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ABSTRACT

This study juxtaposes Ian McEwan's *Solar* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* to illustrate their areas of convergence and divergence concerning their portrayal of ecological discourse. Attention is paid, to how McEwan and Habila deploy characterisation (particularly of the main characters and female characters) to bring to the fore the overwhelming influence of socio-political and economic issues on ecological or environmental crises in the societies portrayed in the two narratives. The aesthetic and socio-political dimensions of ecocriticism are deployed in this study. In the same vein, the interplay of the socio-political and ethical dimensions has been investigated as well. Habila depicts women as victims of circumstances and females as representatives of problems in the postcolonial context while McEwan portrays them as a bad influence who inadvertently prevent men from saving the planet. Ironically, the same women are projected as objects to be used and discarded (in the same manner the natural world is exploited). In addition, *Solar* illustrates climate change issues and their effects on the planet though with an undertone of sociocentrism while *Oil* concentrates on the environmental vis-à-vis economic and social crises in the Niger Delta. It is also ascertained that what makes both texts invaluable for this study is the political and economic ties between the two major countries they are set in, as one is the former coloniser of the other. Significantly, both narratives are not apocalyptic.

INTRODUCTION

England and Nigeria share certain common grounds. Nigeria was a colony of England and today there is an imprint of the colonial system in almost all forms of Nigerian political and economic systems. The Shell company which has been responsible for the major oil drilling in the Niger Delta is a British company and hence, invariably has questions to answer regarding the environmental devastation in the delta region. The research questions are: how is neo-colonialism affecting not just the people but also the environment? To what extent is *Oil on Water* postcolonial ecocritical writing? How accurate has the study demonstrated the hypocrisy of the West (as observed in *Solar*).

SYNOPSIS OF PRIMARY TEXTS

Solar focuses on Prof. Michael Beard who was once a Nobel Prize Winner for Physics. He has been married five times and his last marriage is at the brim of collapse because of infidelity. Having achieved stardom at a younger age, he has not been productive in his profession thereafter and has been surviving on the prestige of his prize, going to conferences and heading organisations set up by the government to source alternative green energy. Patrice is the last wife who has extramarital affairs as revenge for her husband's flirtatious lifestyle. Unfortunately, a young man – Aldous, the second person she is seeing accidentally dies in their house and since Beard is the only person who witnesses it and will not take responsibility for it, Tarpin, who once threatens Aldous for taking Patrice from him is arrested and jailed for the offence. When he regains his freedom, he discovers that Beard sets him up and he destroys the solar panels Beard is working on to provide alternative clean energy to the world. And since Beard steals the patent of the project from the dead brilliant Aldous, he is declared wanted for intellectual theft. *Oil on Water* is about the economic, environmental and social problems in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It portrays the devastation caused by the 'tripartite system of ruination' – the corrupt government, the international oil corporations and the Militants in the regions. Two journalists: Zack and Rufus are used as narrators of the narrative.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

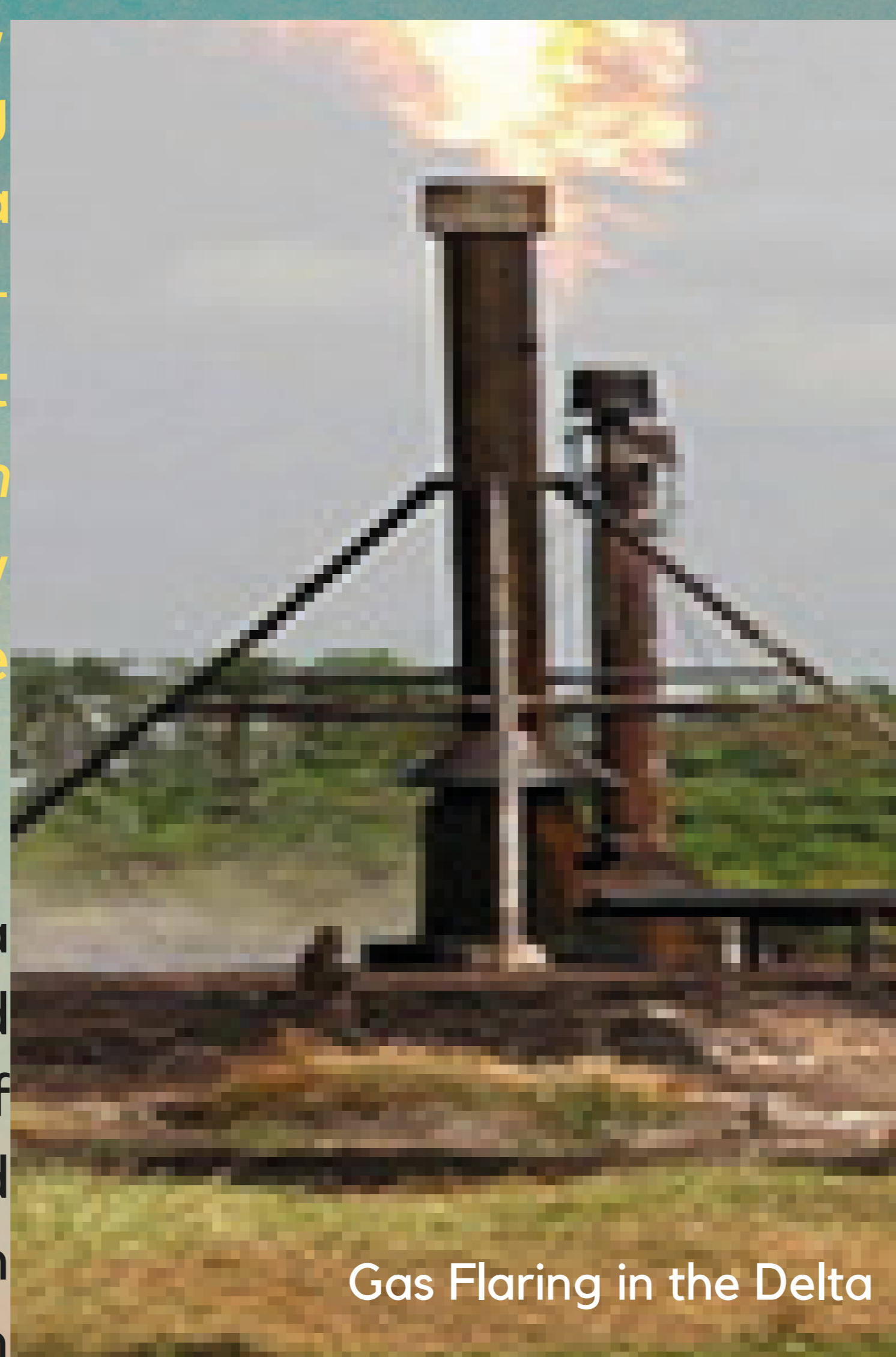
As an ecocritical study, aesthetic dimension ecocritics critique a text with the intent of discovering ways in which it creatively becomes useful in redefining, ecologically, the model of humanity and human culture. Socio-political dimension ecocritics illustrate such issues as environmental, gender and economic injustices and ethical dimension critics consider moral standpoint to the ecological crisis.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research method is deployed, and materials are sourced on ecocriticism, postcolonial ecocriticism and secondary criticism on the two primary texts from both physical and online libraries.

FINDINGS

This study suggests that *Solar* portrays women as femme Fatales, but *Oil* depicts them as victims of circumstance. Also, *Solar* depicts how individualistic western society has been and its implication for the ecological crisis, while *Oil* is an example of a 'national allegory' of African literature. Both texts are not apocalyptic, i.e., they do not foretell the doomed future but rather illustrate the crises that pervade the contemporary milieu.



Gas Flaring in the Delta

CONCLUSION

There is hypocrisy in the approaches of the developed countries to find solutions to ecological problems – what is termed 'double thinking'. The same government that is proactive in sourcing alternative clean energy is responsible by proxy for the devastation of the environment in the Niger Delta region. And what environmental activism means varies according to the problems people are dealing with. While such problems exist in some apocalyptic writings in western literature, it is experiential in the Niger Delta.

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