

**Nonhuman Agency, Development and Psychological Displacement: An Ecopostcolonial
Study of *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh and *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila**



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**Nonhuman Agency, Development and Psychological Displacement: An Ecopostcolonial
Study of *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh and *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila**

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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DEDICATION

To my parents who always stood by my side at any situations.

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Abstract

This research represents an ecopostcolonial reading of *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*, applying Huggan and Tiffin's theoretical framework and archival research methods. The primary focus of this paper is to identify the Ecopostcolonial themes-nonhuman agency, development, and psychological displacement in the novels *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*. Through the lens of Huggan and Tiffin's Postcolonial Ecocriticism, this paper underlines the dynamic relationship between human and nonhuman entities to generate sensibility not to otherize nonhuman agency because the portrayal of uncontrollable natural calamities like storms and diseases like dengue fever in the novels, manifest the fact that Humans are not only the active agents in the environment. In this way, this paper debunks human dominance over the environment and emphasizes the articulation of nonhuman agency. Furthermore, the archival research guides the study to investigate the complexities of development that serve as the bridge between colonialism and the exploitation of nonhuman agencies to monopolize specific products to maintain the power dynamics in the subaltern lands. Therefore, this study highlights the tensions between colonizers' ambitions and indigenous populations' survival strategies. These survival strategies often force indigenous people to become jobless, homeless, and poverty-stricken and generate psychological displacement. Considering these aspects, this study categorizes development as the source of exploitation and a catalyst of psychological displacement. Thus ecopostcolonial reading of these two novels contributes to the deepened understanding of the environmental and postcolonial dimensions in contemporary literature.

Keywords: Postcolonial Ecocriticism, nonhuman agency, development, psychological displacement.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Postcolonial ecocriticism has emerged because scholars have observed that the legacy of colonization is still occurring uniquely where both the environment and subaltern people are still the victim of power dynamics. This new concern in the field of literary genre unifies two different interdisciplinary theories: ecocriticism and Postcolonialism. There are several reasons to unify these two different genres. First of all, both approaches concern the “historical context from which specific mechanisms of exploitation have evolved, and both are inextricably linked to social and political activism” (Gerhardt 517). For example, both fields are aware of the fact land exploitation is the main mechanism of exploitation. Furthermore, both fields are concerned with the “complex relationship between the social and political center and its margin” (Gerhardt 518) and the attempt to provide a voice to the silenced others to listen to them. For example, ecocriticism deals with nature’s voice by considering it a subaltern. On the other hand, postcolonialism deals with subaltern people who have a voice but their voice cannot be heard anymore because of the power dynamics issues. Both of these fields attempt to represent the voice of these unheard voices. Finally, both fields grappled with the constraints of their core concepts, which, “for all their productivity, also threaten to perpetuate traditional ways of binary thinking” (Gerhardt 518). It fosters the idea that both of these fields want to break the concept of binary but fear the fact they might not create another binary. These unified concerns nourish the belief that while Eco-criticism is an interdisciplinary theory that focuses on the “earth-centered approach” (Glottfelty xviii), and postcolonialism, another interdisciplinary field of study examines “the social, cultural, political, and economic effects of colonialism and imperialism, both during and after the colonial period” (Said 511), postcolonial ecocriticism is more focused. It looks specifically at how the environment creates

challenges for people in colonized communities all over the world. Scholars in this field explore how different communities handle problems like pollution, deforestation, and changes in their natural surroundings. By acknowledging these issues Huggan and Tiffin provide the most relevant definition of postcolonial ecocriticism. They remark, “Postcolonial ecocriticism is like a tool that is used to closely examine how people in colonized places deal with environmental issues because the world where we are living has been changed by colonialism. People not only deal with their histories but also with how the environment, the air they breathe, and the land they walk on, are affected” (24). In this regard, it can be considered that postcolonial ecocriticism is a microscope that dissects not only past histories but also ongoing surroundings. Nevertheless, as it is the new concern of the field of literary genre, like other genres still it is in the process of “an ongoing journey of discovery”, (Nixon 69) where scholars keep growing, changing, progressing learning, sharing, and helping the reader to think deeply about the interconnectedness between humans and the world they live in, especially in the context of postcolonial legacies.

By examining these aspects, two recently well-received books, *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh and *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila, take us on unique journeys where both of these books unfold the ecopostcolonial issues in an opaque manner. Both of these books highlight different settings to unfold the environmental issues and power dynamics as well. However, especially, for this paper I only focus on the delta region of the Sundarbans and Niger Delta though in these books other settings are also existing. Ghosh's tale is set in the Sundarbans, a vast mangrove forest, while Habila vividly portrays the Niger Delta. These settings are not just background rather they are the active characters and actively shape the characters' lives and the communities they belong to. For instance, In *Gun Island*, Ghosh unfolds his story in the Sundarbans, a magical mangrove forest by the Bay of Bengal. This is not just a place; it is a living force influencing every species that is connected to its ecosystem. The Sundarbans,

which is accomplished with diverse life and delicate balance, become a key player, impacting how characters see and act in their world. Ghosh cleverly uses this setting to explore the complexities of postcolonial life, where nature isn't just a background but an active part of the unfolding incidents like uprooting the dominant culture, surrendering the freedom of choice, securing the Western ideology, losing the sense of belonging and so on. On the other hand, Habila's *Oil on Water* takes us to the Niger Delta, a region of rivers and rich greenery. The land is not just scenery; it is a living part of the story, interacting deeply with the human characters. The Niger Delta, struggling against environmental harm from oil exploitation, shows the interconnected relationship connection between people and their surroundings after colonialism (Rueckert 110). Habila uses this setting to highlight the challenges like unequal power dynamics, loss of sense of belonging, and so on faced by communities dealing with ecological problems, making it a vital part of the story. In both books, the chosen settings go beyond just being places; they become the main characters shaping lives, struggles, and the feeling of belonging. In that case, it would justify saying that the Sundarbans and the Niger Delta act as storytellers, revealing the impact of ecological changes caused by historical and colonial forces and Ghosh and Habila skillfully uncover the deep meanings hidden in these landscapes, emphasizing the strong connection between nature and the postcolonial experience.

By following the mentioned issues, to accomplish this research, archival research has been used. To describe what Archival research is, Lynee Lewis Gaillet remarks, that it is the process of “revisiting primary and canonical materials with a new set of research questions in mind, mining a broader range of archives than heretofore considered, viewing archives in ways that make knowledge rather than simply finding what’s already known” (36). In that case, it can be considered that archival research is a systematic investigation and examination of historical documents and records that researchers collect from primary sources like manuscripts, newspapers, novels, official documents, articles, and other materials, and by

examining these archival materials, researchers acquire a deeper understanding of incidents of past and its connection with the contemporary setting. Hereof, in this research, the primary data sources are the novels *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*, which have been analyzed within the framework of Huggan and Tiffin's Postcolonial Ecocriticism model. Besides that, to establish my hypothesis I take guidance from other relevant documents like journal articles, theories of ecocriticism, and postcolonialism as well.

Nevertheless, by following this research method, I focus on the critical exploration of non-human agency, a legacy of colonization which is development, and psychological displacement within the Ecopostcolonial context which are portrayed in the novels *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh and *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila. By unraveling the complexities of non-human agency, the study aims to challenge anthropocentric perspectives by understanding the roles and impact of environmental elements. This objective seeks to break the romanticized version of nature highlighting the active roles of agency in both novels. Furthermore, it seeks to break the "pseudo consciousness" (Hall 450) of development in the selected novels by highlighting the historically disguised form of colonization which time and time again revealed through the pseudo happiness, success, freedom, and so on. Moreover, this study also seeks to focus on the characters undergoing psychological displacement within the framework of Ecopostcolonial narratives. By examining the internal issues of the local landscapes of these characters, the study aims to unfold the emotional and mental ramifications of the experiences of the subaltern people. This exploration contributes to a better understanding of how in postcolonial life, people are affected by changes in the environment and society. These objectives together create a thorough examination of ecological and postcolonial aspects in modern literature, enhancing our knowledge of the interconnectedness between humans and the environment and again reminding us of the law of ecology that "Everything is connected to everything else" (Rueckert 108).

However, the observation of this study is confined to the literary domain, and interpretations are subjective, and shaped by the researchers' viewpoints. Additionally, this study does not aim to examine all themes within the novels; rather, it focuses on three specific aspects—non-human agency, development as colonized form, and psychological displacement. In the following chapters, the study explores these themes in the novels *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*. The goal of this paper is not only to analyze these novels but also to contribute to the broader conference on Ecopostcolonial literature.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Ecopostcolonial is a relatively new branch of knowledge. There is not sufficient literature on the novels *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water* read from Ecopostcolonial perspectives. Since the articles are few, there have been no specific scholarly articles found specifically based on the aspects of nonhuman agency, development as colonized form, and psychological displacement of these two novels. Rather most of the articles have focused on the theme of human voice, migration which is another form of physical displacement, climate change, and so on in these two novels.

2.1. *Gun Island*

Aishwarya Samkaria in her paper titled “Postcolonial Nonhuman Blurring (B) Orders in Migrant Ecologies: A Postanthropocentric Reading of Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island*” focuses on the concept of displacement by highlighting the migration of humans. She expresses that, myth plays an important role in migrating people from one place to another. She points out that the novel is based on the popular folk characters Bonduki Sadagrqa and Manasa Devi who are connected with the Land Sundarbans which is located between West Bengal in India and Bangladesh. The character, Bonduki Sadagar (Gun Merchant) denies being a devotee of Mansa Devi and runs from one place to another place to escape from the wrath of Mansa Devi. But he forgets that Mansa Devi is the goddess of snakes and poisonous creatures and it is not easy for him to trick her. Sooner he realizes that no matter what he tries he cannot escape and also admits that humans are insignificant in front of the natural world (Samkaria 28). This implies the fact that there is a symbiosis connection between humans and nature. But as humans are obsessed with their dominant attitude they consider the other essence as insignificance and then the chaos occurs which can be observed throughout the whole novel. To foster this idea, the

author emphasizes the migration issue. She finds that characters like Tipu, Rafi, and Lubna find themselves perpetually on the move due to the ravages of climate change. Dependent on the natural resources of their lands, they face displacement as natural disasters obliterate their surroundings. Migration becomes a desperate pursuit for a better life, driven by the aspiration to escape the aftermath of environmental calamities (Samkaria 34). As human destroy the ecological law, they fall into economic danger and lose the natural resources to live in their native and that is why they move to other places to survive but this migration is a never-ending journey of suffering. Because for getting a better life, people are moving from one place to another but to move from one place to another, one needs money. The people who are already poor, migrate from where they can get money. That is why they take illegal routes to cross the borders. While doing this, most often they become the victim of human traffickers. These traffickers are more dangerous than their impoverishment life in the Sundarbans because if these traffickers do not get money, they do not even hesitate to kill. That is why, the author mentions, “This creates a never-ending cycle of suffering, where people try to escape one dangerous situation only to end up in another” (36). Thus this paper highlights problems of climate change, and poverty which ultimately force people to go for physical displacement.

Bushra Syed, Farheen Akhtar Qadri, and Jawaria Sajid in their paper titled “Devastation of Nature and Exploitation of Indigenous People: Postcolonial Ecocritical Study of Gun Island by Amitav Ghosh” bring out the fact that postcolonial ecocriticism is not limited to certain geographic regions but it has become a universal concern. To highlight this issue, they focus on issues like the deterioration of land and the myth of development. They point out that “postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental violence, and the marginalization of indigenous communities are interlinked” (Syed et al 25) because humans are always left shocked and surprised by disastrous events like “drought, flood, storms, earthquakes, and so forth which

plunder the ecological pyramid and have left us near the precarious edge of destruction” (Syed et al.25). And to reveal the hidden cause for these catastrophes they focus on the myth of Manasa Devi. They share that, there is a myth of Mansa Devi that she sends the hot wind to the house of a gun merchant and a captain and orders the wind to burn the house. Another story of this folk version says that Mansa Devi herself sets fire to their house. However, the truth is it is climate change that is controlling everything. None can be blamed for this. Neither the gun merchant nor Manasa Devi (Syed et al. 27). They also mention, “climate change is the form of development, hence, development is the noble cause for all of the destruction” (Syed et al. 28). However, this development is the legacy of colonialism and historically gun merchants are also part of this development. Hence, in this paper the interlink between gun merchants and development has not been mentioned properly which can be further discovered.

Lucinda Newns in her paper titled “The Sea Cannot Be Fenced”: “Natural” and “Unnatural” Borders in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* and Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island*” focuses on the fact that nonhuman entities like sea cannot be tamed anymore and to project ecological resistance, Lucinda mainly focuses human agency. For example, throughout her paper, she focuses on the human characters and their effort to unveil the hidden meaning of the myth of Mansa Devi to give the environment justice. She points out, “Deen, Piya, Cinta, Lisa’s transnational movement is carried out the environmental justice” (Newns12). Furthermore, to point out the global issues of climate change, she expresses that the novel extensively examines various climate issues through the voices of its human characters. Collectively, these voices unequivocally convey the central theme that the ongoing climate issues are a direct consequence of the relentless exploitation of the environment (16). Moreover, she expresses, “Transforming international spaces into a common point of gathering, characters that meet in the Sundarbans at the start of the novel (Deen, Tipu, Rafi, and Piya) end up finding each other in Venice due to unforeseeable climate events, uncanny

coincidences, and social mobility (legally and illegally)” (Newns 16). Thus to give the justice to environment the author mainly focuses on human voices. However, this particular issue can also be read from the lens of nonhuman agency.

Shaveta Gupta in the paper titled “Ecocide: A Study of Climate Change in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*” brings out the fact that human’s self-centered attitude destroys nonhuman entities like the sea which has resulted in the problems of global warming and climate change because of these issues, how Sundarbans is also affected that has also been discussed. “Ecologically, rising sea levels are rapidly altering the landscape, causing the islands to disappear due to constant encroachment by the sea. The unpredictability of tides makes the construction of embankments challenging (Gupta 118). Ultimately, this rising sea level ultimately brings misfortune to everyone, especially for the Sundarbans as gradually it will lose its biodiversity. To foster this idea, the author points out that, “The inhabitants of Sundarbans, relying on activities such as timber collection, fuel wood, fishing, farming, and honey collection, face daily survival challenges” (Gupta 118). Not only humans the other animals also suffer a lot as animals like dolphins are searching for a secure place to survive but ultimately “some had been ensnared by fisherman’s nets and some had been hit by motorboats and steamers (Gupta 19). The author further mentions the broader aspect of climate change that is happening throughout the world. They express that in the novel, Ghosh represents another effect of climate change and that is wildfires which are happening throughout the world, even in the first world countries. These wildfires also destroy the lives of humans, lands, birds, animals, and plants. (120). This reflects the fact that the destruction of nature is not confined to the local setting rather it becomes a global issue as they remark, “after going through several real-life experiences, not only in Sundarbans but also, in America and Italy, that Deen understood the deep meaning of the legend, where it “opens up a world” showing the real

uncanny ecological picture of the world” (123). Hence, this paper only focuses on climate change which is happening everywhere. Though this paper slightly observes the fact that nonhuman entities are important it does not unravel the fact that non-entities have also a voice and their articulation method is different.

Ursula Kluwick in her paper titled “The global deluge: floods, diluvian imagery, and aquatic language in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*” describes *Gun Island* (2019) as a novel about the natural disaster that ultimately causes migration. People of the Sundarbans because of the natural calamities and other social issues, migrate to other places, especially in Venice. She points out, “Venice has become home of the largest Bangladeshi community in continental Europe. Most of the population came through undocumented migration. The service sector absorbs over 70% of the workers belonging to the Bangladeshi community” (70). It is happening because the people who are living in the coastal areas are suffering a lot because of climate change. To give an example, the author mentions, “Rafi, Bilal, Kabir, and Tipu are a few of those individuals who come to Venice through illegal routes putting their lives at stake. Climatic and the resultant economic reasons forced these people to leave their lands and take refuge, legally or illegally, in an alien land” (Kluwick 70). However, because of this climate change not only humans but animals also migrated to a new place to survive people which has been noted in the following lines: “Like humans, animals at Sundarbans, are also the victims of climate change, resulting in their migration” (Kluwick 71). Because these animals have their ways of life. They have their way of interacting with each other. As the land Sundarbans is changing, the natural or regular way of communication of these animals is hampering now. That is the reason they are now losing their ways and at the same time, they are losing their family (Kluwick71). Thus this paper reflects the notion of

displacement but this displacement is considered as physical displacement. However, how the psychological displacement occurs has not been mentioned in this paper.

2.2. *Oil on Water*

In their article “Environmental Degradation, Militancy/Kidnapping and Oil Theft in Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*”, E. D. Simon, J. E. Akung, and B. U. Bassey highlight the degradation of the communities due to oil exploitation. They point out “Environmental degradation and pollution have caused untold harm and hardship to the Niger Delta region. In discussing these critical issues, theories of ecocriticism will be explored” (Simon et al. 384). Through the lens of ecocriticism, they point out that after the exploration of oil exploration, humans greed exploited the resources of the land which is the ultimate essence of anthropocentrism. They further express that as over time, the environment of Niger Delta is getting polluted hence people who live in a particular area and are dependent on that area for their livelihood now facing a lot of problems. Because their living source is erasing day by day now they are trying to move to another place to survive. Even animals and plants are getting destroyed. Besides because of the gas flares and acid rain, the roofs of houses are also getting messed up (584). They further mention, “the Niger Delta alone, more than 100 places where gas is burned send 400 million tons of a gas called carbon dioxide into the air every year” (Simon et al. 585). However, this damage to local ecology ultimately generates criminal activities. As they point out, “In *Oil on Water*, the central idea is the kidnap of Mrs. Isabel Floode, the expatriate wife of a British Petroleum engineer. Habila links the prevalence of kidnapping to a lack of good jobs, poverty, disillusionment, and corruption among others” (Simon et al. 86). Finally, they point to the collaboration crime of government, militant, local, and soldiers which need to be stopped as soon as possible (Simon et al. 87). Thus this paper from the ecological point of view explores the crisis of the Niger Delta which can also be read from the ecopostcolonial perspective.

Maximilian Feldner in her paper titled “Representing the Neocolonial Destruction of the Niger Delta: Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*” examines the issue like the degradation of the environment and society in the Niger Delta region. She points out that when a region suffers from an economic problem it generates more other crises like “domination, exploitation, oppression, inequality and so many other societal structures that are exploitative by the nature of their creation” (Feldner 515). But to prevent this problem the government does not take any proper steps rather the government is also involved in exploiting the local communities. “The incessant unconventional exploitation process and procedures of petroleum products in the Niger Delta leaves the entire region despoiled and results in different forms of agitation, resistance movements, and groups that seek to draw the attention of the government to their environmental, economic, and health situation. Instead of addressing these germane concerns, the government deploys troops to oppress, dominate, exploit, and silence the people of the communities” (Feldner 517). So here, it can be observed the native is against local natives which is a strong valid point for postcolonial issues because postcolonialism maintains the legacy of colonization in the local space. Here, in this novel, it can be seen that the powerful natives consider the Niger Delta as a resourceful land that they can exploit as much as they can and make that a war place. “The Niger Delta is depicted as a war zone. The military is at war with the militants, the militants are warring with and kidnapping oil workers for ransom, and in the process, pipelines and communities are destroyed, homes abandoned, and land and waterways despoiled and these in a way constitute the social and economic destruction of the environment” (Feldner 522-524). Finally, in this paper, Fledner seeks environmental justice for the environment and local people. Thus this paper represents the socioeconomic and ecological destruction of the Niger Delta. However, from the lens of the neocolonial aspect, this paper mainly focuses on the miserable condition of subaltern people and postcolonialism deals with the sufferings of subaltern people. However, as necolonization is the legacy of colonization

and development also included in this issue hence, the issues of this paper can be analyzed from the lens of ecopostcolonialism.

Nada Osama Hamed Mohammed, Dr. Alshaymaa Mohamed Ahmed, and Prof. Azza Ahmed Heikal, in their paper titled, “Slow Violence and Sociocultural Degeneration in Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water: An Ecocritical Study*” aims to trace Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence in Helon Habila’s novel *Oil on Water*, with focus on the effect of environmental degradation on the sociocultural identity of the population. As Rob Nixon can be considered a pioneer of postcolonial ecocriticism this paper slightly unfolds the issues of ecopostcolonialism. For example, this paper argues that “the Niger Delta is not only under the threat of environmental degradation but is also threatened by the disintegration of the sociocultural identity which unites the region and grants it its sense of wholeness. Identity is a concept that has long been scrutinized and studied by scholars in various fields such as philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, to name a few. It is often associated with abstract notions like tradition, religion, and values. However, several scholars attempt to view identity from a different stance” (Mohammed et al. 114). Firstly, this paper focuses on the devastating impact of oil pollution on the natural resources of the Niger Delta, leading to the gradual erosion of essential environmental elements crucial for people’s survival. As the ecological balance is disrupted, tension rises among the local population, compelling them to seek alternative means of livelihood. The degradation of their once-abundant resources prompts a significant shift, as individuals are compelled to relocate in search of alternative sources of sustenance (Mohammed et al. 117). After that, this paper focuses on the impact of this loss of natural resources which generates the urge to migration because displaced by the destruction of their traditional resources, people are forced to abandon their homes in pursuit of new opportunities and The quest for alternative livelihoods becomes a catalyst for significant “population movements, as individuals and communities grapple with the challenges posed by

the loss of their environmental foundation. The consequences of oil pollution extend beyond environmental degradation, permeating into the fabric of daily life and necessitating a migration-driven search for new avenues of survival” (Mohammed et al. 125). Thus this paper focuses on the psychological displacement in an opaque manner. Through the lens of ecopostcolonialism this issue can be broadly explained.

Ocholi Victor Idakwo and Stephen Ogunpitan, in their paper titled, “Postcolonial Trauma and Environmental Despoliation in Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*” explores the environmental crisis in the Niger Delta and their insightful reflection on the socio-economic conditions of the region's citizens. Drawing inspiration from Franz Fanon's concept of postcolonial mentality, which interprets the Western-Southern colonial encounter as inherently violent and suggests that redress necessitates resistance, they advocate for a vigorous rejection of all forms of environmental exploitation. The focal point of their analysis centers on the devastation inflicted upon the Niger Delta by multinational corporations, positing that these activities significantly and detrimentally impact the socio-economic well-being of the local population (Idakwo & Ogunpitan 51). They highlight the traumatic consequences experienced by individuals such as Zaq and Rufus, who find themselves in these communities for specific reasons. The study underscores that the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta lays bare a paradoxical situation of scarcity amidst abundance, with evident and traumatic implications (Idakwo & Ogunpitan 51). In alignment with Fanonian theory, Idakwo, and Ogunpitan seek for essential resistance against those people who are responsible for environmental exploitation. Additionally, they also seek justice for the subaltern people who are also victims of the exploiters. They are also suffering from trauma which is beyond description. By highlighting people’s trauma, they analyze this issue from the postcolonial aspect. However, this trauma is an essential part of the eco postcolonialism also which generates the idea of

psychological displacement. Thus the issues of this paper can be reevaluated from the lens of ecopostcolonialism.

In his essay "Rape of a Nation: An Eco-critical Reading of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*," Solomon Adedokun Edebor focuses on comprehensive exploration and analysis of the profound consequences and impacts arising from environmental pollution, while also highlighting the invaluable advantages associated with an uncontaminated environment as depicted in the novel. Edebor asserts "the sacred nature of the environment, emphasizing that it should be revered rather than desecrated" (45). Here it reflects a deep concern for the preservation of the natural sources for the benefit of humans. Besides that, through this statement, the author manifests the fact that nature plays a significant role in maintaining economic sustainability for humans. So human has to protect nature the way nature is protecting them. And if humans violate this law then the consequences will be dangerous. Edebor articulates "These consequences bring the catastrophe like loss of human lives, the entrenchment of poverty, a pervasive sense of hopelessness, mass displacement of communities, and the decimation of animals and aquatic life" (45). Furthermore, he underscores the profound impact on the means of "self-sustenance, illustrating how a contaminated environment disrupts the delicate balance necessary for communities to thrive" (46). Edebor's analysis serves as a manuscript to call for justice to protect the environment urgently. Through his exploration of Habila's novel, he shows an urgency of an ecocentric attitude towards nature for the well-being of the environment and humanity. However, from an ecocentric point of view, this paper slightly discusses the fact urgency of nonhuman voices but, how these nonhuman voices act has not been mentioned. So, the issues of this paper can be evaluated through the lens of ecopostcolonialism.

2.3. Exploring Interwoven Environments in the Niger Delta and Sundarbans

Inutu Lukonga in his paper titled “Nigeria's Non-Oil Exports: Determinants of Supply and Demand” focuses on colonial exploitation and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. He remarks “Nigeria continues to be a significant oil-producing nation, relying heavily on crude oil for both sustainability and developmental initiatives, and extraction of oil resources, a key legacy of British colonialism has resulted in devastating ecological consequences”(2) It is noteworthy that before gaining independence, “Nigeria's economic foundation primarily rested on agriculture, with exports of raw materials such as cocoa, cashews, groundnuts, palm oil, and other agricultural products” (Lukonga 2) but after this transition, Nigerian natural environment is suffering from different challenges because of extensive oil pollution. which Lukonga states,

“the creeks and coastal areas are noted for oil pollution hazards resulting from exploration, transportation, freshwater areas are polluted through waste disposal generated from oil and industrial effluent (sic). Also, the pipeline way and road network are polluted during transportation of petroleum products as well as crude” (3)

However, the Nigerian government has established different institutions to prevent environmental crises. The institutions are the “Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA), now a ministry, and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Several laws have been instituted, including the Environmental Impact Assessment Decree No 86 of 1992, the Oil Pipeline Act of 1990, the Oil in Navigable Water Act (LFN, 1990), the Petroleum (Drilling and Production) Regulation under the Petroleum Act of 1969, and numerous others” (Lukongo 23). Unfortunately, the majority of laws and policies ineffective. Furthermore, “during the 1990s, Nigeria underwent a phase of political unrest and violence under the rule of Abacha's dictatorship. Despite global support and protests directed at the government, military, and oil sectors, environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa faced execution in 1995” (Lukongo 35).

Kanksha Mahadevia and Mayank Vika, in their paper titled, “Climate Change – Impact On the Sundarbans” focus on the dual challenges of colonial exploitation and contemporary environmental threats in Sundarbans. They remark,

“Situated in the delta formed by the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers, this area encompasses a substantial part of one of the planet's most extensive and interconnected mangrove forest blocks, rich in biodiversity and natural resources including trees, birds, animals, water bodies, carbon dioxide sinks, honey, fuelwood, pulp, charcoal, thatch, fodder, wax, medicine, and flora. As a renewable natural resource, it holds both economic and ecological significance” (7)

Unfortunately, this valuable mangrove forest is experiencing rapid deterioration which directly leads to serious consequences like sea level rise, extinction of species, biodiversity loss, and so on. For example, “In the past 25 years, sea level has risen at a rate almost double the global average” (Mahadevia and Mayank 8) causing a series of natural disasters in the coastal area. In 2004, under the sea near Sumatra, a large-scale earthquake occurred which generated the Tsunami. This Tsunami caused a lot of damage in 14 countries and billions of dollars to overcome. Though the Tsunami harmed a lot of other places including India in the land Sundarbans it could not show its force. Hence, it can be considered that the land Sundarbans acted like a shield that saved the lives of the people of that land (Mahadevia and Mayank 8). After that, “during the occurrence of Cyclone Aila in 2009, a 400 km stretch of the embankment was breached and the waves crossed over the height of the embankment and entered the flood plains. The seawater got logged and more than 2 million people were marooned for several days affecting not only agriculture but also the drinking water supply” (Mahadevia and Mayank 8).

In their paper titled, “Comrades in Crises: Comparing The Writings On Environmental Catastrophes in Habila’s *Oil On Water* and Ghosh’s *Gun Island*,” Prateek Upreti and Sakshi

Semwal portray a comparative analysis of the novel *Gun Island* and *Oil On Water*. By emphasizing the almost similar setting, the delta region the focus of this paper is the ecological crisis in these two region. They found an almost similar crisis in both regions. In both narratives “The deterioration of the environment, oil wars, trafficking, migration, poverty, unemployment, and the unpredictability and fickleness of life bring together not only the stories but also the humans and their moments of joys along with their eras of sufferings. These similarities, and parallels, of India and Nigeria, of the Sundarbans and the Niger Delta” (Upreti & Semwal). By highlighting these interconnected issues, they initiate a combined study of *Gun Island* and *Oil On Water*, shedding light on the complexities of environmental crises and their socio-political issues in delta regions. Thus from their initiative, this paper also takes the inspiration and takes the challenge to highlight the ecopostcolonial issues in the novels *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*.

Here it can be observed that, although geographically there are justifiable variations in these two lands and two novels, similar experiences of suffering and survival strategies bring every individual of *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water* at one frame. By focusing on these issues, it can be observed that the previous literature, although few, discusses *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water* from different perspectives that are either in the ecocritical analysis or postcolonial analysis. The Ecopostcolonial approach seems to be missing from the context as no literature mentioned above discusses the significance of nonhuman agency, the legacy of colonization, and psychological displacement elaborately. Therefore, these issues through the lens of ecopostcolonialism deserve our attention.

Chapter 3

An Ecopostcolonial Study of *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*

Through their respective novels, *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh and *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila, the authors attempt to portray the life-and-death realities and explore the doomy consequences of negligence. In *Gun Island*, Amitav Ghosh particularizes the natural disasters of Sundarbans to unveil parallels between crises affecting human and non-human lives. On the contrary, in *Oil on Water*, Habila demonstrates the web of Nigerian politics surrounding oil and reveals how years of mismanagement have resulted in violent protests, civil unrest, and economic inequality. Consequently, from these two novels, the ecopostcolonial framework scrutinizes three overarching themes—agency, development, and displacement. Within this framework, in both novels, non-human entities as active agencies, development as a legacy of colonization, and interaction between psychological displacement and sense of belonging will be explored in the following section

3.1. Non-human Entities: An Active Force of Agency in *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*

The concept of agency is complex because, historically, it has been defined within a human-centered perspective that hinders non-human entities from making choices. However, this anthropocentric reasoning about agency itself is problematic because when humans make decisions and choose a particular way of life, it is also influenced by “cultural and environmental factors” (Huggan & Tiffin 191). Then based on the characteristic of making choices, it would not be justifying to mark or categorize non-human entities as voiceless and exclude them from the concept of agency. Even ecocriticism like William Howarth also gives intuition that “A future source of cultural history may be landscape ecology” (76) which will create diverse complexity. By emphasizing this complexity, Huggan and Tiffin focus on the concept of 'Turn to Things' (Clark 91). In this approach, critics and authors draw attention to

the non-human entities, such as “bodies of water, land diverse human bodies, and elements like soil, food, and agriculture” (Clark 91), and categorize them as agency because these entities have their ways of articulation. Novels like *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*, addressing issues like environmental degradation, required the representation of the agency of non-human entities. This perspective not only focuses solely on humanity but also highlights the dynamic relationship between human and non-human entities. In this dynamic relationship between human and non-human entities, each has been affected in different ways. However, non-human appears to be the most affected one because they are oppressed and exploited by both human exploiters and subaltern people. Thus, they suffer doubly and this suffering has long-term consequences.

Considering this fact, in this paper, the researcher focuses on the non-human agency- the land of Sundarbans and the land of Niger Delta in the novel *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*. In both novels, such a portrayal of focusing on land serves several functions. First of all, it challenges the anthropocentric attitude of humans towards land that they think land can be exploited as much as one can. Secondly, it debunks the idealization of land that land is merely a sublime, peaceful, and serene place. As land is something that has its history, offers a “carnivalistic life” (Bakhtin 250) where joy, sorrow, suffering, happiness everything is included and controls the incidents through its action and language, hence, one cannot simply mark it as outcasted. Concentrating on this characteristic of land, Christa Grewe-Volpp remarks, “The land, for example, or, more generally, a place, subtly or explicitly influences the psyche and the actual behavior of individual protagonist” (78).

If we examine the incidents of *Gun Island* that have occurred in the land of Sundarbans, then it can be understood that, here in this novel, the non-human agency- the land Sundarbans plays the role of an autonomous actor. The journey of Deen and his interaction with other

characters disclose the fact that, since the discovery of Sundarbans by traders like Bonduki Sadagar, the Sundarbans started to lose authenticity. As there was no other way to reach the sea, people had to pass the Sundarbans hence, this discovery created a new source of web of commerce. Not only that, after discovering the land, merchants built the shrine in the deep forest by dedicating Manasa Devi, so that, on their journey, they did not get attacked by snakes. But this construction of a shrine in the deep forest reflects the fact human construction can be seen in the places where they do not belong which ultimately generates an “egocentric” (Love 232) attitude of humans that they can do whatever they want. These anthropocentric thinking conveys the “war between profit and Nature” (Ghosh 8) and hampers the “symbiosis relationship between human and nature” (Rueckert 120). Subsequently, it is seen that humans disturb the law of the land of Sundarbans and its authenticity then it strikes back time and time again through different forms and articulations and these articulations are more dangerous than the articulation of humans. The evidence can be examined through the shared experience of characters like Nilima, Moyna, and Lubna who have experienced a series of environmental destruction. First of all, in 1970 the Bhola cyclone attacked the Sundarbans where “three hundred thousand lives were lost but the actual number may have been as high as half a million” (Ghosh 13). In that cyclone, Nilima and her husband suffer from a great deal of damage as the island ‘Of Lusibari’ they are living that island was “ripped away by the storm (Ghosh 13). Not only that island but other places are also being damaged and making the whole land horrific. A young fisherman, Horen Naskar, has observed these devastations with his own eyes and remarks,

“islands where every tree had been stripped of its leaves; corpses floating in the water, half eaten by animals; villages that had lost most of their inhabitants” (Ghosh 14).

After that in 2009, another cyclone Alia occurred in the land of Sundarbans, and the destruction of Alia was observed by Moyna, a local nurse in the novel. This cyclone was

different from other cyclones because the warning system for storms had applied and millions of people were moved safely in India and Bangladesh but its long-term consequences are more dangerous than before. At that time sea had reached those areas where it had never entered. The reason can be global warming because over time global warming has increased and it causes the rise of sea levels which ultimately destroys the coastal areas and the life of local people. Moreover, in that cyclone “fertile land had been swamped by salt water” (Ghosh 14) which ultimately made the land uncultivated and ultimately hampered the lifestyle of local communities of the Sundarbans because it led to the shortages of food and economic challenges. Additionally, Lubna, a Bangladeshi woman overseeing the legal rights of migrants in Venice, coming from a neglected part of the world, her tale highlights how many people who live in the coastal area experience a tough reality every day. When a powerful cyclone hits Bangladesh, it takes away every living material from Lubna’s family and forces them to take shelter in a tree. This situation ultimately illustrates the fact that humans are nothing in front of nature. However, the bitter truth is that all of these incidents have occurred because the first attack has always been done by the human exploiters which ultimately affects the subaltern people also. Focusing on these issues, Huggan and Tiffin remark that, “When a storm gushes steadily, it demolishes everything” (192). This statement fosters the notion that all the non-human entities such as fishes, crops, and the sea in the Sundarbans are not used as a setting but these are portrayed as autonomous forces that deliver their voice in the nonverbal form of storms. It gives the reminder that if anyone goes against the divine law of nature, then that individual and the whole group face punishment by nature in the form of storms and other disasters. That is why Glean A. Love remarks,

“We have engineered ourselves into a position where, for the first time in history, it has become possible for man to destroy his whole species” (232).

On the other hand, In the book *Oil on Water*, non-human agency-the land Niger Delta acts as an autonomous force. In this novel, two journalists named Rufus and Zaq are sent by James Floode, a white engineer working for an oil company in the Niger Delta. Their mission is to find Isabel, the wife of James Floode. However, the kidnapping is just a minor part of the novel. The story sheds light on the serious pollution and damage happening in the Niger Delta due to oil spills and gas flaring. This pollution does not only harm humans, but also it affects the environment and the other elements of living there. Rufus, one of the journalists, observes how the land, which was once vital for the local people, is now extremely polluted, causing terrible consequences for everyone involved.

For example, during their journey for searching Isabel, the first village they encounter in the Nigar Delta looks like a deadly place because of the continuous exploitation of the land by the humans, and the land is now filled with “abandoned oil-drilling paraphernalia”, “thick clumps of grass”, and “dead and decomposing chicken” (Habila 15). After that when they enter the next village that place also looks like the replica of the first village as that village is also empty and everywhere is strong, and unpleasant smell, even the ground is covered with oil slicks. All of these images create a very gloomy environment as if it is a dead place. It is not like only villages are look horrific places, but also other non-human entities like rivers, water, fish, and birds are in endangering in the Niger Delta which can be examined through Rufus' experience which he observes repeatedly in the novels. Such as the water of the mid-river is crystal clear but “towards the banks it turned brackish and still” (Habila 8), “a bat flying overhead, a dead fish on the oil-polluted water” (Habila 13) make the environment more horrific, even the water also takes different forms as “sometimes it was a snake, twisting and fast and slippery, poisonous” (Habila 53), and all of these things make the river polluted and unproductive for fishing but productive for growing gas flares and pipelines” (60).

Here again, it can be seen that the non-human agency land has been deteriorated by human activities. It happens because for the oil exploiters “egocentric” (Love 230) attitude towards the land Niger Delta. They find it as an instrument through which they can gain profits and more importantly they consider it as voiceless. Nevertheless, when these non-human entities have been exploited because of the “anthropocentric” (Love 230) attitude, the land starts to act like tricksters which reemerge in surprising and unpleasant ways as in the novel it can be observed that, some of the dire consequences have occurred in the local communities. These include sicknesses, sudden loss of lives, and so on. For instance, Doctor Dagogo-Mark, in one of his discussions with Rufus, shares the nonhuman-entities attack on the subaltern people. He remarks,

“People started dying. More people died. More fell sick, and a lot died. Almost overnight I watched the whole village disappear” (142). After that, when the Doctor examines Zaq's health conditions, he informs Rufus that Zaq is suffering from dengue fever which is occurring because of “Bugs and the water” (Habila 150), the outcome of the exploitation of land. Here, in the form of diseases, the land shows its audacity. However, the pathetic part is that it also harms the people who are the less contributors to destroy the ecosystem of the land.

By analyzing these two novels, it can be observed that humans may think that the land is speechless, as it does not have human language but the land is “highly articulate” (Haraway78). In that sense, the human dominance idea that- land is peaceful, serene, or fragile that idea no longer functions because if the ecosystem of nature is exploited by the exploiters then the whole group faces punishment by nature in the form of diseases, storms, and other disasters which ultimately breaks the romanticized version of the land that land can be tamed but in reality, no one can tame it.

3.2. Development in *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*: A Disguised Form of Colonialism

The term “development” is an ambiguous word because its meaning depends on the intention why someone is using it. To suggest this complexity, Huggan and Tiffin remark that development is,

“(1) not necessarily antithetical to human equality or (2) ride roughshod over local human and environmental interests in the attempt to secure preferential conditions for international trade” (30).

Through this statement, it can be understood that, the idea of development that is closely connected with the global market, whether it is beneficial or not is a very complex issue. Because, some critics believe that, the idea of development plays a very significant role in recovering colonialism’s damage and securing the lives of marginalized people by protecting their rights for the present and future which ultimately reinforces the idea of “sustainability development” (Huggan & Tiffin 31). On the other hand, others argue that most of the time, development or the global market system whatever we say, usually neglects the local people and land. Hence, in dealing with this complex issue, postcolonial ecocritics do not ignore the fact that as development focuses on a better life of the future. Because, the component of sustainable development- science and technology and other advanced tools have been invented surely for the betterment for the people and environment but at the same time postcolonial ecocritics are concerned about the motif of the dominant group because through these tools practicing power over the poor and local lands are still can be occurred because when any objects become the market commodity then the dominant group visualize it as capitalistic instrument. For instance, from ancient times, land exploitation has been the source of any sort of violation, hence, it might have happened that, in the name of protecting land and people, under the veil of development sustainability, the dominant group can protect their economic growth as Huggan and Tiffin remark,

“Sustainable development implies that it is economic growth, rather than the environment, that needs to be protected” (Huggan & Tiffin 32).

Moreover, when the environment becomes the market commodity, it generates unequal power dynamics between the dominant group and the local people, especially the indigenous people, and creates cultural appropriation which ultimately maintains the core value of the colonial legacy. Hence, it can be considered that “development sustainability”, the new idealization of development, maintains the colonial legacy in third-world countries and their natural resources. Besides that, if we analyze the attempts of colonizers it can be observed that their main agenda was they wanted to wipe out native cultures by substituting their culture and tradition which made the natives rootless. After that, it became easy for the colonizers to control and manipulate the natives. Now the new form of colonization is development which is also maintaining this colonial legacy in the name of “development sustainability” (Huggan & Tiffin 31). The novels *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water* justify a similar notion because, in both of these novels, it has been observed that the land becomes a capitalistic commodity which ultimately generates cultural imitation and unequal power dynamics.

For example, in *Gun Island*, the renowned academic and historian Cinta, who has been a mentor to the protagonist Deen, time and again points out the illusion of development which is the main factor of global warming. During a conversation, Cinta shares her concern with Deen that only the natural reason cannot be the fact for global warming, it is human-made also. She says that the gases that are the main reason for global warming come from “cars, planes factories, whistling kettles, and electric toasters, and espresso machines” (Ghosh 214), and all of these tools have been for the betterment of the human but ultimately it attacks the environment. Here, Deen’s Conversation with Chinta makes us realize something important: the more we focus on sustainability development to make things better for our future, we accidentally cause natural disasters. These natural disasters occur because scientific invention

which is considered as development creates more capital rather than protecting the environment. Moreover, the environment becomes worse day by day because the things we release into the air from cars, planes, factories, and even everyday items like whistling kettles add to global warming. This makes the sea levels go up, and that's a big problem for coastal areas like the Sundarbans. It has also been discussed in the previous section that, the rising sea levels have caused a lot of natural disasters. These disasters are taking so many resources that the local people need from nature and making them rootless and ultimately they suffer from the deficiency of economic sustainability. Because the local people, for their earning source, are dependent on environmental resources. Such as in the novel, the local people of the Sundarbans's profession is mainly fishing, farming, collecting money, or honey from the jungle. But as the sea level rises, they cannot rely on these resources anymore. Besides that, one cannot go to the jungle "without bribing the forest guard" (Ghosh 60). The people who are already poor, cannot give extra bribes to the dominant group to go to the jungle for their livelihood. Ultimately all of these issues made people "moving industry which is also known as human trafficking, already one of the world's biggest and still growing fast industries" (Ghosh 61). Here, advanced technology and science have made for the betterment of the people, but ultimately betterment snatched more things than it gifted. Nevertheless, the shift from agriculture to industry is more horrific as it caused huge damage to both humans and ecology. At first, the land loses its ecosystem which has already been discussed in the previous section. After that, local people lose their economic sustainability and cultural roots which ultimately generates the idea of cultural imitation where the third-world countries people consider that the first-world countries' life is better than their lives. And they start hoping to adapt to the life of first-world countries. The character Tipu also thinks the same thing as he says,

"That's where they see pictures of other countries; that's where they view ads where everything looks fabulous; they see stuff on social media, posted by neighbors who've already

made the journey- and after that what d'you think they gonna do? Go back to planting rice? Have you ever tried planting rice, Pops? You're bent over double all day long, in the hot sun, with snakes and insects swarming around you. Do you think anyone would want to go back to that after they've seen pictures of their friends sitting in a cafe in Berlin sipping caramel lattes?" (Ghosh 62).

Through this statement of Tipu, it can be understood that the economic and corporate level works together. At first, they exploit the land, and then through technology, they represent their culture in a way that most of the people who are suffering in the coastal area because of their "false consciousness" (Hall 446) like Tipu give their "spontaneous consent" (Gramsci) to consume those. In that sense, it can be considered that, when land becomes the tool of market commodity, there is a risk that cultural imitation will emerge in the subaltern land which ultimately maintains the legacy of colonialism.

Like *Gun Island*, the novel *Oil on Water* also discloses many hidden politics behind the issue of development. In the novel, Rufus and Zaq encounter Chief Ibrahim, who lives in the Delta region and shares the history of his living area. The places where Chief Ibrahim was living once upon a time were happy and peaceful, and the people of the village used to maintain an ecocentric relationship with natural elements. However, the setting of the Oil companies gradually broke that relationship. Eventually, oil companies started to offer to the natives that they would send the native's kids to Europe and America to become engineers. They are giving this offer so that one day the natives "could return and work as oil executives in Port Harcourt" (Habila 39). Such kind of pseudo-hopes create chaos among the natives which Ibrahim remarks, "For the first time the close, the unified community was divided" (Habila 39). However, these are the corporations that are never satisfied with what they have and at the same time, they are more powerful than the government, and courts. That is why to fulfill their greed they can use any sort of illegal activities like "repression of the opponents, suppression of dissent, curbing the freedom of media, and forceful disappearances of the people" (Huggan and Tiffin 90).

That is the reason in the novel *Oil on Water*, it can be examined that, to get more profit after that manipulation of some native people, the Oil companies wanted to buy the whole land from Chief Malabo but when he denied they arrested him and killed him, and unethically captivated the land. And the land has started to change as Chief Ibrahim shares,

“The rigs went up, and the gas flares and the workers came and set up camp in our midst, we saw our village change, right before our eyes” (Habila 39). Here, it can be observed that, in the name of development oil company snatches the native land. And the land is not simply a land for the natives. It is the place where they live, earn money, and follow specific traditions. When native people lose their land, they become rootless. However, these oil companies have not only dominated Chief Malabo’s village but also other villages in the name of development, and the condition of those villages is also miserable because, the other villages have taken the cars, television, and DVD players from the oil company and sold their land, all of those material thing have broken as those things were cheap in quality. Chief Malabo shares that, the rest of the money, is “thrown away in Port Harcourt barrooms, or on second wives and funeral parties” (Habila 40). Thus, in third-world countries, an imbalanced power relationship has been practiced since the colonial period where the poor become poorer and the dominant group becomes more dominant.

This hierarchical relationship of unequal power dynamics can be observed in James Floode’s lifestyle whose wife has been kidnapped. When Rufus visits his place he observes that he lives in the exquisite part of Port Harcourt City just like the wealthiest expatriate oil workers which is a very safe and secure part of the town with “a tall, barbed wire-topped wall” (Habila 94). This distinction highlights the different conditions of living for people in the community and all of these scenarios manifest the fact that the first and foremost duty of development is to serve the West by using “economistic myths of progress: ‘amenity’, ‘benefit’, ‘improvement’ (Huggan & Tiffin 71) and that is the reason postcolonial ecocriticism

detests development which in the name of development sustainability maintains the legacy of colonial rules.

3.3. Psychological Displacement in *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*:

The theme of displacement holds significant importance in Ecopostcolonial studies. Displacement can be categorized into two related definitions; the First one is ‘Psychological Displacement’ which includes other concepts such as ‘Entitlement and Belonging’, in which “one loses a sense of at-homeness even though still living in the same place” (Huggan & Tiffin 137). The Second type is ‘Physical Displacement’, “where a group of living creatures, be it animals or humans are displaced physically with force by some other living being or for natural reasons such as lack of resources to survive” (Huggan and Tiffin 137). Both of these classifications of displacement can be observed in the novels *Gun Island* and *Oil on Water*.

Acknowledging the abundance of existing research on physical displacement, this section only focuses on psychological displacement in the delta regions. Psychological Displacement can be defined as the loss of this sense of belonging. “This sense of loss can still occur even when one legally owns the rights to a land (entitlement) but still loses this emotional attachment and belonging to where one lives. This loss can be caused by many factors; Development and Capitalism are examples of such factors” (Huggan and Tiffin 154). In the previous section, it can be seen that the myth of development snatches the consciousness of freedom and the essence of the traditional roots of the natives. These losses ultimately take away the emotional attachment to the land and people lose their sense of belonging to their land.

In *Gun Island*, the notion of development proves disastrous for the Sundarbans, and also for the local inhabitants. The land, once a source of abundance resources, transforms into an adversary, and hardships space. The people, who are connected to these resources, experience a deep sense of loss and consider the place as a foe. Because, both the land and water of the Sundarbans create an adversarial atmosphere for the people. Such as, continuous storms make life unsteady, and when they try to dig well to find clean water, they find arsenic in that water,

even the sufferings of fishermen also know no bounds because once upon a time they used to catch a lot of fishes but now they hardly get any fish from the river. Besides that, every year young people leave this place and more often if they live, they connect with corruption like borrowing and stealing money to pay the agent who might help them to find work for themselves. All of these issues “making a life in the Sundarbans becomes hard” and the “only way to avoid this fate was for the young to get an education” (Ghosh 49). As the living land of Sundarbans is not suitable anymore to survive, hence, local people like Moyna hope that only pursuing education can change their fate. However, becoming a native of Sundarbans isn't that easy to do anything according to their wish. Even though they leave for education, they have to face criticism for being from that land. To illustrate this horrific situation Moyna shares another incident that happens with the character Tipu when he goes to the boarding school in Kolkata, and because of belonging to the Sundarbans, he is bullied by his other mates. Moyna adds, “Things had become worse still when his schoolmates discovered that he was a Dalit, from the Sundarbans” (Ghosh 51). The day other classmates of Tipu acknowledged the fact that he is from Sundarbans they started to bully him. So, he does not deserve to study in a good institution. This reflects the conflict between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving poor’ which is the old cultural distinction. As Tipu cannot bear that distinction, hence one day he lost his temper when one of his classmates said to him, “Only servants and whores came from the Sundarbans” (Ghosh 51) and he beat that boy. But as other boys belong to the influential family, hence, they forcefully expelled Tipu from the school.

Following these incidents, Tipu refuses to attend school due to his identity issue. Both occurrences highlight the erosion of a “sense of belonging” (Huggan & Tiffin 232) in the Sundarbans. The first incident is related to the scarcity of natural resources and natural disasters which breaks the alignment between the people and their environment. In the second incident, Tipu identifies himself as a Dalit native of Sundarbans and marks himself as the lower class

who is abandoned by society because of class hierarchical issues. Because of these issues, he undergoes emotional detachment from his land. Huggan and Tiffin remark, “Whether due to environmental crises or identity-based discrimination, the inhabitants experience a disconnection from their roots, reflecting the multifaceted nature of displacement” (232). Considering this statement, it can be observed that in both incidents, people have lost their sense of belonging to their native land though they are living in their ancestral land and it is nothing but the psychological displacement.

Psychological displacement can also be observed in the novel *Oil on Water*. In this novel, Habila explores the living situations of local people in the Niger Delta. Here, in this novel, many locals face psychological displacement due to environmental pollution, military actions, or militant attacks. For example, people are forced to sell their land and work for the oil companies and the government, and if they protest the superior power kills the protesters which creates psychological pressure among the natives. After that, soldiers’ attack on the natives becomes the new norm for the people of the Niger Delta as the soldiers are suspecting that militants come from poor villages. Thus the novel vividly portrays the harsh conditions these communities endure. Rufus notes that, the soldiers come to village all on a sudden from “the sheds and houses and passages” (Habila 19) and randomly target and attack people and “moved on to another target” (Habila 19). In this scenario, it can be observed that residents living in their ancestral land constantly fear attacks by soldiers. As soldiers randomly attack anyone, there exists a life-and-death situation. This lack of safety in their homeland contributes to a loss of belonging among the native people.

Besides that, after occupying the land the oil companies are continuously polluting the environment as well which was already mentioned in the previous chapter, rivers are no longer useful and are grown only by gas flares. And this damage has a big effect on the people living in the Niger Delta, especially because many of them depend on fishing to eat and make money.

Fishing is really important in their daily life. Because it secures their food and finance. So, when the rivers and water in the Niger Delta get polluted, it causes not only sickness but also takes away the resources to survive. Moreover, it takes away their identity as Nigerian. Because they gradually change their profession and lose connection with the place they call home. For instance, when Rufus looks at the river covered in oil, he finds it “daunting and so foelike (Habila 222). He notices that the usual view of fishermen's boats and the typical scene of selling fish has vanished:

“Where were the fishermen setting out or returning in their long narrow boats with their jute nets at their feet and their sturdy oars in their hands? And where were the women waiting to buy the fish fresh from the water, talking to each other and the fishermen at the top of their voices, now bantering, flirting, but always bargaining?” (222)

As the river loses its viability for fishing, the community faces the challenge of finding alternative sources of livelihood. That is the reason the usual everyday activities are rarely seen in the land and the land becomes an unknown place for the local people. Besides that, as the traditional earning source has been exploited by the exploiters, the native people also fear the fact, that their children might join with militants and one day they will lose their lives by soldiers in their land as there is an ongoing war between the soldiers and the militants. All of these issues make the land a horrific place for the native people of the Niger Delta. For instance, Tamuno, a boatman guiding Rufus and Zaq, expresses his concerns to them and expresses the desire to bring his son along, hoping for a better future. Tamuno remarks, “No fish for the river, nothing. I fear to say soon him go join the militants” (Habila 37). Hence, it has been clear that, as the oil industry takes the Niger Delta’s people's usual jobs, they lose they are suffering from an identity crisis losing their sense of belonging to the land, despite living on their ancestral property.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

As the first law of Ecology, -" that everything is connected to everything else-" (Rueckert 110), this study took the challenge to connect Postcolonialism into the field of Ecocriticism and through the lens of Ecopostcolonism, scrutinized the novel *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh and *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila. Moreover, applying the empirical research method, it aimed to explore the connection among the themes non-human agency, development, and psychological displacement. For instance, In *Gun Island*, the Sundarbans emerged not as a passive background but as an active participant, shaping the lives and determining the destiny of other characters. After that, the concept of development is nothing but a disguised legacy of colonization which is exploiting contemporary life that has also been investigated. Additionally, the way psychological displacement works as the source of internal struggle and tension that has also been scrutinized.

On the other hand, in "Oil on Water," the narrative transported the reader to another land, Niger Delta, where the landscape became a living entity, engaging with characters in different ways. The devastating impact of environmental pollution which is the consequences of oil exploitation makes the local life destructive. Furthermore, through closer observation, it has been scrutinized that in this novel, the concept of development revealed through the mask of neocolonial exploitation. Moreover, the psychological displacement experienced by communities which is occurring because the community has lost their sense of belonging from their own land that has also been examined.

Thus, all of these examination of these novels through the Ecopostcolonial lens has discovered the hidden issues which was existed in these novels in an opaque manner. By exploring the complexities of non-human agency, development, and psychological

displacement, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ecological and postcolonial issues in contemporary literature. In doing so, it paves the way for further exploration and discourse in this existing field, focusing on the interconnection between human experiences and the environment within the postcolonial context as Bakhtin says, “Every text is dialogue open for further comments from other points of view. There is no conclusion” (McDowel 387).

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