

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN NIGER DELTA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR BETTER SOCIETY.

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Abstract

Human actions are often induced by some fundamental assumptions we have about the world around us. These assumptions in turn shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. This understanding in turn determine how we relate with the world around us. This paper applies the analytic method of research to examine and analyze the current causes of environmental degradation while proffering prospects for better environmental friendliness. The searchlight is focused in the Niger Delta region as a sample case. Data from consulted literary works, local and international, affirm that the present condition in the region is a consequence of the dualistic framework of Western worldview which is perpetrated through the operations of Western-owned multinational oil corporations in the region. This leads to the paper's call for outright change of environmental worldview in order to reverse the present state of the environment and its consequences. A return to indigenous worldviews is proposed for their prospects of enhancing sustainability and environmental friendship between humans and non-human members of the material world.

Keywords: Environment, Nigeria, Niger Delta, degradation, etc.

Introduction

Humans, like any other organisms, depend on the physical environment for survival. In other words, the continued good condition of the physical environment is essential for continuity of life on earth. However, awareness over the imperilled condition of the empirical components physical environment is widespread, as narratives of human domination and exploitation of nature replace those of interdependence between humans and nature's physical environment and its resources. This contemporary phenomenon is thus captured in John Morelli: "In the middle of the 20th century, we saw our planet from space for the first time... From space, we see a small and fragile ball dominated not by human activity and edifice but by a pattern of clouds, oceans, greenery, and soils. Humanity's inability to fit its activities into that pattern is changing planetary systems, fundamentally" (2011). The above text captures at a glance the current condition of degradation of the physical environment, its cause, and the inescapability of its mortal consequences. Koffi Annan, the former UN secretary general, describes this condition as a "daunting challenge" to the global community, while the Helmholtz Centre alleges that these deleterious consequence of "human footprints" are turning the present period into an age of the "anthropocene" (2024).

The enormity of this degraded condition of the world's environment is underscored in the statement: "... the sixth major wave of extinction since life began is now occurring, and that this one, unlike the other five, is being caused by human action" (Jamieson, 2008). Jenkins, Pimm and Ross (2008) instantiates this human factor with oil and gas projects which the authors describe as threats to Wilderness, biodiversity, and to the indigenous peoples of the Western Amazon region. The same applies in the oil exploration and extraction activities in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. As a result of these human economic activities, "...forests are shrinking, deserts are expanding, soils are eroding, and rangelands are deteriorating. In addition, the lower

atmosphere is warming ... various forms of life are becoming extinct, environmental refugees are increasing, and output of some pollutants and wastes are rising" (Miller & Spoolman, 2008: 15). Warmer climate subjects living organisms with no capacity to adapt to alterations of the temperature of their natural habitats to the risk of extinction. Authors explain this as "the end of civilization, the extinction of many species and potentially, the extinction of human beings," hence the 1998 warning by Botkin and Keller: "the world will be destroyed if people do not change their approach to the environment".

The increasing presence of these footprints despite the measure of scientific cognition over the existential threats environmental degradation poses rouses critical questions. Empirical studies on biodiversity loss, global warming, and climate change etc, disclose the uniqueness of each case, especially on their causal factors and impacts. But questions of general nature to enable a more comprehensive response to the phenomenon could still be drawn from such abstractions from individual cases. Hence, facts from these unique set of questions lead to certain general statements that are valid for each particular instance and also provide grounds for possible abstractions and explanatory environmental models. Of such questions of philosophical nature, the foremost (metaphysical and epistemological) bother on the ontological status of nature's environments with their numerous ecosystem constituents, and the validity of our judgments and worldviews over them. In addition to concerns over their ethical considerability are questions over the ground of measuring the gains of oil mineral exploration that incorporates neither the wellbeing of humans nor of the physical environment as John Elkington's 3-P model of business outcome assessment reports demands. Such general statements and abstractions have resulted in myriads of environmental theories and models that are in turn subjected to critical analysis and questioning. Arne Naess, and his Deep Ecology School, spotted the methodological flaw of scientific ecology notwithstanding its enormous contributions to contemporary ecological cognition. According to Naess, previous ecologies leaning on the method of the empirical sciences alone allow research to focus only on the symptoms of the problem rather than their root causes. Beyond the use of the methodologies of the empirical sciences, therefore, the need to arrive at ultimate answers to the "why questions" of environmental degradation must assume a comprehensive approach that philosophy provides. In keeping with this demand, Sorcha O'Connor counsels that in treating such problems as environmental degradation, we "...not only manage symptoms but also target the problem's source ..." (2022). This comprehensive approach is urgent, considering the weight of more than eight decades of continuous pummeling of Niger Delta's physical environments. Experiences of its negative impacts on the indigenous peoples in the region call for urgent attention and redress. These needs for a comprehensive approach and the canonical principle of "healing from the roots" inform the approach of this paper. We shall begin by casting a closer look at this region.

The Niger Delta: Ecological Landmarks and the Danger of Degradation

The Niger Delta falls within the tropical rain forest eco-region of Southern Nigeria, along the Gulf of Guinea. Its 70,000km² area makes it the largest delta in Africa and the most extensive marshland in West and Central Africa (Akegbejo-Samsons, & Omoniyi, 2009). Its swamp forests occupies the inner reaches of the expansive Niger Delta (WWF, 2014), which is known for its freshwater swamps, especially in the southernmost part of the Niger River. It has three hydrological variations or zones – the central back swamp area, the eastern delta flank, and the western delta. The geographic setting and each zone's watershed results in different spatiotemporal patterns of distribution of hydrological, ecological, and biological indicators,

hence each zone plays host to biological diversity with a vast floral and faunal assemblage (Omoredede, 2014). The carbon sequestration capacity of its mangroves filters the environment and gives support to a wide variety of plant and animal lives and freshwater. All these join together to make the region a reference point of multiple biotic species, one of the highest concentrations of both floral and faunal diversities, and an arable terrain that sustains wide varieties of both crops, lumber, or agricultural trees, and species of freshwater fish than any ecosystem in West Africa (Johnson, 2011; Offiong, et als., 2018). Importantly, the indigenous peoples of the region have always depended on this physical environment for their food, recreation, cultural, health and energy needs.

Underneath this bio-diversity index, the region houses large deposits of a variety of natural mineral resources. The April 16, 2024 official bulletin of the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) reports that the oil and gas deposits in Nigeria stand at 37.50 billion barrels and 209.26 trillion cubic feet respectively. This accounts for about 40% of Nigeria's GDP, 70% of budget revenues, and 95% foreign exchange, as the two becomes the mainstay of Nigeria's economy (Agbede, 2023 citing World Bank, 2004). With globalization trends' reinforcement of fossil oil economy, Nigeria becomes the "target for multinationals considering her large population, mineral resources and geographical location ..." (Iyanam, Ubi, & Ero, 2021). The hot chase for this "liquid gold" turns the region into the destination hub of many multinational oil corporations (Osigwe et als, 2023). As a result, not less than seven major multinational oil corporations – Agip, Chevron, ELF, Exxon-Mobil, Texaco Overseas, Total and Shell – are currently competing for dominance in fossil oil exploration in the country. Other competitors include Addax and CNOOG, and their local subsidiaries.

Heavy leaning on this physical environment, especially since the rise in timber value and the discovery of oil in the 1940s and 1950s (Ordinioha & Brisibe, 2013), has had a great toll on the region. The course of oil mineral extraction, for example, leaves the region's landscape defaced, ecosystems distorted, and bio-region depleted. The anthropogenic causal factors include gas flaring, oil spillage, wetland conversion, and deforestation. Noted effects on the communities are reflected in many observed cases of environmental hazards, biodiversity losses and overall impoverishment indices (Robert et al., 2014; Offiong et als, 2018). An example is where the 2006 UNDP Report reads: "an estimated 13 million barrels (1.5 million tons) of crude oil have been spilled since 1958 from over 7000 oil spill incidents" (UNDP, 2006 in Ordinioha & Brisibe, 2013). In 2007 already, about 45.8 billion kilowatts of heat from a daily combustion of 1.8 billion cubic feet of gas in 123 flaring sets had been emitted into the atmosphere (cf., Offiong et als, 2018; Ite et al. 2013). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report (2011) affirms the grave consequences of oil spillage, since the two discoveries are driving the destruction of mangrove or swamp forests, wetland ecosystems, and topography and hydrology changes in the Niger Delta. This affects over 1500 local communities in the eight crude oil producing states in Nigeria (Ordinioha & Brisibe, 2013). Once depleted, their environments' and ecosystems' capacity to meet social and environmental needs is thrown into a mortal challenge (see, Onuoha et al, 2018; Donatus, 2016; Omoredede, 2014).

Many publications show environmental degradation in the Niger Delta therefore as an outcome of the exploration activities of those multinational oil corporations. This is given validation in comparative works from other climes validate the above assertion. Steyn (2003), for instance, observes similar outcomes from oil exploration and extracting localities in Ecuador's Oriente region. Baynard's 2011 study of three oil belts in Venezuela attests to similar footprints. The multidimensional consequences, for example, are the same in other climes too. Giles (2018) and Akinwotu (2022), for example, interpret black soot pollution around Port Harcourt city in this

light. All that boils down to saying that unsustainable exploitation subjects the environment to precarious conditions that affect its biodiversity index (Offiong et al., 2022). One can infer that this hot chase for petrodollar is the creative factor of the impoverishment hotspots the Niger Delta region has become. The indigenous communities no longer consider the economic gains commensurate to the dangers and pains that befall them (Onuoha et al., 2018), hence, the statement: “oil resource wealth has turned to oil resource curse as they are disempowered, and condemned to perpetual underdevelopment” (Omoredede, 2014). In a brief, this theatre of human existence has become a victim of unsustainable economic operations and epicentre of biodiversity devastation.

A Causal Hermeneutic

Humans in general are problem solving animals. “One example of the history of humans’ fascination with problem solving is the riddle of the Sphinx from the ancient legend of Oedipus” (Posamentier, et al., 2020). It is no longer in doubt that Nigeria’s Niger Delta region and its environments are in grave danger. The number of disagreeing theories, UN Summits’ Declarations, environmental agencies at both global, regional and national levels, as well as establishment of environmental laws and regulatory bodies, and many more, are indicative of the global worry over this global challenge. While these are proofs of concerted global efforts to address the phenomenon, the relentlessness of the phenomenon reduces the efforts to null effects. As O’Connor (2022) puts it, we cannot be addressing the effects of environmental problems while we continue to produce these problems at the same rate. This re-echoing of deep ecology’s thesis invariably is indicating that failure of earlier ecological movements failed to engender environmental healing is a result of their inappropriate methodology. Interpreting ongoing environmental pillaging in the Niger Delta, for instance, in a “cause and effect” dialectic demands looking beyond the scientific theories. The consequent need for methodological shift ennobles a philosophical approach to the “why” question of environmental degradation (Talukder, 2018).

While Deep ecology remains hazy over what constitutes this “root cause”, Val and Richard Routleys lay the blame on certain “underlying attitudes” to the natural world that were built into the very foundations of Western thought. However, their focus on ethical concerns led them to allude that anthropocentrism and its attendant instrumentalism are foundational to environmental degradation. Subsequent anti-anthropocentric views are seen in various forms of egalitarian environmental theories whose concern was on the ethical considerability of non-human nature and its entities (Mathews, 2014). Biocentrism, eco-centrism and even eco-feminism all contain an underlying egalitarianism which does not recognize the uniqueness of human constitution as a being that is at the same time one with the rest of nature’s entities by virtue of its corporeality, and yet different from the rest by its non-material dimension.

Towing the same anti-anthropocentric stance of the Routleys, later environmental researchers argue that every anthropogenic cause is precipitated by some underlying factor which must be identified before one can effectively address the phenomenon. When Kureethadam (2017) and O’Connor (2022) and other recent contemporary thinkers speak therefore of a problem’s “production at the level of thought”, they are only affirming the above assumption. They are therefore making the underlying root cause of every human act to be a conceptual phenomenon. This significant shift from both Naess, the Routleys or even eco-feminism, demands a new environmental hermeneutic. This requires probing the “conceptual foundations” of the problems, as O’Connor suggests (2022). The logic of this conceptual theory is thus captured in *Hussen*

(2000): “the understanding or perception we have about nature or non-human entities shapes our relationship with them”.

This is syllogistically represented thus:

how we understand the world determines how we treat it
 how we treat our world constitutes our basic modality
 our basic modality colours everything we do – our entire culture takes its cue from it
 (Matthews, 2006).

Summarily, the structures of belief influence or determine people’s actions. The same applies to the actions of the multinational oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta. This invites a closer look at the conceptual framework of the Western owners of the multinational oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta.

The Western Conceptual Worldview and Environmental Degradation

If the claim that how a people conceives nature shapes how they relate or treat it is anything to go by, it would be expedient to examine the worldview of the owners of the multi-national oil corporations operating in the Niger Delta. The afore-mentioned oil corporations have Western origin – Agip is Italian, Chevron (America), Elf (France), Mobil (France), Shell (Dutch-British) and Texaco (America). Hence the need to explore this culture, in order to expose its underlying worldview that shapes its perception and relationship with the outside world.

A deeper peep into European history reveals a hegemonic culture with a perennial tendency to separate and to distance sub-sets from one another: human/nature, reason/senses, mind/body, spirit/matter, Greeks, Barbarians, etc. This metamorphosed into an intellectual culture where the marks of differentiation between the binaries are tied to identifiable properties or characteristic traits. For instance, Aristotle’s two works, *Politics* and *De Anima*, based the ground of differentiation, separation and distancing on identifiable distinguishing traits or properties an entity possesses in addition to the common nature or features it shares with others (Lines, 2006, in Matthews 2014; Motzer, 2022). Descartes, in the modern period, made substance the ground of differentiation. He tied this to a generic delineation of substances into material and immaterial (incorporeal) substances. He therefore grouped all entities in the physical world into two corresponding taxonomic blocs – *res cogitans* (the generic label for things with non-material or incorporeal substance or nature) and *res extensa* (for things with material nature. (Blum, 2019). Thus are laid the foundation and the characteristic features of dualism that would be enshrined into the Western conceptual worldview (see, Williams, 1980; Merchant, 1990; Plumwood, 1993; Haila, 2000; Mathews, 2014; O’Connor, 2022).

This dualistic way of perceiving reality has a remote history that dates back to Plato’s doctrine of two substances – the nonmaterial world of Forms and the material world of the senses. Its modern origin goes to the Cartesian grouping of all things into two taxonomic blocs. This Cartesian dualism posits two separate domains of reality which he codified as “mind” (*res cogitans* or thinking self, self, subject, the thinking thing) and “body” (*res extensa*, body, object, or world outside of the self, extended body). Delineating the “thinking self” as a distinct substance which needs spatial conditions or space, and depends on no material thing, in order to exist, Descartes’ *Discourse on Methods* draws a radical distinction between immaterial “thinking things” (or mind) and “extended things” (physical objects or body). Thus, he separates the mental and the physical (or the mind and body) as somehow radically different kinds of

things. O'Connor remarks that this split is deeply entrenched in our vocabulary, our thinking, and our institutions (2022).

It sets a metaphysical frame within which the phenomena of our observations are organized in place of the Aristotelian-Scholastic hylomorphic conception. It highlights a rather mono-dimensional perception of the natural world in which physical objects (non-human entities) are conceived as constituted only of mechanistic properties, rendered inert as extended matter (*res extensa*), and therefore bereft of any element of teleology, except it is extrinsically conferred (Kureethadam, 2017). In the same light, all of human reality is reduced to the function of mind. Since the two belong to two mutually exclusive compartments, they exist independently, neither reducible to, nor interacting with the other. Generally, dualism teaches that there are two types of reality— the material (physical) and the immaterial (spiritual). This philosophical standpoint conceptualizes reality as a composite of *both* physical (material) and non-physical (non-material) substances, represented by “mind and matter” or “mind and body”. It taxonomizes all things into two blocs: the mental and the material (physical). “Mind” as *res cogitans* (thinking thing), because it lacks the elements of materiality, is imbued with essentially subjective modes or functions like thinking, meaning, purpose, agency, intentionality, will, freedom, value or purpose. “Body”, as *res extensa* (extended things), is not. The body as extended matter has rather objective qualities that are observable and measurable, and therefore calculable, and modifiable. From the paradigm of Newtonian physics, a physical object is composed of discreet units or particles of inert, mindless, meaningless, valueless matter. Constituted only of pure matter, these lack any subjective modes that can enter the objective sphere only through functions of mind. Where therefore inert matter constitutes the fundamental data of reality, that is, a “natural world from which mind is fundamentally excluded”, would tantamount “a world which is in itself without meaning, purpose and value. In other words, although loci of life and sentience might exist in such a world, the world in itself is not a living thing” (Mathews, 2014). This worldview underlies the Western knowledge system and tradition.

Environmental Implications of the above Dualistic Framework

Metaphysical dualism as propagated by Descartes has a lot of social and environmental implications, and leaves behind an innumerable environmental consequences. Many 21st century environmental publications attest that this conceptual framework has impacted the empiricist based scientific tradition that has shaped modern Western knowledge systems. Plumwood (1993), Matthews (2003, 2006, 2014, 2017), Kureethadam (2017), Talukder (2018), and O'Connor (2022), for example, identify in it three principal elements of modernity that are engendering environmental degradation and the consequent ecological crisis across the globe – anthropocentrism, reductionist atomism, and the human/nature dualistic divide. The last, dualism, evokes a relation of contrast between two variables. It is often reinforced by hierarchy and anthropocentrism (O'Connor, 2022). Hierarchy is the structured arrangement of beings and entities in the physical universe in a rather higher or lower order. It engenders a relation of domination and unequal treatment of both nature and the members of bifurcated human classes. Aristotle based his justification of enslavement of Barbarians on his “scale of nature” where he explained that myriad of beings on the lower rungs of the scale exist for humans: “After birth, plants exist for the sake of animals, and the other animals for the sake of humans” (Aristotle, *Pol. 1 III*, 1256b15-22). On the other hand, the Cartesian restriction of subjective characteristics like “identity”, “intentionality” and all mental properties with their functions to humans alone elevates this being to a hiatus that is not accessible to purely material beings (in the extended universe). Merging this Aristotelian placement with the Cartesian turn to the

subject ("self") makes the *Cartesian ego* (humankind) the "Archimedean centre of reality" and the measure of all things, around which all other things revolve to have their meaning and interpretation, as it engenders an asymmetric relationship of separation, between orders that are classified as superior/higher (subject) and inferior/lower (object) (Plumwood, 1993; Kueethadam, 2017; O'Connor, 2022).

While anthropocentrism and its inherent hierarchy reinforce dualism (O'Connor, 2022), they form, in turn, the backbone of Modern Western view of the world. In turn, this Western worldview engrains the human-nature divide, hatches anthropocentrism, and creates conceptions of nature that naturalize human domination and abuse of its goods. The Cartesian paradigm projects an image of all non-human elements that is robbed of all subjective properties. Without such properties, these become mere instruments that depend on humans for interpretation, meaning, and value (Kureethadam, 2017; Mathews, 2014). Thus devaluated, these object are, at best, "bête-machines" that are mechanically composed of discrete particles of quantitatively calculable, measurable and modifiable inert matter (Mathews, 2014; Kueethadam, 2017; O'Connor, 2022). Since therefore humans alone (Aristotle, Descartes) are naturally endowed with such unique powers, they alone stand the chance to modify these hitherto discrete "meaning-less", "soul-less", "mind-less", "value-less" and "inert" elements into "meaning-ful", "valu-able" "goods" or "useful objects" (Mathews, 2014). Historical sources reveal ample instances of interpretations and actions where this unique "power" has been employed as *tools for domination and conquest* (Bacon), *commodification* (O'Connor, 2022) of nature, and the privilege turned into *authority* (the French Revolution, Godard, 2009) or *right* (Roman Law), to *interpret* (Protagoras) and *use* (Bentham) them solely for the *masters' purposes* (Descartes). In none of such instances has nature/*res extensa* been accorded any relation of equality and interdependence with humans (Plumwood, 1993; Haila, 2000; O'Connor, 2022). Thus, and in contrast to African communitarian model, where mutual respect and interdependence shapes peoples' behaviour towards nature, this Western ontology has rather grounded a knowledge system that interprets the subject interprets nature in purely human categories.

The above ontology yields an axiological hermeneutics that feeds on market forces and dynamics that human beings have set solely for themselves (Dijkstra, 2003). This too engendered patterns of thinking that rationalize human exploitative use of nature as means to ends (Dijkstra, 2003). In consequence, non-human entities and nature itself have more often been interpreted instrumentally and economically as "fallow field", "estate", "property", "capital", "resources" and "resource base", and therefore subjugated them under human whims (Dijkstra, 2003; Godard, 2009). Sir Francis Bacon first predicted this conquest of nature, noting that science is the tool for the conquest (Mathews, 2014). Descartes embossed the task's purpose – to make humans *les maitres et dominus* (the lords and masters) and *possesseurs* (possessors) of the estate/nature (Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Book VI). This whole ideology crystallized in the French Revolution's conferment on humans the threefold absolute ownership rights of *usus* (right to use), *fructus* (right to the fruits), and *abusus* (right to dispose of it) – over the estate (Godard, 2009). By virtue of these rights, nature's resources can be exploited at will by the overlords, for whom they exist (Aristotle, *Pol. 1 III*, 1256b15-22). The gulf between humans and nature remains widened, aggravating further, the craving for conquest and dominance of nature. Thus, whereas anthropocentrism and its inherent hierarchy reinforce dualism (O'Connor, 2022), they form, in turn, the backbone of Modern Western worldview that engrains the human-nature divide and creates conceptions that naturalize human domination

and abuse of its goods. Abusive exploration of nature's resources in the Niger Delta is an example.

Prospects for Better Niger Delta Environment

The Niger Delta contains many indicators of the imports of this conceptual worldview. More of the causal roots of the ongoing environmental precipice in the Niger Delta is tied to the same conceptual roots. This Western dualistic worldview engenders other forms of bifurcations that add up to entrench human destruction of the physical environment and its ecosystems. Mathews (2019) illustrates how a core of dichotomous categories, like mind/matter, mind/body, human/nature, human/animal and culture/nature, "provides the basis for further oppositions" based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, wealth, among others in the human society. These relational templates are equally "characterised by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled..." (Plumwood, 1993). Since the same instrumental labelling of nature before the human overlords, remain equally the role of the lower to the superior human class: "Non-human nature is viewed as the passive "landscape" against which active Human history unfolds. The same method of backgrounding is regularly applied to groups of people relegated to the side of nature. The utter dependence of the rise of Europe - and subsequently of the United States - on the enslavement, subjugation, and exploitation of people of color in Africa, the Americas, and parts of Asia is invisibilized in the dominant historical narrative" (O'Connor, 2022). The same properties that separate and grant humankind superiority over nature are the equally the same markers of difference between "superior and inferior" human classes.

Culture naturalizes this differentiation and exclusion and turns the consequent bifurcation into tools for the subjugation and domination of those humans who fall outside the label. Thus, the separation of indigenous Africans from these Western overlords is assumed to be "a normative ought stemming from the innate nature of the groups in question, rather than as the particular result of socio-historical and political constructions" (O'Connor, 2022): "... Africans were said to be non-humans since they have no capacity to reason, and also are outside world history ... they were considered nonhumans as rationality is only what defines human" (Samuel & Leonard, 2018). This leaves behind a definitional challenge over what it means to be "human" since the interrelated web of dualisms like naturalization, hegemony, ethnocentrism, supremacism, exclusion, etc., engenders a "one-way relational definition" that projects Western humans as "the standard to which all those designated as 'others' (the poor, female, people of colour, uneducated, indigenous people) are expected to assimilate or aspire to in order to attain full humanity and civilization" (O'Connor, 2022). In other words, the excluded (lower human) classes are considered as lacking full personhood, identity, dignity, self-worth, and such properties of "selfhood" and "subject-hood". This dominant ideological framework has impacted the West's interrelations with other climes and races, especially Africa and Africans.

Hegel's *Philosophy of History* instantiates the racial, political and even geographical implications of dualism. It excludes the entirety of African continent from world history in a dialectical process he alleges to culminate with Europe, as the end of history, and paints Africans in rather dehumanized, derogatory and pejorative language as "devalued humanity" (Greer, 2013). Such definitions exclude the natives, and rather lump them under the same category of being with non-humans, thus justifying the racial negation of the historical presence of indigenous peoples, even on their lands. Hegel thus succeeded in sowing a supremacist subjection of Africans and

their land to the hegemonic overlords of Europe as the masters and proprietors of the earth. The Niger Delta is a victim of such supremacist hegemony and human exclusivism. Decrying this, Tendayi Sithole writes: “The superfluity of blackness stems from the existential predicament of marginality, suffering, and vulnerability because the humanity of Blackness is brought into question. This questioning not only doubts the humanity of black subjects, but it writes them outside the realm of humanity and relegates them to the realm of disposable things. To write off precisely, means that black subjects are rendered nonexistent – that is, they are dead, and there cannot be any ontological possibility to those who are dead ... In the political condition, where subjection is the defining factor of human life, relationality, and existence at large, this is just superfluous in so far as blackness is concerned” (2017). Thus excluded from the typical human, Africans are divested of all rights and inter-subjective relationship with the superior class. Even Western explorers disrobed their only ground of autonomy, “land”, of intrinsic values, denying the natural, social and spiritual dimensions that make it prime location for the definition of race, but turn it rather into a parameter for dividing people into those qualified to own (“whites”), those qualified to be owned (“blacks”) and those not qualified to own or be owned (“Indians”). It was even a subject of debate whether these peoples have a sense of property (land) ownership, as exemplified in the Valladolid debates of 1550-1551, pitting Bartholomé de Las Casas against Juan Gines de Sepúlveda (Greer, 2013). This motivated colonialists’ claim of territories in the name of distant monarchs by seizing and subjecting large expanses of the continent to the imperial kings in Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland (Greer, 2013). Thus, concepts like colonialism, civilization, education (Western), government as a separate institution, and globalization, are expressions relative to this hegemonic worldview that elevates the West as typical humans and actual *maitres et possesseurs* over the entire globe, even indigenous territories.

The multinational oil and gas corporations from the same dominant culture have always vested themselves with the same ideological framework from their parent nations. As masters and possessors of the global estate, they arrogate themselves every power and right of interpretation, meaning and valuation, and ownership rights over resources from the estates in the Niger Delta to meet the masters’ needs. This confers on them the license to operate and exploit the zone as any human would of fallow land (Dijkstra, 2003). “This situation explains why the domination and exploitation of the natural world has only been intensified in the recent decades with the ‘globalization’ of the western modern worldview around the globe” (Kureethadam, 2017), without paying any attention neither to the damage their activities has done to the local communities where these operations take place nor its global consequences like global warming and climate change.

Summary

The foundation laid by Aristotle, and advanced by Descartes, hatches into contemporary environmental degradation and exploitation. The prevalence of the ideologies this worldview engender has left impactful environmental conditions that threaten the future of the earth. For example, the ethical neutrality over the negligence of polluted land and water ways in Ogoniland (UNEP, 2011; CETIM, 2014) is indicative of how dualistic frameworks erode the dignity of stereotyped human classes and subjugates them to the level of instrumental beings. Such attitudes towards others is under lined in the “systemic racism” observed by Carolyn Weiss in the citing and construction of industrial facilities and toxic-emitting power plants around non-White, middle or upper class communities in North America (Weiss, 2022). Such episodes like

the annexation, partition, and such instruments as Western education system and colonization and subjugation of traditional institutions are imports of the one direction definition and subjugation of “others” under the Western worldview. The relentless continuity of the mega oil companies’ exploitative activities and the negligence (and even outright denial) of the deleterious environmental impacts on the environment in the Niger Delta, despite the many international and regional environmental laws and declarations or agendas of global bodies like the UN, question the disposition of the global community to heal the malfeasance from the root. Indications show rather that “‘humanity’ has been limited by the dominant Western knowledge system to include only white Europeans” (O’Connor, 2022).

The outcome of such Enlightenment definition (that is, exclusion of people of colour, including the Niger Delta) is that these peoples’ life support systems are damaged, the landscape defaced, freshwater and mangrove ecosystems destroyed, with extinction threats to a vast number of biological species – birds, animals, fishes, and ants – as a result of distorted natural habitats from deforestation, oil spillage or pollution. This worldview therefore engenders a logical foundation that validates the maltreatment of “others”, human or non-human. The ongoing environmental degradation in the Niger Delta exemplifies the dangers of such alien dualistic worldviews.

The above underlines the danger of constructing our environmental systems on the pillars of mere concept analysis as Descartes did. The imposition of this metaphysics on indigenous populations, is condemnable, especially where it ignores the inalienable connection between a people’s lived experience and the world around them. On this note, Mathews rules thus: “no particular individual or society is in a position to legislate truth or meaning for others” (Mathews, 2006). She calls for a consideration of these peoples’ experiences in the spirit of epistemological inclusiveness if the present age should mark an advancement in environmental campaigns (Mathews, 2014). O’Connor references, for instance, the indigenous Anishinaabe whose ethics of care and an underlying mutualistic ontology enhances the capacity to envision mutually beneficial relationships through complex webs of interdependence and reciprocal responsibility. The same holds true of the Dao, African and aboriginal cultures. Africans emphasized a communitarian worldview which teaches the interconnectedness of all beings in the universe and enhances a harmonious symmetric relationship between humans and nature that no one dares to abuse (Mathews, 2014; Kanu, 2021; Gowans, 2021; The Twi-Global Group, 2023; The McGill University, 2023).

Conclusion

The above lines contain affirmation that contemporary ecological crisis is a result of Modernity’s “fundamental beliefs and attitudes towards the physical world” originating from the West (Kureethadam, 2017). They depict how the Modern Western worldview of nature serves as the intellectual bedrock of the exploitation and ruthless destruction of nature (Mathews, 2014; Kureethadam, 2017). This worldview’s conception of non-human nature as basically passive matter at the mercy of human caprice serves the conceptual ground for the interference and legitimization of human exploitative use of non-human nature (already nuanced in Aristotle’s *Politics*) without moral limits (Mathews, 2006; 2014). Interpreting environmental degradation arising from such activities and operations in the Niger Delta with this cause-effect dialectic, underscores this point that this Western conception of the world around us is ultimately the source of contemporary ecological crisis in the Niger Delta: “The problematic features of the present human-nature relationship are not features of all human-nature relationships as such,

but specifically of the relationship imposed by the dominant Western knowledge system" (O'Connor, 2022).

The above attestation confirms the demand of many late 20th and early 21st century environmentalists, like the Routleys and Arne Naess, for a new philosophical worldview if the said situation is to be salvaged. This is captured in the title of the paper Richard Routley presented at the 15th World Congress of Philosophy, 1973, titled: "Is There a Need for New, an Environmental, Ethic?" In other words, arresting the ongoing malaise requires a conscious attempt to surpass this underlying worldview. In response to this need, these thinkers advanced many replacement alternatives. But criticized for containing elements that reflect and often propagate the same problem they are trying to address (Mathews, 2009 & 2014; Talukder, 2018; O'Connor, 2022), there arises an urgent need for a more viable worldview that can engender behaviour change, and thus, guarantee a tenable solution to the malaise, a secure future for the earth, and enhance ecosystem services. This paper invites environmental activists and all stakeholders to indigenous environmental worldviews whose systems promote the interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings and their physical environments (Mathews, 2014; Kelbessa, 2020). An example is the eco-communitarian worldview of the Igbo of Nigeria. This worldview conceives the universe as a web of interconnected relationships where the various components, animate and inanimate, and the dead interact as members of a community. This offers an environmental paradigm that shows capacity to stem the present tide of degradation, abate the deleterious consequences, and promote a healthy future for the world's environment. Turning to this alternative is necessary and timely, given its prospect of enhancing mutual respect and eco-friendliness in the human/nature relationship.

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