is depicted in literary texts. Ecocriticism as a movement is known by several designations which include green cultural studies, eco-poetry, environmental literary criticism, green-poetry, eco-literature and eco/environmental studies. Ecocriticism has its source from two Greek words Eco (oikos) and Critic (kritis) meaning house judge. For William Rueckert, “ecology in this regard means man’s house and the critic is its judge - an arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order: no technological tillage, no oil spillage to ruin the original décor” (107). Some well-known eco critics are Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon Estok, Harold Fromm, William Rueckert and Scott Slovic.

Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the proponents of ecocriticism explains ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes on an earth - centred approach to literary studies (xviii). Similarly, Simon Estok in his own contribution explicates that Ecocriticism is more than “simply the study of nature or natural things in literature. Rather, it is a theory that is committed to affecting change by analysing the function- thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical or otherwise of the natural environment or aspects of it represented in documents – literary or others that contribute to material practices in material worlds” (220). This definition echoes the functional approach of Ecocriticism which analyses the analogies between ecosystems and imaginative texts and posits that such texts potentially have a regenerative function in the cultural system (223). In the same breath, Kevin Hutchings illuminates that:

By studying the representation of physical world in literary texts

and in social contexts of their production, eco critics attempt to account for attitudes and practices that have contributed to modern day ecological problems while at the same time investigating alternative modes of thought and behaviour, including sustainable practices that would respect the perceived rights or values associated with non-human creations and processes.

Furthermore, for Lawrence Buell, “ecocriticism is the study of the relation between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of environmental praxis” (1091). By appealing to the “spirit of commitment to environmental praxis”, Buell rejects harmful theoretical notions representing nature as an ideological screen. By this, the green world becomes nothing but a projective fantasy or social allegory. For Buell, literary texts should contribute to man’s interaction with the natural world, hence he postulates four poetics in appraising any literary composition. These are:

- The environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
- The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
- Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation.
- Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant is at least implicit in the text (33).

In line with the above, ecocriticism has much to offer and Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace posit that “the applications and theory that Ecocriticism develops... broadens understandings of how modern cultural assumptions about the environment have developed” (31). Therefore, eco critics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by environmental crisis and how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications. To this end, the environment is not to be considered as a static background but rather to be included as a dynamic factor in the lives of people and in literary production. In relation to current ecological implications, Ecocriticism is a valuable means of evaluating Nigerian fiction as a discourse about the environment alongside human interactions with it.

Natural Ecologies and Despoliation in Habila’s *Oil on Water*.

The construct; natural ecologies are biological environment that may be found in nature rather than created by man. Natural ecologies may be terrestrial such as desert, forest, meadow, or aquatic such as pond, river, or lake (owlcation.com). These have suffered intense ecological despoliation because of mankind’s devastating interface with nature. This study investigates the extent to which the Nigerian novelist Helon Habila depicts ecological annihilation of natural ecologies in the novel *Oil on Water*.

Helon Habila Ngalabak is a Nigerian writer born in 1967. He has received several international awards on literature. Habila’s *Oil on Water*, one of the texts selected for this

study, foregrounds the real-life tragedy of the Niger Delta, in which petrodollars distort human relationships and the natural ecologies as leaking crude poisons man, birds, fish and the like. *Oil on Water* reveals horrible contemporary experiences of individuals and groups and their encounter with oil spillage, violence, militancy and conflicts in the Niger Delta and Nigeria by extension. This has ignited persistent issues of national insecurity, attacks and vandalization of oil pipelines, abduction of expatriates by militants alongside the displacement of the common people.

Sokari Ekine and Firoze Manji in their reading of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* opine that "a great read of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* reveals that it is impossible to separate the actions of the oil multinationals operating across the Niger Delta from the actions of the Nigerian government. Hence, in exchange for the oil removed from the Niger Delta, the oil companies, with the support of the Nigerian state, have left behind ecological disaster, reducing the whole towns and villages to rubble, causing death by fire and pollution by the guns of the Nigerian Military... (27). Therefore, 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. For A. Ikelegbe:

The people of the oil bearing region have not been passive about environmental degradation and the long-term neglect that have become their plight. The people have expressed their dissatisfaction through various forms of protest both peaceful and non-peaceful. The present violent confrontations epitomized by rising radicalization and militarism for resource control shows the Nigerian state and oil companies' insensitivity to the plight of the people... (6).

To appraise Habila's *Oil on Water* from an ecocritical standpoint, Buell's first and second criteria which state that: (1)" The environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history and that (2) the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest will be used" (33). In this context, ecocriticism is more than simply the study of nature or natural things in literature: rather it is a theory that is committed to affecting change by scrutinising aspects of the natural environment in the Nigerian fiction. In this context, Habila's *Oil on Water* provides a panoramic vista of the social space - the Niger Delta region by focusing on the condition and experiences of representative characters such as "Chief Ibiram", "Dr Dagogo Mark" and the villagers who share in the plight of deprivation. Habila captures the gloom of the people who are subjected to dispossession and a plundered environment. The novel portrays an extensive show of filth, decay, and the destructive impact of modern technological development on the Delta space and Nigeria by extension. The narrator gives details:

The village looked as if an epidemic had swept through it...we went from one Squat brick structure to the next, from compound to compound, but they were all empty, with wide -open windows askew on broken hinges, while overhead the roofs had big holes

through which strong sunlight fell. 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 to the next compound, but it wasn't much different: cooking pots stood open and empty on cold hearths; next to them stood water pots filled with water on whose surface mosquito larvae thickly flourished.... (*Oil on Water* 7)

The narrator insinuates that, oil which should have been a blessing to the village has become their undoing. Oil resources have annihilated the people's ecosystem and their life support as the narrator explicates the rot:

Soon we were in a dense mangrove; the water underneath us turned foul and sulfurous; insects rose from the surface in swarms to settle in a mobile cloud above us, biting our arms and faces and ears.... The atmosphere grew heavily with suspended stench of dead matter. We followed a bend in the river and in front of us we saw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots (*Oil on Water* 8).

The above extract signals that oil exploration has defaced the flora and fauna, farmlands and the source of income and livelihood of the Niger Delta inhabitants. Yet again, the narrator bemoans:

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. Eager for a drink, I bent under the mossy pivotal beam and peered into the well's blackness, but a rank smell wafted from its hot depths and slapped my face. (*Oil on Water* 9)

The excerpt above corroborates the dire situation of the people described as "a community of ghosts" an indication of disenchantments, hence they drift about as ghosts or ghouls. These natives are in such miserable state because of their disconnection from the land they have known and grown. Chief Ibiram affirms this as he says: "... always we've had to move. We are looking for a place where we can live in peace, but it is hard. So, your question are you happy here? I say how can we be happy when we are mere wanderers without a home?" (*Oil on Water* 41). The narrator in *Oil on Water* clarifies that Chief Ibiram and his people are peace loving until oil is discovered in their community. Politicians and oil merchants offer to buy the whole village, soon harmful oil-drilling activities, gas flaring and pollution become the order of life in the community. The activities of the combative militants and their constant conflicts with the military shift the dispossessed people from place to place in search of safety. The narrator laments the tensions: "Look at the soldiers, look at their eyes all feverish with excitement and expectation - expectation of what? Of the day when the Major will strike a match and throw it at the bowed, petrol soaked heads. One day it will happen - see how the Major's hands shake with the temptation... by the time I am

through with you, you ‘ll hate the smell of it...” (*Oil on Water* 55-56).

Furthermore, the writer describes the carnage that pervades the Niger Delta space and the extent to which the people are caught up in the disquiet between the military and the militants who have taken up arms in reaction to the poverty, underdevelopment and contamination that have become their lot. Militants resort to dubious means such as piracy, hostage-taking and the vandalization of oil rigs and pipelines to draw attention to government regarding their plight. The competition for oil wealth has fuelled violence between many ethnic groups, causing the militarization of nearly the entire region by militia groups and the Nigerian military. This is described thus: “... Irikefe is now mostly ashes and rubble, bombed by the gun helicopter over there. Not a hut is left standing... What of the people? Expect a lot of casualties, unavoidable of course...” (*Oil on Water* 156). The writer depicts a hostage taking scene when Isabel Floode is kidnapped by her driver Salomon and his colleagues Bassey and Jamabo with the intention to get ransom. They say: ...she is worth “... At least five million... At the moment she is all over the news. That is good. The more publicity, the more money the company is willing to pay: if they refuse to pay, they will be seen in a bad light”(*Oil on Water* 215).

In another instance, Habila seems to be saying that the government and the multinational oil companies appear to be more interested in the revenue generated from natural resources than the welfare of the afflicted people. For Dr Dagogo Mark, a character in the novel, criticizes the situation where an entire village is wiped out by the toxic gas flaring and survivors are left to join militant groups or turn to kidnapping for profit. Habila’s *Oil on Water* illuminates the destruction to which the rain forest, swamps, rivers, animals and species have been imperiled. Oil spillage disrupts the photosynthesis process and kills the trees because their roots are not able to reach oxygen. Thus, when oil spillages continue unabated, entire species and biodiversity in the Delta region may be abolished and the host communities displaced or maimed.

From an ecocritical viewpoint, Habila’s *Oil on Water* reinforces that, the Nigerian ecosystem and its attendant concerns have taken a prominent place in post-modern thoughts and it is ostensible that, there is a connection between the treatment of the flora and fauna and the treatment of subjugated societies. Nigerian rulers in alliance with multinational companies subvert the Nigerian ecological order by over-exploiting natural resources for power, wealth, and profit. Thus, Habila’s *Oil on Water* offers ideas towards taking necessary actions to salvage the Nigerian space. In consequence, human accountability to the ecosystem, environmental awareness, and the notion of environmental praxis are some of the text’s concerns of Habila’s *Oil on Water*.

Imagined Ecologies and Despoilment in Ben Okri’s *Stars of the New Curfew*

The notion ‘imagined ecologies’ is the creative imagination to perceive spatial and temporal variations regarding environmental change. Imagined ecologies describes ways for people to broaden their awareness of their relationship to the earth. It investigates an artist’s exploration of alternative ways to represent the environment and its tensions. This section attempts to explore ideas concerning imagined ecologies and destruction in Ben Okri’s collection of short stories *Stars of the New Curfew*.

Ben Okri, one of Nigeria's new generation writers of literary tuition was born in 1959. For most critics, Okri's collection of short stories selected for this study reflects magic, surrealism, paranormality and dreams to replicate modernist configuring. However, this study scrutinizes Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew* from an ecocritical viewpoint. In view of this, pertinent stories in *Stars of the New Curfew* will be deployed to show to what extent works of art can visualize the realities of environmental crisis. To evaluate Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew* from an ecocritical standpoint, Buell's third and fourth criteria which state that: (3) "Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation and (4) Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant is at least implicit in the text" (33) are used.

Some stories in Ben Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew* present illustrations in which themes of nature, conservation and environmental predicament loom large. An ecocritical appraisal of Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew* is feasible because of his creative imaginations towards environmentalism of his homeland Nigeria. Okri creates perceptions regarding ecological dilemma along with the uneven development apparent in the Nigerian space. He weaves his collections of short stories around the connections between characters and their negative settings. The relevant stories for evaluation are "In the Shadow of War" and "In the City of Red Dust". These selected stories suggest that physical deterioration created by a diseased environment encourages extreme misery for a part of its population condemned to a life of deprivation and death. The stories "In the Shadow of War" and "In the City of Red Dust" highlight the socio-economic and ecological situation where once thriving urban centres have become a place "nature" outstrips people due to dust, disease and bacteria ravaging the bodies of the impoverished who are unable to flee to a decent locale.

Okri's story "In the Shadow of War" reels about the dreadful impact of the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 on the Nigerian ecosystem. The aftermath suggests that the Nigerian landscape reveals high rates of virulent contagious diseases, dirt, dumps, greed, violence geared towards the annihilation of nature and urban spaces. This is captured in the excerpt:

He followed her till they came to a muddied river...Omovo saw capsized canoes and trailing water-logged clothes on the dark water. He saw floating items of sacrifice: loaves of bread in polythene wrappings, gourds of food, coca-cola cans...He noticed the terrible smelling the air... He recognized the voice of one of the soldiers urging the others to move faster...Omovo saw that the dead animals on the river were in fact corpses of grown men. Their bodies were tangled with river-weed and their eyes were bloated...
("Shadow of War" 7-8)

Just like the works done in African environmental scholarship by scholars such as Rob Nixon and Byron Caminero-Santangelo, who articulate the impact of ecological degradation on humans linked to wars and the unprecedented destruction of the rainforest and wild life in Nigeria, the excerpt from "In the Shadow of War" elucidates the overwhelming effect of war and the role it has played in despoiling the environment as trees, the landscape and other signs of life become victims of exploitation, displacement, and obliteration. It is obvious, that, Okri speaks against environmental annihilation and its terrifying impact on the dispossessed people and their sources of livelihood. By replicating issues of

environmental degradation on the Nigerian bionetwork, Okri testifies that the Nigerian landscape over time is a process that is dynamic and not static.

In the same way, the story “In the City of Red Dust” conveys a relentless tale of exploitation, disillusionment and ecological deterioration. The story shows the extent characters navigate their way through surreal and disturbing conditions of selling their own blood, picking pockets and drinking themselves into stupor. An instance, is conveyed where a woman once the victim of rape by soldiers escapes another rape attempt by slitting her own throat. In another scene, the executive governor of a state is portrayed displaying ill-gotten wealth while soldiers’ parade and planes swoop overhead to the amazement of the masses. This confirms the fact that the synthetic nature created by petro-capitalism is not just socially disastrous but transforms to pollution, contamination and disease. Okri brings together critical perspectives of social, unequal economic and political ecology in the Nigerian literature. Thus, political ecology illustrates the interconnections of environmental concerns and the political questions that arise. “In the City of Red Dust” encapsulates the apprehensions wrought by toxic contamination, aggressions and the environmental aftermath of war which occurs gradually and often invisibly.

The story “In the City of Red Dust” delineates frightening pictures of urban life in contemporary Nigerian social space as Okri questions the politics of exploitation and degradation combined with Nigeria’s environmental ethics. For example, the presence of aircraft during the Military governor’s fiftieth birthday makes the city a cesspool of pollution. The governor’s celebration is a mere show of power and affluence amid chronic deprivation as the common people question: “just because he is a military governor does every birthday have to be a big parade? Stamping dust over the city...?” (“City of Red Dust” 53). The expression authenticates the view that the Nigerian people and resources are manipulated by the Nigerian ruling elite leaving behind devastating ecological imprints on the Nigerian landscape. The extract derides the Nigerian rulers and cohorts who indulge in undertakings to plunder the Nigerian landscape.

Apparently, Okri does not only highlight the plight of the ecosystem but of the common man in the face of a threatening environment. To this end, waste heaps, air pollution with dust and gases, pollution of all sort from cars, planes, ship along with their noise-induced hearing loss, blood pressure, stress, sleep disturbance and chronic diseases which are chronically harmful to the ecology are the norm. The story “In the City of Red Dust” further substantiates the situation:

Emokhai went into his room. He was thirsty. He looked into the green plastic bucket that was beside the cupboard and found that he had no drinking water. From the base to the rim the bucket was glazed with red sediment...By the time he got outside he was sweating again. The sun burned relentlessly. Mama Joe ...her other children naked and covered in dust, played about the street with the streamers and strips of paper in chain round their necks (“City of Red Dust” 49-50).

From the quotation, Okri questions the politics of environmental degradation and fictionalizes the consciences of many post-colonial environmental ethics where babies,

young children and elderly people are exposed to health problems from long term exposure to high levels of dust and other pollutions which spawn health concerns such as breathing problems, reduced visibility and aggravate existing health problems. The character Emokhai realizes:

As he left the compound for the nearest bukka, it struck him that all natural life – the cockroaches, the cats, the dogs, the leaves the leaves of the stunted orange tree - was being buried in dust...He saw the red dust and on the zinc rooftops, he saw patterns of a stifled in history... (“City of Dust” 66).

The extract shows there is a reciprocal bond between humans and land, considering nature not just as the platform upon which the human stay is acted out but as an actor in the drama. Okri’s selected stories apparent in “In the Shadow of War” and “In the City of Red Dust” lampoon issues about Nigeria’s ecological degradation, destruction and abuse which often impact the existence and livelihood of common people.

Taken together, environmental policies in post-colonial societies are detrimental to the socially and economically backward classes such as the indigenous people and low-income earners. Thus, fictionalizing the relationship between the environment and the exploited becomes paramount. Therefore, the selected stories in Okri’s *Stars of the New Curfew* suggest the havoc created through war, violence, destruction, filth, and dust initiated by elite and encouraged by corporate globalism. The stories analysed validates the postulations that human accountability to the environment and the perspective that the environment is a process rather than as a constant are the text’s ethical concern. The selected stories confirm connections that individuals should have towards the Nigerian natural world and the world by extension. Consequently, there is a link between the artists Helon Habila and Ben Okri in their ideological opinions and thrusts. The writers’ preoccupations are circumscribed by their concern with development, disease, the critique of globalisation, pollution, social injustice, corporate greed, and militancy. There selected fictions are coordinated efforts by the duo to demonstrate the disastrous consequences of present-day postmodern practices that employ capitalist ideologies of development and exploitation to justify corporate domination. Nevertheless, their novel and collections of short stories uniquely expose local exploitation of the Nigerian environment and the abuses done in the name of advancement.

Conclusion

This study centres on an ecocritical study of Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* and Ben Okri’s *Stars of the New Curfew*. In the light of environmental justice, this paper examines the various forms of eco-degradation that afflict the Nigerian natural space. The writers use their selected texts to posit that Nigerian leaders and their cronies are enmeshed in exploitation of the masses and their bionetwork. They express apprehension over the widening inequality, growing hunger, poverty and destruction of natural environment/resources caused by corporate globalism. Their selected literary works substantiate Heises idea that “everything is connected to everything else and that literature

does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether but rather plays a part in an immensity complex global system in which energy, matter and ideas interact” ... (7). Therefore, the imaginative works of study are speaking entities in the current Nigerian space.

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