

# Colonialism and Ecology: A Postcolonial Ecocriticism of Chinua Achebe's Trilogy

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**Abstract:** Colonialism had a lot of effects on Africa. One of the aspects in which colonialism and its accompanying economic, cultural and political expansion left a mark on the continent is with regards to ecological considerations. It is against this backdrop that this paper entitled "Postcolonial Ecological Setup in Chinua Achebe's Novels" examines the manner in which the Nigerian author presents the relationship between colonialism and environmental stakes in his trilogy *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. The research question that guides the work is: how does Chinua Achebe represent the link between colonialism and the ecology? The hypothesis is based on the premise that Chinua Achebe projects a colonial environment that is suffering from the effects of colonialism. Postcolonial Ecocriticism as outlined by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin constitutes the theoretical framework. The work that is divided into two parts came out with the conclusion that through his trilogy Chinua Achebe depicts colonialism as doing much to the African ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Environment, Fiction, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Degradation, Protection, Vision

## 1. Introduction

From a global perspective, the environment in which man lives is deteriorating rapidly. Morton captures this appropriately as he opines: "The sky is falling, the globe is warming, the ozone hole persists; people are dying of radiation poisoning and other toxic agents; species are being wiped out, thousands per year; the coral reefs have nearly all gone. [...] Environmental legislation is being threatened around the world."<sup>1</sup> This is a serious concern to mankind because the ecosystem's continuous existence is also vital for man's survival on earth and anything that threatens the ecosystem also threatens man's entire existence. Tosic declares that "[...] man feels *vitally* threatened in the ecologically degraded world. Overexploitation of natural resources and man's disregard of the air, water and soil that sustain him have given rise to the question of the survival of both man and the planet (Earth)."<sup>2</sup> Human action is directly responsible for this situation and he has to become more environmentally responsible or face his own doom with the destruction of the ecosystem. Glotfelty and Fromm equally share this opinion as they say: "We have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support system. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face a global catastrophe [...] If we are not part of the solution, we're part of the problem."<sup>3</sup> As far as Africa is concerned, one of the human actions that have had the possibility to influence environmental realities is colonialism. This goes in line with the views of Taylor when he opines that "The central problems raised by environmental crises, however, are political, not individual, in character. The central

message of modern ecology is that the ecology of the earth is immensely complex and integrated, and that human intervention inevitably produces unanticipated and frequently undesirable consequences."<sup>4</sup> He equally adds that "Many human freedoms, likewise, are threatened by ecological restraints."<sup>5</sup> Considering that literature is an artistic interpretation of reality, it is obviously concerned with environmental issues. Handley affirms that literature can help in ameliorating our relationship with the environment as he opines that "[...] we need environmentally oriented literature more than ever, especially if it can remind us, as Jonathan Bate suggests, that "Although we make sense of things by way of words, we do not live apart from the world".<sup>6</sup> The gap this work is out to fill is the impact of imperialism on the African ecology and it aims at analyzing the manner in which the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, presents the impact of colonialism on the ecosystem in his trilogy *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. The research question that guides the study is: how does Chinua Achebe represent the link between colonialism and the ecology? The hypothesis is based on the premise that Chinua Achebe projects a colonial environment that is suffering from the effects of colonialism. As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, Postcolonial Ecocriticism is used and the views of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin will be leant on. Huggan and Tiffin state that Postcolonial Ecocriticism among other things analyse "[...] differences, and potential connections, between Northern and Southern environmentalisms, the ambiguous legacies of development, the problem of subaltern (including non-human) agency, the way genre (pastoral vs. protest literature, for example) determines the scope of the postcolonial and eco/zoocritical imagination,

<sup>1</sup>MORTON, Timothy, *Ecology Without Nature : Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Harvard University Press , 2007, p. 10

<sup>2</sup>TOŠIĆ, Jelica, "Ecocriticism-Interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment"*Working and Living Environmental Protection*2006, p. 44

<sup>3</sup>GLOTFELTY, Cheryl and FROMM, Harold. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp xx-xxxi

<sup>4</sup>TAYLOR, Bob Pepperman , "Environmental Ethics & Political Theory", *Polity*, 1991 p. 581

<sup>5</sup>TAYLOR, Bob Pepperman (1991), (ibid) p. 582

<sup>6</sup>HANDLEY, George B. *New World Poetics Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Whitman, Neruda, and Walcott*. University of Georgia Press, 2007, p. 27

and the necessary tension between activism and aesthetics.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in this work which is divided into two parts, I will analyse the manner in which European environmental ideologies affected the African ecology in the context of imperialism as brought out by Chinua Achebe in his trilogy.

## 2. Pre-colonial Ecological Orientation

In order to have a better understanding of the manner in which imperialism affected the African ecosystem, it is important to take a look at how such an ecosystem was designed before the imperialists brought new realities to Africa. Generally, nature is vital in African spirituality and this paves the way for Africans to protect it. Alias stresses the inseparable nature of man, nature and the deities in ecological discourse as he says: “Nature is both a vehicle for human understanding of the supernatural, the divine, and for a contact between them, and a place for the manifestation of the supernatural powers as well as of the natural forces and elements, which have in themselves the origin of movement and rest [...]”<sup>2</sup> This indicates the intertwined aspect of the African, his deities and nature in the sense that what happens to one affects the others profoundly. Zolfagharkhani and Shadpour state that every element of nature has an oracle on the earth and the Oracles in question have leading rules in the lives of Africans; before adding that “In fact, in the triangle of nature, religion and human being, these Oracles which were the most important components of religion made the communication between the other two parts possible. Before making decisions, Africans consulted with nature to get assured whether their mother earth would allow them.”<sup>3</sup> Some of the deities with natural dimensions are brought out when Gogoi says “For the Igbos, nature was divine. Trees, rivers, hills, cave, and different other components of the environment held divine powers. Ani was the goddess of earth and fertility, Amadiora, the god of thunder, Ufiojioku, the god of harvest and Anyanwu was the sun god. Igbo believed in the Oracle of Hills and Caves and obeyed its command with utmost sincerity.”<sup>4</sup>

Natural items are given divine qualities in the African spiritual setting. When the first white man steps foot in Abame during the planting season, the people like neither him nor his mission and so they kill him and tie up his “iron horse” (bicycle) to the sacred cotton tree. When the rains come, “The iron horse was still tied to the sacred silk-cotton tree.”<sup>5</sup> The narrator says:

<sup>1</sup>HUGGAN, Graham and TIFFIN, Helen “Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment” *Postcolonial Text*, 2009, p. 1

<sup>2</sup>ALIAS, Simona, *An Eco-critical Approach to Chaucer. Representations of the Natural World in the English Literature of the Middle Ages*, Athesina: Athesina Studiorum University, 2011, p. 46

<sup>3</sup>ZOLFAGHARKHANI, Moslem and SHADPOUR, Reyhaneh Sadat, “An Eco-critical Study of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart”, *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 2013, p. 213

<sup>4</sup>GOGOI, Gitanjali, “An Ecocritical Approach to Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God.” *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 2014, p. 3

<sup>5</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 98

Behind the okwoio (sacred house for the initiated) stood a big udala tree which like all udala trees in Umuaro was sacred to ancestral spirits. Even now many children were playing under it waiting for the occasional fall of a ripe, light-brown fruit—the prize for the fastest runner or the luckiest child nearest whom it fell. The tree was full of the tempting fruit but no one young or old was allowed to pick from the tree. If anyone broke this rule he would be visited by all the masked spirits in Umuaro and he would have to wipe off their footsteps with heavy fines and sacrifice.<sup>6</sup>

As seen here, the udala trees always blossom with fruits because of the divinity attached to it. The role of nature in African spirituality is also brought out as natural elements are used for divination. As Unoka breaks the kola nut into lobes, he prays “[...] to their ancestors for life and health, and for protection against their enemies”.<sup>7</sup>

In Achebe’s works, nature is also valorized by the festivals and feasts organized in its honour which go a long way to show the great regard the Igbo people have for such natural elements. One of these festivals celebrated in honour of the flora is the Pumpkin Leaves festival. With regards to the Pumpkin Leaves festival and in reference to Ezeulu, the narrator says:

The festival of the Pumpkin Leaves would fall on the third Know from that day. Tomorrow he would send for his assistants and tell them to announce the day to the six villages of Umuaro. Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watchman.<sup>8</sup>

Here, the people of Umuaro valorize pumpkin leaves by putting aside a festival in his honour. The importance attached to the pumpkin leaves is intensified by the fact that the feast in its honour is ordained by the gods. Another crop honoured with a festival is the yam. The yam is considered the king crop because of the great part it plays in the individual and collective life of the people and it is also celebrated in a feast which is one of the greatest in the land. This yam festival is the only annual ceremony that brings all the inhabitants of the six villages together and is also used as a traditional means of counting the number of people who inhabit each and every village. The gods are also very much involved in this feast not just because the feast was ordained by the gods and each one is announced by them but also because if by the end of the feast the population of any of the villages has declined, sacrifices will be made to the gods so that the lot changes. The narrator resumes this in the words:

<sup>6</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua (1964), *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1954, pp. 195-196

<sup>7</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 5

<sup>8</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua (1964), *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1964, p. 3

At every New Yam feast the coming together of the villages was re-enacted and every grown man in Umuaro took a good-sized seed-yam to the shrine of Ulu and placed it in the heap from his village after circling it round his head; then he took the lump of chalk lying beside the heap and marked his face. It was from these heaps that the elders knew the number of men in each village. If there was an increase over the previous year a sacrifice of gratitude was made to Ulu; but if the number had declined the reason was sought from diviners and a sacrifice of appeasement was ordered. It was also from these yams that Ezeulu selected thirteen with which to reckon the new year.<sup>1</sup>

It can be observed that the importance given to the yam by virtue of the feast organized yearly in its honour is to indicate the important part it plays in the lives of the people and the need for it to be valorized. Anything that touches the yam is affecting the spinal cord of the people because it has a part to play in man's life at different levels. With this cordial link between man and nature, the environment remains largely in its natural state. When Ikemefuna is being taken to the forest to be murdered, the narrator describes the surrounding thus: "The short trees and sparse undergrowth which surrounded the men's village began to give way to giant trees and climbers which perhaps had stood from the beginning of things, untouched by the axe and the bush-fire."<sup>2</sup>

However, as part of the ecosystem, the African depends on elements of nature for food and other needs and so must make use of them. An instance where man kills fowls for food is when people from Okonkwo's village pay him a visit when he is in exile. In a bid to get his guests something to eat, Okonkwo whispers something to his first wife who nods, "and soon the children were chasing one of their cocks".<sup>3</sup> Similarly, when Obierika's daughter, Akuekue, is getting married, the conflicting relationship between man and goats is seen as "Three young men helped Obierika to slaughter the two goats with which the soup was made."<sup>4</sup>

Rituals or sacrifices also lead to man's endangerment of nature in the pre-colonial setup. A case in point concerns Okonkwo's father, Unoka, whose farms do not yield as much as others' do and he resorts to offering fowls as sacrifices to the gods to make his harvest better. Unoka says that every single year, "[...] before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of all land. It is the law of our fathers. I also kill a cock at the shrine of Ifejioku, the god of yams. I clear the bush and set fire to it when it is dry. I sow the yams when the first rain has fallen, and stake them when the young tendrils appear. I weed —"<sup>5</sup> The gods tell him "When your neighbours go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear. They cross seven rivers to make their farms, - you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man."<sup>6</sup>

This shows that though a great protector of nature, the African is not in total harmony with nature. Achebe objectively presents a good number of instances in which man has conflicting relations with nature before colonization. Achebe's objective way of presenting realities is hinted to by El-Dessouky thus; "Achebe paints a vivid picture of Ibo society both before and after the arrival of white men, and avoids the temptation to idealize either culture."<sup>7</sup> A case in point is seen during Ezeudu's funeral where humans kill animals and fell down trees indiscriminately. The narrator says "Ezeudu was a great man, and so all the clan was at his funeral. The ancient drums of death beat, guns and cannon were fired, and men dashed about in frenzy, cutting down every tree or animal they saw, jumping over walls and dancing on the roof."<sup>8</sup> There was, therefore, no total harmony between man and nature in pre-colonial Africa.

Nature itself did cause untold damage and pain on man. The danger nature poses to man can also be seen the year Okonkwo takes eight hundred seed-yams from Nwakibie which is described as the worst year in living memory in climatic terms The narrator says:

The earth burned like hot coals and roasted all the yams that had been sown. Like all good farmers, Okonkwo had begun to sow with the first rains. He had sown four hundred seeds when the rains dried up and the heat returned. He watched the sky all day for signs of rain clouds and lay awake all night. In the morning he went back to his farm and saw the withering tendrils. He had tried to protect them from the smouldering earth by making rings of thick sisal leaves around them. But by the end of the day the sisal rings were burned dry and grey. He changed them every day, and prayed that the rain might fall in the night. But the drought continued for eight market weeks and the yams were killed.<sup>9</sup>

When the rains finally come, "Rain fell as it had never fallen before. For days and nights together it poured down in violent torrents, and washed away the yam heaps."<sup>10</sup>

The man-nature conflict in terms of crops is also seen when cows break loose and feed on people's crops. This points to the fact that humans imprison the cows and limit their movements and these cows also destroy man's crops. The villagers even have a well defined penalty for any man whose cow feeds on the neighbour's crops indicating that this kind of clash is habitual or regular. The night also terrorizes man enormously as extreme darkness causes untold fear in man's hearts. The narrator says: "The night was very quiet. It was always quiet except on moonlight nights. Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals

<sup>1</sup>Ibid p. 202

<sup>2</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua (1958), *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 41

<sup>3</sup>ibid, p. 96

<sup>4</sup>Ibid p. 79

<sup>5</sup>Ibid p. 12

<sup>6</sup>Ibid p. 13

<sup>7</sup> EL-DESSOUKY, Mohamed Fawzy, "The Cultural Impact upon Human Struggle for Social Existence in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart"", *English Language Teaching*, 2010, p. 99

<sup>8</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 84

<sup>9</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 16-17

<sup>10</sup>Ibid p. 17

became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called a string."<sup>1</sup> This paints a vivid picture of the threat and danger nature represents for man. This is further brought out when the Umuofia elders are dialoguing on the reasons that push the most famous palm wine tapper in Umuofia, Obiako, to give up his trade. He is alleged to have stopped tapping palm wine because "[...] the Oracle warned him that he would fall off a palm tree and kill himself".<sup>2</sup>

From all the above, it can be seen that the pre-colonial African generally kept a cordial relationship with nature as seen in the numerous instances where he protects both flora and fauna to permit them to develop. However, there are instances in which he destroys plants and animals but such acts are for his survival as part of the ecosystem. He thus disrupts nature proportionately to have food, to offer sacrifices for better crop yields, or to keep himself and his environment out of harm's way. The pre-colonial African maintains such a harmonious relationship with nature because all his life is centered on natural elements. In addition to being a source of food, divination, spirituality and shelter as explained earlier, nature provides medicine to heal man from various illnesses, provides items for decoration and distinction and provides so many utensils he uses daily. In this light, Ezinma falls sick of "iba" and Okonkwo "[...] took his machete and went into the bush to collect the leaves and grasses and barks of trees that went into making the medicine for iba."<sup>3</sup> When he puts them in a pot to boil, he instructs his wife Ekwefi thus: "You must watch the pot carefully [...] and don't allow it to boil over. If it does its power will be gone."<sup>4</sup> The use of natural items for decoration and distinction in the African cultural setup comes to play in the description of Nwaka, the rich multi-titled man, during the meeting of all the villages in Umuaro to discuss their land problem with Okperi. As he walks to and fro while speaking, the narrator says "[...] the eagle feather in his red cap and bronze band on his ankle marked him out as one of the lords of the land — a man favoured by Eru, the god of riches."<sup>5</sup> An illustration of the role of nature in man's utensils is seen during the Yam Festival when "All cooking pots, calabashes and wooden bowls were thoroughly washed, especially the wooden mortar in which yam was pounded"<sup>6</sup> and when the narrator indicates that the ceiling of Obi's father's house are made up of bamboo. It can thus be said that the pre-colonial African kept a harmonious relationship with nature because both connect both physically and spiritually and have great bearings on each other.

### 3. Colonial Environmental Dynamics

In his trilogy, Chinua Achebe seeks to bring out the true history of Africa and particularly Nigeria into the lamplight including the effects of its contact with the European

colonizers as Alam opines that: "One of Chinua Achebe's goals in writing *Things Fall Apart* was to correct a whole history of misrepresentations of his people and country in occidental discourse."<sup>7</sup> It is also very possible that some of these negative effects of colonization on the African societies can be ecological in nature which can make one feel safe to say, therefore, that imperialism had an impact on Achebe's ecological vision. Achebe presents a pre-colonial African society in which man's relationship with nature was largely a peaceful co-existence. However, colonial powers came and changed this relationship into a much more strained one. This is because colonialism by definition was out to exploit nature as Gogoi states that "The present day environmental predicament is a sure result of the age old practice of exploitation of nature and abuse of the environment for the benefit of human civilization. While the reshaping of nature has been executed throughout human history, the episode of European colonialism is the most outstanding example of human interference with nature as the whole enterprise of colonization was based on the idea of exploiting nature and its resources."<sup>8</sup>

An instance of the pre-colonial African's harmonious co-existence with nature that was disrupted by the advent of colonialism is man's relationship with the python. Achebe presents a situation where Africans consider the python as sacred and it was forbidden for anybody to harm it in any way; not to talk of killing it. Achebe says:

The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as "Our Father," and was allowed to go wherever it chose, even into people's beds. It ate rats in the house and sometimes swallowed hens' eggs. If a clansman killed a royal python accidentally, he made sacrifices of atonement and performed an expensive burial ceremony such as was done for a great man. No punishment was prescribed for a man who killed the python knowingly. Nobody thought that such a thing could ever happen.<sup>9</sup>

However, when the whites colonized Africa and installed their churches therein, they allowed and even encouraged their followers to kill the python. Mr. Goodcountry tells his fellow Christians: "If we are Christians, we must be ready to die for the faith." He adds, "You must be ready to kill the python as the people of the rivers killed the iguana. You address the python as Father. It is nothing but a snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve. If you are afraid to kill it do not count yourself a Christian."<sup>10</sup> He alludes to the Bible story of a snake tempting Eve and bringing sin into mankind to raise the emotions of the Christians beyond the fear of what may befall them traditionally if they kill a python. Mr. Brown, the white missionary, is not as

<sup>1</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua (1958), *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 7

<sup>2</sup>Ibid p. 15

<sup>3</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, 1958, *ibid* p. 53

<sup>4</sup>Ibid p. 60

<sup>5</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua (1964), *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1964, p. 16

<sup>6</sup>Ibid p. 26

<sup>7</sup>ALAM, Fakrul, "Reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* Ecocritically" *Bhatter College Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2010, p. 40

<sup>8</sup>GOGOI, Gitanjali, "An Ecocritical Approach to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 2014, p. 1

<sup>9</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 112

<sup>10</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1964, p. 47

overzealous as Mr. Goodcountry as he always restrains his followers from killing the python. However, this restraint does not come from his love for or desire to protect the python but rather because he does not want to provoke “the wrath of the clan.”<sup>1</sup> However, even Brown is unable to restrain Enoch who is said to have been cursed by his father, the priest of the snake cult, after killing and eating the python. Another Christian who is accused of killing the python is Okoli but “Okoli was not there to answer. He had fallen ill on the previous night. Before the day was over he was dead. His death showed that the gods were still able to fight their own battles. The clan saw no reason then for molesting the Christians.”<sup>2</sup> This indicates that the Igbos did not just protect the python on their own but their gods were there to carry out punitive justice on anybody who destabilized the balance they have with nature; in this case the python.

The prospect of the Africans’ relationship with nature as epitomized here by the python is rather bleak with the coming of colonialism and its church arm. This is because Christians as young as Oduche, Ezeulu’s son, have been encouraged to kill a python to the extent that he attempts doing it by locking one in the box to die by itself; and so he is not guilty of its death. The Christian preaching in favour of killing pythons polarized Umuaro not just into pro-python killing Christians and anti-python-killing non-Christians but cracks appeared and were getting enlarged even among the non-Christians themselves. That explains why people who are considered as Ezeulu’s enemies rhetorically ask “If the Chief Priest of Ulu could send his son among people who kill and eat the sacred python and commit other evils what did he expect ordinary men and women to do? The lizard who threw confusion into his mother’s funeral rite did he expect outsiders to carry the burden of honouring his dead?”<sup>3</sup> Ezeulu is metaphorically referred to as a lizard that spoils its mother’s funeral because as a chief priest of ulu, it is wrong for him to have sent his son, Oduche, to the white man’s church and so they were not willing to sympathize with him when Oduche attempts to kill a python. The threat of Christians to pythons is so great that the children in Umuaro form a song indicative of this. When Ezeulu hears his children Nwafo and Obiageli singing the song and asks them what they mean, they say: “We were saying: Python, run! There is a Christian here.” They even believe as Akwuba tells them that “a python runs away as soon as it hears that.”<sup>4</sup> This indicates that the colonial powers through the church have destroyed the peaceful co-existence that prevailed between the natives and nature as represented here by the python. This purposeless destruction of nature as seen in the killing of the python just to prove oneself as a faithful Christian contrasts the situation of the natives who harm nature only out of necessity.

Another level of colonialism’s ill effects on nature is seen in the situation where Okonkwo and the other elders are put in

detention for holding a meeting to see what else to do after burning the church in retaliation to a Christian convert publicly beheading the Ogwugwu masquerade. The commissioner tells them that “I have decided that you will pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries. You will be released as soon as you agree to this and undertake to collect that fine from your people.”<sup>5</sup> By asking the elders to pay fines in natural element like cowries before being released, the commissioner makes it clear that colonization cannot have a good relationship with nature as it is out to exploit the natural resources of the colonized areas. The natives see the whites from a negative perspective from the beginning and that is why, as Obierika tells the exiled Okonkwo and the rest that the Abame people killed the white man and decided to tie up his “iron horse” (bicycle) to the sacred tree. The narrator says: “This was before the planting season began. For a long time nothing happened. The rains had come and yams had been sown. The iron horse was still tied to the sacred silk-cotton tree [...]”<sup>6</sup> When Achebe refers to the white man’s bicycle as an iron horse, it is to indicate the strenuous relationship the colonialists are likely going to entertain with nature as contrasted to the native realities that are associated to a tree to which they offer much protection and dignity since it is considered sacred.

The Africans’ cordial link with nature is also seen when Okonkwo commits suicide. The villagers cannot bring him down from the tree and bury him because it is an abomination to both mankind and nature for a man to kill himself. A villager tells the commissioner who asks why they themselves cannot bring Okonkwo’s corpse down and bury that “It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down, because you are strangers.” He adds that “When he has been buried we will then do our duty by him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land.”<sup>7</sup> This indicates that the African holds natural elements like land in high esteem as opposed to the European colonizers who lack the kind of bond Africans have with nature and this has an effect on Achebe’s presentation of nature in the colonial era as being less protected. To give this some verisimilitude, Achebe makes historical allusions to the period when the whites were fighting each other for the control of Africa and its resources. In this line, as far as Winterbottom is concerned, “His strong belief in the value of the British mission in Africa was, strangely enough, strengthened during the Cameroon campaign of 1916 when he fought against the Germans”<sup>8</sup>. He further makes allusion to the British and French colonial policies in Africa, crediting the influence on colonialism on Achebe’s views of nature, as he says:

We British are a curious people, doing everything halfheartedly. Look at the French. They are not ashamed to

<sup>1</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua (1958), (*ibid*) p. 126

<sup>2</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 114

<sup>3</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1964, P 125

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid* p. 204-205

<sup>5</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua (1958), (*ibid*) p. 137

<sup>6</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 98

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p147

<sup>8</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1964, p. 30

teach their culture to backward races under their charge. Their attitude to the native ruler is clear. They say to him: This land has belonged to you because you have been strong enough to hold it. By the same token it now belongs to us. If you are not satisfied come out and fight us.' What do we British do? We flounder from one expedient to its opposite. We do not only promise to secure old savage tyrants on their thrones — or more likely filthy animal skins — we not only do that, but we now go out of our way to invent chiefs where there were none before. They make me sick."<sup>1</sup>

It is worth noting that the Mbanta people never wanted the Christian missionaries to settle in their land in the same way as they fought against the other branches of colonialism. This explains why they choose to give the missionaries the evil forest as the place to settle in; when they believe the evil spirits will not allow them to be there.

They asked for a plot of land to build on, An evil forest was where the clan buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox. It was also the dumping ground for highly potent fetishes of great medicine men when they died. An evil forest was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness. It was such a forest that, the rulers of Mbanta gave to the missionaries. They did not really want them near to the clan, and so they made them that offer which nobody in his right senses would accept....They offered them as much of the Evil Forest as they cared to take. And to their greatest amazement the missionaries thanked them and burst into song. "They do not understand," said some of the elders."But they will understand when they go to their plot of land tomorrow morning."<sup>2</sup>

By directing the white missionaries to settle in the evil forest, the villagers indicated that they were being sent there like any of the other groups of people that they considered undesirable and/or to harmful mankind and nature. The rejection of the church for its negative connotations for nature and mankind is brought out in Ezeulu's household. When Nwafo, Ezeulu's child, tells him that the church bells always says: "Leave your yam, leave your cocoyam and come to church." as Oduche the church goer explains, Ezeulu thoughtfully replies that "It tells them to leave their yam and their cocoyam, does it? Then it is singing the song of extermination."<sup>3</sup>

Achebe goes beyond colonialism to neo-colonialism and its connection with nature. This is brought out as he sees his compatriots looking forward anxiously receive the very politicians who exploit them for the benefit of the white colonial masters.

As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gun powder in

honor of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical<sup>4</sup>

Here, in face of the naivety of his people in the midst of the great exploitation of their resources by their political elite for the benefit of the white neo-colonialists, Achebe resorts to nature for justice. He hopes for a miracle and for the natural element, thunder, to tell the people the truth about how their resources are being carried away by the same politicians they are waiting for and their neo-colonial masters. This is done in a bid to better the relationship between man and nature as Slaymaker says "Black African critics and writers have traditionally embraced nature writing, land uses, and landscape themes that are pertinent to national and local cultural claims and that also function as pastoral reminiscences or even projections of a golden age when many of the environmental evils resulting from colonial and the exploitation of indigenous resources have been remediated."<sup>5</sup>To confirm this, Achebe in the essay "The Novelist as Teacher" declares unequivocally that it is part of his "business as a writer to teach" any African boy with an inferiority complex induced by colonial stereotyping about his world to believe "that there is nothing disgraceful about the African weather, that the palm tree is a fit subject for poetry"<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The colonization of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular had a great impact on Achebe's vision of man's relationship with nature. Africans had largely peaceful links with natural elements like the python, land and trees and considered some of them sacred after giving them divine attributes. The pre-colonial African's protection of nature is highlighted when Okonkwo sees a few leaves cut from a banana stalk and gets angry storming his compound with the question "Who killed this banana tree?"<sup>7</sup> However, when the colonial authorities arrive, they disrupt this largely peaceful and harmonious co-existence between man and nature by encouraging not just the exploitation of natural resources but also the killing of animals like the python which Africans considered sacred. Thus, colonialism shaped Africa's ecological setup and also influenced Achebe's ecological perspective as its ill effects on the African ecosystem are highlighted in Achebe's trilogy.

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<sup>4</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *A Man of the People*. New York: Anchor Pub, 1967, p. 7

<sup>5</sup>SLAYMAKER, William "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call for Global green and Black African Responses", in Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (ed) *African Literature; an Anthology of criticism and Theory*, 2007, p. 683

<sup>6</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann, 1975, p. 58

<sup>7</sup>Ibid p. 27

<sup>1</sup>Ibid p. 34

<sup>2</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1958, p. 105

<sup>3</sup>ACHEBE, Chinua, *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1964, p. 42

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