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**Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*: The Investigation of Current Environmental Degradation**

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**Abstract:** Literature in relation to the natural world and the environment is the subject of ecocriticism. The current global environmental crisis has made it urgent to examine literature from an ecological point of view. By examining the ways in which the natural world and the environment are portrayed in literature,

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**Introduction:**

A more recent development in literary appreciation is ecocriticism. It developed initially in the US and subsequently in the UK, only picking up steam in the 1990s. Ecocriticism was founded on the premise that the physical environment and the human world are inextricably intertwined and that each shapes the other. As a result, understanding how humans and nature are depicted in literature is crucial to understanding the current environmental crisis. The term "ecocriticism" was originally used by William Rueckert in his 1978 article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." He explained the word as the use of ecology and ecological ideas in

ecocriticism seeks to identify a method to improve the current ecological predicament. The fusion of ecocriticism with postcolonialism has given new life to critical thought overall, providing fresh perspectives on concepts like race, land, environment, wildness, etc. The two African novels, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1965) chosen for the examination haven't often been studied from an ecocritical angle, but the current paper has attempted to look at how nature and the environment are portrayed in them. This analysis aims to show that, despite pre-colonial African societies being unaffected by nature, colonialism opened the door for its exploitation while neglecting or demeaning the profound values that nature and the environment had for pre-colonial Africans.

literary analysis. But in 1996, a unique book was published that gave the ecocriticism movement a fresh start. It was Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. This book, which was published along with a series of papers on environmental and natural history topics, became recognized as a turning point in ecocriticism. Glotfelty (1996) provides the frequently cited definition of ecocriticism here:

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of text, ecocriticism takes an earth centered approach to literary studies. (p. xiii)

Ecocriticism is thus predicated on the notion that the natural world and human civilization are intertwined and influenced by one another. It investigates how humans and other species are portrayed in literary works. Ecocritics examine how nature is depicted in the text's main body and try to determine how those depictions relate to current environmental crises. Understanding the imbalance of the eco system in the modern world is thus a goal of studying nature.

The long-standing habit of misusing the environment and exploiting nature for the advancement of human civilization is unquestionably to blame for the current ecological situation. Although humans have attempted to alter nature throughout history, the period of European colonialism stands out as the most notable instance since the goal of colonization was to use nature and her resources for human benefit. Through colonialism, the Western cultural heritage of utilizing nature for human advantage was most vigorously espoused. In truth, the practice of harming nature is still being practiced in modern times during the neocolonial era, not just during the colonial era. Therefore, since the Western philosophy of separating the human from the non-human is what led to the environmental disaster, the West bears the brunt of the guilt. This very argument necessitates a postcolonial examination of ecological notions in literature. The potential of ecocriticism has expanded due to its "cross-pollination with postcolonial studies" (Buell, 2011, p. 93), which has deepened our awareness of the problem of environmental deterioration in the modern era.

Since colonial exploitation of the environment was motivated by European Enlightenment philosophy, knowledge of the natural world, conservation policy, etc.,

the convergence of postcolonialism and ecocriticism is justified; therefore, to deny colonial and environmental histories as mutually constitutive misses the crucial role that exploitation of natural resources plays in any imperial project. Despite the fact that postcolonial criticism has always been anthropocentric, the devastating effects of neocolonialism on the ecologies of non-European countries have led postcolonial studies to rediscover their commitment to the environment. They have done this by insisting that the current ecological crises are inextricably linked to historical legacies of imperialistic exploitation and authoritarian abuse. *Greening Postcolonialism* (Huggan, 2004). Therefore, ecocriticism devoid of a postcolonial perspective would amount to studying simply the tip of the iceberg while colonialism's history has concealed the origin of the issue within it.

Postcolonial writers from non-European countries have stepped up in the current climate of environmental degradation to point out the negative effects of neocolonialism and globalization. Without the label of ecocritics, a number of writers and critics have traditionally focused on nature writing in Africa, stressing land difficulties and environmental horrors as a result of colonialism's lengthy history. In his essay "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses," William Slaymaker (2001) theorizes that the resistance to or avoidance of ecocritical paradigms on the part of many African writers is a result of their mistrust of a Western theory that "appears as one more hegemonic discourse from the metropolitan West" and their lack of faith in any Western theory to provide solutions to their environmental problems (p. 132). African writers, though not typically referred to as ecocritics, take the environment and nature very seriously. Both Nigerians Niyi Osundare and Ken Saro Wiwa were well-known authors and ardent environmental campaigners. The position of Chinua Achebe is difficult to establish from these angles. Although Achebe's writings do not appear to reflect any understanding of the ecological catastrophe, his novels, particularly *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1965), provide ample evidence that the author has addressed the issue of nature and ecology. The early colonial period serves as the setting for the second novel, which is set in the pre-colonial Igbo land of southeast Nigeria. As a result, the first novel paints a picture of nature and the environment in their unaltered state, whereas the second novel depicts how those same elements have been harmed as a result of colonial invasion.

### **Research Method**

The qualitative research methodology utilized in this study is built on the interpretive philosophy. A textual account of the phenomena under investigation is used to provide information in a qualitative approach. The qualitative research method is used to analyze the texts of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Through the use of literary tropes like similes, metaphors, personification, the language of animation, symbols, and imagery, the ecocritical relationship as depicted in literature is investigated. As a result, qualitative analysis is the kind of technical analysis that applies to this research the most. The details contained in the words, phrases, and sentences discussed in the section above help to explain this.

### **Discussion and analysis**

The land is the most important property for a colonial people since it is the most tangible and will provide them with food and, most importantly, dignity, according to Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe depicts this spiritual bond between the Igbo people and their environment, one that extended beyond outward physical resemblance. Achebe's book, which is set in the village of Umuofia, does more than merely maintain nature in the background; it also includes it as a character. He depicts the natural world as a living thing that interacts with human characters. The Igbos' physical and mental behaviors, which are influenced by their environment, show that the thought of using nature for their personal gain is unthinkable to them. Achebe demonstrates how the Igbos' agricultural way of life, religious practices, seasonal celebrations, and concepts about the universe are all connected with nature.

First and foremost, it is important to highlight the many private and public activities carried out over various seasons. During the planting and harvesting seasons, Igbos adhered to rigorous regulations. They held the view that the earth would become dissatisfied with any deviation from nature's direction. For instance, it was required to maintain the "week of quiet" prior to the first yam plantation. The Igbos retained a similar level of sacredness prior to yam's plantation since it was a precious food to them. They held that maintaining domestic and communal harmony kept the ground content, resulting in a good harvest. Therefore, Okonkwo, the protagonist, had to endure a severe punishment to make up for the harm he had caused to nature when he violated the sanctity of the week by hitting his wife. You know as well as I do that our forebears commanded that we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word

to his neighbor before we plant any crops on the earth. This is how one of Okonkwo's neighbors admonished him. We coexist peacefully with one another in order to respect the great earth goddess, without whose grace our harvests would not flourish. You have done a terrible deed. In *Things Fall Apart*, The Igbo people didn't conduct any work on the land during the "week of peace." The Igbos' custom of avoiding any activity on the ground revealed their deep respect for it, which they saw as a living being that required rest before a year of labor. Following the "week of peace," both men and women, together with the soil, got very active with the planting and growth of fresh yams (p.36). Once more, the New Yam Festival was celebrated with utmost earnestness since it was a chance to give thanks to Ani, the goddess of the earth and the origin of all fertility. More than any other divinity, Ani had an impact on people's daily lives. She served as the final arbiter of morals and behavior.

Another indication of the Igbo people's deep affection for the country in *Things Fall Apart* was the respect they had for their forefathers. The land itself was a part of who their forebears were. The land of the living was not distant from the territory of the ancestors, as Achebe says in describing the community's burial cemetery. Between them, there was coming and going. Therefore, the deceased community members became a part of the land. This dynamic representation of the earth stretches ancestrally into the future. DeLughrey (2011), As a result, the Igbos seized nature to encompass both living and non-living members of the community. The land belonged to all future generations as well as the forebears, not just the current generation.

The Igbos revered nature as God. The environment's various natural features—trees, rivers, hills, caves, and so forth—held divine powers. Ani was the fertility and earth goddess, Amadiora was the thunder deity, Ufiojioku was the harvest god, and Anyanwu was the sun god. Igbo had uttermost faith in the Oracle of Hills and Caves and obediently followed its orders. There was mention of a large, revered, ancient silk-cotton tree. In that tree, good children's spirits were immaturely awaiting birth. Young women who wanted children would gather there on typical days to sit in its shade. Any disruption of the natural environment was thought to stop the natural flow of life, according to Igbo belief, which held that the divine nature influences human existence from conception to death and even after that. Any incident that seemed out of the ordinary—twins, illnesses like leprosy and smallpox, suicide deaths, etc.—was dealt with in a variety of ways. Igbos had a designated region known as the Evil Forest where

they dumped such individuals. Things that were uncontrollable or unfathomable were left to nature.

Once more, Achebe (1958) demonstrates how the Igbo language was influenced by the environment. Proverbs, sayings, riddles, myths, and other oral methods were frequently employed by Igbos since they lived in an oral society to effectively communicate. The Igbos' intimate connection to nature was suggested by the many mentions of flora and animals. The environment had an impact on several proverbs, like "Okonkwo's popularity had blossomed like a bush-fire in the harmattan", "A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing", "Obierika's house is as busy as an ant mound" etc. To make his point, Achebe employs a variety of myths and folktales. The Cosmic Quarrel between Earth and Sky myth, the myth of the locust, the myth of the mosquito, the folktale of the tortoise and birds, etc., were examples of how their folktales were products of the land and the terrain. DeLoughrey (2011) makes the following observation with regard to this aspect: "The post-colonial ecology of *Things Fall Apart* is evident in the way that language evolves in a long historical relationship to a particular environment and culture. As a result, nature influenced the Igbo people's mentality, which was reflected in their language.

Achebe (1958) continues on to demonstrate how the Christian missionaries and colonial authorities denigrated the philosophy of the local peoples after providing a detailed picture of pre-colonial Igbo society. The missionaries, the forerunners of colonial control, stripped nature and the environment of all the strongly held spiritual connotations by the Igbo people in order to preach Christianity. They attempted to convert the locals to Christianity by demonstrating that the Igbo religion was pagan and that all of their other religious convictions were unfounded. Mr. Brown, a missionary, made an effort to persuade people that Christ was the only true god and that nature did not possess any supernatural force. You carve a piece of wood and call it god, he said. However, it's still just a piece of wood. As a result, the missionaries mocked and disregarded all other natural deities. It may be argued that the erection of a church required the destruction of Evil Forest trees, which not only offended the Igbos' spiritual beliefs but also symbolized the destruction of nature for the benefit of the colonial business.

When Okonkwo hanged himself in the climactic moment, it was an "offense against the soil." Only strangers may touch his wicked body. Okonkwo, who disobeyed nature by killing himself, did not deserve a burial and therefore must not be permitted to blend in

with nature, according to Igbo belief, which held that man must become a part of the natural world after his death. The colonial official, however, dismissed all interpretations of the death and simply thought it "interesting" enough to include in the book he was writing.

Achebe's novel illustrates the beginning of what would take a tragic turn in the history of colonial exploitation by providing a heartbreaking depiction of how the Igbos' dearly revered ideals were destroyed by the colonial rulers. *Things Fall Apart* serves as proof that colonial control, which rejected the idea of a spiritual connection between nature and people, was the root cause of the act of abusing nature and destroying the environment. In *Things Fall Apart*, colonial exploitation was just beginning; in *Arrow of God*, it was at its most aggressive. Again, colonial power over the Igbo community of Umuaro, which is the setting for this book, was infiltrating Igbo culture and upsetting their long-held beliefs gradually but definitely.

Once more, we see an Igbo rural community interacting with the natural world. These Igbos' way of life and livelihood was based on natural phenomena. The moon's position in the night sky determined the timing of the Igbo principal food yam harvest and sowing. Ezeulu, the protagonist of the story and the village's top priest, was tasked with keeping track of the lunar movement to indicate the passage of time and announce the beginning of the harvest and planting season. Because of the reliance on nature, no harvest or planting would take place if Ezeulu failed to announce the sighting of the new moon. Because Ezeulu refused to be named the warrant chief, the colonial authorities imprisoned him for two months because they found it difficult to comprehend the significance of his role in the community. As a result, he could not keep track of time, and the harvest season was not declared. Consequently, Christian missionaries promised to save them through conversion when the entire village fell into starvation as a result of Ezeulu's delay in reporting the harvest. Although the inhabitants were given new life, the impact of Christianity forced the harvest and yam planting to lose their spiritual importance.

Another python-related incident served as a metaphor for weakening the Igbo people's close connection to the environment. The royal python was highly revered and regarded as a symbol of divinity by the Igbo people. But by referring to the python as merely a snake and labeling it "the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve," Christian missionaries persuaded the populace to kill the reptile. (*Arrow of God*, 1965, p. 48) These remarks incited Oduche, Ezeulu's son, to trap the python within a box and kill it.

Achebe (1965) demonstrates how various natural features like rivers, hills, trees, and stones served as repositories for myths and legends. As an illustration, consider the tale surrounding the brook Ota. According to the legend, Ota had been temporarily abandoned since the massive boulder perched on top of two other boulders near its source was going to tumble and would require a softer pillow for its head. While Achebe uses many additional tales to demonstrate that nature is a living thing for the Igbos, he also makes it clear that the colonial authorities did not appreciate nature's aesthetic beauty and friendliness, let alone its spiritual significance. He notes how George Allen, who played the colonial official in *Things Fall Apart* and is the author of *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, expressed his discomfort with the wealth of Africa's natural world by dubbing it the continent's "deadly fecundity" (p. 34).

A noteworthy example of a colonial endeavor to connect areas of the region entirely for the conquerors' profit was the building of a road between Umuaro and Okperi. Additionally, the road symbolized the physical scar left by logging the land's lush forests. The road enforced the colonists' perception of Africa, eradicating the continent's "deadly fertility", but the open region disturbed the locals' thoughts because "the feeling of openness and exposure made him [Obika] vigilant" (Achebe, 1965, p.82). Destroying the forest also entailed upsetting the natural order by robbing the gods of their residences.

The peasants had no choice but to accept Christianity and submit to colonial rule as a result of the starvation, which signaled the novel's triumph of colonial power. Igbo spirituality was replaced by a western material culture where there was no connection between nature and culture with the harvesting of yam in the name of the Christian god. The Igbos' holistic concept would be replaced, and the western ideas of growth and progress (at the expense of nature and the environment) would be established. This end marked the beginning of a new age. In *Arrow of God*, what was predicted in *Things Fall Apart* came to pass.

### **Conclusion**

It is felt necessary to apply postcolonial ecocriticism to these two African novels because, according to postcolonial studies, "environmental issues are not only central to the projects of European conquest and global domination, but they are also inherent in the ideologies of imperialism and racism, on which those projects historically - and



persistently - depend.” (Huggan, et al. 2010) Not only throughout the colonial era but even after the end of colonial control, master-planned development projects in Western nations have been consistently plundering nature's riches and polluting the environment.

The conclusion of this paper stresses the importance of postcolonial ecocriticism in the investigation of current environmental degradation. The western notions of development, which have contributed to environmental issues around the world under the garb of neocolonialism, can gain new understanding thanks to this critical school. A balanced perspective on development is urgently needed, and postcolonial ecocriticism can advance global justice and sustainability by examining environmental and natural history themes in a variety of literary works.

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