

Ecohistorical Analysis of Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God

¹Augustus, Precious Sunday, ²Akpan, Archibong Ntiense

¹Department of English, University of Uyo, ²Department of Geography and Natural Resource Management, University of Uyo

¹Email: precioussemaediong@gmail.com, ²Email: archibongakpan@uniuyo.edu.ng

Abstract

In a bid to present a meticulous portrait of the Igbo society, before Colonialism, Chinua Achebe puts together Things Fall Apart (1958) and Arrow of God (1962). This Paper examined the relationship between intellectual history and culture and a relationship between literature and environment in the study of two typical Igbo novels. Apart from the atmospheric, hydrospheric and lithospheric degradations and pollution in the Niger Delta Region occasioned by the activities of various bodies, there is also colonial degradation brought about by the subtle invasion of the Europeans. This paper used new historicism and ecocriticism as theoretical frameworks in the study of the two novels of Achebe. It was discovered that the incursion of the imperialists put a knife on the cherished values, sacred cultures, customs and traditions of the Igbo people and Africa at large. It divided blood brothers and created "white men in black skins" who mimicked the appalling activities of their bosses. While the pre-colonial African society lived in an inviolate state of nature, colonialism opened the door for denigration of sacred orders held so dear by the African people and the exploitation of the environment.

Keywords: New historicism, ecocriticism, Niger Delta region, exploitation, colonial degradation.

1. Introduction

The continent of Africa has gone through all kinds of degradation, exploitation, pollution and humiliation for many centuries at the hands of the Europeans. "These were done through deliberately lopsided economic policies as well as slave trade, forced labour and the imposition of a pliant class to oversee their activities and interests in Africa" (Ugwanyi, n.d). Be that as it may, Africa has been bedevilled by multidimensional problems across different phases. Ranging from slavery, climate change, environmental degradation, colonialism and Neo-colonialism, these problems have made the African state depend solely on the international hegemonic forces for political and economic stability. (Mazrui, 2000) observes that:

These problems are brought about as a result of African being at the bottom of global heap, with the Western world at the top. Africa has the largest percentage of poor people, the largest number of low-income countries, the least developed economies, the lowest life expectancy and the most fragile political system. Moreover, it is the most vulnerable continent with high incidence of HIV/AIDs (whatever relationship there must be between HIV and the collapse of the immune system in Africa).

Going by what Mazrui has posited, the African state truly has undergone degradation in all its ramifications, and this paper is set out to highlight only the colonial and environmental degradation of Africa through the eyes of Achebe's two novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In that same vein, (Ìsólá et al., 2010) decries that the fatal effects of interventions like the slave trade, colonialism and two foreign religions overwhelmingly undermined the developmental and progressive capacities of African cultures ... They attacked aspects of African culture relentlessly with religion as they promptly identify, demonise and exorcise any African culture trait in their members.

In Africa, a number of writers have actually engaged in Ecocriticism writings. They include Niyi Osundare, Ken Saro Wiwa, Tanure Ojaide, Ebinyo Ogbowei, Ibiwari Ikiriko, etc. Though Achebe has not shown any apparent awareness towards ecological crisis in his writings, his novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, bear sufficient proof of the writer addressing nature and environment. The first novel anticipated the exploitation and degradation, while the second one brought it into reality.

2. Statement of the Problem

The study sets out to examine the concept of new historicism through undertaking a historical account of events in the pre-colonial and colonial African societies. In other words, this paper intends to solve the problem inherent in history and the Nigerian society through literature from the perspective of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. It will also look at how Achebe handles the issues of "green literature" in his works.

3. Theoretical Frameworks

New historicism is a form of literary theory whose goal is to understand intellectual history through literature and literature through its cultural context, which follows the 1950s field of history of ideas and refers to itself as a form of "Cultural Poetics". It was first developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of the critic and University of California, Berkeley English Professor Stephen Greenblatt and gained widespread influence in the 1990s. The term historicism was coined by Greenblatt when he "collected a bunch of essays and then, out of a kind of desperation to get the introduction done, I wrote that the essays represented something I called a new historicism" (Greenblatt 2017:497).

Abrams & Harpham (2009) perceive New Historicism as those who attained primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations... new historicists conceive of a literary text as situated within the totality of their institutions, social practices and discourses that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes.

Veesser (1989), introducing an anthology of essays, 'The new historicism', noted some key assumptions that continually reappear in New Historicism. They are:

1. That every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. That every act of unmasking and critique uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes,
3. That literary and non-literary 'texts' circulate inseparably;

4. That no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths, nor expresses inalterable human nature;
5. That a critical method and a long enough time to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe.

New historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the intellectual history and the cultural context. New Historicism also acknowledges that his examination of literature is ‘tainted’ by his own culture and environment. Based on the literary criticism of Greenblatt and influenced by the philosophy of Michael Foucault, new historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author’s times and circumstances, but that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs and prejudices. A new historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer’s times affect the work and how the work reflects the writer’s times, in turn recognising that current cultural contexts critique the conclusion.

Ecocriticism, or by alternative names, environmental criticism and green studies, designates the critical writings which explore the relationship between literature and the biological and physical environment conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities (Abrams & Harpham, 2009). Ecocriticism is the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyse texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature.

Ecocriticism is a recent evolution in the areas of literary and ecology. It was first coined in 1978 by William H. Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: an experiment in ecocriticism”. Although ecocriticism evolved first in the US and then in the UK, it is an approach that is known by many other designations, including “green (cultural) studies”, “ecopoetics”, and environmental literary criticism”, and is often informed by other fields such as ecology, sustainable design, biopolitics, environmental history, environmentalism, social ecology, etc. (Ecocriticism, n.d).

From the very inception, ecocriticism has been based on the assumption that the human world and the physical environment are closely interlinked and that one is shaped by the other. (Gogoi, 2014) posits that “ecocriticism is based on the human idea that the physical world and the human culture are connected and are affected by each other.” It examines the relationship between the human and the non-human represented in literary texts.

4. Application of New Historicism and Ecocriticism

a. New Historicism: Literature as a Product of Historical Forces

New historicism is highly relevant because Achebe’s novels are not just stories but are cultural documents embedded in specific historical moments. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe reconstructs pre-colonial Igbo society as a complex, organized and dynamic culture, thereby challenging colonial narratives that portrayed Africa as primitive. Through characters like Okonkwo and Obierika, Achebe dramatizes the internal tensions within Igbo society, while also exposing how external forces -British colonialism and Christianity – disrupt existing structures.

From a new historicist perspective:

- i. The novel reflects the late 19th century Igbo life at the first contact with Europeans.
- ii. The arrival of missionaries and colonial administrators is not neutral; it represents power, ideology and domination.

- iii. The text both responds to and revises earlier colonial texts, such as those by (Conrad ,1899/1990) and (Cary, 1939/1989) which misrepresented Africa.

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe advances this historical trajectory:

- i. Colonial rule is now fully institutionalised through indirect rule.
- ii. The conflict between Ezeulu and the colonial administration reflects the clash between indigenous authority and imposed political systems.
- iii. The novel reveals how colonialism manipulates internal divisions, illustrating New

Historicism's claim that history is shaped by competing discourses and power relations. Thus, New Historicism shows that both novels:

- i. Are products of historical conditions (colonial encounter).
- ii. Function as counter discourses to colonial historiography
- iii. Reveal that history itself is constructed, contested and ideological.

b. Ecocriticism: Interdependence of Culture and Environment

Ecocriticism is equally relevant because Achebe's novels foreground the inseparable link between the Igbo people and their natural environment.

In *Things Fall Apart*:

- i. The agricultural cycle (yam cultivation, week of peace, new yam festival) demonstrates a sustainable ecological ethic.
- ii. Deities like Ani (earth goddess) show that nature is sacred and moral, not merely material.
- iii. Proverbs and folklore rooted in flora and fauna reveal that language itself is ecologically grounded.

Ecocritically, this suggests:

- i. Pre-colonial Igbo society practised an environmentally balanced worldview.
- ii. Human actions (e.g. Okonkwo breaking the week of peace) are seen as violations against nature, not just society.

However, colonialism introduces ecological disruption:

- i. The "Evil Forest" is cleared for missionary activity, denoting environmental desecration.
- ii. Nature is desacralized and reduced to economic and religious utility.

In *Arrow of God*:

- i. The dependence on lunar cycles for farming highlights indigenous ecological knowledge systems.
- ii. Ezeulu's imprisonment disrupts Agricultural timing, leading to famine – showing how colonial interference destabilises ecological balance.
- iii. The killing of the sacred python represents spiritual and ecological violence.

From an ecocritical standpoint:

- i. Colonialism is not only political domination but also environmental exploitation.
- ii. It replaces a holistic ecological worldview with a utilitarian extractive mindset.

When these 2 theories, new historicism and ecocriticism are combined, they reveal deeper insights that colonialism in Achebe's novels is both a historical disruption (new historicism), and an ecological catastrophe (ecocriticism). The destruction of Igbo culture is inseparable from the destruction of its environment. Achebe's works demonstrate that history, culture and environment form an interconnected system and disruption affects all three simultaneously.

5. Conclusion of Theoretical Relevance

The application of new historicism and ecocriticism shows that Achebe's novels have historical interventions and serve as a correction of colonial misrepresentations. These novels, *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart*, are ecological texts, preserving indigenous environmental consciousness, and cultural critiques and also exposing the long-term consequences of colonial intrusion.

Ultimately, these theories deepen our understanding by revealing that the tragedy in Achebe's works is not just social or political, but also historical and environmental, making them profoundly relevant to contemporary discussions on identity, sustainability and postcolonial realities.

6. Literature Review

The present-day environment is a product of various shades of degradation and exploitation. These activities, in turn, cause imbalance both in the environment and in the people. Ecocriticism focuses on the physical environment and applies ecological concepts to the study of literature. The history and culture of a people are important in determining the way forward of any society. This brings to the fore the application of new historicism and ecocriticism as significant frameworks in the analysis of this paper.

Salihu (2017) specified in her "Revamping through History: A New Historicist Reading of Obafemi's 'Running Dreams' and 'Drums of the Delta'", how history is reconstructed to present the connection between past actions and present circumstances in society and also present forgotten societal ideals which would serve as indices for revolutionary struggle. (Ugwanyi, n.d) highlights the concerns of Achebe in documenting the history and culture of Africa (Nigeria). Ugwanyi clearly shows that imperialism is the basis of the crises and contradictions that have befallen the Nigerian state, using the two novels of Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

Adama (2016) analysed the eco-critical study of Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist and The Tale of the Harmattan*. It pairs Ojaide's autobiographical novel, *The Activist* (2006), and his poetry collection, "The Tale of the Harmattan" (2007) to argue that his work on the indigenous peoples (especially women) of Nigeria's Niger Delta offers an important means to revise our understanding of Post-colonial theory to move beyond the outdated notion of colonialists' nations to colonialists' powers as seated in multinational corporations that transcend national origin.

7. New Historicism in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*

Achebe creates a mythic village whose history stretches back to a legendary past. The examination of this novel is tainted by culture and environment. The two novels reflect the phases of Nigerian life before and after Colonialism. (Anyadike, 1986:1) observes that "novel writing in English in Africa began as a reaction and protest against what had been done, and continues to be done to a group, a race or a whole continent of people in the form of decades of deliberate misrepresentation and dehumanisation".

Things Fall Apart and *Arrow of God* represent Achebe's response to series of critical periods in Nigerian history. Achebe's point of departure was the fiction of Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad whose works sought, to a very great extent denigrate Africans and their culture. He was equally infuriated by their works which extol the virtues of British imperialism at the expenses of African societies. It was in an attempt to correct these gross misrepresentations in Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* about African people and their culture that informed Achebe's decision to write (Mikics, 2007).

Achebe's novels reveal and chronicle two kinds of movement - the movement of time and the movement of place. The movement of time is from the late 19th century, as reflected in *Things Fall Apart*, through the 1920s, as portrayed in *Arrow of God*, when colonialism had been fully entrenched in Nigeria. The movement of place, on the other hand, is as reflected in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* when colonialism had just had its first contact to the urban setting in subsequent novels. Achebe illustrates the vibrancy of the tradition and culture of the people of Umuofia, where the novel is set. Alumona (2003: 77) posits that:

The name of the dominant clan in *Things Fall Apart*, Umuofia (which means bush people), a pseudonym for the Igbo or African people, is essentially a misnomer. He acknowledges that Umuofia's import has been reduced absurdly by showing that the people to whom it is supposed to apply possess all the social institutions, culture and reflective intellectual tradition and dispositions, which should qualify it as a civilised society in the modern context.

Umuofia itself was a society that operated within the context of the principles of democracy with in-built checks and balances. Tekena (1980:13) observes that:

Even God does not have absolute power. He (the supreme creator) appears to work through Chi to create man. Simply, there are numerous suggestions in Igbo lore of him working with man to make the world or rather to enhance its habitability, for the work of creation was not ended in one monumental effort but goes on still, Chukwu and man talking things over at critical moments, sometimes agreeing, sometimes not.

Umuofia is a society that places a lot of initiative in the hands of man and encourages the individual to feel free to shape his or her own life. Achebe points out that "the limit is not the sky; it is somewhere much closer to earth. A sensible man will turn round at the frontiers of absolusions and head for home again" (Wikipedia contributors, 2026). From these quotations above, there is a demonstration of the recognition of the freedom of the individual to shape his or her life and the need for society to put a restriction on inordinate ambition and reckless individualism. It is against this background that we must place Okonkwo, the hero of *Things Fall Apart*. We first met him as a young man who enjoys fame. From a poor background he rises to become a great wrestler, warrior, farmer and polygamist who had many titles.

In this deep sense of patriotism, Okonkwo fails to recognise the changes in Umuofia which were brought about by the presence of British imperialism before his one-man squad fight against the British forces in Umuofia. His friend Obierika warned:

It is already too late. Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia. We should find it easy. They are only two of them, but what of our own people who are following their ways and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring soldiers and we would be like Abame (Achebe, 1958: 124).

Obierika, the perceptive philosopher in the novel, further warned:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the thing that held us together and we have fallen apart (Achebe, 1958: 124).

Two things become crystal clear from the two quotations: one is that at this point in the history of the peoples of Nigeria, British Imperialism had gained a strong foothold as it had taken over places like Nigeria, Gambia and Ghana in West Africa. Two is that the colonisers had won over many of our people who wore the mask of the white man and still had black skins. It was this last group that took over the reins of power from the colonialists on a negotiated basis, and they must not alter the structure put in place by the colonialist.

In its own right, *Things Fall Apart* is a collective tragedy of Umuofia (Nigeria) and never a personal tragedy of Okonkwo. Mr Kiaga (representing the colonialist) had led many astray, Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, the Outcasts, Nneka, the wife of Amadi, whose previous pregnancies and childbirth always resulted in twins. And these twins were, as usual, thrown into the evil forest. Umuofia had greatly changed! Apart from the church, the white man planted a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance and had court messengers who brought men to him for trials.

Frustrated by the humiliation of his society, Okonkwo strikes the leader of the white man's messengers. He becomes more frustrated and shocked with the new unenthusiastic attitude of members of his society who he erroneously thought would have killed the five remaining messengers. Finding himself alone, he commits suicide. In the last chapter, Obierika mustered up energy and stood ferociously to challenge the white man. "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog...., He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words" (Achebe, 1958:165).

In *Arrow of God*, the forces of imperialism had fully settled their Administration in the land. Here, the chief priest of Ulu accommodated both the traditional religion and the new Christian religion, which brought problems to him and the society at large. He did not accept the new Christian religion, but sent his son to go "and be his eye". In his attempt to satisfy the white man, Captain Winterbottom and benefit from the new system introduced by the imperialists, he incurred the wrath of his people, leading to his downfall. Achebe demonstrated in *Arrow of God*, as he did in *Things Fall Apart*, that "no man, however great, was greater than his people: that no man ever won judgment against his clan" (Achebe, 1962: 22).

Ezeulu and Okonkwo, protagonists of both novels *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart*, remain symbols in their different ways of contemporary Nigeria, thrown into confusion in a period of traditional crisis by strong external pressures. Ezeulu, for *Arrow of God*, was adamant to the plea of his people and preferred to disregard them. Ezeulu lost his leadership position and understanding of his people by confessing his friendship and admiration for the white man. Captain Winterbottom was only interested in promoting the policies and programmes outlined by the imperial forces. Nwaka's response to Ezeulu's information about Captain Winterbottom's invitation is worth quoting:

But there is one thing which is not clear to me in this summons. Perhaps it is clear to others; Ezeulu has told us that the white man has asked him to go to Okperi. Now it does not appear to me whether it is wrong for a man to ask his friend to visit him. When we have a feast, do we not send for our friends in other clans to come and share it with us, and do they not also ask us to their own celebration? The white man is Ezeulu's friend and has sent for him. What is so strange about that? He did not send for me; He did not send for Udeozo; He did not send for the priest of Idemili, he did not send for the priest of Eru; He did not send for the priest of Udo, nor did he ask the priest of Ogwugwu to come and see him. He has asked Ezeulu. Why? Because they are friends or does Ezeulu think that their friendship should stop short of entering each other's houses? Does he want the white man to be his friend only by word of mouth? (Achebe, 1962: 143).

In the end, Ezeulu's friendship with Winterbottom turns sour as the latter orders his incarceration in prison to satisfy the imperial administration, which he represents. Achebe stylishly articulates the indirect rule systems in Eastern part of Nigeria during the colonial rule. Ezeulu refused to accept the position of a warrant chief. Other parts of Nigeria also experienced this indirect rule apart from the east as. Tamuno (1980: 399) observes that "the imposition of the indirect rule system on Tivland, which had no centralised authority and had resisted Islam and the Emirs, led to protest in 1929, 1945 and 1949.

From the foregoing, the presence of Captain Winterbottom amounts to a destabilising factor in the affairs of Umuaro, his offer of a warrant chieftaincy to Ezeulu and the latter's refusal of the offer led to Ezeulu's detention, thereby preventing him from performing his priestly duties to the Ulu people. Achebe captures the capitulation of the Nigerian society to the ravaging forces of colonialism and Imperialism. This reflects the period when our development was intercepted and seems to be permanently arrested by the forces of colonialism with the aid of "white men in black skins" masquerading as our political leaders. This phenomenon is best described in Chinweizu's word "Lugardism" (Chinweizu 2006: 45). In *Things Fall Apart*, Kiaga, representing the imperialist in Umuofia, also helped in the friction and disintegration of a once robust, critical and organised society.

8. Ecocriticism in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*.

As earlier postulated, ecocriticism assumes that the human world and the physical environment are closely interlinked. Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart*, portrays this spiritual relation between the Igbos and their natural world. In fact, the Igbos' agricultural lives, religious lives, beliefs, festivals,

ideas about the world and human life are intertwined with nature. Individual and community activities were observed in different seasons. They maintained the week of peace as a compulsory ritual before the planting of yams, which was a sacred food for the Igbos. Therefore, when Okonkwo broke the sanctity of that week by being violent with his wife, he had to face a heavy penalty to compensate for the harm he had committed against nature. One of Okonkwo's neighbours reprimanded him thus:

You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth, without whose blessings, our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil.

The practice of the Igbos keeping the earth from any work showed their great concern for nature, which they considered as a living being that needed rest prior to a year-long labour. After the week of peace, everyone will be extremely busy planting and growing new yams. Again, the new yam festival comes up as it is an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct (Achebe, 1958:36).

The Igbos ancestors were part of the land. "Thus, the dead members of the community become part of the land". This dynamic model of land extends genealogically from the past to the future (Delougherey & Handley, 2011: 6). Fanon (1963: 34), in *The Wretched of the Earth*, had commented thus: "For a colonized people, the most essential value becomes the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: The land which will bring them bread and above all dignity.

For the Igbos, nature was divine. Trees, rivers, hills, caves, and other components of the environment held divine powers. *Ani* was the god of fertility, *Amadiora*, the god of thunder, *Anyanwu*, was the sun god and *Ufiojioku*, the god of harvest. Igbo believed in the oracle of hills and caves and obeyed its command with utmost sincerity. There was a mention of a big ancient silk-cotton tree, which was sacred. Spirits of good children lived in that tree, wanting to be born. On ordinary days, young women who desired children came to sit under its shade (Achebe, 1958:46).

The Igbos use numerous oral devices, and Achebe illustrates these languages, which were shaped by the landscape. Frequent references to flora and fauna implied the Igbos' closeness to nature. Proverbs like "Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush fire in the harmattan" (Achebe, 1958:2), "A toad does not run in the day time for nothing" (Achebe, 1958:20), "Obierika's house is as busy as an anthill" (Achebe, 1958:79), "The earth quickly came to life and the birds in the forest fluttered and chirped merrily. A vague scent of life and green vegetation was diffused in the air (Achebe, 1958:104), etc., and numerous others were influenced by their environment.

Achebe (1958) incorporates several myths and folk tales to establish the same point. The locust myth, the mosquitoes myth, the myth of the cosmic quarrel between earth and sky, the folktale of tortoise and the birds etc., were evidence of how their folktales were products of their land and landscape. Achebe also presents precolonial Igbo society as structurally organised and culturally rich. This perspective is reinforced by Fanon (1963), who argues that colonialism disrupts the indigenous identity system. Similarly, Mazyru (2000) situates African cultural dislocation within broader global ideological conflicts. Scholars have further examined these

dynamics through ecocritical lenses (Gigol, 2014, DeLoughrey et al., 2011). The postcolonial ecology of *Things Fall Apart* is evident in the way that language develops in a long historical relationship to a particular environment and culture". Thus, nature shaped the mental make-up of the Igbos, which was reflected in the language (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011: 7).

Achebe, after painting the picture of the pre-colonial life, moves to show how the Christian missionaries and colonialists denigrated the philosophy of the native people. In their bid to spread the much-revered 'Christianity', the imperialists and the harbingers of colonial rule stripped from nature and environment all the spiritual meanings held deeply and dear to heart by the Igbos. They tried to persuade the local people to embrace Christianity by establishing that the Igbo religion was Pagan and was bad, but the Christian religion (brought by the colonialists) was holy and therefore was good.

Nature was dismissed and caricatured by the missionaries; the construction of church buildings entailed cutting down trees of the evil forest, which wounded the Igbos' religious beliefs and destroyed the natural habitat of wildlife, flora, and fauna, and in place promoted the advancement of colonial enterprise. In the final scene, when Okonkwo hung himself, it was an offence against the earth. His body is evil; only strangers may touch it (Achebe, 1958: 207). According to the Igbos belief, Okonkwo's dead body must be part of the environment and the surrounding nature after his death. Okonkwo went against nature by killing himself and did not deserve a burial, so must not be allowed to be part of nature. All the meanings attached to such death were immediately slammed by the colonial official, who only found the incident interesting enough to be included in the book he was writing.

In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilisation to different parts of Africa, he had learnt a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a hanged(sic) man from the tree. In the book which he planned to write, he would stress that point... He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (Achebe, 1958: 166).

Achebe gave a heart-rending portrayal of how the Igbos' deeply revered values, customs and traditions were eroded, denigrated and criticised by the imperialists. Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* thus indicates the initial stage of what was to take a devastating turn in the history of colonial exploitation. *Things Fall Apart* is evidence that the act of violating and denigrating nature and the destruction of the environment was inspired by the colonial rule, which did not believe in the spiritual bond between nature and humans. While colonial exploitation was in its initial stage in *Things Fall Apart*, it appeared in full aggression in *Arrow of God*.

In *Arrow of God*, the background is an Igbo village called Umuaro now under colonial rule, where we catch a glimpse of an Igbo community living with nature. The harvest and planting of Igbo's foremost food crop, yams, depended on the appearance of the moon in the night sky. The task of tracking the Lunar movement to mark the passage of time and declare the harvest or planting season was carried out by Ezeulu, the protagonist of the novel, who was the Chief Priest of the village. The dependence on nature was so much that if Ezeulu failed to declare the sight of the new moon, no harvest or planting would be done. The imperialists hardly understood the drastic role of Ezeulu in the community. The imperialists imprisoned him for two months, which resulted

in his failure to keep track of time and declare the harvest or planting season. The colonialists formed “fake saviours” and offered to convert the villagers, who, of course, were restored to life, but had lost the importance and spiritual significance of their festival under the impact of Christianity. The python was a sacred symbol of divinity in Umuaro, but the Christian missionaries encouraged the people to kill the python by calling it a mere snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve (Achebe, 1962: 48). Such words provoked Oduche, Ezeulu’s son, to kill the python by imprisoning it inside a box.

Achebe shows how the different elements of nature, such as rivers, hills, air, fire, stones, etc., were the storehouses of folklore and stories. While Achebe incorporates numerous other stories to prove nature as a living entity for the Igbos, he also indicates that the colonial rulers did not find it beautiful and welcoming, let alone its spiritual value. He points out how George Allen (The colonial official from *Things Fall Apart*), now the writer of the book *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, reflected his uneasiness towards the abundance of Africa’s nature, calling it the deadly fertility of the land (Achebe, 1958:34). Just for the benefit of the colonialists, a road was constructed between Umuaro and Okperi. This resulted in the cutting down of dense forests of the land, leaving a physical scar on its body. Destroying the forests also meant interrupting nature’s course by depriving the deities of their home. The ending of the novel marked the triumph of colonialism as the famine left the villagers at the mercy of the colonial masters and offered them the only alternative, which was to embrace the white man’s god in place of Igbo spirituality, a replacement with the western material culture where the spiritual bond between nature and culture did not exist. The Igbos' holistic philosophy was displaced, and the Western ideas of development and progress (at the cost of nature and environment) would be established. So, as we said earlier on, what was anticipated in *Things Fall Apart* became a reality in *Arrow of God*.

9. Summary

The foregoing analysis has attempted to capture the concerns of Chinua Achebe, whose works have mirrored the Nigerian (African) society since the late 19th century to the present. In *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe tries to show that Nigeria, like other African countries, had a robust culture and sound value system, even though they might not have been perfect. The emergency incursion of the Europeans destabilised the society and all that defined its highest essential points of value. *Things Fall Apart* anticipated the colonialisation, and *Arrow of God* brought it to reality.

The importance of ecohistoricisism comes into play as it is the romance of literature with the environment, and literature with culture and intellectual history. The analysis of Achebe’s two books in this paper has borne sufficient proof of the writer addressing nature and environment, and also pre-colonial tendencies in tandem with historical situation of Nigeria (Africa).

References

- Abrams, M. H, & Harpham, G.G. (2009). *A glossary of literary terms*. 9th Edition. Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Achebe, C. (1964). *Arrow of god*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Achebe, C. (1970). The duty and the involvement of the African writer” in W. Cantey and M. Kilson (Eds). *The African readers: Independent Africa*. Vintage.
- Adama, C. (2016) Eco-critical study of Tanure Ojaide’s *The activist* and “The tale of the Harmattan”. (Doctoral Dissertation, Texas A & M).
- Alumona, V. (2003). Culture and social institution in Achebe’s *Things fall apart: A critical reading*. *Journal of Humanities*, 17, 62-81.
- Anyadike, C. (1986). Individualism in the African novel: A heuristic paradigm. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Ife, Nigeria).
- Cary, J. (1989). *Mister Johnson*. New directions. (Original work published 1939).
- Chinweizu. (2006, March 14). Nigeria: The error of 1914, Lugard and the tragedy of Nigeria. *Vanguard*. <https://allafrica.com/stories/200603140192.html>
- Conrad, J. (1899). *Heart of darkness*. (R. Kimbrough, Ed.; 3rd ed). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1899).
- Delougherey, E. & Handley, G. (Eds.). (2011). Introduction: Postcolonial ecologies: *Literature of the environment*. In *Postcolonial ecologies: Literatures of the environment* (pp.3- 42). Oxford University Press.
- Ecocriticism. (n.d). In Wikipedia. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecocriticism>
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. (C. Farrington, Trans.). Penguin.
- Gigoi, G. (2014). An ecocritical approach to Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart and arrow of God*. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(11) 1- 4.
- Greenblatt, S. (2007). *Learning to curse: Essays in early modern culture*. Routledge.
- Ìsólá, A., Oládípo, O., & Adèlèkè, D. (Eds.) (2010). *Making culture memorable: Essays on language, culture and development*. Hope Publications.
- Mazrui, A. (2000). *Africa in the shadow of civilization: From Cold War of Ideology to the Cold War of Race*. Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation.
- Mikics, D. (Ed.). (2007). *New historicism*. In *A new handbook of literary terms*. Yale University Press.
- New Historicism. (n.d). In Wikipedia. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Historicism.
- Salihu, A. (2017). Revamping through history: A new historicist reading of Obafemi’s “running dreams” and Binebai’s “drums of the Delta”. *Nile Journal of English Studies*, 3(4), 124 - 132.
- Tamuno, T. (1980). British administration in Nigeria” In O. Ikime (Ed), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*. Heinemann Educational Books. pp. 393-413.
- Ugwanyi, M. (n.d), Achebe’s novel as a historical documentation of Nigeria. In *Perspectives of Language and Literature: Essays in Honour of R. U. Uzoezie* (253-270). Caritas University.
- Veesser, H. A. (1989). *Introduction*. In *the new historicism* (Ed.). (pp. xi -xv). Routledge.