

**INTERSECTION OF ECOLOGICAL
DEVASTATIONS AND HEALTH HAZARDS
IN THE NIGER DELTA: A STUDY OF
MACAULAY MOWARIN'S *THE TRAVAILS OF
MUDIAGA***

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Abstract: This study examines the representation and the interconnectedness between environmental devastation and health hazards in Macaulay Mowarin's *The Travails of Mudiaga*. Studies in the field of ecocriticism in Nigeria have examined the negative effect of environmental devastations on both the human and non-human inhabitants. While such scholarly works attest to the connection between the environment and the people, there is need to investigate the health implications of such relationship. The novel, which is an allegorical representation of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, possess an ample recreation of environmental damages and the health hazards it poses, which are birthed by the exploitative activities of oil multinationals as depicted in the narrative. The analysis is guided by the tenets of Eco criticism and Environmental Health Theory. Hence, the blend of both theories account for how environmental devastation and their resultant health effects are portrayed in the text. The physical deformities of some of the characters in the text are attributed to the activities of the oil companies. For instance, Mudiaga's deformity is caused by the toxic gas flare and crude oil that despoil the water, land and air of the region. The study shows that literary representation of the Niger Delta environment account for the negative effect of oil exploration on the health of the human and non-human inhabitants of the environment.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Environmental Devastation, Health hazards, Niger Delta, Oil Exploitation

Introduction

The Niger Delta is paradoxically one of the most resource-rich and underdeveloped regions in Nigeria. Despite being a major source of crude oil wealth, it suffers from extensive environmental pollution poverty and public health crises. The pillaging effects of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has given rise to protest literature, which has come to be known as Niger Delta Literature. Davies (2023) declares that “the lively and ever-evolving corpus of writing known as Niger Delta literature captures the political, social, and cultural aspects of Nigeria's Niger Delta” (p. 178). In Ojaruega’s (2013) examination of eco-activism in African literature, she argues that Tanure Ojaide’s novel, *The Activist*, protests against the environmental devastation in the Niger Delta region. What has come to be globally recognised as Niger Delta literature reflects the oil exploration and ecological realities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The different forms of literature are blossoming in the Niger Delta region. For instance, Kekeghe and Omobowale (2025) state that “Poets from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria explore the devastating effects of oil capitalism and its traumatic manifestations on the emotions and psyches of the region’s indigenes” (p. 298). Some of the Niger Delta writers are: J.P. Clark, Tanure Ojaide, Ahmed Yerima, Nnimmo Bassey, Ibiwari Ikiriko, EbiYeibo, Ebinyo Ogbowei, Stephen Kekeghe, Peter Omoko amongst others. The Niger Delta region comprises Delta State, Rivers State, Bayelsa State, Edo State, Akwa-Ibom State and Cross Rivers State. The major issues explored by Niger Delta writers are the ecological, cultural and socioeconomic experiences of the people of the region.

Ecology is the scientific study of the relationship between the environment and the organisms in it. It is concerned with how the nature of an environment affects its constituents, and also how the activities of its constituents affect the environment in return. There are human and industrial activities which take place in the environment. The effects of these activities on the environment and organisms are the concern of ecology. This reality is underscored by Odum (1960), who sees ecology as the study of structure and function of nature (the environment) including the human species. Odum's view clearly foregrounds that ecology deals with the functions or activities of humans and nature as constituents of the environment. The earlier view of ecology crystalises that, beyond these human and natural

occurrences, ecology also studies the relationship between the producers of these activities (nature and humans) with sufficient attention to how they affect each other.

The preceding explanatory effort has established that the environment is characterised by symbiotic activities— how organisms relate with their environment. Thus, there is an interface between both entities. Humans, for instance, breathe the air which is a component of the environment. They also carry out constructions, using the materials provided by nature— their environment. In addition, humans engage in agrarian activities which involve land cultivation, manuring, planting, and others. These are usually replacement strategies in reaction to the environmental provisions which have been explored. The implication is that nature provides for humans and humans reciprocate through their replacive efforts. This interface is captured in Buell's (1995) view of ecology in which he argues that ecology deals with human and nonhuman webs of interaction. This interdependence, which characterises the existence of organisms in various environments, is what Buell sees as webs of interaction.

These human and natural activities are usually captured by creative writers as a way of furnishing readers with the activities which unfold in their immediate and extended environments. It has been established that African literature is utilitarian. It is not usually inspired by formalist ideas in which a writer's creativity is influenced by an 'art for art's sake' ideology. African literature is depictive of the social and physical environments of Africans, and the works are woven to expose individuals to the historical and extant episodes of the continent. When (physical) environmental concepts are creatively represented on the pages of literary works (prosaic, poetic, or dramatic), and are analyzed by a critic, the analysis is said to be ecocritical. This critic, who has examined the implicit or glaring representations of these environmental concepts, is said to have done a work on ecocriticism.

This study adopts Ecocriticism and Environmental Health Theory to examine the representations of ecological health hazards in Mowarin's *Travails of Mudiaga*. Ecocriticism is an investigative endeavour which bestrides the scholarly boundaries of "environment" and "literature". It is a scholarly analysis of how environmental realities are represented in a work of art. It is an interdisciplinary, critical exercise

which underscores the interplay between literature and environmental science. As revealed in the studies above, ecocriticism examines the effects of human activities on the constituents of the environment— waters, forests (geography), animals, humans, air (biology) as depicted in works of art (literature). This form of criticism is one of the scholarly exercises which establish the limitless nature of research in the humanities. There are research works on literature and medicine, literature and marketing, literature and travels, and others which confirm that literary investigations are without restrictions.

This study interrogates environmental infringements and their devastating consequences which are exposed in the work of art. These consequences are the health hazards which an ecocritical analyst detects and examines. According to Howarth in Glotfelty and Fromm (1996), ecocriticism X-rays the merits and shortcomings of writings which depict the effects of culture upon nation. Howarth's view emphasizes the need to judge the manner of literary recreation of environmental challenges or the authenticity of the depiction in literary works. The authenticity is judged by the critic's in-depth awareness about prevalent, environmental concerns. This is why Garrard (2010) instructs that an ecocritical critic must be at a certain level of "ecological literacy" (p. 5). Howarth also asserts that ecocriticism analyzes the effect of culture upon a nation. Culture, here, is used to represent humans' conduct in matters which border on "environment". This culture could be the activities of multinationals. Multinationals in the engineering domain are companies whose main activities are within the oil sectors of nations. Their activities usually engender air pollution, water pollution, the death of sea creatures, and other hazards. These represent the culture which Howarth refers to. He therefore posits that ecocriticism interrogates these issues of exploitation and their resultant, environmental effects negative.

Ecocriticism is one of the contemporary, critical engagements. It is believed to have emerged in the 1960s. Although, there are some studies which state that it emerged in the 1980s. One of the foremost studies in ecocriticism is Rachel Carson's (1962) *Silent Spring*. In the work, Carson provides the principles of ecocriticism and the relevance of its engagement to the discouragement of environmental violence as it concerns the health of organisms. Ecocritical analyses are not in a sufficient number, compared to other areas of Investigation. This is asserted in Glotfelty's

work which was cited earlier. Critics seem to be more attracted to sociological appraisals. The few available studies, however, are very educative as they expose the very harmful culture in the environment and the widespread devastations it engenders.

Existing studies on ecocriticism in Nigerian literature have carried out critical readings of literary texts on the Niger Delta ecological experience. While most of such studies focus on the destruction of the physical environment, a few of them also identify experiences of psychological trauma occasioned by the environmental plunder. Oseghale's (2019) ecocritical analysis of Kaine Angary's *Yellow-Yellow* is a very scholarly ecocritical study. In the work, Oseghale locates and examines episodes of rage and trauma, influenced by the pollution and destruction of the setting of the primary text. Oseghale also identifies episodes of poverty, caused by the destruction of the people's natural sources of employment— the rivers, the farms, and the bushes. From Oseghale's investigation, it can be concluded that, beyond the physical health hazards, which the environmental denigration triggers, there is also the mental health aspect as residents, who are rendered jobless and homeless, begin to manifest episodes of anger neurosis due to disillusionment. These are also health results which an ecocritical analysis examines. Edebor's (2017) essay is also an ecocritical study. The title "Rape of a Nation "is depictive of the defilement of the natural waters in the novel. Edebor's ecocritical examination of the narrative attacks the destructive effects of the activities of oil companies, and these effects are noticeable basically in the pollution of the environment. Kekeghe (2017), however, investigates Christian Otobotekere's celebration of the pristine Niger Delta environment in his poetry collection, *Around and About 1* and *Beyond Sound and Voice*. Some studies have also examined ecofeminist ideas (Agboola, Solanke & Kekeghe, 2023). This ecocritical reading of Macaulay Mowarin's novel furthers the boundless nature of research in environmental humanities.

Environmental Health Theory is adopted to examine the representation of ecological health issues in the text. Environmental health is a branch of public health that is concerned with all aspects of the natural and built environment affecting human health and general well-being (Dovjak & Kukec, 2019; Chandrappa & Das, 2021). Chandrappa's and Das's work offers an overview of the methodologies and paradigms that define this burgeoning field, ranging from ecology to epidemiology,

and from pollution to environmental psychology, and addresses a wide variety of global concerns including air quality, water and sanitation, food security, chemical/physical hazards, occupational health, disease control, and injuries. Proponents of Environmental Health Theory believe that an understanding the interplay between various factors in the environment is crucial for disease control, management, and eradication (Schirnding & Yasmin, 2015; Kelley, 2018). It shows that environmental health challenges affect the human population. Some of the central tenets of Environmental Health Theory are environmental public health and environmental health protection (Schwartz & Rischitelli, 2005; Jennings, 2016). The combination of Ecocriticism and environmental health helps in investigating the ecological health hazards in Mowarin's *The Travails of Mudiaga*, showing how they affect the human and non-human inhabitants of the environment.

Investigating Environmental Devastations in *The Travails of Mudiaga*

Macaulay Mowarin's *The Travails of Mudiaga* is a novel which exposes environmental terrors and their negative effects on the lives of organisms (humans inclusive). The narrative is set in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which is characteristically the theater of environmental ruins, caused by the activities of multinationals and private individuals. In the narrative, Mowarin creatively decries the exploitation of the natural land, forests, and waters of the Niger Delta – an activity which has regularly created poverty and various illnesses in the area. The characters, dialogues, and settings are very apt in the representation of this saddening, environmental reality of the Niger Delta. The idea, which Mowarin pushes through this narrative, is reflective of his experiences as a son of the region. He deploys the plot of his work to revolt against this injustice to the environment and to underscore that events of exploitation are still ongoing in the Niger Delta. In the extract below, the narrator reveals the activities of the oil companies in Ogonbiri and Ziribiri communities:

Saturn Oil Company began drilling in both Ogonbiri and Ziribiri communities. While an oil well and a gas glare cone were drilled in Ogonbiri, only an oil well was drilled in Ziribiri community... The oil rigs were set up, and pipelines were dug to connect the crude oil to the flow station and export terminal in Torugbene. Within six months, oil was flowing through the pipelines (p. 61).

In the excerpt above, Mowarin exposes the reader to the method of drilling, used by multinationals. This is knowledge of hydro engineering, provided by the novelist in his narrative. The description of the settings of the narrative reveals that they, the settings, are blessed with an abundance of natural resources – minerals, plants, animals, etc. Knowledge of the habitats of these animals reveals to the reader that the activities of multinationals endanger the lives of the animals. In the narrative, Mudiaga returns to the community after six months and discovers a glaring destruction already caused within a short space of time:

However, after six months in the community, relocated families faced new challenges. Mudiaga was surprised to find the land covered in concrete, offering no soil or marshland for his usual activities of digging worms and fishing (p. 61).

Mudiaga, the main character, returns to discover the damage, done on the land which provided them with worms for fishing. One of the predominant, commercial activities of the people of the Niger Delta is fishing. The activity is characterised by natural activities as their worms, boats, baskets, and other materials for fishing are provided by nature. The narrative reveals that the destruction of the environment by the oil companies affects this economic life of the people. The dearth of fishing activities, as recounted in the novel, is as a result of the despoiling of the water and the death of essential organisms like worms. This implies that the multinationals in Mudiaga's community have resulted in the deaths of worms because the land has been hardened by the presence of cement on it. Mowarin, here, captures the sorry realities of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as he makes efforts, to condemn the harmful activities of multinationals in the region. His writing of *The Travails of Mudiaga* comes from a place of rage about these distressing events which unfold in his place of origin.

The activities of the multinationals have also disrupted the easy flow of water around the community due to the different pipes, buried around. The primary sources of water for the indigenes of the creek communities in the Niger Delta are rivers and creeks. The pillaging effects of crude oil on the water bodies led the scarcity of water supply. The borehole systems provided by the oil companies are

ineffective and inadequate. In the extract below, the narrator captures this environmental destruction thereby forespeaking the agony which awaits the people:

A contractor drilled a borehole for the community, but the water flow stopped after just a month... The situation worsened when the borehole water became muddy in the second week and completely stopped flowing in the third month (p. 62).

It has been foregrounded already that before multinationals can "erect" their structures, they usually have to "pull down" natural bodies. The activities of the oil companies in the narrative exemplify this culture of pulling to erect. When these companies gain access to a community, natural bodies like trees are usually pictured as impediments to their activities. For their pipes to be successfully buried, many trees must be felled. This indiscriminate deforestation is a terror to natural bodies, including the trees. Because of the drilling, which is a lucrative venture for the companies, the destructive effects of the activities are usually not considered. The presence of the buried pipes begins to alter many natural processes one of which is the flow of water. The narrator decries the experience of poor water flow in both communities. He laments:

The narrative reveals that the environmental impact of oil exploration was evident in both communities. The natural water flow in the creeks of Oloibiri State had been disrupted by the uprooting of trees to lay crude oil pipelines. This not only made fish scarce in the swamps, streams, and rivers but also dried up the stream that Ogonbiri families relied on for fresh water (p. 65).

Humans usually demonstrate the characteristic, survival instincts. Unlike their human counterparts, fishes and other animals usually do not demonstrate these survival instincts. This fact is represented in the narrative. The environmental disturbances, caused by the oil companies, force the fishes to move away for safety. After the occurrence, fishermen become scared to trace the fishes. It is because the fishermen, who took the risk in the past, lost their lives. The following excerpt reveals this:

Large fish which once found shelter beneath the tree roots had migrated to deeper brackish waters near the ocean - a territory teeming with crocodiles and pythons. Fear of these predators deterred fishermen as many had lost their lives to these dangers. Some of the large snakes were identified as African anacondas (p. 68).

We see the risks which residents take, to survive, as a result of the disruption of activities in the aquatic habitats. As stated already, residents of the Niger Delta are predominantly farmers. The water possesses their livelihood. This fishing, as an occupation, is part of the culture of the people. A typical riverine man finds other occupations, aside from fishing, boring. His emotional and financial fulfillments are tied to fishing. These facts make bare the level of injustice, committed against the residents of the area by causing the migration of aquatic organisms. In the novel, those who could not break free from their attachment to fishing, followed the fishes to the new habitats and got killed by dangerous reptiles. Through these events, the novelist unmasks the migration of aquatic organisms in the actual Niger Delta and the dangers which the situation exposes fishermen to.

The communities in the creek captured by the novelist are facing the risk of environmental devastation. It is untold, environmental devastation that the narrator captures in his lamentation about the migration of fishes. Ogonbiri and Ziribiri communities used to be known for their natural streams, abundance of fish, and other blessings by nature. The oil companies have, within a short space, destroyed the environmental wealth of the communities. In this narrative, there are no exaggerations in the way Mowarin has recreated the agonies of the people of the Niger Delta. This is their plight, appropriately uncovered. The people of the Niger Delta can no longer boast of the abundance of fish in their rivers. This painful attrition has also affected fishing activities in the area as people are beginning to seek alternatives to fishing due to this hurtful occurrence. In the novel, families used to rely on the fresh water of their streams. The streams and the rivers are now dried up due to the indiscriminate, drilling activities of oil companies.

In the novel, oil companies seem to be on rampage to totally destroy the environments of the Niger Delta. After witnessing the ecological devastations, caused by the activities of oil companies in Ogonbiri, Esama travels to Kpakiamia,

another community in the Nigeria Delta, together with her family. When they arrive in Kpakiamia, there is evidence of the presence of an oil company. Esama sees two flare cones. She understands the implications of the structures, hence she laments, "Oil Company must have come to kill all the fish in Kpakiamia" (p. 66). Although, Esama is not a resident of Kpakiamia, she is aware of the negative effects of the activities of oil companies, hence she sadly predicts that the oil companies will kill all the fish in Kpakiamia. Eventually, the narrator confirms her prediction:

...Esama's premonition held true. The fish catch had significantly decreased. The digging of pipelines had altered the natural water flow, reducing the water channels. Additionally, the removal of large trees along the river banks to make way for pipelines, flare cones, oil wells, and flow station buildings had eliminated the natural bonds that formed during the dry season. The rivers themselves were completely dried up (p. 66).

We notice above that the environmental ordeals of the communities are similar. This depiction of similar, environmental denigration underscores the novelist's quest to sensitise the public that all areas of the Niger Delta have been exploited. With the heartrending description of the environmental crumbling, one can imagine the negative effects of the situation on the health of the residents. Their waters are dried up, they cannot access the nutritional values of fish anymore because the species are dead, and obviously, the waters are polluted. Painfully, the era of sound health in the narrative is history.

Festivals are some of the cultural specialties of the Nigerian society with the Niger Delta region not exempted. Emmanuel (2024) in his work, *Boat Regatta and Martine Related Festivals in Nigeria's Niger Delta: An Ethnographic Appreciation*, states that festivals are everyday behaviour. This view further buttresses that the conduct of a group of people is their culture. According to Emmanuel, the environment, where a festival is hosted, determines the nature of the performance; hence he states the obvious that boats and other means of transportation on water are dominant appearances in Ijaw festivals and in other festivals in the Niger Delta. The characteristic appearance of boats in these festivals is influenced by the geographic nature of the Niger Delta—it has an abundance of water and trees. The existence of these festivals indisputably hinges on the sustenance of the environmental

provisions of the areas --- the trees, waters, and other natural elements should be protected. These festivals are sources of unity to these areas. The festivals attract diasporic attention as many indigenes, who live abroad, return home to witness the festival. It gives the people joy. The festival is a tool of unity to these areas. It provides many economic, cultural and psychological benefits. Putting these into consideration, one cannot help but lament the image which Mowarin tries to paint in his novel. The settings in the novel, which are reflective of the Niger Delta of Nigeria, have been selfishly exploited by oil companies; and these natural features of the environment have been destroyed in the process, consequently leading to the death of the festival which had traditionally marked the people. The novel, which is woven around fictive characters, reflects the cultural death of the actual Niger Delta region. In the following excerpt, the narrator laments how the death of fishes, actuated by the activities of oil companies, has put an end to the hosting of their festivals: Peregbarecognised that this once vibrant communal fishing tradition, an important festival for these communities, was rapidly disappearing. It marked the death of a social fishing expedition (p. 68).

Aside from the destructive activities, seen in the companies' felling of trees and the burying of pipes to disrupt water flow, there is also the narrative of pollution which endangers the lives of residents on organisms. Many events in the narrative allude to specific episodes of environmental hazards which unfold in the Niger Delta. The pollution of the waters, by oil spills, has been interrogated by many enraged Niger Delta poets. With a revolutionary tenor, they have written to decry the incessant pollution of the waters due to spilled oil from the pipes, fixed by oil companies; and this has led to the death of innumerable water organisms and even humans. Craig (2022) reported the case of an oil spill which took place in Goi, Ogoni, Rivers State. Craig storied the hurtful event which took place in 2004: oil spilled from a pipeline, built by the Royal Dutch Shell in the 1960s. While fretful witnesses moved around to alert authorities on the impending danger, the oil connected with a fire in a local farmer's house; and there was an explosion. The mangrove forest, houses, humans, and everything within a touching distance were burnt to a frazzle. This episode of explosion is another way in which the Niger Delta has continued to lose its trees. Aside from the loss of trees, the narratives of explosion cannot be complete without giving attention to the scores of charred humans and animals that

went in flames. The destruction of the environment by human activities has led to the painful deaths of many residents of the Niger Delta. Obviously, Mowarin is not unaware about these narratives of explosions which have regularly emanated from the Niger Delta region. The painful experiences presented him with sufficient materials to weave with.

These issues of exploitation and death have induced angst among the indigenes of the Niger Delta – especially the youths. The people of the exploited region feel that they have continued to endure two terrible feelings – environmental devastation and abandonment. The people feel that oil companies have not only destroyed their environments but have also dragged them into poverty. There is the feeling that the oil companies or the government has done little or nothing to compensate the people for the plundering of the region's resources. This feeling was what birthed the creation of militant groups. They blow up pipelines to get the attention of the federal government. It is a form of revolution, and this revolution, according to Peel (2011), deteriorated, at different times, into gun duels with the federal government.

Mudiaga's role as an artist is Mowarin's quest to increase the media of interrogating these recurrent episodes of environmental devastation. It cannot be argued that there are little or no pictorial depictions of these issues which the people of the Niger Delta encounter. Mowarin recommends, through his narrative, that the capturing of these environmental issues, using pictures, can improve the creation of awareness to the people and can attract the attention of international bodies. In the excerpt below, Zikiye, having spotted Mudiaga's talent in drawing, instructs him to represent the environmental challenges in drawing:

Zikiye saw Mudiaga as a potential voice for the oil-producing communities of Eko and Ogonbiri. To inspire him, Zikiye asked Mudiaga to recall specific incidents: the soldiers driving students from the primary school, and the uprooting of the community's "Tree of Life" by a caterpillar (p. 70).

It is glaring that Mr Zikiye tries to explore the talent of Mudiaga to create awareness about the agonies of the people and to facilitate environmental rescue. In the following excerpt, Mudiaga underscores that he is a witness to the environmental

issues, confronting the people. He does a very relatable drawing of his community's ecological challenges:

Mudiaga responded by sketching the chaos when his pregnant mother fell and spilled food, pepper stinging her eye in the commotion. Another drawing depicted the bulldozing and uprooting of the "Tree of Life," the community's water source, which was later replaced by a gas flare cone...He also drew a series on the neglected state of the roads, contrasting it with doctored photos on social media that portray them as newly paved (p. 71).

Mudiaga's drawings are revolutionary. Despite his age, he understands the occurrence of exploitation and the politics around it. First, he creates a striking image of trees that have been felled by bulldozers to create an awareness of the unending deforestation happening in his environment. It is so impressive that Mudiaga understands the politics of the media and how politicians engage the space to cover their failures and depravities. The exploited communities in the narrative are without good roads. The roads are in a pitiable condition but political officeholders, who benefit from the devastation of the environment, present a doctored image which shows the exploited communities as well-developed areas. Mowarin here exposes the falsification of facts which is a culture among politicians.

Health Implications of the Plundered Ecosystem in the Novel

Besides the economic wreck, which the condemnable activities of oil companies cause, Mowarin also explores health implications of the ecological devastations of the environment. Different characters in the novels, including Mudiaga, experience one health condition or the other. According to the Wilderness Society (2021), oil spills are deadly to animals. They cause adverse damage to maritime ecosystem. Water organisms, like humans, survive only in environments which are conducive to living. The Niger Delta is the theater of oil spills. The multinationals drill oil from the ground and transport the products via pipeline. Most times, the pipes crack and the oil spills into rivers and to the land. It is this reality that is depicted in the primary text. In the following excerpt, the narrator reveals that Esama and Peregba see and show their children how oil has polluted the natural water of the community: "Esama and Peregba saw sludge coating the banks of the large lake and at the roots of trees along the rivers... Peregba showed his children oil floating on the

water's surface" (p. 67). The excerpt above reveals a ruined Kpakama that used to be known for its fresh water. The community, for years, boasted of undefiled water which the people relied on for fishing, drinking, cooking, and washing. The activities of the oil companies have led to the pollution of the water to the utter dismay of the indigenes. It should be reiterated that it is the sorry condition of the Niger Delta that Mowarin bewails in the novel.

The narrative reveals that Mudiaga's deformity is caused by the toxic gas flare and crude oil that despoil the water, land and air of the region. Mowarin attributes the physical deformities of some of the residents of the oil rich regions to the activities of the oil companies. These activities result in the pollution of waters, the infiltration of very harmful chemicals into the air, and other threats to health. The novelist anchors the direction of his plot on relatable, true life health disorders which are characteristically evident among engineers at oil multinationals. These engineers usually have vital organs, damaged due to the engineering roles that keep them regularly close to machines and chemicals which are very destructive to human organs. In most oil companies, before recruitment, prospective workers are advised to stop child bearing or to ensure that they have finalized reproductive engagements. This counsel is informed by the employers' awareness about the destruction which refining activities cause to the organs of humans within the locations of refining. The damage is usually reflected in the birth of deformed children. In the following patient-health giver conversation, the matron provides figures which indicate that the physical deformities, which have become the dominant features of the oil regions in the narrative, are the results of the presence of the multinationals. She says, "There are many disabled children in oil-rich Oloibiri State, but fewer in Ogonbiri because the land lacks crude oil..." (p. 6). In Matron Etobo's words, an astounding, quantitative representation of deformities is given; and she makes her clinical observation clearer by saying that the reason, Ogonbiri does not have many deformed children, is that they do not have much oil to be exploited; hence the residents are not as endangered as the residents in other areas.

Most of the portrayals of anxiety before the birth of Mudiaga underscore that residents are antsy about their health situations. They are clearly aware that the incessant pollution of the environment endangers their lives. It is clear that children-bearing has become a very risky venture for them. The narrator reveals the religious

flirtation which the couple demonstrates due to the fear of a possible deformity that their child might have. Esama reveals her effort to seek spiritual backing at her church when she laments, "God, why me? And my pastor assured me that the baby was complete in my belly before I delivered it" (p. 2). The narrator reveals another religious path which Peregba takes just to ensure that the child eludes a deformity: Esama added that her husband had gone to make a sacrifice to their community deity known as Osulu with a goat, and the priest of the deity assured him that the child would not have any complications.

The preventive, religious efforts, which do not yield results, underscore Mowarin's idea that the issue of exploitation and its health hazards, plaguing the Niger Delta region, are not to be approached spiritually. Clearly, the novelist propagates that there will continue to be the reflections of different health conditions in the region no matter the spiritual strategies, deployed.

It is saddening, as bemoaned already, that multinationals do not compensate residents (appropriately) for the different environmental and health hazards the region has been plunged into. Mowarin presents a region with bad roads, insufficient number of schools, and poorly equipped hospitals with inept personnel. It is the pitiful state of the exploited Niger Delta region that he presents through this narrative. Reacting to Mudiaga's health condition, the disillusioned Peregba, who is saddened that the destroyers of their environment still cannot treat the deformity they caused, asks the doctor, "So, you cannot help a child from the oil producing community that your oil company deformed?" (p. 23).

Osugwu and Olaifa (2018) reveal that between 1976 and 1996, over 6,000 oil spills have occurred in the Niger Delta region and about 2,000,000 barrels of crude oil have spilled into the environment. According to the researchers, these spills have contaminated the soil and have contributed to reduced, agricultural yields in the area. These findings broaden the thoughts of individuals, helping them realise that, aside from agricultural policies and poor infrastructural provisions, there is also the case of land pollution which contributes to poor agricultural yields.

It is not just the multinationals that are guilty of this crime of water pollution. The illegal refining, carried out by natives, also contributes. Kadefa (2012) unmasks the activities of the local refineries. He reveals that indigenes boil crude oil in metal

containers, and empty the residue into nearby rivers and creeks. The residue pollutes the waters and makes them unhealthy to be inhabited. It is fair to say that, while the campaign against environmental pollution is taken to the multinationals, it should also be taken to the indigenes who engage in illegal refining activities.

Asimiea and Omokhua (2013), whose work has been cited already, assert that an oil spill, which contaminates the water, causes the reduction of oxygen in the water, thereby coating the breathing of aquatic animals. From this view of the scholars, it is obvious that the presence of spilled oil in water causes difficulty in breathing, for the fishes, due to the reduced presence of air in the water. This is a terror against the organisms in the water, and it is an ecological reality which the primary text mirrors.

There is this dangerous culture which is common among most Africans: they do not give much attention to their health. Most of them are not careful about the things they consume. It will not be wrong to state that most of the individuals in the actual Niger Delta region still use water from the polluted rivers --- some out of ignorance others out of negligence. Those, who use the water out of negligence, ignore the health risks which the polluted water presents. This definitely has health consequences, ranging from damaged body organs, diarrhea, and others.

Some of the facilities and equipment, used by multinationals, include drilling rigs, wellheads, pipelines, separation units, storage tanks, processing plants, gas flares, furnaces, etc. These and the activities of combustion create so much heat in the locations of the company. It is quite unfortunate that these multinationals are usually situated in places close to the residences of humans. The extreme heat triggers discomfort, and one frustrating aspect of this reality is that the rivers, where these suffering residents would have gone to swim and access some levels of coolness, have been polluted. Those, who ignore health warnings and go ahead to swim in the polluted waters, end up developing skin diseases; and there are no reliable, medical facilities where one can be referred for the remediation of illnesses. This continues to be what fuels the rage among the indigenes: their environments are exploited without employment and infrastructural compensations. The heat, which these activities of combustion engender, is captured in the following excerpt:

Finally, Mudiaga's artwork culminated in a portrayal of mothers and children sweating profusely under the gas flares while drying kpokpo garri (p. 71).

It is scarce knowledge that extreme heat is destructive to health. Because of the adaptive strength of Africans, most do not get disconcerted by an atmosphere of extreme heat. Africans are in a neocolonial society where leaders care less about the needs or lacks of the people, and because of this it is believed that one must portray psychological resilience by adapting to heat and other episodes of discomfort. The heat, which is captured in the primary text, is beyond the type, triggered by lack of power supply. It is the extreme heat, generated by the gas flares, erected in the community as is the case of the actual exploited communities in the Niger Delta. According to the World Health Organization (2024), heat is an environmental health disaster which is the leading cause of weather-related deaths. According to the organization, in a very hot environment, already existing illnesses such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, mental health, and asthma can get worse. It adds that diseases are also easily transmitted in an extremely hot environment. There are infections which can be transmitted via sweat. In an extremely hot environment, individuals sweat profusely as captured in the preceding excerpt. If there is not distance or space among the individuals who are sweating, infections can be transmitted when bodies come in contact. The women, making kpokpogarri in the novel, are sweating. The reality is that if there is a character with an infection transferable through sweat, the health of the others is in danger. This is the health hazard the characters are exposed to and the situation is reflective of the precarious situation of the people of the Niger Delta. A striking revelation by the World Health Organization is that heat worsens mental health conditions. This clearly demystifies the circumstances, surrounding psychotic patients' display of extreme aggression when the weather is excruciating.

Exploitation whether in politics or environmental discourses, induces disillusionment, fury, and other manifestations of trauma. This reality explains the display of radicality by exploited individuals through destructive protests, kidnapping, armed robbery, and other vices. It was said in the preceding sections of the work that the feeling of disillusionment and anger among the people of the Niger Delta influenced the forming of militant groups that engage the government in gun battles as a way of portraying their dissatisfaction about the plunderous

dealings of the government and multinationals in the Niger Delta. Members of militant groups are extremely angry. Their anger is what makes them to lose empathy as they engage in very destructive activities, killing and kidnapping people in the process. An individual in such a psychological condition is experiencing mental unwellness, and this is a health condition that should be blamed on the devastation of the environment of the people of the Niger Delta. Mowarin recreates this reality as he invents characters that are extremely angry about the exploitation of their environment and the abandonment of the communities with no or little compensation. The excerpt below reveals the opinion of Zikiye who thinks that the revolt against the exploiters is needed:

There is the need for little rebellion against the corruption and flagrant stealing taking place in the oil-rich Eko Local Government Area in general and Ogonbiri and Ziribiri oil communities in particular. I'm from Ziribiri. I cannot get a job in Saturn oil Company (p. 74).

One now realises why Zikiye, Mudiaga's teacher, has tried to weaponise Mudiaga's drawings to expose the economic ills of the oil companies. From his submission above, it is clear that he has also received his fair share of the feeling of disillusionment. He laments that he can not get a job in Saturn Oil Company. Further reading reveals the sentiments and lack of integrity, shown by the top men in the communities and in the oil companies: they give jobs to very few people of their choices and abandon the larger population of the community. These are episodes of trauma, and trauma is a psychological health disorder. We see this demonstration of trauma in the marital misunderstanding in Peregba's home. Esama, his wife, is traumatized by their financial status. They are unable to get basic needs. This realisation traumatises her as she gets confrontational with her husband, Peregba. The following excerpt reveals an angry Esama, demonstrating traits of trauma as she voices the need for a revolt:

... You're from this community... See our house! Chairs are broken. Ceiling fan is spoilt. We do not have good food to eat. 14 inches television, spoilt. No fridge. No generator. Let Mudi with his one and half leg fight the fight you could not fight with your complete two hands and complete two legs! (pp. 73-74).

Mowarin's infusion of exclamation marks into Esama's utterances underscores her tone. She is obviously shouting, and this means she is expressing anger neurosis --- a mild psychological disorder. The activities of the multinationals have obviously affected her mental health. Esama's demonstration of anger is in line with Freud's (1920) view of trauma. According to Freud, trauma is noticed when the protective covering of stimuli is tampered with. He argues that this leads to overwhelming anxiety. From Freud's perspective, a person, who manifests overwhelming anxiety, is traumatized. This is the medical condition of Esama, and it foregrounds that she is temporarily unwell. Mowarin uses Esama's mental state to metaphorically depict the medical or mental conditions of the people of the Niger Delta who continue to battle with trauma, engendered by feelings of abandonment and disillusionment.

Conclusion

This analysis has exposed the harmful activities of multinationals in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Mowarin's *The Travails of Mudiaga* allegorically captures the events of devastation which unfold in the Niger Delta region. Multinationals go into oil-rich communities and commence their activities. Drilling, burying of pipes, transportation of crude, combustion, and other activities characterise the dealings of these multinationals. To achieve this, they usually disrupt the stability of various habitats by felling trees and drying up waters. These negatively affect organisms as arboreal animals, terrestrial animals, and aquatic animals die in the process or migrate to other places which are not safe for them. The effect goes in a chain as indigenes become unemployed and hungry as there are no fishes to catch or animals to hunt. These activities also affect the health of humans as they fall ill due to the unsafe water they use --- water polluted by oil spill. They also inhale contaminated air. There is also the mental health issue as abandoned indigenes manifest trauma in reaction to the episodes of exploitation they are compelled to endure. Macaulay Mowarin's *The Travails of Mudiaga* is a commendable representation of the agonizing experiences of the people of the Niger Delta.

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