

Decoding Ecological Discourses in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: An Ecolinguistic Approach

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Abstract

This study examines ecological discourses in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* through an ecolinguistic lens. Ecolinguistics explores the interplay between language and environment, highlighting how linguistic practices influence and reflect ecological contexts (Stibbe, 2021). Despite its significance, African literature's engagement with ecological issues, especially Achebe's work, remains underexplored. Achebe's novel, known for its detailed portrayal of Igbo society and environmental interactions, has primarily been analyzed through socio-political and cultural lenses, leaving ecological dimensions less examined. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how ecological themes in *Things Fall Apart* reflect Igbo cultural and environmental values. Using a qualitative approach, the research employs literary analysis within an ecolinguistic framework to interpret key passages and recurring ecological themes. Findings reveal that Achebe portrays Igbo society's harmony with nature through sustainable agricultural practices, spiritual reverence for nature, and communal ecological responsibility. The study also uncovers how colonialism disrupts this harmony, leading to environmental degradation and the erosion of traditional ecological knowledge. Characters like Okonkwo illustrate the impact of colonialism on personal and communal environmental relationships. The discussion highlights the novel's critique of colonial disruption and the value of preserving indigenous ecological wisdom. This research enriches the field of ecolinguistics by advancing understanding of African ecological narratives and calls for further exploration of non-Western ecological discourses and comparative studies with Western traditions. The study underscores literature's role in ecological reflection and advocacy, opening new avenues for research.

Keywords: colonial impact; environmental harmony; indigenous knowledge; linguistic practices; sustainable practices

1. Introduction

Ecolinguistics, a novel paradigm that emerged in the 1990s, expands the focus of sociolinguistics by examining not only the social context of language but also its ecological context, which encompasses the interactions between various species and the environment (Fill & Penz, 2022). It is an interdisciplinary field that explores the relationship between language and the environment, investigating how linguistic practices shape and are shaped by ecological contexts. This includes analyzing how language influences the framing of environmental issues and ecological behaviors (Stibbe, 2021). As (Poole, 2022) explains, ecolinguistics examines how language mediates our engagement with physical spaces, nonhuman animals, and the broader environment.

(Stibbe, 2015) emphasizes the connection between language and ecology, asserting that language structures our thoughts, conceptions, ideologies, and worldviews, which ultimately shape how we treat one another and the environment. Ecolinguistic analysis seeks to uncover the underlying "stories" that shape our environmental values, promoting either ecological preservation or unsustainable behaviors. These stories—whether ideologies, metaphors, frames, or beliefs—can reveal our collective environmental beliefs and provide insights into how language reinforces or challenges ecological practices.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* serves as a valuable text for exploring ecolinguistic themes, as it intricately portrays the deep connection between the Igbo people and their natural environment (Achebe, 1995). The novel not only reflects the Igbo's sustainable ecological practices but also captures the impact of colonialism on both cultural and environmental systems. By analyzing the ecological discourses in *Things Fall Apart*, this study aims to contribute to the growing field of ecolinguistics by exploring how language, culture, and the environment intersect in African literature.

2. Literature Review

The field of ecolinguistics dates back over 50 years, beginning with (Haugen, 1972) reference to it as "the study of the interactions between any given language and its environment" (p. 325). However, the term "ecolinguistics" was first coined by French sociolinguist Jean Baptiste

Marcellesi in 1975. Since then, various texts and earlier connections between language and the environment have been uncovered, including the works of (Hagège, 1993) and (Fill, 1998), which serve as historical precedents for the field. Over time, interest in ecolinguistics has grown, with increasing emphasis on using linguistic tools to address environmental concerns, raise awareness, and promote a sense of responsibility to mitigate environmental damage.

Ecolinguistics has emerged as a multidisciplinary field at the intersection of linguistics, ecology, and environmental studies. (Kamarullah & Yanti, 2024) explain that ecolinguistics explores the relationship between language and the ecological environment, encompassing humans, animals, and nature. Supporting this view, (Wardana & Hidayati, 2024) describe ecolinguistics as a field that investigates the connections between language, culture, and the environment. A key figure in the discipline, (Stibbe, 2015), highlights the vital role of language in shaping human perceptions of the environment. His approach, which involves uncovering the “stories” or narratives embedded in language, has been instrumental in understanding how language influences ecological behavior. According to Stibbe, these narratives manifest as metaphors, ideologies, and frames that shape societal attitudes toward nature, thus impacting ecological sustainability. (Fill & Penz, 2022) reinforce this perspective, arguing that language plays a critical role in shaping human attitudes toward the environment. Additionally, (Stanlaw, 2020) points out that ecolinguistics is a developing subfield that examines both the physical and social-ecological contexts in which language is used, as well as how language and discourse impact the environment.

Previous studies on *Things Fall Apart* have been extensively analyzed from various perspectives. From a literary standpoint, scholars such as (Altıntaş, 2015), (Purwarno & Suhendi, 2017), (Arbaoui, 2018), (Dlnya, 2021), and (Rashid, 2018) have explored themes of post-colonialism, cultural conflict, and the representation of African identity. Their analyses emphasize the novel’s role in addressing the complexities of Igbo society and its transformation under colonial rule. In the field of linguistics, researchers like (Ebim, 2021), (Livina Nkeiruka & E., 2022), and (Purnomosasi et al., 2021) have focused on the linguistic aspects of Achebe’s work, particularly the use of the Igbo language, proverbs, and narrative style. Their work highlights how these elements reinforce cultural authenticity and reveal socio-linguistic dynamics within the novel. Additionally, the translation of *Things Fall Apart* into various languages has been examined by scholars such as (Arenberg, 2016), (Ayoola, 2021), (Babaii & Rashed, 2017), (Mary, 2018), (Mkhize, 2000), (Moruwawon, 2012), and (Paziraie, 2012). They have analyzed the challenges of translating cultural nuances and linguistic elements, discussing how different translations impact the novel’s reception and interpretation across diverse cultural contexts. These approaches underscore the multifaceted nature of *Things Fall Apart* and its enduring significance in literary, linguistic, and translation studies.

Previous research has underscored the pivotal role of literature in fostering environmental awareness and promoting sustainability. Literary texts provide valuable insights into the relationship between humans and the environment, prompting readers to reflect on their own interactions with nature. (Mackenthun, 2021) and (Guha, 2022) contend that literature, particularly through the lens of ecocriticism, plays a crucial role in raising awareness about environmental justice and advocating for biocentric perspectives. Similarly, (Sarawathi & Balakrishnan, 2021) and (Hou et al., 2022) highlight that ecocriticism encourages readers to critically engage with ecological issues presented in literature, thereby deepening their understanding of contemporary environmental challenges. In response to these environmental concerns, increasing public awareness has become a critical priority. Environmental education offers an effective means of addressing this need (Andi & Arafah, 2017). The educational system plays a vital role in this process by incorporating learning materials that connect students with environmental issues (Arafah et al., 2020). (Anufrieva et al., 2020) further argue that cultivating a high level of ecological awareness within society hinges on effective environmental education. (Hart et al., 2020) also emphasize that literature can be a powerful tool for imparting character education, using novels to shape students’ values. Therefore, environmental conservation must be a key priority in shaping the character of the nation’s youth, and education plays a crucial role in achieving this goal (Yun-Sen et al., 2020); (Xuan, 2021); (Poskus, 2017); (Anufrieva et al., 2020). Literature, as an educational tool, is particularly effective in fostering human character development due to its didactic function (Hersila, 2019); (Hart et al., 2020). Teaching literature helps students gain cultural awareness and appreciate the values embedded within texts that reflect the human experience (Sunardi et al., 2018). These cultural values encompass the behaviors and actions of a society, guiding individuals in cultivating positive attitudes that serve as a moral compass in life (Takwa et al., 2022).

However, many of the existing researches in ecolinguistics have centered on Western literary traditions, leaving non-Western narratives, particularly those from African literature, underexplored. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, though extensively studied for its socio-political and cultural dimensions, has not been adequately analyzed for its ecological themes. Scholars like (Kumar, 2021), (Ebim, 2021), and (Siwi et al., 2022) have highlighted the strong connection between the Igbo people and their environment, emphasizing the sacred significance of nature within Igbo culture. Yet, the ecological aspects of Achebe’s novel remain largely overlooked in both literary and linguistic studies.

There is a growing body of research examining the intersection of language, culture, and ecology, but this intersection has not been sufficiently addressed within the context of African literature. Scholars such as (Paşcalău et al., 2021) and (Awny, 2023) have recognized the need to explore how different cultures, particularly indigenous African cultures, perceive and interact with the environment through language. Furthermore, (Mühlhäusler, 2003) argues that language plays a crucial role in promoting either ecological harmony or degradation, suggesting that linguistic practices are keys to understanding ecological sustainability.

This study seeks to address the gaps in ecolinguistic research by focusing on the ecological discourses in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. While previous studies have examined the novel’s cultural and historical significance, its ecological dimensions remain underexplored. By analyzing the novel’s ecological narratives, this research aims to shed light on the indigenous environmental knowledge embedded in

African literature, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how language, culture, and ecology intersect in non-Western contexts.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for exploring the complex and nuanced ecological discourses in literary texts. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth analysis of textual data, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how ecological relationships and themes are constructed and represented in literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study did not employ numerical or quantitative data; instead, it utilized a qualitative interpretive approach, which is particularly effective for achieving a deep and thorough understanding of the research objectives (Wang et al., 2019). Literary analysis serves as the primary method for this research. This involves a close reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to identify and interpret the ecological discourses within the text. Literary analysis is effective for examining the intricate layers of meaning in literary works, particularly how language is used to convey ecological themes and cultural values (Barry, 2017).

The data for this study consist of selected passages and dialogues from *Things Fall Apart* that illustrate key ecological discourses. These selections focus on descriptions of the natural environment, interactions between characters and their surroundings, and references to ecological practices and beliefs. The criteria for selecting specific texts include passages that directly address ecological relationships, environmental changes, and the impact of human activities on nature, texts that highlight the cultural and environmental values of the Igbo society, illustrating how these values are intertwined with their ecological practices and worldview, and selections that play a crucial role in the development of the novel's themes and the portrayal of ecological disruptions caused by colonialism.

The analysis is guided by an Ecolinguistic framework, which examines how language constructs and reflects ecological relationships (Stibbe, 2021). This framework helps decode the ecological discourses in *Things Fall Apart* and understand their cultural and environmental implications.

Tools and techniques for decoding ecological discourses would be discourse analysis and thematic analysis. Discourse analysis is used to analyze how language is used to construct ecological discourses in the novel. It focuses on identifying patterns, themes, and linguistic features that convey ecological meanings (Gee, 2014). Thematic Analysis is employed to identify and categorize recurring ecological themes in the text. It facilitates the organization of data into coherent themes, providing insights into the dominant ecological discourses in the novel (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To ensure the accuracy and cultural sensitivity of the analysis, the study also pays careful attention to the cultural context of *Things Fall Apart*. This involves understanding and respecting the Igbo cultural values and ecological knowledge depicted in the novel.

4. Results and Discussion

In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe presents ecological themes that highlight the Igbo people's deep connection with their environment. Through vivid descriptions of the land, farming practices, and spiritual beliefs, Achebe shows nature's critical role in shaping Igbo culture. The Igbo people's dependence on and reverence for the natural world is woven into their rituals and customs, reflecting an environmental consciousness that aligns with ecolinguistic principles. Achebe illustrates this balance through their agricultural practices and worship of Aní, the earth goddess, showing both practical and symbolic ties to nature. This analysis explores how Achebe uses the Igbo's harmonious relationship with their environment to critique colonial disruptions and underscore sustainable living.

4.1 The Igbo Society's Harmony with Natural Surroundings

In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe intricately depicts the symbiotic relationship between the Igbo people and their natural environment. This bond extends beyond mere survival, embedding itself in the spiritual, agricultural, and communal aspects of their society. The novel's portrayal of this connection reflects a deeper commentary on sustainability and the critical role ecological balance plays in shaping cultural identity. (Manugeren et al., 2023) similarly assert that the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature is shaped by their inherent characteristics, with symbiotic mutualism grounded in a shared purpose of mutual well-being. Coexistence with nature requires cooperation, mutual support, and tolerance, forming an interconnected relationship where all elements are interdependent and work toward the common goal of protecting and preserving the natural world.

Agriculture forms the backbone of Igbo society, and Achebe uses it to illustrate the community's alignment with nature. The protagonist Okonkwo's livelihood revolves around the cultivation of yams, symbolizing not just sustenance but social status and spiritual fulfillment. Through Okonkwo's agricultural challenges, Achebe presents the Igbo as highly attuned to the natural rhythms that dictate their farming cycles, demonstrating a sophisticated ecological understanding.

4.1.1 Nature's Cycles and Human Vulnerability

Achebe underscores the fragility of the human-environment relationship through Okonkwo's struggles with failed crops: "The year that Okonkwo took eight hundred seed-yams from Nwakibie was the worst year in living memory. Nothing happened at its proper time... [the rains] came in violent torrents, and washed away the yam heaps" (Achebe, 1995, p. 7).

This passage highlights the Igbo community's reliance on nature's cycles for agricultural success. The heavy rains ruining the yam harvest reveal both their deep ecological understanding and vulnerability to environmental disruptions. This interdependence shows a community

thriving through ecological awareness but facing immediate risks when these natural cycles are disturbed. Okonkwo's misfortune emphasizes the fragile balance essential for survival, casting nature as both a sustainer and a disruptor.

4.1.2 Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Achebe vividly portrays Igbo agricultural practices as rooted in sustainability, demonstrated through methods such as intercropping and fallowing: "As the rains became heavier the women planted maize, melons, and beans between the yam mounds. The yams were then staked, first with little sticks and later with tall and big tree branches" (Achebe, 1995, p. 10).

The practice of intercropping—planting multiple crops in a single field—demonstrates an environmentally conscious method that ensures the land remains fertile and productive. This agricultural strategy minimizes soil depletion, controls pests naturally, and maximizes land use, reflecting the Igbo people's sophisticated understanding of ecological management. Achebe presents these methods not merely as agricultural techniques but as a reflection of the Igbo's respect for the land's capacity and limitations.

Achebe further highlights the tradition of leaving land fallow between planting seasons: "It was the season of rest between the harvest and the next planting season. The only work that men did at this time was covering the walls of their compound with new palm fronds" (Achebe, 1995, p.22)

This seasonal break indicates a deep ecological awareness, where the Igbo allow the land to rejuvenate. By resting the soil, they ensure its long-term fertility, aligning human activity with the regenerative cycles of nature. Such practices are integral to maintaining the environmental harmony necessary for both ecological and cultural survival. The minimal activity during this period, beyond agricultural labor, symbolizes a cultural rhythm in tune with nature's regenerative processes, reinforcing the theme of balance and renewal.

4.2 Spiritual Beliefs and Ecological Interdependence

Chinua Achebe intricately connects the natural world with the spiritual life of the Igbo people, presenting a unified worldview where ecology and spirituality are deeply intertwined. The Igbo's reverence for nature goes beyond practicality, reflecting their belief in ancestral spirits dwelling within the land. This cyclical relationship between the living, the dead, and the environment highlights an inherent ecological interdependence that defines their existence.

Achebe illustrates this connection in *Things Fall Apart*:

"The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died because an old man was very close to the ancestors" (Achebe, 1995, p. 40)

This passage highlights the Igbo belief in the unity of life, death, and nature. The land, seen as sacred and inhabited by ancestral spirits, symbolizes the cyclical nature of existence. For the Igbo, caring for the land is a way of honoring both nature and ancestors, reinforcing a commitment to environmental stewardship. Achebe's portrayal emphasizes that the Igbo view humans as part of an unbroken cycle, rooted in and connected through the earth, with the land seen as an eternal, shared space that demands reverence and preservation across generations.

4.2.1 Igbo Spiritual Beliefs and Nature

In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe intricately weaves Igbo spiritual beliefs with cultural and environmental values, demonstrating how these elements are interrelated and essential to the Igbo way of life. The Igbo people's spiritual beliefs are deeply connected to nature, as reflected in their reverence for deities like the Earth goddess, Ani, who symbolizes fertility and moral order. Achebe emphasizes this sacred connection in passages like "Ani, the owner of all land" (Achebe, 1995: 5). Here, the earth is not merely physical ground but a divine entity, central to the community's spiritual and moral framework. The New Yam Festival further exemplifies this connection by honoring *Ani* for providing fertility and ensuring the harvest, as seen in Achebe's depiction: "Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity... The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia" (Achebe, 1995, p. 11)

Igbo spiritual beliefs shape both rituals and environmental values, emphasizing respect for the land through sustainable practices like communal farming and the preservation of sacred groves. Cultural values promote collective responsibility and harmony with nature, exemplified by communal gatherings for farming on the *ilo*, the village playground. Achebe's description—"The whole village turned out on the *ilo*, men, women, and children. They stood round in a huge circle..." (p.15)—illustrates the unity and shared duty in Igbo agriculture, fostering sustainable land use and ecological balance.

This respect extends to sacred spaces, protected as natural preserves under the fear of divine punishment. The ritual surrounding Agbala's shrine—"No one had ever beheld Agbala, except his priestess... The fire did not burn with a flame" (p.5)—acts as a cultural deterrent against environmental harm, blending spirituality with ecology. Through these interconnected beliefs and practices, Achebe shows the Igbo as profoundly tied to their environment, reinforcing a worldview where nature, spirituality, and culture are inseparable.

4.2.2 Sacred Natural Spaces in Igbo Belief

Achebe further highlights the spiritual and ecological significance of certain natural spaces, such as sacred groves and trees, in Igbo society. These elements of nature are not only revered for their physical presence but also for their spiritual power, linking the natural world with cultural and religious practices. The silk-cotton tree, for instance, holds special significance: "Behind them was the big and

ancient silk-cotton tree which was sacred. Spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting to be born. On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade” (Achebe, 1995, p. 15)

This passage reflects the sacredness of natural spaces like the silk-cotton tree, which serves as a spiritual symbol. The belief that spirits reside within the tree connects human life cycles to the natural world, portraying an ecological worldview where nature and humanity are closely linked. Achebe demonstrates that nature is not just a resource but a sacred, life-giving force.

Similarly, Achebe conveys the tension between colonialism and indigenous spirituality in a brief but poignant passage: “The iron horse was still tied to the sacred silk-cotton tree” (p.46). Here, the “iron horse” (a bicycle) symbolizes the foreign influence disrupting the spiritual and natural balance of the Igbo community. By tying the symbol of colonialism to the sacred tree, Achebe captures the violation of the indigenous ecological and spiritual harmony.

4.2.3 Nature's Cycles and Mysteries

Achebe often emphasizes the cyclical and mysterious nature of the environment in *Things Fall Apart*. One example is the description of locusts, which highlights the Igbo's deep respect for nature's rhythms:

“The elders said locusts came once in a generation, reappeared every year for seven years and then disappeared for another lifetime. They went back to their caves in a distant land, where they were guarded by a race of stunted men” (Achebe, 1995, p. 17)

This passage portrays the locusts' arrival as part of a natural cycle that is beyond human control, suggesting that the Igbo people live in harmony with these patterns. Achebe also adds a supernatural element to the locusts' disappearance, further reinforcing the Igbo's belief in the mysterious, almost divine qualities of nature. This cyclical understanding of nature is a core part of their worldview, illustrating the integration of ecological and spiritual knowledge.

4.2.4 The Concept of Chi and Ecological Spirituality

The concept of **chi**, or personal god, is central to the Igbo understanding of individual fate and the natural world. Achebe uses **chi** to reflect the Igbo belief in a spiritual force that governs human actions and life paths:

“A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his *chi*. The saying of the elders was not true — that if a man said yea his *chi* also affirmed. Here was a man whose *chi* said nay despite his own affirmation” (Achebe, 1995, p. 43)

Through **chi**, Achebe explores the relationship between individuals, fate, and nature. The **chi** represents the interconnectedness between humans and the broader ecological and spiritual world, suggesting that one's destiny is influenced by both personal will and natural forces. This balance between human effort and the guiding hand of nature mirrors the Igbo's respect for the cycles and mysteries of the environment.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe demonstrates that Igbo spiritual beliefs are deeply rooted in nature. Their reverence for the Earth goddess, their agricultural rituals, and their connection to sacred natural spaces all highlight the integral role that nature plays in their spiritual and cultural identity. Through these elements, Achebe portrays a culture that views the natural world not only as a source of sustenance but as a sacred, life-sustaining force that demands respect and reverence.

4.3 Communal Responsibility and Ecological Wisdom

The communal nature of Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart* is deeply intertwined with their interaction with the environment, particularly through farming. Farming is not just an individual or family activity but a shared responsibility that reinforces social cohesion and collective care for the land. Achebe portrays this as part of their ecological wisdom: “For three or four moons it demanded hard work and constant attention from cock-crow till the chickens went back to roost” (Achebe, 1995, p. 10)

Achebe uses time markers tied to natural cycles, such as moons and daylight, to illustrate how the Igbo align their agricultural and communal activities with nature's rhythms. Farming is a cooperative effort, involving family members in planting, weeding, and harvesting, reflecting a communal stewardship of the land. This shared labor is essential in maintaining ecological balance, as it distributes responsibilities and fosters a sustainable relationship with the environment. By emphasizing communal participation in farming, Achebe highlights how the Igbo maintain a symbiotic relationship with nature. Their agricultural practices are sustainable, as they work in harmony with natural cycles, preserving the land's fertility and ensuring the well-being of both the environment and the community.

Achebe's portrayal of Igbo society highlights the deep spiritual and cultural significance of agriculture. (Neupane, 2022) and (Danlami, 2020) emphasize the importance of festivals in African life, noting how these celebrations foster community cohesion. These cultural practices not only enhance the relationship between people and the natural world but also instill an appreciation for ecological balance and the sustainable coexistence of all elements in the ecosystem. In Umuofia, festivals and rituals are intricately connected to the agricultural calendar, with the New Yam Festival standing out as a major event that both celebrates the harvest and acknowledges the rhythms of nature: “The feast of the New Yam was approaching and Umuofia was in a festival mood... The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia” (Achebe, 1995, p. 11)

This passage reflects the community's joyful celebration of nature's abundance. The festival symbolizes the people's collective recognition of their dependence on the earth and their responsibility to honor it through rituals and ceremonies, fostering a deep ecological appreciation. The communal bond formed through these celebrations reflects their interconnectedness with the environment.

Achebe also explores the gendered division of labor in farming, which reflects an understanding of ecological balance. Men are responsible for cultivating yams, while women grow cassava and other vegetables. This division ensures efficient agricultural practices and aligns human roles with the needs of the natural world. By assigning different tasks to men and women, the Igbo community manages the environment sustainably, promoting a harmonious relationship between labor and nature's cycles. The ecological wisdom of the Igbo society is further illustrated through their sustainable agricultural practices, including crop rotation, fallowing, and resource management. These methods prevent environmental degradation and ensure the fertility of the land:

"Yam, the king of crops, was a very exacting king. For three or four moons it demanded hard work and constant attention from cockcrow till the chickens went back to roost... The young tendrils were protected from earth-heat with rings of sisal leaves... The yams were then staked... The women weeded the farm three times at definite periods in the life of the yams, neither early nor late" (Achebe, 1995, p. 10)

This passage illustrates the Igbo community's pride in their sustainable agricultural methods. By intercropping yams with maize, melons, and beans, they maximize productivity and enhance soil fertility, ensuring long-term food security. Their use of sisal leaves and careful staking practices demonstrates an intimate understanding of local ecological conditions. Their labor is meticulously timed to meet the needs of their crops and prevent soil exhaustion, reflecting a deep commitment to ecological balance. Through these depictions, Achebe shows that the Igbo people's relationship with the land is based on respect and sustainability. Their agricultural practices are designed not only to meet their needs but also to preserve the environment for future generations. This harmonious interaction with nature forms the foundation of their cultural and spiritual life.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe masterfully depicts the Igbo society's ecological wisdom through their farming practices, spiritual beliefs, and communal activities. This balance is disrupted with the arrival of colonial forces, which brings environmental and cultural imbalance. Achebe's portrayal of the Igbo's sustainable relationship with nature critiques the destructive impacts of colonialism on both the environment and indigenous cultures.

4.4 Environmental Degradation

Achebe's portrayal of environmental degradation in *Things Fall Apart* is powerfully metaphorical, illustrating the profound impact of colonialism on the Igbo society's cohesion and cultural integrity. In one passage, the narrator reflects:

"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 things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (Achebe, 1995, p. 57)

In this passage, the metaphor of a "knife" represents the invasive and destructive force of colonialism on Igbo traditions and unity. Achebe uses this image to illustrate how colonialism has "cut" through the communal bonds that once held the Igbo together, transforming the initially minor presence of the white man into a source of profound division and societal disintegration.

The "things that held us together" refer to the cultural practices, beliefs, and social cohesion vital to the Igbo way of life. By introducing foreign religion and governance, colonialism has eroded these core elements, leading to a fractured community. This "knife" metaphor extends to environmental degradation, symbolizing not the destruction of physical land but the erosion of the socio-cultural environment essential to Igbo identity and unity. Achebe underscores the lasting impact of colonial disruption, showing how it severs the community's cultural roots and dismantles the social fabric once central to Igbo life.

4.5 The Relationship between Characters and Their Environment

Achebe intricately portrays the relationship between characters and their environment, emphasizing a profound respect for nature and its role in shaping individual identities and societal status. This dynamic is vividly portrayed through Okonkwo's character, whose identity and social standing are deeply intertwined with his agricultural success: "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen, he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat" (Achebe, 1995, p. 1)

This passage highlights how farming is central to Okonkwo's identity and status. Achebe shows that Okonkwo's achievements—such as his victory over Amalinze the Cat—are closely tied to his agricultural success, with personal honor and social respect in Igbo society rooted in one's ability to cultivate land effectively. In Igbo culture, farming success equates to personal and communal prestige, as seen in Okonkwo's rise, which underscores the importance of environmental stewardship in societal standing.

Achebe's portrayal reveals a reciprocal relationship: Okonkwo's identity is shaped by his bond with the land, and his farming success elevates his social standing. This dynamic reflects the Igbo belief that success arises from harmony with nature, where the land is both a resource and a cornerstone of social structure and individual achievement.

Colonialism disrupts this ecological harmony, introducing economic exploitation and foreign ideologies that erode the Igbo's sustainable practices, resulting in environmental and cultural degradation. Achebe's work illustrates the profound impacts of colonialism on the Igbo worldview, contrasting their traditional respect for nature with the unsustainable demands of colonial influence.

4.5.1 Harmonious Relationship with Nature before Colonization

In pre-colonial Igbo society, ecological practices were intimately tied to religious and cultural beliefs, especially the veneration of Ani, the earth goddess. Achebe describes this reverence during the Feast of the New Yam: “The Feast of the New Yam was approaching and Umuofia was in a festival mood. The last sheaf of yams was harvested and stored in the barn... There was singing and drumming and feasting everywhere” (Achebe, 1995, p. 92)

This celebration marks the end of the harvest season and is a testament to the Igbo people’s respect for the land’s fertility. The communal festivities reflect gratitude and recognition of the land’s role in their sustenance. The practices surrounding the Feast of the New Yam illustrate a harmonious relationship with nature, where ecological sustainability is intertwined with cultural celebration.

4.5.2 Disruption and Degradation Due To Colonialism

Colonialism, however, disrupts this balance through various means. The introduction of European agricultural practices, missionary activities, and new governance structures undermines traditional ecological practices. Achebe reflects this disruption through Okonkwo’s personal and societal struggles: “He had lost his place in the clan. The white man had not only brought new ways but had also undermined the very essence of the old ways that had defined Okonkwo’s identity” (Achebe, 1995, p. 64)

Colonial rule disrupts traditional Igbo practices in agriculture and land management, dismissing the ecological wisdom within these methods and leading to environmental harm. Achebe’s portrayal in *Things Fall Apart* emphasizes the damage caused when indigenous knowledge is replaced by unsustainable colonial approaches, resulting in ecological imbalance and societal breakdown. This shift from a culturally integrated ecological system to one disrupted by colonialism reflects a loss of both environmental stability and cultural heritage, with significant impacts on both the Igbo people and their land.

5. Conclusion

In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe masterfully illustrates the profound connection between the Igbo people and their environment, highlighting their sustainable agricultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and communal activities. Achebe portrays the Igbo’s reverence for nature through their harmonious relationship with the land, including rituals dedicated to deities like Ani, the Earth goddess. This connection underscores the Igbo’s view of their environment as a sacred, life-sustaining force integral to their cultural and spiritual identity. Achebe contrasts this pre-colonial environmental harmony with the disruptions introduced by colonialism. The novel shows how colonial practices undermine traditional ecological knowledge, leading to environmental degradation and cultural fragmentation. Achebe uses the metaphor of the “knife” to symbolize the destructive impact of colonialism, which severs the bonds between the Igbo people and their environment, causing significant socio-cultural disintegration. Achebe’s depiction highlights the Igbo’s deep respect for nature and their commitment to sustainability, demonstrated through sacred rituals and communal agricultural practices. The disruption caused by colonial forces, as portrayed through characters like Okonkwo, reflects a broader theme of cultural and environmental loss. Achebe’s work ultimately emphasizes the importance of preserving indigenous ecological wisdom and the detrimental consequences of its displacement by foreign influences.

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Authors’ contributions

Puji Hariati and Purwarno Purwarno were responsible for the study design and overall conceptual framework. Jumino Suhadi and M. Manugeren contributed to data collection and textual analysis. Rizki Lestari drafted the initial manuscript, while Sri Chairani and Susi Ekalestari reviewed and revised the content for coherence and academic rigor. Andang Suhendi finalized the manuscript and oversaw the submission process. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. Puji Hariati and Purwarno Purwarno contributed equally to this study.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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No additional data are available.

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