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POST-COLONIAL ECOCRITICAL READINGS OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *NOTES ON GRIEF* (2021): ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AS NEOCOLONIAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This paper is a postcolonial ecocritical analysis of the memoir *Notes on Grief* (2021) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in which the author places personal grieving in the context of global ecological destruction and infrastructure devastation as new modes of colonialism. Although the text has been viewed largely as a meditation on loss in general, this study shows that Adichie has embedded grieving within the context of pandemic-related lockdowns, upheaved rituals, and existing disparities that remind of colonial legacies and global capitalist systems. By referring to postcolonial ecocriticism by Huggan and Tiffin, slow violence theorized by Nixon, Eurocene proposed by Sloterdijk and critique of technocracy voiced by Haraway, the paper identifies how its fragmented narrative, breath and space metaphors, and Igbo funeral rituals insistences can be viewed as cultural resistance. The memoir criticizes the lack of technological mediation in the mourning process and reveals the ways that global infrastructures continue to institute unequal vulnerabilities during pandemic conditions. The results indicate that *Notes on Grief* not only functions as a personal elegy but that it is also, in many ways, a literary genre whose distinctive feature is giving priority to the indivisibility of ecological injustice, cultural continuity, and systemic inequality in postcolonial settings. By locating grief at the intersection between planetary politics of environmental and infrastructural dictation, the memoir makes a point about what literature can do to resist neocolonial ecological violence and to expose the structural context of personal loss.

Keywords: *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ecological Grief, Environmental Degradation, Neocolonial Violence, Notes On Grief, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Ritual Resistance, Slow Violence, Technocracy.*

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1. Introduction

Notes on Grief (2021) edited by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an emotional memoir about the process of mourning after the unexpected death of their father caused by the raging pandemic of COVID-19. Although it is common to interpret the work through the prism of universalized bereavement, a more in-depth exploration of the text shows that it is inextricably linked with material and infrastructural circumstances that contribute to the experience of loss. The prohibition of air travel, closing borders, restrictions on funerary practices and the constriction of communal mourning processes are not incidental developments; they are processes mediated through the regime of neocolonial rule, capitalist exploitation and technological intervention. As such, the memoir as a genre becomes a place where the author addresses both personal loss alongside the systemic issues of environmental and infrastructural inequalities, encouraging a take that highlights postcolonial issues with ecocriticism.

Huggan and Tiffin (2015) note that postcolonial ecocriticism is aimed at highlighting how exploitation of the environment cannot be separated in the past and modern global inequalities, even though both imperial past and modern global inequalities are inseparable. In this context, environmental degradation is conceptualised as an aesthetic and a political problem at the same time, thus depicting the long term legacies of colonial extraction, dispossession and ecological inequality. Slow violence notion as explained by Nixon (2011) can be used to elucidate the nature of harms caused by environmental degradation which are generally subtle, accumulate over long periods of time and are disproportionately experienced by marginalised people and communities. The development of this state of analysis has also been furthered in African literary studies, where critics like Davidson Caminero-Santangelo (2014) and Iheka (2018), among other, have analyzed ecological injustice and cultural resistance as portrayed by African texts after neocolonial attack.

Adichie also sees a personal loss in the larger context of these social forces. The interruption of traditional mourning practices and the constraints on the corporeal practice of presence are part of wider disparities in access to movement and lived infrastructure, mirroring broader disparities in both access to benefits and exposure to risks in the environment that scholars have identified as fundamental to the neocolonial ecological violence at play. As such, this paper aims to not only examine *Notes on Grief* as a mourning

piece that lamented an absent father, but also to review it as a literary commentary of environmental degradation and the institutional structures that continue to enact them.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite much critical discussion on *Notes on Grief* as a discourse of general grief, little has been said with regard to how the memoir highlights environmental and infrastructural degradation as neo-colonial violence. Studies also has not covered to consider how pandemic restrictions, including travel bans, small funeral sizes, and technological mediation of ritual, mirror not just ongoing global capital but colonial histories of these inequalities. The reflections on grief, broken routine, and ecological precariousness have not been fully explored in literature studies, especially in a postcolonial ecocritical context.

1.2. Research Objectives

- To explore how the environmental destruction and disruption of infrastructures in *Notes on Grief* are modes of neocolonial violence.
- To examine the critical use of narrative structure, metaphorical language and the cultural resistance acts that Adichie employs in her critique of the global capitalism and environmental injustice.

1.3. Research Questions

How does *Notes on Grief* display ecological and infrastructural destruction, halted rituals, and enforced liminality as acts of neocolonial violence?

In what sense can Adichie s memoir be viewed as a postcolonial act of resistance, a literary tool that uses postcolonial ecocritical means against neocolonial capitalism?

2. Literature Review

The ecocriticism of the postcolonial widens the scope within which the representation of environment degradation, political control, and historical exploitation is understood through literature of formerly colonized parts of the world. In line with this, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) claim that imperial legacies cannot be seen as independent of the contemporary environmental crisis and that the effects of imperial infrastructures, imperial economies based on exploitation, as well as global economy dispositions in trade have historically predetermined both the reach and concentration of environmental degradation. DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) also point out that the novelty of postcolonial writing is how it puts the human-nonhuman interdependence in postcolonial

settings. This framework frames *Notes on Grief* as such a text through which mourning and grieving by an individual is interlinked to the ecological and infra-structural contingencies dictated by past and present practices of neocolonial governance.

Nixon (2011) has introduced the term slow violence; this concept proved to be particularly applicable when reviewing Adichie memoir. Slow violence denotes slow-acting, usually imperceptible kinds of environmental damage that build up slowly, and are especially troubling to the marginalized populations. This insight around infrastructural slow violence can be related, in the context of *Notes on Grief*, to the pandemic-related travel and gathering limitations as a source of grief: the gradual, accumulative effects of disrupted social and ecological systems intensify a feeling of grief. In Mining the Cosmos, Caminero-Santangelo (2014) applies this approach to cases of African literature, showing how texts speak to the environmental injustices that cannot be understood without colonial and neocolonial backgrounds of resource extraction (African literature). Iheka (2018) is more explicit about the role played by the nonhuman actors and how their agency is intertwined with ecological degradation, and cultural upheavals in Africa.

The discourse of necro-politics by Mbemba (2003) broadens our understanding of how life and death are spread to the infrastructures of the world and the local context. Travel policies, funerary policies and disease exposure policies all contribute to structural injustice in risk and care distributions, thus perpetuating modern colonial hierarchies. It is this ambivalence, which stands between the universal and the specific, that Chakrabarty (2009) attributes as the main feature of the environmental crisis, and this quality is what makes the bereavement experience, depicted in the memoir, special.

Cunsolo and Ellis (2018), as well as Comtesse et al. (2021) make the concept of ecological grief explicit, thus bringing a psychological and affective aspect of postcolonial ecocritical investigation. In this context, Grief is not just a reaction to human mortality, but it is also an outcome of the loss of ecological as well as social space that supports ritual and community. Adichie documents the decline of mourning ecologies, physical spaces, shared rituals, and group activities and, as such, a larger loss in environmental strength as well as a growing structural delicacy.

The Eurocene (Sloterdijk 2015) is conceptualized as an extension of Eurocentric dominance by means of global infrastructures and environmental control, whereas integration through science like overlooking inequalities in the name of technological advancement has been criticized by Haraway (2020). Collectively, these theories highlight the significance of how the grief and violation of ritual in Adichie is framed within a world order of neocolonialism that is characterized by environmental degradation, infrastructural domination, and corporate capitalism supporting each other.

Further scholarly literature attempts to contextualize these arguments as well Estok (2015) posits the literature practice within global crises and underscores the role of literature in showing the socio-political aspects of environmental damage. Ghosh (2018) outlines the failure of the imagination that regularly comes along with climate change and planetary crises and explains the relevance of the story in engaging with ecological precarity. Moore (2025) analyzes how capitalism is embedded in ecological systems and how environmental degradation cannot be isolated of economic-technological systems supporting inequality worldwide. DeSousa Santos (2018) pushes the idea of epistemic pluralism, insisting to consider marginalized knowledges and local environmental practices as a form of resistance to ubiquitous logics of global technocracy. Nixon (2017) further extends the explanations of slow violence to understand the moral responsibilities of environmental stewardship in literature that justifies the interpretive appeal of narrative strategies that Adichie employs.

The intersection of these two scholars is how *Notes on Grief* can be a space of both personal grief and societal ecological destruction and neocolonial regime of control. This memoir manifests resistance to global systems of control through narrative fragmentation, metaphorical focus on environmental conditions, and assertion of cultural practices, encapsulating how the violence of projecting national will and integrating it into a global infrastructure is inseparable in the rage of personal loss.

3.Methodology

In this study, a qualitative textual analysis methodological approach will be used to reflect on how the book *Notes on Grief* (Adichie, 2021) portrays environmental destruction and infrastructural damage as neocolonial violence. Qualitative textual analysis focuses on interpretation, theme picking, and contextualization against theoretical background so that the process offers a profound study of narrative structure, metaphor, and the literary devices in mediating social and ecological phenomena that are too complex to be described in a text (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By paying attention to Adichie strategy of narrative fragmentation, and the use of space and time images, the disruption of rituals, the study evaluates how the grief can fit into more important environmental and social political contexts.

3.1. Sampling and Data Sources

The first is Adichie, *Notes on Grief*, which was purposefully selected on the basis of its critical involvement with mourning in the context of pandemic restrictions, disruptions to ritual activities, and limited movements. Such secondary sources are interviews, magazine essays, and official statements of the author that serve as both

additional contextual information on the memoir composition, the pandemic experience, and thoughts about cultural mourning practices. The secondary materials are applied to support interpretation of the primary textual evidence contextualizing the analysis both in literary and socio-political contexts.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis is in three interrelated steps. The text was first coded thematically, specifically focusing on passages that portrayed ecological disturbance, restricted ritual practice of funerals, limitation of travel, and technological intercession onto grief. Second, it is going to discuss narrative structure and metaphorical language, paying attention to fragmentation, repetition, and the use of imagery to translate the environmental and infrastructural aspects of mourning. Third, a postcolonial and Eurocentric-focused ecocritical theoretical framework was integrated using Sloterdijk, Haraway, and Nixon, which opened up deeper interpretations of how individual loss signified larger, ecological, and political injustices. The proposed methodology puts the interface between the literary form, the environmental awareness, and political criticism into focus.

5. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in a multi-theoretical postcolonial ecocritical framework.

Marina Warner (2010) describes the state of contemporary fiction, and postcolonial ecocriticism (Huggan and Tiffin, 2015), which is used by this paper as the overarching critical lens, casts light on how environmental destruction cannot be discussed fully outside of the context of colonial and neocolonial pasts and presents and the way literature is a place of protest and criticism.

Slow violence as conceptualized by Nixson (2011) sheds light on the cumulative effect of structural and ceremonial violations and injuries that affect marginal groups because such violations, as Nixson (2011) describes them, are gradual and hence not recognized as such.

In the Eurocene (Sloterdijk 2015): by way of environmental and infrastructural global systems, Western dominance has permeated around the world and found its material expression in the global constituent process of environmental mourning.

The critiques of Western technocracy offered by Haraway (2020) highlight the affinity between mitigating the pandemic through technological means and concealing systemic problems (systemic inequities in the mediation of care and ritual).

The study combines these frameworks to explore how *Notes on Grief* can be understood as a piece of literary writing that not only describes their personal loss, but also critiques the ecological and infrastructural systems of operation that define mounting under global neocolonial governance.

6. Findings

The analysis provided in *Notes on Grief* reveals many interconnected factors through which the memoir contextualizes personal grief through the frameworks of infrastructural and ecological injustices. Five thematic results were obtained by qualitative construction of texts:

6.1. Disruption, as a Contingency of Subversive Narrative Structure

These elements of the memoir are characterized by uneven pacing, segmentation, and repetition as a way in which to indicate the disharmony of ritual and ecologies. The interruptions in the narrative flow reflect the interruptions in grieving processes that the pandemic raises due to the flight cancellations and closure of the airports and the restrictions on crossing borders. Such structural decisions place an emphasis on the physical experience of grief within environmental and infrastructural frameworks, where the reader can exist within the mismatch between self-based loss and broader systems in flux. Fragmentation, in this respect, is both a formal and thematic tactic, which plays out the dislocation of life-worlds through slow violence and Euro-centric infrastructural oversight (Nixon, 2011; Sloterdijk, 2015).

6.2. Metaphorical Lingo of Breath, Silence and Space

Sometimes, grief is figuratively depicted as air, breath, and space limitation, which Adichie has been using to describe the corporeal dimensions of grief as an ecological and material occurrence. The notion of impatience, suffocation rhythm, and the process of inhaling are brought into play to create a feeling of ecological insecurity and naturalize how environmental conditions and infrastructural systems contribute to the practices of mourning and the everyday social worlds. There is no freedom of gathering in common spaces, coupled with the technologically mediated expression of sorrow, and serves to keep this aspect of social life within a technologically mediated reality; Haraway (2020) calls it the technocratic substitution of embodied ecologies of care.

6.3. Ritual Assertion as Cultural Resistance

Despite constraints, the memoir emphasizes the ethical and cultural necessity of Igbo funerary practices. The insistence on maintaining ritual observances—albeit

modified or deferred—constitutes a form of resistance against systemic erasure. By valorizing ritual within disrupted infrastructures, Adichie positions her narrative as a counter-discourse to neocolonial ecological violence, demonstrating the inseparability of cultural continuity and environmental ethics (Caminero-Santangelo, 2014; Iheka, 2018).

6.4. Technological Mediation and Thin Mourning

Virtual rituals and Zoom funerals are depicted as inadequate substitutes for physical presence, highlighting the limitations of technological mediation in addressing grief. This reinforces the postcolonial ecocritical concern that Western technocratic solutions often obscure structural inequities while failing to replicate relational and ecological dimensions of practice (Haraway, 2020). The memoir documents the affective insufficiency of digital mourning as a form of ecological and social impoverishment.

6.5. Global Infrastructures and the Eurocene

Such travel restrictions, border policies and pandemic norms, are not merely presented to be seen as precarious measures in the realm of public health but as another aspect of systemic inequality that particularly affects postcolonial subjects. Alternatively, these examples of narration reveal the omnipresence of Eurocentric infrastructural hegemony in the daily reality of loss, positioning individual grieving in the context of global neocolonial politics of environmental regulation (Sloterdijk, 2015; Chakrabarty, 2009).

All of these findings provide a combined picture of the fact that *Notes on Grief* is a piece of literature in which the personal experience of grief and loss cannot be dissociated with more structural ecological and infrastructural circumstances. Narrative techniques (namely the use of fragmentation, focus on space and air as metaphors, ritual confirmation, and criticism of the mediation of technology) put this memoir in the position of recording grief but also critiquing the neocolonial systems that shape the landscape of ecological and social life.

7. Discussion

Based on the analysis of *Notes on Grief*, it can be stated that Adichie in her memoir functions both as a personal elegy and a postcolonial ecocritical comment on environmental and infrastructural inequities. The episodic composition of the novel reflects disturbed grief processes and changes in landscape, as Nixon (2011) develops the notion of slow violence. Grief in the text is neither purely affective nor merely discursively constructed but is materially mediated: it is informed by a lack of access to a gathering, a

lack of mobility, a technological mediation of ritual. Such structural and ecological restrictions bring to the fore the systemic injustice that postcolonial literature attempts to condemn (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015).

The metaphors of breath, silence, and a closed space of the memoir intensify the materiality of ecological precarity. The recurrence of the words and phrases air, suffocation, and absence in Adichie also expresses the personal nature of grief but further points toward the climatic and infrastructural realities that make grieving so difficult. The limitations of technological mediation in relation to digital substitutes of other rituals, such as the use of Zoom to attend a funeral, also reveals the shortcomings of contemporary technocracies dominated by Western politics of power and its inability to serve the needs of the marginalized groups (Haraway, 2020).

The cultural and ethical demands by Adichie on the mandatoriness of Igbo funerary rites represent an act of resistance against neocolonial erasure. Framing grief in such a way places it in a relational ecology where humans are not the only actors, following Iheka (2018) in her focus on African literature as a space of ecological consciousness and resistance. Ritual serves as an avenue where the memoir takes a stance of cultural power on a backdrop of cataclysm; it depicts how ecological justice and cultural preservation cannot be extricated.

The focus on the global infrastructure that surrounds the memoir also contextualizes grief in relation to the Eurocene (Sloterdijk, 2015), as systems of travel, health, and technological control, dominated by the West, create postcolonial conditions of loss. Border closures, pandemic measures, and travel restrictions are presented as the tools of structural inequality that limit personal and communal grief, echoing the definition of necro politics by Mbembe (2003). These narrative instances highlight that individual loss can never be severed in global injustice and that the book itself is an act of literature that reveals the nexus between environmental degradation, capitalism, and colonialisms.

This interpretation of *Notes on Grief* adds to earlier criticism. Whereas both Caminero-Santangelo (2014) and DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) have focused on environmental injustice in African literature, this paper shows how contemporary memoir can also become a source of postcolonial ecological writing. The idea of slow violence (Nixon, 2011, 2017) also aids in clarifying how neocolonial infrastructures and the pandemic create subtle but gradual harm on the people of a postcolonial environment. Moreover, the adaptation of both Sloterdijk Eurocene and Haraway critique of technocracy places the memoir in a broader discourse of environmental governance, infrastructural inequality and politics of grief on a global scale.

Adichie is able to create a form of literary resistance by mixing narrative style, use of metaphorical language and cultural ritual, thus criticizing neocolonial ecological and technological processes. This memoir shows that the process of mourning is not the condition less individual process but is placed in the context of the political, ecological, and infrastructural processes. Therefore, the text throws light on the ability of literature to reveal the structural aspects of personal bereavement as well as explain the modalities of moral, environmental, and cultural dissent.

8. Conclusion

This paper has explored the autobiographical essay *Notes on Grief* (2021) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie focusing on how environmental degradation and infrastructural disruption serves as a means of neocolonial violence. Using qualitative textual analysis, the research has revealed the main mechanisms with which the memoir communicates the systemic-level aspects of grief: fragmented narrative, metaphors of breath and space, ritual assertion, technological mediation, and the global infrastructural critique.

The findings reveal that the memoir written by Adichie is not only a personal elegy but a literary intervention that reveals how the grieving process is intertwined with environmental, cultural, and technological injustice that was established during colonialism and perpetuated by global capitalism. By means of promoting the idea of indispensability of ritual and making disrupted ecologies central, the memoir formulates resistance to the Eurocene, making clear the ways in which postcolonial literary projections can be used to relate to planetary issues, slow violence, and infrastructural injustice.

By illustrating the similarity between postcolonial memoir and other forms of cultural resistance, this paper fills the gap in the field of postcolonial ecocriticism, which has also yet to examine more explicitly the role of personal reflection in cultural resistance. It also confirms that literary texts are informative guides to the convergence of grief, environmental precarity, and neocolonial governance. In future studies, it is possible to apply this analysis to other African memoirs of the time and study how individual narratives reveal larger social disparities and environmental challenges, thus broadening the scope of postcolonial ecocriticism.

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