

**CORRUPTION AND OIL EXPLOITATION IN THE NIGER DELTA USING
HELON HABILA'S *OIL ON WATER* AND RUKY DIVINE OGEDE'S
FESTERING WOUNDS.**

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NOVEMBER, 2025.

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
LITERATURE IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT'S OF
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by Blessing Ogheneyenrowo JOSEPH
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supervision.

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Project Supervisor

Date

DEDICATION

This essay is dedicated to God Almighty for His enduring mercy and benevolence. It is further dedicated to those devoted to literature, whose unwavering passion for inquiry persists. This study is also dedicated to my esteemed family, whose steadfast support and encouragement have served as a guiding beacon.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the pervasive themes of corruption and oil exploitation in the Niger Delta as depicted in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. Through a literary ecocritical lens the research examines how both authors portray the environmental degradation, human suffering and systemic corruption that plague oil-rich communities. The texts reveal the complicity of government officials, multinational corporations, and militant groups in perpetuating sociopolitical instability and environmental injustice. Characters in both novels are used as symbols of resistance, victimhood, and survival, highlighting the multifaceted consequences of oil wealth mismanagement. The study also identifies the silencing of whistleblowers and community voices as a critical element in sustaining corrupt systems. By comparing these two literary works, the research underscores the urgency for accountability, environmental justice, and ethical governance in resource management in the Niger Delta.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the complex relationship between corruption and oil exploitation in the Niger Delta, as depicted in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. It analyzes government's simultaneous involvement in perpetuating and addressing corruption, and demonstrates how oil, while economically significant, has contributed to environmental degradation and adverse social conditions. This study aims to analyze the impact of corruption and oil exploitation in the region. Indicating that oil, initially regarded as a source of prosperity, has instead facilitated systemic corruption, a theme thoroughly represented in both texts.

1.2 Scope of Study

Helon Habila has written four novels: *Waiting for an Angel*, *Measuring Time*, *Oil on Water*, and *The Travellers*. In contrast, Ruky Divine Ogede has authored two novels, *Unwanted Shadow* and *Festering Wounds*. This study, however, will focus specifically on Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. Both texts were chosen for this research work because it delves into the relationship between humanity and their environment using the Niger Delta as a firm example. Also, *this* study will examine the impact of corruption and oil exploitation within the Niger Delta as

portrayed in the literary texts. Therefore, an examination of these impacts will outline the scope of study into several areas such as, environmental degradation and its impact on human life, human suffering and displacement, environmental impact of oil exploitation, corruption and environmental negligence, resistance and suppression, environmental impact of corruption.

1.3 Research Methodology

This essay argues for the value of qualitative research by focusing on the primary texts Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. Qualitative methods provide rich interpretation, examination, and analysis of these texts. According to Pratima Bansal and Kevin Corley in the *Academy of Management Journal*, qualitative researchers build a case for their research question and must work harder than quantitative researchers to establish the theoretical gap and importance of the research (qtd in Bansal and Corley 879). For Smith M.L., qualitative research is empirical, as it involves collecting data about the phenomenon being studied, organizing it, and testing it against ideas and hypotheses. Qualitative researchers analyze qualities or entities to understand them in context (174). This study employs qualitative literary analysis to examine representations of corruption and oil exploitation in the Niger Delta as depicted in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. Close reading serves as the primary method to interpret each author's portrayal of the region's social and political challenges. Thematic analysis is also applied to identify and discuss

recurring themes such as environmental degradation, corruption and the socio-economic impacts of oil exploitation. This approach incorporates secondary sources, including scholarly articles, interviews, and critical essays, to situate the novels within broader academic discourse on the Niger Delta crisis. Critical commentaries are utilized to link the narratives to actual events and ongoing debates. The flexibility of qualitative research allows the analysis to adapt as new themes emerge. This methodology facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the depiction of corruption and oil exploitation in the novels and their implications for the culture and society of the Niger Delta.

This essay adopts a qualitative approach to demonstrate its effectiveness in analyzing human experiences and interpreting literature. As Cleland (2017) notes, qualitative research seeks to understand individuals' experiences through detailed examination. In contrast to quantitative methods, it offers greater flexibility and enables in-depth exploration of both events and underlying motivations. The study employs thematic analysis and utilizes journals, author interviews, and critical commentary related to the novels. This flexible methodology is particularly suited for examining characters' actions, thoughts, and emotions, thereby supporting a comprehensive literary analysis. Lastly, The data will be sourced by doing a thorough reading and analysis of the primary text, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*, while paying close attention to the themes.

1.4 Theoretical framework.

This research is informed by ecocriticism. The concept was first articulated by Joseph Meeker in *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972), while William Rueckert coined the term “ecocriticism” in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1978). Ecocriticism investigates literature through the lens of ecology, culture, and the environment. Derek Gladwin describes it as “a broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment” (Clark 8).

Glotfelty and Fromm emphasize that ecocriticism “takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (xx). Emerging from the environmental movements of the 1960s and gaining momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, ecocriticism has since expanded to include perspectives such as ecofeminism, pastoral and wilderness studies, and ecojustice. Its two major “waves” emphasized first the defense of nature and later the interrogation of environmental justice, especially for marginalized populations.

Applying ecocriticism to this study allows for a nuanced reading of how corruption and oil exploitation are intertwined with environmental destruction and human suffering in the Niger Delta. It also highlights how literature functions as a tool of resistance and ecological awareness

Limitations of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism facilitates the analysis of connections between literature and the environment; however, it presents certain limitations as a critical framework. These limitations arise from the scope of ecocriticism and the challenges associated with applying its concepts across diverse literary forms. Key limitations include:

1. **Anthropocentrism:** This is a philosophical viewpoint that places human beings at the center of the universe, considering them the most significant and superior entities. This perspective also prioritizes human needs, values, and experiences over those of other species and the natural environment. Despite its focus on nature and the environment, ecocriticism can still fall into the trap of anthropocentrism, prioritizing human perspectives and values over those of the non-human world. This can limit its ability to fully explore the intrinsic value of nature independent of human interests.
2. **Cultural and Historical Specificity:** Ecocriticism, particularly in its early forms, has been critiqued for focusing predominantly on literature from Western cultures, potentially overlooking the rich environmental themes and perspectives found in non-Western literatures. This can lead to a lack of diversity in ecocritical analyses and an incomplete understanding of global environmental narratives.
3. **Interdisciplinary Challenges:** Ecocriticism incorporates perspectives from disciplines such as environmental science, history, and philosophy, which can

enhance its analytical depth. However, the interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism may also result in superficial engagement with scientific concepts or a diminished focus on rigorous literary analysis.

4. **Risk of Oversimplification:** By emphasizing environmental themes, ecocriticism may reduce the complexity of literary works by focusing primarily on their ecological aspects. This approach can overlook other significant themes and stylistic elements present in the literature.
5. **Political and Ideological Biases:** Ecocriticism can sometimes be criticized for harboring political and ideological biases, particularly in its advocacy for environmental activism and sustainability. While these perspectives are valuable, they may influence the analysis in a way that prioritizes certain environmental ideologies over a more neutral or diverse exploration of the text.
6. **Universalizing Nature:** Ecocriticism may inadvertently universalize the concept of nature, assuming a common understanding or experience of the natural world that does not account for cultural, geographical, and individual differences. This can lead to generalizations that fail to capture the specificities of how nature is perceived and represented across different contexts.

Despite these limitations, ecocriticism continues to evolve as scholars introduce new perspectives, refine methodologies, and engage with interdisciplinary approaches. Acknowledging its limitations enables ecocriticism to provide more nuanced and substantive insights into the relationship between literature and the environment.

Historical Context of Corruption and Oil Exploitation

To understand the thematic concerns of the novels, it is important to situate them in the history of corruption and oil exploitation in Nigeria. Corruption, often described as a plague in Nigeria, predates independence. According to “Corruption in Nigeria,” the nation lost over \$400 billion to corruption between independence and 2012 (1–2). The discovery of oil intensified corruption, creating a centralized system where political elites diverted revenues without accountability.

Commercial oil exploration began with Shell-BP’s discovery at Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, in 1956, leading to the first crude oil export in 1958. Oil soon displaced agriculture as Nigeria’s economic backbone, culminating in Nigeria joining the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1971 and the creation of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in 1977. While these institutions were designed to strengthen Nigeria’s oil economy, they became instruments for corruption, patronage, and resource exploitation.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) such as Shell, Chevron, and Mobil have also been implicated. Yange defines MNCs as corporations headquartered in one country but operating in multiple nations, wielding enormous global influence (Yange 2024). Although they provide jobs and transfer technology, critics argue that they exploit host nations. Onimode characterizes them as “monsters that have consistently and systematically stultified economic development” (Onimode 1982). In the Niger Delta,

MNCs have been blamed for environmental degradation and community impoverishment, sparking cycles of militancy and resistance

1.5. Review of Related Scholarship.

Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ogede's *Festering Wounds* have attracted significant scholarly attention for their portrayal of environmental degradation, corruption, and socio-political tensions. Victoria Ogechi Chizea describes *Oil on Water* as a novel deeply engaged with the socio-political implications of oil extraction (7–8). She notes that it critiques government complicity and corporate greed while exposing ecological devastation. Similarly, Thompson emphasizes how the novel subverts the trope of oil as “liquid gold,” showing instead its destructive costs (45–62).

Amitav Ghosh coined the term “petrofiction” to describe the intersection of oil and literature. He argues that *Oil on Water* demonstrates both the human and ecological consequences of oil exploitation, while also highlighting how oil's negative impacts are often hidden within global economic systems. Margaret Busby further observes that Habila uses the journalist figure as a detective and advocate for social change.

Critics such as Nwagbara (2012) and Wenzel (2020) interpret the novel through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism, emphasizing the depiction of abandoned villages and polluted landscapes. Inabo highlights the symbolic meaning of the title *Oil on Water*, where oil and water, unable to mix, represent the perpetual cycle of decay in the Niger

Delta. Pirzadeh (2017) extends this analysis by framing water in the novel as a site of resistance against ecological domination.

Edebor similarly sees the text as a call to ecological consciousness, describing it as “a testament to the environmental mindfulness of Nigerian novelists” (Edebor 3).

Ogede’s *Festering Wounds* has been examined by Michael Onyeisi Ejiodu, who situates the novel within anthropocentric realism. Ejiodu argues that the text explores the destructive impact of human-centered practices on the environment and the resulting cycles of corruption, protest, and resistance (“Anthropocentric Realism” 2023). In earlier work, Ejiodu contends that eco-literature must engage with contemporary challenges such as pollution, climate change, and deforestation to bring about a better society (“Eco-Literature” 2014).

1.6 Thesis Statement.

Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede’s *Festering Wounds* examine the consequences of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta, including environmental degradation, systemic corruption, and widespread human suffering. Both novels underscore the persistent underdevelopment and ecological damage affecting the region.

CHAPTER TWO

ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE IN HELON HABILA'S *OIL ON WATER*

2.0 Introduction

Ecological damage, according to Ramachandra Guha, refers to “the degradation or destruction of the natural environment due to human activities that disrupt ecological balance and reduce biodiversity.” Cheryll Glotfelty, an ecocriticism scholar, extends this definition by connecting ecological damage to literature, describing it as “the cumulative harm inflicted on nature through industrial expansion, colonization, and unsustainable development,” which literature both + mirrors and critiques. Similarly, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines ecological damage as “the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water, and soil, and the destruction of natural ecosystems due to human activities such as industrialization, oil exploitation, and pollution.” This damage holds disastrous impact on the biodiversity, human health and social life of the marginalized people. Negative impacts such as: Human displacement, Health hazards, economic loss, soil degradation, water pollution, air pollution and climate change are seen as a result of ecological damage.

Ecological damage emerges as a dominant theme in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, where the author exposes the devastating consequences of oil exploration and

environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. The novel presents a grim picture of a region ravaged by oil spills, gas flares, and political corruption. Through vivid imagery and a journalistic perspective embodied in the character of Rufus, Habila unveils the intertwined realities of corruption, oil exploitation, and ecological decay. The result is a cycle of environmental destruction, loss of livelihood, militancy, and human suffering, making the theme of ecological damage central to both the narrative and its ecocritical interpretation.

2.1 Environmental degradation and its impact on human life

Oil on Water captures the grim realities of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region, a place paradoxically rich in natural resources but impoverished and polluted. While parts of the narrative occur in Lagos and Port Harcourt, the story is primarily set within the creeks and forests of the Delta, where militant camps, soldiers, and displaced villagers coexist in a volatile ecosystem.

Environmental degradation is defined as “the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water, and soil; the destruction of ecosystems; and the extinction of wildlife”. (ESCWA, Glossary of Shared Water Resources, 2012). Habila uses powerful imagery to portray how corruption and oil exploitation have destroyed the once-thriving ecosystems of the Niger Delta. E.D. Simon *et al.* (2014) assert that the region’s pollution has constituted challenges and concerns for the people of the oil-rich region, noting that the destruction of flora and fauna, combined with the government’s

negligence, has triggered youth restiveness and militancy. They further indict the government for underdevelopment, linking militancy and oil theft to the frustration of impoverished and displaced communities.

Rhema F. E. Oguche and Zacham Bayei add that the Niger Delta “has become a metaphor for environmental degradation and the rape of the ecosystem,” emphasizing that human are complicit in the destruction of their environment. They argue that industrial activities, especially oil extraction, have endangered both man and nature, leading to pollution, ecological imbalance, and social unrest.

In *Oil on Water*, Habila vividly captures these issues through characters and setting. Chief Ibrahim recalls a time when his village lived in harmony with nature.

“Once upon a time they lived a paradise. It was a small village close to a yellow Island. They lacked nothing, fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children growing up before them.” (p38)

Chief Ibrahim told this story to the journalist “Zaq” who was sent on a mission with a younger journalist “Rufus” a young and idealistic journalist who embarks on the journey with zaq to cover the kidnapping of “Isabel floode” a British woman and the wife of an high ranking oil executive. Chief Ibrahim contrasts this idyllic past with the bleak present. He paints a picture of how the land and the people once lived peacefully, lacking nothing for survival until the oilmen and politicians arrived and made an offer to buy the whole

village. Chief Ibrahim also mentioned that those who sold their land to the multinational companies had nothing left after wastefully spending all the money they got from the oilmen. He says:

“Their rivers were already polluted and useless for fishing and the land grew only gas flares and pipelines” (p40).

This transition symbolizes the environmental destruction caused by greed and corruption. The oilmen, backed by corrupt local leaders, purchased the villagers' land and exploited it to ruin. The statement vividly depicts the water and air pollution that occurred as a result of corrupt and greedy leaders who gave up their inheritance for little pennies. And the oilmen who began to extract and exploit the land beyond repair causing environmental damage. The novel opens with the disappearance of Isabel Floode, a British oil executive's wife, which aids in exposing the dark and corrupt practices of the oil industry. It's also sets off a chain that under covers the impact of corruption, militancy, environmental degradation and its human cost. As the narrative unfolds, it became more glaring that corruption and oil exploitation in the Niger Delta is a root cause of environmental degradation in the region. The struggle for oil in the region has led to loss of lives and livelihood, pollution, human suffering and kidnapping. According to Chizea (2025) she asserted that Habila sets a sober tone in his work by depicting a dying environment. She also stated that the once thriving Niger Delta is now a graveyard of poisoned waters, and dead wildlife. Rufus also describes one village as if a

deadly epidemic has swept through it. Rufus states, “There is abandoned oil drilling paraphernalia stream around a concrete platform that dominates the village centric altar”. An inspection of the abandoned houses by the journalists reveals dead and decomposing animals. This probably would have happened because the air is polluted by oil related materials, thereby resulting in the animals inhaling contaminated air, which led to their deaths. The narrator “Rufus” describes the next village as a replica of the previous one.

“It has the same empty swat dwelling, the same ripe and fragment stench, the bareness, 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”. (p8).

The quotation above shows the sad situation of the Niger Delta communities, the gory pictorial description, the bareness of a once fertile land, and the dashed hope of the villagers who have probably been forced by these circumstances to flee the village. Rufus who is perhaps thirty or putting on the inquisitive nature of journalism bends over to have a drink, but to his uttermost shock, he is forced to reel away due to the stench that veered out of the well. He describes it as the smell of something organic perhaps that of a decomposing human, mixed with an unmistakable smell of oil. (Chizea 2025, p. 15) further reinforces the theme of ecological decay.

Later in the text, Rufus describes the ruined landscape:

“The forsaken villages, the gas flares, the stumps of pipes from exhausted wells with their heads capped and left jutting out of the oil scorched earth, and the ever present pipelines crisscrossing the landscape”. (182)

This scene epitomizes abandonment, pollution, and human suffering, the inevitable consequences of environmental exploitation and corruption. “The forsaken villages” depicts neglect and desolation showcasing the human suffering faced by the people as a result of environmental pollution and oil exploitation. It’s also mirrors an imagery of abandonment and neglect in the land.” Gas flares” symbolizes environmental hazards faced by the people of irikefe, resulting in air pollution and causing atmospheric change. Also, “The stumps of pipes from exhausted wells” vividly exposes the diminishment of natural resources and the environmental degradation it brings. More so, these excerpts vividly highlight the damaging effect of oil exploration on the environment and the local communities. (irikefe).

2.2 Human suffering and displacement

Human suffering in *Oil on Water* encompasses both physical and emotional torment arising from ecological destruction and socio-political oppression. Displacement, in turn, refers to the forced relocation of individuals and communities from their ancestral homes

due to conflict, land seizure, or environmental collapse. Also, human suffering pertains to the physical experiences and psychological or emotional pain faced by individuals. This can be as a result of grief, injury, depression or loss. While, Displacement alludes to forced movement or relocation of a group or individual from their original abode. Displacements often occur as a result of natural disasters, Conflict and war, environmental degradation, land eviction etc. Human suffering and Displacement are two interconnected themes that can be explored to navigate the physical and psychological pain experienced by the locals in *Oil on Water*. Human suffering is practically portrayed through characters who weathered or endured poverty, loss and destruction, environmental pollution, violence and militancy in the narrative. Cases of Human suffering and displacement were majorly seen as a result of oil exploitation in the region as the narrative is set against the backdrop of oil exploration in the Niger Delta. The pollution of the environment has also added to the gasoline that increased the fire of Human suffering. Most families lost their means of survival as a result of the pollution caused by oil extraction. This loss of livelihood has also resulted in the economic hardship and untold suffering of the people. The novel opens with Rufus, a young and enthusiastic Nigerian journalist, who reflects and reminiscence on the trauma that shaped his life and that of his family. A fire according to Rufus destroyed his hometown, killed people and left his sister's face disfigured. Afterwards, his father was imprisoned, his mother relocated to her village and Rufus who was away in Lagos, learnt of the tragedy after it damage. This personal devastating experience sets the tone of the narrative's

exploration of human suffering. The story and the region mirrored Rufus's fractured family and the collective psychological trauma of the Niger Delta region. The character of "Boma" Rufus's only sister lost her beauty after her face got burnt by the fire ignited due to the conflict between militants, oil companies and the government. "Boma" suffered both physically and emotionally after her lover "John" deserted her because of her disfigured face. In addition, the old man "Tamuno" who guides Rufus and Zaq by canoe through the creeks to find Isabel floode is also another character used to portray human suffering. "Tamuno" is a fisherman whose means of livelihood was destroyed due to oil extraction and pollution in the region. Majorly, Fishing and farming were the people's means of livelihood. Most families relied solely on fishing or farming for their daily income. But the damage caused by oil explorers who extract without proper clean ups further destroys the flora and fauna. Oil and water obviously cannot mix. The flow of oil on the water surfaces often disrupts aquatic lives by blocking sunlight and reducing dissolved oxygen. The oil physically coats and suffocates the aquatic lives such as birds and marine mammals by damaging their fur and feathers. Oil operations in the area negatively affects residents by contaminating the soil, water and air which has destroyed livelihood such as fishing and farming leading to unimaginable poverty, and health hazards.

Furthermore, Displacement is also another theme connected to the sufferings of various characters in Habila's Oil on Water. Several villagers left their homes due to the conflict between the soldiers and the militants.

“The rigs went up, and the gas flares, and the workers came set up camp in our midst, we saw our village change right before our eyes. And that’s why we decided to leave” (41).

This account was made by “Chief Ibrahim” who narrated to the journalist “Zaq” on how they left their original abode after the oilmen forcefully took their land, and killed “Chief Malabo” who happened to be chief Ibrahim’s uncle, because of his refusal to sell the land as proposed by the oil companies. He also stated “We left, we headed northwards, we’ve lived in five different places now, but always we’ve had to move”.(41) This pattern of forced migration underscores how oil exploitation leads not only to ecological destruction but also to social fragmentation and loss of cultural identity. This statement further explains the theme of human suffering and displacement showing how the people had to move from their own inherited land due to corruption and oil exploitation of the oil companies. Another instance of displacement was further explained by the narrator Rufus

“The place looked desolate: the only signs that a community had once thrived here were a few sticks jutting out of the water, pieces of straw from roof thatches scattered in the mud and a pole of garbage under a tree, that was all” (184-185)

This statement made by Rufus when their boat passed the flood plain where chief Ibrahim’s village had once stood symbolizes the desolation that comes with displacement. Overall, Helon Habila’s oil on water examines the theme of human suffering and

displacement through characters such as Boma who suffered not just physically but emotionally after the damage of her once beautiful face and the subsequent abandonment she gets from her lover “John”. Other instances include; the people of Irikefe who lost all they had when the militants stormed the village in search for the white woman “Isabel Floode”. We also see Rufus and Zaq who also had a share in the Niger Delta oil conflict while trying to uncover the kidnapping of Isabel Floode. Zaq eventually passed on due to environmental health hazards that impacted greatly on his health. The novel *Oil on Water* deeply portrayed the devastating effects of corruption and oil exploitation while focusing on how their land, homes and lives were rudely interrupted by the oil companies.

2.3 Environmental impact of oil Exploitation

The discovery of oil in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, in 1956 by Shell-BP transformed Nigeria’s economic landscape but simultaneously unleashed a wave of ecological destruction in the Niger Delta. While oil wealth generated national revenue, it failed to improve local living standards. Instead, it brought environmental hazards, health crises, and socio-economic dislocation. In *Oil on Water*, oil functions as both a symbol of wealth and an agent of destruction. Habila uses it to explore the paradox of prosperity and devastation. Oil exploitation, defined as the destructive extraction and commercialization of crude oil for profit, serves as a metaphor for greed, exploitation, and moral decay.

However, the discovery of oil has generated profit and made significant revenue for the country and it’s has also yielded profit to the multinational companies and some of the

corrupt leaders as depicted in our text. While it brings profit, it has also damaged the Niger Delta communities. *Oil on Water* exposes how the discovery of oil has led to the environmental degradation, loss of lives and livelihoods, militancy and social unrest in the region. The theme of oil can be seen alongside the theme of exploitation. The discovery of oil, technically brought about a high level of oil exploitation and corruption in the Niger Delta region. Basically, Oil Exploitation pertains to the destructive exploration and extraction of oil in the Niger Delta. In other words; it is the extraction and use of crude oil for economic gain or development. This Exploitation involves, exploring, drilling, extracting, refining and marketing oil resources for profit. This exploitation symbolizes Avarice and abuse of oil resources at the expense of local communities. The discovery of oil caused major conflicts in the region and in our text. It fueled the issue of the kidnapping of Isabel Floode, the wife of a British oil executive "James Floode" The kidnapping which brought the two journalists "Rufus and Zaq" into the narrative to inquire of her safety. This incident made Rufus and Zaq exposed to firsthand experience of oil spills, displaced villages, human suffering and environmental pollution. Rufus's descriptions provide striking visual imagery of the environmental impact:

"The patch of grass growing by the water was suffocated by the film of oil each blade covered with blotches like the liver spots on a smoker's hand" (8-9)

The excerpt showcases some figures of speech, making it literary. For example, the phrase “like the liver spots on a smoker’s hand” is a simile because it uses “like” to compare two unlike things. This phrase is also a sign of damage or decay, graphically emphasizing the harm caused by oil and comparing the damaged grass blades to human suffering. The passage also uses personification: “The patch of grass growing by the water was suffocated by the film of oil.” Here, “suffocation” is a human action attributed to grass, a non-human object. The grass is portrayed as if it could suffer and breathe, which humanizes the environment and amplifies the emotional impact of its destruction. The excerpt powerfully depicts environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region. The visual imagery of grass suffocated by oil reveals the destructive impact of pollution. The grass represents nature and innocence, while the oil symbolizes industrial pollution and corporate exploitation, highlighting the harmful effects of oil exploitation on the environment. As Rufus describes this, he reminisces about the first village they encountered and states, “The next village was almost a replica of the last.” He also evocatively mentions similar characteristics seen in communities devastated by oil exploitation. Rufus continues:

“The same empty squat dwellings, the same ripe and flagrant stench, the barrenness, the oil slick and the same indefinable sadness in the air”. (p8).

This statement highlights how Habila’s *Oil on Water* uses vivid imagery to depict the impact of oil in the Niger Delta. The repeated use of the word “same” emphasizes

environmental stagnation through anaphora, a rhetorical device where a word recurs at the beginning of successive clauses. The barrenness and oil slick serve as metaphors, symbolizing both emotional desolation and spiritual pollution affecting the land and its people.

The phrase “indefinable sadness in the air” metaphorically conveys a pervasive, collective grief. “The barrenness of the oil slick” vividly illustrates the destruction of a once-prosperous region, now unable to sustain life and stripped of its productivity. The oil slick also symbolizes the loss of hope and dignity among displaced communities who have lost their inheritance and livelihoods. Rather than bringing prosperity, oil has resulted in emptiness and grief for the indigenous people. As the narrative continues, Rufus recounts their journey through the devastated land in search of Isabel Floode.

“The merger landscape was covered in pipelines flying in all directions sprouting from evil smelling, oil fenced earth. The pipes crisscrossed and interconnected endlessly all over the eerie land. We walked inland, ducking under the or hopping over the giant pipes, Our shoes and trousers turning black with oil” (p35).

This excerpt vividly depicts the physical impact of oil exploitation. The scene captures and describes a polluted and devastated environment dominated by oil pipes, painting a grim picture of a landscape overshadowed by industrial infrastructure. It shows how the oil companies overtook their land with no single atom of regard for the people and the

ecosystems .The visual imagery of shoes and trousers turning black with oil symbolizes not just physical pollution or environmental degradation but also an economic and moral corruption that stains but the guilty and the innocent. Habila uses Isabel floode as a stark portrayal of this instance.”Isabel floode” who only came on a mission to restore her marriage got entangled in her husband’s mess and the Niger Delta Oil conflict .She suffered greatly despite her innocence. Also, it reflects how deeply the environment has been devastated and altered by oil and its corporate exploitation.

Oil exploitation in Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* is clearly mirrored through vivid imagery, characters and settings.oil has impacted negatively on the environment, resulting in oil-spilled landscapes, health hazards, deforestation, loss of lives and biodiversity.

CHAPTER THREE

CORRUPTION

3.0 Introduction

According to Basel institute on Governance “Corruption is commonly defined as the abuse of public power for personal gain”. Corruption does not only lead to personal gain but can involve gains for a collective entity such as a political party, a corporation, or a group of people. Gain is not limited to financial gain only but explicitly also include non-financial gains, and in particular the preservation or increase of a person or an entity’s position of power and influence. More so, corruption is not reduced to the monetary form of corruption that is bribery, but that a wide range of behaviors, such as conflicts of interest, patronage, nepotism, embezzlement, influence peddling or the manipulation of legislative processes with an ulterior corrupt objective are understood to be subsumed by the notion of corruption. Meanwhile, Chinua Achebe from his work *The trouble with Nigeria* (1983) in page 1, states that “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership, Corruption he says has permeated every facet of Nigerian life”. Achebe views corruption as both systemic and moral life, deeply tied to poor governance. Ruky Divine Ogede majorly explored the theme of corruption in *Festering Wounds* to expose the ills of corruption caused by oil exploitation in the Niger Delta Region. This

chapter aims to expose while sanctioning corrupt leaders. And also to investigate how oil exploitation leads to corruption. Similarly, Osaghae (2007) and Ogbondah (2009) observe that Nigeria's political economy is characterized by pervasive corruption that exacerbates inequality, hinders development, and erodes public trust.

3.1 Corruption and Environmental Negligence

Ekiyor in his broad view of corruption defined it as the unlawful use of official power or the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. According to Kliitgaard(1988) "Corruption equals monopoly plus Discretion minus Accountability.($C=M+D-A$)". klitgaard presents corruption as likely to occur when an official has monopoly power, discretion, and no accountability. While, Environmental Negligence pertains to the default in exercising proper care to prevent harm in the environment. This often includes careless actions and inactions that lead to the degradation of the environment. It can also be viewed as the failure of not taking the necessary safeguard to protect and secure the environment. This can procure serious environmental consequences, such as: pollution, loss of wildlife and biodiversity, resource depletion, climate change and high risks of natural disasters. However, corruption and environmental negligence is a profound theme that was evocatively explored in Ruky Ogede's *Divine Festering Wounds*. To navigate the impact of corruption in the text. Corruption and environmental negligence are critical issues in the Niger Delta and in the text. Majorly, corruption is often the architect of environmental negligence. The corrupt practices of the multinational companies and the greedy chiefs

who represented the government resulted in environmental negligence causing ecological damage in the region. Oil in the Niger Delta region, which ought to be a source of wealth and a significant blessing to the indigenes became a curse in disguise. The discovery of oil has obviously led to the devastating state of the region. It has also increased the issue of corruption amongst the government and the greedy elders who wanted to secure a future for themselves at the expense of the development of the region. This discovery has also led to the neglect of the goose that lays the golden egg. Various instances in Ogede's *Festering Wounds* depict corruption leading to environmental negligence. *Festering wounds* is a prose work set in Ofousu, a fictitious oil rich community in southern Nigeria. It deals with the subject of environmental degradation and corrupt practices. It articulates its remote causes, dramatizes its effects and the politics behind these man-made problems and how it crumbles the nation. Ruth Epochi-Olise (2022) notes that "Ogede sees environmental degradation as a result of bad governance, greed-infested leadership, and the insensitivity of multinational oil companies whose actions have caused untold hardship among the people." This observation is evident throughout the text.

This masterpiece "Festering Wounds" tells the story of oil spillage, corruption, and deterioration which has led to the shattering of hopes and dreams of the indigenes of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, especially the youths. It passes the message of hope to the current generation and the coming one that the situation in the Niger Delta can be changed for good without violence or crime. Ogede, (2022). The novel explores the devastating effect of corruption and the obvious destructive relationship with the

environment..*Festering Wound* highlights the destructive nature of unchecked power and corruption in a society, Ogede views it from an anthropocentric angle where humans place their own needs above the needs of others, which leads to communal suffering, underdevelopment and social unrest. The work suggests that the selfish and self-centered disposition to the environment and governance creates a continuous cycle of decay and environmental desolation leading to resistance and ultimately threatening the well being of the society. In addition, Ogede's *Festering Wounds* connects the theme of corruption directly to the environmental degradation of the environment, suggesting the exploitative practices and lack of accountability through corrupt governance. The story also suggests that literature can be a strong tool for creating public awareness about environmental and societal issues. Corruption encompasses various sectors in *Festering Wounds*. The narrative vividly captures how corruption affects the economic sector through the diversion of public funds by corrupt elders of ofousu. characters such as: Chief Dogo Mok, Chief Zhouli, Chief Tombra, and Chief Ronami are all perpetrators of corrupt practices in the community.(Ofousu). This fact was vividly mirrored in the passage openly exposing the corruption and environmental negligence in Ofousu.

“Our people die every day as a result of one sicknesses or the other.The money that is provided by the oil companies around has not been Used to maintain the communities, the money is steadily looted by our peopleWho call themselves elders of the community and these have made the Community to be underdeveloped” (p12).

This statement vividly pictures a grim act of corruption by the elders of Ofousu which has led to environmental negligence. This statement was made by Munabo's government teacher who stated in her class where she taught on the topic "Public Opinions" and stated that "The money that is provided by the oil companies around has not been used for the purpose it was sent for.

In this statement, Ogede through the character of the teacher tends to expose the ills of corruption by indigenous leaders. and this shows that corruption does not just spring up solely from the multinational companies but also from our indigenous people who get carried away by greed. This also states that corruption by elders of Ofousu has contributed widely to the problem of environmental negligence birthed by oil wealth in the community.

Furthermore, Elders of ofousu serve as representatives in dealings with the government. There are various forms of economic corruption in Ogede's *Festering Wounds*; such as "Embezzlement, Money laundering, misallocation of Resources, favoritism and Nepotism. Accor Prof. Dennis Rondinelli defines embezzlement as diverting public funds into private accounts, which undermines governance and development. Embezzlement is a white-collar crime, a term Edwin Sutherland introduced for offenses committed by individuals in positions of trust. These crimes typically involve deception or fraud for financial gain and are often committed by influential members of society. In Ogede's

Festering Wounds, embezzlement is portrayed as a form of corruption. This definition highlights that such crimes are not limited to traditional street crimes and such can involve acts of deception and fraud for financial gain. This emphasizes that the perpetrators of white-collar crime are individuals who hold positions of influence and are generally seen as respectable members of the society. Furthermore, this act of embezzlement was vividly portrayed in Ogede's *Festering Wounds* as a form of corruption; it does depict characters like Chief Dogo Mok who was from Oloibiri community, and other elders who often held meetings at the town hall to discuss the problem facing the community and to proffer solutions to them. This act of corruption in ogede's *Festering Wounds* sprang up when the Government sent money to the community, for the execution of new projects and development of the community. This was stated by Chief Dogo Mok in a meeting at the town hall in chapter 2 of Ogede's *festering Wounds*.

“The Government sent some money to us for executing some projects in the Community and the vice president will come to commission them.

The sharing formula will be as follows “. (p23).

This news, which supposedly ought to be a cause for celebration for the Izon people became a means for embezzlement and corrupt practices. The sharing formula did not sit well with most of the elders because it was partially distributed. This was a major form of

dispute among the people because the money allocated to a particular community was greater than the one of another community. The elders believed that the money should be shared equally among them and not otherwise. However, this statement was the beginning of corruption amongst the people.

“The elders kept on taking a peek at the bag as Dogo Mok’s boys gave the money to them one after the other. Chief Ronami and Chief Tombra took Ofousu’s share and went home happily. They have not seen such a huge amount of money in a long while. They resolved to take from the money, and then present the rest to the elders of their own community. (25)

This passage uses visual imagery to help the reader picture the scene and understand the characters’ emotions and actions. Here are the main examples of imagery in the text: Visual imagery of the elders’ curiosity and anticipation: “The elders kept on taking a peek at the bag...” This creates a vivid picture of the elders repeatedly glancing at the bag, suggesting their eagerness and curiosity about its contents. Visual and tactile imagery of the money being handed over: “...as Dogo Mok’s boys gave the money to them one after the other.” The reader can imagine the physical act of money being handed over, one by one, building a sense of suspense and excitement. Emotional imagery of joy and satisfaction: “Chief Ronami and Chief Tombra took Ofousu’s share and went home happily. They have not seen such a huge amount of money in a long while.” The use of “went home happily” and the reference to the “huge amount of money” evoke the joy and

amazement the chiefs feel, helping the reader to sense their satisfaction and pleasure. Imagery of greed and secret plans: “They resolved to take from the money, and then present the rest to the elders of their own community.” This suggests a secretive, almost sneaky action, as the chiefs plan to keep some of the money for themselves before handing over the rest. It creates an image of plotting and self-interest. Summary: The imagery in this passage appeals mainly to sight (the peeking, the money being handed over) and emotion (happiness, greed), helping the reader visualize the scene and understand the characters’ feelings and motivations. Similarly, this page reveals and exposes the corrupt intent of leaders placed at the corridors of power to represent and serve the people. Majority of them did not use the money for the construction of roads, and development of the community rather they used it for their own selfish gain. Unfortunately, this same corrupt leaders are highly placed with men at the top and they are still been celebrated by the locals. and anyone who dared to stand or preach against their ways were terminated or replaced with immediate effect. This was stated in another page of Ogede’s *Festering Wounds*.

“Dogo Mok and his boys are the ones engaging in oil bunkering and kidnapping of white men in the community, yet they’re the most connected people and celebrated people in the same community that we all live,” he Said sadly. Talking about what to do in the present circumstances, Munabo thought for a While, his father did not have too many choices. The elders of his community Would not hesitate to embezzle the money

meant to develop the community if he failed to collect his share. The thought of challenging Chief Dogo Mok was enough to cause him to worry. In a recent past, a chief who had dared to preach against embezzlement in a meeting was found dead by the bush side. (Pp26-27) .

This statement made by Chief Ronami when his son Munabo sadly stated that his father has compromised and has taken sides with chief Dogo Mok to enslave the people of Ofousu. simply captures the corrupt society we live in, where those sitting at the corridors of power commit all forms of atrocities and get away with it.

In addition, corruption which is the misappropriation of public or private office for selfish interest has far-reaching consequences across various sectors. Corruption, hinders economic development and this was vividly depicted amongst the people of ofousu.

“Adegadiza laughed saying,”they call for meetings every day. Is there any effect of the meeting on the community? Is there any meaningful development in the community now?development is a gradual process, I firmly believe that this community will become a paradise one day.” Ronami maintained. “But not when there are corrupt elders around,”Munabo chipped in. (19)

This conversation between Adagadiza, Ronami and their son Munabo. Openly detect that corruption in ofousu is a major hindrance to development and growth. In essence, the

failure of the elders in commencing the projects which they were allocated funds for is a major qualm to the development of the Niger delta region.

More so,Chief Zhouli who was also a party to the corruption in Ofousu exposed this fact unknowingly.

“Talking about corruption,from the top to the bottom is rotton and ravaged with Corruption. The FCT is where the fate of this country is decided as the fate of Ofousu is being decided in the town hall meeting” He did not know when he Spat the last word out.That was a secret which anyone in Ofousu was not aware of. The elders shared this secret alone”. (Pp62-63).

This excerpt further exposes the secret of corruption and corrupt practices amongst the leaders in ofousu.Chief Zhouli who was speaking to an unnamed woman spat out these words, but later wished he could retract his statement. His words were heavy secret only the Elders of Ofousu shared. This also explains the grim fact that major decisions affecting the lives of the people were been decided in the town hall meeting without the knowledge of the villagers who were unfortunate victims of their wrong decisions.

Furthermore, the discovery of oil in the region is a major source of corruption leading to environmental negligence. Characters like Chief Ronami and Chief Zhouli who were representatives of Ofousu channeled the money meant to construct the motorway into their pocket for the benefits of their family. Poverty was also a source of corruption

amongst the people. This is portrayed through the character of “Chief Ronami” Munabo’s father, whose home was constantly flooded by water swatted in black oil and debris, which made his son Munabo curious.

“Ronami grinned, sighed and said,” you’ve grown up my son. Even if I tell you the problems of this community, do you have anything to do about it? The swamps, the stench of Sulphur and other gases that we inhale are caused by our leaders” (11)

This statement made by Chief Ronami to his son Munabo captures the suffering of the people. This human suffering and impoverishment is majorly caused by the leaders in Ofosu, who yielded wholeheartedly to corruption and decided to neglect the environment for selfish gains.

Corruption and environmental negligence are two themes showcased in Ruky Divine Ogede’s *Festering Wounds*, to expose the corrupt practices of leaders and how it’s eventually transcends into environmental negligence, making the environment unfit for human living.

3.2 Resistance and Suppression

Ogede’s *Festering Wounds* also portrays the theme of resistance and suppression of whistleblowers in a corrupt system. According to Historian E.P Thompson, “Resistance arises when communities perceive economic practice as unjust or violating traditional

norms, prompting collective action to defend their moral standards". While Michael Foucault views resistance as a complex and multifaceted concept that emerges in response to power relations Foucault argues that resistance is not external to power, but rather an integral part of the power dynamic. The term Suppression according to Karl Marx is a tool of the ruling class to maintain power and control over subordinate classes. He argues that suppression is often used to prevent revolutionary consciousness. This two major themes are core in the next and was portrayed by characters such as; Keloni, the daughter of Chief Dogo Mok who resisted against the corrupt practices of the elders through her debate, and was suppressed by her father. "Mr Raton" the principal of Ofousu secondary school, is also another major character who stood against corruption and met his waterloo. several instances from the text portrays resistance and the suppression that seldom follows.

"No need to stress yourself muna, revolution is the only solution to this problem. They call our people terrorists and guerilla fighters because we fight for our rights. And now we have been given the share of it and our elders cannot use it to develop our communities and create employments for our youths that graduated from the University. Things have remained the same in the community, no meaningful Development." (p14).

This statement made by Douye while conversing with Munabo, regarding the current ill state of their school and the need for a social reform and self liberation in ofousu. It's

simply portrays an act of resistance from the teenagers, who obviously were not comfortable with the situation. Douye's form of resistance is revolution as stated in the excerpt that revolution is the only solution to the problems of corruption in the community. He also highlights some failures from the elders on Ofousu who were greedy to the core. Resistance in Ofousu emerged as a result of the corruption ravaging the environment and the society at large. It was also as a result of the money sent by the government for projects execution that was embezzled by the elders in their various communities. Thus, creating a continuity for underdevelopment, environmental degradation and pollution. This resistance took off with Keloni, Douye and Munabo through their debate titled "Post-Militant Era is better than the Militant Era in the Niger Delta". This subtly exposed the corrupt nature of the elders in Ofousu. Another instance was also portrayed by Munabo after his father Chief Ronami brought home the money meant for the construction of roads in Ofousu. Munabo accused his father confidently for compromising while also stating that;

“His dream was to be a Vanguard to the people, a messiah, a voice crying

In the community, enjoining all and sundry to desist from embezzling the

Money allotted to them, saying no to underdevelopment of the communities.

In fact, the school debate was to address the problems of the community

By creating awareness on the need to come together for the development of

The Community” (p28).

This assertion briefly creates another atmosphere portraying resistance through Munabo who strongly protested against the act of corruption from his father. "Vanguard to the people" is a metaphor that implies leading the populace in a similar manner to how an army's vanguard leads the way. It suggests leadership, protection, and pioneering. Biblical Reference:"A messiah" refers to the biblical character who, according to Jewish and Christian faiths, is the anointed savior or deliverer. "A voice crying" is a clear reference to the biblical expression "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," which is most notably connected to John the Baptist, who cleared the path for Jesus. It represents an urgent or prophetic summons to action or awareness. When taken as a whole, these components conjure up the picture of a prophetic leader urging people to reform or find salvation. He also clearly states that the goal of the debate was to create public awareness while resisting against the corrupt act of the elders. Past heroes such as Dukana,Bori,Kensaro-Wiwa were also mentioned in the text as those who resisted and played their part in the struggle against oppression and corruption in the Niger Delta.

Furthermore, Resistance in ofousu was seldom accompanied by suppression through Characters such as; Keloni,Douye and Munabo who were oppressed by their parents. keloni in particular was forced to live Ofousu because of the debate she organized in ofousu secondary school which brought to limelight all the evil act of the elders,

including her father “Chief Dogo Mok”. Mr Raton, the principal of Ofousu secondary school was also terminated for been a party to the debate competition.

“She is not going back to that school again. since my enemies decided to use her

Against me, I won’t fold my hands to watch them spoil her before my eyes.

She will leave that school of politics. The old rogue that calls himself principal

Liaised with the elders of the community” (47)

This excerpt portrays some metaphors "My enemies decided to use her against me" is a metaphor that depicts the person (her) as a tool or weapon in a conflict. Instead of seeing her as an individual with her own agency, she is depicted as something that the speaker’s enemies manipulate or exploit to cause harm or disadvantage to the speaker. The phrase emphasizes the idea of being exploited in a strategic or harmful way within a struggle or rivalry.

"The old rogue"

The term "rogue" here is a metaphor for a deceitful, untrustworthy, or morally questionable person. Calling someone an "old rogue" suggests that this person (the principal) has a long history of dishonest or unscrupulous behavior. It conveys a strong negative judgment about the principal’s character, implying cunningness or trickery rather than respectability. Both metaphors deepen the sense of conflict and mistrust in the

excerpt. This statement made by Chief Dogo Mok after the debate symbolizes the suppression that follows after the act of resistance. He also had fears due to the fact that his daughter was standing up and resisting against his corrupt act. “Ebiere”,keloni’s mother was equally surprised and wondered if keloni was been influenced. Several acts of suppression sprang up from keloni’s parent after the debate.

“I will find out soon whoever that is feeding you with those words.

If it is your teachers that are feeding you with that rubbish, I will

Get them down soon. Thank God you’re not going back to that school again

The driver will be taking you to Abuja very early tomorrow morning” (p50).

This excerpt paints a grim picture of parental suppression. Keloni was suppressed by her father simply because she created a platform where truth was subtly told, exposing evil and resisting against corruption. The death of Mr Raton also validates the fact that resistance brings suppression.

“They said he was killed because of the competition that held

In his school,”Chief Zhouli reported”. (p62)

This statement explains the act of corruption also called deadly suppression that extends to terminating those who resist. Individuals who speak out are often oppressed or eliminated. The goal of Chief Dogo Mok who had a hand in the death of Mr Raton is to create fear in the heart of the locals and to discourage further resistance.

Conclusively, Resistance and suppression are two themes explored in Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. Resistance was explored in order to challenge and expose the corrupt practices of the elders of ofousu even at great personal risk. While, suppression which refers to the deliberate act taken by leaders to threaten and silence whistleblowers. In order to maintain corrupt practices was mirrored in ofousu to navigate the sufferings of the people, particularly those who resist against corruption.

3.3 Environmental Impact of Corruption

Corruption is portrayed as a deep rooted societal ill that significantly affects the environment. Corruption has diverse impact on the environment as portrayed in Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. Corruption holds severe negative consequences on our natural habitat, extending to the lives of individuals in the region. According to Ruth Epochi-
Olise *Festering Wounds* deals with the subject of environmental degradation and corrupt practices in Ofousu. she asserted that Ogede sees environmental degradation as a result of bad governance, greed-infested leadership and insensitivity of multinational oil companies whose ill-treatment and evil deeds have caused untold hardship among the people and have practically destroyed the communities and nation at large". (Epochi 2022). The impact of corruption on the environment in Ogede's *Festering Wounds*, includes: Environmental degradation, pollution, Environmental negligence, misallocation of environmental funds and its role in promoting unsustainable development. Several instances depict environmental degradation in the text.

‘Muna emitted a loud hiss and said to his mother, “Black oil everywhere, can’t the Oil companies find solutions to the stench of this oil? Everywhere is Swampy and nowhere to play”. (p10)

This statement was made by Muna the son of Chief Ronami and Adegadiza when a hump shaped mud cracked in from the walls, creating a gash for body of water swatted in black oil and debris and flowed inside and thereafter the water flowed to Muna who was curled up in a fetal position enveloped in the cold. This made Muna annoyed and wondered if the oil companies cannot find solutions to the oil stench causing environmental pollution in Ofousu. This instance graphically portrays the effect of oil exploitation and corruption amongst the oil companies in Ofousu. This often leads to environmental ruin. This was portrayed through the character of “Muna” and Chief Ronami’s family as a whole. The scene also depicts the poverty and wretchedness of the people as a result of the environmental degradation in the region. And as the story unfolds, we see “Keloni”, the daughter of the most corrupt politician in oloibiri community “Chief Dogo mok” who sets up a debate competition alongside Douye, the son of Chief Zhouli one of the perpetrators of corruption in Ofousu and “Munabo”, Chief Ronami’s son who also worked hand in hand with the corrupt elders in Ofousu to ensure underdevelopment which effortlessly led to environmental damage in Ofousu. However, Mr. Raton the principal of Ofousu secondary school, signed and approved the debate competition and also enjoined them to hit the nail on the head in their arguments and most importantly Mr Raton advised:

“Secondly, dwell on the post militancy realities basing your arguments on the ecosystem; the devastation and despoliation of the environment leading to the Untimely death of indigenes” (p37)

This piece of advice from Mr Raton, Ofousu secondary school principal to Keloni and her friends openly exposes the terrible state of the ofousu and its negative impact on the indigenes. This statement vividly pictures the grim fact that environmental degradation has a devastating impact on the locals. Environmental degradation has also led to the loss of lives and untimely death of poor indigenes as stated by Mr Raton. Another instance of environmental pollution was stated by Nick one of Chief Dogo Mok’s men who helped in carrying out his duty duties. Nick asserted during their meeting with chief Dogo Mok after the assassination of Mr Raton who was murdered in cold blood by chief Dogo Mok after the debate competition that exposed the evil deeds of the corrupt leaders in the community.

“There are living in mansions and big duplexes but we’re living in swamp
And trenches, inhaling sulphur released in the Ecosystem while they are
Sleeping in their cozy homes with air- conditioners”. (p66)

This statement made by Nick though exposing the environmental hazards faced by the people due to corruption and poor governance was also made to justify their evil. As he earlier stated,

“This paddle was the source of our income before now, but since they

They have polluted our ecosystem, what else would they have people

Like us do? (65)

Nick emphasizes by stating the fact that they once had a reliable source of income until the multinational companies came and over shadowed the land. Hence, polluting their ecosystems with oil and contaminating the waterways. And this obviously, has led to the loss of livelihood. Consequently, the jobless people began to look for means for survival, such as kidnapping, oil bunkering, and total reliance on the funds provided by the government for development are been embezzled as a result of joblessness or loss of livelihood. Making the youth engage in all forms of vices, such as kidnapping and illegal oil bunkering which often lead to untimely death.

Corruption as portrayed in Ogede’s *Festering Wounds* impacts the environment negatively. its result in pollution, underdevelopment, and also promotes unsustainable development through the character of Chief Dogo Mok and other elders. who made use of low standard materials in constructing the roads after embezzling the funds meant for the construction of the roads. “He stopped talking when philipan brought out his gadgets and placed it on the road. The machine read ‘Low standard! Low standard! Low standard! Everyone rocked with laughter. Philipian said that the road will only last for a year” (p111) this excerpt validate the problem of corruption in Ofousu which has also promoted

unsustainable development as seen in the quote when Philipian stated “the road will only last for a year”. At the end of the narrative, corrupt leaders like Chief Dogo Mok and other chiefs were arrested for embezzlement of public funds. Chief Dogo Mok was also sentenced to death by hanging for all the numerous atrocities he has committed. While, the elders were sentenced to ten years in prison.

Ultimately, Ogede’s *Festering Wounds* explored corruption as a lens to expose how corrupt leaders directly expose the environment to crises which has resulted in underdevelopment, loss of lives and livelihoods, environmental degradation and pollution.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY

Corruption and Oil Exploitation are two interconnected themes. And this essay has succeeded in exploring the themes of corruption and oil exploitation in Helon Habila's *Oil On Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. This study has analyzed the literary texts using Ecocriticism theory to vividly investigate the impact of oil Exploitation and corruption in the Niger Delta. Both authors explored the devastating effect of corruption and oil exploitation on the indigenous people of the Niger Delta. Also, Habila and Ogede wrote to expose how multinational oil companies, in conglomeration with local leaders, exploit the people of their natural resources, while neglecting the region. Both literary texts portray the theme of ecological damage, cooperate negligence, conflict, violence, displacement and untold suffering. However,for literature to be functional, it must address contemporary issues such as flooding, pollution, depletion of the ozone layer ,environmental negligence global warming etc. As such urgent steps must

be taken to preserve the biosphere. In this regard, this research work successfully x-rays ecocriticism with a view to assess the contribution of literature to the environment.

This essay, also expands the fact that there are various environmental consequences that proceed as a result of the ecological degradation that may procure significant harm to the biosphere. Helon Habila used the technique of literary journalism to search for truth through the character of Rufus and Zaq who went in search for the British woman “Isabel Floode.” While, Ruky Ogede majorly explored the theme of corruption and the failure of the nation’s stage. He also evidently portrays the theme of domestic colonialism through the character of chief Dogo Mok and other greed-infested chiefs from the various communities who through greed deprived the people of their rights to good living. This study vividly shows that corruption does not only spring up from multinational companies but also from traditional institutions through indigenous leaders who steal at the expense of the communities’ development.

Furthermore, Corruption and Oil Exploitation are two interwoven themes that are both evident in the literary texts. The discovery of Oil in 1956 at Bayelsa state has fueled the marginalization of the indigenous people of that region, and has also brought about the division of the community. This act of marginalization by the multinational companies erupted militancy as a form of resistance in Habila’s *Oil On Water*. Militancy, which took off as a form of protest became an ugly menace as the so-called militants such as the character of the “Professor” justified their act of kidnapping as a means of survival.

While Ogede through the character of “Nick” who aided Chief Dogo Mok in carrying out his dirty duties justified their act of eliminating innocent people who stood against their corrupt practices as a means to keep what belongs to them. because, the oil companies has taken their livelihood. However, the impact of corruption and oil Exploitation are innumerable. We can evidently see through this essay, the degradation and pollution of the environment, loss and destruction, psychological problems such as; frustrations, anger and disillusionment were mirrored in the society and portrayed through various characters. Both consummate raconteurs exposed vividly the tangled web of greed, violence, loss, corruption and suffering that obviously defines the region.

Additionally, both novels underscore the complexities of the Niger Delta region and the corruption that sets in as a result of oil. This research has also examined, through various themes that the owners of this oil wealth such as the Niger Delta people have been given less attention and due compensation has not been well given. Rather, the people are conflicted, displaced, impoverished and disillusioned. We see through the narrative; the loss of lives due to health hazards and also as a result of corrupts leaders as we see in *festering Wounds*.

Finally, Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede’s *Festering Wounds* present a gloomy reality of how the wealth from oil has developed into a curse rather than a blessing. Hence, leading to corruption, environmental collapse, moral decay, and untold

hardship. Both novels serve as an eye opener to enlighten the public while calling for justice, accountability and a sustainable development in the Niger Delta.

CONCLUSION

The Niger Delta, despite its oil wealth has ironically come to represent poverty, violence, and environmental destruction. The literary works, such as; *Oil on Water* and *Festering Wounds* offer realistic yet fictional depictions of how corruption and oil exploitation have wreaked havoc on communities, such as "irikefe" in *Oil on Water* and "Ofousu" in Ogede's *Festering Wounds*. These villages' environment and means of subsistence were ruined by pollution and oil spills brought on by oil extraction. Conflicts between government forces, oil firms, and insurgents also caused them to be traumatized, displaced, and subjected to violence.

Nonetheless, certain conclusions have been drawn from a critical evaluation of both texts. In addition to reflecting the sociopolitical reality of the area, these literary works are potent critiques of ineffective governance, corporate negligence, and the human cost of

resource exploitation using Ecocriticism as a literary theory to examine the relationship between literature and the natural environment. In Habila's novel, the imagery of oil polluted rivers, and slick coated animals present a landscape deeply harmed by exploitation showcasing a key ecocritical concern. Some of the major findings include the exposure of the fact that corruption fuels environmental exploitation. Additionally, I have discovered during the course of this study that corruption actually undermines environmental regulation. Both texts reveal how government officials such as the local elders collude with oil companies allowing oil exploitation to go unchecked, resulting in devastating oil spills and pollution. More so, I have also discovered through the literary texts that resistance follows oppression. Characters like "Keloni" and her friends "Douye" and "Munabo" in *Festering Wounds* were threatened and suppressed, echoing real life cases like "Ken Saro_Wiwa" who was suppressed for standing up for the Ogoni people and resisting against oil exploitation through activism. Militancy also emerges as a reaction to injustice. Lastly, I have discovered that oil is a symbol of both wealth and curse. Oil represents prosperity but brings only pain, war, and environmental collapse to the host communities as seen in both literary texts. Also, there is a lack of development despite the oil wealth. The resource curse is a major finding in both texts as members of indigenous communities suffer untold hardship, pain and psychological trauma due to oil exploitation. Both novels represent the Niger Delta environment as a victim of human greed and corruption.

Furthermore, numerous studies have explored the environmental and political issues in the Niger Delta but only a few have thoroughly examined how Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Ruky Divine Ogede's *Festering Wounds* portrays the intricate relationship between oil exploitation and corruption. Both novels present a vivid fictional reflection of the realities of the Niger Delta exposing the grim fact that corruption is a root cause of oil exploitation. Most works tend to analyze militancy or environmental destruction in isolation, overlooking the underlying systemic corruption that actually fuels these crises. There is lack of detailed research that uses Ogede's *Festering Wounds* and Habila's *Oil on Water* to critically expose how corruption facilitates exploitation leading to environmental degradation, displacement, and the breakdown of social structures.

Additionally, limited scholarly attention has been given to how journalistic storytelling in literature like in *Oil on Water* humanizes these issues for deeper impact. Both texts also tends to fill the "knowledge gap" by enlightening the masses on the happenings in the region and raising awareness. Both novels shed light on the complexities of the Niger Delta which is often underreported or misunderstood in mainstream media. Habila and Ogede also gives a voice to the marginalized by offering a platform through which their stories can be heard. This study tries to fill the "Accountability gap". Ogede's *festering wounds* especially, portray lack of accountability from the so called community elders, such as 'Chief Dogo Mok' and other greed infested leaders. While, Habila tries to fill this gap by highlighting the oil companies lack of accountability for their actions, which often leads to environmental degradation and destruction in the land. By

portraying this accountability gaps, both literary texts critically sheds light on the need for greater transparency, accountability and justice for the marginalized. The literary text vividly humanizes the consequences of greed and oil exploitation, emphasizing the need for those in power to be held accountable for their actions. There is also limited comparative analysis of how different Nigerian authors portray these issues through fiction, particularly in combining the narrative strategies, characterdevelopment, and thematic alignment across two texts. However, this study fills the gap by: Analyzing corruption as the root cause of multiple crises, such as: environmental, social and political in both literary texts. This research work also uses literature as both a mirror and critique of real world events thus contributing to environmental and political studies. The study also uses literary devices, such as: metaphor, simile, personification, imagery to draw attention to corrupt driven suffering in the society.

This study contributes to scholarship by expanding the conversation on the Niger Delta literature to include newer voices like Ruky Divine Ogede, alongside established authors like Helon Habila. This work also documents the intersections between environmental degradation, corruption, and social disintegration in literary form, giving a voice to the marginalized.

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