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From Petrofiction to Praxis: The Impact of Oil Exploitation on Mental and Physical Health in Ted Elemeforo's *Fountain of Betrayal*

*¹Otutu-Flo, R. E., & ²Oburumu, A.

¹Department of English, College of Education, Warri

²Department of English and Communication Art, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

*Corresponding author email:ritzflonow@gmail.com

Abstract

The intersection of social challenges and their profound impact on the mental and physical health of individuals within the context of some Niger Delta literary writers, with emphasis on Ted Elemeforo's novel, *Fountain of Betrayal*, is the preoccupation of this paper. Embracing Petrofiction as a theoretical framework, the analysis ventures into the intricate narrative that intertwines the environmental, economic, and sociopolitical challenges posed by the oil industry in the Niger Delta and its effect on the mental and physical health of characters like Papawey, whose trauma from displacement reflects community-wide psychological strain, Bodiere and Amatu, whose health issues symbolize the physical toll of pollution and its effect; not forgetting some of the lives lost as a result of the menace that comes with unguarded oil exploration. Petrofiction as a theory facilitates an understanding of how the narrative mirrors real-life struggles caused by the injurious activities of petroleum production, shedding light on the interconnectedness of societal challenges and the intricate web of impacts on the mental and physical well-being of individuals and the communities of operation. Through this exploration, the study emphasizes the urgent need to address the complex interplay between societal challenges and health outcomes in Niger Delta literature, offering insights into the broader implications of oil-driven narratives for contemporary literary studies.

Keywords: Petrofiction, Societal Challenges, Mental Health, Physical Health, Environmental Degradation

Introduction

The issue of mental health and its impact on individuals and the society has given rise to great concern to the Niger Delta, Nigeria and the world in general. Coming to the Niger Delta, the question of mental health cannot be over emphasized, especially where it concerns women. Kenechukwu Anugwom, talking about mental stress in women, especially widows in Niger Delta says, "280 (62.5%) suffer from physical stress while 7 (1.6%) suffered from mental stress. This is as a result of the weight of responsibilities handed down to them after the death of their spouses" (91:2). The Head of the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Chrisland University, Abeokuta in Ogun State, Dr. Olakunle Olawunmi, has however attributed the main cause of mental health to unemployment, among others (2023). In all, there are known stressors to mental health; unemployment has been identified as one of them, in addition to the desire of inability to make ends meet for both gender. For an oil rich region, unemployment as a cause for mental health disorder appears to be a sad reality. In the Niger Delta, the environment is confronted with environmental problems that are categorized into oil and non-oil sectors. The non-oil related environmental problems include; coastal/river bank erosion, flooding, spread of exotic species, agricultural land degradation, fisheries depletion, and inadequate sanitary and waste management. The oil related environmental problems are oil spills, gas flaring, dredging of canals and land take for the construction of facilities (37). Ted Elemeforo's novel, *Fountain of Betrayal* (2021), stands as a poignant exploration of the multifaceted challenges arising from the oil industry, offering a narrative canvas upon which societal complexities are painted with vivid strokes. Within the context of this literary work, the present study embarks on an examination of the interrelation between social challenges in the region and their profound

repercussions on the mental and physical health of individuals. Drawing upon Petrofiction as a theoretical lens, this exploration seeks to unravel the intricate tapestry woven by Elemeforo, shedding light on the ways in which the characters' experiences echo the harsh realities of oil exploitation in contemporary society.

Petrofiction, a genre that intricately weaves narratives around the socio-political and environmental ramifications of the oil industry, provides a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing Elemeforo's work. Coined by Amitav Ghosh, petrofiction highlights the "oil encounter" between global capital, local communities, and ecological degradation, often giving voice to marginalized populations affected by petrochemical industries. It is a genre that explores the socio-economic, environmental, and human consequences of oil extraction, has emerged as a critical lens for examining the exploitation of natural resources in regions like Nigeria's Niger Delta (Ghosh, 1992). As Firat Oruc notes, Petrofiction extends beyond mere storytelling; it serves as a means to "interrogate the 'realities' of the petroculture" (Gana, 165–176). Through this lens, the exploration of *Fountain of Betrayal* extends beyond the confines of fiction, unravelling layers of truth embedded within the narrative. The significance of this analysis lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between literature and the pressing issues of our time. Notably, the exploration aligns with the broader discourse on the impact of societal challenges on individual well-being. A wealth of scholarly works has delved into the intricate relationship between social factors and mental health (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). However, the unique contribution of this study lies in its use of Petrofiction as a theoretical anchor, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how the oil industry, as portrayed in *Fountain of Betrayal*, becomes a catalyst for mental and physical health disparities. Ted Elemeforo's *Fountain of Betrayal* (2018) exemplifies this tradition, weaving narratives of greed, betrayal, and hope against the backdrop of oil politics in the Niger Delta; making it a more suitable literary text for this research. As we explore the characters' journeys, the study aims to unravel the complex web of consequences on individual well-being, emphasising the pertinence of Petrofiction as a tool for comprehending and addressing the interconnectedness of societal challenges and health.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research methodology that is designed to align with the chosen theoretical framework of Petrofiction, and to address the significance of the study in unraveling the nexus between societal challenges, individual health, and the literary exploration found in Ted Elemeforo's *Fountain of Betrayal*. The selection of *Fountain of Betrayal* as the primary text is deliberate and grounded in its relevance to the Petrofiction framework, which emphasizes literary narratives that engage with the socio-political and ecological consequences of oil extraction. Elemeforo's novel is set in a context that mirrors the complexities of oil-dependent communities, offering a rich narrative for analyzing the intersections of environmental degradation, societal conflict, and personal health. The novel's focus on betrayal—both interpersonal and systemic—provides a compelling lens through which to explore how resource exploitation shapes individual and collective experiences. By anchoring the analysis in this text, the study aims to illuminate how literature can serve as a medium for critiquing the socio-economic structures that perpetuate inequality and health disparities in oil-rich regions. The qualitative process includes the following:

Literary Analysis: An in-depth literary analysis of *Fountain of Betrayal*, using Petrofiction as the guiding theoretical framework has been done. This involves a close examination of the narrative elements, character development, and plot dynamics that contribute to the depiction of societal challenges, particularly those associated with the oil industry. While not limiting the study to Elemeforo's *Fountain of Betrayal*, the issue of pipeline vandalism by unemployed members of the community who seek means of livelihood is also examined. As Agary reveals, sometimes, "the community took the matter up with the oil company that owned the pipes, but they said they suspected sabotage by the youths and were not going to pay compensation for all the destruction that the burst pipes had caused" (*Yellow Yellow:2006*, 4). The Niger Delta's communities are disgruntled to experience the worst effects of the oil sector while receiving little of its potential benefits.

Comparative Study: A comparative study of relevant Petrofiction works, expanding the analysis to include other literary pieces that similarly explore the socio-political and environmental implications of the oil industry. This comparative aspect enhances the generalizability of findings and this contributes to a broader understanding of the genre.

Content Analysis of Scholarly Discourse: Analyze scholarly articles, reviews, and critical discourse surrounding both *Fountain of Betrayal* and the broader field of Petrofiction. This step is crucial to contextualize the novel within the existing academic conversations and to identify gaps or areas requiring further exploration.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant in several ways, such as:

1. **Theoretical Advancement:** By applying Petrofiction as a theoretical framework, this study contributes to the advancement of literary theory, particularly in understanding how fiction can serve as a powerful tool for interrogating and reflecting on complex societal issues.
2. **Interdisciplinary Insights:** The research bridges the gap between literature and health sciences, providing interdisciplinary insights into the impact of societal challenges on mental and physical health. This is particularly relevant in today's context, where such intersections are of increasing importance.
3. **Literary Criticism and Cultural Discourse:** The study enhances literary criticism by offering a nuanced analysis of *Fountain of Betrayal* within the Petrofiction genre. Additionally, it contributes to broader cultural discourse by examining how literature can serve as a mirror reflecting and shaping societal perceptions of health and well-being.
4. **Implications for Policy and Advocacy:** Findings from this study may have implications for policy-making and advocacy, especially in regions affected by the socio-economic and environmental challenges associated with the oil industry. The exploration of individual health consequences adds a human dimension to the discourse, potentially influencing policy decisions and community initiatives.

By combining these methodological approaches with the chosen theoretical framework, the study aims to provide a comprehensive distinction in understanding the interplay between societal challenges, individual health, and the literary realm in *Fountain of Betrayal*.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aim to investigate the intricate relationship between social challenges portrayed in Ted Elemeforo's *Fountain of Betrayal*, and their impact on the mental and physical health of individuals. By employing Petrofiction as a theoretical framework, the research seeks to unravel the complexities within the narrative, shedding light on the interconnectedness of societal issues and individual well-being, through the following objectives:

1. To analyze the representation of societal challenges, particularly those associated with the oil industry, within the narrative structure of *Fountain of Betrayal*.
2. To explore and delineate the psychological and physical consequences experienced by the characters in the novel as a result of their exposure to environmental degradation, displacement, and socio-economic disparities.
3. To critically evaluate the applicability and efficacy of Petrofiction as a theoretical framework for understanding and interpreting the intersection between social challenges and the mental and physical health of individuals as depicted in contemporary literature, specifically in *Fountain of Betrayal*.

Theoretical Framework

Petrofiction, as a theoretical framework, provides a lens through which to analyze the intricate connections between societal challenges and the mental and physical health of individuals within the context of Ted Elemeforo's *Fountain of Betrayal*. Petrofiction, defined by FatricOruc (Ed Nouri Gana: 2013), as a genre that explores the socio-political and environmental implications of the oil industry, serves as a theoretical anchor for understanding the close interplay between the narrative elements of the novel and the broader societal issues it mirrors. As a genre, Petrofiction intricately weaves narratives around the socio-political and environmental ramifications of the oil industry, providing a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing Elemeforo's *Fountain of Betrayal*.

Coined by Amitav Ghosh, petrofiction highlights the "oil encounter" between global capital, local communities, and ecological degradation, often giving voice to marginalized populations affected by petrochemical industries. It is a genre that explores the socio-economic, environmental, and human consequences of oil extraction, has emerged as a critical lens for examining the exploitation of natural resources in regions like Nigeria's Niger Delta (Ghosh, 1992). As Firat Oruc notes, Petrofiction extends beyond mere storytelling; it serves as a means to

“interrogate the ‘realities’ of the petroculture” (Gana, 165–176). Through this lens, the exploration of *Fountain of Betrayal* extends beyond the confines of fiction, unveiling layers of truth embedded within the narrative.

Ted Elemeforo’s novel aligns with the principles of Petrofiction, as it delves into the complexities of oil exploitation and its far-reaching consequences on communities in the Niger Delta. Gana N. (2013) emphasizes that Petrofiction is not merely a literary genre but a tool for interrogating the realities of petrocultures, in literary representation. In the case of *Fountain of Betrayal*, the novel becomes a canvas on which the petrocultural landscape of Niger Delta is painted, offering a mirror to reflect the environmental degradation, displacement, and socio-economical disparities caused by the oil industry. The characters’ experiences in the novel are not merely fictional; they encapsulate the lived realities of individuals grappling with the profound impact of the oil industry on their well-being. Lawrence Buell, talking about this from the lens of an Eco-critic, sees petrofiction as the “study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist’s praxis” (430). Petrofiction thus becomes a theoretical framework that allows for a degree of understanding on the intersections between literature, societal challenges, and individual’s health.

Ted Elemeforo weaves a narrative that mirrors the complexities of the petrocultural landscape, thereby offering a theoretical toolkit for dissecting the layers of meaning embedded in the text. By employing Petrofiction, the study therefore seeks to move beyond a traditional literary analysis, extending into the realms of social critique and cultural inquiry. This aligns with the perspective of Gana (2013), who suggests that Petrofiction goes beyond storytelling to engage in a critical examination of the petrocultural realities, making it a robust foundation for dissecting the societal challenges presented in *Fountain of Betrayal* and their profound impact on the mental and physical health of individuals, and unravel the complexities of the narrative, shedding light on the broader implications for both literature and the lived experiences of communities affected by the oil industry.

The Activist Passion of Ted Elemeforo as a Petrofiction Writer

Ted Elemeforo, known for his work *Fountain of Betrayal* (2021) and *Child of Destiny* (2009) not only explore the environmental and socio-political dimensions of the oil industry in his novels but also demonstrate a passion for activism. His writings often reflect a commitment to raising awareness about the challenges faced by communities affected by oil exploitation. In the backdrop of Petrofiction, Elemeforo’s activism is particularly evident as he uses literature as a platform for social critique and change. Having hailed from Okordia, a village that is a living testament of negative impact of oil exploitation in Bayelsa State, Ted Elemeforo has a firsthand information of the social and mental health challenge that besiege the Niger Delta. His novel, *Fountain of Betrayal*, therefore serves as a vehicle for activism by shedding light on the ecological and human costs of the oil industry. For instance, his portrayal of environmental degradation, displacement of communities, and socio-economic disparities becomes a form of advocacy. This aligns with the spirit of Petrofiction, a genre that aims to interrogate and critique the realities of Petrocultures (Gana, 2013). Ted Elemeforo presently represents Yenegoa Constituency 3, in the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, Nigeria.

***Fountain of Betrayal* as Petrofiction Novel**

As a genre that explores the socio-economic, environmental, and human consequences of oil extraction, Petrofiction has emerged as a critical lens for examining the exploitation of natural resources in regions like Nigeria’s Niger Delta. Using Ted Elemeforo’s *Fountain of Betrayal* (2021), some of the socio-economic, environmental, and human consequences of oil extraction are discussed below:

The Lack of Basic Amenities

In Nigerian literature, this genre addresses the paradoxes of oil wealth amid poverty, environmental ruin, and social unrest, as seen in works that depict the Niger Delta’s struggles against multinational oil companies and corrupt governance. Ted uses Mercy’s dialogue to succinctly captures the prevailing irritation and despair experienced by the people in the narrative, mirroring a more widespread socio-political discontent:

“Pa-pa-weey, take it easy, our turn will come. It is turn by turn,” Mercy said without conviction. “Nothing is working in this state; they can’t provide common portable water for the smallest state capital in the world. One day, we all will march to the streets” (Elemeforo, 2020, p. 48).

The statement “Nothing is working in this state; they can’t provide common portable water” emphasises the government’s inability to fulfill fundamental necessities, despite the significant revenue generated by oil resources. This discontent corresponds to the concept of Petrofiction, which Gana (2013) proposes is not just a literary form but also a critical instrument for examining the realities of petrocultures. The government’s failure to deliver vital services highlights the inequality and disregard experienced by communities, a recurring theme in Petrofiction that examines the socio-political repercussions of oil exploitation

Environmental Degradation: The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) conducted a comprehensive study titled “Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland” in 2011, which highlighted severe environmental degradation in the Niger Delta due to oil spills and pollution.

Oil exploration has had significant negative effects on the Niger Delta region. These include environmental degradation due to oil spills, pollution of waterways, and destruction of habitats, disruption of traditional livelihoods like fishing and farming, as well as social issues such as conflicts over resource control and unequal distribution of wealth. On a visit to see Amagbe at Ekowe, a suburb of Yenegoa, Amatu was taken aback by the sad note in Amagbe father’s utterance:

Our plants no longer yield as it used to, owing to oil exploratory activities. Worse still, greed drives staff of oil companies to induce spillages with the help of some village miscreants in order to rip their companies of money, leaving us to bear the brunt. The Government chose to be silent despite its knowledge of our pains. I believe, one day our voices will be heard (Elemeforo, 2020, p. 160).

This quote highlights the dual issues of environmental degradation and socio-economic exploitation resulting from the oil industry’s activities. The speaker’s rhetorical question about fishing underscores the profound knowledge and dependence of the local community on their natural environment, which is now being compromised. The response reveals the devastating impact of oil exploration on local agriculture and fishing practices, both crucial to the community’s livelihood.

Disruption of Livelihoods: Apart from the impact of oil exploration on the livelihood of those in the Niger Delta communities, also affected is the green world. Rita Otutu-Flo (2014) argues that,

“The oil spillage pollutes and destroys the land and prevents it from reproduction... The men destroy the fruitfulness; the fertility of the women just as the oil companies and oil spillage pollutes and prevents the fertility of the Niger Delta land and rivers” (131),

thereby tempering with the ecosystem of the region. Studies such as those by Onuoha (2016) in the “Journal of Sustainable Development Studies”, have discussed how oil exploration has disrupted traditional livelihoods such as fishing and farming, leading to economic hardship for communities in the Niger Delta.

Destruction of Habitats: The loss of habitats and biodiversity in the Niger Delta has been extensively documented. Reports from organizations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) have highlighted the impacts of oil exploration on fragile ecosystems and wildlife in the region.

The Niger Delta is recognized as one of the most ecologically diverse regions globally, consisting predominantly of mangrove forests, freshwater swamps, and tropical rainforests. This “green world” harbors a rich biodiversity that is integral to the livelihoods of millions of local inhabitants. However, oil exploration and frequent oil spills have caused severe environmental degradation over the past decades. Oil spills have led to the destruction of critical mangrove habitats, contamination of soil and water bodies, and a sharp decline in aquatic life, including fish populations vital for local fisheries (Imoobe&Iroro, 2009). This literature review synthesizes scholarly analyses of the novel, real-world health impacts of oil exploitation, and the transition from fictional representation (petrofiction) to practical action (praxis), emphasizing how the text illuminates mental and physical health crises. In this context, the following sections will navigate the

narrative landscape of *Fountain of Betrayal*, dissecting the socio-political, economic, and environmental challenges depicted in the novel.

Pollution of Waterways: Numerous studies have documented the contamination of waterways in the Niger Delta. Elemeforo postulates that government neglect of the oil rich Delta region is a shame, as the inhabitants defecate, bath and something drink from the oil polluted river.

“Can I use one of the canoes to empty my bowel? I am press,” Amatu lowered his voice.

“Me too. Let’s go down here,” she pointed to some canoe tied to a metal post.

“Can’t you see people in the river taking their bath and doing other things; let’s go to the other end to avoid embarrassment.”

“You are not even pressed. For me, I am going down here. Don’t you know that even the person taking their baths could be emptying their shit in the water? Everybody in the river just needs to be sharp-eyed so he doesn’t nod or swallow shit.” (173)

The above scenario is a pitiable state of the Niger Delta, that produces about 8.07 million barrels of oil per day, in the month of July, 2025 (NUPRC, 2025). Also, research published in the “International Journal of Environmental Science and Technology” by Orubebe B. B. (2018) examined water quality degradation in the region attributed to oil exploration activities. With pollutions like this, it is not surprising that there was decline in the medical health of characters like Bodiere who became sick with kidney issues (143-4).

Social Issues: Scholarly works by academics like Ikelegbe (2006) in the “Journal of Modern African Studies” have examined the social implications of oil exploration in the Niger Delta, including conflicts over resource control, marginalization of local communities, and unequal distribution of oil wealth. These have most times lead to youth restiveness and kidnapping in the region. Along with these vices come accusations, unlawful arrests and infringement on human rights. For instance, Amatu is taken away by plain-clothed officers, likely from a security agency (SSS), after a brief struggle and exchange of words with his sister, Imomo. He is forced into a car and driven off while his sister tries to follow. Later, Amatu finds himself in an office where he sees Dr. Olokumo, a well-dressed man, seated in the Director’s office. Amatu has been held in a dark interrogation room for 11 days, where he is been tortured and questioned about the kidnapping of Mr. Clayton, which he denies any knowledge of. The officers are skeptical and have subjected him to physical abuse, including hanging him upside down and near-suffocation. And then he was casually told,

“You’ll be released today,” Amatu was told as he sat on a rusted metal stool at the far right of the room in his dirty shorts. “They brought you here as a suspect in the disappearance of Mr. Clayton, one of your foremen, but they have found no connection between your activities and the disappearance of your boss, so the DSS is full of apologies....”

“That’s alright. It is a pity this happened to the innocent” (136).

The quote also represents an emerging unified opposition, as suggested by Mercy’s declaration, “One day, we all will march to the streets” (48). Injustice on a people is likely to generate collective confrontation. This plea for collaborative effort acknowledges the possibility of widespread societal unrest as a reaction to systematic injustices. It is clear that the above identified issues provide foundation for understanding the negative impacts of oil exploration on the Niger Delta, encompassing environmental, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions.

Complicit Nature of Government

A significant critique of legislative inefficacy is seen in the text. Ideally, legislative bodies should enact laws that guarantee sustainable development and protect the environment. Nevertheless, as Mercy’s inquiry indicates, these entities frequently neglect their obligations, resulting in unbridled environmental degradation.

“What are the House of Assembly members doing?
“Is it not possible for them to enact laws that are environmentally friendly?”
(Elemeforo, 2020, p. 68).

Mercy’s ensuing dialogue:

“Do we have an Assembly?” demonstrates this critique. Their relatives will accuse you of being envious when you converse with them. Some members were recently making comparisons between themselves and the Lagos State House of Assembly” (2020, p. 68).

Elemeforo asserts from the above that “only a foolish snail would raise its horns in the presence of a moose”. This statement underscores the stark discrepancy between the purported role of legislative bodies and their actual performance. The ineffectiveness and absence of autonomy in other regional assemblies are underscored by the comparison to the Lagos State House of Assembly.

Lawrence Buell’s research on environmental literature also offers a valuable framework for comprehending these critiques. Buell (2005) underscores the significance of environmental advocacy in literature, contending that it is essential for the purpose of increasing awareness and inciting political action. Broader effects include anxiety from environmental degradation, displacement due to climate-induced flooding, and infectious disease outbreaks like malaria, which compound mental health burdens. The metaphors of “a foolish snail” and “a moose” serve to further emphasise the power dynamics that are at play. Mercy asserted that, “The West has passed down political tradition and a history”. The personalities there are not the types you pushed around” (Elemeforo, 2020, p. 68). The entrenched political culture and the strength of democratic institutions in the West are highlighted by the statement “When the governor raises his voice, they will roar because they know their onions” (Elemeforo, 2020, p. 69). This is in stark contrast to the novel’s portrayal of legislative bodies that are easily manipulated and weak. It implies that there is a necessity for political institutions that are more autonomous and robust, as they can effectively counteract executive power and advocate for environmental protection.

Tension Between Host Communities and the Oil Companies

We see the prevalent tension between the host communities and the oil companies.

The last time he came to the village, there was rumour that the youths from the community were having running battle with the contractor in charge of clearing the pipeline because he conspired with SPDC to divert the infrastructure meant for his own community to another community after receiving bribe from the latter. He was told the community youths had sworn to disallow any clearing of grasses on the line until the company changed the contractor. Amatu was not sure whether this was true because he had come to know that would-be contractors concocted all kinds of stories to discredit those they wanted to replace (Elemeforo, 2020, p. 97).

This passage vividly illustrates the tension between local communities and the oil companies operating in their regions. It reveals how corruption and mismanagement by contractors, in collusion with multinational corporations like SPDC (Shell Petroleum Development Company), exacerbate local grievances and lead to conflicts. According to Nouri Gana’s analysis of petrofiction, such narratives often underscore the “betrayal and disillusionment” felt by local populations when their interests are sidelined by powerful external actors (Gana, 2020). In this context, the quote highlights how rumors and allegations of corruption can erode trust within communities and disrupt local efforts to assert their rights.

The conflict described in the quote also aligns with Lawrence Buell’s notion of “environmental injustice”, which posits that marginalized communities are often disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and exploitation (Buell, 2020). The youths’ protest against the contractor’s actions reflects a broader resistance to environmental injustices perpetuated by the oil industry. This resistance is a crucial aspect of the Petrofictional framework, as it demonstrates how communities navigate and challenge the socio-environmental impacts of oil extraction. Moreover, the passage illustrates the complex interplay between local politics and

corporate practices. As Amatu's skepticism about the accuracy of the rumors suggests, the narrative emphasizes the manipulative tactics employed by contractors and corporations to discredit and undermine community resistance. This skepticism is a key element in Petrofiction, as it exposes the often opaque and deceptive practices that characterize the oil industry's interactions with local populations.

Loss of Pristine Nature

The impact of oil exploration on the environment, as depicted in the novel, aligns with Lawrence Buell's concept of "environmental criticism", which emphasizes the significance of literary works in addressing ecological issues (Buell, 2005). Buell argues that literature can reveal the ways in which environmental concerns are intertwined with socio-political issues, a perspective that is evident in Elemeforo's portrayal of the oil industry's impact on the local environment. The degradation of plants and the poisoning of fishing waters reflect a broader pattern of environmental neglect and exploitation, where the pursuit of profit overrides ecological and human health considerations.

"Do you know how to fish?" "What kind of question is that? Who in this area does not? Our plants no longer yield as it used to, owing to oil exploratory activities. Worse still, greed drives staff of oil companies to induce spillages with the help of some village miscreants in order to rip their companies of money, leaving us to bear the brunt. The Government chose to be silent despite its knowledge of our pains. I believe, one day our voices will be heard" (Elemeforo, 2020, p. 160).

This quote highlights the dual issues of environmental degradation and socio-economic exploitation resulting from the oil industry's activities. The speaker's rhetorical question about fishing underscores the profound knowledge and dependence of the local community on their natural environment, which is now being compromised. The response reveals the devastating impact of oil exploration on local agriculture and fishing practices, both crucial to the community's livelihood.

Apart from the impact of oil exploration on the livelihood of those in the Niger Delta communities, also affected is the green world. Rita Otutu-Flo (2014) argues that, "The oil spillage pollutes and destroys the land and prevents it from reproduction... The men destroy the fruitfulness; the fertility of the women just as the oil companies and oil spillage pollutes and prevents the fertility of the Niger Delta land and rivers" (131), thereby tempering with the ecosystem of the region. The Niger Delta is recognized as one of the most ecologically diverse regions globally, consisting predominantly of mangrove forests, freshwater swamps, and tropical rainforests. This "green world" harbors a rich biodiversity that is integral to the livelihoods of millions of local inhabitants. However, oil exploration and frequent oil spills have caused severe environmental degradation over the past decades. Oil spills have led to the destruction of critical mangrove habitats, contamination of soil and water bodies, and a sharp decline in aquatic life, including fish populations vital for local fisheries (Imoobe & Iroro, 2009). Elemeforo opines:

Our plants no longer yield as it used to, owing to oil exploratory activities. Worse still, greed drive staff of oil companies to induce spillages with the help of some village miscreants in other to rip their companies of money, leaving us to bear the brunt. The Government chose to be silent despite its knowledge of our pains (160).

Gaseous emissions from associated gas flaring further exacerbate the degradation, as can be seen above, contributing to atmospheric pollution and loss of soil fertility (Kadafa, n.d.). A recent comprehensive study using satellite data and artificial intelligence revealed the extent of ecological damage caused by oil spills to the mangrove ecosystems, highlighting ongoing and alarming habitat loss (Ryan Institute & University of Ilorin, 2025). This environmental destruction directly impacts the socio-economic conditions of local communities by reducing fish availability and arable land, leading to food insecurity and increased poverty (Eweje, 2024).

The quote also reflects a broader critique of governmental inaction in addressing the plight of affected communities. Imre Szeman (2012), is of the opinion that,

Oil plays an important role in our lives in ways that we might not have believed... [However, in spite of its goodness,] To a great many Americans, oil smells bad. It reeks of unavoidable overseas entanglements, a worrisome foreign dependency, economic uncertainty, risky and expensive military enterprises; of thousands of dead civilians and children and all the troublesome questions that lie buried in their graves.... And to make things worse, it begins to smell of pollution and environmental hazards. It stinks, it becomes a Problem that can be written about only in the language of Solutions (Project Muse, 3).

The phrase, “it stinks” is a metaphor of the ills that comes with oil exploration; this is the message Ted Elemeforo amplifies in his literary communiqué, *Fountain of Betrayal*, using Petrofiction as a ribbon of dispatch.

As a petrofiction, the text exposes neocolonial exploitation, where oil wealth benefits elites while impoverishing locals, echoing broader Nigerian narratives of environmental injustice. “Apart from these few persons, who in that assembly can cough in the presence of the governor? (Elemeforo, 2020, p. 69). The silence of the government, as mentioned in the passage, signifies a neglect of responsibility and accountability, which is a recurring theme in Petrofiction. Elemeforo’s narrative suggests that this silence is a form of complicity in the exploitation and suffering of local populations. Nouri Gana’s work on Petrofiction emphasizes the role of literature in documenting the narratives of those marginalized by the oil industry (Gana, 2014). Gana’s analysis underscores how oil-related literature often portrays the struggles of local communities against the backdrop of global oil politics. In *Fountain of Betrayal*, Elemeforo illustrates how the greed of oil company staff, coupled with governmental indifference, exacerbates the suffering of local populations. This depiction aligns with Gana’s view that Petrofiction serves as a critical lens through which the destructive impacts of the oil industry are examined and critiqued.

In Nigerian literature, this theme of governmental neglect is not uncommon. Scholars like Chidozie K. Uzoechina (2020) have discussed how literature often portrays the government’s failure to protect its citizens from the negative impacts of oil exploitation. Uzoechina argues that such portrayals highlight the need for greater accountability and reform within the Nigerian political system, reflecting the frustrations of communities affected by oil-related environmental damage. Elemeforo sees the problems of degradation and oil spillage in the Niger Delta as a result of,

“The country’s return to democracy [which] had paved way for all kinds of associations and public protest over the flimsiest of reasons, some of which bordered on the absurd. Papawey connected this trend with the general discontent and disappointment in the state and the region generally, regarding oil exploration and the attendant environmental degradation with its social and economic implications (230).

No matter **how** bad a situation is, though restoration and management efforts to rehabilitate oil-affected sites are ongoing, these remain insufficient due to weak enforcement of environmental regulations and limited resources (Imoobe & Irobo, 2009). The continued research and application of modern technologies are crucial for monitoring environmental recovery and guiding policy decisions to mitigate further damage (Ryan Institute & University of Ilorin, 2025).

Conclusion

Pollution, oil spills, pipeline vandalism, and crude oil theft have caused major environmental degradation, leading to serious conflicts. According to literary writers from the Niger Delta, such as Elemeforo, Agary, Bassey, Orlu, Uchenna, and other concerned contributors like Habila, and many more, environmental issues in the region rob people of their means of subsistence survival, which includes farming and fishing. These in turn result in economic, sociological, and psychological traumatic conditions for the people of the region. In addition, traumatic conditions can result in issues of mental health and social vices such as pick-pocketing, rape, prostitution, pipeline vandalism, and kidnapping, to mention but a few. These perspectives are framed through

the lens of Petrofiction, which examines the problems caused by petroleum exploration in the region through literary works of art.

Recommendation

This study suggests the following recommendations as solutions in combating the menace of oil exploitation and spillage in the Niger Delta:

Land Treatment Technology: It is believed that the use of land treatment technology, when employed, can be used to compellingly restore the ecosystem and natural resources. Through the appropriate laws and regulations, the government should penalise multinational corporations that leak oil or pollute the environment.

Creation of Mental Health and Empowerment Centres: Mental health agencies should be instituted in every local government council of the states of the region, to help organize periodical mental health awareness and its implication to the wellbeing of communities. The emphasis on paper qualification should be reduced, and more emphasis should be placed on skill acquisition. This will encourage the youth to be geared towards self-reliance.

Encourage Literary Works on Petrofiction: More literary works on petrofiction should be encouraged, as this can help address the issues attributed to petroleum exploration in the Niger Delta. Petrofiction, in this context, will not just serve as a tool for combating oil exploration and exploitation, it will become a powerful tool to raise awareness about the environmental degradation, social injustices and economic disparities caused by oil extraction. By exploring the human experiences and ecological impacts of oil exploration through literature, petrofiction can then help in:

- Raising Awareness: Highlight the severity of environmental damage and social injustices in the Niger Delta, making readers aware of the consequences of oil extraction.
- Promote Empathy: Through storytelling, petrofiction can foster empathy for the people and ecosystems affected by oil exploration, encouraging readers to care about their plight.
- Inspire Activism: By documenting the struggles and injustices faced by communities in the Niger Delta, petrofiction can inspire readers to take action and advocate for environmental justice.

By engaging with works on petrofiction, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding oil extraction in the Niger Delta and develop empathy for those affected. Ultimately, petrofiction can play a vital role in promoting environmental awareness and inspiring action to address the issues plaguing the region.

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