

The Anthropocene in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has received different critical and theoretical interpretations that examined and reexamined the novel within the context of different social realities. This study therefore is an eco-critical reading of how the ecology is one of the “things that fall apart” in the novel. Through the eco-critical approach, the study interrogates and reveals the cultural orientations that induce environmental mistreatment and consequent ecological problems in the novel. The ecological problems manifest as both implacable forces and uncanny reactions. The discovery is that the characters subdue the environment with various socio-economic activities as the environment consequently reacts to the actions of the characters. The patterns of oppression and subjugation of the environment are traced, revealing the culpability of the characters in the environmental problems that threaten their existence. The study advances the process of rethinking African literature and criticism as it also advances the frontiers of the emerging discipline of environmental humanities.

Keywords ecocriticism; Chinua Achebe; Anthropocene; African literature; environment.

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Introduction

Things Fall Apart is one of the earliest African novels but it is always new in the light of new critical perspectives. Literary critics have examined and reexamined the relationship between the text and other social realities but this study interrogates the representation of environmental problems in the novel. The eco-critical methodology is used as an analytical tool to examine this representation. Ecocriticism exposes how human cultures are responsible for environmental problems. The notion that nature exists for the benefit of man is reexamined. This anthropocentric ideology is deeply rooted in human culture and has been the bane of sustainable environment. The eco-critical approach shows one of the many ways literature could navigate the terrains of other disciplines, borrowing their concepts and terms for the purposes of representation as “literature is even more expansive, entering every domain, and carrying away materials for new constructions”¹ (Akwanya 47). This approach has repositioned and reinforced literature, through the medium of representation, to participate in the global discourses on environmental issues.

Humans have always subdued the environment with various socio-economic activities. A study that is eco-critical traces and connects the patterns of oppression and subjugation of the environment by humans, with an argument for a change in actions that debase the environment. Estok (2001) observes that an eco-critical study: is committed to changing things [...] it makes connections. It is in its ability to make connections that ecocritical readings of say, Shakespeare would distinguish themselves from other readings of Shakespeare that have looked at nature, the natural, and so on. Ecocriticism at its best seeks understanding about the ways that dynamics of subjugation, persecution, and tyranny are mutually reinforcing, the ways that racism, sexism, homophobia, speciesism, and so on work together and are, to use Ania Loomba’s term, interlocking².

The subversion of the environment by the characters in the novel under study, and the European incursion into Umuofia that results in the subversion of the people’s culture, are structurally connected. There is an echo of a sense of deprivation both on the side of the characters whose culture has been ‘raped’ and on the side of the environment that has also suffered mistreatment from the characters. This kind of connection is what Estok (2001) calls “the logic of complementarity.”

1 A. N. Akwanya. *Verbal Structures*. Enugu: Acena publishers, 1997.

2 See S. C. Estok. “A Report Card on Econcriticism” in AUMLA: The Journal of the Australasian Universities Language Association (2001). Retrieved from: <<http://www.asle.org/site/resources/ecocritical-library/intro/report-Card>>

An eco-critical study accounts for how humans relate to nonhuman nature with commitment to sustainable environment, using the medium of literary texts.

The American historian, Lynn White (1996), traces ecological problems to religion and belief system and states that “what people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion” (6)¹. He accuses, in particular, the Christian religion for its role in the current environmental crisis. He picks holes in the creation story in The Book of Genesis and says that the account “not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploits nature for his proper ends” (10). The summation of the foregoing is that religion and belief system influence human relationship with the environment. Joseph Meeker (1972) echoes White and locates ecological crisis within the context of anthropocentric ideology. He believes that the crisis lies on the “assumption that nature exists for the benefit of mankind, the belief-that human morality transcends natural limitations, and humanism’s insistence on the supreme importance of the individual” (42-43).²

Ecocriticism, therefore, reveals ways human culture is indebted to the natural environment, and brings to bear how human culture has exploited the natural environment. This study therefore interrogates how the characters in the novel under study subdue the environment with various socio-economic activities. The patterns of oppression and subjugation of the environment are revealed; the characters are responsible for the environmental problems in the novel.

Subversion of the Environment in the Novel

The environment is represented in the novel as being under constant threat, especially from the activities of humans. Intensive, and in some instances, negative agricultural practices provoke damage to the environment. The characters’ ignorance of the laws of nature and their over-exploitation of the natural resources worsen the problems. Deforestation, bush burning, and other forms of environmental degradation result in changes in different components of the environment. Bush burning is an agricultural practice which negatively alters the environment in the text. Burning is part of the cultural values and traditional farming practices of

1 Lynn White. “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Cherry Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds.). Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

2 Joseph Meeker. *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*. New York: Scribners, 1972.

the characters and involves deliberate use of fire for bush clearing. This common land management practice in the novel pose serious challenges to sustainable environment, and the characters seem not to realize it. It is expected that they should be ignorant of the threats of such practices because they are part of their cultural values. They see nothing wrong in them, and the narrator observes it:

After the Week of Peace every man and his family began to clear the bush to make new farms. The cut bush was left to dry and fire was then set to it. As the smoke rose into the sky kites appeared from different directions and hovered over the burning field in silent valediction. (23)

The incidence of bush burning is common in the text as the narrator says: ‘every man and his family’ is part of this practice. It seems a way of life, without the knowledge of the net negative effects. It is not only the kites that appeared from different directions as a result of the fume that rose into the sky; other chemical compounds are also generated which go into the sky. Chemical reactions occur which produce gases and smoke contains some of these gases. The presence of these gases which are contained in smoke may result in warming or cooling, depending on the interaction of the gases and atmospheric pressure. The gases are capable of ozone formation or depletion, leading to cooling or warming.

Humans affected solar radiation in the novel, and this by extension affected the processes of precipitation and finally affected the environmental processes. The narrator observes:

The year that Okonkwo took eight hundred seed yams from Nwakibie was the worst year in living memory. Nothing happened at its proper time; it was either too early or too late. It seemed as if the world had gone mad. The first rains were late, and when they came, lasted only a brief moment. The blazing sun returned, more fierce than it had ever been known, and scorched all the green that had appeared with the rains. 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 smoldering earth by making rings of thick sisal leaves around them. But by the end of the day, the sisals rings were burnt dry and grey. He changed them everyday, and prayed

that the rain might fall in the night. But the drought continued for eight market weeks and the yams were killed. (16-17)

The severity of this climate problem may form part of the lore that will be bequeathed to a future generations. In that case, it may echo a similar legend and lore encountered in the novel, about a climate problem—"the quarrel between Earth and Sky long ago, and how sky withheld rain for seven years, until crops withered and the dead could not be buried because the hoes broke on the stony Earth" (38). This story may be one of the past realities that still exists in the memories of the people of Umuofia, and that is why it is told till date. The story may have been weaved to literarily account for the paleoclimatology of Umuofia. The quarrel between Earth and Sky may have been the commonest analogy to express this climatic situation. Climate problems intersperse the history of *Things Fall Apart*; what may be classified as climate variability. It is further exposed where drought continues for weeks and when it rains, it rains ceaselessly for days. The environmental processes have been affected and the people battle with severe climatic conditions of two extremes. It is either the rainy season is too severe or the dry season is. The narrator notes:

And now the rains had really come, so heavy and persistent that even the village rain-maker no longer claimed to be able to intervene. He could not stop the rain now, just as he would not attempt to start it in the heart of the dry season, without serious danger to his own health. The personal dynamism required to counter the forces of these extremes of weather would be far too great for the human frame [...]. Sometimes, it poured down in such thick sheets of water that earth and sky seemed merged in one grey wetness. (24)

This is in another farming season after the previous mournful farming year that was described as the worst in human history. The narrator acknowledges the two extremes of weather, which he describes as too great for the human frame.

The novel reveals more environmental problems as Okonkwo arrives Mbanta on exile of purification. The narrator observes that he is well-received and his five cousins give him three hundred seed-yams each to start his life afresh. He is to farm on some piece of land immediately the first rain arrives. The narrator describes the climatic condition in Mbanta before the rain finally comes. He notes:

At last, the rain came. It was sudden and tremendous. For two or three moons

the sun had been gathering strength till it seemed to breathe a breath of fire on the earth. All the grass had long been scorched brown, and the sand felt like live coals to the feet. Evergreen trees wore a dusty coat of brown. The birds were silenced in the forests and the world lay painting under the live, vibrating heat. And then came the clap of thunder. It was an angry, metallic and thirsty clap, unlike the deep and liquid rumbling of the rainy season. A mighty wind arose and filled the air with dust. Palm trees swayed as the wind combed their leaves into flying crests like strange and fantastic coiffure. (91-92)

These are grim images of severe drought before the rain finally comes. The characters could not imagine windstorm and thunderstorm in the dry season and the burning nature of the earth.

What saves the people from going through the same catastrophe recorded in Umuofia is that the horrible weather condition preceded the first rain. Had it been such weather condition arrived when the people had already planted their crops, Okonkwo would have experienced another great loss of the proportion of what he lost during the drought in Umuofia. The drought here is as a result of the late arrival of the rainy season. The sun becomes destructive because the degree at which it is supposed to radiate to bring average weather has been increased.

This is why the narrator uses the following grammatical structures to capture the destructive powers of the sun; such structures as: “the earth burned like hot coals and roasted all the yams...”(16), “the birds were silenced in the forests, and the world lay panting under the live vibrating heat” (91).

There is interconnectedness among the structures that deteriorate the environment in the text. The thoughts, actions and inactions of the characters are predicated in a culture that aggressively exploits the natural environment. The earliest account of the exploitative mindset of this culture is recorded when Chika, a then priestess of Agbala, chides Unoka for not joining other farmers to wreck more havoc on the forest, thinking she is chiding him for his laziness. The priestess says:

You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your matchet and your hoe. When your neighbors 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. (13)

Phrases such as “exhausted farms” and “reluctant soil” used in the above extract

show the level to which the land is exploited without any concern for the net negative effects; without concern because the priestess says that Unoka's neighbours go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests. Their immediate vicinity is devastated and they have to cross seven rivers to make their farms. Crossing seven rivers is a great deal of distance. Perhaps, somebody like Unoka does not have the strength to make such a journey. The people do not realize that the more forests they destroy, the more reluctant their soil becomes, the more problems they create for themselves unknowingly and the more distance they create in search of further forests. These characters fail to realize that deforestation affects the climate by increasing the atmospheric level of carbon dioxide and affects the environment by inhibiting water recycling. This can trigger off severe drought or flood depending on the interaction of the atmospheric pressure. The characters are inexorably culpable in the debasement of their environment, with harsh and unpredictable climate as the effects of their actions. Hilderman (2013) observes that:

Deforestation also results in soil degradation. Forests store nutrients that are required for all plant life. In the tropics almost all nutrients are stored in the vegetation because tropical soil has little organic matter and almost no nutrients storage capacity. If tropical forests are cleared for cropland, the land will yield crops for only a few years and when the nutrients are depleted they become waste land.¹

The above scenario painted by Hilderman seems a portrayal of the plight of the characters in *Things Fall Apart*. A story is told how Unoka consulted Agbala to find out the reason for his poor harvest every year. The narrator notes of Unoka: "every year", he said sadly, '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...' (13). Unoka does not realize that the fertility of the land is lost but Chika, the priestess of Agbala owns up to this fact, although, without any effort to trace the cause(s) of this loss of soil nutrients. Chika notes of Unoka: "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" (13). This is an acknowledgement of the effects of deforestation. It can make the soil 'exhausted' and 'reluctant' through

¹ See Richard Hilderman. *The Effect of Deforestation on the Climate and Environment*. Retrieved from http://www.climateandweather.net/global_warming/deforestation.htm.

the loss of soil nutrients and fertility.

Representation of Ecoambiguity

There is the presence of reverence for nature and also the presence of exploitation of nature which create some sort of contradiction and ambiguity in the narrative discourse. Nature is respected and exploited at the same time in the text. In the first instance, thoughts and feelings are gradually rendered in the narrative and follow certain linguistic patterns that express reverence for nature. An instance of this reverence is observed when Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess, Ani, rebukes Okonkwo for beating his wife during the Week of Peace. Ezeani says:

[...] 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 blessing our crops will not grow. (24)

The characters in Umuofia fear what could annoy the earth. It is often about the earth. “It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman...” (99). Obierika “remembered his wife’s twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land...” (100). “It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth...” (165). Unoka “died of the swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess” (14).

The Earth which is a part of the natural environment has been deified and accorded a great measure of sacredness in Umuofia amidst the exploitative and destructive actions against the environment. This creates some sort of contradictory relationship between man and nature and echoes what Karen Laura Thornber (2012) calls *ecoambiguity*.¹ Thornber, in her text, *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures*, develops the concept of *ecoambiguity* and uses it to capture the contradictory and complex relationship that exists between human beings and the natural environment. These contradictory interactions between the non-human environment and the characters in *Things Fall Apart* are encountered through some discourse structures in the text. The exploitation nature suffers and the reverence it enjoys can be graphically captured in some of the following extracts among many others:

1 Karen Laura Thornber. *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literature*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012.

Unoka says: "I clear the bush and set fire to it when it is dry[...]" (13).

Chika says: "[...] your neighbours go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests[...]" (14).

The narrator observes: "After the Week of Peace every man and his family began to clear the bush to make new farms. The cut bush was left to dry and fire was then set to it" (23).

If we keep in mind the above linguistic structures that reveal harm to the Earth and juxtapose them with the following structures that reveal reverence to the same Earth, one may conclude if there is contradictory interactions or not between these individuals and their natural environment. The narrator observes the utterance of one of the men standing at the point of Okonkwo's suicide:

"It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth [...]" (165).

"We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land" (165).

Unoka says: "before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of all land" (13).

This is a contradictory and complex relationship between these characters and the Earth. They debase the Earth and at the same time revere it. The linguistic structures in the first set of examples have an undertone of destruction while those in the second set of examples reveal a deep sense of duty and sacredness. The second set of examples may be products of interplay of their culture and religion, which reflect a deep-seated spiritual commitment and consolidate their belief system. It seems that the reverence for the Earth by these characters is a spiritual one because of the deification while their physical interactions with the Earth reveal a great deal of exploitation. Constant cutting down of trees and the system of bush burning are aspects of their culture. This reveals how human culture defines man's relationship with the physical environment; a relationship that often promotes human interests to the detriment of the environment. This is a part of the motivations of an eco-critical research; to explore through the literary art how language is used to understand as well as communicate human relationship with the natural world.

One can deduce through some of these linguistic structures that the reverence these characters have for the Earth is motivated by fear and not out of a conviction to promote a sustainable environment. This fear is deeply rooted in the wrath of

the goddess of the Earth. Everybody is afraid to offend the goddess of the Earth who has both benevolent and malevolent powers. The benevolent powers of the Earth are sought after when everybody is required to sacrifice a cock to *Ani* before the planting of crops begins. This is because the characters believe that *Ani* is “the owner of all land” (13), as Unoka asserts, and such sacrifice is meant to attract good harvest. There is the fear that lack of such respect could attract poor harvest. This is why Unoka goes to the priestess of Agbala to know why he still records poor harvest after fulfilling this obligation. Considering the narrative discourse, there are no efforts in the text to promote environmental sustainability. The only efforts are seen in their spiritual exercise of sacrificing animals to the Earth out of their cultural and religious obligations.

The negative powers of the Earth are also feared. Respect rooted in fear are revealed in the following structures. “It is an offence against the earth [...]” (165), “we shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land” (165). Everybody is conscious of not offending the Earth and when the Earth is offended, the necessary sacrifices needed to appease the Earth are not negotiable, just like in the case of Okonkwo’s suicide. The narrator reports an acknowledgement of this obligation, that sacrifices must be made, “[...] to cleanse the desecrated land” (165). According to one of the men standing at the scene of Okonkwo’s suicide, “his body is evil” (165). This presupposes that it would pollute the land if an atonement is not made. It is to avert the pollution that sacrifices are needed. This is the kind of pollution the characters want to avoid but they would always practice prescribed burning and indiscriminate deforestation that degrade the land and cause carbon pollution of the atmosphere, which results in climate problems. The structural representation of the Earth in *Things Fall Apart* appears to have created an image of dualism of the Earth—the Earth as part of the natural environment and the Earth as a deity. The characters respect the Earth more as a deity than as part of the natural environment.

In Umuofia, nature provides a rich repertoire for good speeches, proverbs, images, figures of speech, stories and so on to the characters. They explore and exploit nature for their end uses. Stories are often framed drawing from nature. Before the arrival of Chielo, the priestess of Agbala to take Ezinma to the cave, the narrator observes a session of story-telling between Ekwefi and Ezinma, all about the tortoise and birds, about the tortoise and cats, and so on. Nature is the source of their stories, providing both the characters and other literary elements in the stories. This shows the place of nature in the affairs of Umuofia and echoes Heise’s (1999) view that “ecocriticism analyzes the ways in which literature represents the human relations to nature at particular moments of history, what values are assigned to

nature and why, and how perceptions of the natural shape literary tropes and genres” (1097).¹

There are proverbs rooted in nature which are captured through certain linguistic structures. Narrative discourse takes place as proverbs among other instances of discourse. Okonkwo is described “as slippery as a fish in water” (3). Okonkwo’s fame is said to have grown “like a bush-fire in the harmattan” (3). These structures portray a good use of simile in the text. These indirect comparisons are made, drawing from linguistic structures that echo the natural environment. These natural elements are also elements of the physical environment. In the course of Okonkwo’s visit to Nwakibie to borrow seed-yams he intends to plant, the latter offers a prayer which reads in part, “let the kite perch and let the egret perch too” (15). Following John Austin’s speech-act theory, as observes in Abrams (1999), the entire linguistic structure can be considered a *constative* act of locution and to use Abrams words, “it provides a systematic ... framework for identifying the unspoken presuppositions[...]

(293).² The presuppositions are embedded in the metaphorical use of language. In this case, ‘let the kite perch and let the egret perch too’ is a metaphor for cordial relationship among human beings.

The kite and the egret presuppose all kinds of human beings. This instance of discourse is semantically valid and useful because it takes place within a specific cultural setting and among specific individuals that have a pattern of language use—“a shared knowledge of the complex ways in which the meaning of a locution varies with the particular situation, as well as with the type of discourse, in which it is uttered” (Abrams 67). The characters within the context of the discourse appreciate the meanings imbedded in such idiosyncratic use of language. What is more important is the use of nature as a metaphor for harmonious relationships among human beings. Nwakibie realizes that when the kite perches and the egret perches, peace would reign. In this case, a human to human relationship is echoed. Such harmonious relationship between humans and the environment is lacking in Umuofia.

Some comparisons in the text are drawn from nature. Ikemefuna is said to be growing rapidly in Okonkwo’s house “like a yam tendril in the rainy season” (42). In praising Okonkwo for his hard work as a young man, Nwakibie says, “as our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look” (17). When Chielo takes Ezinma to the cave, the narrator describes the mood of her mother, Ekwefi: “a strange and

1 Ursula K. Heise In “Forum on Literature of the Environment”, 1999.

2 M.H. Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th ed.), Massachusetts: Heinle and Heinle, 1999.

sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voice like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite” (82).

This simile that is drawn from a natural phenomenon is a graphic portrayal of Ekwefi’s desperation following the long absence of her daughter. Nature is captured through some linguistic structures which are capable of affecting the human psychology. The irony of the existence of the forest in *Things Fall Apart* is that the characters in Umuofia also destroy what they claim to be their root. *Umuofia* is an Igbo word which means children of the forest which makes them children of nature. This should have made the characters to be protective of the forest which is a symbol of their existence. The forest should have been a sacred entity that needs their reverence and not destruction. Tracing their root to the forest should have made them to respect the forest but they abuse it. This may be why the forest conspires with some other natural forces to take a revenge on them. Environmental factors seem to be interlocked in a chain of interfaced existence. This is why the abuse of the forest can bring down the wrath of the sun or the rain or some other climatic forces. It appears that the symbols of nature react to any abuse of nature.

Representation of Homeostatic Balance

What is witnessed often in the text is a momentary collapse and renewal of the ecology; a kind of climate fluctuation. Although the collapse and devastation are not always prolonged, there is the need to note the presence of renewal. The renewal of the ecology in the novel is not traceable to human efforts but to homeostatic balance, a kind of natural renewal after ecological collapse. The severe environmental conditions the characters encounter are often normalized after a while through some natural mechanisms. The climate problems represented in Umuofia which lead to a sad harvest year and the one represented in Mbanta are beyond the grasp of the characters. The characters can only give an account of the effects and not an account of the causes or the solutions to the problems. The narrator sums up in the following words the inability of the characters to comprehend and proffer solutions to what has befallen them: “the personal dynamism required to counter the forces of these extremes of weather would be far too great for the human frame” (24). This seems an excuse to exonerate the characters from their inability to comprehend their Problems and proffer solutions to them. This is expected considering the period in which the characters live; no mechanization, no modern technology. Homeostatic balance becomes the only solution to their ecological problems and it is structurally represented in the narrative as the only agent of renewal after series of ecological collapse in the novel.

The setting in *Things Fall Apart* makes industrialization and modern technology non—existent in the thoughts of the characters. This goes a long way to show how setting determines the thought processes and the materials accessible to characters. During the ravaging drought and the consequent heat, the measures taken by some characters to contend with the situation does not go beyond what is available to them. Those things that are available are within the frame of their local ingenuity. The narrator observes that Okonkwo had tried to protect the withering tendrils “from the smouldering earth by making rings of thick sisal leaves around them” (7). This is the much Okonkwo can do. He could not have constructed dams or used any other source to provide water for his farm by way of irrigation farming because his historical time is not that of such technology. Even if the effects of the drought had lasted several years, the characters would not have had modern technology and mechanized farming as an option.

Unoka is very important in the ecological overview of the plot of the novel. Unoka is not only a foil to Okonkwo but also one to Chika, the priestess of Agbala and other characters that engage in different agricultural practices in the novel. Through Unoka, Chika’s thoughts on the agricultural practices in Umuofia are revealed. It is on the account of Unoka’s visit to Agbala to know why he still records poor harvest after fulfilling his cultural obligations that Chika, the priestess scolds Unoka. It is observed that Chika did not talk out of an inspiration from Agbala but out of a common knowledge of the person of Unoka. Chika even acknowledges that the whole clan knows it. Chika’s advice to Unoka is based on Umuofia’s agricultural practices which she extols as a model. Through Unoka, it is revealed what the other characters think about their environment; how they relate to their environment and the degeneration their environment suffers. No character in the novel wants to know why some parts of the land of Umuofia are exhausted and some soil reluctant to agricultural activities. They are all interested in cutting down more virgin forests, without regulation. There is no account of why the people have to go to such far places to make their farms, but it is possible that all the areas they have to pass to make their farms are exhausted and reluctant to agricultural practices. All these revelations are made possible in the plot through the character of Unoka.

Conclusion

The characters in *Things Fall Apart* are irredeemably ignorant of a plane of existence where every action against the environment is held accountable. This plane of existence is beyond the very world that embodies the belief in supernatural forces and motivates the various religious practices of the characters. The world

they appear ignorant of is the natural world that responds to most human actions that have bearing on the environment. The natural world trudges on along the paths created by the actions of these characters to manifest its own reactions. The characters are structurally condemned to a lack of a realization of their environmental problems as a product of cause and effects. If it appears that there is a certain necessity in the actions of these characters, there is also a necessity in the reactions to their actions.

Considering Rose's (2004) model that "an organism that deteriorates its environment commits suicide" (188)¹, it follows that the characters cannot escape from the effects of their actions. The necessity in the collapse of the ecology in *Things Fall Apart* and the necessity in other catastrophic actions constitute tragedy in the plot. The necessity of the actions and reactions in the relationship of interdependence in the ecosystem is a craft that enhances the tragic plot. It portrays the degree of human suffering in the event of environmental change and reveals also the breadth and depth of the human spirit to keep up struggles. The title of Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* has a deep philosophical insight. It is not only the socio-cultural and religious patterns of life in Umuofia that have fallen apart, the ecology has also been badly affected and the consequent environmental problems are evident. The subversion of the environment in the novel and the subversion of the culture of Umuofia by the imperialists are aggressively interlocking, and to use Estok's words, are "mutually reinforcing."

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