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Fashioning Petrotopia: Environmental Crime in Oil Extractive Zones

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Abstract

This paper examines the construction of "petrotopia" in global oil extractive zones through Linda Hogan's Mean Spirit, Abdelrahman Munif's Cities of Salt, and Helon Habila's Oil on Water. Drawing on energy humanities and Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, it argues that petrofiction exposes oil territories as sacrifice zones shaped by environmental crime, racial injustice, and forced displacement. While the novels depict spectacular forms of petro-violence—murders, military repression, and militant resistance—they also foreground less visible ecological devastation such as poisoned water systems, habitat destruction, climate alteration, and psychological trauma. Across Oklahoma, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Niger Delta, oil capitalism transforms peripheral communities into disposable landscapes in the service of imperial and corporate power. The promise of oil wealth produces an illusion of prosperity, yet results in displacement, "displacement without moving," and environmental desolation. By expanding the meaning of crime beyond individual acts to systemic ecological destruction, the paper contends that petrotopia represents not utopia but a dystopian order structured by extraction and sacrifice. Petrofiction thus makes visible the hidden violences of fossil-fuel modernity.

Keywords: Petrofiction, Petrotopia, Environmental Crime, Slow Violence, Sacrifice Zones, Extractivism, Petrocapitalism, Displacement.

Introduction

Oil is a natural entity, a substance shaped by the decomposition of biotic matter for multitude of years. In the past three hundred years, oil has altered the planet and the human species in various facets and ascertained its own space in the hegemonic geopolitics of the universe. The present century is crafted by crude oil energy. As Allan Stoekl remarks in his Foreword to *Oil Culture*, "[Oil] is dumb matter, a natural offshoot of natural processes, gunk

in the ground, that we use, and that uses us, keeping us prisoner to our energy slaves, to the rich energy inputs that we find so hard— even impossible—to derive from any other energy source" (Barrett xiii). Thus the inanimate corporeal matter is endowed with the potential to maneuver the political, social and cultural configurations of the world.

Nevertheless, even while the world remains inundated with the modernity established by the crude oil resource, the lubricant remains imperceptible to the common populace. Oil is often extolled as clean energy shipped across continents and conveyed to the consumer hubs through oil pipelines and trucks. The consumption of oil away from the sites of extraction and purification conceal the texture of the oil from universal imagination. The explosive clatter of drilling, the rigging and the fracking, and the working of mammoth-like machinery do not reach the customer, as these terrains are thoroughly veiled by the capitalist system that endeavours to flourish in the indiscernible nature of oil. Accordingly, a twenty-first-century human whose life is determined by crude oil is completely obscured from oil's origin and geopolitics.

Literature, too, seemed to have maintained its silence in making oil intangible. As Amitav Ghosh describes, crude oil averted writers from embracing it until late due to the unfathomable social and political blemishes it generated during the utilitarian and vehement pursuit of the fossil fuel resource using military and ideological persuasions (29). Consequently, the crude oil resource which brought about an epochal shift in modernity did not translate into the imaginative realm of novels. He contended that for various reasons which includes the imperialist criminality that obliterated individuals, community and people, "the history of oil is a matter of embarrassment verging on the unspeakable, the pornographic" (30). According to him this state of discomfiture had made oil encounter "imaginatively sterile" (30).

However with the emergence of petrofiction, which narrated the stories of corruption a nd petro- despotism; spill and disaster; the conflict between oil capital and community and co mmotion about oil prices enacted across international territories, the anthropogenic tales from the fossil fuel extractive zones were interleaved into the domain of literature. In fact it was A mitav Ghosh who had coined the term, "Petrofiction" as the title of his review of Abdelrahma n Munif's quintet of novels *Cities of Salt* in the issue of *The New Republic in* March 1992 to r ecognise a category of literature that incorporates oil in the work's thematic content. It is the m ost recognisable strain of energy-art which focuses on extraction narratives, local and global t ales of oil's advancement and its spectacular conversion of space, geography and way of life. Thus petrofiction can be reckoned as crime novels as most of them are set in spaces of extract ion where social and ecological injuries are profound. Such an association between petroficti on and crime fiction crucial as it would aid in reworking "the prevailing idea of "crime" as an individual act that has immediate, visible and usually bloody/ violent consequences" (Puxan-Olivia 368). Instead the slow and exponentially rising environmental crime in the spaces of e xtraction will be allotted attention

The present chapter will examine three literary texts narrating the tales of significant crude oil arenas on the world oil map: America, the Arabian Peninsula and Nigeria. In the peripheral level, all these novels, namely Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* (1991), Abdelrahman

Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984) and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) deal with one or more specific crimes. While, Hogan's *Mean Spirit* narrates the tale of a series of murders based on incidents that happened in the Osage country between 1921 and 1926, Habila's *Oil and Water,* narrates the story of a young, minor-league journalist, Rufus, who embark in search of the kidnapped woman, Isabel Floode, the wife of the British oil engineer. However, to discover one single plot line of crime in Munif's *Cities of Salt* which is written in an episodic manner analogous to *The Arabian Nights* is arduous. However multiple crimes including the alleged murder of Mizeban and the disappearance and the reappearance of Miteb al-Hathal are featured in the fiction. Through several plot strategems, the respective authors attempt to solve the specific crimes. However the tentacles of the criminal acts, which is invariably entangled with the the global power politics of oil imperialism and petrocapitalism, resists an absolute resolution. Thus even when the crime seem deciphered, the petrofiction opens a necessity to interrogate the environmental crimes represented.

However the environmental crimes generated by petromodernity and petrocapitalism i n the extractive territories are diverse, the outcomes of which are often temporally displaced. Nevertheless, one major factor which makes them analogous is the transformation of oil space s into sacrifice zones. Extractive "sacrifice zones" refer to "places that, to their extractors, so mehow do not count and therefore can be poisoned, drained, or otherwise destroyed, for the s upposed greater good of economic progress" (Klein 169-170). These capitalist extractive spac es of petromodernity are spaces of crime where "capitalism's fundamental logic of *withdrawa l*—of value, nutrients, energy, labor, time—from people, lands, culture, life-forms, the elemen ts, without corresponding deposit (except as externalities of non-value in the form of pollution , waste, climate change, illness, and death)" is experienced ("Extraction: Decolonial Visual C ultures in the Age of the Capitalocene.").

In a petomodern world reigned by fossil fuel energy, "[r]unning an economy on energy sources that release poisons as an unavoidable part of their extraction and refining has always required sacrifice zones"(L;rin 275). In the oilscapes represented racism acts as a major tool assisting the formation of "disposable peripheries [which is] harnessed to feed a glittering center" (Klein 171). In *Mean Spirit,* the racial hostility can be witnessed in several instances. The Euroamericans considered the native people who hunted the eagles and feared the bats to be "foreign and strange" (Hogan 114). The dominant whites "had ideas about Indians, that they were unschooled, ignorant people who knew nothing about life and money" (Hogan 60). Those in charge of the oil corporation believed that the "Indians were a locked door to the house of progress" (Hogan 56). Thus, akin to all sacrifice zones that nourished industrial capitalism, the Osage territory was also an "out-of the way" place. The Osage people were economically prosperous, but they did lack state support. Even the sheriff, Jess Gold, who was in charge of guarding the citizens, believed that "Indians aren't like us… They drive good cars. But under it all, they're still different. Half savage maybe" (Hogan 125). The state and the law machinery seem to view the people as jettisons. This is apparent to the readers since the oil murders in the Osage territory go almost unnoticed. The oil murders received attention only

after the death of Mr. Forrest. "He was the case breaker. He was white, educated, affluent, and his body was found on Indian land, which gave them federal jurisdiction" (Hogan 310-311). Thus while the deaths of the Osage natives were neglected by the authorities, the EuroAmerican racial identity of Mr. Forrest coaxed the law to investigate the oil deaths.

Similarly in the Niger Delta, the third-largest wetland, the enormous amount of enviro nmental disaster is dealt with by the national and international communities in a placid manne r. Rob Nixon in his work, *Environmentalism of the Poor*, argues that the racial bigotry of the multinational oil firms is the primary reason for this negligence. He exemplifies it by describi ng the actuality of slapdash oil spillages in Nigeria. "Shell's racism is manifest: in Africa, the company waives onshore drilling standards that it routinely upholds elsewhere…. When oper ating in the Northern hemisphere—in the Shetlands, for instance—Shell pays lucrative rents t o local councils; in the Niger Delta, village authorities receive no comparable compensation" (113). This mellowed and lackadaisical attitude is evident in the village described by Habila i n *Oil and Water* where toxins start accumulating in the soil and water as an aftermath of drilli ng which kills people, livestock and plants. However when Dr. Mark comprehends the need t o take action and approaches the oil company, they bribed him with money and job and wante d to hush up the whole discovery. Later he sents his findings to the government. "They thank ed [him] and dumped the results in some filing cabinet" (Habila 92-93). Thus a "particular bra nd of irresponsibility" is promoted in the sacrifice zone of Niger Delta made possible by racia l bigotry (Klein 171). This is resonated through the conversation between Rufus and James Fl oode. "These people endure the worst conditions of any oil-producing community on earth, th e government knows it but doesn't have the will to stop it, the oil companies know it, but beca use the government doesn't care, they also don't care" (Habila 108). Here the historically unde rprivileged faction of the society is judged as deserving of sacrifice due to the prevailing racis t politics and is pushed to the disposable periphery.

However in the Gulf, capitalist and imperialist motives surpassed the racial prejudices. As Ian Rutledge points out, "for many years the objectives of the integrated, multinational major oil companies owning refineries in the USA was in exploiting low-cost oil reserves abroad and importing these into the USA at commensurately low prices" (5). But religion actively obstructed the entry of capitalism in the Gulf. For the Arabs in the Middle –East, the Americans who believed in a different God were infidels. The Westerners, especially the Americans who were engaged in an imperialist capitalist conquest, wanted to ensure that nothing like a pan-Islamic movement (that earlier existed to save the Ottoman empire in the 1920s) would resurface. Therefore, they tried to ensure that Islam's values, dictums, and culture were not threatened. Thus the foreigners who initially arrived in the Wadi spoke in Arabic and made sure that the religious sentiments of the Bedouins were treated with reverence. When Ibn Rasheed asked them to repeat, "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His prophet", the Americans did it without any dilemma. However ,once the oil concessions where signed and the oil territory was in the imperialist control, the foreigners found it needless to be diplomatic to the "uncivilized" Arabs: "At first the Americans had laughed and slapped them on the

shoulders. Now they did not look at them or if they did, spat out words that could only be curses" (Munif 301). Here imperialist ploy of the occident towards the orient is exposed and the façade of racial brotherhood is revealed.

Thus, in practice and policy, "environmental racism" reigns in the oil territories creating "disposable people". According to Rob Nixon, these people encompass "a compendious category subject to almost infinite local variation as well as to fracture fault lines of ethnicity, gender, race, class, region, religion and generation" who have to face "militarisation of both commerce and development" and is often "assailed by coercion and bribery" (4).The regions represented in the books discussed hold such disposable people " who count so little that they are considered deserving of sacrifice" (Klein 170) and which "made their poisoning in the name of progress somehow acceptable" (165).

However, when an investigation is carried out in the select works, none of the extractive community initially perceives themselves as scapegoats. Instead, the population is immersed in the discourse of energy utopia that locates crude oil as the recipe that provides a superior life. Oil appeared to the masses as having the ability to modernize "social life - sending out tentacles into people's private lifeworlds to change them in what seemed, to many (but not all), exuberantly positive ways" (Buell 283). However, the aspirational desire for such an energy utopia leads the communities in all sacrifice regions to trauma. He estimates exuberance and catastrophe as persisting motifs in an oil space. As Frederick Buell opines, "oil exuberance was wedded all too clearly to oil catastrophe in a high-profile marriage of absolute opposites" (289). This fusion of the two is both "complex and polyvalent" (Buell 287).

This is detailed in the fiction discussed, through the dreams of the Bedouins represented by Munif, whose world echoes with the promise of gold and riches under their feet and for whom , the "words rich and gold hung in the air like smoke" (Munif 95). Even Abdelrahman Munif believed in this exuberant nature of crude oil. This reverberates in the words he shares with Peter Theroux during a family dinner in Damascus, where they meet for the first time. Munif opines that "Oil is our one and only chance to build a future" (qtd in Theroux). Similar excitement can be traced in the Osage natives of *Mean Spirit*, who are unexpectedly consecrated with petro dollars which inspired them to indulge themselves in odd delights. Jim Josh, a lover of plants, is reported to have purchased "several useless claw-footed bathtubs even though he lived in a shack with no running water" (Hogan 56). Michael Horse had three gold teeth. Jim Josh bought a car even though he knew no driving. "It's just for looks", he said (Hogan 92). As in Habila's *Oil and Water*, the residents of the village hopefully, anticipated the arrival of oil, believing it to be the remedy for their entire discontentment which was based on the "illusion that oil, and its profits, belong to everyone" (LeMenegar 91). Accordingly, Dr. Dagogo Mark, the medical practitioner whom Rufus meets at the Major's camp, recounts how an elder came to him and told him, "I am not ill. I am just poor. Can you give me medicine for that? We want the fire that burns day and night. He told me that plainly, pugnaciously" (Habila 91). Oil and oil money provided an illusion of opulence and well-being for the twenty families who lived in the village.

This particular characteristic of oil is described by Ryszard Kapuscinski, who explains how oil generates "the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free." Achieving oil wealth is like an archetypal dream which is realised "through lucky accident, through a kiss of fortune and not by sweat, anguish, hard work"(37). Consequently, the natives in the oil land are blinded by the promise of oil wealth and the establishment of an oil utopia. Howerever, "oil is a fairy tale, and like every fairy tale, a bit of a lie" (Kapuscinski 37). The price they had to pay for the cheap petro-modern yields was immense. As Jennifer Wenzel points out,"Petro-magic is one of the forms that petro-violence takes; its illusions of sweet surplus can, for a time, mask the harm that petroleum extraction does to humans and nonhuman nature, turning each into instruments of violence" (214). This catastrophe was "an integral part of the exuberance of oil", mutually reinforcing each other (Buell 282).

In Wadi al Uyon, the catastrophe presented itself in the form of sizeable oil-run iron machines from which "a sound of rolling thunder surged out" startling "men, animals and birds" of the Wadi" (Munif 68).). Its oil-fed mechanical claws pronounced the apocalyptic end of the oasis. The carnage of Wadi-al-Uyon reached its conclusion with the razing of "a brook, and trees, and community of people" (Munif 106). The men and nature succumbed to the will of the petromodernity with little resistance. This is manifested in *Mean Spirit* by Linda Hogan through the violent crimes committed against the affluent Indian Osage population. Thus Grace Blanket, the richest of the Osage tribe, is shot and murdered. Sara Blanket dies in a nitro fuse explosion. Walker is poisoned, and Benoit is found hanging from his own belt in a cell. The primary motive of all these crimes and homicides committed by the capitalist representatives was the territorial oil money. In the Niger Delta, the presence of oil does not improve the lives of the natives. Rather it have "fueled "a gigantic reservoir of anger and dissent," a sense of frustrated hopelessness, and a belief that non-violent protest is fruitless"(Caminero-Santangelo363) transforming the young people into militants who vandalised the oil pipelines and "constantly threatened to blow up" the oil rigs and refineries. (Habila 7). The community indulge in activities like kidnapping the expatriate workers, threatening and vandalising the oil paraphernalia, etc., as a mode of protest against the federal government and the oil capitalists.

Infact, as Nikolai Bukharin opines, "every capitalist expansion leads sooner or later to a bloody climax" (142). In most of the territories where oil capitalism reigns, "A secret but pervasive surveillance regime is installed, capacious bureaucracy emplaced and a disciplinary managerialist regime emerges, destabilizing unions and binding state elites and the police force to oil-refinery management" perpetuating oil crimes and petro-violence. (MacDonald, "Monstorous Transformer" 18). According to Michael Watts, petro-violence describes the struggles over the control of oil reserves."The world of oil and gas is and has been saturated with violence: symbolic, cultural, political, ecological, and economic"(Watts, "Petroviolence" 258).

This violence is funded by oil revenues and can be biological and social. Here biological violence signifies the violence committed against the biophysical world, whereas social violence indicates "criminality and degeneracy associated with the genesis of petro-wealth and

its ecological destructiveness" (Watts, "Petro-Insurgency" 1). Such petro-violence detectable in the select works is divided into spectacular and slow violence as described by Rob Nixon in his work, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. While spectacular violence which is palpable receives media visibility and quick response from people, slow violence, catalysed by petrocapitalism with its existential nature seems to receive little attention.

Spectacular violence in the sacrifice zones is visible in all the oil novels deliberated on . This petro violence is disseminated through the activities of various groups, which includes: a)The authoritative government and its agencies, b)the formidable capitalists and c)the belligerent activists

While the government and its agencies indulged in ideological persuasions in certain regions, certain other terrains witnessed vicious harassment. In both the petrolist states of Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, the government themselves participate in promulgating aggressive and discernible violence. They employ the military or police force to abet capitalists displacing the citizens and annexing the oil terrains. Thus when a voice of dissent emerges from Miteb al-Hathal in *Cities of Salt*, the emir points to the sword placed against the wall and proclaims: "We have only one medicine to troublemakers: that" (Munif 87). Later, when the Wadi is destroyed and the people refuse to leave, Emir uses the aggression of the Desert Forces to relocate the community. Thus coercion is employed by the oligarchic government to meet its needs. The proletarian revolution enticed by the suspension of the twenty-three workers and the murder of Mufaddi al-Jeddan at the order of Johar, the commander of the Desert Army are all instances of this mode of spectacular violence. During the strike, Johar ordered his commanders "to teach them what red death is. Break their bones. Curse their grandfathers and have no mercy." (Munif 583).

Similarly in *Oil and Water*, Habila portrays Nigeria "as a neo-colonial, comprador state" that acts as "an organ of international capital" in exploiting and manipulating the people of the neo- extractive sites (Beckman 40). This unethical partnership between the government and the foreign oil corporations is evident in Chief Ibrahim's narration of the skirmishes in the settlement close to Yellow Island, where oil companies constantly visit to gain the land right for excavation. The chief recalls how the oil executives never arrived alone but were accompanied by influential political leaders from Port Harcourt. The oil capitalists and the politicians tried to tempt the chief by promising him money: "money, more money than any of them had ever imagined" (Habila 38). When Chief Malibu declined the offer, the oil capitalists joined hands with the government machinery and arrested him on the false allegation of assisting the militants and contriving against the autocratic regime. Firstly, a lawyer arrived, promising the tribe to remove all the charges against Chief Malibu. He laid a condition that demanded the elders adhere to the company's demands to sell the land. Secondly came a politician from Abuja, claiming to be a senator with two white oil executives. When these schemes failed, more people arrived in the village – "all working for the oil companies, trying one way or another to break the villagers' resolve" (Habila 40). Chief Malibo stayed strong, determined not to sacrifice the ancestral land to the insensitive industrialists. Later, when the

villagers met the jailed chief, the jail officials informed them that he was dead, and his body was handed over to them. Even before Chief Malibo's body was buried, the oil companies, with the aid of the state military, arrived to claim the land: "They came with a whole army, waving guns and looking like they meant business" (40). For the Nigerian federal government, "oil-as-money is the lubricant that keeps the machine of national progress running" (Wenzel 217).

However, such targeted and explicit violence is absent in the context of America. Even when Linda Hogan depicts crimes and murders in *Mean Spirit*, rarely does government get involved in direct violence. However, the law and order departments and the judiciary are often co-conspirators in the murders planned and executed by the capitalist agents. Thus, when Benoit was wrongly accused and put in jail for the murder of his wife, Sara Blanket, the law prevented him from placing an inquiry or claim. The lawyer informs him that he is an Indian and cannot file a claim for his wife's money as "Indians are not citizens" (Hogan 84). This discrimination was an accepted fact among the natives. This can be understood from the words of Lenoit, who explains, "Besides, we're not legal, Benoit. The law doesn't apply to us" (Hogan 84). The whole legal system seems to justify the Euro-Americans even when the events reveal that it is the natives who were right. The government also brought in policy changes, making life difficult for the native Indians. In the beginning, the Osage Indian Tribe is given their due share of mineral royalty money. However, soon, laws were implemented that prevented them from getting the fair share of their payments. The government had also set up competency commissions that could easily declare any competent Indian incompetent. "The courts had already named at least twenty competent Indian people as incompetents and had already withheld all their money until they were assigned legal guardians" (Hogan 62). This is infact a feature of pertocapitalism that often operates in a "war-like scenario" (Rutledge 4).

Accordingly, the second group which enables spectacular violence is the oil capitalists. In pursuit of profit, they often employ violence against the community, wherein the government acts as an apparatus that implements their will. Thus, the petrofiction from the American oil terrain depicts the oil capitalists as the primary antagonist. Thus Jim Josh, the capitalist agent in *The Mean Spirit* exercises violence against the Osage community. Hogan describes these oil capitalists as "newer kinds of thieves" who "wore fine suits, diamond stickpins, and buffed their fingernails" (Hogan 40).Their ingenious astuteness helped them to build a stable rapport and gain the trust of the natives. They were "always ready with a quick offer and fast cash" (Hogan 54). Yet, they were sly, shrewd, and in relentless pursuit of profit which is often justified using the arguments of capitalist and economic survival. Accordingly Mardy Green, Hale's accomplice argues in the court that the Osage murders are not crime: "you could call that a plot… or call it murder, but here it's just survival" (Hogan 327). T

In the Middle East, as depicted by Munif in *Cities of Salt,* the Bedouin community does not face visible violence from the imperialist oil companies. However, the novel reveals how the workers were provided minimal rights by the oil companu. They were often suspended from work without any genuine reason or explanation. This is voiced by a worker who remarks, "They just threw us out without giving a reason, as if we had no rights"(Munif 386).

Consequently, with the worker's strike in Harran, the multinational corporation becomes antagonistic and employed repressive and brutal measures against the oil community. However, Africa is the epitome of petroviolence where oil and blood are muddled up in an indistinguishable manner, where capitalists act as active agents who direct and organise venomous violence against nature and the community. The police force was employed by the oil companies for the protection of their property who were venomous like the Major who drenches his prisoners in petrol from a rusty iron water can, while the soldiers point guns threateningly at them. He believes that human rights and justice are just fancy romantic notions: "There are no human rights for people like them… The best thing is to line them up and shoot them" (Habila 97).

The third faction that propagates spectacular violence is the revolutionaries and militants critical of and hostile to the oil conglomeration. While such a faction is invisible in select American novel, one can witness antagonistic voices of dissent from the Middle East and Nigeria. In the Middle East, the voices of resistance are represented in *Cities of Salt* in the form of working class strike, wherein the oil workers strike to gain access to their rightful privileges and claims. However, the petro violence depicted in both *Oil and Water* is more horrendous. The armed militants or revolutionaries and their constant conflicts with the police force and the community transform the region into a blood-stained borough. Karibi describes the plight of the villagers who face petro-violence thus: "Communities like this had borne the brunt of the oil wars, caught between the militants and the military, and the only way they could avoid being crushed out of existence was to pretend to be deaf and dumb and blind" (Habila 33).

Nevertheless, the petro violence enacted in all the sacrifice zones receives high visibility in the eyes of the citizens and other participants involved in and around the extractive zones. In fact, the spectacular violence in the Niger Delta is universally condemned by the citizens of the world and the Human Rights Group deliberated and act upon the issue. Similar is the case in Oklahoma, where public judgment forced the government to take charge of the murders. In the Middle East, the visible worker's resistance also coerced the government to change the labour policies of the oil companies. The visibility of such violence had led to these changes.

However, certain violence is not spectacular as the ones discussed. Instead they are "slow and long lasting, calamities that patiently dispense their devastation while remaining outside our flickering attention spans" (Nixon 6). They "are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects" (Nixon 10). Consequently, the victims of slow violence are often overlooked or dispensed with. As Rob Nixon remarks, "slow violence is often not just attritional but also exponential, operating as a major threat multiplier; it can fuel long-term, proliferating conflicts in situations where the conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded" (3).This affects the ecology, the community and the individual in varied modes, namely environmental dilapidation, displacement and personal trauma.

Mean Spirit does not overtly deal with the environmental effects of oil excavation except for the metaphysical descriptions of the earth, which was "drilled and dynamited open" (Hogan 39). Nevertheless, chaos can be witnessed in Wadi al-Uyon where Munif craftily illustrates the metamorphosis of the region into a "nature-exporting" society (Nixon 81). Nature is aggressively altered unrecognisably according to the capitalist scheme. "The tractors attacked the orchards like ravenous wolves, tearing up the trees and throwing them … trees shook violently and groaned before falling, cried for help, wailed, panicked, called out in helpless pain and then fell entreatingly to the ground" (Munif 106).

In fact with the destruction of the natural ecology of the valley, an anthropogenic climate change is initiated in the region. When Fawaz returned to the Wadi, everything had changed. "Even the fresh breezes that used to blow at this time of the year had become hot and searing in the daytime, and a bitter cold penetrated his bones late at night" (Munif 135). This gradual alteration in the climate is noticeable in the capitalist industrial city of Harran too. Instead of summer arriving slowly, with "rising heat and humidity," it assaulted the city "with searing winds and tumultuous sandstorms" (Munif 374). The elders opined that "they had not seen such a spring in long years, and others said that there had never been a drought like this one" (Munif 376). For Ibn Naffeh, these changes were caused by the demons under their soil. He warns the people about the demons: "before long they'll take over everything, for within every creature dwells a small black demon, which grows ever bigger unless man makes some effort to kill it" (Munif 376). Presently, the world seems to be aware of this demonic oil spirit and is attempting to tackle the extractive culture that creates these climate variations. The Paris Agreement of 2015 has requested the currently operational extractive sites to slow down the extractive process to maintain global warming beneath 1.5 degree Celsius. Thus, Munif, in his *Cities of Salt*, obliquely addresses the issue of greenhouse emissions in the extractive sites.

Another consequence of environmental crime discussed by Munif in the novel is the scarcity of water. The Middle East had always been a water-stressed region. However, Wadi al-Uyon was a place where "water and greenery burst out" and "sweetness of the water" was "available every day of the year" (Munif 1-3). Three reservoirs in Wadi were never empty. However, when the oil company began the drilling process in search of oil, the inhabitants of Wadi were staggered. The American oil workers fetched "large quantities of water dozens of times a day and [used] it wastefully as if it were some plentiful commodity of little importance" (Munif 83). When the Bedouins complained about the foreigners' improvident treatment of water, the emir replied to them injudiciously. "If it's water that's bothering you, don't worry. We'll dig you one hundred wells to take the place of those three, if not there then somewhere else, just as you like. That's a minor matter" (Munif 88). Here the emir who consider water to be immeasurable and inexhaustible is unable to identify the profundity of the sitaution. Here the perception of violence is delayed and, as a result, often invisible. However, its consequences cannot be disparaged.

Nevertheless, the most intricate and multifarious ecological catastrophe is witnessed in the Niger Delta, where ecological racism manifests in the most deplorable manner possible.

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The haphazard oil spills, contamination of water resources, and oil leakages into agricultural lands are all instances of environmental violence depicted in the Delta. The oil exploration, excavation, and distribution of crude oil have calamitous impacts on Niger Delta. Thus Rufus, who commences on his journey through the Delta, witnesses uninhabitable villages near the oil wells: "as if a deadly epidemic had swept through it" (Habila 8). The ecologically sensitive mangrove swamp has "turned foul and sulphurous", and their dangling roots "grew out of the water like proboscis gasping for air" (Habila 9). The whole ecosystem is drenched in deadly oil, killing the living beings around them, "we saw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fishes bobbed white-bellied between tree roots" (Habila 9). Even the grass around the region "was suffocated by a film of oil, each blade covered with blotches like the liver spots on a smoker's hands" (Habila 9).

Nevertheless, the ecological damage of the Delta does not alarm the federal government. The natives suffered while the nation thrived on oil money. Their land, water, and livelihoods were destroyed. Chief Ibrahim describes, "Their rivers were already polluted and useless for fishing, and the land grew only gas flares and pipelines" (Habila 39). Common species, including fish, their staple food, began to disappear. Several discussions and exchanges mentioning this are hinted at throughout the text. The young girl in the village tells Rufus about the disappearance of crabs that used to be sold by Rufus during his childhood as a means to pay his school fees. "No crabs here now. The water is not good" (Habila 26). In another context Nurse Gloria informs Rufus about the departure of bats from the island of Irikefe. When Rufus searches for a cause, "She wordlessly turned and pointed at the faraway sky, towards the oil fields. – Gas flares. They kill them. Not only the bats, other flying creatures as well: (Habila 129).Thus, *Oil and Water* reeks of oil-invigorated contamination.

The community living in such an environment enveloped by slow violence is preyed by the senseless oil ethos built by petromodern capitalism. Thus, the state perceives the resource-endowed land as a permit to attain affluence, and the native community is forcefully expelled from their own land. The forms of oil-induced displacement represented in the petrofiction are of different types. Firstly there is the aggressive and spectacular displacement of the natives from the regions where oil wells are dug, and crude oil exploration happens. This can be witnessed in *Oil and Water* through the casting out of Chief Malabo's tribal hamlet with the discovery of oil. "We left, we headed northwards, we've lived in five different places now, but always we've had to move. We are looking for a place where we can live in peace. But it is hard…how can we be happy when we are mere wanderers without a home?" (Habila 41). This kind of displacement also includes the forced embargo of the natives who live in and around the oil pipelines and oil installations to prevent sabotage and theft. Even though this form of displacement is primarily motivated and encouraged by the federal government, the compensation amount paid is deficient, and the resettlement plans are defective.

In *Cities of Salt* also, the community is involuntarily relocated to regions alien to them. "For the first time in their lives, places seemed hostile; they were so awfully cruel" (Munif 24). This forceful exile fills the people with a dilemma evident in Wadha al-Hamad's words: "Was

it possible for them to depart and leave everything behind? Could they survive the move to another place after losing their homes, land and livelihoods" (Munif 120). For the inhabitants of Wadi, who were suddenly transformed into refugees, the new places they moved into "seemed hostile" and "awfully cruel" (Munif 124). Munif describes how even the animals seem to feel the grief of displacement like the camels which "plodded on monotonously" (Munif 125).Wadi al-Uyon and its people "were all scattered under the stars, some in the east and some in the west" (Munif 225). The cracked opened land thus witnesses the turmoils of displaced and homeless people.

Similar exodus is visible in *Mean Spirit*. Horse writes, "They left like a lost and hungry trail of ants" (Hogan 342). The violence forced upon the Indians coaxed them to sell their land and migrate from their homes. "I saw them leaving, the men in their cotton summer shirts and straw hats, the woman with clean brushed hair. . .I saw the grandmothers sitting on the wagons, the breezes stirring their hair as they watched the land pass by, their soft, moist eyes looking over the fields that moved back and away from them" (342).

However, the most traumatic form of displacement in these oil sites is stationary displacement. While the aggression involved in the earlier forms of resettlement is detectable and discerned by the spectators, the effect of stationary displacement is often ignored or unseen. Even when people remain in their familiar space, the space undergoes such a drastic change that it becomes toxic and uninhabitable. Their livelihood is lost, and their soil is poisoned. This leads to what Rob Nixon terms as "displacement without moving", thereby creating a "community of refugees in place" (Nixon 19).

This 'displacement without moving' is palpable in all the novels chosen for study. In *Oil and Water*,, the villagers are forced to continue in the village while the place itself is transformed into an oil-engineered zombie space permeated with , "the gas flares, the stumps of pipes from exhausted wells with their heads capped and left jutting out of the oil-scorched earth, and the ever-present pipelines, criss-crossing the landscape…the carcasses of the fish and crabs and water birds that floated on the deserted beaches" (Habila 175).These oil pipelines operate both as a "visible metaphor and an invisible infrastructural element supporting contemporary petroculture" (Wilson 23), which through constant leakages, transforms the ancestral land into "a place for dying" (Habila 90). As Dr. Mark reports, "A man suddenly comes down with a mild headache, becomes feverish, then develops rashes, and suddenly a vital organ shuts down. And those whom the disease doesn't kill, the violence does" (Habila 93).

Similar experience is narrated in *Cities of Salts* by Shaalan, who had stayed back in Wadi al-Uyon. He stays back in the valley "that bore no resemblance to the one that had been before, except in name" (Munif 133). Even his identity is lost. He learned English and became identified as "Company Shaalan" or "American Shaalan" instead of Shaalan al-Miteb. His sense of belonging to his own tribe was taken away from him, and he wonders, "How is it possible for people and places to change so entirely…Can a man adapt to new things and new places without losing a part of himself" (Munif 134). In this context, Shaalan is staggered by

what stationary displacement. This is more evident when Shaalan. Suweyleh and Fawas wonder about the state of the oasis. “In this place, inside the barbed wire, they felt so foreign that they could not imagine that it had once been their home, or indeed they had a home anywhere” (Munif 142).

This concept of “displacement without moving” is reverberated in *Mean Spirit* too. The drilling and the “stationary displacement” had a metaphysical influence on the Osage’s native's unconscious life. Oil capitalism had colonized their dreams. “Bad dreams were as common as gas fires at the drill sites, as ordinary as black Buicks” (Hogan 39). When Michael Horse listens to these dreams, he associates the dreadful dreams to earth, which was “drilled and dynamited open” (Hogan 39). According to Horse, the turbulence on earth affected the life and sleep of the natives.

The slow violence disseminated in the environment and the community affects the individuals too. Petro-dispossessions and displacements lead to post-traumatic stress disorders and environmentally induced traumas like “solastalgia”. The term solastalgia, was coined by Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht to illustrate the inimitable psychological angst instigated by the encounter with negative environmental change. According to Albrecht, this is a psycho-terratic trauma based on the “existential and lived experience of negative environmental change” (38). Considered an inveterate condition, it is “characteristically a chronic condition, tied to the gradual erosion of identity created by the sense of belonging to a particular loved place and a feeling of distress, or psychological desolation, about its unwanted transformation” (Albrecht 39).

While Grace Blanket, Sara Blanket, and several others lose their lives in the capitalist battle for oil in Oklahoma, others like Benoit and Nora Blanket are flanked by oil. The petroviolence in the region lead to post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) in the natives, akin to the case of Nola Blanket. As Munasir Kamal observes, “Nola, as a witness to her mother’s murder and an inhabitant of an environment where danger is constant, has symptoms that are not fully commensurate with the symptom-clusters of PTSD: re-experiencing, avoidance/numbing, and arousal” (95). Thus Nola is observed as sleeping “with her eyes wide open, not letting her guard down” (Hogan 44). Even though her mother's death initiated traits of traumatic depression in her, the removal of Nola from her natural environment aggravated this. Her marriage and pregnancy intensify the trauma, leading to her murdering her husband, Will Forrest. However, her leaving Watona and her return to the ancestral ecology of the hills seem to cure her and bring her back to normalcy. Thus, the psychological turmoils she suffered were not just the effect of trauma but were also initiated by the change in her homeland, resulting in solastalgia.

The same can be perceived in the Middle East, where the psychoterratic illness of observable in Umm Khosh and Wadha. While the trauma of displacement results in Wadha losing her power of speech, Umm Khosh is shattered to a serious extent and dies from heartbreak. In the terrain of the Niger Delta, Rufus of *Oil and Water* is a victims of oil accidents. In fact, he carries the family trauma of his father accidently burning down the house

and leaving his sister disfigured for several years. All of these individuals are ordinary people encountering the complexities of growing up in an oilscape racked by neo-colonial manipulation, ecological destruction and social mal-development perpetuated by capitalist oil conglomerates and government. However, all of them like in every oil community subsist in proximity with injury and pleasure (LeMenager 17). The central conflict in each of these territories is that its subject "lies near to trauma as well as desire" (LeMenager 17). The oil communities of the sacrifice zones have identified their affliction as inherent in the resource itself- a 'resource curse'. Yet the 'petro-magical' promise of prosperity puts them in an ambivalent dilemma. In fact the whole world is in such a kind of a dilemma wherein on one hand a life without oil is beyond our imagination, while life with oil implies an impending apocalypse on the other.

The utopia promised in the oil terrains are always discounted and instead a petrotopia is created to comply with the demands of the oil empire and the petro-elites. Petrotopia or petroleum utopia; an "ideal end-state" far from idyllic (LeMenager 75). It creates a space that agitatedly annihilates and reorders "in the service of capital" (LeMenager 76). They are often spaces of state-sponsored environmental crime. The extraction sites are transformed into a world of felony and corruption where racist and imperialist politics thrive. To confront this baffling state, the oil queries must be acknowledged and addressed and the hydrocarbon world must be made sense of. In a century where the oil tales remain obscured, and stories of resource wars which forcibly and persuasively apposite and restructure ecology and lives are forcibly appropriated, petro-crime fiction will facilitate in transferring oil from the realms of the unconscious to the conscious.

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