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**Representation of Environmentalism: A
Postcolonial Ecocritical Study of Chinua
Achebe's *Things Fall Apart***

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Outline

Modern African literature started as an intellectual response to the marginalization of Africa and Africans by the mechanism of the white colonizers.

This paper focuses on the environmental tropes in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and explores the realities of colonial exploitations of land and people. The new approach of ecocriticism opens the door to viewing environmentalism as a common and foundational feature of postcolonial African literature.

Statement of the Problem

The primary interest of this paper is the representation of interactions between people who may not identify themselves as environmentalists and their immediate local environments.

Many postcolonial critics ignore environment writing and wilderness/species preservation issues, which are deeply existed in the writings of the Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe.

Achebe's novel portrays Africa before colonization as a society with a strong bond with the land and determined to preserve this sacred affinity against colonial endeavor.

Statement of the Problem

The novel conveys how the settlers' policies that sought to manipulate indigenous land as part of their colonial territorial conquest and forced assimilation provoke African people against colonization and exploitation.

The paper also points out the role of story-telling as a technique through which indigenous people cope with and undermine colonial narratives.

Key Questions

Why study literature and the environment?

Environmental literature, combining as it does the traditional novelistic focus on character and daily life with a heightened awareness of the meaning of place, offers a unique locus for a study of the everyday environment and the richness of everyday experience.

Ecocriticism and Literature

The term ecocriticism refers to a critical perspectives that pays close attention to the relationship between literature and the natural world.

Ecocritical examinations of the extent of environmental exploitation, its destruction of human and non-human habitats, the resulting senses of displacement, homelessness and double consciousness and how these motifs are expressed or disguised in a text may be readily applied to the existing body of postcolonial

theory.

Where Ecocriticism Meets Postcolonialism

The division between “us” and the presumed “them” turns the world towards the place of *postcolonial* ecocriticism, which is the study of the representation of nature and the environment in dialogue with postcolonialism. The pairing of postcolonialism with ecocriticism provides a novel lens through which to interpret the dialogic roles of the environment in a postcolonial framework.

Where Ecocriticism Meets Postcolonialism

The link between language and environmental thought is an important area of investigation. The implications for the relationship between language and the environment are much broader, however. The study focuses on the literature of former British-colonized countries in order to draw some clear parallels about the legacies of exploration and colonization on the environmental histories of Africa. This study begins to weave together these different levels of investigation. Close attention is paid to the everyday environmentalisms represented in postcolonial literature, and read them alongside theoretical projects of postcolonialism, environmentalism, and specifically postcolonial ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism and African Literature

Literary criticism of African literature is a relatively new field. Since the publication of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* 1958, hundreds of African novels, plays, and short stories have been published by the Heinemann African Writers series. Postcolonial ecocriticism is being used to explain the achievements of the most important writers of African literature. This is best exemplified in the production of the Nigerian novel. Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*. He is examined as a writer and intellectual resisting typical definitions of otherness, ethnic, religious and cultural borders. He goes beyond postcolonial concerns and depicts in the wider context universal questions of dispossession, exploitation of minorities, identity and environment.

A Postcolonial Eco-critical Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Being part of their environmental culture, Africans have the ability to communicate with nature since they see language as not a human-only talent. In Rigby's opinion, this issue is not exclusive to "animistic civilizations" (Rigby, 2002, p. 165). "A snake was never named by its name at night because it would hear," Africans believed, referring to the Earth, sky, and animals as living entities capable of listening and communicating. Therefore, it was referred to as a string—Achebe (Achebe, 1994, p. 16).

A Postcolonial Eco-critical Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Achebe aims to demonstrate in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, how the arrival of the colonizer caused a feeling of threat and fermentation in the African's relationship with nature. The unity of African nature and culture was among the things that went apart on the land with the arrival of the white man, as he states in his novel. This dilemma is mentioned in chapter twenty when Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel, speaks with a friend about the division between them: "Does the white man understand our customs about land?" "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue"? (Achebe 1959, 176). The importance of land to African people cannot be realized by the white man whose tongue is no more than a colonizer.

Story-telling and Environmental Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Wendell Berry, a renowned American writer and environmentalist, once said, "A human society should collect leaves and stories, and bring them to account. It must develop soil and that memory of itself" (Garrard 115), and Achebe thinks that works of literature should address and include stories from the margins. Achebe is convinced that African writers "must become political and resort to their story-telling traditions to tell the story of belonging, of dwelling amid their land, of being alienated from it, and of trying to offset the loss of heritage, if only to make their people whole again" (Searle 65).

Story-telling and Environmental Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Achebe's description of humans as "story-telling animals" (Achebe 1976, 59) implies that he is open to the possibility that art might serve both evolutionary and revolutionary purposes.

The oral tradition is the backbone of African arts and letters. Recognizing the social and political import of the oral traditions and colonizers' efforts to denigrate African cultures and traditions.

Story-telling and Environmental Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Things Fall Apart's narrative innovation is best understood in the light of Achebe's obligation to oral tradition. Oral tradition relates to the corpus of narratives known in African communities, both at household by the fire and in the larger society. These stories were told to Achebe when he was a child.

Repeating, a tone change, parallelism, piling and linkage, direct address, digression, images, exaggeration, allegory, and symbolism are examples. Furthermore, historical stories frequently end with an added message that affirms the culture's rules in which they are presented.

Story-telling and Environmental Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Achebe employs tale-telling skills and customs from his ancestors to convey the narrative of the Umuofians' falling part of the story. When questioned what he intends by defining himself as a storyteller in an interview with Charles H. Rowell, he responded as follows:

...we mustn't forget that we have a certain link of apostolic succession; if you like, to the old *griots* and storytellers and poets. It helps anyway; it gives me that sense of connectedness, of being part of things that are eternal like the rivers, the mountains, and the sky...(Rowell 269).

This feeling of belonging, identity, and interconnectedness is most evident in Achebe's employment of Igbo proverbs and his employment of metaphors and similes derived from the African storyteller's unity with the physical environment.

Story-telling and Environmental Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Things Fall Apart, the storyteller announces the importance of nature-based proverbs in the first paragraphs of his story by telling his reader: "Among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe 1959, 7). As Achebe observes (Ibid, 180), it "aids people to comprehend what to do now depending on what has occurred in the past."

The tale of Okonkwo's ascension and downfall and the collapse of his society, therefore intertwined with proverbs. Okonkwo, for example, is renowned for his cunning talents, which are said to render him "as flexible as a fish in water" (Achebe 3). His athletic strength places him prominently in Umuofia, where his reputation is said to have spread "like a bushfire in the harmattan" (Ibid 3). The village elders accept him as well, One of whom politely takes his kola nuts and alligator pepper gift. The elderly recognizes his standing and right to be himself by saying, "Let the kite perch, and let the egret perch as well" (Achebe 1959, 17).

Story-telling and Environmental Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

In addition, this elder assists Okonkwo in establishing his position in society because he believes that “you could identify a mature corn by its look” (Achebe1959, 20).

Nature is the basis of the most striking parallels for the storyteller. Okonkwo's adoptive kid, Ikemefuna, is reported to have grown in his family “like a yam tendril in the rainy season” (Achebe1959, 47).

When Okonkwo's beloved child Ekwefi feels afraid, the narrator compares her to “a chicken whose lone chick has been taken away by a kite” (Achebe1959, 93), when her anxiety reflects that of the society, the narrator witnesses fireflies buzzing about “with their little green light, which just added to the darkness” (Achebe1959, 94).

Conclusion

Achebe's achievement as a writer in *Things Fall Apart* also demonstrates how the arrival of colonialism harmed the lives of people living in harmony with nature and how the arrival of whites had disrupted the state of equilibrium reached by West Africans in their interactions with their environment. Achebe opposes the presentation of stereotyped negative views of Africans linked with inferiority, darkness, viciousness, and their classification as primal or savage.

Conclusion 1

Achebe has succeeded in illustrating how society got disturbed and the land got contaminated by the arrival of colonialism through his narrative approach, employment of time, command of the language, and use of sayings and images. The most crucial reason for African colonialism was exploiting the region's natural resources; "Europe is what it is because of what Africa is not." Through the various troubles which the character 'Okonkwo' faced throughout the novel, it is easy to conclude that fighting colonialism was a near-impossible endeavour.

Conclusion 2

The genuine African culture, which spread morals and humanism and was in direct contact with nature, posed a danger to the colonists. As a result, colonizers sought to eradicate this civilization in order to subjugate Africans. Pre-colonial African culture was integrated with religion, which was rich in natural themes. After conquering African cultural identity, the colonizers and their Christian missionaries began to spread their own culture and establishing their colony, which is a clear indicator of environmental degradation. The African culture that was fused with nature influenced its people's conduct and mentality.

Conclusion 3

Achebe's work provides a corrective perspective on the African backdrop and the distortion of native Africans and exposes the colonial part played out via the indigenous' persistent and systematic oppression and cultural life. By the end of the novel, one realizes that the Igbo world has been damaged, and the complicated linkages formed between nature and society by the clan have been unstable due to persons like Mr. Brown and the District Commissioner's acts. For the Igbo, people had become one with their surroundings, and culture and environment had merged. Rootedness in a location and genuine, highly personal, spiritual interaction with the local environment and ecological philosophy of care and respect are the significant features of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Thanks

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Do you have any questions?

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Resources

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