

THE IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN THE NIGER-DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of corruption on environmental management in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. The research reveals that corrupt practices significantly contribute to environmental degradation in the region. The findings further highlight the emergence of social vices such as kidnapping as a consequence of profound social inequalities exacerbated by a rigid class structure. This divide between the privileged and the marginalized exacerbates poverty, illness, and mortality among affected communities due to oil spillages and environmental hazards. The study concludes that corruption has dire implications for environmental sustainability in the Niger-Delta and fosters a cycle of conflict and violence. Moreover, it underscores how class oppression and marginalisation provoke the oppressed to resort to extreme measures, including criminal activities, as a response to systemic injustice. The research emphasizes the urgent need for addressing corruption and class disparities to mitigate environmental degradation and social unrest in the region.

Keywords: Corruption, Environmental Degradation, Marginalisation, Conflict, and Environmental Sustainability.

Introduction

This article aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the socio-economic challenges prevalent in Nigeria's Niger-Delta region. It seeks to highlight the complex interplay between corrupt practices, social decay, and economic exploitation that perpetuate various forms of vice in the region. By examining the impact of dishonest and fraudulent conduct, particularly among those in positions of power, this study underscores the devastating consequences on the region's environmental and social fabric. The resultant effect is the degradation of the geographical environment, which is the primary source of sustenance for the inhabitants, leading to a reliance on illicit activities for survival. This study is grounded in the premise that understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the systemic issues that plague the Niger-Delta region.

Corruption has far-reaching and severe consequences, encompassing a wide range of detrimental effects. The multifaceted repercussions of corruption can be profoundly grave, leading to social deprivation and a myriad of associated vices, including inner-city crime,

armed robbery, prostitution, civil unrest, and kidnapping. Literary works like Habila's *Oil on Water*, Tony Nwaka's *Lords of the Creek*, have effectively captured the complexities of social deprivation and its consequences, while critical theorists have posited that capitalist systems and class structures are underlying factors contributing to social exclusion and marginalization. provide poignant narratives on the prevalence of kidnapping and other social ills in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Marxism, which provides a critical lens for examining the social, economic, and political dynamics of capitalist societies. According to Karl Marx, the political economy of a capitalist state is characterized by the dominance of a powerful class – the bourgeoisie – that exploits the society for its own interests. Marx's theory posits that human society is fundamentally divided into two antagonistic classes: the bourgeoisie (the oppressors) and the proletariat (the oppressed). This dichotomy elucidates the nature of exploitation and the power dynamics between these classes. The bourgeoisie, as the owners of the means of production, wield significant control and dominance over the proletariat, who are forced to sell their labour to survive. This power imbalance enables the bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat through unfair labour practices and wage suppression, thereby maximise their profits. However, Marx argues that as the proletariat become aware of this exploitation, they will inevitably resist and engage in revolutionary protest to challenge the status quo and transform its circumstances. Thus, Marxism advocates for collective action and revolutionary change as a means to address systemic exploitation and inequality.

Marxist Literary Theory

This study is grounded in Marxist literary theory, which posits that literature reflects the societal dynamics shaped by class struggle and economic conditions. Marxist criticism examines literary works within the context of historical materialism, emphasizing the role of ideology, class relations, and economic structures in shaping cultural production. According to Marxist theorists like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, society is divided into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, with the former exploiting the latter through control of the means of production. This fundamental class conflict is seen as the driving force behind social change and historical development.

Marxist literary criticism, as articulated by scholars such as Terry Eagleton and Georg Lukács, focuses on analyzing literary texts as products of specific historical and socio-economic contexts. It seeks to uncover the ideological underpinnings of literary works and their role in either reinforcing or challenging dominant power structures. Key concepts in Marxist theory, such as alienation, commodity fetishism, and the base-superstructure model, provide critical tools for understanding the relationship between literature and society.

The base-superstructure model posits that the economic base of a society determines the nature of its superstructure, including cultural, political, and ideological institutions. Literature, as part of the superstructure, is shaped by and reflects the economic conditions of its time. Marxist critics argue that literature should be understood in relation to its historical and social context, and that it has the potential to evoke revolutionary consciousness and challenge existing power relations.

Social Depravity and Oppression in the Niger-Delta

It is pertinent to preface this discourse with pertinent quotations on the role of writers in society, which will elucidate the rationale behind the persistent portrayal of social depravity in Nigerian literature. Notably, Chinua Achebe's assertion that "a literature which draws its sustenance from the life lived around it and develops imaginative identification with that life has a good chance of achieving the quality and the authority of prophetic utterance" (qtd in Onwuka 4) underscores the significance of literature in reflecting societal realities. This perspective is reinforced by Chris Adetuyi, who posits in "Thematic Preoccupation of Nigerian Literature: A Critical Approach" that Nigerian writers serve as "sensitive questioners" and reformers, critiquing the human condition and exposing societal ills (p, 22). Adetuyi further argues that Nigerian literature often depicts the harsh realities of life, including poverty, political oppression, economic exploitation, and various forms of injustice (22). The alignment of Achebe's and Adetuyi's views with the themes prevalent in Nigerian literature underscores the imperative of examining social depravity and its manifestations, such as kidnapping, in the region. Scholars like Olaniyi Evans and Ikechukwu Kelikume have also highlighted the impact of socio-economic factors on militancy and violence in Nigeria, providing valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals in the Niger-Delta region.

The submissions of Evans and Kelikume highlight the critical issues of exploitation and marginalization in the Niger-Delta region, which are intricately linked to social depravity and kidnapping. This perspective is reinforced by scholars such as Chinedu Udeh and Charles Feghabo, who emphasize the devastating impact of oil exploration and exploitation on the socio-physical environment of the region. Udeh notes that "oil exploration and exploitation has over the last four decades impacted disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the Niger-Delta oil-bearing communities" (114), while Feghabo asserts that the region is a victim of severe environmental degradation due to frequent oil spills and gas flaring (3).

The neglect of the Niger-Delta region by the government, despite the environmental damage, is a recurring theme in the literature. Adaobi Ugbomeh and Augustus Adubi argue that the region's crisis reflects long-held feelings of alienation, power inequalities, and perceived injustices (108). The discovery of oil in the region has led to the transformation of the Niger Delta wetland into an industrial wasteland, with petro-businesses adopting substandard practices that subject the local population to inhumanities and injustices.

The environmental and socio-economic consequences of oil exploitation in the region are well-documented. Oil spills have destroyed farmlands, polluted water sources, and disrupted

traditional occupations (Inoni et al, 2006; Uyigue and Agho, 2007). Gas flaring has contributed to air and land pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change (Ndubuisi & Asia, 2007). The cumulative impact of these activities has pushed the region towards ecological disaster, threatening the livelihoods of the local population (Ohiagbuchi, 2007).

The literature underscores the urgent need to address the environmental and socio-economic challenges facing the Niger-Delta region. The effects of oil exploitation have led to rapid environmental and climate changes, dictating the nature and pace of social changes in the region. It is essential to consider the long-term implications of these changes and the potential consequences for the region's ecosystem and inhabitants.

Environmental Degradation in the Niger-Delta

The Niger-Delta region faces significant environmental and health challenges due to decades of oil spills and gas flaring. Despite the lack of immediate health impact assessments, recent studies have highlighted the environmental health consequences of oil activities in the region. Research has shown that oil exploration and exploitation have led to increased health hazards, including respiratory illnesses, cancers, and miscarriages (Ana et al., 2009; Ndubuisi & Asia, 2007). The environmental degradation caused by oil activities has also disrupted the livelihoods of local communities, who rely on the natural environment for survival.

The impact of oil exploration and exploitation on the environment is multifaceted. Seismic activities and drilling have serious ecological impacts, including deforestation, soil structure disruption, and groundwater pollution (Ikporukpo, 2004). Oil spills have contaminated surface and groundwater sources, posing significant health risks to local communities (Ana et al., 2009). Furthermore, gas flaring has contributed to air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change (Ndubuisi & Asia, 2007).

The Niger Delta region's environmental degradation has significant economic and social implications. The region's biodiversity and ecosystem services are crucial for the livelihoods of local communities, and the degradation of these services has exacerbated poverty and unemployment (UNDP, 2006). The lack of economic development and infrastructure in the region has led to widespread discontent and conflict.

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established to address the socio-economic challenges facing the region. However, corruption and incompetence have hindered the commission's effectiveness (Watts, 1999). The region's dependence on oil revenue has also created a paradox, where the abundance of oil has become a curse rather than a blessing (Dr. Michael Uduak).

To address the environmental and socio-economic challenges facing the Niger Delta region, there is a need for transparency, accountability, and community participation in governance. The government must ensure proper financing of the Ministry of Niger-Delta and checkmate corruption, which has been a major obstacle to development in the region. Additionally, the

government should prioritize environmental sustainability and social justice, and work towards diversifying the economy to reduce dependence on oil revenue.

Kidnapping in the Niger-Delta Region as a Product of Social Deprivation in a Class Structured Society

Kidnapping in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria can be understood as a product of social deprivation in a class-structured society. The region, notably rich in oil resources, has been plagued by poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation, leading to feelings of frustration and desperation among its inhabitants.

Kidnapping can be seen as a product of social deprivation in a class-structured society, where individuals or groups feel marginalized, excluded, and disenfranchised from accessing resources, opportunities, and social services. In such societies, the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and privileges can lead to feelings of frustration, resentment, and desperation among those who are disadvantaged.

Social deprivation can manifest in various forms, including poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education and healthcare, and limited opportunities for social mobility. When individuals or groups feel that they are being denied their basic rights and needs, they may resort to extreme measures, such as kidnapping, to draw attention to their plight or to exact revenge on those they perceive as responsible for their situation.

In a class-structured society, the privileged class often holds power and influence, while the marginalized class is left to struggle for survival. This can create a sense of hopelessness and despair among the disadvantaged, leading some to engage in criminal activities, including kidnapping, as a means of coping with their situation or seeking revenge against those they perceive as responsible for their plight.

Furthermore, social deprivation can also lead to a breakdown in social cohesion and trust in institutions, creating an environment in which kidnapping and other forms of violence can thrive. In such societies, the rule of law may be weak, and the government may be seen as ineffective or corrupt, further exacerbating the sense of desperation and frustration among the marginalized.

Overall, kidnapping as a product of social deprivation in a class-structured society highlights the need for addressing the underlying social and economic issues that drive individuals to engage in such activities. This requires a comprehensive approach that includes addressing poverty, inequality, and lack of access to resources and opportunities, as well as promoting social justice and human rights.

Literature Intervention on Niger-Delta Literature

The literary landscape of the Niger Delta region is characterized by a distinct body of works that reflect the region's worldview, consciousness, sensibilities, identity, society, and

landscape. Notable texts that have earned the credit of being distinguished as Niger Delta Literature (NDL) include J.P. Clark's *Ozidi Saga* (1966), Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Soza Boy: A Novel in Rotten English* (1985), Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* (2006), and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), among others. These texts, while not exhaustive, encapsulate the thematic drive of NDL, which often centers on cultural issues, social depravity, and the confluence between resource control and kidnapping.

The discovery of oil in the region has sparked a capitalist mentality among the upper class, leading to social deprivation and environmental degradation. Writers from the region have adeptly captured the individual and environmental changes that have occurred as a result of oil extraction. For instance, Caroline Nwaka's ecocritical analysis of Ibiwari Ikiriko's *_Oily Tears of Death_* and Tanure Ojaide's *_Waiting for the Hatching of a Cockerel_* highlights the truncation of the natural cycle of the landscape's flora and the emasculation of human subjects dwelling in the Niger Delta environment.

The link between social deprivation and kidnapping in the Niger Delta region has also been explored by scholars. Enobakhare Esosa's study on fatal attraction and social isolation notes that the region's conflict over unfair share of crude oil earnings and gas flaring activities has spawned vicious kidnapping. Similarly, Peter Ottuh's evaluation of the Nigerian experience asserts that the Niger Delta region is rich in petroleum oil, yet characterized by high incidence of poverty, absence of infrastructure, and deprivations of the local and oil communities.

These studies and literary works underscore the complex relationship between social deprivation, environmental degradation, and kidnapping in the Niger Delta region. The region's unique cultural, social, and environmental context has given rise to a distinct literary and scholarly discourse that highlights the need for social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and resource control.

The Niger Delta region's complex socio-economic and environmental context has been extensively explored in literary works and scholarly research. Scholars such as Joyce Agofure and Zulfa'a Yeshu'a have analyzed the region's crisis through the lens of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, highlighting the repressive tendencies of the Nigerian state and the exploitative activities of oil multi-nationals. Their analysis reveals that despite the region's immense oil wealth, the local population suffers from poverty, oppression, and exploitation, which has led to the phenomenon of kidnapping.

Similarly, other scholars have examined the poetics and politics of landscape in Nnimmo Bassey's poetry, noting the environmental destruction and violence that have resulted from unguided oil exploration. Tanure Ojaide's conclusion that the Niger Delta region's conflict is part of a larger misunderstanding and mistreatment of the people underscores the need for social justice and environmental sustainability.

The consistent awareness of social depravity and kidnapping in the Niger Delta region has become a recurring theme in NDL. Scholars such as Kimiebi Ebienfa and Douglas Kaze have corroborated that the region's marginalization, disempowerment, and suppression have made aggressive oil agitations inevitable, leading to radical activities and violence.

Ecocritical analyses of literary works such as Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* have also highlighted the environmental degradation and exploitation that have led to the impoverished existence of the people. The vulnerability of the people, who are mostly rural peasants engaged in farming and fishing, has morphed into anxiety and insurrectionary acts.

The connection between social depravity and kidnapping in the Niger-Delta region is unmistakable. The region's unique cultural, social, and environmental context has given rise to a distinct literary and scholarly discourse that highlights the need for social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and resource control.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant relationship between social depravity and kidnapping in the Niger-Delta region. The findings suggest that social depravity can escalate into kidnapping as a means of seeking redress for perceived marginalisation and oppression. While this research does not condone kidnapping as a legitimate means of addressing grievances, it emphasizes the need for the government to address the underlying issues driving this phenomenon.

To mitigate the prevalence of kidnapping in the Niger-Delta region, it is recommended that the government engages in consistent dialogue with aggrieved groups to address their concerns and implement agreements. Furthermore, policies should be formulated to address resource control and regional development, demonstrating a genuine commitment to the well-being of the Niger-Delta people. By adopting a proactive and inclusive approach, the government can work towards reducing social depravity and creating an environment that fosters peace and stability in the region.

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