

ILLUMINATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESPOILATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUBVERSIONS IN ANGLOHONE LITERARY TEXTS

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ABSTRACT: *The current environmental crisis is traversing socio-economic and political discourses across all disciplines. In literary studies, researches have been carried out on environmental quagmire in Africa. The concerns of these studies range from environmental degradation occasioned by reckless exploitation of resources, the changing images of the environment to representation of the neocolonial destruction of the environment among other issues. However, the examination of the emerging subversive socio-economic activities which not only pit the global capitalists against the locals but also escalate environmental crisis remains unexplored. This paper therefore explores A Casualty of Power (2016) and Oil on Water (2010) as testaments of the locals' subversive activities such oil theft, violent sabotage, prostitution, kidnapping and ransom seeking as well as fear mongering as means of subverting the infallible image and hegemonic powers of the global capitalists. These activities cause more disastrous environmental despoliation never witnessed before. The choice of the texts is informed by the fact that although the extractive activities are conducted by the British and Chinese owned and run corporations, the texts portray a similar pattern of thought in terms of resource exploitation in Africa. They show the darker side of resource exploitation by the global capitalists in the continent. Using postcolonial ecocritical theory and adopting analytical research design as an analysis method, the study establishes that through the subversive activities, the infallible hegemonic image of the global capitalists is overturned, and the locals disempower the global powers that are responsible environmental ruination in Africa.*

KEYWORDS: illumination, environmental despoilation, socio-economic subversions, Anglohone literary texts

INTRODUCTION

To Africans 'ecoscaples' like land, water, and forests are regarded as crucial entities for eking out livelihoods. This is why they view the reckless exploitation of these spaces by global capitalists as provocative and as such protest the abuse and over exploitation. Under the garment of development and modernism, the hegemonic powers have extended their wealth creation strategies by "robbing the periphery of its natural wealth " (Panitch and Leys 2004, 189).

Arguably, the capitalists' process of gathering wealth is responsible for environmental quagmire experienced in the continent. The multinationals and international trade organizations in cohorts with the respective African governments are blamed for the environmental woes bedeviling the region. Ojaide (1994), using the Niger Delta region, graphically paints the picture when he laments thus:

By the 1960s the rivers had been dredged to allow pontoons or even ships to enter our backyard. Shell BP had started to pollute the rivers, streams and farmlands with oil and flaring gas. Forests had been cleared by poachers and others to feed the African Timber and Plywood Company in Sapele. Streams and marshes dried up. Rubber trees were planted in a frenzy to make money and were soon tapped to death (p15).

Although the passage demonstrates the impact of environmental imperialism in the Niger Delta, the same scenario is replicated across the continent. The extractive activities of the multinationals led to water and land pollution, deforestation, poaching and loss of livelihoods. As a result the locals began to resist the fore-mentioned environmental and socio-economic injustices attributable to the exploitative activities of the multinationals. Habila (2010) and Chipanta (2016) locate the subversive activities inaugurated by the locals in order to counter the foreign entities' socio-economic powers excised on the resources and environment. According to the Webster dictionary, subversion is a systematic attempt to overthrow or undermine a government or political system by persons working secretly from within. Alison (2011) traces the meaning of subversion from its Latin origin relating to the military and gastric disorder. He concludes that subversion is "an overturning or uprooting" strata of dominant power or authority.

In the context of this study, subversion is viewed from two fronts. Firstly, the foreigners subvert the authority of national governments in matters such as laws, the national economy, the people's culture, and knowledge. Secondly, the locals subvert the authority of the powerful foreigners by engaging in violent sabotaging of pipes, oil theft, kidnapping and ransom seeking, fear-mongering, and prostitution.

Choral (2016) identifies subversion as an element of ecological degradation. He argues that "ecodegradation" is in diverse forms and is considered as undermining the natural interrelatedness of organisms in the ecosystem (p.129). From Choral's argument, it is clear that subversion is the overturning of the natural order, which lends itself to retribution. Therefore, this chapter picks cue from Choral's (2016) postulation and maintains that environmental degradation, as occasioned by the exploitative activities of the foreign companies, gives rise to trails of activities that upturn socio-economic and political conditions and relations in a postcolonial African context.

Consequently, the people are pushed to desperation and thus exhibit counter-productive behaviour considered culturally and economically disorderly. For instance, the ordinary members of the community in *Oil on Water* (2010) undermine the authority of the multinational companies as well as the government by vandalizing oil pipes, while in *A Casualty of Power* (2016), the powerful foreign entities are reconfigured by the locals by engaging in transactional sexual relationships.

Therefore, this paper examines how the locals subvert and undermine the authority of the foreign companies and international organizations exploiting resources in Africa by engaging in oil theft, violent sabotaging of pipes, prostitution, kidnapping and ransom seeking, as well as fear-mongering.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Oil Theft and the Impossibilities of Eco-economic Restoration in the Niger Delta

Katsouris and Sayne (2013) observe that oil theft in Nigeria started with the top military personnel in the 1970s and 1980s when Nigeria was under military rule. Later, at the advent of agitations for resource control by the indigenous communities, oil theft took a new turn. The locals, organized by youths, appropriated violence by sabotaging and vandalizing pipes. By these engagements, the indigenes demanded their rightful share from the oil economy run by multinational corporations. They wanted to extract, process, and market oil (Ikelegbe 2005, p.105). When the authorities failed to meet their demands or paid little attention, they resorted to violent activities such as oil theft, vandalism, and kidnapping. These strategies are deployed as means of eking out a living as well as expressing protest at the exclusion of the locals from the coveted oil enterprise.

Oil on Water (2010) is a story of the aftermath of oil spills on land and water in the oil-rich Niger Delta. Notably, the pre-industrial period in the community was blissful and life fulfilling. Rufus, the protagonist, notes, "Once upon a time, they lived in paradise. It was a small village close to Yellow Island. They lacked for nothing, fishing and hunting, and farming and watching their children growing up before them, happy" (p.38). This excerpt demonstrates the happy life the villagers led before the industrial encroachment by the foreign oil explorers. However, the commissioning of oil companies disrupted the everyday life of the community in many ways. For example, the industries discharged wastes into water sources and land, compromising the quality and water of water and the fertility of agricultural land.

As a consequence, fishing stock drastically reduced while farm produces declined. Since the community depended on fishing and farming, the people had to face hunger and economic crisis. The situation pushed people to find alternative ways of earning a living as well as subverting the powerful oil extractive companies; hence they engaged in oil theft.

Thus, oil theft in *Oil on Water* (2010) is a political act of subversion. The locals are up against a strong opponent in multinational companies working in cahoots with the current government. They cannot face them in open head-to-head combat because they would be outmatched and outnumbered. They, therefore, resort to guerilla tactics and acts of vandalism to subvert the powers that be. Oil theft is a weapon deployed by the locals to counter the environmentally destructive strategies deployed by the oil companies and reconfigure their powers.

The youth hack pipelines causing grim environmental destruction. Their activities are motivated by the reality that the companies have little impact on their lives, yet the local political elites reap maximally from the extractive operations of such companies. Therefore, the vandalism of pipes

by the youth, which leads to oil spills and leaks, is informed by political and economic suppression perpetrated by multinationals.

Oil as a resource plays a significant role in developing and sustaining local economies after the destruction of the traditional sources of livelihood such as agriculture and fishing. Oil manufactures and bolsters political power for those who control it. In a seeming power struggle between Major and his captives, Major demonstrates that to control oil is to wield political power when he tells them, “You want to control oil? Control this. This will teach you to terrorize innocent villages” (p.55). These sentiments by Major demonstrate that oil is both a political and economical tool for either empowerment or disempowerment. It is clear that to reconfigure the foreign entities’ power gained from oil wealth; the locals resort to oil theft.

In as much as oil theft remains a significant economic venture for the locals, it poses dire economic consequences to the oil companies. Rufus’ father vividly brings this out: No, not in this town. There’s nothing here... This is the only business booming in the town. I buy from little children, I buy cheap, and I sell cheap to the cars that come here at night. Emmanuel, John’s father, is my partner... it’s not a bad business, really, we get by, we give the police a little something to look the other way, but sooner or later they’ll get greedy... where do the children get the petrol you buy from them? They come to me with their little gallons and I don’t ask them where they get it (p.64) The extract is vital in illustrating that oil theft is a structured syndicate with an extensive network of perpetrators, including the police, the locals, children, militants, political elites, and oil companies. The involvement of children portrays the extent of desperation. One would expect that children are protected and fended for by the adults, yet the adults entrench the acts by involving children in the dangerous retaliatory game. The children’s involvement symbolizes that this practice will continue for generations to come unless some dramatic action is taken to change the people’s economic situation.

The police force is a government agency whose mandate is to maintain law and order and protect personal and institutional property. Unfortunately, the Niger Delta region police have been hooked into the booming but ‘criminal’ business of oil theft. In an expected turn of events, the police provide ‘protection’ to the people involved in oil theft ventures. They enable them to access, refine, and sell oil in exchange for financial bribes. While it baffles me to realize that the police collude with the masses to deny the government revenue, it is a fact that they promote corruption to bring down the very government they are paid to serve. The situation demonstrates that the police have joined the citizens in undermining the government and the multinational oil companies. Besides, it shows that the police, like ordinary citizens, suffer the same fate.

Worse still is the fact that the government has failed to address the widespread corruption by the police. The question begs: What policies or systems has the government put within the police service to prevent police involvement in illegal business? The answer to this question is much more revealing. Part of the government’s failure owes to the widespread corruption, which remains a significant threat to most African governments. The West has persistently painted Africa as

overtly corrupt as contrasted to the developed nations. While this picture may be largely accurate, it is also a fact that multinational companies from the West have also been responsible for fueling corruption in Africa, as evident in the international cartels that coordinate poaching activities in Africa.

Mr. Floode in *Oil on Water* (2010) is a perfect illustration of the double talk by the West on corruption in Africa. He tells Rufus, “Nigeria could easily become the Japan of Africa, the USA of Africa, but the corruption is incredible” (p.107). The comment is a blatant contradiction because it is clear that Mr. Floode castigates corruption in public but practices it privately. For example, his company pays the military and the political elites to protect the oil fields and refineries while ignoring the gross environmental damage sanctioned by industrial activities. Therefore, Mr. Floode’s condemnation is hypocritical as he undeservedly adopts the high moral ground when judging African nations. This is why by subversive activities, the people combine forces to thwart western hegemonic thoughts on environmental conservation practices.

Whereas oil theft is indeed a means of eking out a living for the locals, it is also a fact that oil theft institutes detrimental damage to the already desecrated land. The numerous oil spills affect both the land and water. This is what Rufus expresses when he observes, “rivers were already polluted and useless for fishing, and the land grew only gas flares and pipelines” (p.39). The statement reveals that fishing and farming, which are the mainstays of the rural communities, have been rendered redundant. Besides, the quality of water is compromised, making it unfit for human consumption. The locals and upturning water from oil-polluted sources. For instance, the village well which is known to provide water for drinking is described thus:

In the village centre we found a communal well. Eager to drink, I bent under the wet, mossy pivotal beam and peered into the well’s blackness, but a rank smell wafted from its hot depths and slapped my face; I reeled away, my head aching from the encounter, something organic, perhaps human, lay dead and decomposing down there, its stench mixed with that unmistakable smell of oil (p.9). Later in the text, the Chief Priest corroborates this observing that, “even the water in the wells turned red” (p.129). The two extracts reinforce the extent of water contamination in the area. With no alternative in sight, the villagers have no option but to depend on the same water for drinking. Much as it is possible to blame the locals for the state of water contamination in the village because of sabotage, it is true, to a more significant extent, that involvement is coercion by the government and multinational oil corporations. How would the locals sit and watch while the more money is generated from oil sales, the more their poverty level rises? They have to do something to change the matrix. The immediate thing is to demystify Western-created ‘illness’, which in the true sense is poverty. An elder dismisses the notion of sickness and tells the doctor, “I am not ill. I am just poor” (p.91). The older man sees the broader picture of poverty that the Western created narration about poverty. It makes them expose themselves to the dangerous conditions that cause them such diseases. If they had an alternative, they would live in a safer environment and not be sick.

The environment is the biggest loser in the tussle between the locals and foreign oil companies. Apart from the contamination, the environment is scorched. When the locals realize that the oil companies have intensified surveillance on oil theft, they change the strategy by setting oil reservoirs on fire. The fires cause huge environmental damages and social implications. Mr. Floode talks of daily explosions in the place while the narrator captures the situation when he reflects that:

Almost five years ago I came home from Lagos after graduating from journalism school and found half the town burned down. The newspaper said villagers brought it upon themselves by drilling into the pipelines to steal oil (p.107)

The passage reveals that other sabotage activities like deliberate explosions accompany oil theft. Sadly, the resultant effects are deaths and family disintegration. Rufus reflects on what happened to his family, “my father was imprisoned...my mother returned to her parents’ village, where she still lives. And my sister burned” (p.3). Readers can only sympathize with the family while the oil companies and the government cannot run away from the blame.

Unfortunately, there are no structures to compensate the affected families, let alone confirming the claimed sabotage. Instead, the government promptly unfairly imprisons ‘suspects’ without any tinge of trial while the rest are intimidated and blackmailed. The government is in league with the oil companies. This is in tandem with Amnesty Report (2013), which observes that:

Sabotage and oil theft are serious problems in the Niger Delta. However, international oil companies are overstating the case in an effort to deflect attention away from the oil spills that are due to corrosion and equipment failure (p.6).

It is also interesting to note that the government combines forces with the foreign companies in thwarting compensations to the affected families by lumping blames on the locals. Whereas the government and companies view oil theft as a crime, the locals gain economic and political powers over the oppressions. The loss suffered by the companies is expressed in Mr. Floode’s bitter and desperate sentiment toward Rufus. He notes, “our pipelines are vandalized daily, losing us millions...and millions for the country as well. The people don’t understand what they do to themselves” (p.107). It is needless to emphasize that oil theft promotes low oil productivity hence incalculable loss to the companies and country. The stolen oil is sold cheaply in the black market while the state loses revenue that could have been used to fund development.

Having realized that it is difficult to win the war against the locals, the capitalists pay the militants not to vandalize the pipelines. This demonstrates how acts of sabotage significantly shift the political configurations in favour of the locals. In their desperation to protect their economic interest, the foreign capitalists are forced by the local militia to play ball. Although the power plays revolve around economic and political issues, the core environmental issues are sacrificed at

the altar of personal interests by both sides of the conflict. As such, the environment is the biggest loser.

Besides, oil shortage, which results from oil theft and vandalism of pipes, negatively impacts international oil prices, which has ripple effects globally. Major, a militia group leader, for instance, captures the situation when addressing his captives. He tells them, “In Port Harcourt oil companies are being bombed, police stations are being overrun, the world oil price is shooting through the roof” (p.59). In this case, the violent actions of the local militia succeed at having ramifications globally. This helps them get back at the global economy that they blame for impoverishing them for ages. Therefore, the largely oil-driven world economy is subverted by little-known groups acting desperation in some villages in Nigeria.

In the Wake of Environmental Degradation, Sexuality Upsurges

As Giddens (1992) observes, sexuality is a social construct “operating within fields of power, not merely a set of biological promptings which either do or do not find direct release” (p.23). To echo this, Brickell (2009) claims that power is “intrinsic to sexuality” (p.57). Thus both males and females promote or undermine dominance in sexual activities. Hence, power and sexuality are intertwined. Understanding sexual contexts are central in the comprehension and expression of power. The sexual relationship between the foreigners and locals is two-pronged. While the local women seek economic empowerment through sexual activities, the influential male foreigners rely on them to maintain dominance.

Moreover, it is proper to argue that whereas the local women are seen as victims of sexual exploitation, they, in equal measure, gain power in this seemingly perceived unequal relationship. Through transactional sexual relations, the local women manage to intriguingly dismantle the class barriers between them and the mighty foreigners whom they succeed in dragging down to their level on a moral scale. The local women sleep with the foreigners and get money in return in a manner that can be interpreted to sabotage the infallibility image crafted by the rich and powerful foreigners. Thus, the women, considered loose virtue, succeed in deconstructing the foreigners' supremacy and ‘purity.’ From this perspective, the power play in the sexual relationships seems to tilt to allow the local women to supplant imperialism their way. From this perspective, the power play in sexual relationships encapsulates local initiatives at undercutting imperialism.

Foreign workers' sexual relationships with the locals in *A Casualty of Power* (2016) are kin to sex tourism which has been going on in Africa over the years. O'Connell (2004) explains that sex is widely understood as part of the tourists' /explorers' experience, whether with other tourists or locals. Pucia (2009) echoes the argument and brings a twist to it when he observes that:

A person who travels to a place where he/she does not usually reside and who, pleasure seeking, has sex with a native or immigrant person during his/her leisure time-it does not matter if people go to the countries with the specific motive of having sex with native or if they happen upon the possibility after they arrive in the host country (p.536)

The two imply that tourists travel to tourist destination areas with the sole intention of sexually exploiting the locals. Besides, foreign workers engage in sexual relationships in pursuit of pleasure. Kalala is a product of a brief love relationship between a Norwegian aid worker and a young pretty Zambia girl. The Norwegian had marriage Kalala's mother marriage and a trip abroad, thus getting his way with her. However, Kalala's mother only learns she has been duped when her partner leaves Zambia two months before the child's birth without a word and "never to be heard from again" (p.137).

As represented by Kalala's mother, it is indisputable that the local women end up in frustrating, traumatizing, and disappointing sexual arrangements with the foreigners to earn a living. This is in tandem with a sex worker's confession in Lin (1989) that:

Often times I don't feel anything during sexual encounters. There are times when I am hurt. If I keep doing it, it is because I need money for myself and my children. I have learned to do motion mechanically in order to satisfy my customers. If you do it very well they will come back- and that means money (p.74)

Although not specific to the Zambian context, this statement represents the plight of many third world-women who engage in sexual intercourse with foreigners for certain favours. As is the case with Kalala's mother, they are often pushed into such engagements due to economic reasons.

Kalala, the child born from this ill-fated union, symbolizes the burdens the African continent has to bear resulting from its naïve interaction with the foreigners, as evident in the unbeneficial exploitation of Africa's resources by foreign agents. The affair between Kalala's mother and the Norwegian exposes the expatriate foreigners as exploiters who are only interested in Africa for its short-term pleasures and nothing more. In a way, therefore, Kalala's mother, despite being the victim, in this case, subverts the authority of the foreigner by exposing his true picture for all to see and ridicule.

The relationship between Kalala's parents is an intriguing one when viewed from the politics that define the contact between the foreigners and the locals. Whereas the father displays dominance over the mother, the mother taints the father's hegemonic supremacy and purity. The father's dominance is revealed because he determines the reward for sexual pleasures between him and Kalala's mother. Moreover, because of his economic stability, he can choose the extent and duration of the relationship. This is evident in his termination of the so-called marriage contract, leaving Kalala's mother or son with no compensation.

Worse still, he has no regard for the emotional state of both Kalala's mother and the son following their abandonment. This demonstrates that there is structural power inequality between the two partners. Hence, Kalala's mother comes out as submissive and powerless while the father remains dominant. However, from the point of view of power dynamics between the two parties, Kalala's

mother demystifies the foreigner's apparent superiority. Having an affair with a local African girl under cheap pretenses strips the Norwegian expatriate of the superiority status he allocates himself due to his origin.

Furthermore, the foreigner's commodification of Kalala's mother's body symbolizes foreign corporations' commercialization and control of African resources and government. The global capitalists exercise and extend powers over resource extraction, processing, and marketing while the host communities are left to wallow in persistent poverty. Consequently, the African environment is ruined, resources plundered, and the foreigners responsible for such atrocities flee the affected African countries to go and develop their own countries.

Nonetheless, Kalala's mother reconfigures the foreigners' power by denting the infallible image of the foreigners who emerge as exploitative and insensitive. The relationship of Kalala's mother with the foreigner helps to account for many halves casts children sired and abandoned by the foreigners. These children, like Kalala, suffer an identity crisis and further exploitation at the hands of their very 'parents.' As a consequence, the children seek refuge from the Chinese. Kalala, for instance, joins CMMC as a mineworker where he is oppressed. He is later killed in cold blood by his Chinese supervisor, Jinan Hu. This situation symbolically implies that African's attempt to seek refuge from the Chinese after exploitation by the West turns out worse.

Of pertinence is the fact that the Zambian government is playing politics with the people's lives. It is expected that a stable state should tackle poverty and improve livelihoods, yet it has failed to do that, hence contributing to women's disempowerment. Besides, it should appropriately respond to local and international challenges by developing legal frameworks that guarantee not only the sovereignty of its people but also their safety and security. In contrast, the government has allied with the foreigners to exploit both the local women and resources. The District Governor declares this to the people:

Your demands are outrageous. They cannot be met as they are. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars at stake for the country. This is money that can and will make a difference in the lives of the very same people you are purporting to represent (p.171).

The District Governor is institutionalizing foreign dominance over the people. The government has seemingly cut a deal and cannot afford to lose it. To sustain dominion over the government, foreign companies use bribery as a strategy. It is clear from the preceding that the District Governor benefits the mining companies and does not value the lives of the many children born and abandoned by the foreigners and are currently suffering under the exploitative systems enacted by the Chinese.

Violent Sabotage and Environmental Sanitization

The invasion of multinational companies and international organizations in Africa suggests a pursuit of economic and political power for their mother countries. The extraction, processing, and marketing of natural resources within the continent are marred with irregularities and illegalities.

This is attributable to the companies' indiscriminate exploitation of resources and the loose enforcement of environmental conservation policies. The companies exercise socio-economic and political powers over the host communities by ensuring total control of the resources. They tactfully, and in some cases, forcefully grab the resources.

The capitalists understand that to exercise power over the host communities is to control their resources. This is why the newly commissioned oil company in *Oil on Water* (2010) invades the village and takes a "sample of soil and water" (p.40) which they send to their countries for quality evaluation. Sending the samples abroad is suspicious and ill-informed because it demonstrates the foreigners' reluctance to develop capacities and infrastructures on-site in Africa, perpetuating continued over-reliance on foreigners. Africa is treated as a massive field site that sustains laboratories and industries abroad to benefit foreigners. Thus, from the word go, the foreigners take an exploitative trajectory.

However, on the surface, the companies masquerade as developers who are out to empower the locals economically, yet this is a chance for the foreigners to gain acceptance and foreground their intrusion and extractive activities. Some locals are capable of seeing through these devious schemes and resist. This is why after the foreigners take samples from the village, the villagers come out to protect their resources by fighting them back. The narrator notes, "There was a brief skirmish, nothing too serious-one of the oil workers escaped with a swollen jaw, the other with a broken arm" (p.39).

Having received the approvals for the suitability of the resources for exploitation, the foreign entities begin to strategize on how to acquire such lands legally. They coin a cliché that allows them to commoditize land and offer lucrative prices to lure the locals into selling. The community is persuaded to accept money in exchange for their land. The narrator conjures up the picture when he says that:

One day, early in the morning, Chief Malobo called the whole village to a meeting. Of course, he had heard the murmurs from the young people and the suspicious whispers from the oil people, all wondering what it was he had been discussing with the oil men and politicians. Well, they had made an offer, they had offered to buy the whole village, and with money- and yes, there was a lot of money, more money than any of them had ever imagined-and with the money they could relocate elsewhere and live a rich life. But Chief Malobo had said no, on behalf of the whole village he had said no p.38-9

This excerpt brings to the fore the callous nature of the foreigners who lure the villagers into accepting 'lucrative' offers so that they can assess and control rich-resource lands. For the villagers, the pertinent question is: Where else would we find our heritage, identity, livelihoods, and the purported rich life if not on our land? To the foreigners' surprise, the villagers reject the offer arguing it is on the land where "their fathers were buried...and though they may be rich, the

land had been good to them, they never lacked for anything” (p.39). There is no doubt that the foreign agents sabotage the culture of the people through the commercialization of their heritage. Furthermore, the foreigners sabotage the power of the Chief through coercion. The narrator confirms this saying:

One day they came with a whole army, waving guns and looking like they meant business. They had a contract they said Chief Malobo had signed in prison before he died, selling them all of his family land, and that was where they'd start drilling and whoever wanted to join him and sell his land would be paid handsomely, but the longer the people held on, the more the value of the land would fall (p.41).

This extract reinforces the fact the land is 'legally' taken, and the foreigners establish their political and economic bases within the community. It is ridiculous that the government's authority is also subverted as they have been reduced to serving foreigners' will. For instance, they provide the foreigners with the army for evicting their citizens.

Angered by the deprivation of livelihood, the locals form militia groups whose objective is to resist economic and political subjugation by foreign entities. They fight to restore environmental sanity as well as economic and political power. As Henshaw points out, the armed groups are determined to fight to the core for what they consider the right course. Henshaw declares to the journalists, Rufus and Zaq, “We are the people, we are the Delta, and we represent the very earth on which we stand...No. I have never met the professor. We're a different group, the four of us...This land is ours, after all” (p.154-5). The language of resistance against foreign powers is discernable from Henshaw's tone, particularly in his conclusion. The group is determined to subvert the powers of the oil companies and restore environmental sanity as well as the sovereignty of the land. This is in tandem with Ngugi's (1982) proposition that “violence, to change an intolerance unjust sound order, is not savagery, it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man (p.28). Therefore, the endless violence to which the region is accustomed aims to correct environmental, social, and political injustices sanctioned by the multinational corporations. The activities of the militia groups represent a continuation of the oil agitations of MEND and MOSOP, which sabotaged pipelines, stole oil, kidnapped, and even killed oil workers (Fabola and Oyenyi 2015, 99).

A major subversive strategy used by militants against foreign entities and the government is vandalism, particularly the bombing of oil installations. This guerrilla tactic is meant to disorient and disempower the capitalists. The militia groups demarcate territories where they control resources and exert their unorthodox powers. Any form of encroachment into their territories degenerates into an outbreak of violence. For example, Professor Ani, a leader of one of the armed groups, orders for the shooting of Jamabo for creeping into his territory. Operating from their designated territories, militia groups bomb oil reservoirs to get the capitalists' attention and the compromised government. Although oil bombing imposes gross environmental challenges on the locals, the militia has no option left. People grapple with the dilemma of surviving in a desecrated

environment and violently tackle multinationals and the military, which are the ones responsible for their current situation.

There is a firm resolve amongst the people to fight for environmental restoration and economic empowerment. Professor Ani confesses to Rufus that:

I am a soldier, I know how to fight and will never stop fighting till I achieve my goal. By this time tomorrow, one of the major oil deposits will be burning. I want you write about it, tell them I am responsible. I can't tell you more than that, but I can tell you the war is just starting. We will make it so hot for the government and the oil companies that they will be forced to pull out (p.220).

The war that the excerpt refers to is both environmental and economic. In conjunction with the oil companies, the government has provoked the locals leaving them with war as the only option for solving problems. The spirit of determination in the locals to succeed is unmatched. They want to reverse the power equation by having a firm grip on resource control.

The 'weaponization' of the youth as agents of subversion against the political elites and the companies are exposed by the description of Professor Ani's background. The narrator says that: A secondary school dropout, a backstreet thug and bully who went to jail for the first time at fifteen. When he came out at twenty he became a party thug in the pay of his local government Chairman, who was up for reelection. He was convicted of murder at the age of twenty-two and sent to prison for life. He broke out of jail at thirty, by which time he had realized there was no future in being a petty thug and hired gun. Luckily for him, his politician godfather had reinvented himself as a pro-environmentalist and won a seat in the senate. But they parted ways when Ani was bought by a rival politician, who paid him to kill his erstwhile godfather, the assassination attempt was foiled, and his godfather called the police on him, and that was when he moved into the swamps and joined a rebel group that specialized in kidnapping foreigners for ransom (p.148). This passage illustrates that Professor is a school dropout who resorts to atrocities on behalf of the politicians to reconfigure the economic situation. He is motivated to move into 'the bush' for economic empowerment. It is ridiculous that the politicians take advantage of the desperation of the youth to pursue their interests. The youth on the other hand are determined reconfigure the powers possessed by political elites,

Ironically, the government has deployed its military to fight back the militants agitating for environmental sanity. It is a mockery that the same foreigners who destroy the environment are the ones who receive government support. "The oil companies pay the soldiers to keep the militants away" (p.35). Why would the government turn against its people? The benefits reaped from the oil companies are more significant than the mere protection of the citizens. The government primitively collects money from the extractive activities of the oil companies. The situation ignites protests and violence amongst the youths. The media is said to be full of "shots of picketing youths holding placards in front of an oil-company building in Port Harcourt" (p.107). The presenter talks of how "corruption sustained poverty, how oil was the source of revenue, and how because the country was so corrupt, only a few had access to that wealth" (p.107). This segment is a country

steeped in poverty with only a few benefits yet rich in resources. The media attributes this corruption to the government and oil companies. The greatest losers in the corruption sagas are the communities that are compelled to survive. Indeed, “The only way they could avoid being crushed out of existence was to pretend to be deaf and dumb and blind” (p.33). As a result they form agitation groups to counter the powerful governments and military.

The subsequent face-off between the militants and soldiers destroys the Island. The confrontation between the militants and soldiers destroys villages leaving in its wake ruins and desperate people. The traumatizing aftermath is vividly captured in the narrator’s voice:

But the soldiers came early the next morning. First they came in a boat, and there were only five of them. They were on routine patrol; they hadn’t known the militants were here, and they ran into an ambush—it was a massacre. They were all killed, instantly, the soldiers must have called for back-up because this morning the helicopter came and started shooting at everything beneath it, indiscriminately, people running and jumping into the water. It was awful. Awful. The water turned red. Blood, it was blood. But in the confusion the rebels slipped away and left the villagers to face the soldiers...now see everything is in ruins. Nothing left, it is a miracle so many are still alive. Miracle. (p.154).

Although the government should restore peace and environmental sanity, it has failed to obtain this. The political leaders have let people down, and the spiritual leaders have taken up the responsibility of rebuilding the destroyed communities. The narrator explains the situation that confronts her when she retreated to the Island, “when she came back she found the military pulling out, and the villagers, led by Naman, who was now the head priest, engaged in rebuilding the shrine and the huts and salvaging anything that they could” (p.223).

Circumventing Power through Kidnapping and Ransom Seeking

The Niger Delta region has borne the brunt of environmental degradation occasioned by the reckless extractive activities of multinational companies over the years. This situation has forced the community's inhabitants to contend with socio-economic hardships resulting in their marginalization and exploitation. The youth in the region have turned into militants because they want to draw the attention of the government and multinational oil companies to the plight of the people. Hence, they have resorted to kidnapping foreigners and seeking ransom to raise money from the kidnapped hostages.

Oil on Water (2010) is a story about the kidnapping of Mrs. Isabel Floode, the wife of a British expatriate petroleum engineer in Port Harcourt. Before the abduction, the government dismissed several other kidnapping activities as criminal. Nonetheless, the ‘crime’ has escalated with several other cases demonstrating the prevalence of the activity in the community—for instance, a seventy-year-old woman, a three-year-old girl, and an albino, among other people. The militants adopt kidnapping to articulate protest against the foreigners’ exploitation of the environment without compensating the affected families.

Salomon, Mr. Floode's driver, conspires with Jamabo, a police officer, and Bassey, his neighbour, to kidnap Mrs. Floode to raise money in a well-hatched scheme. In his discussion with Jamabo, he rationalizes the kidnapping and the demand for the ransom as a payment for his wife Koko, who his boss, Mr. Floode, impregnated. He notes that the payment is derived from oil, which the community owns in the true sense. He says:

Payment for all the pain these people caused me a refund for all my investment in Koko... The Oga had insulted me badly... the money wasn't even coming of his pocket: the oil company always pays the ransom... the money come from our oil, so we are getting back what was ours in the first place.

This is a clear indictment of the oil companies that impoverish and oppress the people. It is said that even though Salomon entrusted his wife with Oga, he impregnates her and threatens him with dismissal should he chose to pursue the matter further. From the above statement, it is apparent that the question of resource ownership still lingers. Through the militia groups, the locals are determined to either have control over oil or get the revenue from it while the foreigners cling to the resource and reap all the benefits. Although the government and foreign agencies often publicly rule out the option of negotiating with and paying ransom for those kidnapped, the available evidence is usually to the contrary. By compelling the state and/or the multinational companies to yield to their demands, the criminal outfits succeed at scoring crucial points against those they deem as oppressors.

It is not surprising that the police have joined the civilians in kidnapping the expatriates and seeking ransoms. The action by the police symbolizes the desperation that engulfs everybody in the community. Like the rest of the community members, they are afflicted with the economic atrocities committed by the powerful foreigners. They want to control the oil economy and, as such, subvert the powers of the government as well as the companies. Hence, they have reneged on their mandate in providing security to all. As a result, morals and laws are thrown to the wind. To illuminate the benefits derived from kidnapping, Jamabo draws an analogy between kidnapping and ransom. He declares, "It is like plucking money off money tree" (p.199). The activity is the quickest way of making a lot of money. This is why there is a mad rush for the ransoms. The groups target vulnerable groups like the old, the young as well as those with disabilities. For example, the capturing of a seventy-year-old woman, a three-year-old girl, and an albino. These vulnerable persons are likely to win the sympathy of many and attract a tremendous amount of money. Symbolically, the kidnapping of these vulnerable persons confirms the magnitude of the desperation of the locals and the determination to subvert the powers that be.

Through kidnapping, the militia groups regain some kind of power against the foreigners who dominate every aspect of their lives. For instance, Professor, a militia group leader, adopts a powerful position that is otherwise invested in the foreigners. The life of Mrs. Floode is in his hands and manipulates her and the husband. With a stern warning to Rufus, he hands over an envelope to him containing Mrs. Floode's hair strands and tells him, "take this envelope to her

husband. It contains more of her hair. Tell him his wife is safe, but after two days, if you don't hear from him, we can't guarantee her safety anymore. We are getting impatient—two days final” (p.209). Professor with finality concludes the case of Mrs. Floode. The husband has no option but to oblige.

Fear Mongering and Reconfiguration of Power

In *Oil on Water* (2010) fear is spread by the militants. Fear simultaneously to the local populace and the foreigners. The militants create fear in the locals, especially those perceived to sympathize with the foreigners and the government. They also reign terror and tension on foreigners whom the militants view as the source of survival challenges. These groups undertake fear-mongering to gain leverage about resource control.

Although the militia groups claim to be fighting for the rights of the locals, they are constantly arousing fear on the very locals. Tamuno expresses fear that pervades the village and considers it unsafe for his son, Michael, who seemingly has a bright future. He pleads with Rufus and Zaq thus:

But see, we go do here? Nothing. No fish or river, nothing. I fear say soon him go join the militants, and I no wan that. Na good boy, I swear, You go like am. Intelligent. Im fit read and write already even though him school close down, but Im still remember to read and write (p.36)

Tamuno sees his son as a potential candidate for militia groups enlistment, which would darken his otherwise promising future hence the desire to exile him. The process through which the militants address resource control is dreading and destructive to both the environment and the local populace.

Moreover, the rest of the villagers are under duress, as is evident in their interaction with the militants. They live in constant fear of being attacked by the militants under the pretext of foreigners' informers. Equally, the foreigners are working with the military to torture those who are mingling with the militants. The arbitrary arrest of Karibi exemplifies this. Rufus notes, “I re-created with as much detail as I could the brutal taking of Karibi, and as I wrote, his words came back to me: He'll be taken to Port Harcourt, where he'll be tried and found guilty of fraternizing with the militants” (p.24). The attacks and counter-attacks symbolize the power tussle between the foreigners and the local populace. The militants regain power by reigning fear over the ordinary members of the community. This, by extension, is to reconfigure the economic and political dominance of foreign oil companies.

The level of insecurity in the Delta region is taking a toll on foreigners. In fact, “some oil companies have already stopped sending expatriate workers to the region, and are even thinking of shutting down their operations” (p.106). Driven by the fear created by the locals, the expatriate workers are out to pay anything to safeguard their lives as well as their counterparts. Mr.Floode implores upon Rufus that, “I have to trust you. You're my only hope, you and Zaq. My wife's life

is in your hands, I know things aren't that good between us, but she's a good person, and she doesn't deserve this" (p.111-2).

FINDINGS

Firstly, the study established that although the host communities' provocative acts such as oil theft, violent sabotage, prostitution, ransom seeking, and fear mongering do not fit within the best socio-economic practices and environmental sustainability, they are informed and shaped by the complex environmental situations of the host communities. When the locals resort to armed conflict and acts of violent sabotage against the multinational companies, this should not be simplistically dismissed a crime. Instead, such actions by the people amount to deliberate acts of subversion meant to supplant the authority of the powerful foreign companies that dominate the oil industry. These acts of sabotage are thus desperate political maneuvers intended to gain visibility and recognition within the dominant economic discourse championed by the imperial multinational agencies supported by the African governments. Such acts by the locals are thus meant to undermine the policies and activities of the companies that comprise their economic wellbeing.

Secondly, the study found out that the environmental misdeeds occasioned by multinationals and the militarization of resources in Africa had bred resistance to protest the fantastic levels of environmental destruction and skewed sharing of revenue accruing from the exploitation of environmental resources. In this conflict pitting two sides, the biggest losers have been the environment and the local people. The militarization of the African resource spaces has often led to the destruction of the very environment both sides claim to protect, as evident in deliberate oil spillage, bombing, and acts of arson. The ecosystem has been heavily jeopardized in the process, and people have lost livelihoods leading to wretchedness.

CONCLUSION

Owing to the imperialization of the environment, the local populace resort to alternative means of undermining the powers of the foreign powers responsible for the environmental destruction. The youth forms militia groups that protest the absolute dominance of the foreigners on resource control and environmental sustainability. Since they cannot face the foreigners head-on, they resort to oil theft, violent sabotage, prostitution, kidnapping, ransom seeking, and fear-mongering to get the multinationals' attention and reconfigure their economic and political powers the global capitalists.

Through the subversive activities, the infallible hegemonic image of the global capitalists is overturned, and the locals gain political powers that warrant the world's attention. Therefore, the chapter establishes that the locals disempower the global capitalists who are exploitative and callous in imperialized spaces.

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