

# Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the African Response to Human Experience and the Environment

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## ABSTRACT

Postcolonial ecocriticism is a theory that looks at both the environment and people, how both are interconnected, reflect and define each other. Writers symbolically use wholesome social environment to indicate spiritual and moral vivacity of a society while unhealthy environment shows exploitation, extreme materialism, moral decadence, and spiritual ineptitude of a society. This paper looks at Postcolonial ecocriticism as a local response to global environmental issues, and also explores the colonial impact and legacy on human and nonhumans in Africa. The paper is reliant on Postcolonial ecocriticism and uses Frantz Fanon's thoughts in *Wretched of the Earth* as the theory that guides the analysis of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *I will Marry When I Want* and Athol Fugard's *Sorrows and Rejoicing*. The plays serve as the primary texts of this research paper. Thus, this paper will look at the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans in the two select plays. The paper specifically sees Postcolonial ecocriticism as Africa's local response to the global environmental writings that have occluded the issue of colonialism and displacement. The paper also establishes a connection between the *anthropos* and nonhuman elements in African drama.

*Keywords:* Postcolonial ecocriticism, colonialism, environment, *anthropos*, interconnectedness.

## Introduction

While this paper recognizes the importance of critically engaging the universal man and his environment in literary criticism, it argues that the African experience and environment cannot fit into a global environmental epistemology that isolates local particulars, the alterity of Africans, and the discussion of colonial legacies and postcolonial contexts. This is because of the peculiarity of our history. One may take a cue from Susie O'Brien's recommendation that "the global and local come together, not by way of simple synecdoche...but in a way such that each interrupts and distorts the other" to accepting both the peculiarity of the locals and "globalising impulses"<sup>1</sup>. The paper also explores the history of Africans, and the crises that confront and limit their human and environmental development. Therefore, this study finds an intellectual/theoretical posture and framework that addresses the African experience and environment in Postcolonial ecocriticism. The identification of the impacts of slavery, colonialism and apartheid; and neo-imperialism in this paper is to allow a retrospective evaluation and reformation of Africans – and their environments. Such a context blends with the notion of what Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley refer to as a "transformative self-conscious disruption"<sup>2</sup>. The paper traces the history of the human and environmental crisis confronting Africans as explored in the drama texts studied.

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<sup>1</sup> O'Brien, Susie. "Articulating a World of Difference: Ecocriticism, Postcolonialism, and Globalization". *Canadian Literature*. 170/171. 2001. p.143

<sup>2</sup> Deloughrey, Elizabeth and Handley, George. eds. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010. p. 28.

## Local Response in a Global Consciousness

More than a century has passed since Joseph Conrad carved in fiction the unregulated colossal plunder he witnessed in the Congo. What he termed ‘Eldorado Expedition’ in his novel *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad (1899) sees an Africa rich in material resources but inhabited by species of savaged humanity a little above animals with neither culture nor intelligible communication which justified the colonial exploitation of the region and the disruption of their culture.

Other creative writers and critics since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have been exploring the impact and legacies of slavery, colonialism and racism in postcolonial communities to capture human and environmental degradation of the colonial “other”, a practice Robin Nixon referred to as “environmentalism of the poor”<sup>3</sup>. More importantly, in more recent years, they are looking beyond colonial and neo-colonial impact on humans to the impact of historical human activities on the environment and extra human elements. This has led to the rise of cultural and environmental studies/theory in African literature. This research contributes to the rising literary corpus of culture (post colonialism) and environmental studies (ecocriticism).

Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism are both difficult to define because of ideological concerns, fundamental difference in approach and methodology, and divisions amongst the practitioners of the two theories. Each of the theories developed in isolation of the other while focusing on specific concerns. Postcolonialism is anthropocentric, and looks at problematized divisions between people and race, while ecocriticism focuses on nature. Postcolonialism is a theory and concept of negation that explores the impacts and legacies of imperialism and racism on

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<sup>3</sup> Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environment of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011. Print. p. 234

former colonies and slaves, and how through reinvention of colonialism, former colonies still depend on foreign societies and countries through uneven economic and political relations (what is called neo-colonialism). Postcolonialism ignores the long historical environmental exploitation of the former colonies and ecological concerns that underpin both the colonized and the colonizers. Ecocriticism, on the other hand, is an invention of Northern environmentalism. It targets “the [modern] materialistic civilization [that] makes man the butcher of Earth”<sup>4</sup> seeks to restore the Edenic nature and curb the exploitation of same. However, eco/environmental criticism “fails to factor cultural difference”<sup>5</sup> and ignores humanity, colonialism, and racial exploitation and discrimination. As Huggan and Tiffin put it:

Postcolonial critiques of European imperialism and colonialism, as well as studies of their post-independence legacies, have from the outset been informed by ethical and political concerns, while the burgeoning area of environmental analysis and critique, particularly though by no means exclusively in the humanities, has in large part emerged out of genuine alarm at the future of the planetary environment and its inhabitants<sup>6</sup>.

By highlighting the different concerns of postcolonial and Ecocritical critics, Nixon buttresses the reasons for the late entry of environmental studies into postcolonial studies despite the environmental consciousness of blacks in the pre-colonial context<sup>7</sup>. Nixon extensively shows the

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<sup>4</sup> Ramachandra, Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique”. *Environmental Ethics*. 11.1: 71 - 83 p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> Huggan, Graham and Tiffin, Helen. “Green Postcolonialism”. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 9.1. 2007. p. 3

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environment of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP. 2011. 2005. Print. p. 235.

difference between postcolonialism and the first wave ecocriticism known as “deep ecology”. Deep Ecology evolved to become Ecocriticism and is an American-based environmental movement and an ecological/environmental ideology that asserts the intrinsic value of all living things regardless of their utilitarian value to humanity. It advocates love for nature and argues that nature is a structure of existence where living organisms are dependent on the existence of others within the ecology. Deep Ecology's core principle is to promote respect for nature and acknowledge nonhuman nature's right to existence no matter how dispensable they are to humankind<sup>8</sup>. Deep Ecology is also strict in its stance on nature preservation. However, with the adaptation of Deep Ecology to ecocriticism, Nixon's assertion may not be validated because recent ecocritical studies or environmental studies accommodate the social aspects of the environment.

Before Deep Ecology's evolution (from its concentration on American environmental issues to expanding its scope to accommodate other ecologies outside America), it was widely rejected by postcolonial critics. Deep Ecology was popularized by American environmentalists without recourse to other ecologies and the historical participation of Western governments and multinational corporations in the degradation of former colonies; and also the impacts of racism in the impoverishment and displacement of blacks especially, African Americans. This made postcolonialists wary of this theory that talks about preservation of nature but turns a blind eye to the exploitation of other ecologies outside the Northern hemisphere. Byron Caminero-Santangelo and Gath Myers are of the view that first wave ecocriticism is a bourgeois environmentalism that tends to represent and sell the idea of Edenic nature, a pure state of nature with amnesia towards the impacts of racism and colonialism in the

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<sup>8</sup> Naess, Anne. “The Third World, Wilderness and Deep Ecology.” *Deep Ecology in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. George Sessions. Boston: Shambhala. Print. 1995. p. 6

degradation, displacement, disruption and exploitation of ecosystem people<sup>9</sup>. This Northern deep ecology or “pastoral and wilderness writing” as Greg Garrard<sup>10</sup> put it ignores the literature and, human and nonhuman environmental conditions of Africans. For instance, during the first wave ecocriticism, African writers were seldom studied in ecocritical discourses and publications. Most of the writers explored are American and European and again such works lacked any concern for the disparity within human society(ies).

Ramachandra Guha argues that “deep ecology indicates a lack of concern with inequalities within human society”<sup>11</sup> and how they are products of social structures and historical events. This out-of-touch notion of environmental studies made postcolonialists suspicious of identifying with such mononational literary criticism that is committed to a specific locale. Guha condemns first wave ecocritics like Arne Naess because of their inability to recognise the cultural difference or peculiarities of other ecologies and the imposition of American and European concept of nature on the global world. Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey believe Deep Ecologies endorsed the “orientalist methodologies”<sup>12</sup> which ignore the degradation of Africans by multinational companies’ industrial activities like the exploration of oil with poor global practices in places like Nigeria where oil is spilled and the ecology of the Niger Delta where this exploration is taking place destroyed.

Postcolonialists also reject Deep Ecology’s wild portrayal of the former colonies which encouraged their violent appropriation because wildness can be interpreted as unclaimed or having no ownership. Such

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<sup>9</sup> Camniero-Santangelo, Byron and Myers, Gath. *Environment at the Margins Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*. Ohio University Press: Athens, US. 2011. p. 4

<sup>10</sup> Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge. 2011. p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Ramachandra. *Radical American Environmentalism*. p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> Cilano, Clara. and DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. “Against Authenticity: Global Knowledges and Postcolonial Ecocriticism”. *ISLE* . 2007. 14.1. p. 71

mentality led to the displacement of natives and the forceful appropriation of natives' lands for reservations that appeal to deep ecology's sentiments of reservation of nature.

Arne Naess, one of the leading voices of Deep Ecology accepts Guha's argument/accusation that Deep Ecology is narrow and goes further to include literatures from the ecologies of the world's poor in her writings. She is of the view that for global social progress, there must be cooperation between poor ecologies/disadvantaged economies and deep ecology. Naess in a paternalistic tone calls for trust and dependence of poor and exploited societies on deep ecology<sup>13</sup>. Naess's assumptions endanger any form of cooperation between postcolonialism and ecocriticism because of the dependent position allocated in this context to Africans and so paint a picture of continued colonialism and independence. Such dependence on Deep Ecology is also impossible because of the suspicion that Deep Ecology and Northern literature lack political anthropocentrism and cultural recognition of blacks which have been the bane of postcolonialism.

However, it can be averred that the strict nature-culture difference between ecocriticism and postcolonialism has become a minority position in recent environmental studies. Most critics are beginning to consider the social implication of the environment, what Ursula Heise describes as social ecology which "tends to value nature primarily in its human uses and has affinities with political philosophies ranging from anarchism and socialism to feminism"<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, there has been growing interests in literary criticism in finding points of intersection between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. Caminero-Santangelo and Myers point out that there is a growing

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<sup>13</sup> Naess, Anne. "The Third World, Wilderness and Deep Ecology." *Deep Ecology in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. George Sessions. Boston: Shambhala. 1995. p. 399

<sup>14</sup> Heise, Ursula. 2006. "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism." *PMLA*. 121.2: 503-16. p. 507

number of “...articles, edited collections, special issues of journals, and monographs” that “have focused on the intersection of ecocriticism with postcolonial cultural studies”<sup>15</sup>. Such work has been termed postcolonial ecocriticism and often emphasizes the similarities between the two fields of scholarship in terms of a sense of political commitment, interdisciplinarity, and the interrogation of capitalist development and progress”<sup>15</sup>. Nixon points out that postcolonialism and ecocriticism are both activists in nature with strong bias for social change and justice. With the existence of points of intersection, this thesis will heed to the call of reimagining of postcolonialism and ecocriticism to look at social justice of the environment and the anthropocentric while taking cognisance of the peculiar cultural and historical experiences of blacks’ bioregions without being transcendental, in Nixon’s words “...to recuperate, imaginatively and politically, experiences of hybridity, displacement, and transnational memory for any viable spatial ethic”.<sup>16</sup>

Postcolonial ecocriticism is a re-imagining of Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism and demands urgent attention in establishing how racism and colonialism affect both humans and the environment. While emphasizing the urgency and need for a dialogical connection between postcolonialism and ecocriticism, Caminero-Santangelo and Myers note it is “pressing” and with the avalanche of intractable damages done since colonial and neo-colonial times, there is a “need for new kinds of environmental discourses”<sup>17</sup>.

Reimagining postcolonialism and ecocriticism entails thinking beyond the political aspects of culture and cultural assertion, and the study of

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<sup>15</sup> Caminero-Santangelo , Byron. and Myers, Gath. .Eds. *Environment at the Margins Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*. Ohio University Press: Athens, US. 2011. p. 3

<sup>16</sup> Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environment of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011. Print. p. 243

<sup>17</sup> Caminero-Santangelo , Byron. and Myers, Gath. .Eds. 2011. *Environment at the Margins Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*. Ohio University Press: Athens, US. 2011. p 2

colonial impacts and legacies to accommodate environmental concerns; rethinking the dominant paradigms of Edenic wilderness preservation and agrarianism in such a manner that ecocriticism goes beyond bioregions; and accommodating transnational environmental and human concerns. It must also recognise the impacts of racism, imperialism and neo-colonialism on poor and racially discriminated ecologies. This can be done through reimagining literary works to accommodate both bioregional and transnational social justice for human and nonhuman nature. As Richard Mabey writes, “the challenge, in a world where the differences between native and stranger are fading, is to discover veins of local character which are distinctive without being insular and withdrawn.”<sup>18</sup> Postcolonial ecocriticism must emphasize the interdependence and interconnectedness of human survival and environmental change, and the sustainment of a relationship between cultural survival and a viable environment.

## **Frantz Fanon’s Postcolonial Ecocriticism Theory and its significance**

Although Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* was written in the context of colonialism in Africa, the book is deep in postcolonial ecocriticism. Thus a critical study of the book also reveals a theory that explains the structural pattern of environmental exploitation similar to the racial and colonial discrimination of Africans. Fanon’s work is examined to show the postcolonial ecocritical underpinning it contains and how an ecological reading of the text can foreground the connection scholars like Rob Nixon, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have

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<sup>18</sup> Mabey, Richard. *Landlocked: In Pursuit of the Wild*. London: Sinclair Stevenson. 1994. Print. p. 71

established between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. The paper shifts from the strict postcolonial interpretation of Fanon's theory in *The Wretched of the Earth* and establishes that it also explores environmental impacts of colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* focuses on resource exploitation, human degradation, eco-economics of the colonies in relation to the mother countries, neo-colonization and native collaboration, and most importantly, decolonization. There are diverse interpretations of Fanon's theory. Hannah Arendt is one of the leading voices against Fanon's violence while Homi Bhabha (2004), Michael Azar (1999), and Jean-Paul Sartre approve of Fanon's violence-based poetics within the colonial context Fanon engaged in the book. In his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre defends Fanon's prescription of violence in the decolonization of the colonies citing the peculiarity and contextualization of Fanon's violence. Sartre is of the view that violence can only be interpreted in the context of consciousness, the recreation of oneself in understanding "that no gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy them"<sup>19</sup>. For him, violence in itself is the creation of the colonial masters bequeathed to the colonized and implanted in their psyches through a "thousand-year-old oppression"<sup>20</sup> and that no passivity can dismantle such structured oppression. Sartre enumerates the viciousness of colonialism and warns that the native will strike back and that Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is a warning to Europeans:

Our striking power has been given the mission of changing this abstract certainty into reality: the order is given to reduce the inhabitants of the annexed country to the level of superior monkeys

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<sup>19</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Preface". *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press. 1963. p. 21

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, p. 25.

in order to justify the settler's treatment of them as beasts of burden. Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours. Sheer physical fatigue will stupefy them. Starved and ill, if they have any spirit left, fear will the job; guns are levelled at the peasant; civilians come to take over his land and force him by dint of flogging to till the land for them; if he shows fight, the soldiers fire and he's a dead man; if he gives in, he degrades himself<sup>21</sup>

Sartre is quoted at length to show his angst against the deep atrocity committed against Africans.

It may seem as has been pointed earlier that Fanon was basically anthropocentric in his analysis of colonialism, often ignoring nonhuman nature; but a closer look will expose the environmental concerns buried in the text. Cajetan Iheka argues that "Fanon's interest in the spatial economy of the colony, the economics of resource plundering, and what he calls the "magical superstructure" of the African colonial societies open up spaces for theorizing environmental racism, critiquing the loss of biodiversity in Africa, and elaborating an African centred ecocriticism (emphasis mine)<sup>22</sup> Fanon aligned the environmental conditions of the oppressed with what was earlier pointed out as species, the colonialist claim of superiority and racial difference: "The governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, 'the others'<sup>23</sup>. He observes further: "The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of value,

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<sup>21</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press. 1963. p.7

<sup>22</sup> Iheka, Carjetan. *African Literature and the Environment: A Study in Postcolonial Ecocriticism*. PhD Thesis. Department of English, Michigan State University. Michigan. 2015. p.35

<sup>23</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press. 1963. p. 41

but also the negation of values”<sup>24</sup>. The natives are also described in zoological terms and references “...to the slithery movements of the yellow race, the odours from the native quarters, to the hordes, the stink, the swarming, the seething, and the gesticulations. In his endeavours at description and finding the right word, the colonist refers constantly to the bestiary”<sup>25</sup>. In questioning the materialist systematic exploitation of blacks, Fanon also noticed the environmental racism and its impact in the colonies. The colonist’s quarters are Edenic and reflect the affluence of materialism while the native quarters are unhygienic slums. Fanon’s lengthy description vividly provides information about the uneven development and environmental discrimination/racism that reflect situations in and beyond Africa.

The colonist’s sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel. It’s a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers. The colonist’s feet can never be glimpsed, except perhaps in the sea, but then you can never get close enough. They are protected by solid shoes in a sector where the streets are clean and smooth, without a pothole, without a stone. The colonist’s sector is a sated, sluggish sector; its belly is permanently full of good things. The colonist’s sector is a white folks sector, a sector of foreigners<sup>26</sup>.

While the Europeans occupy plains and choice lands the blacks have been displaced by the colonialists and they occupy the filthy barracks that are disease ridden (Fanon describes the natives’ environment as a place of death). While the descriptions of the environment of colonialist’s and colonized show glaring differences of poverty and

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 40

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p. 7

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p. 39

penury juxtaposed against the organised and affluent environment. The impacts of colonialism and its legacies cannot be severed from the environment since colonialism usually introduces environmental racism. Bunyan Bryant validates connections existing among imperialism, colonialism and racism in his definition of environmental racism. According him:

It [environmental racism] is an extension of racism. It refers to those institutional rules, regulations, and policies or government or corporate decisions that deliberately target certain communities for least desirable land uses, resulting in the disproportionate exposure of toxic and hazardous waste on communities based upon certain prescribed biological characteristics<sup>27</sup>

Apart from environmental racism, Fanon decries exploitation of nonhuman resources which were used in enriching the colonialist's mother countries. The years of colonialism saw an export of Africa's resources and raw materials for the development of America and Europe and for the emerging American and European industries respectively. Fanon links the environmental exploitation to the human conditions of the natives. While the wealth of the natives is being taken to Europe, they live in abject poverty and chronic fears, hence "today Europe's tower of opulence faces these continents for centuries of departure of their shipments of diamonds, oil, silk, and cotton, timber, and exotic produce to this same very same Europe. Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The riches which are choking it are those plundered from the underdeveloped peoples".<sup>28</sup> The environmental undertones of Fanon's treatise are often ignored by critics who focus on the

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<sup>27</sup> Bryant, Bunyan. 1995. *Introduction. Environmental Justice: Issues, Policies, and Solutions*. Washington DC: Island Press. p. 5

<sup>28</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press. 1963. P. 39

anthropocentric aspect of the work, often ignoring the impacts of imperialism and environmental racism on colonial and racialized societies. It is within this context that C.N. Iheka asserts that, “it is safe to indicate that there is geographical violence implicated in the distinction between the world of the settler and that of the people on whose land the alluring European quarters sit”<sup>29</sup>.

Fanon provides in *The Wretched of the Earth* a background that critics can invoke in locating points of intersection between Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism. Fanon explores and exposes colonialism with its consumerist exploitation; and the post-colonial characterized with omnivorous nationalism and development that guarantees more casualties than beneficiaries. Worse still is the collaboration of black elites with those who according to William Finnegan conduct “imperialism by email”<sup>30</sup>, the neo-colonial masters in forms of multinational companies and world institutions whose bids are consumerist developments which physically and imaginarily exploit and displace the ecosystem.

## **African Drama and Postcolonial Ecocriticism in Ngugi and Fugard**

Even though critics have often ignored this aspect of constructing out Eco-critical meaning from them, there is a strong environmental consciousness in African drama, Eco-criticism and issues relating to the environment have been present in African drama but man is only concerned with those issues he thinks concern him thus, ignoring nature as if the issue of environmental hazards does not exist. Critics have been

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<sup>29</sup> Iheka. *African Literature and the Environment*. p.38

<sup>30</sup> Finnegan, William. “The Economics of Empire: Notes on the Washington Consensus” *Harper* 53. 2003. p.53

occupied with colonialism, culture contact and conflict, apartheid, neo-colonialism, disillusionment, and even gender equality but nothing for nature equality (the equality of man and other things existing in the universe).

Bennett and Royles say that “when we think about colonies we think, first perhaps, of space, of the appropriation and exploitation of land”.<sup>31</sup> They go further to posit that “outside of science-fiction or the wilder speculations of scientists, there is effectively no other space, no externality, apart from the Earth, no other world but this one.”<sup>32</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong’s and Ngugi wa Miri’s *I will Marry When I want* looks at the concept of externality in Postcolonial ecocriticism through the world views of the characters in the play. For instance, the characters Kioi, Jezebel, Helen, Ikuua, Ngugire represent this notion in *I Will Marry When I Want* exploiting other animals from different climes. *I will Marry When I want* goes further in the rejection of industrialization without minding the hazard done to the environment. This is seen in this essay’s application of the concept of Deep Ecology in the play which, according to Bennett and Royle, is “an environmental movement that rejects the notion of ‘sustainable development’ and suggests that “capitalism, progress, even Western liberalism itself is responsible for the current ecological crisis that afflicts the world.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite the Marxian and post-colonial dialectics most of the critics have not really talked about the ecological vision of Ngugi and Ngugi in the play, *I will Marry When I Want*. The play’s central focus is nature, that is, land, an element or part of the ecological units that make up our universe. Again, land is tied to the behaviour of man towards nature and to himself; the exploitative nature of man and his capitalist destructive

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<sup>31</sup> Bennett, Andrew. and Royle, Nicholas. 2009. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Britain: Pearson/Longan. p. 243

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p. 143

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, p. 143

tendencies towards his environment and himself on the backdrop of greed and the eco-mental perspective of externality. According to Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, “externality is the idea that there is an environment elsewhere, outside of our immediate habitat available for exploitation – another village, town or region, another country or, best of all, another continent or even another planet.”<sup>35</sup> Ngugi and Ngugi decry the moral dilapidation of man, which affects his attitude towards himself and his environment.

The play is about the Kiguunda’s one and a half acres of land located in a place mostly inhabited by the poor indigenes of Kenya. The land has been paid for by Kiguunda which he did with almost the earning of his lifetime, sweat and hard-suffering. This land is the only plot of land belonging to Kiguunda, a poor labourer in Kioi’s farm, a bourgeois. The play begins with the anthropomorphizing of the one and a half acres of land personifying and treating it like a character in the play. Kiguunda and his wife, Wangeci, treat the land, which is symbolized in the framed title deed, like a human being. The dialogue between the man and his wife reveals the spiritual and emotional attachment of the couple towards the land. In fact, they discuss the land as if it was their other child, a second child. The narrator tells us of how Kiguunda longs for a human touch with the land and therefore deliberately causes it to fall to enable him feel and have a human touch with it, “ He picks it up (touches it) and gazes at it (admires it) as if he is spelling out the letters (proclaiming love for it)”<sup>34</sup> (emphasis mine). We notice that he talks about the land with his wife the same way and passion with which he talks about his daughter Gathoni.

Wangeci: What do you want to do with the title-deed?

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<sup>34</sup> Ngugi, wa Thiong'o and Ngugi, Wa Miri . *I Will Marry When I Want*. Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982p.3

Why do you always gaze at it...? <sup>35</sup>

Kinguunda proclaims his love for the land and declares that it is “worth more to me [him]”<sup>36</sup>. This shows the spiritual and emotional attachment the couple have toward their child, the “one and a half acres of land”. The land and their daughter are the couple’s only achievement and the man’s only link to nature and they symbolize his sanity, inner peace and cultural identity in a post-colonial Kenya where there is the madness of rejection of culture and neo-colonization, expulsion and degradation of nature through industrialization, exploitation and pain. The land, and the daughter are the only therapy that heals the excruciating loss and bitter experience he has had in the hands of the white and indigenous colonial masters who like leeches have exploited and sucked the blood of Kenyans. Thus, the land is treated like a human being, the same way Gathoni is treated.

Wangeci : What’s wrong with the child?

She used not to be like this!

Kiguunda: It’s all the modern children.

They have no manners at all.<sup>37</sup>

The difference between the children, that is Gathoni and the land, is that Gathoni is responsible for her exploitation and her father losing her while the land was lost by the couple’s lack of spiritual intelligence and a mortgage of nature.

The couple’s attachment to the daughter and the land shows their closeness of the couple to nature and their consciousness to protect nature and thus, safeguard their existence. It reveals the self-realization

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p. 3

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, p.3

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, p.17

and self-respect they have for themselves and their cultural identity. According to Eckersley Robyn, "the cultivation of an attitude of respect for nature is a necessary aspect of human psychological maturity and self-realization".<sup>38</sup> The personify the land to show us the satisfaction one gets with an affinity with nature. The land becomes the centre that holds the Kiguundas' lives. It is the nexus that holds the Kiguundas to the sanity of the eco-agrarian contentment and cultural pride. Boasting about his ecological hegemony, the narrator tells us that:

Still singing, he stands up and walks to the title-deed, pulls it off  
the wall and looks at it.  
This is mine own homestead  
This is mine own homestead  
This is mine own homestead  
If I want to roll on the dust  
I am free to do so.<sup>39</sup>

Kiguunda's song portrays his manliness and his freedom from cultural insanity, and also his patriarchal authority as an African. The land is not just central to the theme of the play but it is also given a human configuration by the playwright to the extent that the reader feels its domineering presence not just as it hangs in the form of a title-deed but also as it plays a human role in the development of the plot. At this period of the man's eco-friendliness, we notice the conspicuous display of the title-deed on the wall. "On one of the walls there hangs a framed title-deed for one and a half acres of land".<sup>40</sup> Its presence is even more domineering than the presence of Gathoni, considering the manner with

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<sup>38</sup> Eckersley, Robyn. *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach*. New York: UCL Press, 1992. Print. p. 162

<sup>39</sup> Ngugi, wa Thiong'o and Ngugi, Wa Miri . *I Will Marry When I Want*. Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982 p.14

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, p.3

which the playwright hurriedly introduce her in the play; “Gathoni is busy doing her hair”.<sup>41</sup> This is an evidence of a strong characterization of land as espoused in the play.

Nature (land) also is the subject of conflict in the play and is an allusion to the Biblical story of the land conflict between Naboth and the couple, Ahab and Jezebel. The play, draws our attention to nature as the centre of the great controversy between pro-nature and the others whose intention are to exploit and destroy nature like the boy in William Wordsworth’s poem “Nutting”, who forces himself through a virgin land “unseen by any human eye”, a land that has never been tended by any man. In his capitalist mentality and notion of consumerism, he enters the virgin land to hunt for hazelnuts and feels a kind of demonic colonial power over the unvisited land. With the crook in his hand, he goes on rampage destroying that which has been solemn and sacred:

Then up I rose,  
And dragg’d to earth both branch and bough, with crash  
And merciless ravage, and the shady nook  
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,  
Deform’d and sullied, patiently gave up  
Their quiet being; and unless I now  
Confound my present feelings with the past,  
Even then, when from the bower I turn’d away,  
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings-  
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld  
The silent trees and the intruding sky.

The boy destroys that which is beautiful because he is only after hazelnuts and does not mind the damages he leaves behind. The boy

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, p.3

could be seen in *I Will Marry When I want* in the person of Mr Kioi and the wife, Jezebel. Like the Biblical Ahab, he is after Kiguunda's one and a half acres of land with the collaboration of like minds such as Ndugire, Helen and Ikuua. The play reveals the extent of exploitation of man and the destruction of the ecosystem that these people are involved in to get rich at the detriment of their world. While Kiguunda is preserving his land to be close to nature and retain his sanity and cultural identity, Kioi, Jezebel, Ndugire, Helen and Ikuua are after using the land for industrial purposes: building an insecticide company which pollutes the environment, endangers the bio-lives of that environment and destroys the eco-system. In referring to industrialization, especially the factories in Kenya, Gicaamba, in the play, notes the destruction the likes of Kioi brought to their village through collaborating with foreigners to build industries without recourse to eco-protection and environmental standards and regulations.

What did this factory bring to our village?

Twenty-five cents a fortnight.

And the profits, to Europe!

What else?

An open drainage that pollutes the air in the whole country!

An open drainage that brings diseases unknown before!

We end up with the foul smell and diseases

While the foreigners and the local bosses of the company

Live in palaces on green hills, with wide tree-lined avenues,

Where they'll never get a whiff of the smell

Or contract any of the diseases!<sup>42</sup>

We see that Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii are critical about

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, p.39

the post-colonial environmental degradation of Kenya, through his play, he condemns the industrialization of Kenya without considering the negative impacts it has on the environment and people. These industrialists have the idea of externality, they believe that there is another environment outside their own which they can destroy and be safe in their own habitat. This perception threatens the reality that the universe is one, a universe that has no spare. Bennett and Royle call it “a dangerous myth”<sup>39</sup> because this planet is only one and anywhere there is threat to the eco-system, it means a threat to the inhabitants of this universe. The likes of Ikuua in *I Will Marry When I Want*, think themselves safe in their own little world. They destroy other places thinking themselves safe. The playwrights reveal the extent of the wicked exploitative tendencies of the bourgeoisies who see their world as different from that of the poor and therefore exploit them and destroy their environment for material gains.

Listen Mr Kioi.

Don't forget that business about the insecticide factory.

Our foreign friends want to start as soon as possible

As you know,

The main problem with such a factory

Is that it's bound to produce a lot of smelly gases

And therefore it cannot be built in an area

Where important people live.

What we need is a place like Kiguunda's

Or any other place similarly situated...<sup>43</sup>

This perception endangers our world and drives destruction. The eco-critical vision of Ngugi is one that everyone, no matter his or her social

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, p.75

class, must begin to take serious. It is the responsibility of everyone to protect our earth. The pseudo-perception of another world or the conception of externality is mythically wrong and threatens our existence.

Kioi and his collaborators are bent on the destruction of Kiguunda's sanity by luring him with the utopian religious promises of western religion. While they were trying to rip Kiguunda off his child and the land, John, Kioi's son, is sexually exploiting Gathoni, Kiguunda's other child by enticing her with material promises. A closer eco-critical evaluation of this situation will reveal the link between the child and the land. Gathoni, a female child, is the archetype of nature (Mother Nature). Nature and women are often victims of patriarchal exploitation. By gendering nature, we portray it from the patriarchal perspective as weak and vulnerable. Gathoni represents nature, which is weak and defenceless to the machination of man. John takes her to Mombasa and literary takes away her innocence. Like Kioi, his father, he deceives and takes advantage of the indigent situation of the girl and destroys her life by impregnating and jilting her<sup>44</sup>. While John is ravaging Gathoni, Kioi, Jezebel, Ndugire, and Helen are manipulating Kiguunda and Wangeci to reject their culture and thus sever their nexus with nature. The rejection of their traditional and marital rusticity by Kiguunda and Wangeci and their acceptance of Christianity's sacramental marriage depict a rejection of nature. It is a fundamental tragic flaw that Kiguunda and Wangeci let down their guard despite the warning of Njooki and Gicaamba to desist from their association with the "Kiois". Ngugi portrays Njooki and Gicaamba as ecological rangers who try to shield Kiguunda's land from consumerist poachers. Njooki and Gicaamba's apocalyptic vision for Kiguunda and Wangeci is a warning for the legendary deaf fly that follows the corpse to the grave.

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p.97

Gicaamba: ...Leave these people alone.  
They are just playing about with you,  
In the same way a cat plays about with a mouse,  
Knowing that the mouse will end up in the cat's belly!<sup>45</sup>

We notice the portrayal of Kiguunda and Wangeci as simple minded, rustic with the simple mindedness of a child without the esoteric knowledge of the people who have lost touch with the sanity of nature. Kiguunda is influenced by the exogenous appearances and luxury of consumerism, which is a product of ecological destruction. Kioi and cohorts convince them to mortgage their land in order to obtain loan to execute a Christian wedding and have the ephemeral things of life. By that singular action, the playwrights reveal the loss of the endogenous sanity and simplicity of nature that resides in Kiguunda and Wangeci. Like their daughter, Gathoni, they lose their affinity with nature and simplicity by mortgaging their only link to nature in order to gain material utility. The mortgage of the "one and a half acres of land" and the loss of the title deed is the loss of ecological perfection and nature. There seems to be a chaotic change in the setting of the room as Gathoni comes in to notice the loss of inner peace and serenity which was there when the presence of the title deed was hanging on the wall. Like our polluted eco-system, the environment is stuffy with the pollution of consumerism. The title deed has been consumed and is now being replaced with a board with the inscription "Christ is the head...etc"<sup>46</sup>. The change come with its confusion, as Wangeci does not even know how to cope in such materialist polluted environment. As she asks, "How does one put on this (bra)?"<sup>47</sup>

The playwrights warn us about the replacement and mortgaging of

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, p.98

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, p.91

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, p.92

nature and the destruction of our universe with exogenous consumables. The loss of the title signifies that once we destroy our planets, we have succeeded in endangering our lives. The “one and a half acres of land” is our only world and our sustenance. There is no other one. We must not lose it to the industrialists and people who are just ready to build insecticide industries, pollute our environment and make profit while our ecology is destroyed. The harm we inflict on our world is reciprocal as the destroyed world comes back to affect us. Kiguunda is affected because he loses the land. As Wangeci reveals,

After a week  
Kiguunda got a letter from the bank’s lawyers.  
The letter said: pay back the loan  
Or we shall sell your piece of land.  
Kiguunda has no job.  
He has tried to sell the goods  
We foolishly bought with the loan money  
And they are not fetching much.  
So the radio announced that  
The piece of land would be auctioned.<sup>48</sup>

With this, Kiguunda loses his affinity to nature by mortgaging it for material things and thus, loses his peace, identity and sanity. The play has very deep ecological meaning as has been portrayed in this paper. It is not just about the exploitation of man, but also about the exploitation and destruction of our eco-system. The play ends with a weak hope for our ecosystem. The couple realize their mistake but cannot reclaim their land. Once we destroy our world, it will be gone and there would be no one left even as we regret. It is therefore exigent that eco-critics must

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, p.107-108

look for salient environmental issues in literary texts in order to assert their notion of preservation. Tiiu Speak, in his critical evaluation engages the silence of nature. This discovery is to make nature have a deafening vocal and a conspicuous presence in literary texts; and through this, move men to act upon its preservation and yet retain the beauty of literary creativity and discourses.

Athol Fugard's *Sorrows and Rejoicing*, is a play that captures the extent of human tragedy in a society that gives value to the pigment of one's colour. The play *Sorrows and Rejoicing* is one set in a post-apartheid South-Africa. Athol Fugard dramatizes the notion that the exploitation of man and nature is one that comes back to haunt us. The activities of today determine what or how his future will look. In the play, after the fall of the apartheid regime, the tragedy of such exploitative system still have a hold on some people. The system has become such that has established an irreversible emotional, psychological loss on the victims of such exploitative system. The formal apartheid South-Africa is one that promoted the exploitation and human waste of the native black South-Africans who were the original owners. Through very extreme marginalizing systems, the Blacks are reduced physically and psychologically to sub-human, unfit associates for the whites and were kept indigent and suppressed.

In the play, David is a white activist born in South-Africa, His parents died in a tragic accident and he came to live with the grandparents and Karoo, a village in South-Africa. Like the ecocritics, David finds the apartheid system as devilish and dedicates his writings to fighting the system. He falls in love with Marta Barends, a black maid to David's family whose mother equally served David grandparents "The colored Barends have worked in this house almost as long as the white Oliviers have lived in it."<sup>49</sup> In the course of the affair, they gave birth to a baby

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<sup>49</sup> Athol, Fugard. *Sorrows and Rejoicing*. South Africa: Samuel French. 2002. Print p.9

girl named Rebecca. Due to the outlaw of a relationship between the whites and the blacks, Marta and Rebecca could not get the attention of David as the system is one that suppresses such affair. David and Marta's love for each other remains unsuppressed but Rebecca sees this as denial of love and lack of filial responsibility which David owes her. David is forced into an exile and there lost his loses his heartbeat for his struggle for freedom through writing.

The play is ironic in conception and is juxtaposition between freedom and oppression, wrong and right, white and black, rural and urban setting; of which all are significantly linked to ecocritical concerns. The play is a flashback narration that brings the dead man David to fore, to give validity to the narrations of the two women in his life. One, a black maid who is also his concubine and the other, a white woman, his legitimate wife. Though David left Karoo and the natural rural setting of Karoo in search of freedom and quietude, he meets his waterloo in the urban city of London because he is haunted by the sanity of his rural Karoo home. According to Allison's testament, David "spent a lot of those sixteen years in London dreaming about being back here, in the village, in this house, this room"<sup>50</sup>. In his exile with his legitimate wife which the apartheid system has forced him to take, there seems to be a link between David exile and Marta the abandoned. That link is nature, the table which David loved and which Marta polished with his tears. In confessing his love for the table, the playwright through David's allegoric tale, gives character to nature by giving words and action to nature. David reveals to Marta how the table came to be. The table used to be the king of the forest and yet even when it has been cut down and made into a tree, it never forget its root "But it hasn't forgotten its life in the green forest. Yes, it's got a memory..."<sup>51</sup> This tale is an allusion to David's life. He

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid*, p.12

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, p.13

was forced into exile but never forgot his root which is a symbol of nature and identity, an unexploited, spiritual and physical wholeness and sanity. While Allison loved London, she admits that “David of course hated it. He became very paranoid about little things like that, saw them as an erosion of his Afrikaner identity.”<sup>52</sup> Down in Karoo, Marta treats the table as if it was David himself. She polishes it with patience and love and with the utmost loyalty. This apotheosis of the table attracted the anger of Rebecca, her child with David who has grown into a conscious child. She saw this as an imprisonment to a man who has betrayed her mother and herself. A man that made her an illegitimate child and object for sneering. Rebecca angrily calls her mother “an Old Stinkwood Servant”<sup>53</sup>.

Marta represents the wholeness of nature in Karoo, even with the psychological torture she was going through, her closeness to nature retained her sanity unlike David whose divorce from nature is such that shattered him. In juxtaposition to Marta is Allison that represents a false dream and racist discrimination. She never saw the wholeness in Karoo village. She is a city girl and prefers the materialism of city’s life. She tells Marta “and I could never understand why”<sup>54</sup> David is so much in love with the unrefined dusty empty grey bush village of Karoo. With Allison forced on David’s life by the apartheid system, he began to have a utopian conception of rural London, and sees exile in London as the escape route to freedom. He tells Marta “exile is going to give back my voice, Marta. In London I’ll have the freedom again to speak and be heard, to write and be read.”<sup>55</sup> Ironically, that exile was a death to his voice, and freedom became illusive. In nostalgia, he declares to Marta that “What I really need though is Karoo sunshine and fresh air and your

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, p.11

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*, p.12

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, p.19

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*, p.24

cooking”<sup>56</sup>. In London, he was unable to write, suffered several infirmity and became a drunk. He was haunted by his love for nature, for Marta and his daughter, Rebecca. In London, he feared he will die and sought to make peace with Karoo even in death “if anything happened to me, Allison, for my soul’s sake don’t bury me in England. Get my body back home.”<sup>57</sup> From an ecocritical point of view, London, with its industrial history is anti-nature, a place of pollution and disease, while Karoo, with its rusticity, is a place of healing and wholeness. At his return, David made Marta tell him about the things that happened in his absence. He wants to re-live the wasted years in London, this time, at Karoo<sup>58</sup>. When Allison returned to Karoo, at David’s death, she realizes the spiritual sanctity of Karoo. She realizes that all she needed to do was to open her mind to the peace and freedom Karoo offers even in the face of oppression.

I opened myself to everything I use to hate about this place...to that cruel sun beating down on our heads, to the veld and koppies, to those solemn Afrikaner faces standing around the coffin with the dominee’s voice droning on in Afrikaans that I didn’t understand, to that donkey braying in the distance...<sup>59</sup>

At this moment of anagnorisis, the deep rich content of Karoo village is conceived by Allison. She discovers the deep blessings of nature in stock for all those who cherish. Fugard tells us in this play that nothing can be compared to the existence of pure nature. Allison confesses that: “And you know something terrible sad, Marta...I knew that if he had been alive and I was given another chance now...I would end up loving it!”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid*, p.16

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, p.21

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, p.18

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, p.21

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, p.21

The African identity of David shows his closeness to nature. Though he lives in an environment where the blacks are seen as sub-humans, he lent his voice to the struggles of the black man and met his tragedy for protecting man against the exploitation, oppression and suppression of his own kind who thinks there is difference between man and that some men are biologically superior to others. David may not be exempted from the crimes of his kind knowing full well the implication of an affair with a black woman. But his love and emotion overtake his reason. He sleeps with a black woman and in the apartheid perception, a bastard was born. The fact that he ignores Marta and refuses to acknowledge Rebecca makes him part of the lot of eco despoilers. This guilt of indifference towards his love, Marta, and daughter, Rebecca compounds the ban of his writing and thus forces him into exile. That makes up for the motif behind Rebecca's hatred for the father. As she says, the father is to blame, In all, David redeemes himself by his return from exile. He makes peace with himself when he returned to Karoo after spending sixteen painful years in England. Most importantly, he sees the daughter again. Through clinging back to nature, David is made whole again. The playwright in the play has made a very ecocritical and salient point which is that. That whatever damage we do to nature, no matter how long it takes, it will surely come back to haunt us. So many years after the fall of the apartheid regime, the ghost of that period still haunts people like David.

## **Conclusion**

Reading *I will Marry when I want* and *Sorrows and Rejoicing* from Postcolonial ecocritical perspective is a way of connecting African environment and African experience. It is also a deviation from the mainstream/global ecocriticism that has often occluded the African

environment and feigned amnesia towards the role of colonialism in human and environmental degradation in Africa. More importantly, the stance of this paper is a local response to the global environmental concern that captures local environmental issues situated in global and universal consciousness and global discourse.

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