DEVASTATING ECOLOGIES AND RESISTANT VOICES IN TANURE OJAIDE'S THE ACTIVIST AND HELON HABILA'S OIL ON WATER

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Abstract
Devastating ecologies and resistant voices have become principal concerns in contemporary Nigerian literature, particularly in narratives of the Niger Delta. This paper examines The Activist and Oil on Water to explore how environmental ruin and human resistance are mutually constituted. The paper addresses the troubling persistence of ecological degradation caused by oil exploitation and the consequent marginalization of local communities whose voices are repeatedly suppressed. It aims to examine how the texts represent environmental devastation while simultaneously foregrounding acts of resistance that challenge structures of exploitation and silence. Grounded in ecocriticism, the paper draws attention to the dynamic relationship between human experiences and the damaged natural environment. Employing close textual analysis, the paper carefully interprets narrative techniques, imagery, and characterization to determine how the writers construct ecological trauma and resistance. The analysis reveals that the environment is not basically a passive backdrop but an active place of memory, suffering, and defiance. Characters in the texts develop as agents of resistance that confront corporate greed, state neglect, and ecological violence in ways that complicate victimhood. The paper concludes that Ojaide and Habila, in their works, reevaluate the Niger Delta as a tensed environment where devastation coexists with resilience and where storytelling itself turns out to be a powerful tool of resistance against expurgation and environmental injustice.
Keywords: Eco-criticism, Niger Delta, Environmental Degradation, Resistance, Nigerian Literature

Introduction

The Niger Delta occupies a paradoxical position in Nigeria's national imagination. It is at the same time a countryside of immense natural wealth and a terrain marked by prolonged environmental devastation. Since the discovery of crude oil in the region in the late 1950s, the ecological balance that once sustained local livelihoods has been severely altered by continuous oil exploration, gas flaring, and industrial pollution. Rivers that once nurtured fishing economies have become contaminated waterways, while fertile farmlands have steadily metamorphosed into toxic grounds incapable of sustaining agricultural life. These environmental alterations have not only disrupted

ecosystems but have also restructured social relations, cultural identities, and political consciousness within affected communities. Contemporary Nigerian literature has gradually turned toward this ecological crisis. It narratively interrogates the human cost of resource extraction and amplifies voices that resist environmental injustice. Within this literary tradition, Ojaide's *The Activist* and Habila's *Oil on Water* stand as powerful imaginative engagements with the ecological and socio-political realities of the Niger Delta. The texts approach environmental degradation not basically as a physical condition but as an existential crisis that affects memory, belonging, and survival. The narratives reveal how environmental destruction intersects with systems of power, that is, multinational corporations, state institutions, and global economic interests that perpetuate inequality and silence marginalized communities. Foregrounding lived experiences within damaged settings, these texts reposition ecology as principal to questions of justice and human dignity rather than as a passive background to human action.

Eco-criticism provides a useful framework for examining these literary interventions because it emphasizes the interconnectedness between human societies and the natural world. Scholars of eco-critical studies argue that literature plays a decisive role in influencing ecological awareness by exposing how environmental crises are culturally constructed and politically mediated (Buell 23; Garrard 5). In the context of African literature, eco-critical inquiry extends beyond environmental appreciation to address histories of colonial extraction, neo-colonial capitalism, and uneven development that intensify ecological vulnerability (Nixon 4). The Niger Delta exemplifies what Nixon describes as slow violence, where environmental harm develops gradually nevertheless produces enduring social and psychological consequences for marginalized populations (Nixon 2). Ojaide and Habila dramatize this slow violence through narrative forms that capture the visible scars of pollution and the less visible erosion of hope and community cohesion. In *The Activist*, Ojaide constructs poetry-inflected prose that merges political commitment with ecological consciousness. His narrative foregrounds activism as personal awakening and collective responsibility. It portrays characters that refuse to accept environmental destruction as inevitable. The text situates resistance within cultural memory. This suggests that storytelling itself becomes a means of reclaiming agency in the face of systemic exploitation. Similarly, Habila's *Oil on Water* presents a haunting depiction of journalists traversing polluted creeks and fractured communities in search of truth. Through fragmented encounters and shifting perspectives, Habila reveals the moral ambiguities surrounding militancy, corporate power, and state violence. It complicates simplistic binaries of victim and perpetrator (Habila 37). The texts therefore resist reductive portrayals of the Niger Delta. Instead, the texts present it as a disputed ecological and political space impacted by competing narratives.

Importantly, these texts challenge anthropocentric assumptions by granting the environment narrative presence and emotional weight. Polluted rivers, burning gas

flares, and abandoned villages function as witnesses to historical injustice. These ecological issues exemplify collective trauma while simultaneously inspiring resistance. The damaged environment becomes inseparable from human suffering, and demonstrates how ecological crises produce ethical questions about responsibility, survival, and resistance. In this sense, Ojaide and Habila participate in a movement within African literature that reconceptualizes nature as an active participant in historical processes rather than a silent backdrop (Iheka 12). Furthermore, resistant voices in these texts surface through multiple forms such as activism, journalism, communal memory, and storytelling itself. Resistance is not always heroic or triumphant. At times it appears fragmented, uncertain, or morally ambiguous. However, these moments of resistance disrupt structures of silence imposed by political and economic power. In representing characters that speak, document, protest, or simply endure, the texts portray the persistence of agency within conditions of ecological devastation. Literature thus becomes an alternative archive through which marginalized experiences are preserved and articulated.

This paper therefore examines how *The Activist* and *Oil on Water* portray devastating ecologies alongside resistant voices. It argues that the texts reimagine the Niger Delta as a living archive of environmental trauma and human resilience. Through eco-critical analysis, the paper explores how narrative techniques, characterization, and imagery reveal the mutual constitution of environmental ruin and resistance. However, the texts demonstrate that storytelling itself functions as an act of ecological and political intervention, and challenges erasure while envisioning possibilities for justice within damaged settings.

Ecological Devastation, Environmental Justice, and Narratives of Resistance in Niger Delta Literary Studies

Scholarly engagement with Niger Delta literature has positioned environmental degradation as one of the defining concerns of contemporary Nigerian writing. Critics generally agree that literary representations of the region move beyond environmental description to interrogate structures of power, violence, and resistance entrenched within ecological crises. Studies on Ojaide's *The Activist* and Habila's *Oil on Water* therefore surface within an eco-critical and postcolonial discourse that examines how literature mediates relationships between humans, nature, and systems of exploitation. Eco-critical scholarship provides the foundational framework for understanding these texts. Early eco-critical theorists argue that literature restructures ecological consciousness by revealing how environmental problems are socially produced rather than naturally inevitable. Within African literary studies, this approach has been adapted to address colonial extraction and neo-capitalist exploitation, particularly in oil-producing regions. Scholars observe that Niger Delta narratives recurrently portray ecological destruction as inseparable from political marginalization and economic inequality, thereby transmuting environmental discourse into a critique of power relations (Nixon 3-5). This critical orientation has influenced subsequent readings of

Ojaide and Habila whose works foreground environmental devastation alongside human resistance.

Critical attention to Habila's *Oil on Water* largely centers on its depiction of ecological trauma and socio-political instability. Edebor's eco-critical study argues that the text exposes the destructive consequences of unchecked resource exploitation while simultaneously awakening ecological awareness among individuals by dramatizing the interconnected suffering of humans and the natural world (Edebor 52). Rather than presenting environmental damage as an abstract issue, Habila situates pollution within everyday experiences of displacement, violence, and economic deprivation. Similarly, Victor and Ogunpitan interpret the changing countryside in the text as a symbolic representation of postcolonial trauma. They note that environmental ruin restructures identities and communal relations in ways that echo colonial patterns of domination (Victor and Ogunpitan 64). Further studies extend this ecological reading by examining narrative technique and language. Davidson's ecolinguistic analysis demonstrates how metaphors in *Oil on Water* construct ideological oppositions between purity and contamination, thereby reinforcing moral judgments against corporate exploitation and political negligence (Davidson 118). Through evaluative language, the text encourages one to align emotionally with victims of ecological violence. It suggests that stylistic choices themselves function as ethical interventions. Obi similarly argues that Habila's narrative foregrounds silenced victims by highlighting certain ecological realities while exposing institutional erasures that obscure environmental suffering (Obi 91). These studies collectively emphasize that narrative form is fundamental to the text's ecological politics.

Another noteworthy strand of scholarship examines resistance within *Oil on Water*. Ogungbemi contends that the text operates as a form of ecological advocacy in which storytelling becomes an instrument for challenging environmental injustice and exposing neocolonial power structures (Ogungbemi 44). Rather than proposing simplistic solutions, the text presents resistance as complex and morally ambiguous. Omesu and Onwuka expand this argument by interpreting militancy in the text as performative resistance. That is, a symbolic attempt by marginalized communities to reclaim visibility within global systems that ignore their suffering (Omesu and Onwuka 73). Such readings portray how resistance in Niger Delta fiction habitually develops from desperation as much as political consciousness. Ecofeminist critics further broaden interpretations of Habila's work by linking environmental destruction to gendered vulnerability. Michael and Daniel observe that ecological devastation disproportionately affects women and indigenous populations whose dependence on land and water intensifies the consequences of oil pollution (Michael and Daniel 210). Their analysis accentuates how environmental crises intersect with social hierarchies, and reinforces the idea that ecological degradation produces layered forms of marginalization.

While scholarship on Habila is extensive, studies on Ojaide's *The Activist* focus more explicitly on activism and ecological consciousness. Bhuvaneshwari's eco-centric reading argues that Ojaide envisions environmental resistance as a collective struggle rooted in indigenous knowledge systems and communal responsibility (Bhuvaneshwari 6). The text presents activism not basically as political protest but as an ethical obligation to defend ecological balance against multinational exploitation. Similarly, Onyema and Mba emphasize that Ojaide employs satire and social criticism to expose corruption and governmental complicity in environmental destruction. They portray literature as a medium for social accountability (Onyema and Mba 29).

Comparative studies help situate *The Activist* within wider Niger Delta narratives. Olughu's analysis of eco-degradation and activism identifies multiple forms of resistance such as radical, liberal, and reformist entrenched in Ojaide's fictional world. The analysis demonstrates how characters negotiate survival within oppressive ecological conditions (Olughu 48). Such scholarship reinforces the idea that resistance in Ojaide's writing is polygonal rather than ideologically uniform. Beyond the text itself, critics examining Ojaide's oeuvre provide insight into the ideological foundation informing *The Activist*. Nwagbara argues that Ojaide's ecological imagination functions as an art of resistance that challenges ecological imperialism and envisions literature as a tool for remaking the Niger Delta through environmental consciousness (Nwagbara 82). This perspective illuminates how Ojaide's activism is deeply rooted in poetic traditions that merge cultural memory with ecological protest.

Beyond eco-critical readings that foreground environmental devastation, scholars have turned their attention to the narrative construction of voice and agency in Niger Delta literature. This shift recognizes that ecological crises in literary texts are inseparable from struggles over representation. That is, who speaks, who is silenced, and whose suffering becomes historically visible. Critics argue that contemporary Nigerian writers deploy narrative voice not only as an aesthetic device but also as a political strategy aimed at reclaiming suppressed histories. In this regard, the works of Ojaide and Habila have attracted scholarly interest for their ability to transform storytelling into a space of resistance against environmental and knowledge erasure. Postcolonial ecocriticism has been particularly influential in modeling this conversation. Huggan and Tiffin contend that environmental degradation in postcolonial societies must be understood within global histories of imperial extraction and capitalist expansion where ecological exploitation mirrors earlier colonial modes of domination (Huggan and Tiffin 29). Applied to Niger Delta narratives, this perspective reveals how oil extraction reproduces asymmetrical power relations between multinational corporations and local communities. Scholars reading *Oil on Water* through this lens observe that Habila's depiction of devastated sceneries reflects not basically local governance failure but a global economic system that renders certain environments disposable (Ugor 112). The polluted creeks and abandoned settlements therefore symbolize the uneven distribution of environmental risk within global capitalism.

Several critics further argue that Habila's narrative structure itself enacts ecological uncertainty. Okuyade notes that the fragmented journey undertaken by the journalists in *Oil on Water* mirrors the instability of the Niger Delta environment where truth becomes elusive amid violence and propaganda (Okuyade 141). The shifting encounters experienced by the protagonists create a narrative rhythm that reflects disorientation. It suggests that ecological devastation destabilizes physical geography and knowledge certainty. This reading aligns with eco-trauma theory which proposes that damaged environments disrupt narrative coherence because trauma resists linear representation (Craps 63). Consequently, Habila's episodic storytelling becomes formally consistent with the fractured reality it depicts. Attention has also been given to spatial representation in Niger Delta fiction. Spatial critics argue that sceneries in these texts function as political archives that preserve collective memory. Akingbe observes that literary representations of polluted rivers and burning oil installations encode historical experiences of dispossession and resistance that transforms geography into testimony (Akingbe 105). Within *Oil on Water*, movement through waterways exposes layers of ecological violence accumulated over time, thereby linking present suffering with historical neglect. Similarly, Ojaide's *The Activist* reimagines space as culturally meaningful terrain whose destruction signifies an assault on identity itself. Scholars suggest that by emphasizing indigenous relationships with land, Ojaide challenges Western industrial notions that reduce nature to economic resource (Aderemi 88).

Another prominent area of scholarship examines the ethics of witnessing in Niger Delta narratives. Critics argue that characters who document environmental suffering such as journalists, activists, and storytellers serve as mediators between marginalized communities and global audiences. Nfah-Abbenyi maintains that African writers assume the role of ethical witnesses who translate localized experiences into human concerns while resisting exploitative representations of suffering (Nfah-Abbenyi 154). In Habila's text, journalistic investigation becomes morally complicated. It reveals tensions between empathy and professional detachment. Scholars interpret this ambiguity as a critique of media sensationalism. This suggests that representation itself can reproduce forms of exploitation even while attempting advocacy (Adeoti 97). Studies focusing on resistance aesthetics further illuminate Ojaide's narrative project. Okpewho argues that African literary resistance draws from oral traditions that privilege communal voice over individual heroism, thereby redefining activism as collective expression rather than singular rebellion (Okpewho 233). This insight is particularly relevant to *The Activist* where resistance materializes through community consciousness, cultural memory, and shared storytelling practices. Critics observe that Ojaide's blending of poetic sensibility with political narrative produces an affective form of resistance that appeals to moral imagination as much as ideological critique (Udenta 119).

Environmental justice scholarship also contributes considerably to interpretations of

the texts. Environmental justice theorists emphasize that ecological harm disproportionately affects marginalized populations lacking political power. Applying this framework to Nigerian literature, scholars argue that Niger Delta fiction exposes environmental racism operating within national and global economic systems (Alagoa 58). The suffering depicted in *The Activist* and *Oil on Water* therefore reflects structural injustice rather than accidental ecological damage. Literary representation becomes a means of demanding ethical accountability from the state and corporate actors. Recent interdisciplinary studies have expanded analysis by incorporating affect theory and memory studies. Iheka suggests that African ecological texts evoke emotional responses such as mourning, anger, and resilience that enable one to perceive environmental crises as lived experiences rather than distant abstractions (Iheka 47). Emotional engagement thus becomes principal to ecological awareness. In Ojaide and Habila, settings carry affective weight. That is, polluted environments evoke grief while simultaneously inspiring acts of defiance. Scholars argue that this emotional dimension transforms ecological literature into a catalyst for ethical reflection and political consciousness.

Despite these extensive contributions, existing scholarship habitually treats Ojaide and Habila within separate critical conversations. Studies on Habila tend to emphasize narrative ambiguity, journalism, and ecological trauma, whereas analyses of Ojaide foreground activism, poetic resistance, and cultural reclamation. Comparative examinations that analyze how devastation and resistance operate dialogically across the texts remain relatively limited. Consequently, there is insufficient exploration of how ecological destruction generates resistant voices while resistance itself restructures perceptions of ecological crisis. This paper builds upon prior scholarship while addressing this critical gap. Examining *The Activist* and *Oil on Water* together, it investigates how devastating ecologies function not basically as thematic concerns but as generative forces that produce new forms of subjectivity, voice, and resistance. The review of related literature thus demonstrates that while scholars have extensively analyzed environmental degradation and activism independently, the dynamic interplay between ecological ruin and resistant narration requires cavernous critical attention. Such an approach allows for holistic understanding of Niger Delta literature as an evolving discourse where environmental suffering and human resilience remain inseparably intertwined.

Environmental Devastation, Narrative Witnessing, and Resistant Agency in *The Activist* and *Oil on Water*

The ecological imagination of the Niger Delta in Ojaide's *The Activist* and Habila's *Oil on Water* develops from settings violently altered by oil capitalism. In the texts, environmental devastation is not basically described. It structures perception, identity, and resistance. The damaged ecosystem becomes inseparable from human suffering while resistance arises as an ethical response to ecological violation. Through contrasting narrative strategies, Ojaide's activist realism and Habila's melancholic

witnessing, the texts transmute environmental crisis into a narrative of moral confrontation. In *The Activist*, ecological destruction appears first as an intrusion into ordinary communal life. Oil pipelines cut across intimate spaces of survival, and reveals how industrial modernity penetrates rural existence. The narrator recalls that leaking pipes "crossed playgrounds of children, crossed cassava farms of the women, and even went through many parts of the village" (Ojaide 153). Situating pipelines within spaces associated with childhood and sustenance, Ojaide exposes ecological violence as an assault on continuity itself. The land ceases to nurture. Instead, it threatens. The resulting blowout produces an apocalyptic inversion of nature when "the Uto River was literally burning" and poisonous fumes engulfed "plants, wildlife, and humans around for days" (Ojaide 206-07). The image of a burning river destabilizes natural order. It suggests that industrial exploitation has rewritten ecological laws. Fire consumes water, and survival becomes uncertain within an environment stripped of predictability.

Habila's *Oil on Water* approaches devastation through sensory immersion rather than political narration. As journalists travel through the creeks, the environment reveals its corruption gradually. The water has "turned foul and sulfurous," while "dead birds" hang from branches with wings "black and slick with oil" and "dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots" (Habila 9). The accumulation of tactile and visual details metamorphoses pollution into atmosphere. Death is not episodic but continuous, suspended in air and water alike. Where Ojaide dramatizes catastrophe, Habila depicts aftermath. Villages appear emptied of vitality, marked by "the same oil slick and the same indefinable sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above the punctured zinc roofs" (Habila 10). Environmental ruin becomes psychological presence. The land itself mourns. The texts insist that ecological devastation is neither accidental nor natural. In *The Activist*, oil companies knowingly abandon communities during crisis. Despite awareness of the disaster, the company "sat in their offices" and issued statements blaming villagers for sabotage rather than sending help (Ojaide 154). Institutional indifference thus becomes an active form of violence. State authority reinforces corporate power through repression. When students organize a peaceful protest, soldiers respond with lethal force, and within minutes "bursts of gunfire" leave protesters dead as "blood splattered on the soil and on leaves" (Ojaide 207). The imagery merges human bodies with countryside. It suggests that the earth itself absorbs political violence. Ecological exploitation and state brutality function as interconnected systems.

Equally disturbing is the manipulation of public narrative. After the massacre, official reports deny responsibility while national media remain silent publishing only government bulletins and showing "no picture of the carnage for the nation or the world to see" (Ojaide 208). Environmental devastation therefore depends upon controlled visibility. Silence becomes a technology of power. In *Oil on Water*, silence manifests differently. Rather than overt propaganda, there exists a pervasive normalization of decay. Communities abandoned by militants and corporations exist outside national

concern. When Rufus peers into a communal well, the smell rising from it carries "that unmistakable smell of oil," mixed with decomposition (Habila 10). Pollution infiltrates even drinking water, nevertheless no institutional presence intervenes. The absence of authority becomes itself a political statement. The texts insist that environmental destruction registers first on human bodies. In Ojaide's narrative, exposure to toxic fire produces immediate physical consequences. "…babies coughed relentlessly," "the old wheezed," and pregnant women went into premature labor as smoke filled the air (Ojaide 207). The environment invades biological processes, and collapses distinctions between ecological and medical crises. Habila similarly renders pollution through bodily reaction. As Rufus encounters contaminated spaces, nausea and exhaustion overwhelm him, and the oppressive atmosphere leaves the travelers feeling "drained just standing there" (Habila 11). The body becomes an instrument that measures ecological damage more accurately than political discourse.

Through these depictions, the texts redefine environmental degradation as lived personification rather than abstract policy debate. Against devastation, however, resistance surfaces as moral necessity. In *The Activist*, student leaders interpret the community's suffering as an urgent call, recognizing that "there was a cobra on their doorstep and they had to kill it fast before it inflicted a painful death on them" (Ojaide 65). The metaphor frames activism as self-defense rather than rebellion. The peaceful protest itself exemplifies symbolic resistance. Demonstrators carry "green leaves and branches to signify the peaceful nature of their protest" (Ojaide 207). Nature becomes victim and language of dissent. Here, protesters reclaim ecological symbolism against industrial destruction. Even when violently suppressed, resistance persists. The protagonist later joins global protests, lifting a placard declaring "EVERY LIFE MATTERS" while enduring police water hoses however remaining "determined to go on with the protest" (Ojaide 318). Activism transcends geography linking Niger Delta struggles to global systems of economic exploitation. In contrast, resistance in *Oil on Water* is inconspicuous and more ambiguous. Journalism itself becomes an act of defiance. Documenting devastated communities, Rufus and Zaq resist collective forgetting. Their journey through polluted creeks transforms witnessing into ethical responsibility. The act of seeing, of refusing to look away from dead rivers and abandoned villages, constitutes resistance against erasure.

A decisive convergence between the texts lies in their understanding of storytelling as resistance. Ojaide foregrounds collective mobilization and vocal protest, while Habila emphasizes observation and testimony. However, they suggest that narrating ecological suffering prevents its disappearance. In *The Activist*, mourning rituals after the massacre unify the community as "dirges and wails were heard everywhere," transmuting grief into shared historical memory (Ojaide 208). Memory resists official denial. Similarly, Habila's narrative voice lingers over damaged sceneries so insistently that forgetting becomes impossible. The repeated encounters with polluted villages accumulate into

moral indictment. It forces one to inhabit ecological trauma alongside the narrator. Therefore, the texts reject portrayals of Niger Delta communities as passive victims. Devastation produces consciousness. Environmental destruction exposes structures of exploitation, and resistance, whether through protest, journalism, or memory, appears as a reclaiming of agency. Ojaide's world burns with urgency and collective mobilization, while Habila's setting whispers through silence and witnessing. However, they arrive at a shared insight. That is, ecological ruin generates voices that refuse disappearance. The damaged environment becomes archive, teacher, and catalyst, compelling individuals to speak where institutions demand silence. Through their narratives, Ojaide and Habila demonstrate that resistance in the Niger Delta begins not only with political action but with recognition. That is, the moment when people see clearly that the land's suffering mirrors their own.

The ecological imagination in Ojaide's *The Activist* and Habila's *Oil on Water* deepens as the narratives move beyond the initial depiction of environmental ruin into a sustained interrogation of memory, witnessing, and collective resistance. What becomes evident is that devastation in the Niger Delta is neither accidental nor natural. It is structurally produced and ideologically maintained. The texts therefore construct ecology not basically as damaged setting but as a historical archive inscribed with violence. In *Oil on Water*, Habila's descriptive technique intensifies ecological trauma through sensory immersion. The narrator's journey through the creeks metamorphoses the environment into a living witness of slow death. The river setting is rendered grotesque when the journalists encounter "dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil" while "dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots" (Habila 71). The imagery collapses distinctions between nature and corpse. It suggests that oil extraction has converted the ecosystem into a mass grave. The description does not basically record pollution. It dramatizes ecological suffocation. The mangrove roots appear to gasp "for air," implying that even vegetation participates in the struggle for survival (Habila 70). Through such imagery, Habila subtly reframes environmental degradation as violence enacted upon a breathing entity.

Equally significant is how environmental devastation influences psychological perception. The narrator observes villages haunted by "an indefinable sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above the punctured zinc roofs" (Habila 72). Here, ecological ruin generates spectral presence. The environment remembers what political discourse attempts to erase. The ghostliness of the village reflects displacement without movement. That is, people remain physically present however existentially erased. Habila therefore links ecological destruction to emotional dislocation, and suggests that environmental injustice produces a crisis of belonging. Ojaide's *The Activist* approaches devastation through historical reflection and political exposition. Upon returning home, the protagonist confronts a transformed homeland whose environment bears the scars of exploitation. The text notes that the Niger Delta now possessed "a new face, an ugly or rather sick face" compared to the "pristine one he

used to know" (Ojaide 46). The metaphor of illness is crucial. Here, ecological damage is figured as bodily degeneration which implies that the land itself has been infected by oil capitalism. The alteration is not gradual but catastrophic, described as the aftermath of "a destructive hurricane as far as the environment was concerned" (Ojaide 46). This framing situates ecological devastation within temporal rupture. That is, a before and after that mirrors colonial and postcolonial extraction histories. Ojaide further exposes the political machinery sustaining ecological violence. Oil corporations operate with impunity under military regimes and enjoy "a free hand… to continue increasing production," a process that produces wealth for the state while ensuring "total disregard of the Niger Delta people and their environment" (Ojaide 46). The text thus disassembles official developmental rhetoric by revealing its ecological cost. Development becomes synonymous with abandonment.

Resistance, however, surfaces not only through protest but through storytelling and media intervention. In *The Activist*, the establishment of *The Patriot* newspaper symbolizes the reclamation of voice. The text observes that people who had long been silenced "suddenly got a voice of their own," which enables local experiences to appear publicly "as a witness of their experiences" (Ojaide 230). Journalism becomes ecological activism, and transmutes narrative into political weapon. Documenting deformities in animals and environmental damage, the newspaper converts invisible suffering into collective evidence. Resistance therefore operates through visibility. That is, to narrate is to resist erasure. Similarly, resistance in *Oil on Water* manifests through witnessing rather than overt militancy. The journalists' journey itself becomes an ethical act. That is, to see, record, and remember. However, Habila complicates resistance by presenting militants, villagers, and victims within morally ambiguous spaces. The constantly shifting waterways, which change from "the clearest… blue to a turbid, unknowable gray in a minute" (Habila 94), metaphorically reflect the instability of moral categories in zones impacted by exploitation. Resistance is fragmented because ecological violence has fractured social coherence. The texts therefore reject simplistic binaries of victim and hero. Ojaide portrays area boys and militant figures as individuals attempting to reclaim what has been taken from them, suggesting that resistance grows from dispossession rather than inherent violence (Ojaide 47). Habila likewise depicts militants as products of ecological injustice, influenced by settings that have denied them viable futures. The environment thus produces resistance as much as it produces suffering.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that Ojaide's *The Activist* and Habila's *Oil on Water* reimagine the Niger Delta not basically as a geographical setting scarred by oil extraction but as an intensely contested moral and ecological space where environmental devastation generates new forms of consciousness and resistance. Through differing nevertheless complementary narrative strategies, the texts reveal

how poisoned rivers, abandoned villages, and militarized settings restructure human relationships to memory, identity, and belonging which expose ecological destruction as inseparable from political neglect and economic exploitation. Ojaide's activist-centered narrative foregrounds collective protest, ethical responsibility, and the insistence on public voice as necessary responses to environmental injustice, while Habila's inconspicuous, introspective storytelling emphasizes witnessing, ambiguity, and the emotional burden of seeing what the world prefers to ignore. Therefore, the texts demonstrate that resistance in the Niger Delta does not exist only in dramatic rebellion but also in acts of remembrance, narration, and survival that refuse expurgation. Allowing devastated settings to speak through human experience, the texts metamorphose literature into an archive of ecological memory and a form of moral intervention which suggests that storytelling itself becomes a mode of environmental justice. However, the paper argues that these texts challenge predominant developmental myths by insisting that any vision of progress detached from ecological care produces not prosperity but dispossession, and that within damaged environments, resistant voices persist as enduring affirmations of dignity, community, and the possibility of renewal.

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