

Effects of Colonialism on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* from an Ecocritical Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

Ecocriticism and Post-Colonialism, as intellectual currents, emerge as direct consequences of the post-structuralist paradigm. Both of these literary theories emerge as novel constructs, intricately intertwined with one another. The emergence of postcolonialism can be traced to the response of the formerly colonized territories to their erstwhile imperial overlords. The indigenous writers, in a courageous act of resistance, began to engage in a literary discourse that challenged the hegemonic center that had exerted its dominance over their existence for countless generations.

The dominant discourse has perpetuated a degrading representation of the native inhabitants of the colonies. The indigenous inhabitants were depicted as barbaric and devoid of civilization, thereby prompting the colonizer to rationalize its occupation by framing it as a noble obligation to rectify the purportedly "unethical" and "immoral" customs of these primitive individuals.

Similar to the emergence of postcolonialism, Ecocriticism too has arisen from a profound affection and apprehension for the entirety of the natural world. Ecocriticism endeavors to forge a robust nexus between the natural realm and the sociopolitical sphere. It is asserted that the preservation of Nature should not be compromised in the pursuit of human materialistic desires. Through the interdisciplinary framework of Ecocriticism Post-Colonialism, we are afforded the opportunity to delve into the intricate layers of Cultural and Environmental degradation, meticulously orchestrated by the White rulers under the guise of development and modernization.

In the seminal work *Things Fall Apart* (1958) authored by Chinua Achebe, one is presented with a vivid and penetrating depiction of the profound repercussions of colonialism upon both the human and non-human constituents. Achebe's masterful narrative endeavors to capture the essence of this historical phenomenon with a remarkable degree of realism and accuracy. This essay endeavors to delve into the intricate dynamics of Africa's cultural and environmental exploitation at the hands of colonial powers. Through a meticulous examination of Chinua Achebe's seminal work, *Things Fall Apart*, one can discern a profound exploration of the contrasting realms of pre-colonial African society and the colonized Africa, thereby illuminating the transformative impact imposed by imperial powers.

Keywords: *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe, Culture, Environment, Ecocriticism, Postcolonialism.

The current discourse aims to examine the depiction of Igbo culture and its subsequent collapse as a consequence of colonialism. The literary work entitled *Things Fall Apart* is authored by Chinua Achebe, a prominent African writer. The publication of the work occurred in the year 1958, with its title being borrowed from the poem "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats. The work is structured into three distinct sections, providing a portrayal of the experiences and circumstances of the Igbo community in both the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras of the nineteenth century. The first segment delineates the customary practices, rituals, cultural norms, and historical background of the Igbo society. Subsequently, the subsequent and tertiary sections expound upon the ramifications of imperialism and the influence of Christian missionaries on Okonkwo and his community.

The majority of the narrative unfolds inside the setting of Umuofia, focusing on the trajectory of Okonkwo's ascent and subsequent decline. Umuofia is a self-sufficient and mostly agricultural community that effectively meets its own requirements. However, the encroachment of imperialism introduces a disruptive element that upsets the existing equilibrium. The individuals in question exhibit a profound sense of satisfaction with their current circumstances and possess an inherent inclination towards hospitality. They consistently extend a cordial reception to their visitors and engage in harmonious communal existence.

Chinua Achebe, in his literary works, does not engage in the idealization of indigenous culture, but rather unveils the inherent contradictions and spiritual turmoil that existed within African society prior to the advent of colonialism. As Booker writes, "Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* is worthy of close analysis not simply because it offers insight into the purely structural or syntactic dynamics of European colonialism, but also because of its visionary exploration ... of the pre-colonial people" (01).

The novel's protagonist, Okonkwo, fights to protect his people's culture against the oppressive influence of colonial authorities. He is a wrestling champion, a rich farmer, and a member of the elite Ekwugwu, all of which have helped him become famous in the Umuofia suburbs at an early age. In the androcentric Igbo culture, where men are revered and women are devalued, his masculine qualities—his strength, work ethic, and lack of a feminine side—are highly valued. He is quite traditional and feels that he cannot be a real man until he has complete control over his home and his wife. When he refuses to eat for a few days after murdering Ikemefuna, his humanity finally shows through.

Achebe depicts many core aspects of Igbo culture, from their religious beliefs to their familial and societal structures to their views on evil spirits. Mainstays of African culture such as the arts, music, and poetry have been portrayed in a unique light. The work also delves into the Igbo culture's secular side. Most men have many wives and a large brood of kids. Taking care of crops is fundamental to their daily lives. Yam is their primary food crop, and males are responsible for its cultivation. Women, however, tend to a variety of other crops, including melons and beans.

The absence of centralized governmental systems is an integral part of Igbo culture. Every tribe has its own head, but they all celebrate together at important events to foster unity and cooperation. Achebe has shown both the good and bad sides of Igbo society by presenting the beauty and the weaknesses of Igbo culture. Traditional Igbo rituals include killing identical twins, polygamy, and reliance on oracles, indiscriminate warfare, and the deplorable treatment of women. A person with severe swelling of the limbs and stomach is not permitted to die at home according to Igbo tradition. If such a person were to die in the town, it would anger the Earth goddess. They are herded into the Evil Forest and left to perish there. The Evil Forest also claims the life of Okonkwo's father.

Because of these brutal customs, White colonial authorities look down on Igbo society as morally bankrupt. The missionaries had arrived to the tribal people with the good intentions of convincing them to abandon their harsh and barbaric ways and convert to Christianity. They established Christian communities by constructing churches in many different settlements. Every day, more and more people converted, and as a result, many of them turned into sworn enemies of their brethren. When Obierika saw how his community was breaking apart, he became despondent, “Our own men and sons have joined the ranks of strangers. They have joined his religion, and they help to uphold his government. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us?” (Achebe 129).

But it was the establishment of British government apparatuses like courts, jails, and trade and commerce restrictions that marked the beginning of the genuine breakdown of Igbo

society. Those who did not follow the Whiteman's rules found themselves behind prison as the government started to enforce its regulations.

A messenger from the government declared the chiefs of Igbo society's unlawful gathering as they discussed the imperial rulers' deceitful character. After Okonkwo murdered the officer and realized his clansmen wouldn't fight beside him against the wicked authorities, he took his own life. His death marked the end of Igbo civilization and the triumph of British overlords. By imposing its own, more evolved theological and political ideals, the outside force manages to destroy the Igbo way of life. Ernest N. Emenyonu fittingly argue that “*Things Fall Apart* is indeed a classic study of cross-cultural misunderstanding and the consequences to the rest of humanity, when a belligerent culture or civilization, out of sheer arrogance and ethnocentrism, takes it upon itself to invade another culture, another civilization.” (Whittaker, p. 59).

Things Fall Apart's Ecocritical Preoccupations

The word "Ecocriticism" was introduced by William Ruckert in 1978 via his work titled "Literature and ecology: An experiment in ecocriticism." This term pertains to a method in literary analysis that involves the examination of ecological issues and problems within the environment. , Chinua Achebe explores the complexities of Igbo society and the impact of European colonization on traditional African cultures. The novel delves into the life of Okonkwo, a respected warrior and leader Chinua Achebe portrays the profound spiritual connection that exists between the Igbos and their natural environment, extending beyond just observable physical manifestations. The Igbo people have the belief that nature has divine qualities and is endowed with boundless capabilities. Ani, Amadiora, Ufiozioku, and Anyanwu are revered deities within Igbo culture, fulfilling the role as guardians of the natural world.

The Igbos have effectively preserved ecological balance by abstaining from any actions that may cause damage to the environment. The notion of exploiting nature just for personal financial benefit is inconceivable within their cultural framework. The myths, festivals, and religious beliefs of this culture exhibit a profound connection and interdependence with the natural world. It is posited that in the event of one individual transgressing the divine rule, the whole clan would be subjected to the occurrence of natural calamities.

The Igbo people adhere to stringent regulations during the periods of planting and harvesting. Prior to the commencement of the agricultural season, a customary practice is undertaken whereby a designated period of time, known as the 'week of peace', is observed. This observance is conducted with the intention of appeasing Ani, the revered deity associated with the land, in the hopes of receiving her kind blessings for a bountiful harvest. Throughout the course of this week, individuals refrained from engaging in laborious activities. They engage in

social visits to the households of their acquaintances, where they mostly allocate their time to engaging in conversations, exchanging rumors, consuming food and beverages, and participating in celebratory activities. The act of uttering a derogatory remark towards another individual is seen as a transgression. In the event of an individual's demise during the current week, their remains are not interred but rather disposed of in the Evil Forest, where they are left to decompose in an exposed state. Individuals are hesitant to engage in behaviors that deviate from the established customs of this event. Should someone choose to act in opposition, they will be subjected to a substantial punishment enforced by Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess Ani. Okonkwo transgressed the sacredness of the community by engaging in physical violence against his second wife, Ojiugo. As a consequence, he was instructed to present an offering of one goat, several textiles, and a substantial sum of currency to the revered site of Ani, as an act of penance.

The earth goddess and the spirits of the ancestors are revered during the new yam festival, which is celebrated by the Igbo people. Intimacy among the Igbo people was fostered as well as the more obvious necessities of food, drink, and matchmaking by the celebration. Many guests, including affluent farmers from far and close and in-laws, are invited. This event gives them a chance to talk to one another and learn more about one another's perspectives. Uchendu elaborates on the festival's underlying ideology by saying, "A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes...we come together because it is good for the kinsmen to do so" (Achebe 118).

Achebe's portrayal of the precolonial Igbo culture is comprehensive, providing a holistic understanding of its many aspects. Subsequently, the author highlights the detrimental impact of imperial control on the indigenous people's philosophical beliefs and values. The indigenous population maintains a subjective connection with the land, while foreign governing powers see the land primarily as a resource to be used for the construction of their institutions and infrastructure. The act of deforestation was undertaken in order to facilitate the construction of the religious edifices. The Igbo community has the belief that Pythons possess holy and divine qualities. However, the introduction of missionaries led to a shift in perspective, as they portrayed the python as a common snake, so encouraging the Igbo people to engage in its killing. Oduche terminated the python, so initiating the fight between man and the untamed wilderness.

Achebe's work elucidates the manner in which the geographical landscape had an impact on the development and evolution of the Igbo language. The Igbo people, being an oral civilization, used a diverse range of oral techniques for communication and discourse, including riddles, sayings, tales, and proverbs, among others. The author draws parallels between Okonkwo's increasing popularity and the rapid spread of a bush-fire, as well as Obierika's constant engagement in various activities to the bustling nature of an anthill. Achebe adeptly incorporates a diverse array of myths and traditional folk tales into his work, including the

mosquito myth, locust myth, conflict between Earth and Sky, and the narrative around Tortoise and birds. These examples provide as proof of the deep affection that the Igbo people have for their natural surroundings. About this facet De Loughrey observes, “The post colonial ecology of *Things Fall Apart* is evident in the way that language develops in a long historical relationship to a particular environment and culture” (07).

The colonists cut down forests, dammed rivers, and leveled slopes in the name of progress. Cutting down so many trees to make way for highways has a direct impact on the survival of forest-dwelling creatures. The conquerors utilized their superior knowledge and resources to eliminate African communities' autonomy in every sphere of life. For their personal financial gain, they successfully pillaged their society and despoiled their land.

Conclusion

Ecocriticism and postcolonialism are two distinct academic disciplines, with the former focusing on environmental issues and the latter on colonial subjects. Colonialism unquestionably had a profound impact on both individuals and communities at the same time. When a place gets colonized, its whole ecosystem is altered forever. Before colonization ruined everything, the Igbo people had a close connection to their natural environment, which is shown in *Things Fall Apart*. Obierika one of the important characters in the novel said that the whites have “put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart”. The profound connection with the natural world and the equilibrium that formerly supported the community has been entirely eradicated. The novel depicts what the critic Ato Quayson has called “the struggle between an organic esthetic...indigenous to the culture and an esthetic... that comes with colonialism” (833).

In Achebe's masterful narrative technique, one witnesses a profound portrayal of societal agitation and the contamination of the land, achieved through his deft manipulation of time, mastery of language, and adept utilization of proverbs and metaphors. In the denouement, the indigenous inhabitants, regrettably, prove unable to safeguard their time-honored rapport with the natural world, ultimately capitulating to the dominion of the colonial overlords.

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