

Ecofeminist Issues in Helon Habila's Novel Oil on Water

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine ecofeminist issues in Helon Habila's Oil on Water. Ecofeminism literary criticism was used to analyze the novel. Thus, based on the analysis made, the novel Oil on Water has various ecofeminist issues. Primarily, it mirrors the serious destruction of the natural environment in the Niger Delta. Because of this destruction, the ecosystem is in grave danger, and the annihilation of human and non-human beings is extensively portrayed in the novel. On the other hand, there is no clean environment including water in the Niger Delta due to oil spillage, no fresh air due to burning oil, and no peace due to the ongoing war. As a result, women, children, and indigenous peoples are forced to live in such a hostile environment. Furthermore, many living organisms become extinct as a result of oil companies' contamination of the environment, which destroys their habitat. Rivers become contaminated, trees and vegetation dry up, fish and birds die, humans perish, and many people abandon their homes and are displaced on a regular basis. Finally, the novel depicts patriarchal dominance, environmental exploitation, and violations of indigenous peoples and women.

1. INTRODUCTION

In post-colonial Africa, several writers have worked to correct history and myths created by colonial powers. They are working hard to debunk myths, reconstruct fictitious and poetic histories of pre-colonial and colonial Africa, and portray authentic African perspectives in the international arena. As a result, readers, critics, and researchers, in general, are paying attention to modern African literature written by both experienced and young authors. For this reason, many agree that corruption, gender injustice, civil war, religious fanaticism, drought, famine, globalization, migration, maladministration, and environmental crises are the major themes of contemporary African literature. As Irele (2009) describes, the various issues raised by contemporary African writers are the following:

...themes such as colonialism and anticolonialism, the analysis and critique of missionary activity, the civilizing mission, and Negritude, the challenge to Islam, anti-apartheid activism, and the questioning of Occidental superiority have now been partially displaced by concern for the environment, immigration, democratization, civil conflict, genocide, the National Conferences, child soldiers, the disintegration of the nation-state, AIDS, the Truth, and Reconciliation Commission, and globalization – sociopolitical factors reconfigured in the imaginative landscapes of writers whose works exhibit a profound engagement with the most demanding ethical issues of our time. (p. 230)

Thus, as stated earlier, depicting environmental issues in African literature is becoming a new trend. As Esamagu (2020, p. 243) points out, “in recent times, there is a surge of African writings chiefly committed to preserving the earth, originating most especially from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.” On the other hand, Irele (2009) explains that the remarkable entry of women writers into African literature has enabled them to depict themes about their social condition concerning polygamy and male domination, their economic life in modern society, and their participation in national politics in the new African states.

Therefore, though there are attempts to represent the exploitation of nature and women in African literary works, gender injustice and environmental crises are still serious issues that require further investigation into how they are represented and discussed in contemporary African literature. This is because, as Stratton (1994) clarifies, in characterizing contemporary African literature, critics still ignore gender as a social and analytic category. Furthermore, (Iheka, 2018) questions critics to investigate the representation of non-human beings and other ecosystem components in contemporary African literature. As a result, albeit efforts are made to explore issues linked to women's representation and the natural environment independently, there are still constraints to examining ecofeminist themes in African literary works. Therefore, this study focuses on the portrayal of ecofeminist issues in Helon Habila's novel *Oil on Water*.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Yang (2017), Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the word "ecofeminism" in 1974 in an attempt to raise awareness about the links between women's oppression and nature's dominance in an attempt to free women and nature from unjust subjugation. Since its inception, many efforts have been made to establish theories and strategies for understanding and responding to the intricate interconnections between gender roles, sexually differentiated bodies, and the natural environment.

Thus, Greta Gaard and Murphy (1998, p. 2) define Ecofeminism as a theoretical and practical movement for social change arising from the struggle of women to sustain themselves,

their families, and their communities. These struggles are against the "maldevelopment" environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism. Overall, ecofeminist themes are expressed in a number of ways by academics. For instance, Greta Gaard (1993, p. 1) states the concern of ecofeminists as follows.

By documenting the poor quality of life for women, children, people in the Third World, animals, and the environment, ecofeminists can demonstrate that sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism (the oppression of nature) are mutually reinforcing systems of oppression. Instead of being a "single-issue" movement, ecofeminism rests on the notion that the liberation of all oppressed groups must be addressed simultaneously.

Besides, Adams (1993) explains that ecofeminists see the interaction between social dominance and natural dominance, such as deforestation, which displaces indigenous peoples; hazardous waste sites near-poor and Black neighborhoods; industrialized factory farms, which eliminate the small family farmer; and international free trade policies that harm poor people and the environment. Women, along with the impoverished, are the main caregivers for pollution victims, and they are the primary sufferers of industrial pollution. Women account for the vast majority of those denied basic rights to clean air, water, food, shelter, health, and well-being. Ecofeminism also challenges the human misery and degradation of the environment that is being wrought by the Western corporate domination of the world economy (Ruether, 2003).

One of the major concerns of ecofeminists is the impact of war on women and the natural environment. This is because war victimizes them in many ways. Christiansen (1997) states the importance of ecofeminist concerns about women, war, sexual aggression, and the environment by taking the Persian Gulf War as an example.

The majority of women's oppression and exploitation, as well as the exploitation of nature and other victimized human and non-human groups, share the same fate in the world. According to Smith (1997), many ecofeminist theorists argue that there is no primary form of oppression because all oppressions are interconnected and reinforce one another. However, depending on one's social position, one kind of oppression often appears to be more important in one's daily life than another. Most Native women, for example, are likely to feel the impact of colonization on their daily lives more than other forms of oppression. Most types of oppression were not present in most Native civilizations before colonization, which may explain why colonization appears to be the predominant concern for Native women. The dominance of women and the dominance of nature began with colonialism.

Smith adds that ecofeminist theory must take colonization, particularly the colonization of Native lands, more seriously in its study of oppression. This is required for several reasons, one of which is that native lands are the sites of the most environmental destruction, as the Niger Delta. This is because native lands are always targeted for toxic waste dumps, military and nuclear testing, or exercise. As a result, there is a leakage of radiation into the atmosphere from nuclear and exploding bombs, as well as leakage of nuclear reactors into groundwater, wreaking environmental havoc in indigenous communities. Though she stated that mining of natural resources, for example, crude oil and its spillage, is also destructive, as in the Niger Delta. In short, as Alghamdi (2021) suggests, “adherents of this perspective recognize that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are connected to colonialism, neo-colonialism, race, class, and caste.”

Furthermore, Cudworth (2005) describes ecofeminism as an inclusive theory that can be simply characterized as a set of ideas that address the connections between gender social organization and how societies are constituted concerning "nature." Ecofeminism's most important contribution is a better understanding of multiple types of social dominance, exclusion, and inclusion based on a variety of hierarchies of difference (such as class, "race," and place, in addition to gender), which intersect and entangle, and shape environment–society relations in significant ways.

Based on the common ground of the theory, Legler (1997, p. 227) defines what ecofeminist literary criticism should be as follows:

As literary criticism, an ecofeminist is a hybrid form of criticism that combines environmental or ecological criticism with feminist literary criticism. It provides literary and cultural critics with a unique blend of literary and philosophical viewpoints through which they may study how nature is represented in literature and how representations of nature are linked to representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Investigation of the cultural production of nature, which also involves an analysis of language, desire, knowledge, and power, is one of the core tasks of ecofeminist literary critics.

Besides, Armbruster (1998, p. 106) defines ecofeminist literary theory as a study of the “important connection between the oppression of women and the destruction and misuse of non-human nature within male-dominated cultures in poetry and prose writings.” However, ecofeminist literary critics, according to Armbruster, can develop an interpretive and analytical tool that allows them to go beyond simply looking for literature that emphasizes

women's or other marginalized people's sense of connection with nature (connections that are inextricably opposed to the dominant culture's alienation from nature).

For this reason, Helon Habila's novel, *Oil on Water* (2010) is the most extensively read novel that has attracted many readers throughout the world which can be interrogated from ecofeminist literary criticism. This is because it discusses various issues, mainly environmental destruction caused by oil companies in post-colonial Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta.

The novel is about two journalists, Rufus and Zaq, who are sent to find a kidnapped white woman who was the wife of a British oil executive and was caught as a bargaining victim by militants. As these two journalists navigated through islands in the Niger Delta, they deeply explored the destruction of the ecosystem, the devastation of biodiversity, and the grave danger of environmental pollution because of international oil companies. On top of this, they prove how devastating war is taking place there. This war is between the government and its military to defend the profits and the machines of oil production on one hand and the militant forces fighting to liberate their people and resources from the exploitation of industrial companies on the other hand.

In short, since the novel is regarded as one of Africa's most popular novels of the twenty-first century, much groundwork has been done based on this novel, and Egya (2017), Feldner (2018), and Victor and Ogunpitan (2019) have explored many issues in the novel *Oil on Water*. Though these researchers examine ecological destruction and its effects in the novel from a variety of perspectives, they don't address the issue of how environmental destruction, war, and violence simultaneously affect women, children, other people, non-human beings, and the ecosystem in general from an ecofeminism perspective. Thus, unlike the above works, the current study focuses on the various forms of exploitation and dominance of women and the natural environment and the interconnectedness between women, nature, indigenous peoples, and other non-human beings in the novel.

2.1. Research Questions

Despite the interconnection between women and the natural environment in Africa, it remains unaddressed how they are equally exploited. As a result, the purpose of this study is to explore how the novel *Oil on Water* (2010) approaches ecofeminist themes. In short, the study provides answers to the following questions:

- How are nature and women represented in the novel?
- How are the interconnections between women, other indigenous peoples, and nature embodied in the novel?

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In this research, ecofeminist literary criticism has been adopted as an approach to analyzing the novel *Oil on Water* (2010), which is the primary source of the study. In addition, many secondary sources, like reference books and e-journals, were accessed to obtain further information on the topic. Furthermore, environmental destruction, women, human and non-human groups as victims of ecological crisis, the impact of war on women, nature, and other groups, and post-colonial aspects and their impacts on women and nature are used as analytical tools in the examination of the novel. Then, a close reading of the novel was conducted to extract the necessary data. Next, textual analysis of extracts from the novel has been undertaken carefully. Finally, extracts were analyzed based on the perspective of ecofeminism literary theory.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Pollution and Reduction of Ecosystem in the Niger Delta

Pollution and destruction of the ecosystem are serious problems of the 21st century. The environmental crisis is gradually destroying biodiversity globally. *Oil on Water* is an indicator of this serious issue that reveals the degradation of biodiversity in the Niger Delta. Human beings and non-human beings are always endangered because of pollution and the devastation of the natural environment. Society who lives in the Niger Delta are victims of the socio-economic problems caused by pollution, war, and displacement. The same is true for animals, fish, and birds, which are always vanishing because of the polluted environment and imbalanced ecosystem.

One of the novel's issues is water pollution. The novel in the next extract depicts, for example, enormously polluted water covered by oil spillage. The water was totally polluted and became sulfurous. It was the oil that contaminated the freshwater. Only insects were visible, for it becomes difficult for other organisms. If it is poisoned, the mangroves around it are exposed to being dry and dead. Fish can't live longer. It is hard for birds to inhabit it. On top of this, the water is not usable anymore. It will destroy the ecosystem that is linked to water. "Soon we were in a dense mangrove swamp; the water underneath us had 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" (p.9).

On top of this, Habila repeatedly stated that the water was and polluted, and those smells caused itches on their faces. This shows how the environment was damaged, which caused sickness to even pass by. On the other hand, it shows how much the natural environment is dangerous for human survival and biodiversity in general. In short, the following extract shows how polluted the river was." and the foul smell that clung to our hair, and the itch on our grime-smear faces" (p. 11).

In addition to the above, Habila reveals the griminess and toxicity of the water in the Niger Delta. He states the destruction of the ecosystem on the life of the people in the Niger Delta, who depends on fishing. Their rivers are intoxicated with oil spillage. They will never be used for fishing anymore. Not only fish but all the biodiversity in the rivers is also destroyed. The following extract shows Habila's concern about the destruction of lives in the Niger Delta. The fish, the people who live based on fishing, and other organisms that live in the water are highly affected by the pollution.

I couldn't understand their words, but I imagined they were speaking of the dwindling stocks of fish in the river, the rising toxicity of the water, and how soon they might have to move to a place where the fishing was still fairly good. I listened in and out of sleep and I dreamed of the little girl with the burnished skin (p. 18).

Rufus articulates the unusual form of the water. It was dirty and full of trash which made the river unpleasant. The water is polluted and many things float in it. Moreover, the water doesn't have the same form and content; it abruptly changes. It becomes fresh and brackish. This shows how polluted it is. It is difficult to grow organisms and mangroves around here because they are spoiled.

The water took on different forms as we glided on it. Sometimes it was a snake, twisting and fast and slippery, poisonous. Sometimes it was an old jute rope, frayed and wobbly and breaking into jagged, feathery ends, the freshwater abruptly replaced by a thick marshy tract of mangroves standing over still, brackish water that lapped at the adventitious roots. (p.37)

Since it is contaminated, there is no clean water in the villages where there is a deposit of oil that serves the world. The people in the villages drink water from the communal well. The water is so polluted and there are dead matters around and deadly sure, the water is polluted because of the spillage of oil. However, as Habila explains via the voice of his narrator, Rufus, there was no water around except for the communal well. Additionally, Rufus reflects that the environment was so suffocated because of the destruction of the environment. The worst thing is that there was even a dead body mixed with oil. That shows how the environment was hit. Based on his observation, the environment was polluted and no one was around, which made the place strange and abandoned and not suitable for living things, especially human beings.

In short, in Habila's view, the Niger Delta river is exposed to fatal pollution and then the demise of many organisms. Every place he goes is highly damaged. Swamps and rivers are highly contaminated and they have a foul smell. The river is full of dead matter that floats everywhere. The decayed animals, pieces of clothes, and rolling logs are what he sees on his way, which shows how contaminated it was. He states it as "... a piece of cloth, a rolling log, a

dead fowl, a bloated dog belly-up with blackbirds perching on it, their expressionless eyes blinking rapidly, their sharp beaks savagely cutting into the soft decaying flesh" (p.38).

In addition, Rufus states that oil companies are extremely dangerous and that sometimes they may even consume a village with fire. The lethal fire that burned his town is an example. It shows how deadly the oil companies are and how much they are careless about protecting the safety of people. Rufus tells of the mass killing and destruction of his hometown and the dead people. This shows the Niger Islands are endangered by the burning oil companies. As stated earlier, the oil companies do pollute the water with oil spillage. And Rufus adds that they can even burn you, burn a town and the people because of selfishness and negligence. To present the general picture of the burning of his village, Rufus, the main character, states the following: "...the oil fire that consumed my little town, killing and maiming a quarter of the population, including my sister and my best friend's father" (p.52).

He portrays also the burning oil flares and smocks are like a clouds in the sky. The environment is totally dark because of the oil companies' smock. For this reason, that it was unthinkable to see a clear sky. The smoke from the flare of the oil has covered the sky. And it was once he saw the clear sky. This shows how Mother Earth and the sky are polluted in the Niger Delta.

Furthermore, Habila states the horrible and unimaginable destruction of the environment and the death of human beings caused by the oil companies. Habila's character, Gloria, a friend of Rufus, describes the demise and destruction. In his understanding, Gloria was dismayed by the death toll and the destruction of the environment in the Niger Delta. She explains that oil companies have destroyed the natural environment. The oil flare and their smock destroy all the biodiversity on earth and in the water: birds, fish, forests, animals, and human beings. Because of waste and oil spills, they have wreaked havoc on the ecosystem as a whole. That shows creatures that live on the ground and fly in the sky are killed by oil companies. Rufus said that "She wordlessly turned and pointed to the faraway sky, toward the oil fields. — Gas flares. They kill them. Not only bats but other flying creatures as well" (p.127).

The novel also shows Habila's significant concern about climate change in the world. He explains what he observes on TV through the main character's point of view, Rufus. Rufus tells us about the melting polar ice cap and the land that has sunk under the water. This shows the true threat of the present time. Because of the rise of global warming, the earth is in grave danger. The polar ice caps are melting and will sink in many places. Mother Earth is getting hot and a lot of changes are taking place in the weather that will affect our lives. This is what Habila states about climate change. "I switched on the TV and watched a science fiction movie

about a submerged world. The polar ice cap has melted and land has sunk underwater and is now talked about only in legends" (p.96).

In addition, the novel depicts how our Mother Earth is suffering from the destruction of the ecosystem and its biodiversity. When Zaq asks the priest whether there is a ghost or not, he tells him that there is no ghost, but a spirit. There are bad and good spirits. A bad spirit, according to a priest, is one who has sinned against Mother Earth and is unable to rest in her womb. This is a crucial statement stating that Mother Earth suffers as a result of those who constantly cause her crises and unrest. Her enemies exploit and destroy her mindlessly for the accumulation of wealth. Their greediness may go far and cause trouble for the people who live in harmony with her. And here is the extract:

Zaq moaned and held his head. —...Do you believe in ghosts, priest? —Of course, we believe in spirits, good and bad. The bad ones are the ones who have sinned against Mother Earth and can't find rest in her womb. They roam the earth, restless, looking for redemption— (p.114).

Likewise, what makes the Niger Delta crisis worse is that there is always a war going on, which continuously harms the people and the ecosystem. It is obvious that if there is a war, everyone will become a victim, especially women, children, the elderly, and some other vulnerable people. Thus, the people of the Niger Delta, including women, children, aged people, and other victims of the conflict, are always in chaos. On top of this, the natural environment is always impacted by conflicts, the burning of oil barns, and the explosions of pipelines. Many innocent people die for no reason.

The following extract portrays burning of a boat with a rocket in the Niger Delta. As Habila describes it, the scene is frightening. The fire was on the beach. The smock rose into the sky like a tornado, scorching the trees. These all demonstrate how the war destroyed both people and the environment. Therefore, the war between the government and the militants is another reason to destroy the ecosystem. Rufus said that "a wooden boat was responsible for the fire on the beach; it was broken to bits, probably from a direct hit by a rocket. "Inland, smoke rose like a tornado into the sky, high above the savaged, seared trees" (p. 75).

Similarly, Gloria describes the disastrous reason for the establishment of the shrine as it was built in the aftermath of a tragic war on the island in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta's bloodshed is commonly linked to both oil companies and militants. Whatever the reason, the war was so heinous that blood flowed into the rivers. Blood and the water were mixed up and drenched, and the fish died, and the dead warriors floated for miles along the river, then snagged on mangroves on the banks or got stuck in the muddy swamps, half in and half out of the water. "The land was so polluted that even the water in the wells turned red. That was when

priests from different shrines got together and decided to build this shrine by the river. The land needed to be cleansed of blood and pollution" (p.128).

In the same way, it is obvious that war ruins the earth and annihilates lives including forests, animals, fish, birds, and other forms of biodiversity. Thus, Habila, has stated that after the end of the war, there was serious destruction of one of the islands in the Niger Delta. For example, Irkefe, an Island, was the field of death and demolition. Habila presented the dreadful atmosphere created by war for both human lives and the natural environment.

In addition, Habila says "*empty squat dwelling, the same ripped flagrant stench, the barrenness, the oil slick...*" (p.9) to show a sullen environment, a gloomy nature whose creatures are devastated and will never live long in her womb. He portrays about the dissolute village where people lived once in the past, and how it became barren land when he arrived there. Habila talks about the hollowness he felt when he reached the village. As for him, even the air was in a mood of indefinable sadness. That shows how polluted and deteriorated the environment was in the village.

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 was suspended above the punctured zinc roofs, unwilling to depart, yet powerless to return. (p.9)

Finally, Rufus describes the village, which seems owned by the forest, as a little bit hostile. The village was crowded and full of consumer goods, which were displayed in many places. Things were put in many places that made the village the settlement of an undeveloped society. The image of their houses and their goods, like second-hand clothes, shows the poverty and low standard of living. On top of this, only women and children were seen in the village. It may indicate that many of the men joined the militants or that they have migrated to other places. However, it demonstrates that the unstable livelihood appears to be so low. Women and children were endangered by living in a polluted environment. On the other hand, it shows women, children, and the natural environment were victims of the oil spillage and oil-related pollution. He depicts that "The houses seemed to belong more to the trees and forest behind them than they did to a domestic human settlement. Women and children stared out at us inquisitively" (p.12).

4.2. Exploiting Women in the Niger Delta

Ecofeminism emphasizes more on the connection between women and the natural environment and the homogenous exploitation of both. The reason, as stated earlier, is that women can't be freed as long as Mother Earth is exploited and destroyed continuously. Thus, based on that, the impact of the destruction of the ecosystem due to the oil companies has a

direct and indirect impact on women, children, animals, indigenous peoples, and other victim classes. Therefore, in this part, the way women and girls are represented in the novel is stated as follows.

According to *Oil on Water*, women and girls are a victim of domestic and sexual exploitation. For instance, Rufus recounts a girl to note that girls have many responsibilities even at a young age. Thus, he narrates about her as “She was about ten, and as she bent down to place the lamp, she glanced at us furtively, and in the quick... Later, she returned with food on a tray: boiled cassava and fish with palm oil and ground pepper” (p. 17). As it is stated, there was no one who could assist her. Thus, from this point of view, it can be noted that girls are exploited and have a job burden to serve their families.

Moreover, Zaq, Rufus’s friend, states the oppression of women contemptuously. He tells about how a madman escapes from an institution and rapes many women. He narrates, “—Here’s a riddle. A madman escapes from an institution. He crosses a river and comes across some washerwomen, he rapes them, well, not all of them, as that mightn’t really be possible . . .” (p.21). And Tolu, Rufus’s friend responds objectionably to Zaq as—Surely, Zaq . . . sir, the subject of rape is a sensitive one, most women wouldn’t see the joke in . . . (p.21). Though it is a jock, it can be stated that talking about rapping seems only a women’s issue because it is women who don’t want to hear this kind of jock, according to Habila’s view.

As stated earlier, in *Oil on Water*, what is stated boldly and repeatedly is the exploitation, destruction, and pollution of the natural environment in the Niger Delta. It reveals the burning and poisoning of Mother Earth because of the oil companies. Similarly, it reveals that the society of the Niger Delta is still in harsh poverty, though they are the ones who possess the most wealth. Foreign companies take advantage of them and have already caused them harm. They not only manipulate the land, but they also manipulate women whenever they desire them. Habila explains what a white oil man (James Flood, a petroleum engineer) did to Salomon’s fiancé, Koko. Mr. Floode hired Koko as his maid, and he eventually abused, harassed, and impregnated her.

At the same time, Salomon was Mrs. Floode’s chauffeur. As a result, Salomon was irritated by what had happened to his fiancée. Here is what Salmon said, “—No, not by me. She is pregnant by the Oga...—I love her. —I’m sorry (p.159). This shows a big picture of how multinational corporations and their men exploit Africa and African women. They do not only rape Africa; they also assault and rape women, too

Habila’s *Oil on Water* has chained all the colonial and civil war impacts in relation to the social, economic, and political changes that have taken place for years. One of the incidents stated in the novel is that in the aftermath of the civil war there was a continuous migration of

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people from the villages to towns. More specifically, many girls started to flow from the village areas to the cities like Logos, looking for jobs. In Logos, life becomes completely different for the girls who come from all over the country's villages, some of whom come from respected families. However, for one thing, Logos doesn't care about the girls' background in the village. Whether they are respected or not, they have the same life status in Logos. They ended up living through their worst episode and possibly dying. They end their lives as prostitutes on Bar Beach. Some of them are pregnant and homeless on the streets, the lucky ones. Some of them are the unlucky ones. ... "died and their bodies discovered in the water days later, washed up in faraway Lekki. Raped. Brutalized. Strangled. Stabbed" (p.97).

Based on the above evidence, it is possible to conclude that in *Oil on Water*, women are represented as vulnerable to a wretched and terrible life. They are raped, brutalized, strangled, stabbed, impregnated, and killed, especially those who work as sex workers in cities like Logos. Though this is common in urbanized places, the same is true for women in the Niger Delta. They are exposed to this kind of fate. They are the victims of both war and pollution. This means that the oil companies cause a variety of crises for women's health and physical burdens. It is obvious that, in a polluted environment, women and children are the ones who are most vulnerable to different diseases. Thus, *Oil on Water* reflects the exploitation and crisis of women boldly and broadly from many perspectives.

Furthermore, as in the novel, *Oil on Water*, the natural environment and many lives in the Niger Delta are being destroyed. He has, therefore, reflected on the issues critically. Exploitation of women and the natural environment, in particular, is well addressed.

Armed robbers tied to sand-filled tin drums and shot by soldiers right in front of cheering crowds. That was the Bar Beach Show under the military government. In the eighties, it was beer shacks and prostitutes. The unlucky ones died, their bodies discovered in the water days later, washed up in faraway Lekki. Raped. Brutalized. Strangled. Stabbed. Well, Zaq saw the story in that when the rest of us saw only prostitutes selling sex. Every day he'd be there with those prostitutes, talking to them, and who knows, perhaps sleeping with them, maybe pimping for them (p.119).

In his novel *Oil on Water*, Habila represents the various aspects of women's lives. As previously stated, he has described the migration of women to cities following the end of colonialism, as well as the civil wars in Nigeria. Life in the city is far more complicated than life in the village. The introduction of Western culture is accentuated in cities. One can observe the domination of western culture over indigenous tradition in the cities. The erosion of culture, values, and religion has spread to the cities. Habila has indicated the erosion of culture and

values, as well as the complicated life in Logos. This is especially strange for girls from villages all over the country. Thus, many of them experience a terrible life.

Consequently, Zaq, Rufus' favorite journalist, was very concerned about these women's lives and their vulnerability to danger. As a result, he wrote a story about these women's lives. This story is famous all around the country. As a result, as more people read his story, many people, including politicians and the governor's wives, supported girls' returning to school. The story he wrote was entitled "Five Women," which shows his respect for women. He didn't title them "Five Prostitutes," though they were. Thus, Habila's view is so broad; he tells us what should be done to help the poor while others exploit them. In another way, it can be concluded that Habila's view of women is very positive and justifiable. As Beke Johnson explains, their paper was "the biggest-selling," and Zaq similarly became famous and popular, and everything he wrote was great. He portrayed how Zaq played a great role in saving many girls' lives. Many went to school and graduated, including his girlfriend, Anita.

On top of this, Habila narrates Mrs. Floode's bad marriage experience. She came from England to save her marriage. She was warned not to go to Nigeria because of the risk of being kidnapped, which many foreigners face. However, she decided to come and save her marriage, and she did it. In contrast, she didn't get what she had expected. Her husband, Mr. Floode's personality had been changed and he had started an affair with another woman. He was uninterested in his wife, and he was dissatisfied with her arrival. Though she tried to be with him, he didn't want it. Finally, he requested a divorce from her. After all, it was because she came to him that she got kidnapped. As this story demonstrates, Habila has described the woman as the one who wants to save her marriage, whereas men go to the women's mothers. Though she was from England, she faced the same fate as Boma. Thus, anywhere in the world, in Europe or Africa, women are victims of their husbands' interests. They oppress and decide whatever they want. Therefore, Habila's representation of women is very accurate and broad. "When I decided to come to this country, the last thing on my mind was getting kidnapped.... I was coming to save my marriage" (p. 198) He started coming home late, ... He told me he wanted a divorce. (p. 200).

Finally, rape is one of the most serious issues that Habila frequently depicts. For example, when he narrates the background of the professor, the head of the militant groups, he portrays how his daughter was raped. And the reason he became so cruel was that his daughter was raped at university. This girl was so bright that she was raped repeatedly in a graveyard by a group of men.

One important issue that Habila's *Oil on Water* discusses is the kidnapping of women for ransom. However, many more crimes are committed in the Niger Delta, as described in the

novel. From rapes and kidnappings to individual assassinations and massacres, there is something for everyone. Moreover, as the natural environment is exploited, women are equally exploited by different powerful groups and individuals. They may take advantage of women by any means if they decide to. In the following extract, Rufus depicts the kidnapping of a seventy-year-old woman and a three-year-old girl. So, Habila has discussed the kidnapping issue in many ways.... "another kidnapping, that of a seventy-year-old woman and a three-year-old girl. They had been kidnapped for ransom by militants. I titled the editorial "Gangsters or Freedom Fighters?" (p.32).

Kidnapping for ransom is a widespread issue in the Niger Delta. In this novel, the victims are women, particularly a white woman named Mrs. Floode. As a result, there are various groups that kidnap people for money. Thus, in this novel, a militant group asks for five million dollars. "There's a request for five million dollars. They want us to send five reporters to confirm she is alive and well" (p.35).

According to Habila, kidnappers are common throughout the Niger Delta. Most of them kidnap individuals for monetary gain. As in the novel, they were hidden on the islands and were moving from place to place to find an opportunity. The kidnapers commit such crimes for different reasons. The first thing is unemployment. Many young people were unemployed, so they joined the militants and engaged in vandalism and kidnapping. Another reason is that they were excavated from their ancestral land and had nowhere to live. The final reason is that many were with militant groups protesting the devastation of their environment caused by the oil companies. On the other hand, they were against oil companies and corrupt government officials. In one way or another, these youths join military groups and do whatever they can to get money. In particular, some were doing their best to get money by kidnapping, oil theft, etc. As a result, the islands were full of kidnappers. Habila calls these places "Kidnappers' Den" (p.36). Besides, the white woman, Mrs. Floode was kidnapped for this reason. The militant groups were hunting foreigners to get a huge amount of money as ransom.

Habila's denotes the sexual exploitation and suppression of women and girls even by the so-called holy men. In the following excerpt, Rufus portrays about the incident of his ex-girlfriend, Mary's family. Mary's father had died years ago, and her mother wanted to remarry, so she asked a holy man to pray for her. However, everything went wrong. This holy man sexually abused both her and her seventeen-year-old daughter. Mary was shocked for weeks after she realized what had happened to her mother and her sister. This is a terrible story that shows the manipulation of women and girls. The man was thought to be holy, but he was completely evil and impregnated both a mother and a daughter. This implies Habila's view of how females can face challenges in life and how males can enforce females to quench their

feelings. Habila states, "Mary came home to find he'd moved into her mother's bedroom, and had impregnated not only her mother but also her seventeen-year-old sister" (p.133).

The explosion of oil storage tanks and the continuous war in the Niger Delta wreaked havoc on society, families, and individuals. As in the novel, fire can sometimes engulf an entire village and burn every house, killing and injuring people. Even though fire kills everyone, women and children are the most vulnerable. Thus, this incidence seems common in the Niger Delta based on what Habila has stated. Boma, Rufus's sister, was one of the victims, with the left part of her face charred. She was burned when their village was destroyed by fire. As Rufus stated, Boma was among the survivors, while many others perished. As a result, even after she recovered, she never felt free or happy about her face. She tried to conceal it. When she saw her daughter's scarred face, her mother was also devastated. According to Rufus, her mother ran into the room and cried, and then Boma joined her, and they both cried for a long time until their voices were hoarse. Her face had not only been harmed by the scar, but she had also been severely harmed emotionally. Likewise, her husband, John, left her after he realized it. He abandoned her because she had burned her face. It was so disgraceful that he left her because she had burnt her face.

As previously stated, whenever there is a crisis in the Niger Delta, women, children, and other victims are the first to suffer. They are all victims of the devastation caused by pollution and war. When the militants arrived, women, children, and other victims were directly attacked, as Rufus describes. Many of them were hurling themselves onto the benches, and some had even jumped into the water. At the same time, women and some men were crying and wailing. This shows the vulnerability of women, children, and some other victims. At the same time, it shows Habila's sensitivity to the susceptibility of women and children whenever there is war and violence. After all, war is led and fought by men. There are no female attackers in the villages. That is what Habila states, too. Males are wreckers. ... "the glare of their flashlights blinded our eyes and threw the women and children into panic and confusion" (p. 205).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, the novel *Oil on Water* is embedded with a variety of ecofeminist issues. It shows that the devastation of the ecosystem is generating such a catastrophic occurrence in the Niger Delta. Burning oil pollutes the atmosphere while spilling kills all ground-dwelling organisms. Environmental contamination has wreaked havoc on river streams, flora, fish, and wildlife. Besides, women, children, and some other people are directly affected by pollution and destruction of the environment because of the oil companies. Furthermore, this environmental damage has a direct impact on the indigenous people who have lived there for generations. As a result, these self-interested corporations and their impact

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continue to evict them from their homes. Women, children, and other vulnerable people are always at risk at this point. This means that environmental damage has a direct impact on women, children, and poor indigenous people. In short, the oil companies are responsible for a significant ecological imbalance in the Niger Delta. These giant oil companies are responsible for poverty, pollution, instability, and other tragic events that have occurred in this place. On the other hand, rehabilitating the Niger Delta means saving the lives of many human and non-human organisms.

Another recurrent problem in the Niger Delta, as stated in the novel, is war and violence. The impact of war on women, nature, and indigenous peoples is causing such a devastating incident in this place. It is obvious that war burns the environment and destroys lives. It victimizes women, children, and other people who can't protect themselves. For this reason, the novel shows how the continuous war and violence resulting from the volatility of the region affect women, children, nature, animals, and some other people directly and indirectly in the Niger Delta.

Another issue is the displacement of indigenous people from their origins because of the oil companies and the continuous war and violence. When people are uprooted from their ancestral homeland, where they were born and raised, many changes occur in both them and the environment. The displacement puts the entire environment in jeopardy. Another reason for their displacement is that multinational corporations duped the people and took control of their homelands and origins. If that is not possible, they kill them and invade their ancestral land. What this type of trick has in common is that corrupt politicians from local governments are always involved. They cooperate with foreigners and endanger their people. However, because of the sabotage of the oil companies and local politicians, villagers sell their land but never use the money properly. In this case, women, other people, and other non-human beings are affected in many ways.

The patriarchal exploitation of women and the natural environment is the novel's other major issue. Women in the novel are depicted as victims of men in many ways. They are represented as victims of rape, assault, and abduction. Women and girls are exploited by men from all walks of life. Furthermore, the novel bluntly depicts the exploitation of Mother Earth. International oil companies are repeatedly accused of extracting oil for their profit and then polluting the environment in the novel. As a result, the novel depicts the parallel exploitation of both women and nature in general.

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