

**FULL-LENGTH ARTICLE****Reclaiming African Ecologies: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading of *Things Fall Apart* and *Petals of Blood***Ashenafi Belay Adugna<sup>1\*</sup> and Tesfaye Gebremariam Hailu<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Department of English Language and Literature, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia<sup>2</sup> Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia\* Corresponding author: [hireebirraa@gmail.com](mailto:hireebirraa@gmail.com) (AB)**ABSTRACT**

While much of the scholarship on African literary counter-discursive voices to colonial representations of Africa has primarily focused on the social and cultural dimensions, the ecological aspects have often been overlooked. This study addresses this gap by examining the ecological counter-discourses in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, emphasizing the interconnectedness of social and environmental concerns. Utilizing close textual analysis and grounded in postcolonial ecocriticism, the study explores how both novels highlight the significance of indigenous environmental knowledge and practices, portraying the Igbo and Gikuyu traditions of environmental stewardship. The findings reveal that these ecological counter-discourses challenge colonial narratives that sought to naturalize the exploitation of Africa's environment by depicting it as a wild and uncivilized wilderness in need of taming and control. Moreover, the novels expose how colonialism disrupted sustainable indigenous practices, resulting in environmental degradation and ecological crises. The study concludes that African literary counter-discursive voices play a critical role in addressing the ecological implications of colonialism, advocating for a more sustainable and equitable relationship with the environment. The insights gleaned from these novels contribute to broader discussions on the role of literature in addressing pressing environmental challenges and promoting environmental justice.

**Keywords:** African literature, ecocriticism, colonialism, environmentalism, Achebe, Ngũgĩ**INTRODUCTION**

The Western notion of humanity has historically been constructed in opposition to the "non-human," often characterizing non-European peoples and lands as "uncivilized, animalistic," and primitive (Plumwood, 2003, p. 52). This anthropocentric and Eurocentric worldview justified colonialism by framing non-European lands as empty and exploitable. Consequently, colonial narratives have propagated reductive images of non-Western cultures to assert European supremacy, a phenomenon described by Bhabha (1994) as being laden with stereotypes that devalue both the people and their environments. These distortions permeated literary works, particularly English novels, which became crucial tools in disseminating colonial ideology. Beyond the physical exploitation of resources, colonial texts reshaped indigenous cultural values. As Fannon (1963, p. 168) states, "[b]y a kind of perverted logic, it [colonialism] turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it." European imperialism's impact extended beyond the social and political realms; it also disrupted ecosystems, introduced diseases, and brought lasting environmental degradation (Crosby, 1986; Grove, 1996).

In response, mid-20th-century African writers began crafting counter-narratives that rejected these reductive perspectives and highlighted the interconnectedness between African cultures and their environments. As Tiffin (2007, p. xiii) notes, these narratives challenge the Western dichotomy of humanity versus nature, offering alternative understandings in which humanity is seen as part of, rather than separate from, the natural world. Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, among others, stand out

as key figures in this literary movement, producing works that reclaim African identities while resisting colonial narratives. Kehinde (2006) asserts that the African novel, particularly, reflects an evolving historical, cultural, and political consciousness, pushing back against the negative portrayals of Africa promoted by European writers. Despite African literature's use of multiple genres to resist colonial realities, the novel has become its dominant form (Irele, 2001), with Achebe and Ngugi using it to articulate their counter-discursive voices against colonial misrepresentations of African societies and environments.

In recent years, postcolonial studies have brought the environmental aspects of African literature into sharper focus, particularly by challenging the Western-imposed hierarchies between humans and nature (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011). This focus gained prominence through the postcolonial examination of conquest, colonization, race, cultural knowledge, theories of indigeneity and diaspora, and relations between native and invader, which are also central to animal and environmental studies (Tiffin, 2007). Postcolonial environmentalism questions the imposition of Western ecological perspectives on other cultures, recognizing how colonial practices framed indigenous people and their lands as mere resources for exploitation (Plumwood, 2003). Despite this emerging focus, the ecological dimensions of African literature remain less explored compared to its socio-political aspects.

Recent studies on African novels focused on the intersection of postcolonial literature, ecology, and gender dynamics. While eco-feminist perspectives on Achebe's works (Nkechi & Emmanuel, 2017; Ajibola & Okoli, 2022; Anwar, Hussain, & Amjad, 2024) and studies on environmental violations in Ngugi's novels (Ugwanyi & Asukwo, 2023; Trisha, 2024) highlight the subjugation of women and nature in colonial and postcolonial contexts, they overlook voices that challenge ecological exploitation. Ecocritical readings of Achebe's works (Gogoi, 2014; Okoye-Ugwu, 2013; Abraham & Abdulmalik, 2015; Ebim, 2021) also reveal African culture's ecological consciousness but do not address these narratives as ecological counter-discourses. This gap underscores the importance of examining African narratives that interweave social, political, and ecological themes as forms of resistance.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the ecological aspects of counter-discursive voices in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. Both Achebe and Ngugi are key figures in postcolonial literature whose works have traditionally been examined from socio-political and cultural perspectives (Kehinde, 2006). Yet, the ecological dimensions in their seminal works, which directly respond to colonial narratives such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) (Ashenafi & Tesfaye, 2024), deserve further exploration. This study argues that the ecological impact of colonialism is complex and intertwined with social and political dynamics, thereby illuminating the broader implications of these narratives within the context of postcolonial ecocriticism. By analyzing these novels, the study aims to highlight how African literature articulates ecological resistance, not only to historical colonial narratives that embody environmental exploitation.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

African literature has historically served as a powerful counter-discourse to imperial ideologies. While several studies examined the socio-political aspects of postcolonial African literature, the ecological dimension of these counter-narratives has often been overlooked. In recent years, however, scholars have explored the intersections between postcolonial literature, ecology, and gender dynamics, especially within African narratives that reflect the legacy of colonialism and its impact on the environment. These studies follow eco-feminism, ecocriticism, and postcolonial theory, to uncover the intricate relationship between culture and the natural world in African literary works. A brief review of the studies on the works of Achebe and Ngugi is presented as follows.

Eco-feminist perspectives have emerged as a central theme in the scholarly discourses pertinent to analysis of Achebe's novels. Nkechi and Emmanuel (2017) argue that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays the interconnected subjugation of women and nature within patriarchal structures of Igbo society, suggesting that both are subjected to exploitation under traditional and colonial forces.

Similarly, Ajibola and Okoli (2022) extend this argument to *A Man of the People*, highlighting how the exploitation of natural resources parallels the commodification and oppression of women. Anwar, Hussain, and Amjad (2024) also emphasize the roles of women as custodians of ecological balance, drawing attention to their spiritual and physical connection with nature. While these studies offer valuable insights into gender dynamics and ecological concerns, they overlook the narratives' engagement with ecological resistance beyond gendered exploitation.

In exploring ecological violations and postcolonial infrastructures, Ugwanyi and Asukwo (2023) investigate the environmental abuses depicted in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels, particularly how colonial and postcolonial infrastructures perpetuate environmental degradation. Similarly, Trisha (2024) critiques the neocolonial government policies in *Petals of Blood*, illustrating how such policies foster continued exploitation of natural resources, thereby exacerbating environmental and social inequities. While these works effectively link colonial and postcolonial economic structures to ecological harm, they often center on political themes like economic development and infrastructural projects. This focus obscures the counter-discursive ecological experiences within these narratives, missing the voices that resist and challenge destructive practices from within the novels themselves.

Ecocritical perspectives on Achebe's works offer further insights into the people's relationship with nature. Gogoi (2014) and Okoye-Ugwu (2013) explore how *Things Fall Apart* presents a harmonious relationship between the Igbo people and their environment prior to colonial intrusion. Similarly, Abraham and Abdulmalik (2015) discuss how mythological narratives in the novel reinforce the community's ecological values, highlighting their spiritual connection to nature. Meanwhile, Ebim (2021) adopts an ecolinguistic approach, analyzing how Achebe's use of language reflects the community's ecological ethos. While these studies highlight Achebe's portrayal of environmental themes, they do not specifically engage with how these themes function as counter-discursive voices that resist colonial ecological dominance.

Further studies investigate the role of land and space in African literature. Danlami (2020) explores the degradation of African ecosystems depicted in Achebe's works, highlighting the impact of land alienation on the socio-cultural fabric of Igbo society. Okoye and Okoye-Ugwu (2022) argue that Achebe's narratives reconstruct a pan-Igbo reality, promoting a fluid and interconnected view of culture, space, and environment. Keat and Adugna (2024) expand this notion by examining how African novels critique hierarchical ecological relationships. While these analyses contribute to understanding land as an integral part of cultural identity, they overlook how colonialism's shifting dynamics of space affect characters. This gap presents an opportunity to explore how these narratives articulate counter-discursive responses to ecological exploitation.

Studies like Wani and Ganaie's (2022) ecocritical analysis of *Things Fall Apart* examine the impact of colonialism on the cultural and ecological integrity of Igbo society, emphasizing how Achebe depicts the exploitation of Africa's landscape. Similarly, Nazari (2024), in his comparative examination of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing*, critiques the exploitation of natural resources and the resulting social and environmental injustices. However, both studies pay limited attention to the counter-discursive ecological voices that challenge colonial misrepresentations and assert indigenous knowledge.

Exploring the intersections of environmental exploitation and gender, Isiguzo (2021) adopts a postcolonial eco-feminist lens to argue that Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* critiques both colonial and neo-colonial capitalist structures. The study examines how female characters like Wanja and Nyakinyua symbolize the cultural and economic impacts of this exploitation. However, this work does not address the counter-discursive ecological voices that could provide a nuanced understanding of resistance to colonial domination within the novel. Likewise, Sivasubramaniam (2019) employs Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" to demonstrate how colonialism disrupted traditional attitudes toward nature in *Petals of Blood*. Despite this focus, the study does not emphasize the ecological counter-discursive voices embedded in the novel that resist these exploitative practices.

While scholars like Kehinde (2006) and Ismail (2023) discuss African literature as a means of challenging colonial ideologies and reclaiming indigenous knowledge, works such as Ogude (2022)

address the ecological consequences of colonialism and resource extraction. However, these discussions leave unexplored the specific ecological voices within African literature as a form of counter-discourse. This gap leaves room for a nuanced examination of how novels like *Things Fall Apart* and *Petals of Blood* articulate ecological resistance to contemporary environmental exploitation. This study aims to explore these gaps by analyzing the ecological aspects of counter-discursive voices in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. As leading figures in postcolonial literature, Achebe and Ngugi have primarily been studied from socio-political and cultural perspectives (Kehinde, 2006), with limited emphasis on their ecological dimensions (Slaymaker, 2001). By focusing on these novels, which respond directly to colonial narratives such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) (Ashenafi & Tesfaye, 2024), this study highlights how ecological concerns in African literature function as a form of resistance and reclaim indigenous perspectives on ecology.

### **Postcolonial Ecocriticism as Theoretical Framework**

This study explores the ecological themes embedded within Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, employing postcolonial ecocriticism as its primary analytical framework. Ecocriticism examines how literature shapes societal perceptions of the environment and the depiction of human-nature interactions (Love, 2003). It advocates for the rights and welfare of non-human entities, challenging the entrenched assumption of human superiority.

Initially, ecocritical theory focused predominantly on Western nature writing; however, it gradually expanded to encompass a diverse array of natural and built environments significant to writers of various ethnic, national, racial, and gender backgrounds. This evolution also addressed interconnected social and environmental concerns, amplifying the voices of marginalized perspectives that had previously been neglected (Glotfelty, 1996; Gersdorf & Mayer, 2006). As part of this development, a postcolonial approach to ecocriticism emerged, drawing attention to issues that Western-centric ecocritical theories often overlook.

In the African context, ecocriticism necessitates the integration of postcolonial perspectives to address the effects of colonialism and globalization on the continent's environment and society. This distinguishes African ecocriticism from its Western counterpart, which has historically paid little attention to the impact of European colonialism (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011). For ecocriticism to hold relevance in African contexts, it must center on local concerns, particularly the relationship between social life and the natural environment.

The incorporation of postcolonial perspectives into ecocriticism began by applying the theory to non-Western texts and interrogating the political and cultural implications of such analyses. Scholars like Gerhardt (2002) have explored the intersection of racial oppression and environmental exploitation in African American literature, suggesting that a postcolonial dimension provides critical tools for this examination. Likewise, Huggan (2004) has critiqued the traditional ecocritical focus for its narrowness, cautioning against its potential to become a form of "ecological imperialism" (p.5) that prioritizes an idealized, untainted nature while neglecting pressing human and social issues.

In their seminal work "Green Postcolonialism," Huggan and Tiffin (2007) emphasize the significance of postcolonial ecocriticism, highlighting how Western environmental assumptions influence readings of postcolonial literature from an ecocritical perspective. They challenge the conventional understanding of categories such as 'nature,' 'culture,' 'human,' and 'non-human' in ecocritical discourse, underscoring how definitions of humanity often rely on the existence of the non-human and the uncivilized. Their critique links environmental worldviews to postcolonial power dynamics, positioning both postcolonialism and ecocriticism as discourses dedicated to transforming the world and pursuing justice. They assert that social justice is inseparable from environmental justice; without social justice for all ecological beings, justice remains incomplete.

Postcolonial ecocriticism, therefore, serves as a framework for examining the intricate relationship between colonialism, the environment, and literature. It focuses on how colonialism has shaped human understanding of and interaction with the natural world, as reflected in literary works (Wright, 2010). Additionally, it foregrounds the perspectives of Indigenous and other non-Western peoples

marginalized in mainstream environmental discourse (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). Postcolonial ecocritics argue that Western views of the environment are frequently embedded in ideologies of imperialism and racism. European colonizers often perceived other peoples as extensions of the natural world, treating them as mere resources while coercing colonized peoples into adopting Western environmental views (Guha & Martinez, 1997).

Guha and Martinez (1997) further contend that various forms of environmentalism exist, notably the 'environmentalism of the poor,' which arises from social conflicts over the control and access to natural resources. They advocate for acknowledging the diverse sources and priorities within environmental movements, highlighting instances of solidarity among communities organizing to protect their land rights or access to natural resources. Their argument posits that economic hardship can drive ecological consciousness, challenging the conventional association of environmentalism with affluence.

Given that both *Things Fall Apart* and *Petals of Blood* are set within colonial African contexts and explore the complex interplay between humanity and the environment amidst colonial oppression, this study employs postcolonial ecocriticism as its theoretical framework. By utilizing this perspective, the study aims to illuminate how colonized peoples have resisted and countered Western environmental perspectives through counter-discursive voices. Drawing on Guha and Martinez's (1997) arguments, the study foregrounds Indigenous and non-Western perspectives on environmentalism, employing these as a counterbalance to dominant Western narratives. It examines how colonial ideologies of nature influenced the colonial encounter in Africa, how the novels resist and challenge these colonial views, and how environmental degradation is tied to colonial and other forms of systemic oppression.

Thus, postcolonial ecocriticism serves as the lens through which this study interrogates the ecological themes in these novels, guiding the exploration of the following key questions: (1) How do Achebe and Ngugi portray the human-nature relationship in their works? (2) How do colonial ideologies and practices manifest in these depictions? (3) In what ways do the novels challenge prevailing Western perspectives on the environment? (4) What roles do Indigenous and other non-Western environmental perspectives play in these narratives? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the intersection between postcolonialism and environmental discourse within African literary contexts, taking the two novels as case studies.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing textual analysis and literary criticism to explore ecological counter-discursive voices in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*. These novels have been purposively selected for their foundational role in challenging Western misrepresentations of Africa. Both Achebe, from Nigeria, and Ngugi, from Kenya, are among the early literary figures who explicitly resisted colonial ideologies through their writing (Kehinde, 2006), making their works particularly fitting for a study situated within a postcolonial ecocritical framework.

The primary method of data collection involved an in-depth, multistage close reading of the novels. This approach allowed for a deep engagement with the texts, particularly passages depicting the natural environment, instances of ecological degradation, and characters' interactions with non-human nature. The close reading process emphasized identifying ecological themes, noting both implicit and explicit references to environmental practices, and uncovering how colonial influences affect both the landscape and cultural relationships with nature. The analysis was structured to trace ecological counter-discursive narratives that respond to colonial portrayals and Western environmental ideologies. Additionally, secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and essays on postcolonial literature, ecocriticism, and African counter-discourses, were incorporated to construct a theoretical foundation for the study. A comprehensive literature review of these secondary materials provided contextual support for interpreting the novels within broader discourses of postcolonial ecocriticism. These sources informed and enriched the study's understanding of both the historical and theoretical dimensions of environmental representation in postcolonial African literature.

The analytical approach is anchored in postcolonial ecocriticism, a lens that critically interrogates the interconnection between colonialism, environment, and literary production. This theoretical framework serves multiple purposes: it unveils how colonial ideologies have historically defined human-nature relationships; it highlights the intersections between environmental destruction and social oppression; and it draws attention to the counter-narratives presented by African writers in reasserting indigenous perspectives on nature and environmental stewardship. By employing a postcolonial ecocritical approach, the study seeks to understand how Achebe and Ngugi not only challenge colonial narratives but also articulate visions of environmental decolonization through their storytelling. This involved analyzing how their narratives resist the ecological imperialism critiqued by scholars like Huggan and Tiffin (2007) and foreground local environmental justice concerns that are often neglected by traditional Western ecocriticism. The study also examines how these works advance the argument put forth by Guha and Martinez (1997), emphasizing that environmental degradation is intertwined with social oppression and colonial exploitation.

Through this methodical and theoretically grounded approach, the study offers a comprehensive analysis of how *Things Fall Apart* and *Petals of Blood* serve as counter-narratives to colonial environmental discourse, advocating for the recognition of non-Western perspectives on ecological justice and the reclamation of indigenous environmental identities. The examination contributes to the field of postcolonial ecocriticism by shedding light on the vital role of African literature in redefining environmental narratives and highlighting the inextricable link between social justice and environmental justice in postcolonial contexts.

## RESULTS

The first-generation African novels serve as counter-discursive narratives that challenge the Western literary canon's representation of Africa and its ecological dimensions. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (PoB) are seminal works that embed ecological counter-narratives that contest the prevailing Western perspectives on the environment. In TFA, Achebe foregrounds the symbiotic relationship between the Igbo people and their environment, presenting sustainable agricultural practices and a deep spiritual connection to the land, both of which are disrupted by the arrival of European colonizers. In PoB, Ngũgĩ critiques neocolonial exploitation of Kenya's natural resources by multinational corporations, spotlighting the voices of marginalized communities advocating for environmental justice. This section analyzes how both novels articulate ecological counter-discourses, situating their voices within the broader context of postcolonial ecocriticism and African environmental thought.

### Ecological Counter-Discursive Voices in *Things Fall Apart*

Achebe's TFA stands as a pioneering Anglophone African novel that destabilizes colonial narratives and offers a literary reclamation of African perspectives on nature and society. The novel, set during the late 19th century British colonization of Nigeria, follows the life of Okonkwo, an Igbo leader whose life is profoundly impacted by colonial intrusion. Achebe's counter-narrative aims to dismantle the negative colonial representation of Africa, exemplified by works like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), which depict the continent as a wild, chaotic, and uncivilized space devoid of cultural and ecological sophistication.

In contrast to the colonial narrative that often-depicted Africa as a violent and untamed wilderness, Achebe portrays the Igbo landscape as a peaceful, sacred entity with intrinsic agency. This portrayal disrupts the Western notion of nature as a mere backdrop for human activity or as a passive resource to be exploited. The natural world in TFA is instead presented as an active participant in human life, one that maintains a delicate balance and harmony. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of people and the environment, the novel foregrounds the harmonious relationship that existed in pre-colonial African societies. The stories that circulate within the Igbo community serve as cultural vehicles that instill environmental consciousness from a young age. For instance, Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, is captivated by his mother's stories about the earth and sky, which are imbued with moral lessons about environmental balance and humanity's place within it:

*He remembered the story she often told of the quarrel between Earth and Sky long ago, and how the Sky withheld rain for seven years, until crops withered, and the dead could not be*

*buried because the hoes broke on the stony Earth. At last Vulture was sent to plead with sky, and to soften his heart with a song of the suffering of the sons of men. Whenever Nwoye's mother sang this song, he felt carried away to the distant scene in the sky where Vulture, Earth's emissary, sang for mercy. At last Sky was moved to pity, and he gave to Vulture rain wrapped in leaves of cocoyam. But as he flew home his long talon pierced the leaves and the rain fell as it had never fallen before. And so heavily did it rain on Vulture that he did not return to deliver his message but flew to a distant land, from where he had espied a fire (Achebe, 1958, p. 44).*

This narrative, with its personification of natural elements and the human-like qualities of the vulture, reinforces the interconnectedness of all beings and underscores nature's agency. Through such traditional stories, Achebe emphasizes the role of nature in shaping the Igbo worldview and culture. Nwoye's preference for these nature-centered stories over his father's violent tales reflects a cultural ethos that values environmental harmony and respect for nature. In other traditional stories used in the novel, nature is portrayed as harmonious, as seen in the tales about the birds invited to a celestial feast (Achebe, 1958, p. 80) and the great famine in the animal lands (Achebe, 1958, p. 83). Through such storytelling, the novel counteracts the colonial portrayal of African landscapes as hostile and chaotic, offering instead a vision of nature as harmonious and integral to cultural identity. In postcolonial ecocritical terms, such stories serve as cultural articulation of nature's agency, illustrating how indigenous narratives embed ecological consciousness and ethical imperatives for living in harmony with the environment. This aligns with the postcolonial ecocritical framework, which posits that colonized peoples possess alternative environmental perspectives rooted in local traditions and spiritual beliefs (Huggan and Tiffin, 2007).

The representation of nature as sacred and interconnected with human life is further underscored by the novel's focus on Igbo religious beliefs. Unlike the colonial ideologies that establish a hierarchical separation between humans and the environment, the traditional Igbo religion situates nature as central to the moral and spiritual order. Through the gods and goddesses, nature plays a crucial role in connecting the people to their God, Chuku (Achebe, 1958, p.147). The people hold great respect for the goddess of earth and believe that she can curse them for their wrongdoing. As a result, they try to avoid committing crimes or sins during the planting season. The Earth goddess Ani, for instance, is depicted as a powerful deity who commands respect and observance of moral codes, particularly during the agricultural cycle.

*You know well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crop in the earth, we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbor. We live in peace with our fellows to honor our great goddess of the earth, without whose blessings our crops will not grow.... The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish (Achebe, 1958, p. 25).*

The priest's admonition in this extract underscores the community's belief in the sacredness of nature and the consequences of failing to uphold ecological and social harmony. The violation of moral codes that honor the earth goddess is seen as a direct offense against nature, warranting communal responsibility to appease the goddess through ritual and sacrifice. This belief system emphasizes the importance of honoring and respecting nature as a way of upholding moral standards within the society. This portrayal disrupts the Western dichotomy of nature versus culture, revealing a worldview in which the environment is not just a passive resource but an active participant in the community's ethical and spiritual life. Scholars such as DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) argue that postcolonial ecocriticism must engage with such indigenous belief systems to fully understand the complexities of human-nature interactions in colonized societies. This interdependence between humanity and the natural world is further illustrated in the "Feast of the New Yam," an annual celebration honoring Ani before the harvest:

*The Feast of the New Yam was approaching, and Umuofia was in a festival mood. It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of*

*morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to earth.*

*The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honor the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers (Achebe, 1958, p. 30).*

These rituals exemplify the Igbo culture's deep respect for nature, reinforcing its moral and spiritual significance. Offering sacrifices before harvesting signifies an ethical engagement with the natural world, embedded in a broader cosmological framework. Honoring nature is an enduring tradition, demonstrated through various rituals, including sacrifices before planting crops to appease traditional gods and ensure abundant harvests. One clears the bush and sets fire to it only after the sacrifices are made. The emphasis on ritual observance and respect for nature reinforces the novel's counter-discursive stance. This ethical approach ensures nature's continued provision for human survival. Achebe's novel echoes Guha and Martinez's (1997) argument about the environmentalism of the poor, arising from a deep connection to the land and the need for careful stewardship. The novel's portrayal of pre-colonial Igbo society embodies an environmentally conscious ethos disrupted by colonial intrusion.

Achebe's use of ecological counter-discursive voices challenges colonial narratives that portray nature as passive. In *Things Fall Apart*, nature possesses agency and communicative power. For example, Achebe writes, "a snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called a string" (1958, p. 16), imbuing nature with the capacity to listen and respond. This approach subverts the Western notion of human supremacy, portraying a reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature. By attributing a listening capacity to non-human nature, Achebe challenges Western conception of nature as silent and inanimate. This counter-discursive move aligns with Gerhardt's (2002) notion of a symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment in African literature, challenging Western ideologies of environmental exploitation.

Achebe also critiques colonial disruptions to these traditional relationships with nature. The arrival of European missionaries introduces new farming practices and religious beliefs that displace traditional ecological knowledge. He uses the character of Okonkwo to illustrate how colonial impositions disrupt indigenous connections to the land. Okonkwo's punishment for violence during the Week of Peace and his subsequent exile for inadvertently killing a clansman demonstrate how breaches of the natural order result in consequences that aim to restore environmental harmony:

*The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years (Achebe, 1958, p.103).*

*The Earth had decreed that they were an offense on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offense against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender (Achebe, 1958, p. 104).*

This emphasis on communal responsibility towards nature reflects an ethical system where offenses against humanity are also viewed as offenses against the earth, revealing an intrinsic connection between social and ecological justice. Okonkwo's suicide at the novel's end is similarly portrayed as an affront to the natural world, further reinforcing the belief that humanity's actions are deeply intertwined with the environment. The respect that the Igbo hold for nature extends to humanity, as they believe that gods and goddesses serve as intermediaries between the two. Therefore, people are not only obligated to respect nature but also to respect each other, as they are all considered to be children of nature. In describing Okonkwo's suicide, the narrator states: "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansman. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it" (Achebe, 1958, p. 170). This passage clearly positions humanity within nature, as suicide is viewed as an offense against the earth. This representation underscores the profound connection between nature and humanity that the novelist establishes in the story.

Achebe's use of ecological counter-discursive voices in TFA is a powerful way of challenging the dominant colonial discourse and of asserting the value of African culture. He uses characters to explore environmental themes. The protagonist, Okonkwo, embodies the traditional values of agricultural practice and respect for the land. He adheres to rituals that align with the seasonal cycles and agricultural ethics of the community. In one scene, Okonkwo is shown planting a yam seed following indigenous agricultural practices that attunes to keeping balance (Achebe, 1958, pp. 28-29). His second wife, Ekwefi is also depicted as a skilled farmer and herbalist who has a deep knowledge of the natural world and uses her knowledge to help her family and community. Achebe's novel shows that there are alternative ways of thinking about the relationship between humans and the environment. The novel contrasts these indigenous practices with the destabilizing effects of colonial rule, revealing how the introduction of foreign ideologies disrupts the harmonious relationship between the Igbo people and their environment. This representation resonates with the postcolonial ecocritical critique of colonialism's ecological impact, as discussed by scholars like Huggan (2004), who argue that colonial narratives often dismiss indigenous ecological practices in favor of imposing Western modes of resource exploitation.

Achebe's narrative strategies serve as a powerful challenge to colonial ecological representations. By portraying the African landscape as fertile, interconnected, and reflective of a complex indigenous culture, Achebe counters colonial depictions of Africa as barren, wild, and uncivilized. His characters' deep connection to the land exemplifies an environmental ethic that contrasts sharply with Western exploitation and extraction. The agricultural practices and rituals depicted in the novel, such as the cultivation of yams and the observance of the Week of Peace, highlight indigenous methods of sustainable land use and stewardship. Through these ecological counter-discourses, Achebe questions the so-called civilizing mission of the colonizers, revealing how their arrival fundamentally alters the Igbo people's relationship with nature. The novel's environmental imagination provides readers with an alternative lens to view the natural world—one that values interconnectedness, reverence, and sustainability over dominance and exploitation. The novel thus frames colonialism not as a civilizing mission but as an ecological and cultural disruption that undermines indigenous knowledge systems and environmental ethics. Hence, Achebe's representation of the Igbo people's deep respect for the land and the sacredness of nature contributes to the broader discourse on environmental decolonization.

### **Ecological Counter-Discursive Voices in *Petals of Blood***

In *Petals of Blood* (PoB), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o crafts a narrative that counters colonial depictions of Africa as a wilderness ripe for exploitation. Rather than subscribing to colonial views of nature as a commodity, he situates Africa as a deeply interconnected ecosystem where human societies are inextricably linked to the land and where ecological balance is woven into cultural practices. Set against the backdrop of the Mau Mau uprising in colonial Kenya, Ngũgĩ not only critiques the environmental destruction wrought by colonialism but also highlights how colonial policies and capitalist ventures severed the symbiotic relationships between humans and nature.

Ngũgĩ's PoB offers a critique of the colonial perspective that treats nature as a resource for economic gain. The novel's precolonial setting showcases the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, depicting the colonial period as a time of ecological devastation. Through characters like Munira and Karega, Ngũgĩ presents an ecologically conscious worldview that contrasts with the colonial drive to extract and exploit, showcasing how colonial authorities and their local collaborators disrupt traditional agricultural practices, deplete natural resources, and erode indigenous environmental ethics.

Ngũgĩ illustrates the Gikuyu people's deep spiritual and cultural ties to their ancestral land, portraying it as a source of life, identity, and sustenance—a vital part of their cultural heritage. This is in stark contrast to the colonial government's exploitative policies, which treat land as an economic resource. He juxtaposes the Gikuyu's reverence for the land with the colonial imposition of cash crops and land reforms, exposing how these practices led to environmental degradation and the loss of traditional agricultural methods. The introduction of cash crops and the restructuring of indigenous land tenure are depicted as acts of ecological violence that alienate the Gikuyu from their ancestral lands, exacerbate poverty, and undermine the sustainable relationship between people and their environment:

*Our erstwhile masters have left us a very unevenly cultivated land: the centre was swollen with fruit and water sucked from the rest, while the outer parts were progressively weaker and scraggier as one moved away from the centre.* (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 58).

The colonial government's land reform policies further disconnected the Gikuyu from their land, worsening environmental and social issues. Ngũgĩ emphasizes this through characters who note the declining productivity of the soil and increasing hardship: "‘What a harvest!’ Nyakinyua exclaimed. ‘Our soil seems tired. It did not receive enough water to quench its thirst. Long ago land the size of this piece could yield eight to ten containers each the size of this sack here.’" (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 65). This extract underscores the lasting impact of colonial interventions on the land, resulting in an environment where once-fertile soils are transformed into barren, unproductive spaces. By exposing the devastating consequences of colonial ecological practices, Ngũgĩ aligns with what Guha and Martinez (1997) identify as the "environmentalism of the poor," a form of environmental consciousness rooted in the defense of local resources against colonial and capitalist encroachment.

PoB emphasizes how colonial land reforms and economic policies lead to environmental degradation and social issues, including poverty, hunger, and unrest:

*The land seemed not to yield much and there was no virgin soil to escape to as in those days before colonialism. His son had gone away to European farms and the big towns... Njuguna, like other peasants in all the huts scattered about Ilmorog country, had to be contented with small acreage, poor implements and with his own small family labor* (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 11).

This narrative conveys a profound sense of dislocation as the fertile land of the Gikuyu is transformed into a barren and desolate space. Ngũgĩ illustrates how colonial agricultural policies force indigenous people to confront degraded land conditions, labor exploitation, and economic marginalization. Through characters like Njuguna, Ngũgĩ shows how colonial agricultural policies force indigenous people to struggle with poor soil quality, limited resources, and exploitative labor conditions. In the excerpt, Ngũgĩ draws attention to the displacement and economic disenfranchisement experienced by the Gikuyu people, revealing the connection between environmental degradation and social injustice. These consequences are depicted as direct outcomes of colonial ecological practices that disregard the intrinsic connection between the Gikuyu people and their land, challenging the colonial view of the African landscape as an exploitable asset.

Ngũgĩ imbues nature with dual symbolism in PoB: it is both a target of colonial exploitation and a site of resistance against ecological imperialism. He portrays precolonial African societies as having a sustainable relationship with their environment, reflected in traditional agriculture, communal stewardship, and cultural values that respect the land. Ngũgĩ uses land metonymically and metaphorically to illustrate how African societies have historically maintained strong connections to their environment, embodying cultural identities through their interactions with the land. However, the arrival of colonial powers disrupts this balance, introducing practices that prioritize extraction and commodification over sustainability and respect for the land. This disruption is particularly evident in Ngũgĩ's depiction of the shift to monocultural cash crops and the forced restructuring of land tenure systems, which he portrays as acts of ecological violence (Ngũgĩ, 1977, pp. 68-69).

Ngũgĩ's depiction of the precolonial African landscape contrasts starkly with the overexploited, desolate environment of the neocolonial era. This contrast conveys a sense of longing for the landscape that has been devastated by capitalist interventions. He illustrates how European capitalist exploitation severed the natives' connection to the land, transforming once fertile soils into barren, unproductive spaces:

*The land seemed not to yield much and there was no virgin soil to escape to as in those days before colonialism. His son had gone away to European farms and the big towns... Njuguna, like other peasants in all the huts scattered about Ilmorog country, had to be contented with small acreage, poor implements and with his own small family labor* (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 11).

This depiction underscores the profound sense of dislocation experienced by indigenous communities as colonial agricultural policies devastate both the land and the livelihoods of the people. Ngũgĩ's

narrative aligns with Huggan and Tiffin's (2007) argument that environmental and social justice are inextricably linked, as colonial ecological practices lead to the economic disenfranchisement of the Gikuyu and the degradation of their environment.

The colonial imposition of infrastructure, such as roads and railways, is another focal point of Ngũgĩ's critique. He portrays these constructions as symbols of colonial power, serving as tools for extracting resources and enabling capitalist expansion at the expense of ecological health. In *A Grain of Wheat*, the railway acts as a symbol of environmental destruction, cutting through forests and displacing indigenous ways of life (Ngũgĩ, 1967, p. 71). Similarly, in *PoB*, the railroad and its accompanying road network are depicted as exploitative forces that "ate the forest" and left in their wake a barren landscape:

*The road had once been a railway joining Ilmorog to Ruwa-ini. The line had carried wood, and charcoal and wattle barks from Ilmorog forest to feed the machines and men of Ruwa-ini. It had eaten the forest, and after accomplishing the task, the two rails were removed, and the ground became a road—a kind of road—that now gave no evidence of its former exploiting glory* (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 14).

This observation from the narrator exposes the underlying ecological theme in *PoB*, which lays bare the devastating impact of colonial and capitalist development. This metaphor of the railway "eating" the forest underscores the novel's ecological theme, exposing how colonial and capitalist development ravages natural landscapes to meet industrial needs. Ngũgĩ's portrayal aligns with Foster and Clark's (2004) critique of capitalist systems that "rob the periphery of its natural wealth," showing how these systems deplete ecosystems and reduce the land to an object of exploitation.

To the colonists who introduced the railway, nature was merely a resource to be exploited, and they showed no regard for its preservation. The novel's narrator poignantly conveys the sentiments of the natives as they witness the destruction of their land and the hardships it brings upon them. The reckless plundering of the land by global capitalist forces, with the assistance of local collaborators, has left an indelible mark on the landscape and the lives of the natives. Ngugi vividly employs the imagery of a flower denied its chance to bloom, symbolizing the detrimental impact of exploitation on the natives. The narrator's observation, "...denying them the right to grow to full flowers in air and sunlight" (Ngugi, 1977, p. 294), highlights the stifling effects of exploitation on the people's growth and development.

By vividly portraying the detrimental effects of capitalism on the native people and their environment under the guise of advancement, Ngugi exposes the hollowness of colonial progress and its profound impact on the African landscape. The exploitive nature of the foreigners is addressed in Maturi's reflection in the following extract as "they only knew how to eat, how to take away everything" in the following extract:

*'You forget that in those days the land was not for buying. It was for use. It was also plenty; you need not have beaten one yard over and over again. The land was also covered with forests. The trees called rain. They also cast a shadow on the land. But the forest was eaten by the railway. You remember they used to come for wood as far as here – to feed the iron thing. Aah, they only knew how to eat, how to take away everything. But then, those were Foreigners – white people* (Ngugi, 1977, p. 94)

The novel discusses how the colonizers introduced foreign crops and plants to African lands, which had a devastating impact on the biodiversity of the land and led to the destruction of native vegetation. This act of colonizing plants was seen as an attempt to control and dominate the natural environment. The introduction of new crops was driven by the desire for profit, and Ngugi portrays it as a form of looting and exploitation of ecological resources.

Ngũgĩ also explores the alienation of the Gikuyu from their environment—a process driven by colonial land policies and the commercialization of agriculture. The colonial commodification of land and the introduction of monocultural cash crops distance the Gikuyu from their traditional ecological knowledge and practices. This estrangement is embodied in the transformed landscape of Ilmorog,

which becomes a hub of urbanization and capitalist exploitation. The land, once sacred, becomes a denatured space, stripped of its cultural and ecological significance: "bars, lodgings, groceries ... robberies, strikes, lockouts, murders and attempted murders... prostitution... police station..." (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 190). Here, Ngũgĩ paints a grim picture of a landscape that has been dehumanized and denaturalized. This process reflects what Mittal (2014) describes as the "denaturalization" under colonialism, where the environment is stripped of its cultural and ecological significance, reducing it to a resource for economic gain. By illustrating how colonial capitalism devastates both the natural world and the moral fabric of society, Ngũgĩ shows how land that once provided identity and stability has been turned into a site of exploitation and social ills.

Ngũgĩ's critique extends to the colonial practice of introducing foreign crops, such as wheat, to African lands—a move that he portrays as an attempt to control and dominate the natural environment. The narrator's phrase "land and soul-grabbing empire" (Ngũgĩ, 1977, p. 82) highlights the colonizers' relentless pursuit of profit at the expense of both human and ecological well-being. The introduction of wheat in PoB serves as a striking example of the colonizers' eco-imperialist agenda. The narrator emphasizes that this introduction was not merely an economic endeavor but also a part of the colonizers' civilizing mission, aimed at asserting control over both the human and non-human aspects of the African landscape. The detrimental consequences of this ecological imperialism are evident in the severe drought that afflicts Ilmorog, causing immense hardship for the people. The novel highlights that the colonizers' attempts to "tame" the land, driven by their insatiable greed, ultimately led to the destruction of the delicate ecological balance. The narrator's exploration of the origins of ecological imperialism reveals that this destructive mindset has its roots in the early colonial period:

*First a white colonist, Lord Freeze-Kilby and his goodly wife, a lady. He was probably one of those footloose aristocrats, but a ruined one, who wanted to make something of his own in what he saw as a New Frontier. To change Ilmorog wilderness into civilized shapes and forms that would yield a million seedlings and a thousand pounds where one had planted only a few and invested only a pound, was a creative act of a god. For this he needed other's sweat, and he used the magic of a government, the chit and the power of his rifle, to conscript labor. He experimented with wheat, ignoring the many frowning faces of the herdsmen and survivors of the earlier massacres in the name of Christian pacification by the king's men, and he again trusted to the rifle he always slung on his shoulders. (Ngugi, 1977, p. 82)*

The novel's narrator introduces Lord Freeze-Kilby's introduction of wheat to the native land as the initial step in the project of transforming Ilmorog into a "civilized" setting. This transformation essentially involves westernizing the local practices and landscapes, making them resemble European settings. The depiction of Kenya (Ilmorog) as a wilderness clearly lays the groundwork for efforts to tame it. The logic of taming begins with the project of distancing. What is particularly noteworthy about the text is the bio-colonization that the white colonist undertakes as a tool to civilize the land. However, as the narrator reveals, the underlying motive of this project is to maximize profit from the imperial exploitation of both the land and the people. The narrator's use of the phrase "civilized shapes and forms" underscores the colonizers' paternalistic attitude towards the native people. They believe that the natives are backward and uncivilized, and that it is their duty to bring them to a higher state of civilization. This civilizing mission is often used as a justification for colonial expansion and exploitation.

Ngũgĩ employs nature as a site of resistance against ecological imperialism, using it as a symbol to critique the destructive forces of colonialism and capitalism. His narrative poignantly highlights the devastating consequences of capitalist expansion on both indigenous inhabitants and their surroundings, often justified under the guise of progress. One striking example of this is the native people's act of setting the wheat field on fire—a symbolic rejection of colonial exploitation and a reclamation of their land and identity:

*At night, on Ilmorog ridge, their leaders met and reached a decision. They set fire to the whole field and themselves ran to the outer edge of the plains, awaiting deadly repercussions. The lord refused to move. But his lady deserted him. The warriors came back and made strange noises around his bungalow late at night. The lone adventurer must have then seen the wailing*

*ghost of the earlier colonist, and a man of God, too, and he quickly retreated to the happier and healthier valleys of OlKalou.... In Ilmorog, the natives burnt down the wooden bungalow and danced and sang around it (Ngugi, 1977, p. 82).*

This act of ecological resistance challenges the colonial endeavor to dominate and commercialize the land, highlighting the role of indigenous knowledge and practices in resisting environmental degradation. The indigenous people of Ilmorog's triumph over Lord Freeze-Kilby's eco-imperialist scheme represents the colonizers' futile attempt to impose their own agricultural practices and sever the natives' ties to their ancestral crops and trees. This act of resistance is not merely an act of defiance but a reclaiming of ecological sovereignty, challenging the colonial attempt to commodify the land and imposing foreign agricultural practices. The destruction of the wheat fields is a rejection of colonial "progress". This act of resistance highlights the significance of environmental justice (Guha & Martinez, 1997) and the need to protect the rights of indigenous peoples to manage and utilize their own resources.

The symbolism of Theng'eta, an indigenous flower, further encapsulates the environmental and cultural alienation caused by colonial and capitalist exploitation. Prior to colonization, Theng'eta was culturally significant, tied to the Gikuyu's spiritual and ecological knowledge. In the neocolonial era, however, it becomes commodified and distanced from its traditional meaning, representing the wider process of ecological imperialism. The transformation of Theng'eta into the "Petals of Blood" signifies both the loss of cultural practices and the commercialization of indigenous plants, reflecting how colonialism severs the sacred ties between people and their environment. This corruption is epitomized by the detachment of the school children and their teacher Munira from traditional knowledge due to the influence of colonial education. Ngugi's skillful use of the flower's dual imagery in the novel's title highlights this transformation, emphasizing the corruption that overshadows its traditional significance. The novel presents the flower as a symbol of both the cherished traditional customs and the estranged plant distanced from the people due to commercialization and the bloodshed fueled by imperialism.

In *Petals of Blood*, Ngũgĩ critiques colonial and neocolonial ecological practices that treat African landscapes as commodities to be exploited. By contrasting the Gikuyu people's reverence for the land with the exploitative actions of colonial authorities, he reveals a deep-rooted environmental consciousness within African societies and underscores the devastating consequences of colonial land policies on both people and the environment. Ngũgĩ's work aligns with postcolonial ecocriticism's broader aims of highlighting the intersection between environmental degradation, social oppression, and cultural alienation (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010), challenging Western environmental paradigms and advocating for the recognition of indigenous perspectives. Ultimately, PoB reclaims the African landscape as a site of cultural identity, spiritual connection, and ecological resistance, underscoring the need for environmental justice and the protection of indigenous ecological knowledge.

## DISCUSSION

The foregoing analysis reveals that Achebe's TFA and Ngũgĩ's PoB provide critical counter-narratives to colonial and capitalist depictions of Africa, articulating an alternative ecological vision rooted in traditional African cultural practices and environmental ethics. Both authors showcase how colonial interventions disrupted the harmonious human-nature relationships that existed in African societies. By embedding ecological themes into their narratives, they critique colonial exploitation and emphasize the interconnectedness between people, culture, and the natural environment.

In TFA, Achebe presents precolonial Igbo society as one that deeply respects and lives in symbiosis with nature. As represented in the novel, the land is not merely a backdrop for human activities but a living, sacred entity that shapes the Igbo people's cultural and spiritual practices. This symbiotic relationship, as Glotfelty (1996) describes, is characterized by a cultural worldview that sees humans as part of a larger ecological system. Achebe illustrates this interconnectedness through the Igbo's agricultural practices, seasonal rituals, and reverence for natural entities such as the earth goddess Ani. The Igbo people's agricultural rituals, like the "Feast of the New Yam," underscore the significance of respecting natural cycles and maintaining ecological harmony (Achebe, 1958, p. 30).

Achebe's narrative serves as an ecological counter-discourse, resisting colonial misrepresentations of Africa as a "dark and savage" continent (Conrad, 1902). Through his portrayal of precolonial Igbo society, Achebe challenges colonial views by depicting the African landscape as a space of order, spirituality, and cultural complexity. Nature in TFA is portrayed as a living, sacred entity, contrary to the colonialist portrayal of nature as wild and demonic. Achebe's emphasis on the cultural practices that maintain ecological balance confronts the colonial narrative that sought to distance Africans from their land by depicting them as uncivilized. As Huggan (2004) points out, colonial narratives often stripped the colonized of agency, reducing both people and the environment to resources for exploitation. Achebe reverses this narrative by restoring the agency of the Igbo people and their environment, illustrating the profound knowledge and respect for ecological systems that existed prior to colonial intrusion.

Similarly, in PoB, Ngūgĩ explores the Gikuyu people's relationship with their ancestral land and the devastating impact of colonialism on their environment and culture. Ngūgĩ critiques the colonial mindset that views nature solely as a resource to be exploited for capitalist gain. This critique resonates with Guha and Martinez's (1997) concept of "environmentalism of the poor," which emphasizes the struggles of indigenous communities to preserve their land and resources in the face of external economic pressures. In PoB, the land is depicted not just as a physical space but as a repository of cultural memory, identity, and spiritual sustenance. The novel reveals the alienation that results when colonial forces impose cash crop economies and capitalist modes of production, leading to the degradation of both land and community.

Ngūgĩ's narrative underscores how the commodification of land and the imposition of monocultural agricultural practices disrupt the traditional ecological knowledge of the Gikuyu people. This disruption reflects what DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) describe as the colonial "eco-imperialism" that distances people from their environment and commodifies nature. Ngūgĩ illustrates this alienation through the transformation of Ilmorog, a landscape once characterized by fertility and communal harmony, into a degraded space marked by urbanization and capitalist exploitation. The railroad's construction and the burning of the forest to make way for industry serve as symbols of how colonialism severs the indigenous people's connection to their land (Ngūgĩ, 1977, p. 14). In this way, PoB functions as an ecological counter-discourse that challenges the imperialist logic of resource extraction and advocates for the reclamation of traditional ecological knowledge and practices. Ngūgĩ's critique of the capitalist mindset aligns with the arguments of Foster and Clark (2004), who emphasize how global capitalist forces "rob the periphery of its natural wealth," (p. 73) leading to environmental degradation and social injustice in colonial contexts.

Both Achebe and Ngūgĩ emphasize the importance of cultural harmony and the preservation of traditional ecological knowledge in the face of colonial oppression. In TFA, the Igbo people's adherence to ecological principles is embodied in their respect for the earth goddess Ani, who governs fertility and morality. The narrative shows how colonialism disrupts this ecological balance, introducing new values and technologies that alienate the Igbo from their land and undermine their spiritual and cultural connection to nature. This disruption is a form of ecological violence that, as DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) argue, is a central aspect of the colonial project. Achebe's depiction of the Igbo's traditional practices, such as the Week of Peace, contrasts sharply with the colonialists' disregard for the land, illustrating how indigenous knowledge is central to sustainable ecological management.

In PoB, Ngūgĩ similarly critiques the colonial and capitalist exploitation of nature. He presents the precolonial Gikuyu society as one that exists in harmony with the land, engaging in sustainable agricultural practices that respect the natural cycles and resources. This harmonious relationship is disrupted by the advent of colonialism and its capitalist imperatives, which commodify the land and introduce practices that deplete natural resources. Ngūgĩ's portrayal of the burning of the wheat fields serves as a symbolic act of resistance against the colonial imposition of monocultural farming, highlighting the struggle for ecological sovereignty. As Huggan and Tiffin (2010) point out, postcolonial literature often uses ecological themes to critique the environmental consequences of colonialism and advocate for environmental justice.

Ngũgĩ extends his critique to the neocolonial context, exposing the continued exploitation of land and natural resources by post-independence governments and multinational corporations. This is exemplified by the transformation of Ilmorog into a commercialized space, devoid of its spiritual and cultural significance. The symbolic significance of the indigenous flower, Theng'eta, further underscores the consequences of colonial and capitalist intrusion. Ngũgĩ's narrative aligns with contemporary discussions in postcolonial ecocriticism, highlighting the ongoing environmental injustices faced by postcolonial societies (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011).

In sum, Achebe and Ngũgĩ's novels serve as literary interventions that resist colonial ecological narratives and advocate for the reclamation of indigenous ecological knowledge. Through their ecological counter-discourses, they articulate how colonialism not only exploited African land and resources but also undermined traditional ecological practices that had sustained local communities for generations. By centering indigenous perspectives, Achebe and Ngũgĩ contribute to a broader postcolonial ecocritical discourse that calls for environmental justice and the decolonization of ecological thought (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010; Guha & Martinez, 1997).

### CONCLUSION

This study examined the ecological counter-discursive voices in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood* through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism. By analyzing these canonical texts, the study revealed how both authors utilize nature as a symbolic conduit for resisting the dehumanizing and environmentally destructive forces of colonialism. Achebe and Ngũgĩ challenge colonial narratives of exploitation, presenting instead a precolonial African worldview where nature is an integral, sacred, and harmonious component of human existence. Through their works, they highlight the environmental and cultural devastation caused by colonial intrusion and its capitalist legacies, which disrupted sustainable ecological practices and severed indigenous connections to the land.

Achebe's TFA exposes the colonial impact on Igbo society, emphasizing how traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual reverence for nature were displaced by colonial forces. Similarly, Ngũgĩ's PoB critiques the capitalist and colonial exploitation of Kenyan landscapes, revealing how colonial policies, infrastructure projects, and monoculture cash crops alienated indigenous communities from their ancestral land and environment. Both works underscore the disruption of ecological harmony, aligning with broader postcolonial ecocritical discourses that seek to reclaim indigenous perspectives on environmental sustainability (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010; DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011). The ecological counter-discourses presented in both offer powerful critiques of colonial and capitalist practices, advocating for recuperation of traditional ecological knowledge.

The study demonstrates that ecological concerns are inextricably woven into both novels as part of cultural resistance, offering insights into how postcolonial literature can be a site for advocating environmental decolonization. By illuminating how literary works from Africa provide nuanced critiques of power dynamics and environmental exploitation, it contributes to the broader field of postcolonial ecocriticism. While this study sheds light on the significance of ecological counter-discourses in two of Achebe and Ngũgĩ's works, it acknowledges the limitation of not capturing the full spectrum of ecological perspectives across different literary works. Future research could expand this analysis to include a wider range of literatures and cultural contexts, examining how diverse indigenous perspectives address ecological counter-discursive voices and depict ecological issues such as climate change and land rights.

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