

From Anthropocentrism to Deep Ecology: Reimagining Human Nature Relations in Literary Texts

H. I. Nwachukwu

Department of English and Literary Studies, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
harrison.nwachukwu@iaue.edu.ng

Abstract

This study explores the intersection of literature and environmental justice, focusing on how contemporary African literature critiques anthropocentric world views and promotes deep ecology. By examining key works such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981), and Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1999), the research investigates how these texts challenge neocolonial exploitation, capitalist systems, and the environmental degradation that accompanies them. The study employs ecocriticism and postcolonial theory to analyze the human-nature relationship depicted in African narratives, highlighting how authors critique colonial legacies and advocate for sustainable, ecologically responsible human practices. The findings reveal a consistent call for ecological balance, the preservation of biodiversity, and the restoration of indigenous ecological knowledge as central tenets of a sustainable future. The texts examined suggest that literature can serve as a powerful tool for both critiquing ecological exploitation and imagining a more just and environmentally conscious world. In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of literature in fostering global awareness of environmental sustainability, offering solutions rooted in local ecological wisdom and the reconnection with nature.

Keywords: Deep ecology, anthropocentrism, neocolonial exploitation, ecocriticism, postcolonial theory, biodiversity, sustainability, environmental justice

1. Introduction

The human-nature relationship has historically been defined by anthropocentrism, a worldview that places humans at the center of the universe and regards nature as an instrument to fulfill human desires and needs. This anthropocentric outlook has often led to environmental degradation, as human activities such as deforestation, industrialization, and agricultural expansion have been conducted with little regard for the long-term consequences on the natural world (Buell, 2005). This perspective views nature primarily as a means of fulfilling human needs, resulting in unsustainable practices that harm ecosystems and biodiversity (Garrard, 2019).

In contrast, the development of deep ecology, a philosophical movement that emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature, independent of its utility to humans, has emerged as a response to the limitations of anthropocentrism. Deep ecology advocates for a more holistic understanding of human existence, one that sees humans as part of the greater ecological web rather than as separate or superior to nature (Naess, 1973). This shift in perspective calls for environmental justice, recognizing that the exploitation of natural resources and the disregard for ecological balance are ultimately detrimental to both human societies and the environment (Robbins, 2012).

The influence of deep ecology is increasingly evident in contemporary literary works, as writers explore the complex relationship between humans and nature. These works reflect a growing concern about environmental degradation, climate change, and the need for sustainable practices. By examining how literature portrays these shifting dynamics, this study seeks to analyze how literary texts can both reflect and shape the way we view our relationship with the natural world (Tiffin, 2013).

Postcolonial African literature, like much of the world's literary tradition, has been shaped by anthropocentrism, yet contemporary authors are increasingly drawing on ecocritical perspectives to address the environmental crises plaguing the continent (McGregor, 2020). This shift in perspective reflects the broader global environmental discourse that increasingly recognizes the need to rethink and restructure human-nature relations.

The central problem this study addresses is the shift in the human-nature relationship in literature, moving from an anthropocentric perspective which centers human interests and justifies the exploitation of nature to a deep ecological perspective, which emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and advocates for a more sustainable and harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. This shift is particularly significant in contemporary literary texts, where authors are increasingly engaged in ecocritical discourse that critiques the damage done to the environment and imagines alternative ways of relating to the natural world.

While numerous scholars have analyzed the rise of ecocriticism in literature, there is a gap in comprehensive studies that specifically examine how deep ecology is represented in literary works and its influence on shaping environmental consciousness. Moreover, the potential of literature as a tool for environmental activism and its ability to inspire real-world change is underexplored. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by investigating how literary narratives are contributing to the re-imagining of human-nature relations and exploring the political and ethical implications of this shift in perspective.

1.1 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To explore how anthropocentric worldviews are represented in selected African literary texts and how these representations affect the human–nature relationship.
2. To analyze the emergence of deep ecology in contemporary African literature, identifying how these texts challenge anthropocentrism and advocate for an ecocentric approach to environmental issues.
3. To examine the environmental themes in selected works and analyze how these themes reflect the political and economic systems that drive ecological degradation in postcolonial Africa.
4. To explore the role of African literature in advocating for ecological justice, highlighting the ethical and political implications of adopting deep ecological perspectives in literary narratives.
5. To assess the potential of literary works to influence public policy and inspire environmental activism, promoting sustainable practices in African societies.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How is anthropocentrism represented in selected African literary texts?
2. How do contemporary African literary texts represent the shift from anthropocentrism to deep ecology?
3. What are the implications of shifting from an anthropocentric to a deep ecological perspective in African literature?
4. How do African writers use literature as a tool for environmental activism?
5. What role does African literature play in reshaping human–nature relations, and what impact does it have on public attitudes toward environmental conservation?

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study will focus on contemporary African literature produced after independence, specifically analyzing works from sub-Saharan Africa that engage with anthropocentric views of the environment and the shift toward deep ecology. The study will be defined by the following delimitations:

1. Geographic Scope:

The study will focus on sub-Saharan African literature written by authors from regions such as East Africa, West Africa, and Southern Africa. Key authors include Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩwa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, and Mariama Bâ. The research will explore how these authors reflect local ecological concerns and political struggles related to resource management and environmental sustainability (Achebe, 2000; Ngũgĩ, 2017).

2. Literary Works:

The study will primarily analyze novels, short stories, and poetry that contain significant ecological themes. Texts such as Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Ngũgĩ’s *Petals of Blood*, and Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* will be central to the analysis. Other works, including Soyinka’s *The Man Died*, will also be considered for their ecocritical insights (Soyinka, 1999).

3. Temporal Scope:

The study will focus on 20th and 21st-century texts, beginning from postcolonial African literature to

contemporary works. It will specifically analyze how African writers have engaged with environmental issues in response to global ecological challenges such as climate change and deforestation.

4. Exclusions:

Pre-colonial African literature will not be included, as the focus is on postcolonial and contemporary works. Also, literature from other continents, although relevant in the field of ecocriticism, will not be part of this study. The focus is on African texts that engage with deep ecology in the context of postcolonial Africa.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Anthropocentrism: The Human-Centered Worldview

Anthropocentrism is a human-centered perspective that places humans at the center of the universe, seeing nature primarily as a tool to serve human needs and desires. This worldview views nature as existing to fulfill human purposes, such as providing resources for economic growth, industrialization, and technological development (Buell, 2005). In an anthropocentric framework, nature is not regarded as possessing intrinsic value but is evaluated in terms of its usefulness to humans. This perspective has been instrumental in shaping many of the political, economic, and social systems that dominate modern society, leading to environmental degradation and unsustainable resource consumption (Garrard, 2019).

Anthropocentrism emerged as the dominant worldview during the Enlightenment, and its influence persisted throughout the industrial revolution, where the exploitation of natural resources was justified by the belief that nature existed for human progress. In this sense, colonial and neocolonial practices are deeply rooted in this worldview, where land and resources were exploited for the economic gain of colonial powers, often with little regard for the environmental or cultural consequences (Tiffin, 2013). Literature, especially during the colonial and postcolonial periods, has often reflected this human-centric perspective, where the exploitation of nature was legitimized through narratives that portray nature as a passive background to human activities.

In African literature, the anthropocentric worldview is particularly evident in colonial narratives that portrayed the African landscape as a blank slate, ripe for resource extraction and economic development. These narratives justified the exploitation of the natural world as a means to civilize and develop African societies. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) illustrates how the Igbo people’s relationship with nature is disrupted by colonial powers who view the land solely as an economic commodity. The arrival of Europeans introduces a worldview that exploits both human and ecological resources for profit, disrupting the sustainable practices of indigenous African communities (Achebe, 2000).

2.2 Deep Ecology: A Biocentric Perspective

In contrast to anthropocentrism, deep ecology promotes a biocentric perspective that sees humans as an integral part of the ecosystem, rather than as separate or superior to it. Developed in the 1970s by philosopher Arne Naess, deep ecology asserts that nature has intrinsic value

beyond its utility to humans. It calls for a radical shift in how humans interact with the environment, urging that ecological conservation, biodiversity, and sustainability be prioritized over economic growth and technological advancement (Naess, 1973).

Deep ecology advocates for the rejection of anthropocentrism and emphasizes that all living beings, not just humans, have a right to exist and flourish. This philosophy encourages humans to reconnect with the natural world by embracing ecological values and fostering a sense of spiritual connection to the earth. Naess argues that humans must acknowledge their ecological interconnectedness and adopt a more humble and respectful approach to nature. The deep ecology movement calls for a radical overhaul of society's values and systems, including political and economic structures, to ensure that nature's integrity is preserved for future generations (Naess, 1973; Garrard, 2019).

Deep ecology challenges the traditional economic and political systems that exploit nature in the name of progress. The environmental crises we face today such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss are largely a result of anthropocentric policies that prioritize human gain over ecological balance. Deep ecology, by contrast, calls for decentralized governance, local control over resources, and sustainable practices that honor the integrity of ecosystems and respect the rights of all living beings (McGregor, 2020).

In African literature, deep ecology is often explored through narratives that advocate for a return to indigenous knowledge systems and traditional ecological practices that value the interdependence of humans and nature. Works such as Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977) challenge the neocolonial systems that exploit African lands and promote unsustainable development. The novel critiques the exploitation of natural resources by both foreign and local elites and advocates for a return to sustainable practices and community-based conservation (Ngũgĩ, 2017).

2.3 Intersections Between Anthropocentrism and Deep Ecology in African Literature

The shift from anthropocentrism to deep ecology in African literature reflects a growing recognition of the importance of ecological sustainability and the intrinsic value of nature. Writers such as Achebe, Ngũgĩ, and Bâ have explored how colonial and neocolonial systems have altered the human-nature relationship, leading to ecological degradation and cultural loss. These authors use their works to critique the exploitation of resources and to highlight the ethical implications of environmental degradation.

In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), for example, the protagonist, Okonkwo, represents the anthropocentric view of nature, where land and resources are to be dominated and used to further personal ambition. The arrival of colonialism introduces a new economic system that disrupts the harmonious relationship the Igbo people have with their environment. The novel ultimately demonstrates the tragic consequences of an anthropocentric worldview and reflects the ecological imbalance caused by colonial exploitation (Achebe, 2000).

In Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), the shift toward deep ecology is evident in the portrayal of the Kenyan landscape, where the narrative critiques the neocolonial exploitation of natural resources and advocates for sustainable land use. Ngũgĩ urges a return to indigenous knowledge and a holistic approach to the environment that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all life forms (Ngũgĩ, 2017). These texts challenge the dominant anthropocentric worldview, presenting deep ecology as a necessary response to the environmental crises Africa faces today.

2.4 Theoretical Foundations: Key Environmental Philosophies

In this section, we explore the key environmental philosophies that form the theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between humans and nature in the context of literary studies. These frameworks provide valuable perspectives for analyzing how literature engages with ecological issues and reflects shifting attitudes toward the environment.

Anthropocentrism is the belief that humans are the central and most significant beings in the universe. In this worldview, nature is primarily regarded as a resource to serve human needs and desires. The anthropocentric perspective has been foundational to modern industrial societies, where economic growth, capitalism, and technological progress often take precedence over environmental sustainability. Nature is seen as a resource to be exploited for human benefit, with little regard for the long-term consequences of this exploitation (Buell, 2005; Garrard, 2019).

Historically, anthropocentrism gained prominence during the Enlightenment and continued into the industrial revolution, justifying the exploitation of natural resources in the name of progress. In the context of colonialism, this worldview was used to justify the extraction of African resources for economic gain, with little regard for the ecological health of the continent. African literature often critiques the anthropocentric mindset, highlighting its role in the colonial exploitation of both human and natural resources. For instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the narrative explores how colonial powers introduced an anthropocentric perspective that disrupted the sustainable relationship that the Igbo people had with the land (Achebe, 2000).

Deep ecology presents a stark contrast to anthropocentrism by advocating for a biocentric worldview, which values nature for its intrinsic worth. Deep ecology calls for a shift away from human-centered thinking to an approach that recognizes nature's inherent value, irrespective of its usefulness to humans. This philosophy encourages humans to see themselves as part of a larger ecological web and stresses the need for ecological sustainability and biodiversity conservation (Naess, 1973). It advocates radical changes in human behavior and calls for deep structural shifts in the way societies approach environmental issues. Rather than focusing solely on economic growth, deep ecology promotes equitable coexistence with the natural world, where humans and nature thrive together.

In African literature, deep ecology is explored through narratives that critique neocolonial exploitation and advocate for a return to indigenous ecological practices. Authors such as Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o emphasize the need for a more sustainable and ecologically responsible approach to the land and natural resources (Ngũgĩ, 2017). In works like Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood* (1977), the author critiques the economic structures that perpetuate environmental degradation and promotes a return to community-based conservation that respects both human life and ecological integrity.

Ecofeminism links the exploitation of nature with the oppression of women and other marginalized groups. This environmental philosophy argues that the same patriarchal systems that perpetuate gender inequality are responsible for the environmental degradation that disproportionately affects women and marginalized communities. Ecofeminism highlights the interconnectedness of social injustices and environmental crises, asserting that both must be addressed together in order to achieve true environmental justice (Gaard, 2011). In literature, ecofeminism calls attention to the ways in which women's voices have been marginalized in environmental discourse and advocates for gender-inclusive approaches to environmental sustainability.

In the context of African literature, ecofeminism is particularly relevant, as many African women are at the forefront of efforts to preserve natural resources and combat environmental degradation. Authors like Mariama Bâ in *So Long a Letter* highlight the gendered impact of colonialism and neocolonialism, which have not only disempowered women but also contributed to the environmental crisis (Bâ, 1981). Through eco-feminist perspectives, literature offers a lens through which gender, race, and environmental concerns are explored in an interconnected manner.

2.5 Ecocriticism: Understanding the Human-Nature Relationship in Literature

Ecocriticism is a critical framework that examines the relationship between literature and the environment, focusing on how human-nature interactions are represented in literary texts. As a multidisciplinary field, ecocriticism draws from literary studies, environmental science, and philosophy to analyze how literature reflects or challenges human impacts on the natural world. It also explores how literary narratives can influence public attitudes toward ecological issues and promote environmental change.

At its core, ecocriticism seeks to understand how the human relationship with nature has evolved and how these shifts are captured in literary works. The three key environmental philosophies discussed above—anthropocentrism, deep ecology, and eco-feminism—serve as foundational pillars for ecocriticism, helping critics interpret the representation of nature in literary texts and evaluate their implications for environmental justice and sustainability.

In ecocritical studies, one of the primary goals is to critique the dominance of anthropocentrism and promote a biocentric worldview that sees humans as interconnected with and part of the ecological system. This shift is often explored through literary texts that critique capitalism,

colonialism, and neocolonialism, all of which are seen as contributing to environmental degradation and the exploitation of natural resources (Robbins, 2012). Ecocriticism reveals how literature reflects and critiques these systems, encouraging readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world.

Through deep ecology, ecocriticism advocates for sustainable practices and a more holistic understanding of the human-nature connection. It also explores how literary texts can raise awareness about environmental justice and the need to address global environmental crises, such as climate change and deforestation (Garrard, 2019). In African literature, authors such as Ngũgĩ and Achebe use narratives to explore how human actions driven by anthropocentrism have led to environmental destruction, calling for a shift to more ecologically responsible ways of living (Achebe, 2000; Ngũgĩ, 2017).

Finally, eco-feminism within ecocriticism brings attention to the gendered aspects of environmental justice, recognizing that the exploitation of women and the environment are interconnected. Literary texts that incorporate eco-feminism reveal how women are often the primary victims of environmental degradation, while also showing how they play a vital role in advocating for environmental change. Writers like Mariama Bâ and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie highlight these issues by addressing gender inequality and the environmental challenges faced by women in postcolonial Africa (Bâ, 1981; Adichie, 2006).

2.6 Review of Literary Texts and Their Environmental Themes

In this section, key literary texts that engage with environmental themes will be discussed. These texts reflect how African writers address the complex human-nature relationships and critique environmental degradation. These works illuminate the environmental consequences of anthropocentrism, neocolonialism, and exploitation of natural resources.

Chinua Achebe in his work *Things Fall Apart* insists that the Igbo people's relationship with nature is not merely utilitarian but is sacred and central to their cultural identity. In Achebe's novel, the Igbo worldview is depicted as one in which nature and the environment are deeply respected. The land, the forests, and animals are not seen as mere resources but as integral parts of their spiritual and cultural existence. However, the arrival of colonialism introduces a disruptive force, bringing with it an anthropocentric perspective that views nature primarily as a commodity to be exploited for economic gain. This clash between the indigenous view of nature and the colonial exploitation of resources reflects the broader environmental consequences of colonialism. Achebe critiques the destructive impact of Western capitalist approaches to resource use, which disrupt the ecological balance and contribute to environmental degradation. Achebe's text underscores how colonialism not only destroys indigenous cultures but also leads to the exploitation of nature (Achebe, 2000).

Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o, in *Petals of Blood*, critiques the neocolonial exploitation of land in Kenya, demonstrating how postcolonial societies continue to exploit natural resources for economic gain, often without regard for the

environmental impact. The novel examines the consequences of capitalist systems introduced during colonialism and how these systems persist in the postcolonial era, where industrialization and corporate greed continue to undermine sustainable land use and ecological balance. Ngũgĩ critiques the exploitation of the land by both foreign investors and local elites, revealing how their actions contribute to deforestation, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss. Ngũgĩ's work calls for a return to indigenous practices that promote ecological sustainability, where communities engage in resource conservation and respect for nature (Ngũgĩ, 2017).

Mariama Bâ, in her novel *So Long a Letter*, explores how the environment is both a cultural and gendered site of struggle. While the novel primarily focuses on the gendered challenges faced by women in postcolonial Senegal, it also reflects how women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation. Bâ suggests that women's roles in both family and community life are closely tied to the land and natural resources, which are increasingly being depleted by neocolonial economic practices. The impact of environmental exploitation is especially evident in rural areas, where women are responsible for water collection, firewood gathering, and food production, all of which are threatened by ecological imbalances (Bâ, 1981). Through this lens, Bâ critiques the intersectionality of gender oppression and environmental degradation, calling for a more sustainable and equitable relationship with the land that respects both women's roles and the environment.

Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* reflects the degradation of both human dignity and the natural environment in the face of political oppression. In this work, Soyinka connects the dehumanization of political prisoners with the destruction of the environment, revealing how tyrannical political systems are inherently exploitative not just of human beings, but also of natural resources. Soyinka draws parallels between his personal experiences of oppression in prison and the broader environmental destruction caused by oppressive regimes. Through his reflections on Nigeria's political landscape, Soyinka highlights the role of political elites in exploiting both nature and human rights, and the ecological consequences of authoritarian regimes that prioritize economic gain over environmental sustainability. The text serves as a critique of political systems that contribute to social injustice and environmental degradation, urging for a more just and sustainable future (Soyinka, 1999).

2.7 Summary of Literature Review

The literary texts reviewed in this section Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood*, Bâ's *So Long a Letter*, and Soyinka's *The Man Died* offer diverse critiques of the human-nature relationship in the context of colonialism and neocolonialism. These authors explore the environmental consequences of anthropocentrism, capitalist exploitation, and political oppression.

In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the Igbo people's harmonious relationship with nature is disrupted by the imposition of colonialism, which brings with it a destructive, anthropocentric worldview. Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood* critiques the neocolonial exploitation of land and

resources in postcolonial Kenya, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices and a return to indigenous ecological knowledge. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* highlights how gendered and environmental injustices are intertwined, with women's roles in resource management being impacted by environmental degradation. Soyinka's *The Man Died* connects the dehumanization of political prisoners with the destruction of the environment, critiquing political systems that exploit both human beings and natural resources.

Together, these texts underscore the interconnectedness of social justice and environmental justice, advocating for a shift in human-nature relationships toward sustainability and ecological harmony.

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative research design with a literary analysis approach. The primary objective was to examine how African literary texts engaged with environmental themes, critiqued anthropocentric worldviews, and proposed alternative ecological perspectives. Given the focus on textual analysis and the interpretation of literary works, a hermeneutic approach was used, which involved the interpretation and understanding of texts within their cultural and historical contexts (Gadamer, 2004), analysis of key African literary texts, examining how ecological themes were presented and how these texts engaged with broader environmental philosophies such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and political ecology.

3.1 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis for the study involved the following techniques:

1. **Thematic Analysis:** Thematic analysis was used to identify key ecocritical themes in the selected literary works. The themes included anthropocentrism, deep ecology, resource exploitation, gendered environmental injustice, and neocolonialism. Each of these themes was analyzed to understand how the authors engaged with environmental issues and human-nature relationships. The analysis focused on how literary characters, settings, and plot structures reflected the environmental impact of colonialism and neocolonialism, as well as how they proposed alternative approaches to human-nature relations. The study also explored how these texts represented gendered aspects of environmental justice, particularly in the works of Mariama Bâ and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Bâ, 1981; Adichie, 2006).
2. **Ecocritical Framework:** The texts were analyzed through the lens of ecocriticism, focusing on how they portrayed the ecological crises in African societies. Ecocriticism allowed for the exploration of environmental consciousness in literature and provided insights into how authors critiqued anthropocentric perspectives and proposed a shift toward sustainable and equitable relationships with nature.
3. **Postcolonial Theory:** This framework was used to analyze the political ecology of the selected texts,

examining how colonial histories shaped the environmental policies and social systems in postcolonial African societies. Postcolonial theory helped to understand the legacy of colonialism in shaping the environmental exploitation of African lands and the struggle for ecological justice in postcolonial contexts.

4. Comparative Analysis: The study engaged in a comparative analysis of the selected texts, examining the similarities and differences in how African authors represented the human-nature relationship and critiqued environmental degradation. This also included a comparison of how different African regions and literary traditions responded to environmental issues and proposed solutions for sustainable development.

4. Discussion of Findings

This essay presents a discussion of the key findings of the study. The findings are based on the analysis of the selected African literary texts through the lens of ecocriticism and postcolonial theory, focusing on how these works engage with environmental themes such as resource exploitation, sustainability, and human-nature relationships. Specifically, this chapter will discuss how these texts reflect and critique anthropocentric worldviews and propose alternative perspectives that emphasize ecological balance and environmental justice.

4.1 Analysis of Anthropocentric Worldviews in Literary Texts

Anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are the center of the universe, is a dominant worldview that has historically shaped both societal structures and environmental policies. This study analyzed how African literature critiques the anthropocentric worldview through the portrayal of human domination over nature and the consequences of such exploitation. Through the close reading of key African literary texts, it became evident that these works challenge the human-centered perspective and depict the destructive impact of this worldview on both ecology and culture.

1. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), the anthropocentric perspective is represented through the character of Okonkwo, who views nature and the land primarily as resources to be controlled and used for personal gain. Okonkwo's worldview is shaped by his desire for strength and achievement, and he sees the natural world as something to conquer. The Igbo people, before the arrival of colonialism, maintained a spiritual connection with nature, where the land and environment were regarded as sacred and interwoven with their cultural and religious life. However, Okonkwo's personal ambition and his role in Igbo society contribute to an exploitative relationship with nature.

The arrival of colonial powers brings a destructive anthropocentric worldview, wherein the colonizers' perspective of nature as a resource to be exploited for economic profit directly leads to the disruption of the Igbo people's ecological balance. Colonialism, in Achebe's

novel, is depicted as a force that not only dehumanizes the indigenous population but also leads to the environmental degradation of the land. This shift from sustainable practices to exploitative systems represents the harmful effects of an anthropocentric worldview on both people and the environment (Achebe, 2000).

2. Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977)

In Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), the critique of anthropocentrism is even more pronounced, as the novel explores the neocolonial exploitation of the Kenyan landscape and its people. Ngũgĩ critiques the capitalist and neocolonial systems that perpetuate the destructive anthropocentric view of nature. In the novel, land is no longer a communal resource, managed by the indigenous population through traditional ecological practices; instead, it becomes a commodity to be bought and sold for economic profit.

The characters in the novel especially the indigenous Kenyan workers are depicted as victims of a system that exploits both human labor and natural resources for the benefit of foreign investors and the elite class. Ngũgĩ's critique focuses on how the shift from communal land ownership to privatization leads to the disintegration of ecological systems and economic inequality. The exploitation of land for profit reflects the anthropocentric attitudes of both colonial and postcolonial systems (Ngũgĩ, 2017).

The industrial development promoted by the neocolonial government emphasizes short-term gains over long-term ecological balance, resulting in soil erosion, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Ngũgĩ's work underscores the consequences of viewing nature solely as a resource for economic exploitation, demonstrating how capitalism and colonial legacies continue to harm both nature and local communities (Ngũgĩ, 2017).

3. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981)

In Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981), the critique of anthropocentrism is more implicit, focusing on the intersection of gender and environmental degradation. Although the novel primarily addresses gender inequality and polygamy, it also highlights the impact of environmental exploitation on women, particularly in rural areas where women are responsible for gathering firewood, collecting water, and farming. Bâ critiques the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism on women's roles in sustainable agricultural practices, as economic systems often prioritize industrialization and urbanization over environmental stewardship.

The environmental consequences of anthropocentrism are evident in the novel's depiction of land degradation, where women's labor becomes increasingly burdensome as natural resources become scarcer. Women, in particular, are depicted as bearers of ecological knowledge and stewards of the land, yet their work is undermined by capitalist and colonial policies that devalue traditional ecological practices and exacerbate environmental crises (Bâ, 1981). The novel critiques how neocolonial systems perpetuate environmental injustices that disproportionately affect marginalized groups, particularly women.

4. Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1999)

In Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1999), the critique of anthropocentrism is more philosophical, exploring the dehumanizing effects of political oppression and environmental degradation. Soyinka reflects on his experiences in prison, where he observes the dehumanization of prisoners as being akin to the exploitation of nature by tyrannical governments. Soyinka uses the metaphor of political imprisonment to explore how authoritarian regimes contribute to the destruction of both human dignity and natural resources.

Soyinka critiques how dictatorships and neocolonial governments view nature as a commodity to be exploited for economic gain, often disregarding environmental sustainability and social well-being. In his reflections on Nigeria's political landscape, Soyinka connects environmental degradation with oppression, asserting that both social justice and ecological justice are interdependent. His work underscores how neoliberal policies and authoritarian rule are driven by anthropocentric attitudes that harm both people and nature (Soyinka, 1999).

4.2 Summary of Findings: Anthropocentrism in African Literature

The analysis of key literary texts revealed that African authors consistently critique anthropocentrism and the destructive human dominance over nature in their works. These authors highlight the environmental consequences of colonialism and neocolonialism, demonstrating how these systems perpetuate unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* critiques the imposition of colonial systems that disrupt indigenous ecological practices. Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood* exposes the neocolonial exploitation of land for profit, which undermines traditional ecological stewardship. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* subtly addresses the gendered effects of neocolonial exploitation on women's relationship with the land. Finally, Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died* critiques the dehumanizing effects of oppressive political systems, highlighting the parallel exploitation of both human labor and natural resources.

4.3 The Shift Toward Deep Ecology in Contemporary Literature

Deep ecology is an environmental philosophy that promotes the idea that nature possesses intrinsic value, independent of its utility to humans. This perspective calls for a shift from the anthropocentric worldview to a biocentric or ecocentric one, where all living beings are considered equally important in the ecological system. In contemporary African literature, the shift towards deep ecology reflects an increasing concern with ecological sustainability, resource conservation, and the preservation of biodiversity. This shift challenges traditional narratives of exploitation and calls for a reconnection with nature that emphasizes harmony, balance, and respect for the environment.

1. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), there is a noticeable shift from the anthropocentric worldview to

an early form of ecocentrism, particularly in the way the Igbo community's relationship with nature is depicted. Before the arrival of colonialism, the Igbo people viewed nature as a sacred and integral part of their spiritual and cultural existence. The earth, land, and forests were not mere commodities to be exploited, but were considered partners in a harmonious existence. Achebe critiques the anthropocentric colonial mindset that imposes Western values on African communities, leading to the destruction of ecological systems and the disruption of traditional ecological practices.

Achebe's novel highlights the balance and interdependence between humans and the environment within Igbo society. The Igbo community's approach to land and natural resources exemplifies an early form of ecological sustainability, where cultural practices supported a sustainable use of resources. The novel's portrayal of colonial interference underscores the importance of deep ecology, where the integrity of nature must be preserved, even in the face of external pressures for economic development (Achebe, 2000).

2. NgũgĩwaThiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977)

In NgũgĩwaThiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), the shift towards deep ecology is more explicit, as the novel directly critiques the neocolonial exploitation of Kenyan land and resources. Ngũgĩ portrays nature as a living entity that is deeply tied to the spiritual and cultural fabric of the Kenyan people. The novel emphasizes the harmful impact of modern industrialization, which prioritizes economic gain over the preservation of nature. Through the lens of deep ecology, Ngũgĩ critiques the destructive practices of corporations and political elites who exploit natural resources for profit, without considering the long-term ecological consequences.

Ngũgĩ's work calls for a return to indigenous ecological practices that emphasize sustainability, biodiversity, and respect for the environment. The text argues for the preservation of traditional ecological knowledge and the establishment of eco-centric values that prioritize the health of the land over profit-driven motives (Ngũgĩ, 2017).

3. Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1999)

In Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1999), there is an implicit shift towards deep ecology, especially when Soyinka reflects on his experiences in political imprisonment. The text critiques the political systems that view both human beings and nature as resources to be exploited. Soyinka draws parallels between the oppression of prisoners and the destruction of the environment, illustrating how authoritarian regimes prioritize economic progress over ecological balance.

The deep ecological perspective in Soyinka's work is evident in his call for a radical rethinking of human-nature relations. Soyinka critiques the anthropocentric mindset that underpins political and economic structures that contribute to environmental harm. The text advocates for a deeper, more respectful relationship with nature, emphasizing the importance of ecological justice in the face of political oppression (Soyinka, 1999).

4. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981)

Although Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) does not explicitly focus on deep ecology, the novel subtly reflects an eco-feminist critique of the gendered impact of environmental degradation. In postcolonial Senegal, women are portrayed as the primary stewards of the land, responsible for managing natural resources such as water and firewood. The novel critiques the neocolonial economic systems that exploit both women's labor and the environment, leading to resource depletion and land degradation.

Bâ's text implicitly advocates for a reconnection with nature, where women play a pivotal role in sustainable resource management. The eco-feminist perspective in the novel aligns with deep ecology, as it emphasizes the interdependence of women and the environment and the need for ecological sustainability (Bâ, 1981).

4.4 Literary Representation of Ecological Crises and Human-Nature Interactions

The representation of ecological crises in African literature often revolves around the human-nature conflict, where industrialization, colonialism, and neocolonialism contribute to environmental degradation. These texts highlight the tension between human exploitation of the environment and the need for ecological sustainability.

1. Environmental Degradation and Resource Exploitation

The novels examined in this study portray the environmental consequences of human exploitation of natural resources. Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood* (1977), for example, explores the destruction of the land caused by capitalist exploitation, while Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) critiques the disruption of traditional land use practices due to colonialism. In these texts, the exploitation of resources such as land, water, and forests is depicted as contributing to the environmental crises faced by postcolonial societies.

Both Achebe and Ngũgĩ emphasize how economic systems rooted in capitalism and colonial legacies prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability, resulting in ecological collapse. The texts highlight the importance of local, community-based management of natural resources and the preservation of biodiversity (Achebe, 2000; Ngũgĩ, 2017).

2. Human-Nature Interactions in the Face of Ecological Crises

In addition to critiquing anthropocentrism, these African literary texts also depict human-nature interactions in the face of ecological crises. Soyinka's *The Man Died* (1999), for instance, explores how political oppression leads to environmental destruction, while Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) highlights the gendered impact of resource depletion. These works underscore the interdependence between human well-being and the health of the environment, suggesting that social justice cannot be achieved without environmental justice.

The novels demonstrate how colonialism and neocolonialism have reshaped the human-nature relationship in Africa, leading to ecological imbalance. However, they also propose alternative futures where

indigenous knowledge systems and eco-centric values are used to promote environmental sustainability and ecological justice (Soyinka, 1999; Bâ, 1981).

5. Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that African literature serves as an important medium through which ecological issues and human-nature relationships are explored and critiqued. The literary texts analyzed Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981), and Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1999) highlight the significant role of literature in addressing the environmental crises exacerbated by colonialism, neocolonialism, and capitalist exploitation.

These works reflect the shift toward deep ecology, promoting a biocentric worldview that recognizes the intrinsic value of nature and calls for ecological sustainability. The analysis also emphasized the gendered aspects of environmental degradation, where women are often at the forefront of ecological activism and resource conservation.

Ultimately, the study concluded that African literature not only critiques the human-centered exploitation of nature but also proposes alternative frameworks for sustainable human-nature interactions. The literary texts analyzed advocate for a respectful, sustainable relationship between humans and the environment, where ecological balance, resource conservation, and social justice are prioritized.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for literature and environmental action:

1. Promote Ecocriticism in Literature: African literature should continue to engage with ecocritical perspectives, particularly by critiquing anthropocentric views and promoting deep ecology. Authors and literary scholars should work to further explore how literature can provide solutions to environmental crises, with a focus on sustainability and ecological justice.
2. Integrate Environmental Education in Literature: There should be a concerted effort to incorporate environmental themes in educational curricula, especially in African schools and universities. By studying literary works that address environmental degradation and human-nature relationships, students can be encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of ecological issues and engage with environmental activism.
3. Advocate for Gender-Sensitive Environmental Policies: Gender equality and environmental justice should be seen as interconnected. Women in many African societies are crucial to environmental management and resource conservation. Literature can raise awareness about the gendered impact of ecological degradation and push for policies that empower women in sustainable resource management.

4. Encourage Indigenous Ecological Practices: African literary texts often reflect the wisdom of indigenous ecological knowledge systems, which have been proven to contribute to sustainable land management and biodiversity preservation. There is a need to advocate for the integration of traditional ecological knowledge into contemporary environmental management and policymaking.
5. Promote Public Awareness through Literature: Literary works that address environmental justice and sustainability can serve as tools for raising public awareness about ecological crises. Authors and activists should collaborate to reach broader audiences and encourage collective action for climate change mitigation, conservation, and biodiversity protection.

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