



Research article

Victimhood Self-construal, Irony of Tears and Melancholy amid Wealth: Critical Assessment of Select Literary and Visual Metaphors on the Niger Delta Environmental Despoilment

Thank-God I. Igwenagu¹ , Alphonsus C. Ugwu² , Norbert O. Eze³ & Emeka Aniago^{4*}

¹Fine & Applied Arts, University of Nigeria

²Mass Comm., University of Nigeria

^{3,4}Theatre & Film Studies, University of Nigeria. *Corresponding author.

Abstract

Studies on self-construal indicate that man is propelled by what happens around him to react in a certain manner and this reaction, we suggest is a human universal common and a representation of conscious purposive response to concomitant environmental and circumstantial realities. This purposive response encapsulates messages, which an observer articulates and interprets; hence, our study is about deepening our understanding of the factors and variables responsible for victimhood self-construal projected in select texts on the Niger Delta environmental despoilment. Drawing from the theories of eco-criticism, victimhood, and self-construal, this study utilizes an interpretive approach to discuss select instances of victimhood portrayals in the poem 'Delta Blues' by Tanure Ojaide, in the drama *Hangmen also Die* by Esiaba Irobi and in the film *Blood and Oil*, directed by Curtis Graham. The study examines the primary reason, which is the dispossession of livelihood by environmentally destructive oil exploitation, adduced by the Niger Delta inhabitants to understand how it generates variables that instigate victimhood self-construal. Our observation is that in the texts the inhabitants' victimhood self-construal can be described as purposive, the propelling variable is their concomitant environmental realities and the texts as communication media have different encumbrances and advantages regarding their efficacy and utility for advocacy.

Keywords: eco-criticism, eco-literature, eco-film, Niger Delta, self-construal, visual metaphor.



Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, Life on Land

Introduction

Although theories on self-construal suggest that its definition is elusive, they are in accord that it is a human universal common, usually propelled by concomitant human realities, and its

Article History: Received: 17 November 2023. Revised: 28 December 2023. Accepted: 29 December 2023. Published: 30 December 2023

Copyright: © 2023 by the author/s. License Aesthetix Media Services, India. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Citation: Igwenagu, T., Ugwu, A. C., Norbert O. Eze, N. O., & Aniago, E. (2023). Victimhood Self-construal, Irony of Tears and Melancholy amid Wealth: Critical Assessment of Select Literary and Visual Metaphors on the Niger Delta Environmental Despoilment. *Rupkatha Journal* 15:5. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n5.14>

articulation comes from rational choice. In their pacesetting theory on self-construal, Markus and Kitayama (1991) describe how one of the numerous concomitant human realities (culture), instigates purposive articulation and presentation of self. In their interpretation, they observe that self-construal is about how individuals articulate and project how they feel about the broad set of cultural influences around them. Their observation is that different propelling forces emanating from cultural realities instigate individuals to begin the formulation of purposive idea(s) about their feelings, which usually leads to the projection of definitive outward visible signs, and actions that imbues identification and attributions. The meanings, purposes, typologies, and the propelling factors that motivate self-construal have continued to generate interpretations from diverse disciplinary trajectories. For instance, scholars in the fields of psychology such as 'personality study' (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Ashton-James et al, 2007), 'organizational psychology' (Brockner, et al 2005; Goncalo & Staw, 2006), and 'consumer psychology' (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2009; Zhang & Shrum, 2009), have theorized variously on self-construal as a purposive rational response to stimuli.

On purposive response to stimuli as that which yields self-construal, in their study, 'Toward a Better Understanding of Self-Construal Theory: An Agency View of the Processes of Self-Construal' Benjamin G. Voyer and Bradley Franks provide an illuminating elucidation on the dynamics of the individual's mind and its linkage to the happenings around as basis of his/her self-construal. The interpretation by Voyer and Franks accords with the positions of other scholars such as Brockner et al (2005), Zhu & Meyers-Levy (2009), Zhang & Shrum (2009), who interpret self-construal as a purpose-driven presentation and manifestation of mindset. In many ways, self-construal reflects an individual's inclination and the works of Locke (1689/1975), Mead (1934), Shoemaker (1968), Sedikides & Brewer (2001), Kühnen et al (2001), and Devine et al (2003) on self-presentation, impression management, projection of identity and self-awareness, provide useful praxis and interpretations in examining the interconnectedness. More so, scholars such as Tajfel & Turner (1979 & 1986), Costa & McCrae (1988), Bayne (2008), Synofzik et al (2008), and Balconi (2010), apply self-agency concept, to deepen the understanding of self-construal. The debate here is that if self-construal is an articulate inclination presentation as most of the studies mentioned above suggest, we argue that 'victimhood persona' is an inclination-driven experience, conviction, and agenda. Meanwhile, despite evidence of a growing number of publications explaining various shades and dimensions to self-construal, there is a paucity of studies primarily dedicated at deepening understanding regarding the utilization of literature, film, and other artistic media to interpret the nuances of self-construal that project dispossession and victimhood due to the Niger Delta environmental despoilment. In this study's context, self-construal represents a purposive articulation and presentation of rational choice actions aimed at projecting a victimhood identity based on an individual's response to his/her concomitant environmental realities such as dispossession in select Nigeria's Niger Delta literature, films, and other arts.

The irony of 'tears and melancholy despite huge wealth' in the Niger Delta began to manifest as environmental despoilment grew rapidly due to the deplorable oil exploitation approaches leading to loss of livelihood, poverty, and restiveness. The Niger Delta inhabitants perceive the degradation of their natural environment as wilful dispossession of their nature's gift. Hence, they refer to themselves individually and collectively as victims of dispossession by Nigerians and their leaders who do not need their permission to exploit their nature's gift, leaving

behind monumental detriments. This scenario encapsulates the metaphor of tears and melancholy despite huge wealth; and some Nigeria's literati, filmmakers, and other artists have utilized self-construal approaches to depict Niger Delta inhabitants as victims of dispossession. This study comparatively examines self-construal portrayals in the poem 'Delta Blues' by Tanure Ojaide, the play *Hangmen also Die* by Esiaba Irobi, and the film *Blood and Oil* directed by Curtis Graham to deepen understanding regarding the relationship between concomitant environment and the claim of victimhood in Nigeria's Niger Delta. To foreground considerably the thematic purviews in this study, we shall provide a relevant review of the terms 'Niger Delta', 'victimhood' and 'self-construal'.

Victimhood and Niger Delta Inhabitants

Niger Delta is a geographical region that consists of nine oil-bearing states in the south-south, southeast, and southwest regions of Nigeria. The states are Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo and Rivers in the south-south, Abia and Imo in the southeast, and Ondo in the southwest (Asuni 2009; Nwaozuzu et al. 2020). Niger Delta is the world's second-largest delta with a coastline of about 450 km, occupying a total land area of 75,000 square kilometres and the world's third-largest wetland, located on the Atlantic coast of southern Nigeria (Awosika 1995; Ukiwo 2009). From 1956 when crude oil was discovered in commercial quantity at Oloibiri in Bayelsa State, Niger Delta has remained the major source of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings (Nwilo and Badejo 2006; Nwaozuzu et al. 2020). Beyond the large deposits of hydrocarbon, the other Niger Delta's natural gifts include its very hospitable and aesthetic ecology, eco-system, topography, atmospheric condition, soil and water, which provide stunning habitat to many varieties of wildlife species and vegetation. Scholars blame the detrimental realities of oil exploitation such as massive wellbeing depreciation, loss of livelihood, sense of victimhood, restiveness, and violence on the abysmal leadership by successive Nigeria's governments (Obi 2010; Wiki 2009; Eze et al. 2021; Nwaozuzu et al. 2020; Ebegbulem et al. 2013; Aluko 2001).

In her contribution, Tami Jacoby (2014) explains that victimhood is an idea like any other that takes on contextual characteristics; hence, the concepts of suffering or victimhood are relative and usually contested. This contestation is because there are instances whereby individuals might project themselves as 'victims' in contexts that others may regard as their life's normal realities (Garkawe 2004; Bar-Tal et al. 2009). Scholarly reports providing debates regarding the criteria that qualify an individual as a victim revolve around factors such as discipline-specific conceptualisations and ideological inclinations (Zur 1994; Cole 2007; Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Ferguson 2010; Berman 2010; Jacoby 2014; Govier 2015; Noor et al. 2017).

So who is 'a victim'? In what instance can Niger Delta inhabitants qualify as victims? In response to these questions, Aquino and Byron note that "in the most general sense, a victim is anyone who experiences injury, loss, or misfortune as a result of some event or series of events" (Aquino & Byron 2002: 71). Meanwhile, growing number of scholars are in accord in their observations that the magnitude of damage to Niger Delta inhabitants' wellbeing is enormous and the feeble attempts by Nigeria government towards the despoilment mitigation remain far below the inhabitants' expectations (Wunder, 2003; Nwilo and Badejo, 2006; Ekpo et al. 2018; Eze et al. 2021; Okeke et al 2022). Consequently, the Niger Delta inhabitants' sense of victimhood and

restiveness revolve around collective feeling of livelihood and well-being dispossession, which connote injustice (Nwaozuzu et al. 2020; Eze et al. 2021; Okeke et al 2022). Collective victimhood is "a state of mind that is brought into being by society members and transmitted to the members of new generations" through assimilation (Bar-Tal et al. 2009: 257). This mindset germinates when individuals collectively assume that the variables responsible for their travail are supposedly wilful and deliberate, thus, "the sense of self-perceived collective victimhood is an unavoidable part of the human repertoire in the context of intractable conflict" (Bar-Tal et al. 2009: 258). Consequently, a sense of victimhood self-construal develops when individuals harbour "self-perception of having been the target, either momentarily or over time, to harmful actions emanating from one or more other persons" (Aquino & Byron 2002: 71).

Therefore, do these debilitating negative impacts of dispossession emanating from legitimate but detrimental oil and gas exploitation in the Niger Delta qualify the inhabitants as victims in line with the conceptualizations of Trudy Govier, James E. Bayley, and Tami Jacoby? A victim according to Trudy Govier is "a person or agent harmed by an act of external element that is not deserved and not a matter of his or her will, but instead imposed by an external force or agent" (2015: 37). Based on the above premise, the Niger Delta inhabitants qualify to be classified as 'victims' because the detrimental oil and gas exploitation evidently have harmed them massively. The metaphor 'massive harm' in this context is the dispossession of their means of livelihood (fishing and farming) due to oil spillage, which has rendered their fishing water bodies and farmlands inhospitable to aquatic life and vegetation respectively. Furthermore, the dispossession is undeserved and the government's (as the aggressor) inability to provide a commensurate remedy to the inhabitants to mitigate the dispossession is the reason for their perpetual agony, hopelessness, anger, and sense of victimhood.

To Jacoby, a victim, "in contemporary violent conflicts, the construction of grievance-based identity is a fundamentally contested process" because "the lines between victim and perpetrators are blurred by ongoing cycles of belligerence and retribution" (2014: 511). The idea here is that in conflict situations such as the Niger Delta, whereby the inhabitants are describable as victims based on the despoilment in their environment, which dispossesses them of their means of livelihood, their response with violence (militancy and terrorism) is a trajectory in victimhood study that generates contestation as regards to victim status. Highlighting contexts, which qualify individuals as victims, James E. Bayley notes that "people are victims if and only if they have suffered a loss or some significant decrease in well-being unfairly or undeservedly and in such a manner that they were helpless to prevent the loss" (1991: 53). More so, "the loss has an identifiable cause; and the legal or moral context of the loss entitles the sufferers of the loss to social concern" (Bayley 1991: 53). A salient interpretation subsumed in Bayley's supposition highlights that, "the concept of victimhood requires that the loss on the sufferer must not only be acted upon, but also be acted upon by an identifiable agent" (Bayley 1991: 54). Our articulation to elucidate Bayley's supposition that someone who deserves a loss is not a victim is that a drunk driver who crashes his car, and became maimed is not a victim. Consequently, in line with Bayley's explanation, "victims must be innocent" and "they must not be guilty of having contributed to their loss" and consequence (1991: 53 – 54). Again, basing our interpretation of the Niger Delta inhabitants 'victim' status, we can say they are 'victims'. However, the contestation of victimhood status comes in at the stage where the perceived victims (the Niger Delta youths) engage in

militancy and terrorism such as kidnapping of oil workers, bursting of oil pipes, and the use of unlicensed firearms. Thus, the authorization of Nigeria's soldiers to eliminate militants and terrorists who are Niger Delta inhabitants suffering the consequences of dispossession, creates heavy debate regarding the Niger Delta youths are subsisting victims, even though they are engaged in terrorism because the environmental despoilment is subsisting.

To deepen understanding regarding the debate on when a victim who becomes an aggressor ceases to be a victim, we turn to Bayley's third characteristic feature of victimhood, which states that an individual's "entitlement to social concern" is a variable that "distinguishes victimhood from most other species of loss" (1991: 54). Therefore, at the point a victim of dispossession, such as when the Niger Delta inhabitants take up arms to maim and kill or destroy the properties or belongings of others, they are effectively engaged in the dispossession of others, hence, their unanimous entitlement of social concern becomes contestable. Hence, "to recognize someone as a victim is to recognize that person as morally entitled to concern" (Bayley 1991: 54). The explanation provided by Bayley indicates that self-inflicted loss, harm, or misfortune do not automatically generate victimhood status. The environmental despoilment and loss of livelihood by Niger Delta inhabitants are not self-inflicted thus they qualify within the stipulation outlined Bayley to be classified as victims.

The explanation here is that victimhood is a socially constructed concept; hence, the basis upon which one refers to self or another person, as a victim is fluid because social contexts are consistently inconsistent. This gives room for continuous assessment and re-assessment of self-construal that depicts one as a victim. Furthermore, the portrayal of a self-construal leading to the projection of self as a victim is a purposive action that indicates that there are evident motivations and propelling forces behind self-construal. More so, another dimension to victimhood self-construal study is the contextualization of the motivations of self-construal, such as the supposition that self-construal is not a reflex action or spontaneous creation but a purposive presentation. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that a victimhood self-construal may emanate from an honest inclination or devious deceit. As regards devious deceit as the basis of victimhood self-construal, individuals may decide to present themselves as victims in a bid to draw sympathy towards them as a political or mischievous underhand tactic for some form of profit. So is the victimhood self-construal enacted in select literature ('Delta Blues' by Ojaide and 'Hangmen also Die' by Irobi) and film ('Blood and Oil') on Niger Delta environmental despoilment based on honest inclination or devious deceit?

Victimhood Self-Construal in Select Literature, Films, and Other Arts

In eco-critical creative arts, the eco-literati, eco-filmmakers, and other eco-artists through their works relay their differently inclined perspectives concerning the metaphors of tears and melancholy in the Niger Delta and the dispossession and victimhood claims. William Rueckert introduced the term eco-criticism in his essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism' as "the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment" (Glottfelty & Fromm 1996: xviii). However, the relevance and the application of eco-criticism in scholarship have evolved to connote various forms of textual portrayals and interpretive assessment of ecology through critical creative arts such as music (Rehding 2002; Allen 2011; Smith 2019), films

(Ivakhiv 2013; Kääpä 2014; Bülbül 2015), and fine arts (Braddock 2009). Regardless of the media individuals utilize to engage in eco-criticism, the common characteristic that cuts across in their endeavour is that each eco-critical art presents a purposive sharing of the author's perceptions and inclinations on ecology and the realities of human actions and inaction on ecology.

Creative artists' applications of dispossession polemics to justify victimhood claims and victimhood metaphor are a tactical approach to inculcate empathy and sympathy in the art-consuming public to propel solidarity and advocacy for the victims to attain worthwhile solace (Jensen & Ronsbo 2014). Explaining the efficacy of creative writing in inculcating empathy and sympathy in the reading public, Carolyn Forché observes that the literati utilize their writings "to speak for more than one and to engage all others" (1993: 34). Forché in the above comment indicates that creative literature assumes a literal and metaphorical representation of social contexts and attributions purposively packaged in the creative vision and inclination of the author for mass communication. In some instances, the agenda of the author is to provide a specific inclination, ideological bents, or worldview(s), to instigate advocacy, which will increase the solidarity necessary to change a particular reality. In their various studies, some Nigerian scholars, Eze et al (2021), Abba & Onyemachi (2020), Iheka (2018), and Ali (2017), interpretively illustrate instances of environmental degradation in Niger Delta creative narratives, to highlight the authorial inclinations variously illustrating trajectories of victimhood self-construal. The above-mentioned scholars in their studies suggest that Nigerian eco-poets, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Nnimmo Bassey, Christopher Okigbo, Christian Otobotekere, and eco-dramatists, Greg Mbajiorgu, Esiaba Irobi, Barclays Ayakoroma, and Ahmed Yerima, deliberately create literature that stimulates awareness and propels debate regarding Niger Delta environmental dispossession polemics. They observe that these literati relay the tears and melancholy metaphor emanating from the transition of Niger Delta's environment from a healthy and aesthetic habitat to an unhealthy and dreadful ruin to highlight the subsisting detriments, conflicts, and likely aftermaths.

One of these poets, Tanure Ojaide who through victimhood self-construal in his poem 'Delta Blues' presents himself as a victim of the Niger Delta despoilment, states in his work 'Poetic Imagination in Black Africa', that eco-critical Nigerian literature represents a literally ideologically driven reactions to the "senseless destruction of our original neighbours, the trees and animals" (1995: 16). In 'Delta Blues' Ojaide relays the monumental level of despoilment and dispossession that has gone on in Niger Delta five decades, thus, in an unabashed rhetoric, he berates the oil-consuming 'Large Economies' for their apparent disinterest in the plight of the Niger Delta inhabitants. Furthermore, in 'Delta Blues' Ojaide portrays the atmosphere of anger, bitterness, dismay, and melancholy, which he claims continue to reside in the consciousness of Niger Delta inhabitants. Highlighting the polemics of tears and melancholy amid wealth, Ojaide notes that his poems in the collection, 'Delta Blues' and 'Home Songs' are collectively "a poetic diatribe against the environmental degradation of the Niger Delta and the unjust system which makes the people to be chief mourners and paupers amid their oil wealth" (1998: blurb). To buttress Ojaide's victimhood self-construal let us critically look at line one to line seven in the poem 'Delta Blues'.

This share of paradise, the delta of my birth,
Reels from an immeasurable wound.

Barrels of alchemical draughts flow
From this hurt to the unquestioning world
That lights up its life in a blind trust.
The inheritance I sat on for centuries
Now crushes my body and soul . . . (Lines 1 – 7 in 'Delta Blues' Ojaide, 1998: 21)

In the first line, Ojaide recalls nostalgically, the splendour of the Niger Delta natural environment, as he personalizes his narration by specifying his connectedness to Niger Delta through his birth. In this line, he lets his readers know that he is an insider and an informed commentator. In line 2, he laments sorrowfully the subsisting degradation of the Niger Delta environmental splendor. The 'wound' metaphor suggests that the Niger Delta environment is still in a state of despoilment. His expression 'reels' in line 2 is a present continuous expression which highlights that the detriments of the environmental despoilment are subsisted. In line 3, Ojaide blames the detrimental 'crude oil' exploitation as the factor behind the festering 'wound' (the massive despoilment in the Niger Delta environment). He also notes that the various international consumers, of Niger Delta's crude oil are primarily interested in the benefits despite the throes left behind in oil-bearing communities. Here the 'throes' include soil and water contamination due to oil spillages, acid rains, and massive air pollution due to gas flaring and columns of smoke from the sites of oil exploitation and refining. 'This hurt' inline four subsumes the despoilment of the mangrove forests, rivers, creeks and farms, which irredeemably have altered adversely the Niger Delta ecology and eco-system. More so, the expression 'the unquestioning world' refers to countries buying Niger Delta's 'oil and gas' who Ojaide alludes in line 5 are supposedly 'selfishness' because what they care about is the utility of 'oil and gas' in their economies regardless of the unambiguous monumental detriments to the Niger Delta inhabitants. More so, his expression 'the unquestioning' contextually represents the oil and gas consuming nations who are 'disinterested' in the plight of the dispossessed Niger Delta inhabitants. Furthermore, the expression is a scathing remark and unveiled rebuke, pointing towards the apparent 'double standard' of a select group of oil and gas consuming nations who will not allow the kind of oil exploitation going on in the Niger Delta to take place in their countries because it lacks due diligence and dependable environmental protection and conservation approaches. In line 6, Ojaide personalizes his narrative as he stresses solemnly that the Niger Delta oil and gas are nature's gift and providence to all Niger Delta people, his people. In line 7, he deftly summarizes his victimhood self-construal by portraying himself as a victim and a symbolic witness of the excruciating agony of the dispossession, which has created varying personal to loss of livelihood and wellbeing in a collective loss.

Nigerian Eco-dramatists and Niger Delta Environmental Despoilment

In the area of drama, playwrights such as Esiaba Irobi, Ahmed Yerima, and Barclays Ayakoroma through their plays lament the negative consequences of the non-environmental friendly approaches to oil and gas exploitation in Niger Delta and the inhabitants' portrayal of victimhood and dispossession claim. Irobi's 'Hangmen Also Die', Yerima's 'Hard Ground' and Ayakoroma's 'A Chance to Survive' similarly portray the deep feeling of melancholy, disenchantment, and nostalgia, dominant in the Niger Delta due loss of livelihood and well-being because of massive

environment despoilment. The playwrights present a different approach to victimhood self-construal from Ojaide's who presents himself as the victim of the dispossession. The playwrights utilize their play characters to personify the portrayals of instances and circumstances that qualify the Niger Delta inhabitants as victims of dispossession. Through the characters, Oloye in *A Chance to Survive* and Nimi in *Hard Ground*, Ayakoroma and Irobi respectively highlight the victimhood self-construal variables to instigate debate and solution.

For instance, Esiaba Irobi, a prominent Nigerian dramatist and a foremost eco-dramatist on Niger Delta in his play 'Hangmen Also Die', relays the dispossession polemics, the tears and melancholy that gravitate to restiveness and violence. In 'Hangmen Also Die', Irobi presents instances of despondency that generate emotional turmoil and violence through the incidences that revolve around the anger emanating from the loss of means of livelihood by the people and the conflict in sharing the palliative sum of money sent by the oil multinationals. Through this play, Irobi highlights how dispossession, poverty, and hopelessness trigger victimhood, which instigates hopelessness and anarchy. The people he depicts in the play present themselves as helpless in the face of massive despoilment of the lands and water, which are their primary sources of livelihood as fishermen and farmers. More so, Irobi projects that the inhabitants' complaints hardly receive the required attention, rather the oil multinationals apply the divide-and-rule approach through irregular offers of lump sums (literally pittance) to strategic stakeholders in a bid to set the people against themselves. Anger emanating from this sense of injustice propels the unemployed graduates to form militant groups to engage in the disruption of oil exploitation through the busting of oil pipes, and kidnapping of oil workers, to reduce oil profit in a bid to force Nigeria's government and the oil companies to a round-table. In response to the youth's violent restiveness, the government sends the military, to shoot and eliminate the militants at sight.

According to Nobert Oyibo Eze the unemployed youths in the play otherwise called the suicide squad "is a child of depravity, a child of necessity, formed as a means of walking out of the terrains of neglect, poverty" and hopelessness (2000: 35). Irobi's play indicates that the youths' deep sense of victimhood waxed strong when it appeared that the dysfunctional and tepid government intervention are a deliberate scheme to keep them from emancipation to challenge their stranglehold on power.

Eco-criticism and the Visual Metaphors in 'Blood and Oil'

Studies indicate that the "film medium in many ways is like the literary arts in its mechanics and dynamics of entertaining, embedding, consolidating, and re-aligning of both culture-specific and universal ideas in the consumers" (Aniago et al. 2020: 1). This is because the film "is regarded as an art that is pervasive and powerful" because as "a cultural product and medium" which individuals, groups and governments are utilizing as means of disseminating information (Cloete 2017: 1). The idea here is that "film as a medium, possesses the propensity to unleash both aggressive and subtle efficacious propelling force on the viewers in varying proportions" and "such efficacy can invigorate or re-invigorate the consciousness, and re-engineer the viewers' worldviews and ideologies" (Aniago et al. 2020: 2).

Studies attribute the understanding of visual metaphors to situational and cultural contexts, hence, Metaphor is classified as a conceptual phenomenon (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), that manifests in both language and other communication forms, such as gesture, visual image, and architecture (see Kovecses, 2002; Goatly, 2007; Forceville, 2009). According to El Refaie, visual metaphors represent the pictorial expression of metaphorical thinking and there are “a whole range of different forms through which metaphorical concepts can be expressed visually” (El Refaie 2003: 80). In their attempt at providing interpretive approaches to increase the understanding of visual metaphors, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), observe that visual images, like language, perform variously as communicative media which relay varied attributions to beholders and that these representations are efficacious and functional. Thus, an artist utilizes his creative vision to construct in specific choice ways to represent ideas. There are some visual metaphors in every existing artistic medium that utilizes visual images in film, theatre, dance, painting, sculpture, and photography to communicate. This means that knowledge encoded in perspectives and meaning-making can produce varied and similar perspectives. The context of metaphor is not just applicable to writing and speech, scholars such as Toulmin (1958), Kuhn (1970) and Brown (1976) observe that metaphor transcends all aspects of communication modes. Choice application of metaphors relays to a critic the cognitive depth and density, and the nature of freedom of expression of the user and the user’s worldview and perspectives. Scholars widely agree on the premise that metaphor intensifies and deepens meanings in art beyond the literal attributions of most beholders; hence, the need for a greater understanding of the intentionality in arts requires greater insight (see Osborne, 1970; Burnham, 1971; Hatcher, 1974; Goodman, 1976; Berger, 1977; Matejka & Titunik, 1977; Gombrich, 1979; Enright, 1990).

Looking at the utility of film as a medium that subsumes visual metaphor, Aniago et al observe that “film-makers consciously attempt to appropriate the film medium for socio-political and/or cultural engineering or reengineering of the philosophical trajectories and perspectives of the target film consumers” (2020: 2). The view here is that film as a means of information dissemination, its efficacy and aesthetics reside in its ability to create long-lasting memories of all kinds of human realities to all categories viewers – children, adult, literate and illiterate. Hence, film is a widely utilized means of advocacy on environmental issues because its pictorials and images of actualities, beyond the oral language flexibility, help all categories of viewers to understand, memorize and recollect. This scenario is different from that of poems, which in most cases are not easily interpretable by most readers and practically inaccessible to illiterates. Again, poems just like drama do not receive the same level of audience/reader reception in countries where literacy levels and reading habits are abysmal. The images included in environmental films are practically accessible to people from all ethnic backgrounds, hence, the film reduces the oral language barrier, which occurs in poems and plays. However, despite this widely acknowledged functional utility of films, some studies suggest that environmental advocacy and eco-critical films focusing primarily on Niger Delta despoilment are few.

In their words, “studies directly devoted towards clear interpretation of filmic contributions to the portrayals of how oil exploration in Niger-Delta represents profit and monumental wealth for a few (the multinationals, corrupt government officials and their proxies) and massive economic and health misery for the host communities are scare” (Nwaozuzu et al 2021: 2). However, an example of a utilization of Nollywood film for environmental advocacy is ‘Blood and

Oil' which relays layers of physical and emotional upheavals bedevilling the Niger Delta oil bearing communities that have become massive sites of despoilment. 'Blood and Oil' relays instances of individual and collective sense of victimhood due to the appalling environmental degradation, government neglect, and calculated suppression, which has lead to large-scale wellbeing detriments. In their observation, Nwaozuzu et al note that "'Blood and Oil' represents a credible narrative, subsuming polemics of environmental degradation, health misery, massive unemployment, subjugation, and violent restiveness in Niger Delta due to poor political leadership, greed, and corruption" (2021: 1).

Boma 'Gunpowder', the central character in 'Blood and Oil' graduated with a first-class degree in geology from a university, and gained employment in an oil company but abandoned it to enlist with a militant gang. To his mother, who weeps that he is with a violent gang, he tells her that a handful of the youths working in the oil companies are not helping the community's desire to end the ongoing despoilment of their environment, which has rendered more people jobless and hopeless. Boma is convinced that the government and oil multinationals will accede to accord the Niger Delta people the right to resource control only through the disruption of oil exploitation. The disruption includes sporadic infliction of serious economic sabotage through the destruction of major oil pipes, burning of flow stations and kidnapping of oil workers, mostly expatriates as a way of instilling fear in those planning to relocate to Nigeria to work for oil multinationals as well as prompting those already in Nigeria to leave in a hurry.

The contexts of the visual metaphors in 'Blood and Oil' revolve around the information-laden visuals of farmlands and rivers just the image in Figure 1. This image clearly portrays the degradation of the ecology due to massive oil spillage. The image provides information beyond words in poems and plays which leaves the reader to continue to imagine. Figure 2, which was sent to Mr Powell by the gang affiliate of Boma clearly delivered a powerful message to him. The emaciated boys in one of the pictures and the other with a boy whose hands is soiled with oil scooped from the river are loaded with visual metaphors. The emaciated boys connote suffering and poverty that dwells in communities in the Niger Delta due to the despoilment of the environment by oil multinationals. In other words, the images project the victimhood realities of the inhabitants. Therefore, with the visual metaphor the message sinks and penetrates faster than written accounts. Thus, we agree with Aniago et al that "it will not be out of place to suggest that the film-maker is in many ways a philosopher, an opinion moulder, a manipulator of emotions and a conjurer of ideas" (2020: 2). This is because film places information with visuals in the public domain to instigate debates and aggregation of perspectives and worldview just as in 'Blood and Oil'.



Snapshot 1. A snapshot of a boy scooping oil from a lake filled with spilled oil



Snapshot 2. Mr. Powell, the Executive Director of Forshaw oil company which operates in Oloibiri, Niger Delta, Nigeria

Conclusion

The study examined self-construal as a purposive articulation and reflection of consciousness in response to stimuli in an individual's concomitant environment and its realities. The study reviews the notion that self-construal represents an individual's attempt at showing his inclination to specific circumstances that directly influence him. We also observe that self-construal evolves, aggregates, and changes in response to concomitant realities. Focusing our attention on Niger Delta, we observe that the eco-plays of Barclays Ayakoroma, Ahmed Yerima and Esiaba Irobi depict the deplorable actions of the oil multinationals and the government who exhibit clear disinterest in the conservation of the natural environment in Niger Delta. We noted that this

despoilment has altered the eco-health, the inhabitants' well-being and livelihood adversely. In the poem 'Delta Blues' the poet Tanure Ojaide displays deep insider awareness of the social contexts in the Niger Delta as he utilizes pertinent perceptual language to drive his message. The poem draws the attention of the global community to the plight of the inhabitants of oil and gas-bearing communities in the Niger Delta. The poem indicates that before oil exploitation in Niger Delta, the ecology and eco-system was a pleasure to behold, it was a beautiful and healthy habitat for humans and animals with extensive bio-diversity. He bemoans the ruin that has replaced the beauty with contaminated rivers, streams, and lakes, which chokes the flora and fauna and rapidly drives them to inevitable extinction. The texts indicate that victimhood self-construal as exhibited by the inhabitants revolves around their sense of collective travail. All the texts, we discussed in this paper similarly deplore the prevailing unfortunate atmosphere of indifference by most Nigerian leaders. More so, tacitly the texts indicate that restiveness, violence, insecurity, and crime are likely to continue in Niger Delta if drastic changes are not made.

The study examined the efficacy of images in the film 'Blood and Oil' as a means of creating a more lasting impact on the minds of the viewers. We argued that the images in 'Blood and Oil' make it a very strong medium of communicating to more individuals regardless of their educational level in comparison to poems and plays which are not usually accessible by illiterates and those who do not understand the language utilized in the writing. We also noted that 'Blood and Oil' through a creative combination of images of despoilment and characters' utterances intensified the projection of victimhood self-construal by Niger Delta inhabitants. The argument here is if self-construal is an articulate inclination presentation as some studies purport, it is plausible to contend that 'victimhood persona' is an inclination-driven experience, conviction, and agenda propelled manifestation.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest.

Funding Disclosure/Acknowledgement

No funding was received for carrying out this research.

References

- Abba, A. A. & N. D. Onyemachi. (2020). 'Weeping in the face of fortune: Eco-alienation in the Niger-Delta eco-poetics' *Humanities*, 9(54): 1–16.
- Alabi, O. S. (2021). 'Between the praise and defence of nature: An eco-critical discourse of Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide's eco-poetry' *International Journal of Languages and Culture*, 1(2): 1–7.
- Ali, S. T. (2017). 'Women, nature and biophilia: The making of nature-based identity in Temsula Ao's *Laburnum for My Head Middle Flight*. *SSM Journal of English Literature and Culture*, Special Volume: Peripheral identities in literature, film and performance, 6(1): 219–226.
- Allen, A. S. (2011). 'Eco-musicology: Eco-criticism and musicology' *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 64 (2): 393.

- Aluko, M. A. (2001). 'Sustainable development, environmental degradation and the entrenchment of poverty in the Niger Delta of Nigeria' *Journal of Human Ecology*, 15(1): 63-68.
- Aniago, E., Okpara, C. V., & Nwaozuzu, U. C. (2020). 'Metaphors of Igbo worldviews on ghosts as mystical realities: interpretations of filmic portrayals as archetypal and imaginative visual aesthetics in two Nollywood films' *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 12(1): 1 – 13
- Aquino, K. & Byron, K. (2002). 'Dominating interpersonal behaviour and perceived victimization in groups: evidence for a curvilinear relationship' *Journal of Management*, 28(1): 71.
- Arnheim, R.(1969). *Visual thinking*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Arnheim, R. (1974). *Art and visual perception: A psychology of the creative eye*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Ashton-James, C., van Baaren, R. B., Chartrand, T. L., Decety, J., & Karremans, J. (2007). 'Mimicry and me: The impact of mimicry on self-construal' *Social Cognition*, 25: 518-535.
- Asuni, J. B. (2009). 'Blood oil in the Niger Delta' US Institute of Peace, *Special Report*, 1–20.
- Awosika, L. F. (1995). 'Impacts of global climate change and sea level rise on coastal resources and energy development in Nigeria' In: J. C. Umolu, (Ed.), *Proceedings of global climate change: Impact on energy development*, 83-88. Jos: DAM TECH Nigeria.
- Ayakoroma, B. (2002). *A Chance to Survive: And Other Plays*. Port Harcourt: Dee-Goldfinger.
- Balconi, M. (2010). *Neuropsychology of the Sense of Agency: From Consciousness to Action*. New York: Springer.
- Baldwin, M. W., & Sinclair, L. (1996). 'Self-esteem and 'if...then' contingencies of interpersonal acceptance' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(6): 1130-1141.
- Bar-Tal, D., Chernyak-Hai, L., Schori, N., & Gundar, A. (2009). 'A sense of self-perceived collective victimhood in intractable conflicts' *International Review of the Red Cross* 91(874): 229-258
- Bayley, J. E. (1991). 'The concept of victimhood' In: D. Sank et al. (eds.), *To Be a Victim*, New York: Springer Media, 53-62
- Bayne, T. (2008). 'The phenomenology of agency' *Philosophy Compass*, 3(1): 182-202.
- Berger, J. (1977). *Ways of seeing*. Middlesex: Penguin.
- Berkowitz, L. (1989). 'Frustration-aggression hypothesis: Examination and reformulation' *Psychological Bulletin*, 106(1): 59-73.
- Berman, A. (2010). 'Post-traumatic victimhood : Between recovery and fixation' In: A. Berman, M. Berger, & I. Urlic. *Victimhood, vengefulness, and the culture of forgiveness*. NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 1-17
- Blair, L. (1975). *Rhythms of vision: The changing patterns of belief*. New York: Warner.
- Bowers, C. A., & Flinders, D. J. (1990). *Responsive teaching: An ecological approach to classroom patterns of language, culture, and thought*. N Y: Teachers College.
- Braddock, A. C. (2009). 'Eco-critical Art History' *American Art*, 23(2): 24–28.
- Brockner, J., De Cremer, D., van den Bos, K., & Chen, Y. (2005). 'The influence of interdependent self-construal on procedural fairness effects' *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 96(2): 155-167
- Brown, R. H. (1976). *A poetic for sociology: Towards a logic of discovery for the human sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

- Bülbül, A. E. (2015). 'Greener: On ecocinema theory' *Sinecine: Journal of Film Studies*, 6(2): 7-25.
- Burnham, J. (1971). *The structure of art*. New York: Brazillier.
- Campbell, J. (1990). *Transformations of myth through time*. New York: Perennial Library, Harper & Row
- Cloete, A. L. (2017). 'Film as medium for meaning making: A practical theological reflection' *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 73(4): 1 – 6.
- Cole, A. (2007). *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War on Welfare to the War on Terror*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press
- Costa, P. T., & McCrae, R. R. (1988). 'Personality in adulthood: a six-year longitudinal study of self-reports and spouse ratings on the Neo personality inventory' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(5): 853-863
- Devine, P. G., & Brodish, A. B. (2003). 'Modern classics in social psychology' *Psychological Inquiry*, 14(3): 196-202.
- Ebegbulem, J. C., D. Ekpe & T. O. Adejumo. (2013). 'Oil exploration and poverty in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A critical analysis' *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 4: 279–287.
- Egya, E. S. (2012). 'Eco-human Engagement in Recent Nigerian Poetry in English' *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49: 1–11.
- Ekpo, I. E., Obot, O. I., & David, G. S. (2018). 'Impact of oil spill on living aquatic resources of the Niger Delta region: A review' *Journal of Wetlands and Waste Management*, 2(1): 48 – 57
- El Refaie, E. (2003). 'Understanding visual metaphor' *Visual Communication*, 2(1): 75–95.
- El Refaie, E. (2009). 'Metaphor in political cartoons: Exploring audience responses' In C. Forceville & E. Urios-Aparisi (Eds.), *Multimodal metaphor* (173–196). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter
- Enright, D. J. (1990). *Fields of vision: Literature, language, and television*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Eze, N. O. (2000). 'Meaning and significance in Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi* and *Hangmen Also Die*' *Okike: African Journal of New Writing*, 44: 24 – 45.
- Eze, N. O. (2007). 'Environmental impact assessment and the dramatist: A conceptual study of Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*.' *African Performance Studies*, 2&3: 46 – 54.
- Eze, N. O. (2013). 'Drama and the politics of climate change in Nigeria: A critical appraisal of Greg Mbajiorgu's *Wake up Everyone*' *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 5(1): 67–74.
- Eze, O., Nnanna, N. & Aniago, E. (2021). 'Antimonies of crude oil production in the Niger Delta: Reflection on Ahmed Yerima's trilogy' *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 13(3): 1-12.
- Ferguson, N., Burgess, M. & Hollywood, I. (2010). 'Who are the victims? Victimhood experiences in post-agreement Northern Ireland' *Political Psychology* 31(6): 857-886
- Forceville, C. (2009). 'Nonverbal and multimodal metaphor in a cognitivist framework: agendas for research' In: C. Forceville & E. Urios-Aparisi (Eds.), *Multimodal metaphor* (19–42). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Forché, C. (1993). *Against Forgetting: Twentieth century Poetry of Witness*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Garkawe, S. (2004). 'Revisiting the scope of victimology – How broad a discipline should it be?' *International Review of Victimology* 11(2-3): 275–294

- Glotfelty, C. & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Goatly, A. (1997). *The language of metaphors*. London: Routledge.
- Gombrich, E.H. 1963. (*Meditations on a hobby horse and other essays on the theory of art*). London: Phaidon.
- Gombrich, E.H. (1979). *Ideals and idols: Essays on values in history and in art*. Oxford: Phaidon.
- Goncalo, J., & Staw, B. (2006). 'Individualism - collectivism and group creativity' *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 100(1): 96-109.
- Goodman, N. (1976). *Languages of art*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Govier, T. (2015). *Victims and Victimhood*, London: Broadview Press
- Hatcher, E. (1974). *Visual metaphor: A formal analysis of Navajo art*. St. Paul, MN: West
- Horwitz, R. B. (2018). 'Politics as victimhood, victimhood as politics' *The Journal of Policy History* 30(3): 552-574
- Iheka, C. (2018). *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Irobi, E. (1989). *Hangmen Also Die*. Enugu: ABIC.
- Ivakhiv, A. J. (2013). *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Effect, Nature*. NY: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Jacoby, T. A. (2014). 'A theory of victimhood: Politics, conflict and the construction of victim-based identity' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43(2): 511-530.
- Kääpä, P. (2014). *Ecology and Contemporary Nordic Cinemas: From Nation-building to Ecocosmopolitanism*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Kövecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed). London: Routledge.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1970). 'The structure of scientific revolutions' *Number Two of the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago
- Kühnen, U., Hannover, B., & Schubert, B. (2001). 'The semantic-procedural interface model of the self: The role of self-knowledge for context-dependent versus context-independent modes of thinking' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80(3): 397-409
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Locke, J. (1689/1975). *An essay concerning human understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). 'Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation' *Psychological Review*, 98(2): 224-253.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1998). 'The cultural psychology of personality' *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 29(1): 63-87.
- Matejka, L. & Titunik, I. (1977). *Semiotics of art: Prague school contributions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Matsumoto, D. (1999). 'Culture and self: An empirical assessment of Markus and Kitayama's theory of independent and interdependent self-construal' *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2(3), 289-310.
- Mbajiorgu, G. (2011). *Wake Up Everyone*. Ibadan: Kraft.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Noor, M., Vollhardt, J. R., Mari, S. & Nadler, A. (2017). 'The social psychology of collective victimhood' *European Journal of Social Psychology* 47(2): 121-34
- Nwaozuzu, U-C., Abada, I. & Aniago, E. (2020). 'Delta oil exploration politics and the portrayal of brutal impact in Yerima's *Hard Ground*' *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, 32: 21-34
- Nwilo, P. C. & Badejo, O. T. (2006). 'Impacts and management of oil spill pollution along the Nigerian coastal areas' *Administering Marine Spaces: International Issues*, 119-133.
- O'Brien, S. (2007). 'Back to the world: Reading eco-criticism in a postcolonial context' In: H. Tiffin (Ed.), *Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire*, NY: Rodopi. 177-200.
- Obi, C. (2010). 'Oil extraction, dispossession, resistance, and conflict in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta' *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 30(1-2): 219-236.
- Ojaide, T. (1995). *Daydream of Ants and Other Poems*. Ikeja: Malthouse Press.
- Ojaide, T. (1998). *Delta Blues & Home Songs*. Ibadan: Kraft.
- Okuyade, O. (2016). 'Ecocultures and the African literary tradition' In: Zapf, H. (Ed.), *Handbook of Eco-criticism and Cultural Ecology*. Walter de Gruyter.
- Osborne, H. (1970). *Aesthetics and art theory: An historical introduction*. New York: E. P. Dutton
- Rehding, A. (2002). 'Review article: Eco-musicology' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 127(2): 305-320.
- Rueckert, W. (1978, 1996). 'Literature and ecology: An experiment in eco-criticism' In: C. Glotfelty & H. Fromm (Eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 105-123
- Sedikides, C., & Brewer, M. B. (2001). *Individual self, relational self, collective self*. NY: Psychology Press
- Smith, E. (2019). *John Cage's 'Rock' Music: Eco-critical and Performance Considerations in Ryoanji for Solo Oboe and Percussion Obbligato (1983)*. PhD Musical Arts. The University of Southern Mississippi.
- Spiro, M. E. (1993). 'Is the western conception of the self 'peculiar' within the context of the world cultures?' *Ethos*, 21(2): 107-153.
- Synofzik, M., Vosgerau, G., & Newen, A. (2008). 'Beyond the comparator model: A multi-factorial two-step account of agency' *Consciousness and Cognition*, 17(1): 219-239
- Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1979). 'An integrative theory of intergroup conflict' In: W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Monterey, CA: BrooksCole.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). 'The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour' In: S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations*, Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 7-24.
- Toulmin, S. E. (1958). *The uses of argument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University
- Ukiwo, U. (2009). *Causes and cures of oil-related Niger Delta conflicts*. Policy Notes Series. Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute.

- Voyer, B. G. & Franks, B. (2014). 'Toward a Better Understanding of Self-Construal Theory: An Agency View of the Processes of Self-Construal' *Review of General Psychology*, 18(2): 101 – 114.
- Wiki, J. (2009). *Poverty in the Niger Delta*. Port Harcourt: Jurat Publication Company.
- Wunder, S. (2003). *Oil wealth and the fate of the forest: A comparative study of eight tropical countries*. London: Routledge.
- Yerima, A. (2006). *Hard Ground*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Zhang, Y., & Shrum, L. J. (2009). 'The influence of self-construal on impulsive consumption' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(5): 838-850.
- Zhu, R., & Meyers-Levy, J. (2009). 'The influence of self-view on context effects: How display fixtures can affect product evaluations' *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46(1): 37-45.
- Zur, O. (1994). 'Rethinking 'don't blame the victim: The psychology of victimhood' *Journal of Couples Therapy* 4(3-4): 15-36