ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM IN IMBOLO MBUE'S *HOW BEAUTIFUL WE WERE*

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Ecological Imperialism In Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Ecological Imperialism in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*

Imbolo Mbue, a contemporary Cameroonian American novelist addresses urgent environmental issues in her novel *How Beautiful We Were*. A story of environmental destruction is skillfully woven holding a mirror to the unethical actions of international oil drilling corporations wreaking destruction in the name of progress. This study emphasizes the serious consequences of this kind of ecological exploitation and argues that large-scale environmental damage and land degradation are the fault of western businesses acting in the name of development. The methodology of my research is shaped by the comprehensive research of Crosby, which offers a fundamental basis for deciphering the complex layers of environmental influence that are portrayed in Mbue's work. Furthermore, the research includes the perspectives of Serpil Opperman, Michael Watts and Kristin Shrader-Frechette, whose academic contributions enhance the theoretical framework. The primary objective of this research is to examine Mbue's novel from the perspective of ecological imperialism, a theory that examines how powerful organisations exploit the environment and rural communities. Using the conceptual framework developed by Crosby and including the theoretical insights of Watts, Opperman and Shrader-Frechette, the study aims to provide a thorough comprehension of the ways in which imperialist endeavours impact the ecology of a fictional African community, as skilfully depicted in Mbue's literary work. The purpose of this research is to engender academic interest in petro fiction as a voice of resistance against environmental injustice and raise awareness of the ways in which corporations might affect marginalised societies and ecosystems. It also aims to start a crucial discussion regarding environmental concerns raised in Mbue's novel.

Key Words: *Ecological Imperialism, Petro fiction, Environmental Injustice, African community*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter **Page**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Parents and Family for their endless support and encouragement.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nature and literature have always had a close relationship. This bond has been mirrored in the works of authors and poets from all around the world. As the world grows more interconnected, environmental issues have become more complex and sometimes involve issues of justice, power, and the ongoing consequences of colonial legacy. In areas characterised by economic vulnerability, in particular, the quest for natural resources sometimes entails the violent destruction of regional ecosystems and the exclusion of native communities. These problems find resonance in literary works as a powerful illustration of the complex relationship that exists between ecological challenges and more general society processes.

Examining the complex relationship between nature, literature, and social dynamics necessitates delving into the historical foundations of imperialism. Imperialism has left a lasting impact on both human communities and the natural world because of its heritage of exploitation and dominance. Therefore, imperialism is "an act of geographical violence" (77), as Edward Said clearly articulated it, by which the colonised are "brought under control" (or "civilised" in European terms). This historical background lays the groundwork for understanding the modern phenomena of ecological imperialism, in which the quest for natural resources frequently feeds an endless cycle of social injustice and ecological degradation, especially in areas with weak economies.

Vast reservoirs of natural wealth, including minerals like diamonds, gold, and coltan, are found throughout Africa's diverse landscapes, from lush rainforests to expansive arid areas. However, their exploitation has resulted in significant environmental degradation and social unrest throughout the continent. These minerals are extracted at great cost to nearby ecosystems and communities by large-scale mining operations, which are frequently managed by foreign firms. Disruptive techniques including deforestation, contaminating water sources, and uprooting indigenous populations are often part of the extraction process. These actions not only damage the scenery, but they also disturb the delicate balance of local ecosystems. Furthermore, a major focus of economic exploitation in many African countries is the extraction of fossil fuels, especially petrol and oil. Due to decades of uncontrolled

exploitation and repeated spills, oil-rich regions spread over the continent suffered significant environmental harm. Social unrest and economic inequality have been made worse by the quest of oil wealth, which has prolonged cycles of violence and poverty. The unrestrained resource extraction in Africa is a prime example of how ecological imperialism continues to have an adverse effect on the environment and social justice.

The phrase "ecological imperialism," coined by Alfred W. Crosby, captures the tremendous effects that colonial and imperialist endeavours have on the natural world and native people. This idea is frequently expressed in literature through pieces that highlight the detrimental effects of imperialist actions on the environment and the communities that depend on it. Ecological imperialism can take many different forms, such as the destruction of pristine ecosystems or the looting of natural resources, all of which exacerbate the vulnerabilities of the local population and environment. Beyond environmental damage, social inequities, the uprooting of indigenous peoples and the loss of cultural legacy are among the long-term effects. Authors like Imbolo Mbue explore the intricacies of ecological degradation and its far-reaching consequences in their current work, effectively portraying this dynamic. While examining ecological imperialism and environmental issues in modern African literature, it is imperative to take into account the contributions made by different authors from Cameroon who have studied relevant socio-political phenomena. The drama *Lake God* by Bole Butake shows how international corporations affect local people while addressing issues of ecological and cultural exploitation. *Houseboy* by Ferdinand Oyono parodies the inequities of colonial rule, while *The Poor Christ of Bomba* by Mongo Beti examines the socioeconomic and political effects of colonialism. *Dog Days* by Patrice Nganang accurately captures socioeconomic problems and post-colonial corruption. While these writers offer valuable perspectives on Cameroonian politics and society, they mainly address colonialism's aftereffects, governance, and equality rather than environmental concerns directly. This is where Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* shines because it offers a clear-cut and moving critique of ecological imperialism by carefully combining the themes of political tyranny and environmental deterioration.

Mbue's work contributes significantly to the discourse and is a suitable primary source for this thesis since it offers a new and critical viewpoint on the

confluence of political and environmental issues in Cameroon. The choice of Imbolo Mbue to investigate ecological topics in her book *How Beautiful We Were* stems from her observations of the social and environmental conditions in her native Cameroon, in addition to her own personal experiences. Raised in an area characterised by the existence of transnational companies and the environmental fallout from their activities, Mbue became acutely aware of the complex interplay between environmental issues and social inequalities. Through her writing, she hopes to draw attention to the severe power imbalances that are present in the extraction of natural resources, where profit-seeking frequently overcomes concerns for human welfare and environmental preservation (Venugopal).

1.1 Thesis Statement

Mbue's novel, *How Beautiful We Were*, with its focus on ecological disasters caused by oil drilling companies seems to substantiate many aspects of the theories of ecological imperialism and environmental justice. This research is an attempt to highlight ecological issues presented in her novel with reference to a merged framework developed from themes like disease and death as an outcome of the claimed progressive practices brought about by imperialism, as stated by Crosby; distributive justice and participative justice, as examined by Shrader-Frechette; Watts's Petro capitalism and the effects of anthropocentric policies on the environment and indigenous communities, as emphasised by Opperman.

1.2 Research Questions

The foremost objective of my research was to highlight the destructive and dehumanizing effects of US oil imperialism on the ecology of the fictional world of Mbue's novel, *How Beautiful We Were*. In order to achieve this objective, the following questions informed by the theoretical underpinnings of Crosby's work on imperialism were set up:

1. In what ways does ecological imperialism affect the environment of fictional African village of Kosawa as presented in the novel *How Beautiful We Were*?
2. How does Mbue's novel substantiate Crosby's claim that imperialist power brings death and disease to the natives?

3. How does the selected novel expose environmental justice issues caused by ecological imperialism?
4. How does the collusion between a native ruler and the imperial power influence the struggles of the local people to protect their environment in the selected novel?

1.3 Significance of Study

The study of Ecological Imperialism in Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* is extremely important because it gives an ecocritical reading of the text, tackles current environmental issues, and serves as a wake-up call to the urgent need of environmental protection. Furthermore, by offering a novel viewpoint on environmental themes in African diasporic literature, this work contributes to the subject of ecocriticism and fills a significant gap in the analysis of ecological issues. Through examining the effects of ecological imperialism on a fictitious African village, it highlights the practical implications of corporate greed and environmental damage. It further advances scholarly discourse by delving into different aspects of ecocriticism and broadening the scope of ecological literary analysis.

1.4 Delimitation

This study is delimited to the analysis of Mbue's novel *How Beautiful We Were*. Since Ecological Imperialism has been selected as a theoretical tool; analysis is confined to theoretical framework developed from Alfred Crosby's theory of Ecological Imperialism, Opperman's Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Fiction, Michael Watts's Petro capitalism and Shrader-Frechette's Distributive Justice, Participative Justice, and the Principle of Prima Facie Political Equality Environmental Justice.

1.5 Chapter Breakdown

This qualitative research thesis is structured into five main chapters to facilitate the development of the argument and enhance reader comprehension, adhering to the guidelines and conventional format of a literary thesis:

Introduction

The first chapter includes the background study of the topic. It also provides details about the statement of the problem, research questions, the significance of the study, and delimitation.

Literature Review

This chapter examines previous research on the selected theories and explores pertinent literature. A critical review is done of the existing research on Mbue's novels. Previous research on the theory of ecological imperialism has also been reviewed.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

In this chapter, theoretical frameworks are explained in detail, and research methodology is discussed.

Textual Analysis

This chapter carefully examines Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*, emphasising issues of ecology and aspects of ecological imperialism. It examines the themes and author's environmental ideas. It also examines the story's anthropocentric viewpoint and its consequences, as well as its connection to distributive and participative justice for nature.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research by summarizing the important findings and suggesting recommendations for further research in this area. There is also discussion of other strategies that could be used in future studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on the earlier studies conducted on the selected theory and novel. It also acknowledges earlier research to show a gap in previous studies where this new research fits in. Various dissertations, articles, and journals linked to this topic are critically reviewed for inclusion in this chapter. Other works that were analysed from an ecocritical perspective are also reviewed.

For this purpose, I have structured this chapter into two sections. In the first section, I have reviewed primary and secondary texts related to the theory of ecological imperialism and its origins in ecocriticism, and in the second section, I have discussed various scholarly studies related to ecocriticism and ecological imperialism in the work of Mbue and other writers.

2.1 Theoretical Perspective

Ecocriticism began with a re-evaluation of romanticism and its social offspring. Since then, it has grown to focus on how the non-human world builds and develops communities. It looks at how environmental issues, environmental culture issues, and how people feel about nature are shown and talked about. One of the main goals of ecocriticism is to study how people in society act and react when it comes to nature and environmental problems. William Howarth begins his essay "Some Principles of Ecocriticism" by stating:

> Both eco and critic come from the Greek words "oikos" and "kritis." Together, they mean "house judge," which may surprise many people who like writing about nature and the outdoors. So, the ortos is nature, which Edward Hoagland calls "our widest home," and the kritos is a judge of taste who "wants the house to be kept in good shape, with no shoes or dishes lying around to ruin the original decor (69).

We can conclude from this discussion of the etymological origins of the word "ecocriticism" that it is a literary approach that views the organic and non-organic worlds as interdependent, indivisible, and of equal value. In this regard, the first ecological law proposed by Barry Commoner, ‘Everything is related to everything else,’ had a great influence on ecocriticism, which Glotfelty admits in her explanation

of "What is Ecocriticism?" on the ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) website. She claims that if we accept Barry Commoner's first ecological law, which states that everything is related to everything else, then we must come to the conclusion that literature is crucial to an extremely complicated global system in which energy, matter, and ideas interact. Later, at the Western Association meeting, she mentioned that Ecocriticism is simply defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies (Glotfelty, Harold).

In the Introduction to *The Ecocritical Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Goltfelty traces the origins, development, main features, and future of ecocriticism; this has become the most widely read and quoted source of ecocriticism to date. In fact, her Introduction created ecocriticism as a literary theory and provided a framework for all ecocriticism researchers and students worldwide. True, ecocriticism has broadened its scope and is now more enriched than Goltfelty's 1996 definition. However, anyone interested in learning about ecocriticism should start with her definition. Apart from this Introduction, her numerous conference presentations and networking activities garnered the attention of many researchers and contributed to the popularisation of ecocriticism both within and outside the United States. She pointed out that scholars appear to be ignorant of the worldwide environmental problem. Until recently, there was little indication that the literary studies institution was even concerned about environmental issues. For instance, there have been no publications, professional societies, or meetings on literature and the environment. As a result, she believes that, in this era of global environmental disaster, English literature "must redraw the limits to remap" the fast-changing limits of literary studies. Since its inception, ecocriticism has lacked a uniform explanation, despite Glotfelty's attempts to explain it by comparing it to feminism and Marxism. Besides Goltfelty, Lawrence Buell and Harold Fromm are two prominent scholars who have made significant contributions to the foundation of ecocriticism.

The early ecocriticism's shortcomings paved the way for the second and third waves of the movement. The wave metaphor of ecocriticism, like feminism, is

frequently used to describe the evolution of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, like feminism, is separated into three stages of growth. Glotfelty compared the three developmental phases of feminism as proposed by Elaine Showalter to the evolutionary stages of ecocriticism in her 2014 essay, “A Guided Tour of Ecocriticism, with Excursions to Catherland”. But it was Buell, in his 2005 book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, who first used the wave metaphor to explain the evolution of ecocriticism. He primarily distinguished two types of ecocriticism. Buell separated ecocriticism into two waves, although he did not provide a precise explanation of each wave's unique emphasis. In his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* he writes:

> No definitive map of environmental criticism in literary studies can [...] be drawn. Still, one can identify several trend-lines marking an evolution from a “first wave” of ecocriticism to a “second” or newer revisionist wave or waves increasingly evident today (Buell).

Second-wave ecocriticism has focused on endangered landscapes and marginalised minority peoples and groups both at home and abroad—as well as texts from both high art and vernacular culture that face such issues. Because the second wave of ecocriticism focused on the writings of nonwhite people and cared about "racial minorities", ecocriticism and postcolonialism came together. In his article "Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends," Buell says that environmental justice ecocriticism's focus on oppressed communities connects it to another new movement: postcolonial environmentalism. "Like the first generation, the second generation of ecocriticism puts a lot of emphasis on local place-allegiance and how different each society's environment is. He postulates that how well ecocritical models made in the first world can be used in the developing world will go on for a long time. Buell's prediction has come true as we see environmentalism continue to grow beyond the second wave and take on new issues. "Third wave ecocriticism" is the name of a new movement. For the first time, Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic discussed the possibility of a new "third wave of ecocriticism" in the summer 2009 issue of MELUS: Multiethnic Literature of the United States” they argued that there are as many ways to write about the environment as there are ways to write about anything else. But until recently, the ecocriticism community was not very diverse. It was also limited by a possibly too narrow view of "white" and "non-white" as the main categories of ethnicity. So, this issue looks at what seems to be a new third wave of ecocriticism,

which takes into account ethnic and national differences but goes beyond them. This third wave looks at all parts of human life from an environmental point of view. As a result, the third wave of ecocriticism seeks to develop literary bridges across cultures and raise awareness of environmental concerns and our place within them. The second and third waves of ecocriticism have broadened the scope of ecocritical studies by including ethnicity, ecofeminism, environmental justice, postcolonialism, and transnationalism, thereby expanding it to encompass hitherto unexplored literary works and genres. By tackling literature by former colonial authors, as well as works by authors of colour and women, they have enabled ecocritical literary studies to reach a broader audience and generate more new debates on the topic of human-nonhuman interaction. In this way, ecocriticism has the potential to connect diverse environmental perspectives and generate significant debates about how literature may contribute to the reduction of environmental and climate change-related dangers worldwide.

2.2 Environmental Justice: Intersections and Implications

Ecocriticism is inevitably linked with the society, and people are an important part of society. The Second Wave of Ecocriticism includes both social ecocriticism and environmental justice. Environmental justice means that everyone should be treated equally and without bias by a system that hurts the environment and "keeps indigenous or racial minority populations in a position of structural injustice" (Adamson 159). The environment is an area where people and animals can live together and help the life chain. All living things have the same right to use natural resources, and they all need to be protected from environmental risks in the same way. Environmental justice is a contentious notion, but it can be summed up as the multidimensional demand for and/or achievement of a clean environment for everyone; equal access (for all groups of people) to everyday resources; equal treatment under the law from environmental threats; equal access to environmental information; as well as equal participation in ecological decision-making.

It is commonly believed that the environmental justice movement originated in the United States in the late 1980s, when poor communities of colour gathered to oppose the disproportionate siting of facilities. In this context, an "environmental justice community" is a group of racialized inhabitants of a lower socioeconomic status that is typically surrounded or affected by dirty industry, such as petroleum

refining or coal-fired utilities, chemical industries, municipal landfills, nuclear power plants, or hazardous waste dumps. People often say that these places get the least policy and financial help, even though they need it the most. According to the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), environmental justice is achieved when "all individuals, regardless of race, colour, gender, national origin, or income, are treated fairly and are meaningfully involved in the development, implementation, and enforcement of laws, rules, and policies". Even though the idea for the ecological justice movement did not emerge until the 1970s and 1980s, the momentum behind it had been growing for decades. Unless the environmental movement was thought of in the 1970s and 1980s, it had been growing for a long period of time, like a river supplied by many streams, to use Cole and Foster's words.

Distributive justice is a key component of environmental justice discourse, analysing how environmental benefits and liabilities are divided among various social groups. This involves having access to basic necessities like power, water, and green areas, as well as being exposed to environmental threats like air pollution and harmful chemicals. However, it is widely recognised that procedural justice, which ensures fair and open decision-making procedures, is equally important (Bell).

Clark et al. (2007) argue in their essay titled "Relationships of Environmental Justice to Ecological Theory" that environmental justice is a social movement, as the majority of ecologists definitely agree. However, it is also a field of study and practical application that relates to ecological theory (Bullard). The aspect of environmental justice (EJ) that is most easily linked to ecology is distributive justice. This refers to the unequal distribution of environmental hazards and advantages based on race, class, ethnicity, gender, or age (Shrader- Frechette 2002). Participatory justice is another element of environmental justice that addresses equitable access to the decision-making process that affects environmental outcomes. While ecological knowledge can aid in effective participation, this essay focuses on the information ecology can provide for predicting unequal outcomes.

The key principles of this article indicate that ecological theory offers useful insights into the patterns of distribution of resources, dangers, and ecological services, allowing for a better comprehension of and response to unequal distribution. A community's ability to engage in decision-making processes and have their opinions heard is further empowered by ecological knowledge. Distributive justice initiatives

can be made better informed by the use of ecological knowledge, and participatory justice can be improved through transdisciplinary approaches.

As stated in the "Principles of Environmental Justice", which were adopted during the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in October 1991, environmental justice requires "the abolishment of the production of all toxins, toxic waste, and radioactive materials" as well as the fair distribution of environmental hazards. The other principles include commitments to equity in recognition and participation, as well as claims for compensation for victims of injustice that are similar to those later made on behalf of those hurt by climate change. Beyond just utilitarian considerations, approaches to establishing justice that emphasise distributive equity People raise concerns over the distribution of hazardous facilities in relation to race, class, and other variables that render a specific community relatively powerless in the siting of such facilities. Thus, the environmental justice movement in the United States asserts that there is a racial bias and that people of colour face a greater amount of the risk than whites. Since it is unjust for poor, rural, or ethnic minority populations to face risks for the benefit of the rest of the people in the region, proponents of distributive equality often advocate for shifting such risks. In situations where it is hard to allocate risks, compensation is used to establish distributive equality. The concept of paying individuals who face risks in hazardous sites acknowledges that it is certainly immoral to compel a group or community to locate a hazardous facility for industrial output that primarily benefits others. While compensation schemes cannot disperse the risks brought by the facilities, they try to recognise the imbalance of risk-bearing through a payment and share a portion of the facility-related expenses.

Christian Hunold and Iris Marion Young find both unfair ways of doing things and unfair things that happen when environmental hazards are put in certain places. Not only is it unfair that poor racial minorities are more inclined to be exposed to natural hazards, but the way these kinds of decisions are made is also in question. Hunold and Young make the argument for a principle called "democratic inclusion" ,which says that it is unfair to put people at risk through decisions about where to put waste that do not give potential victims a say (Hunold). They do not agree with accounts of pluralism in which richer people's interests often win out over those who are socially and economically disadvantaged. This has led some individuals to ask for

waste disposal decisions to be taken by politically enclosed administrators instead of through the conversational democratic procedures that they recommend. They also expand the idea of environmental justice that comes from the politics of hazardous waste beyond fairness in the distribution of risk, calling for a form of environmental justice that goes beyond fairness in the distribution of risk. Certainly, distributive equity must be a factor in site selection. However, for a variety of reasons, moral considerations in sitting should not be limited to distribution issues. First, debates about distributive justice cannot answer the question of who has and should have the authority to make decisions and according to what procedures. These are unquestionably issues of justice. Practices of hazardous siting that focus on whether compensation should be provided to those who bear risks, however, appear to assume that such questions of justice are not involved in initial decisions of site selection for a facility but that such initial siting decisions involve only issues of geology, estuary, and aquifer safety. Once potential sites have been identified based on such technical criteria, considerations of distributive justice might be raised. Recent research on environmental racism or classism, as Lake notes, tends to focus on quantifying the spatial link between poverty and/or race and the prevalence of hazardous sites. While such documentation is a critical component of compensating schemes designed to address distributive imbalances resulting from facility placement decisions, just mapping the distribution of such inequities is insufficient. We argue that limiting moral inquiry to concerns of distribution fails to raise issues of decision-making power and authority as justice issues. Like Hunold and Young, Kristin Shrader-Frechette (Chapter 8) argues for a link between distributive equity in social benefits and burdens and participative justice, defending what she terms the notion PPFPE stands for the principle of prima facie political equality. Drawing upon her earlier work on the ethics of risk, Shrader- Frechette views the PPFPE as instrumentally useful in discouraging substantively inequitable impositions of risk, as when authorities locate hazardous waste facilities near politically marginalised communities without consulting them, but also as constituting an important expression of justice in its own right. Shrader-Frechette illustrates the policy relevance of her principle in several applied cases, including an extensive case study of offshore oil development, grounding substantive and procedural EJ norms in law, and policy and contrasting her expansive vision of environmental justice with alternative views of risk management based on technology or expertise that fail to account for either kind of inequity. More

than any other work in this volume, this essay illustrates the potential for EJ principles to be meaningfully incorporated into institutions and policy analysis without losing their critical value or normative force, developing mechanisms by which EJ objectives can be institutionalised and its ideals more effectively pursued from within rather than outside of state authority.

Distributive justice must be used to ensure that environmental harms are distributed fairly in order to improve environmental justice, but this is insufficient on its own. No system that is only based on distribution can advance justice as Iris Marion Young observes with accuracy due to the fact that solely distributive models frequently overlook the institutional frameworks that affect or determine the distributions. Young provides the example of a community whose members gather to prevent the construction of a big hazardous waste treatment facility in their small town. She asserts that these demonstrations are not primarily about the fairness of material transfers but rather the fairness of decision-making authority and procedures. No one should deny the public's right to review and maybe reject a dangerous facility that places them at undue risk. Participants at the 1992 National Individuals of Color Environmental Leadership Summit were aware of this, when they adopted seventeen environmental justice principles. They sought participatory justice directly. Their fifth principle asserted that all people have the right to self-determination. Seventh principle: "Environmental justice requires the freedom to engage as equal participants at every level of decision making" (139).

2.3 Dominance and Exploitation: The Phenomenon of Ecological Imperialism

The process of ecological imperialism can be seen as a consequence of capitalism's globalization. Alfred Crosby first used the term "Ecological Imperialism" in his 1986 book, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. It talks about both the environment and colonialism at the same time. It looks for "imperial underpinnings of environmental practises" in both "colonised" and "colonising" countries, both now and in the past. He went into detail about the ways that colonisers ran their businesses, such as bringing in and sending out plants and animals from the areas they took over. He also talked about the clever ways that imperial powers used to rule over the poor natives, especially those from the Third

World. He looked into why Europe has been so powerful in what is often called the "western world". He called the places where the first Europeans lived "Neo-Europes".

Alfred Crosby's theory of ecological imperialism includes a number of postulates that describe the fundamental ideas and dynamics that underlie the phenomenon of human colonisation and its effects on the environment. These hypotheses clarify the mechanisms and effects of ecological imperialism by shedding light on the intricate relationships that exist between colonising nations and foreign ecosystems. The significance and implications of these postulates in relation to Crosby's theory and the larger body of scholarly work on environmental history and ecocriticism will be examined in this section.

Throughout his work, he questioned if technology was the primary reason for controlling the natives' environment or whether "the achievements of European imperialism support continued biological and ecological components" (Crosby 7). He believed that Europe was successful in imposing its imperialist ideals since its animals and crops appeared to flourish in those other nations as well. Because of this biological change, local communities and the places where they lived almost went extinct. According to this theory, colonisation was not just a method of imposing political and cultural tyranny but also of intimidating and violently altering the natural environment. This idea proposes that wherever colonists established themselves, they introduced diseases that devastated native populations (both of humans and plants and animals), along with invasive weeds and pests that encroached upon pre-existing flora and wildlife and finally starved them to extinction. Ecological imperialism can be defined as the deliberate devastation of environmental assets in colonial lands by the exploitation, removal, and transfer of such resources in the name of economic and scientific advancement. Ecocriticism, which analyses the relationship between literature and the environment, places a significant emphasis on ecological consciousness as one of its primary concerns. It holds the belief that the natural environment is a living, spiritual thing and that every person has a strong sense of personal connection to a certain location within it.

In the words of John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark (2004), "ecological imperialism" is robbing the periphery of its natural wealth and exploiting ecological resources. (Ecological Imperialism: The Curse of Capitalism) This, they say, went hand in hand with "genocide inflicted on the indigenous populations" (188), and

"undisguised looting, enslavement, and murder" (189) were turned into a capital in the dominant centre. Therefore, natural habitats were subjected to a ruthless expropriation in the form of continuous plunder and vast plundering in the same manner that colonial peoples themselves were brutally treated. The economic well-being of the British people depended on their ability to exert control over nature; as a result, they paid little attention to the impact their actions would have on the environment, unless those acts put their economic interests in jeopardy. Liebig thinks that ecological imperialism is a "robbery system" that legitimises capitalism because it encourages primitive wealth accumulation and turns people into peasants. The forced removal of people from their land and environment, along with the colonial influence of the resources that come from these lands, has a lot of negative effects on the environment (Ricardo 175). This destructive mandate, which is espoused by capitalism, is written into the fundamental architecture that ecological imperialism is built upon. As a result, ecological imperialism is a consequence of capitalism; more specifically, ecological imperialism is the foundation of capitalism and vice versa. Imperialist forces use the system of global capitalism to impose socio-ecological principles of manufacturing on the world. This makes the violent polarity between the centre and the periphery, or the North and the South, even worse (Oppermann).

Nwagbara (2010) says that in the era of neo-colonialism, ecological imperialism is more horrible and eviler, but it has a more subtle, malleable shape. He says this is because the current language of colonialism, that also uses neo-colonialism as a cover, makes it hard to understand the danger of ecological imperialism, which comes in the form of international donor bundles, international aids, business operations by multinational companies, foreign partnership deals, and other disguises.

Crosby said that the colonists made sense of "landscape, flora, and fauna that had been changed only by the blind power of nature" (75). In other words, when the British moved into the colonised areas, they brought with them dangerous plants and animals from the Old World, as well as disease-causing organisms, contagious germs, and dangerous microbes, which caused many native animals and plants to go extinct. In almost every bioregion the British took over, the biological expansion upset the ecosystems in a big way.

Crosby made a compelling case that the type of lands the British chose for conquest was a major factor in their success because these regions had native populations and ecosystems that were particularly vulnerable to the biology of the invading imperialists. He believed that conquerors' primary technique for gaining control over native people and their territory was the devastation of the natural environment. He claimed that in order to bring the wilderness (both natural and created by humans) back into balance, science, technology, and colonisation itself all worked together (which was more suited to Europeans' demands). Crosby has also provided considerable opportunity for discussing the European presence in America with farm animals. They brought both good and bad stuff with them on their journey: murderous weapons, deadly germs, insects, weeds, tamed plants, varmints, diseases, and so on. Farmers' waste increased varmint populations (primarily rats and mice). It resulted in the spread of various diseases and an attack on human food supplies (29-30). Ecological imperialism and mechanical science have robbed nature of its essential value and turned it into a wholesale commodity. Regardless of whether it was suitable for the local ecosystems, the impact of forced land conversion for production quality or for capital resources, for example, caused such devastation that it affected both non-human resources and indigenous peoples. E.C. Rolls (1984) asserts that ecological imperialism has left behind a variety of negative effects, including the extinction of native species and the displacement of people. The original settlers were fervent poisoners. Anything that appeared even remotely like it might cause trouble was poisoned, including the wombat, the wedge-tailed eagle, any kind of eagle, the raven, and the dingo. The native cat as well as the tiger cat were also poisoned for their propensity to raid chicken coops and consume eggs, as were the goannas. Moreover, the aboriginies were almost gone (18) What's worse, however, is that as a result of the colonial imperialist expansion, ecological imperialism has become ingrained in the minds of all colonised peoples. Hence, racial ideologies, Eurocentric colonial discourses, and imperial power politics are inextricably related to the mastery of nature. The anthropocentric paradigm's literary works proved to be an even more effective tool for disseminating the inconsistent set of environmental ideals and reflecting ecological imperialism's entire apparatus in a way that all educated British people could concur on.

2.4 Human-Centered Perspectives: Delving into Anthropocentrism

The idea that humans are the most significant creatures in the universe and that all other creatures exist exclusively to fulfil human needs and interests is known as anthropocentrism. This viewpoint has been used to legitimise human dominance over other species and ecosystems, as well as the exploitation of natural resources. When it comes to ecological imperialism, European colonisers frequently saw the natural environment as a resource to be exploited for their own gain rather than as a complex and interrelated system of which humans were but a small component. This anthropocentric viewpoint caused widespread ecological devastation and the eviction of indigenous populations.

Anthropocentrism has also been used to defend a lack of concern for the long-term ecological effects of human behaviour. When short-term human interests were prioritised, it frequently resulted in choices that had an adverse effect on the environment and other species, such as the introduction of non-native species and disruption of the local ecosystem. Anthropocentrism played a fundamental role in the ecological imperialism that characterised European colonisation overall, and it continues to be a major barrier to attaining environmental justice and sustainability.

Ecocritic and literary researcher Serpil Opperman has written extensively about how people and the environment interact in literature and culture. She has suggested that the human- centered worldview, or anthropocentrism, has significantly influenced how we view the natural world. She expands on Crosby's pioneering study of ecological imperialism in her article Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Fictions (2007). Opperman emphasises how the anthropocentric Western perspective, which views non-human beings as nothing more than a community, supports the European colonisation of the New World, which irrevocably alters the indigenous ecology. According to Huggan and Tiffin, Ecological imperialism is not only perceived as a "simple pattern of invading, clearing land, and destruction" (8) but in Opperman’s view it is rather a "planned damage via exploitation, extraction, and transfer of natural resources of the conquered territories in the purpose of scientific and commercial development" (180). The belief that nature exists solely for (Western) human’s benefit strips nature of its inherent values and transforms it into a wholesale good. Ecological imperialism, primarily a British endeavour, is the purposeful exploitation and reshaping of local ecosystems in the peripheries in order to improve

the economic well-being of the centre. It is a specific form of anthropocentric philosophy which benefits only the western white human race. Opperman's analysis of literary texts reveals that anthropocentrism is limited to privileged western white nations as my research also focuses on how Eurocentric anthropocentrism damages not just nature but also the indigenous populations of the world which come under imperialism.

The hypotheses advanced in this article illustrate how these fictions portray the damaging impact of anthropocentric policies on the natural world. They focus on the ecological effects of such methods as they investigate how these policies result in the exploitation, deterioration, and destruction of nature. The article also looks at how indigenous populations are portrayed as being negatively affected, including through displacement, the loss of cultural practises, and the disturbance of customary interactions with the environment. It questions and challenges ideologies that place human interests above those of nature and indigenous peoples, critically evaluating the anthropocentric worldviews that are ingrained in these fictions.

2.5 Previous Research

Ecocriticism and Ecological imperialism have been widely used by various researchers in their research. To investigate the issue of ecological concerns across different locations, a thorough examination of ecocritical works has been conducted and is presented in this section. The review includes a variety of papers and research that explore the ecological aspects of literature from many regions of the world. Even though the review's regions are diverse, taken as a whole, they add to the conversation on ecological issues. This section seeks to demonstrate how ecological issues in literature are relevant everywhere, across national borders, by analysing these ecocritical works. The section highlights the significance of tackling these themes in literary studies and highlights the connection of environmental issues by looking at the shared ecological concerns across many locations.

2.5.1 Ecocritical Perspective on Colonial Narratives

Shankar in his article "Exploration of Eco critical perspective in Amitav Gosh's *Hungry Tide* and Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* explores how an eco-critical perspective can be applied to Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*. According to the article, both novels provide

a chance to consider the complex interactions that exist between people and their environment, as well as how these interactions affect the delicate ecological balance. Shankar talks about how *The Hungry Tide*, which is set in the Sunderbans, a delicate ecosystem of mangrove forests and rivers, may be read from an eco-critical perspective. As marine biologist Piya Roy negotiates the challenges of working with local communities in the Sunderbans, the essay explores the contradiction between scientific knowledge and ecological knowledge. Shankar also emphasises the effects of human actions on the environment and the ecosystem's fragile balance, including deforestation and climate change. The study argues that *The Hungry Tide* might be interpreted as a plea for environmental preservation and conservation in its entirety.

Similar to this, Shankar adopts an eco-critical viewpoint in *Nectar in a Sieve*, which is set in rural India and focuses on the hardships of a peasant family to survive in the face of ecological challenges. The article looks at how economic and political factors outside of the control of the peasant family affect how they interact with the natural environment. The story emphasises the significance of sustainable farming techniques as well as the effects of droughts, floods, and other environmental difficulties on rural communities. The influence of colonialism in forming attitudes towards the environment and natural resources may also be examined in an ecocritical approach. The article argues generally that *The Hungry Tide* and *Nectar in a Sieve* both address environmental themes and issues, and that this can be done by adopting an eco-critical viewpoint. We can acquire a better grasp of the ecological themes and lessons included in these novels by using an eco-critical lens.

2.5.2 Ecocritical Approaches to Postcolonial Literature

Vincent in “An Eco-Critical Analysis of Climate Change and the Unthinkable in Ghosh’s Fiction and Non-Fiction” examines how Amitav Ghosh approaches the issue of climate change in his literary works. The article's main focus is an eco-critical examination of Ghosh's writings, which looks at how people interact with the environment and the environmental disaster brought on by global warming. Vincent talks about Ghosh's nonfiction book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, which makes the case that literature has largely ignored the coming climate change catastrophe. Ghosh thinks that our cultural and literary heritage, notably the colonial-perpetuated division of the natural and social sciences, is to blame for our incapacity to fully appreciate the scope of climate change. Colonialism

made it possible for Europeans to rule and take advantage of nature and the natural world by maintaining a barrier between people and the environment. The modern era has seen a continuation of this exploitation, which has triggered the current climate problem.

Vincent also focuses at how Ghosh uses his characters' experiences to analyse the effects of climate change in his novels. For instance, in *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans and its residents are threatened by rising sea levels brought on by climate change. According to Vincent, *The Ibis Trilogy* and *The Hungry Tide* are two instances of eco-critical stories that oppose the effects of climate change and promote ecological preservation. Ghosh argues in his ecocritical writing that the Anthropocene challenges modern culture and that the climate issue also represents a crisis of culture and imagination. He thinks that new kinds of writing and art are needed to express the world's misery as a result of climate change. As an advocate for a "postcolonial green" that works for global justice and sustainability, Ghosh's novels, such as those set in the Sundarbans and the Ibis Trilogy, strive to combine fictional aesthetics and activism for social and environmental justice. Ghosh's writing is a call to action for the world's responsible citizens to address ecological difficulties while realising the connections between natural ecosystems and social and cultural issues.

In her article "Postcolonial Ecocriticism: An Analytical Analysis of Ghosh and Silko's Fiction," Qurat-ul-ain Mughal examines how postcolonialism and ecocriticism interact in the works of Amitav Ghosh and Leslie Marmon Silko. The article argues that the two authors' works examine how people interact with the natural world and colonial legacies while also addressing environmental issues. Mughal's study begins by locating Ghosh and Silko's work within the postcolonial and ecocritical contexts. Postcolonialism is the study of colonialism's impact on colonised countries and cultures, whereas ecocriticism is the study of how literature and the natural world interact. According to Mughal, postcolonial ecocriticism analyses the connections between environmental issues and colonialism as well as the ways in which literature may be used to question these connections. Mughal then analyses how Ghosh and Silko's works address these concerns. Mughal argues that Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* depicts the effects of globalisation and development on the natural world as well as the history of colonialism in India. The novel highlights the interconnection of all living things by examining the relationship between animals and human beings. In her

analysis's conclusion, Mughal emphasises the value of postcolonial ecocriticism for comprehending the nuanced interrelationships between people and the natural world as well as the various ways in which literature can be used to engage with colonial legacies, challenge prevailing ideologies, and advance environmental sustainability and conservation. The article by Mughal makes an important contribution to postcolonial ecocriticism. She provides an extensive view of the ways in which environmental issues are connected to colonialism and the ways in which literature can be utilised to investigate and critique these links by examining the works of Ghosh and Silko via an ecocritical perspective.

The article "An Eco-critical Analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by Moslem Zolfagharkhani and Reyhaneh Sadat Shadpour examines how Achebe's book *Things Fall Apart* represents the ecological and environmental concerns of African societies. According to the researchers, Achebe's writings offer a critique of colonialism and its detrimental effects on African ecology, as well as the necessity for a more mutually beneficial interaction between human cultures and the natural world. Zolfagharkhani and Shadpour examine several significant issues in the novel, such as the presentation of the Igbo people's traditional way of life, the impact of British colonisation on the environment and the people, and the importance of language in shaping our impressions of the natural world. They argue that Achebe's novel emphasises the connection between humans and the natural world and underscores the perils of environmental exploitation and destruction.

Additionally, the article investigates how Achebe's writings interact with the concept of "ecological imperialism", which refers to the encroachment of Western environmental ideals and customs on non-Western countries. The writers argue that Achebe's book casts doubt on this idea and offers an alternative viewpoint on how human society and nature interact. Overall, Researchers' study provides a thorough analysis of *Things Fall Apart* from an eco-critical perspective and emphasises the novel's significance as a critique of colonialism and its effects on the natural world.

In his article "Environmentalism and Native American Writers: An Eco-critical Analysis," Sardar Ahmad Farooq examines the connection between environmentalism and Native American literature. The article examines how Native American authors have been at the forefront of the environmentalism, frequently as a result of their close ties to the land and traditional ecological knowledge. It is an ecocritical

examination. Farooq's study is based on the ideas of ecocriticism, which sees literature as a means of comprehending and engaging with the natural environment. In order to show how Native American writers like Leslie Marmon Silko, Linda Hogan, and N. Scott Momaday use language and storytelling to express their ecological ideals and oppose Western views on environment, he looks at their works. One of the main ideas covered in the article is bioregionalism, which places a strong emphasis on the value of comprehending and preserving the distinctive ecological systems of various geographic areas. Farooq argues that Native American authors, through emphasising place- based tales and their ties to their ancestral places, reflect the concepts of bioregionalism and offer insightful explanations for how we might coexist with nature. The study by Farooq makes a significant contribution to the debate about environmentalism and Native American literature by noting the crucial part that these authors have had in influencing how we view the natural world. For academics and researchers interested in the relationship between environmentalism, Native American literature, and ecocriticism, the article is a useful source.

Hojjat and Daronkolae in their work “By the Name of Nature but Against Nature: An Ecological Study of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* gives ecocritical analysis to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The authors examine how humans and nature are portrayed in the book and how colonised people are exploited in a way that is related to how nature is exploited. They argue that the novel can be seen as a critique of both the capitalist system that supports colonialism's destructive and exploitative practises as well as its destructive and exploitative character.

Maral in her article “Ecocriticism in Amitav Ghosh’s *River of Smoke* examines the ecocentric aspects of Ghosh's work. Maral's examination of the ecocentric elements of Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke* emphasises the novel's depiction of the disastrous influence of ecological imperialism on the natural world. The opium trade is revealed to have terrible consequences on the flora and fauna of India, China, and Mauritius. The story shows the environmental destruction brought on by this trade. Maral claims that modernization has caused the characters of the novel to lose connection with nature, and the example of Kochama the baby's isolation from nature through television emphasises this disconnect. This loss is symbolised by the novel's once-blooming garden's neglect and deterioration. Maral also notes that although the narrative depicts the disappearance of rare and exotic flora and moths, the characters

do not seem to care much about their loss. Apart from plants, some kinds of moths are also threatened, yet the characters show no remorse or sadness as "Roy describes human nature... thinks only of money and glory" (42).

Maral emphasises the value of spreading understanding of ecological issues through her interpretation of *River of Smoke*. She points out that promoting environmental consciousness and conservation is the main objective of ecocriticism. Maral cites *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy as another example of this genre of fiction that educates readers about nature as well as how to preserve it in the future. In conclusion, Maral's study provides a comprehensive and perceptive analysis of the environmental aspects in *River of Smoke* and the ways in which the novel might be understood via an ecocritical lens. It emphasises the significance of comprehending the intricate interaction between humans and the natural world and makes an important contribution to the research of ecocriticism and environmental literature.

2.5.3 Ecological Imperialism in Literature

Bera in his article “Commodification and Ecocidal exploitation of nature: Reconfiguring Ecological Imperialism and Eco-Cultural imbroglio in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* focuses on the novel's described ecological imperialism and eco-cultural crisis. According to the researcher, the novel demonstrates how colonial countries exploit the environment and their resources in an effort to gain economic and political dominance. The novel should be read to understand how these exploitative behaviours affect intricate cultural and ecological interactions. Bera delves into the novel's many characters, such as Rajkumar, who represents the struggle for independence as well as the need to conserve the environment, and Saya John, who represents the British colonial mindset of power and exploitation. According to the author, the book reveals ecological imperialism's violence and injustice while also challenging the mainstream colonial narrative. The article also looks at how nature is exploited through commodification. According to the researcher, when nature is made into a commodity, it is turned into a resource that can be purchased and sold. Its commodification establishes an exploitative system that sustains social injustice and environmental harm. The commodification of nature also undermines customs and cultural activities that are closely related to nature. The themes of ecological imperialism and the eco-cultural crisis in *The Glass Palace* are critically analysed in this article. According to the researcher, the text emphasises the

importance of understanding the intricate connections between politics, ecology, and culture. The researcher invites readers to think about how their actions affect the natural world and the communities that rely on it.

Saravanan and Prabha, in their article "Ecological Imperialism in George Orwell's *Burmese Days* and *Coming Up for Air*", explore the theme of ecological imperialism in the context of Orwell's literary works. The tension between industrialization and economic growth and the preservation of the environment is highlighted in the writers' opinion that Orwell's novels show the harmful effects of colonialism and industrialization on people and the environment. In the introduction, the term "ecological imperialism" is defined along with how it relates to current environmental concerns. The researchers go on to discuss how ecological imperialism is portrayed in *Burmese Days* and *Coming Up for Air* and the moral dilemmas that the characters experience as a result of environmental degradation. *Burmese Days*, according to the researchers, highlights how the British colonial government in Burma exploited natural resources and destroyed the environment. The novel illustrates the effects of mining, hunting, and deforestation on the surrounding ecosystem and the uprooting of local communities. John Flory, the main character, is divided between his conscience and his loyalty to the British colonial rule as he observes the exploitation of local residents and the degradation of the environment. Similar to this, *Coming Up for Air* illustrates how industrialization harms the environment and displaces local inhabitants. The tale shows how a rural and pastoral England becomes an urban and industrialised setting. George Bowling, the primary character, muses about the disintegration of his childhood memories and the loss of nature as a result of economic advancement. The researchers come to the conclusion that Orwell's novels call into question the dominant ideology of growth and progress and advocate for a more sustainable method of development. They argue that ecological imperialism is an important topic in today's environmental conversation and that Orwell's writings offer an insightful look at the nuanced interaction between people and the natural world.

In her work "Eco-Imperialism and Environmental Justice", Nygren explores the idea of eco-imperialism and how it affects environmental justice. Eco-imperialism is the dominance and exploitation of less developed countries or populations in the guise of preserving or protecting the environment. This may lead to a disrespect for

cultural norms, livelihoods, and local knowledge, which may result in environmental injustices. The article starts out with defining the term "eco-imperialism" and looking at its colonial-era historical beginnings. Following that, the researcher examines examples of eco-imperialism that are already occurring, such as the promotion of "green" technologies and the creation of protected zones that uproot local communities. According to the researcher, such attempts can reinforce environmental injustice and disregard the requirements and viewpoints of disadvantaged groups. The article also examines the connection between environmental justice and eco-imperialism. The fair and equitable distribution of environmental advantages and liabilities, such as access to clean air and water, secure and healthy living circumstances, and defence against environmental risks, is known as environmental justice. The study argued that by marginalising local communities and emphasising conservation over human rights and social justice, eco-imperialism can harm environmental justice.

According to Nygren, environmental preservation and conservation require a more comprehensive and participatory approach that respects the rights and demands of local populations and acknowledges the importance of their traditional knowledge and traditions. The essay urges the support of community-based conservation programmes that are focused on social justice and the equitable sharing of environmental benefits and costs. Nygren emphasises the connection between eco-imperialism and environmental injustice, contending that when wealthy nations impose their environmental agendas on developing nations, the benefits and costs of the environment are frequently distributed unequally. The term "ecological imperialism" refers to the act of utilising economic and political power to rule over and exploit the natural resources and people of poor countries. This argument is especially relevant to this topic. By citing Nygren's article, it is made evident that these policies frequently have negative environmental impacts that disproportionately affect underprivileged populations, thus promoting environmental injustice. Nygren suggests community-based conservation programmes that put fairness first and involve local groups in decision-making to address this problem. Conservation activities can provide more enduring and just results by incorporating the knowledge and customs of these people.

The article by Kristiawan Indriyanto "Postcolonial ecocriticism and Hawaii's Ecological Imperialism Reading the *Shark Dialogues* by Kiana Davenport "examines how Davenport's novel criticises how colonialism and imperialism affected Hawaii's ecosystem and native population. Indriyanto argues that Davenport utilises the character of Pono, a Hawaiian activist opposing the construction of a luxurious resort, to symbolise the opposition to the ecological and cultural degradation brought on by the tourism industry. This is done through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism. Indriyanto also analyses the character of Keo, a shark goddess who is a prominent protagonist in the story, as a metaphor for Hawaii's relationship with its natural environment. Davenport criticises the Western idea of dominance over nature that has resulted in the extinction of Hawaii's ecosystems by illustrating Keo's struggle against human interference in the ocean.

The study aims to fill a gap in postcolonial eco-criticism literature by evaluating Kiana Davenport's novel *Shark Dialogues* (1994). The goal of this investigation is to analyse how American colonialism has led to ecological imperialism in Hawaii. Ecological imperialism is the theory that colonial powers rule and exploit the natural resources of conquered lands through their imperialistic policies. This exploitation has had a serious negative effect on Hawaii's ecosystem and the indigenous tribes that depend on it for their survival. By exposing the connections between colonialism, environment, and indigenous populations in Hawaii, this article aims to further the conversation of postcolonial eco-criticism. We intend to shed light on the effects of American colonialism on the environment and the indigenous communities that live there by analysing Davenport's novel. This study is important because it assists in helping us comprehend how colonialism, environmental damage, and social injustice are related. Additionally, by exploring the ways in which these challenges overlap in Hawaii, we can get insight into how these problems may be handled in other postcolonial contexts.

In her article "Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Literature", Serpil Oppermann investigates the connection between ecological issues and colonialism in British colonial literature. Oppermann argues that British colonial writers frequently ignore the perspectives of the colonised people who have a stronger connection to the land and its biological processes and instead present nature as a resource to be exploited for the advantage of colonisers. The study of Oppermann is founded on the

idea of ecological imperialism, which describes how imperial powers exploit natural resources in colonial territories, frequently at the expense of the environment and the indigenous populace. The background of British colonialism, which mainly relied on the exploitation of natural resources to support its economic expansion, makes this idea particularly pertinent. The representation of colonised lands as uncontrolled wildness in need of civilization by European powers is one of the recurrent motifs that Oppermann finds in British colonial literature. Likewise, colonists are portrayed as dominant and in charge of nature when metaphors that associate femininity with nature are used.

Oppermann also draws attention to works of British colonial literature that oppose the concept of ecological imperialism and provide a more complex understanding of how colonisers, colonised people, and the environment interact. These literary works, which criticise colonialism and its effects on the environment and indigenous cultures, include those by authors such Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, and Olive Schreiner. Oppermann's article contributes to a better understanding of the complex interplay between environmental concerns and colonialism in British colonial literature. Oppermann offers insightful information on the environmental and social effects of colonialism by analysing the ways in which this literature supports and contradicts the concept of ecological imperialism. For academics and researchers interested in the connections between postcolonial and ecocritical theory, her article serves as a valuable resource.

2.5.4 Eco critical Analysis of Environmental Degradation in *Oil on Water*

In "Rape of a Nation: An Eco-critical Reading of Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*," Solomon Adedokun Edebor goes into an eco-critical examination of Helon Habila's novel *Oil on Water*. The study offers a stimulating examination of the novel's environmental issues and their societal ramifications in light of Nigeria's oil sector. Edebor expertly dissects the complex relationships between literature, ecosystems, and environmental activism, providing insightful information about the various ways in which literature may be used to spread knowledge about ecological challenges and their effects on society. The study conducted by Edebor focuses on the depiction of environmental destruction brought on by oil production and its effects on Nigerian indigenous communities and ecosystems. The article exposes the mistreatment, corruption, and violence that frequently surround Nigeria's oil business while

shedding light on its sociocultural, economic, and political aspects. Edebor emphasises how Habila's book illustrates the complex interplay between human behaviour, environmental deterioration, and the ensuing socio-environmental effects.

Furthermore, Edebor's study deals with the idea of eco-criticism and shows how important it is for analysing and understanding literary works that tackle environmental issues. By using an eco-critical approach, this paper advances the subject of environmental literary study and offers a comprehensive critique of the book. It emphasises the value of literature in provoking environmental awareness and inspiring social change. The importance of Edebor's article goes beyond its evaluation of *Oil on Water* and connects with the larger discussion concerning the negative environmental effects of the extraction of oil in Nigeria. It emphasises the dire need for environmental justice, the terrible effects of resource exploitation, and the marginalisation of local communities. The article improves comprehension of the complex relationships between literary works, ecology, and societal realities by embracing an eco- critical perspective.

In her work "Environmental Injustice in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*", Dr. Heba-t- Allah Badr M. Abd El-Wahab examines the issue of environmental injustice as it is presented in the novel. With a focus on the injustices experienced by communities impacted by oil extraction, the article provides a critical examination of how the novel depicts the environmental and social effects of the oil business. El-Wahab's analysis examines into the social inequalities, environmental degradation, and pollution brought on by the oil industry as it is shown in *Oil on Water*. The article looks at how advantages and liabilities are distributed unevenly, as well as how communities that live close to oil operations are marginalised and evicted. El-Wahab emphasises the negative effects of environmental injustice on these communities' health, cultural continuity, and economic inequities. The article also discusses how Habila's story reveals the cooperation of transnational corporations, dishonest officials in government, and the plunder of natural resources. El-Wahab emphasises how the novel exposes the covert costs and injustices that extractive companies continue to perpetrate while undermining the prevalent narrative of success connected to oil extraction. Within the larger field of environmental literature, the article's analysis of environmental injustice is important. It advances knowledge of the ways in which literature can describe and assess the socio- environmental difficulties that

communities impacted by extractive industries experience. El- Wahab's article offers insights into the intricacies and ethical dimensions of the impact of the oil industry on local communities by studying the convergence of environmental challenges, socioeconomic inequities, and power relations. Understanding how the novel depicts environmental injustices is improved by the article's analysis of the unequal distribution of rewards and liabilities as well as the social and ecological effects of the oil industry. The discussion of environmental literature and its ability to increase understanding of the difficulties faced by communities impacted by extractive industries is improved by include this article in the literature evaluation.

In "An Ecocritical Reading of Subjectivity in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*", Abubakar Salihu examines into an ecocritical analysis of the books, looking at how subjectivity is portrayed and how it relates to the environment. In *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila and *Yellow-Yellow* by Kaine Agary, the protagonists negotiate their subjective experiences in connection to the ecological situations they live in. Salihu's research focuses on how the novels present the protagonists' individualised perceptions of nature and their relationships with it. The authors' depiction of the characters' subjectivity as influenced by their environment is examined in this article, demonstrating how the natural environment affects the characters' identities, viewpoints, and experiences. By demonstrating how subjectivity affects ecological environments, Salihu draws attention to the importance of subjectivity within the larger context of ecocriticism. The study also discusses how the characters interact with nature and how human actions affect the ecosystem. Salihu examines how the novels bring up topics like pollution, resource extraction, and ecological imbalance, posing questions about the effects of human behaviour. The authors' presentation of the characters' subjectivity as being closely tied to the ecological issues and disasters they encounter is revealed in the article, inspiring readers to consider their own interactions with the environment. By underlining how subjectivity, the literature, and the environment are intertwined, Salihu's analysis adds to the body of work in the field of ecocriticism. It emphasises how crucial it is to comprehend how ecological environments shape subjectivity and how literature can be used as a tool for examining these links. The article's observations give light on the manner in which ecological issues and interactions between people and nature affect how literary narratives produce subjective experiences. Understanding how human

subjectivity is impacted by and entwined with the environment is improved by the article's analysis of the characters' subjective experiences within ecological situations. The debate of ecocriticism and its ability to shed light on the intricate relationships between subjectivity, literature, and the environment is deepened by including this article in the literature review.

The article “War for the Environment in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water”* by Abianji- Menang examines how the environmental catastrophe in the Niger Delta is portrayed in Habila's *Oil on Water*. The author highlights the contaminated rivers, oil spills, and destroyed ecosystems shown in the book as evidence of the environmental damage brought on by oil prospecting. The study also explores the crisis' socio-political repercussions, focusing on the confrontation between transnational oil companies, dishonest public servants, and the regional communities impacted by environmental degradation.

Additionally, Abianji-Menang's critique concentrates on the novel's depictions of environmental degradation, human rights violations, and the fight for social justice. The author emphasises the marginalised voices of the local communities as providing insight into the difficulties activists, journalists, and regular people encounter in their pursuit of equality, transparency, and a sustainable future. The article also acknowledges the psychological effects of residing in an area with a damaged environment. Abianji-Menang emphasises the emotional upheaval experienced by the protagonists by highlighting their feelings of helplessness, rage, and anguish as they watch their nation being destroyed. Thus, the article emphasises the significance of grassroots organisations and the relentless efforts of people in the struggle for environmental rights.

In his article "Representing the Neocolonial Destruction of the Niger Delta: Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*, Maximilian Feldner focuses on how the novel depicts the environmental disaster in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Feldner investigates how the natural assets of the area, particularly oil, have come to be a target of exploitation by global businesses through a study of the novel. The author highlights the adverse ecological effects of oil production and the ensuing pollution, particularly oil spills and polluted waterways, in order to illustrate how the Niger Delta is portrayed in the book as a location of environmental destruction. Feldner also examines the neocolonial power relations that are explored in the book. The article

examines how corrupt government officials, local elites, and multinational oil companies work together to continue environmental exploitation and degradation in the Niger Delta. Feldner draws attention to these political and economic interests that put profit ahead of the health of the environment and the community by emphasising these power systems. Feldner focuses on the novel's confrontation of local communities' marginalisation, giving voice to their concerns and emphasising the value of group resistance in the campaign for environmental justice. It is clear from this literature study after including Feldner's observations that Habila's work successfully addresses the various facets of the environmental situation in the Niger Delta. The novel's contribution to the discussion of neocolonialism, environmental degradation, and resistance is highlighted in the article, which also emphasises the importance of social justice, sustainable practices, and local empowerment.

The article "Petrofiction: Oil and Literature in *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila and *419* by Will Ferguson" by Mara Fiorini examines how oil is portrayed in these two books. In order to analyse the socioeconomic and environmental effects of oil production, these novels use the Petro fiction subgenre, which is the subject of this article. In *Oil on Water*, Habila illustrates the disastrous results of oil exploration in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, bringing to light the deterioration of the environment, pollution, and socio-political tensions brought on by oil exploitation. With a focus on the neocolonial aspect of oil exploitation, Fiorini's critique underscores the novel's examination of the power relationships between multinational corporations, dishonest public officials, and marginalised populations. Similar to how Ferguson does in *419*, he explores Nigeria's oil industry while weaving a story around an email scam. The article examines how the novel highlights the socioeconomic inequalities brought on by oil wealth as well as the ethical conundrums that the protagonists encounter in their quest for vengeance and justice. Fiorini draws attention to the ways in which *419* emphasises the human cost and moral ramifications of wrongdoing in the oil industry.

In their article, "Environmental Degradation, Corruption, and Militancy in Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*", Manasseh Terwase Iortyer and Agabi J. Ntamu attempt to clarify the significance of the novel's portrayal of these themes within the more general discourse on environmental activism, governance, and social justice. Iortyer and Ntamu emphasise the repercussions of unrestrained extraction and its effects on the local communities by highlighting the descriptive testimonies in the book that

show contaminated rivers, oil leaks, and the devastation of ecosystems. The article also looks at the narrative's endemic corruption. Iortyer and Ntamu examine how the novel reveals the conspiracy between transnational oil companies, dishonest public officials, and local elites that result in resource depletion and the continuation of environmental deterioration. The authors place emphasis on how the experiences and interactions of the individuals in the book serve to highlight the detrimental impacts of corruption on both the Niger Delta's ecosystem and its inhabitants. The researchers draw attention to how the novel sheds light on the basic socio-economic and political elements that influence the formation and conduct of militant groups, illuminating their motivations and complexity.

2.5.5 Eco critical Perspective on *How Beautiful We Were*

Musaib Junejo and Tania Shabir Sheikh analyze *How Beautiful We Were* from Postcolonial Eco-critical perspective in their article “Land Deterioration and Environmental Damage: A Postcolonial Eco-Critical Study of *How Beautiful We Were*”. The novel narrates the story of a fictional African village that is completely destroyed by the social and environmental effects of an international corporation's oil production. Junejo and Sheikh utilise the novel as a platform to investigate more general problems related to environmental harm and land deterioration in postcolonial societies. The researchers start out by giving a general summary of postcolonial Africa's history, politics, and methods of natural resource exploitation. They argue that many African nations are now exposed to the negative economic and environmental effects of resource exploitation, and that this has led to the environmental destruction and land degradation that are visible in many parts of the continent. In their extensive examination of the novel, Junejo and Sheikh then discuss how Mbue portrays the negative social and environmental effects of oil production on the made-up village of Kosawa. They argue that Mbue's portrayal of the village serves as a powerful critique of the social and environmental inequities frequently connected to multinational enterprises in postcolonial societies. The researchers point out that Mbue uses a range of narrative strategies, such as diverse viewpoints and non-linear storytelling, to emphasise the complexity and interconnectivity of environmental and societal issues. The article also discusses how literature might help postcolonial cultures address environmental problems. The scholars assert that literature can be a powerful tool for bringing attention to social and environmental injustices and for

giving disadvantaged voices a platform. They assert that the literary approach known as eco-criticism, which focuses on the connection between literature and the environment, can be a significant resource for understanding and resolving these problems. The journal advocates the stance of Huggan and Tiffin to highlight the importance of land as according to Huggan and Tiffin, “we breathe into it [land], it is touched by our modes and memories” (115).

According to the researchers, Natives in Kosawa are unable to breathe in the novel, their memories are lost, and their ways of life are being changed. Oil is discovered in Kosawa, but instead of bringing riches, it causes cultural and environmental calamities. Their article "Land Deterioration and Environmental Damage: A Postcolonial Eco-Critical Analysis of *How Beautiful We Were*" contributes significantly to the increasing body of research on postcolonial environmentalism by offering a thoughtful examination of the environmental themes in Mbue's novel but their focus is more on the narrative structure rather than on the individual characters.

In "A Voice of Resistance and Activism: A critique of Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*”, by Teresia et al. the themes of resistance and activity in Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* are thoroughly examined. According to the researchers, the novel offers a potent critique of the environmental and social injustices that are frequently connected to multinational businesses in postcolonial cultures, and it emphasises the significance of action and resistance in the face of these injustices. The researchers focused at how native resistance and eco-activism had been triggered by the ecological damage in Kosawa. The research was also influenced by Lawrence Buell's second wave of eco-criticism from 2005, which support environmental justice for those who suffer from environmental degradation. It is also interested in the extinction of both plants and animals. This study presents ecocriticism as a framework that exhibits activist and resistance methods. The results of this study demonstrate that an oil spill can have devastating effects on people, livestock, and aquatic life. The research examined how the characters deal with and fight ecological problems as they are portrayed in the novel. The environmental catastrophe caused by the oil industry should be stopped in order to protect the environment, which is the basis for the resistance and activity against its damaging marketing practices. A more thorough investigation and integration of environmental protection into a comprehensive plan for sustainable economic development are required. The central argument of this

study's findings is that environmental activism and resistance are crucial to restore the earth's natural threatened ecosystems. The novel links ecological degradation to the practice of using natural resources for economic gain without taking into account the harm to the environment. The study demonstrates that there is no one ideal approach to solving this big issue. We might choose a hybrid strategy as our course of action. The research also indicates that there is a great need for ecological awareness. The research also discovered that indigenous people lack access to the justice system even though there are legal structures available to both uphold justice and protect human rights. The article emphasises the value of activism and resistance in the face of social and environmental injustice and emphasises the ways in which literature may be utilised to support oppressed groups and overthrow oppressive power structures.

Brygida Gasztold's article, "Environmental Neocolonialism and the Quest for Social Justice in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*" provides a keen analysis of Mbue's main themes. The novel *How Beautiful We Were* (2021) by Imbolo Mbue, which criticises economic injustice brought on by corporate greed and the unequal allocation of natural resources, is discussed in this article along with its themes and messages. Mbue explains how foreign investment causes environmental damage and disturbance to traditional communal life in a fictional African nation. It draws attention to the risky ways that crude oil is extracted, endangering human health and life, as well as the corruption and economic injustice that come from the unequal distribution of oil's advantages. The researcher points out that the novel promotes traditional practises while criticising Western modernity and capitalism and arguing for the necessity for alternative epistemologies. It also looks at how local organisations use memories of the past to fight against extractive projects, emphasising the significance of resource temporalities and their bearing on the futures of nearby communities. The researcher argued that the novel's appeal to a broad age group highlights modernity and highlights the memory of colonial exploitative activities.

The researcher in her study also emphasises the value of education and knowledge in the struggle against injustice, placing special emphasis on the role played by Thula's character in coordinating the village's conflict with the multinational oil firm. This analysis highlights the novel's message that underprivileged populations need information and awareness as essential instruments

to fight for their rights and pursue justice. According to the researcher, Mbue's novel delivers a powerful critique of corporate greed and environmental destruction, emphasising the value of alternative epistemologies and opposition to extractive initiatives.

Karmakar and Chetty, in their article, "Extraction and Environmental Injustices: (De)colonial Practices in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*", explore the important topic of environmental injustice, with a focus on tropical and African nations. It draws attention to how historical and current colonial capitalist practices that prioritise the exploitation, commodification, and management of tropical land and individuals have led to ecological catastrophes, climate crises, and environmental degradation that disproportionately impact countries in the developing world. Mbue's novel *How Beautiful We Were*, which is set in the made-up African town of Kosawa, offers a prism through which to view the effects of structural racism, environmental injustice, and extractivism. The researchers stress how important it is to comprehend environmental injustices in light of other types of structural injustices. It highlights how pervasive neocolonialism is and how it shows itself in racial, economic, and intellectual practises. The researchers hope to shed light on the complex nature of injustice in the Global South as well as the effects of capitalist development and advancement on underprivileged populations through the story of Kosawa's decades-long battle against the American oil corporation Pexton. The concepts of "slow violence" and "testimonial injustice" are among the main concerns raised. This shows that the environmental injustices that the inhabitants of Kosawa have to deal with do not usually happen quickly or dramatically; instead, they develop gradually over time, resulting in continuous pain. In response to these injustices, the idea of "epistemic disobedience" is also presented. It is implied that the narrative shows characters—like Thula and the madman—who oppose the exploitative objectives by standing up to the current understanding systems and epistemic practices that uphold injustice (Karmakar & Chetty).

Robi Andika in "Environmental Apocalypse in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*: An Eco Critical Study" examines the vital significance of the ecological themes in Imbolo Mbue's book, *How Beautiful We Were*. The story provides a graphic depiction of the disastrous environmental effects of oil mining at a time when concerns about environmental problems, including pollution, global warming, and

over-mining, are becoming more and more widespread. This ecocritical examination looks at the story's two main aspects. First, the researcher explores the idea of an environmental apocalypse in the text, pointing out two distinct instances. The gradual loss of natural resources, which include food, clean water, and oil, becomes a major issue, demonstrating the concrete effects of oil mining on the ecosystem. The study also emphasises the idea of a natural imbalance, which is characterised by major disturbances in the ecosystem that result in a decline in biodiversity. These environmental repercussions provide a moving mirror of ecological problems associated with industrial activity in the actual world. The study also looks at environmentalists' responses to the novel. The researcher emphasises the need of respecting nature, standing in solidarity with it, and having a strong commitment to protecting it by using a perspective of environmental wisdom. These character reactions serve as an example of how environmentalists interact with ecological damages in the story.

2.6 Research Gap

A thorough examination of previous researches on Mbue's novel establishes the text's importance in petro fiction. Two significant articles are "Environmental Neocolonialism and the Quest for Social Justice in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were"* and "Extraction and Environmental Injustices: (De)colonial Practices in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were"*. The fictitious oil firm Pexton is discussed in Gasztold's article along with its effects on social injustice and environmental damage. It draws attention to how corporate greed and quick economic expansion disturb Indigenous way of life and damage the environment. The risks associated with extracting crude oil, the unequal distribution of its rewards, and the system of corruption that allows for economic injustice are the main points of interest. Nevertheless, a thorough examination of the viewpoints, agency, and resiliency of Indigenous characters is missing in the analysis. It also does not go thoroughly into the complexities of intersecting identities in the narrative. Similarly, Karmakar and Chetty discuss ecological disasters, climate change, and environmental deterioration in the tropical regions of Africa. It underscores the necessity of mapping ecological injustices with other forms of structural injustice and draws attention to the ways that racial, economic, and epistemological practices continue to perpetuate neocolonialism. The "testimonial injustice" and "slow violence" that the Kosawa

people must deal with are the main subjects of this study. It does not, however, fully acknowledge the complexity of intersectional perspectives and identities and ignores the important problem of collaboration between Indigenous political leaders and imperialist forces.

While earlier studies on her novel have mainly focused on neocolonialism, social justice, environmental apocalypse, extraction and environmental justice issues, they have not focused so much on indigenous resilience, activism and resistance against complicity of local elites in exploitative activities. By addressing these overlooked areas my thesis expands on the following:

- Indigenous Perspectives: Although earlier research has touched on a number of environmental challenges, it frequently ignores the important perspectives of Indigenous people. As a response to environmental exploitation, my research emphasises the experiences and voices of Indigenous people, emphasising their cultural preservation efforts, resistance, and resilience.
- Intersectional Identities: Previous studies have narrowly focused on the conflict that exists between traditional Indigenous life and Western modernity. In order to provide a more nuanced understanding of these intersecting aspects, my research delves into the intricate intersectional experiences and identities of characters negotiating numerous cultural, social, and economic dimensions.
- Collusion between Indigenous Elites and Imperialist forces: The important problem of collusion between Indigenous political leaders and imperialist forces has not been covered in previous research. This is a topic I explore in depth in my thesis, looking at how this nexus makes social and environmental inequities worse.
- Environmental Activism: In order to encourage activism, my research emphasises the function of "petro fiction" as a means of protesting environmental injustice. Through an examination of the ways in which Mbue's novel animates eco-critical discourse, this study promotes more extensive discussions on environmental activism and social transformation.

This study deviates from previous research in that it applies a multi-theoretical framework and concentrates on marginalised topics like Indigenous agency and

identity intersectionality. This study eliminates these gaps by highlighting the perspectives of indigenous people and exploring the intricate relationships between privilege, authority, and identity throughout the narrative. It offers a thorough look at how disease and death rates in Kosawa are closely related to Pexton's operations, something that has been briefly discussed in prior studies regarding the health effects of oil exploitation. Furthermore, an area largely ignored in previous research is the collaboration between the imperial power and the native leader Woja Beki. My research exposes the locals' struggles to the forces both internal and external, by emphasising the part indigenous leaders play in maintaining ecological imperialism. Furthermore, I have integrated real-life instances from Cameroon, such as the environmental impact of the Kribi Oil Pipeline and the activism of figures like Nasako Besingi and Samuel Nguiffo. These comparisons not only ground the novel’s themes in real-world contexts but also underscore the ongoing relevance of Mbue’s narrative to contemporary environmental and social issues.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this study is to thoroughly analyse the selected novel by Imbolo Mbue from the perspective of Ecological imperialism, paying particular attention to how oil drilling by foreign companies with the support of indigenous political elite affects the fictional villages that the writer has created in her writing. A well-organized theoretical framework has been developed to accomplish this goal, drawing on ideas from four significant works: Alfred Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Serpil Opperman's "Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Fiction", Shrader-*Frechette's Distributive Justice, Participative Justice, and the Principle of Prima Facie Political Equality Environmental Justice* and Michael Watts's "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria". Each work offers various perspectives on the intersections of Ecological imperialism, environmental justice, resource exploitation, and petrocapitalism, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the narrative's intricacies.

According to Arnold, "imperialism" and "environment" have become closely linked concepts. The term "imperialism" here refers to the strategy and practice of expanding a nation's dominance over other lands by colonisation, invasion, or economic hegemony. In the colonised areas, resources and people are exploited and control is asserted.

3.1 Outcomes of Ecological Imperialism

In his book, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, published in 1986, Alfred Crosby came up with the term "Ecological Imperialism." This idea examines the connection between colonialism and the environment. The impact that imperial powers' control and exploitation of their natural environments had on both colonising and colonised countries is examined. Crosby examined the exchange of plants and animals that colonisers imported and exported from the areas they settled. He also emphasised how imperial powers, particularly in less developed nations like the Third World, used smart strategies to

rule over indigenous populations. The goal of the book was to determine the causes of Europe's extraordinary hold over what is frequently known as the "western world." Crosby used the term "Neo-Europes" in his work to designate areas where early European settlers set up their presence and influence. Since European colonisers arrived, these areas have undergone considerable changes. Throughout his work, he questioned whether technology was the main reason for controlling the natives' environment or whether consistent “success of European imperialism has a biological, [and] an ecological, component” (Crosby 7).

Crosby's analysis of "Neo-Europes" and the success of European imperialism can be understood within the context of environmental determinism and ecological imperialism. While advanced technology and navigation were crucial for European dominance, the unintentional biological and ecological consequences of colonization also significantly contributed to the transformation of the colonized regions.

Crosby used the term "ecological imperialism" to highlight the ecological damage brought on by European colonisation of the Americas. The introduction of various non-native species by the Europeans, including plants, animals, and illnesses, had a significant impact on the local ecosystems. The introduction of contagious diseases like smallpox, to which the native inhabitants lacked protection, had the most severe effects. These illnesses drastically reduced the population, changed how land was used, and interfered with conventional ecological practises. As he stated in his book, “The Europeans made the oceans into highways, arrived in America with guns for conquest and with infectious diseases for decimating indigenous populations, and opened whole regions for immigrant settlement and exploitation, i.e., for making the New World into an enormous and varied adjunct to European societies and economies” (xviii).

Crosby believed that the ecological changes brought on by the arrival of new species and illnesses to these countries had a significant impact on the European colonial expansion, which was not merely a product of military triumphs and political dominance. Native populations and local ecosystems were significantly impacted by the unintentional or deliberate introduction of species that are not native. The spread of infectious diseases like measles, influenza, and smallpox to indigenous peoples in North America, Africa, and Australia is among Crosby's most important case studies. The native population lacked any innate immunity to these diseases because they were

foreign to them. Because of this, when they encountered European explorers and immigrants, these diseases triggered terrible epidemics that wiped off a sizable section of the indigenous population. According to Crosby, the unintended introduction of diseases was a key factor in facilitating European colonisation and conquest. He explained “A large number of natives died due to the various “plagues” and “sleeping sicknesses” (95).

Indeed, "[i]t was their germs, not these imperialists themselves, for all of their brutality and callousness, that were chiefly responsible for sweeping aside the indigenes and opening the Neo-Europes to demographic takeover" (198). He discusses how when Europeans colonised new regions, they unwittingly introduced diseases that the local population had never before seen. Smallpox and measles were among the illnesses that spread swiftly among the indigenous populace because they were defenceless against them. Many indigenous people became ill and died as a result of this. As a result, European settlers—who were frequently healthier as a result of their prior exposure to these illnesses—became more common than the native people. The settlers were able to seize control of these new regions more easily as a result. Crosby also talks about how the ecosystems and environments of these new areas were altered by the plants, animals, and diseases that European settlers carried with them. “The whites simply were not equipped to impose their will on Africa until the nineteenth century and the age of cheap and plentiful quinine and repeating rifles” (137). Crosby is describing the difficulties European powers, also known as "the whites," had in trying to assert authority over Africa up to the nineteenth century. He makes the point that before this time, these European countries lacked the resources or advantages needed to establish their domination in Africa. According to him, Europeans weren't better able to exercise control and supremacy over Africa until the nineteenth century, when they had access to quinine to treat malaria and revolving rifles for tactical advantage. These scientific and medical developments were essential in allowing European countries to increase their influence on the continent of Africa.

Crosby believed environmental damage to be one of the most important strategies used by invaders to obtain control over people and their territories. According to him, “the African ecosystem was simply too lush, too fecund, too untamed and untamable for the invaders until they added more science and technology to their armaments” (137).

Ecological imperialism includes deliberate misuse of resources for scientific and commercial advancement, which is connected to the technological worldview and entangled with Eurocentric and also anthropocentric ideologies. Crosby's pioneering work on ecological imperialism is further developed by Serpil Opperman in her article, "Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Fictions" (2007). In her study, she focuses on the ecological aspect of British imperialism and how it appears in works of British colonial fiction that are based on the intertwined anthropocentric and Eurocentric discourses. Opperman highlights "how the anthropocentric Western paradigm, which views non-humans only as a community, supports the European colonization of the New World, which irrevocably alters the indigenous ecosystem" (2007). It is necessary to establish an understanding on what is meant by the term "anthropocentric" before getting into the consequences of anthropocentric policies as they are covered in Oppermann's paper "Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Fictions". The idea of anthropocentrism, which has its roots in environmental philosophy, places humans at the centre of the natural world and tends to see it primarily through the prism of human requirements, interests, and aspirations. This viewpoint frequently causes the well-being of humans to be prioritised over the wellness of ecosystems as well as other species. The implications of anthropocentric policies are a key area of attention in Oppermann's thorough analysis in "Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Fiction", which is the foundation of this work. This framework focuses on the effects of human-centred views, illuminating how they affect indigenous communities and the environment within the context of imperialism. Focusing on the effects of anthropocentric policies, this study reveals the complex interactions between anthropocentric theories and the natural and cultural aspects of British colonial fiction.

3.2 Consequences of Anthropocentric Policies

3.2.1 Consequences on Natural Habitats

Serpil Operman claims that the anthropocentric policies present in British colonial fiction, which prioritised resource exploitation over ecological sustainability, justified the destruction of natural habitats. Crosby 's (1986) words, "Carrying their domesticated animals, pests, pathogens, and weeds the settlers constituted an incidental dimension of imperialism" (155-199).

3.2.2 Impact on Native Communities

The adoption of anthropocentric concepts caused cultural dislocation and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge, upsetting long-standing connections between indigenous peoples and their natural surroundings. According to Clark (2004), ecological imperialism is "robbing the periphery of its abundant resources and exploiting ecological resources" (189), which they claim went hand in hand with the "genocide inflicted on the native populations" (188) and "undisguised looting, enslavement, and murder" (189) transformed into a capital in the dominant centre. As Ania Loomba (1998) stated, "military violence was used almost everywhere... to secure both occupation and trading 'rights': the colonial genocide in North America and South Africa was spectacular".

3.2.3 Justification of Environmental Degradation

British colonial literature frequently portrayed environmental degradation as a justification for resource extraction, which resulted in the irrevocable loss of nature in colonised territories. Cecil Rhodes, the founder of Rhodesia, better explains the true nature of British imperialism and the main motivation behind it: "We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials while also exploiting the cheap slave labour available from the natives of the colonies". Additionally, the colonies would serve as a disposal location for the excess items produced in our industries (quoted in Foster 87–88).

3.3 Environmental Justice

In order to broaden my exploration beyond the effects of anthropocentric policies, I now focus on the eco-justice features described by Shrader-Frechette. I have picked some environmental justice elements from Shrader-Frechette's "Distributive Justice, Participative Justice, and the Principle of Prima Facie Political Equality", in which she has explained the components of environmental justice (EJ) that refer to the unequal distribution of environmental hazards and benefits depending on class, race, gender, ethnicity, or age. Participative justice is another element of EJ that focuses on ensuring that all people have an equal opportunity to participate in decision-making that has an impact on environmental consequences. Shrader-Frechette makes the case for both preventing unfair risks and promoting a sense of

equality and justice in the process of making choices by combining these two ideas. She thinks we can accomplish a more reasonable and moral response to environmental issues in this way.

When it comes to systems that affect the environment and underprivileged communities, environmental justice is defined as promoting fair treatment. It places special emphasis on equal access to resources, minimising hazards, information availability, and meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. When communities of colour and lower socioeconomic level protested against the unequal placement of polluting plants in their neighbourhoods, the environmental justice movement began to develop in the United States in the late 1980s. These areas, known as environmental justice communities, are frequently bordered by industrial pollutants and do not have access to sufficient funding or policies. Environmental justice, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), is guaranteeing equitable treatment and significant participation of every person in environmental decision-making processes, regardless of their nationality, gender, ethnicity, or income. Environmental justice requires not just the protection of all humans, regardless of gender or race, but also the protection of every square inch of the earth:

Despite environmental justice criticism's understanding of place as more of a human than a natural construct and its focus on the formation of localities by institutionalized macro social processes, it has taken a specific interest in the narratives of representative endangered communities... If every location on earth were looked for as we believe a "protected" reserve is, maybe the health of the world and its inhabitants could be ensured (Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* 68).

3.3.1 Distributive Justice

Environmental justice "would demand that they not be abandoned and deprived of their biological, social, and ecological inheritances... or persecuted by (environmental) imperialism and/or corporate globalization" (Buell 160). The aspect of environmental justice (EJ) that is most easily linked to ecology is distributive justice. This refers to the unequal distribution of environmental hazards and advantages based on race, class, ethnicity, gender, or age (Shrader- Frechette). Participatory justice is another element of environmental justice that addresses equitable access to the decision-making process that affects environmental outcomes.

While ecological knowledge can aid in effective participation, this essay focuses on the information ecology can provide for predicting unequal outcomes.

Numerous ethical theorists define "justice" almost exclusively in terms of distribution, whether of tangible goods such as wealth or nonmaterial goods including equal opportunity. John Rawls, for instance, describes justice as a measure by which a community can evaluate the "distributive elements" of its fundamental structure. The First National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 established the concepts of environmental justice, which place a strong emphasis on the need to stop the manufacturing of poisons and make sure that environmental hazards are distributed fairly. The need for distributive equality is highlighted by worries about racial bias in the location of dangerous facilities, with compensation frequently being utilised to rectify disparities in risk-bearing. Christian Hunold and Iris Marion Young find both unfair ways of doing things and unfair things that happen when environmental hazards are put in certain places. Not only is it unfair that poor racial minorities are more inclined to be exposed to natural hazards, but the way these kinds of decisions are made is also in question. Hunold and Young make the argument for a principle called "democratic inclusion," which says that it is unfair to put people at risk through decisions about where to put waste that do not give potential victims a say. Like Hunold and Young, Kristin Shrader-Frechette (Chapter 8) argues for a link between distributive equity in social benefits and burdens and participative justice, defending what she terms the notion PPFPE stands for the principle of prima facie political equality. Drawing upon her earlier work on the ethics of risk, Shrader-Frechette views the PPFPE as instrumentally useful in discouraging substantively inequitable impositions of risk, as when authorities locate hazardous waste facilities near politically marginalised communities without consulting them, but also as constituting an important expression of justice in its own right. Shrader-Frechette illustrates the policy relevance of her principle in several applied cases, including an extensive case study of offshore oil development, grounding substantive and procedural EJ norms in law, and policy and contrasting her expansive vision of environmental justice with alternative views of risk management based on technology or expertise that fail to account for either kind of inequity. More than any other work in this volume, this essay illustrates the potential for EJ principles to be meaningfully incorporated into institutions and policy analysis without losing their critical value or

normative force, developing mechanisms by which EJ objectives can be institutionalised and its ideals more effectively pursued from within rather than outside of state authority.

3.3.2 Participative Justice

"Environmental justice requires the freedom to engage as equal participants at every level of decision making" (139).By using participatory justice as part of the PPFPE, one tries to get rid of the unfair limits that some people put on the lives and actions of others. Warren County residents were subjected to unjust restraints when the state of North Carolina dumped substandard PCBs on a poor, African-American community that lacked the capacity to reject it, resulting in significant health risks and no compensation. To prevent such injustice, the principle of participatory justice is supposed to ensure that there are organisational and procedural rules that afford everyone an equal chance to be considered in decision-making. Otherwise, survivors of unequal treatment are more likely to be exploited, marginalised, rendered powerless, and subjected to violence (Vanderheiden). The environmental justice discourse has tight ties to the concept of "eco-imperialism," which refers to the imposition of northern ecological views on the Third World. Criticism of historic explanations of European colonisation of the rest of the globe in environmental terms gave rise to the eco-imperialism discussion

After examining ecological imperialism, environmental justice, and the anthropocentric viewpoint, the theoretical framework now integrates the concept of petrocapitalism. Petrocapitalism, a term coined by scholars such as Michael Watts in his article 'Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta,' refers to the economic system characterised by the petroleum industry's dominance and impact on global markets, politics, and society. The idea of petrocapitalism is introduced, and it becomes clear that oil companies are essential to this economic structure. Oil corporations have a crucial role in maintaining the conditions of petrocapitalism, as Watts succinctly states in his article "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil, and Power in the Niger Delta." Watts explains how multinational companies, largely motivated by profit, use tremendous power over resource extraction activities in oil-rich countries. He wisely notes that although promises of progress and wealth are frequently not fulfilled, local communities are

disproportionately affected negatively by resource extraction. As Watts mentioned “The presence and activities of the oil companies as a part of oil complex,constitute a challenge to customary forms of community authority , inter-ethnic relations and land disputes”. It draws attention to the ways that the activities of oil firms disrupt established social structures inside communities and intensify conflicts related to local government and ethnic relations. When the interests of oil firms collide with those of local communities and state institutions, property and land conflicts frequently result in this disruption. Analysing these difficulties can help us understand how government, socio-environmental dynamics, and petrocapitalism interact intricately in oil-rich areas". In the present research, petrocapitalism serves as a lens to examine the socioeconomic, environmental, and political components of resource extraction, especially in regard to the oil drilling featured in Imbolo Mbue's novel.

3.4 Theoretical Model

Based on the ideas of the four writers discussed above I have selected four main aspects, which have been used to analyse the impact of ecological imperialism in the selected novel:

- Disease and death as a corollary of the so-called progress brought about by imperialistic practices (Crosby)
- Distributive justice and participative justice (Shrader-Frechette)
- Consequences of anthropocentric policies on nature as well as natives (Oppermann)
- Petro Capitalism (Michael Watts)

3.5 Application of Theoretical Framework

Using the theoretical frameworks developed by Kristin Shrader-Frechette, Alfred Crosby, Serpil Oppermann and Michael Watts provides a thorough lens through which to analyse the ecological imperialism portrayed in Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*. The way that Mbue depicts the imaginary African village of Kosawa, where the encroaching Pexton Corporation causes environmental destruction and health issues, is a powerful connection to Crosby's claim that imperialist endeavours result in death and sickness among native communities. Mbue's story

emphasises how environmental responsibilities are not equally distributed and how indigenous voices are marginalised; this aligns with Shrader-Frechette's focus on distributive and participatory justice. Moreover, Oppermann's anthropocentric viewpoint clarifies the negative consequences that human-centered policies have on the local community and the environment. Watts's theory of petro-capitalism clarifies how extractive industries—especially the petroleum industry—maintain social inequality and environmental devastation. The narrative's representation of the Pexton Corporation's activities in Kosawa serves as an example of the extractive character of petro-capitalism, in which resource extraction takes preference over environmental sustainability and social welfare in pursuit of profit. Furthermore, Watts highlights how marginalised populations are disproportionately affected by petro-capitalism, which exacerbates already-existing power disparities. This dynamic is eloquently illustrated in the fictional village of Kosawa, where the indigenous population is disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and health risks brought about by the corporation's operations. This echoes Watts's criticism of the unequal allocation of costs and benefits in petro-capitalist economies. Through the application of these frameworks, this study aims to explain the various effects of ecological imperialism on society and the environment in the text, therefore advancing our knowledge of power dynamics and environmental justice concerns in modern literature.

3.6 Research Methodology

This study is descriptive/interpretative in nature, with the goal of defining and interpreting the term ecological imperialism with reference to the selected work. This study is intended to get a deep understanding of the effect of imperialism on the environment of a fictional country in Africa. In order to achieve this objective, a theoretical framework has been devised from Cosby’s work, Watts, Shrader-Frechette and Opperman’s articles used to analyze the selected text. In this study, the researcher has used a qualitative methodology. The method used in this research is thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke. Using this framework, the themes in Mbue’s *How Beautiful We Were* have been examined in relation to ecological imperialism. The thematic analysis method used in this research can be outlined in the following six steps:

i) Familiarization with Data

Close reading of the text with the special focus on patterns and themes related to ecological issues.

ii) Generating Initial code

Ecological Imperialism, Environmental Justice, Exploitation of Natural Resources, Petro capitalism.

iii) Searching For Themes

Distributive Justice, Participative Justice, Power Imbalance. Impact on native communities

iv) Reviewing Themes

Ecological Imperialism (Imperialism Progress: from Ugly to Deadly, Hegemony of Imperial Power and its Environmental Consequences) Power Dynamic (Authoritarian Governance).

v) Defining and Naming Themes

Environmental Degradation: This theme relates to the damaging deeds of the Pexton, which takes advantage of the environment and local communities in the process of obtaining natural resources for financial gain.

Community Involvement and Agency: This theme emphasises the Kosawa villagers' devotion and unity in opposing the corporation's exploitative tactics and working to save their way of life and environment.

Hegmony of Imperial Power and its Environmental Consequences: In the novel, ecological imperialism serves as a lens through which to examine the extensive influence of imperial authority and its destructive consequences on the environment.

vi) Producing the report

> In the last phase of my thematic analysis, I combine my research findings into a coherent story that clarifies how *How Beautiful We Were*, the novel's examination of ecological imperialism and environmental justice, is explored. I develop an in-depth analysis of the intricate socio-political processes happening in the story by drawing on the themes previously mentioned.

Through the application of the Barun and Clark (2006) paradigm to thematic analysis, this study attempts to identify the underlying themes of ecological imperialism in Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*. In order to identify and explore recurrent themes and patterns in the text, thematic analysis provides a methodical and thorough approach to text examination. Using this approach, the study aims to offer insightful understandings into the intricate interactions of social injustice, environmental deterioration, and resistance in the story. The study intends to emphasise the significance of solving ecological imperialism-related concerns and promoting better knowledge and activism for environmental justice by clarifying the text's thematic nuances.

3.6.1 Justification of Chosen Theorists in Light of the Research Questions

The research questions of this study are designed to explore the environmental and social challenges presented in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*, with a focus on ecological imperialism, social injustice, and environmental activism. To address these questions effectively, the study employs theoretical frameworks from distinguished scholars in the field:

Crosby's work entitled "*Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* "published in 1986 Highlights the concept of ecological imperialism and is fundamental for addressing the question, "In what ways does ecological imperialism affect the environment of the fictional African village of Kosawa as presented in the novel *How Beautiful We Were*?" This framework helps analyze how imperialist powers exploit natural resources in colonized regions, leading to environmental degradation and social disruption.

Oppermann's in her article "Ecological Imperialism in British Colonial Fiction"published in 2007, eco-critical perspective enhances the analysis of environmental literature and is pertinent to exploring "How does Mbue's novel

substantiate Crosby's claim that imperialist power brings death and disease to the natives?" Her approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and non-human elements, shedding light on how the novel portrays the harmful health impacts of ecological exploitation on the villagers.

In order to answer the question, "How does the selected novel expose environmental justice issues caused by ecological imperialism?" it is imperative to consider Shrader-Frechette's in her work "Distributive justice, Participative justice,and the Principle of Prima Facie Political Equality Environmental justice" published in 2002 ,beliefs on environmental justice. Her research offers a framework for comprehending the moral implications of ecological exploitation and how villagers struggle for fair treatment and input into decisions that impact their health and land.

Watts' article "Resource curse? governmentality, oil and power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria"published in 2004, his theory of petrocapitalism is crucial in answering the question, "How does the collusion between a native ruler and the imperial power influence the struggles of the local people to protect their environment in the selected novel His work contributes to the critique of the political and economic aspects of oil production as well as the local elites' role in sustaining social and environmental inequalities.

Throughout the examination of *How Beautiful We Were*, selected theoretical frameworks and fundamental ideas are employed to reveal the complex effects of social injustice, ecological imperialism, and petrocapitalism on the imagined African community of Kosawa. Through the incorporation of these theoretical frameworks, the analysis offers a thorough analysis of the novel's themes, highlighting the intricate relationships between privilege, power, and resistance.

3.6.2 Definitions of Key Terms

- **Ecological Imperialism**: According to Alfred Crosby, ecological imperialism is the practice of colonial powers taking advantage of the natural resources of the areas they have colonised, causing social unrest and environmental damage. The influence of Pexton's activities on Kosawa is examined through the lens of this notion.

- **Environmental justice** is a notion that centres on equitable distribution of environmental advantages and disadvantages as well as the involvement of underrepresented groups in environmental decision-making. Applying environmental justice ideas by Kristin Shrader-Frechette, examine at the villagers' struggle for fair treatment and involvement.
- **Petrocapitalism** is the term used by Michael Watts to describe the world economic system that is based on the production and consumption of oil and is defined by the concentration of power and wealth among large multinational businesses. This idea challenges the reasons behind and effects of Pexton's actions throughout the text.

CHAPTER 4
UNCOVERING ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM: ENVIRONMENTAL EXPLOITATION, RESISTANCE, AND JUSTICE

In the world of literature, the interaction between human stories and environmental effects sheds light on a complex discussion of the effects of imperialistic goals. The novel *How Beautiful We Were* by Imbolo Mbue, which depicts the extensive effects of Ecological imperialism in vivid detail, is evidence of this complex relationship. This story navigates the connection between illness and death, distributive and participatory justice, and the effects of anthropocentric policies amid the ecological changes brought on by imperialistic practices—a complex web that resonates with the theoretical frameworks of Alfred Crosby, Michael Watts, Kristin Shrader- Frechette, and Serpil Oppermann. In this chapter, I have discussed a brief summary of *How Beautiful We Were* before diving into the theme of "Imperialism's Progress: From Beautiful to Ugly to Deadly." The changing effects of imperialism on the fictional African village of Kosawa inside the story of the novel are critically examined in this section. Analysis of the effects of anthropocentric policies on the environment and indigenous communities follows from there. Next, I have focus on highlighting imperial power's hegemony and the effects it has on the ecosystem. Finally, the chapter delves into the novel's portrayal of environmental justice, reviewing examples of distributive and participative justice as the characters struggle through their battles for a just and sustainable environment. This chapter includes a thorough literary analysis of Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* in addition to actual events from Cameroon to give a more comprehensive sociopolitical and environmental backdrop. This analysis emphasises the urgent reality of ecological imperialism and the resiliency of Indigenous people by comparing the fictitious events in the novel to real-world ecological and activist scenarios in Cameroon.

4.1 Brief Summary of *How Beautiful We Were*

This story, which takes place primarily in the 1980s through the 2000s, spans generations and is set in the village of Kosawa in a fictional African nation. Every single chapter is written from the viewpoint of "the children," who are the protagonist

Thula Nangi and the other children at the beginning of the novel. The remaining chapters alternate between the perspectives of several Nangi family members. The story opens with news that the village's water is sickening and killing its youngsters. We hear heartbreaking accounts of parents who had to bury their children since doing so would end their family's legacy. When the people ask for help from the authorities, they are met with deception and a refusal to accept responsibility. The story of how things ended is told throughout the remainder of the book. By the time the oil firms arrive, Kosawa has been shaped by colonial and imperial interests for centuries. Kosawa is already under the ownership of the American oil company Pexton, leading the locals to believe that prosperity will come soon. Since Yaya and Big Papa, Thula's grandparents, were young, Pexton has resided in Kosawa. Without success, the people have approached Pexton and the authorities for assistance numerous times. Malabo, Thula's father, went to the main city of Bezam a year earlier to request assistance along five other men, but all disappeared mysteriously.

During one such futile meetings with the Pexton representatives, the village's madman, Konga, takes car keys from Pexton representatives, setting off the central conflict of the narrative. The villagers are then faced with a choice: touch the madman, which is against their system of belief, and let the Pexton employees punish them properly or use the opportunity to spark a revolution. They decide to do the latter and kidnap the Pexton guys until they provide the name of a helpful person in Bezam. Kumbum, one of the captives, mentions his nephew Austin as a reporter for an American publication. When Kumbum passes away from illness, their plan to let the village spirit erase the Pexton representatives' memories of these incidents is failed. By the time Austin gets to the village and finds out about his uncle's passing, he has already finished writing an article on Kosawa. The local healer and his identical twin, the medium, throw their spears when the soldiers come. A massacre is the response from the army. An organisation known as the Restoration Movement seeks to assist Kosawa once the article is published. One of the various viewpoints held by the group is that the youngsters require more education. Despite conventional gender norms, Thula develops into a very motivated student and ends up attending college in the US, where she devotes to studying protest movements, improves her leadership abilities, and falls in love with the exiled Austin. In the meantime, Thula's companions in Kosawa are impatient with the promised changes and start destroying

Pexton property before resorting to violence. Many of them are falsely accused and arrested. Yaya, Thula's grandmother, struggles with all of her family members passing away and considers taking her own life. Sahel, the mother of Thula, and Juba, her younger brother, move with Sahel in Bezam. After spending several years in the US, Thula believes that the country's dictator, not Pexton, is the true issue. She works to get people together to support the objective, but many people are put off by her status as a determined single woman. Her efforts eventually come to a head on Liberation Day, which is meant to mark the beginning of the nation's revolution. Little has changed. Some attorneys later support Kosawa's cause, although they are ultimately unsuccessful in bringing charges against Pexton. As Juba becomes a successful and egotistical government figure, he departs ideologically from his sister. Unaware of their plot, Thula's friends kidnap Mr. and Mrs. Fish, the Pexton supervisor, and his wife. The army arrives to save Mr. and Mrs. Fish and order everyone to flee Kosawa. The villagers learn that after they evacuated, an explosion killed Thula, her companions, Mr and Mrs Fish several soldiers. The dictator destroys Kosawa by burning it to the ground and forbids them from going back. The elders lament the effort they expended in trying to save Kosawa.

4.2 Imperialism's Progress: From Beautiful to Ugly to Deadly

Alfred Crosby's comment on European behaviour and its ecological effects resonates in *How Beautiful We Were*. The statement that “The Europeans made the oceans into highways, arrived in America with guns for conquest and with infectious diseases for decimating indigenous populations, and opened whole regions for immigrant settlement and exploitation (xviii) emphasises the multifaceted nature of imperialistic endeavours. In the text, we can see a parallel as the imaginary community of Kosawa becomes ruled by the American oil firm Pexton, which is comparable to the historical Europeans. This comparison draws attention to the persistent themes of colonisation, exploitation, and contempt for indigenous peoples in both real-world and imagined settings. As we study the text, we see how the characters' lives are entangled with ecological imperialism, which is motivated by conquest and exploitation. The words of Mbue provide one moving illustration of the far-reaching effects of such imperialistic practices “The dirty air had gotten stuck in his lungs. Slowly, the poison spread through his body and turned into something else"

(10). This description illustrates the insidious intrusion of environmental toxins within the pages of the book, symbolising the pervasive effects of imperialistic activities on both the physical environment and the daily lives of the characters. Similar to previous ecological upheavals brought on by colonisation and industrialization, the metaphor of "poison" represents the slow but unrelenting degradation produced by external influences. The transformation described in the preceding line, which also applies to the character's physical transformation, is mirrored in Kosawa. Pexton's invasive operations gradually transform the area's once-vibrant ecosystem into one marked by ecological imbalance and human misery. The novel emphasises not only the horrifying visuals of environmental contamination but also how vulnerable the local people are to its dangers. In order to observe "slow violence," to use Rob Nixon's term, the diseases that covertly afflict the villagers take the form of embodied experiences. The physical problems that silently plague the people in the text highlight the insidious impact of delayed brutality. As the text points out, some children develop "rashes and fevers" (9), a symptom of the underlying harm that appears minor but is alarming. “When the cough hit, his eyes watered, his back hunched out, he had to hold on to something to steady himself” (9). From the perspective of the children in the story, Wambi, the younger son of Lusaka, holds a special place in their collective memories. Wambi was more than simply a classmate; he was a member of their group, someone who left a lasting effect. Wambi's involvement in their lives was characterised by his mathematical skills and his isolated attitude. They were all roughly the same age. His peculiar, disturbing cough, though, was what really stuck out. The sight was a mixture of sympathy and amusement, like seeing someone stumble, that expressed worry and a fleeting chuckle. In their youthful innocence, they made fun of Wambi's cough, laughing that he ought to see the doctor for treatment. They were not aware of its seriousness. Crosby provided evidence of how new land uses (such as destroying native forests for industrial agriculture or digging oil wells and building pipelines) and the introduction of foreign animal, plant, and disease species caused significant changes in the ecology of the colonised regions and the collapse of the local human and nonhuman populations. Thus, Crosby's approach emphasises how ecological colonisation of non-European countries was harmful to the local ecosystem and created the conditions for military colonisation. The text highlights the ecological effects of introducing foreign materials, directly echoing Crosby's analysis: “The sky began to pour acid and rivers

began to turn green, we should have known our land would soon be dead" (6). The ecological devastation brought on by human activity is clearly shown in this striking illustration. With Crosby's observation of the unforeseen ecological effects brought on by the introduction of alien species, diseases, and changes in land usage, the image of acid rain falling from the sky and rivers becoming an unnatural green resonates. According to the villagers' lamentations, these patterns disturb the natural equilibrium and portend the impending downfall of their once-thriving land. This graphic rendition captures the novel's story as a microcosm of the larger ecological patterns Crosby observed.

According to Crosby, "It was their germs, not these imperialists themselves, for all their brutality and callousness, that were chiefly responsible for sweeping aside the indigenes and opening the Neo-Europes to demographic takeover" (196). According to Crosby, the local inhabitants underwent changes due to factors other than the colonists' activities when Europeans colonised new areas. Rather, Crosby contends that a greater part of these changes was caused by the diseases (germs) that the colonists brought with them. The diseases that the colonists brought with them significantly altered the population in the colonised countries, despite the fact that the colonists were frequently cruel. Hence, Crosby contended, the diseases had a greater influence on the demographics of these recently colonised areas than the acts of the colonists. Crosby's viewpoint is echoed in Mbue's depiction of the villagers' experiences.

"Though Pexton has been here since Papa was a little boy, they didn't start becoming the cause of many deaths until three years ago, after they decided to add a new oil well at Gardens" (34). Thula narrates the story that when Papa was a child, the American oil corporation Pexton had been there for a long time, but things changed around three years ago. They made the decision to drill a new oil well at Gardens at that time. After that, unfavourable things began to occur, including an increase in illnesses and fatalities.

4.2.1 Pexton's Actions as Ecological Imperialism

The American oil firm Pexton serves as the novel's external aspect, causing ecological changes. This company's presence, which was initially unremarkable over time, is consistent with Crosby's depiction of germs that persisted covertly before

their unwanted effects became apparent. The text's and Crosby's ideas are similar, which emphasises the notion that outside influences can cause ecological disruption and act as catalysts for important changes. The villagers' environment is susceptible to change due to the entrance of outside factors, much like the Neo-Europeans that Crosby addresses. Both situations illustrate how trivial or seemingly unimportant elements can have unanticipated effects that change the environment and communities. We are better able to understand how historically accurate analysis and fictional portrayal are intertwined by associating the story with Crosby's concern. The complex interactions between human behaviour, the introduction of outside influences, and their long- term effects on the fragile balance of ecosystems are brought to our attention by this comparison. This further deepens the analysis by making Crosby's thoughts tangible through the novel's narrative. From Thula's contemplation "It was then, with the increased wastes dumped into it, that whatever life was left in the big river disappeared" (34). We see a significant change in the ecological condition of the village. The increased disposal of trash into the large river marks a crucial turning point. Any remaining life in the once-thriving river has vanished as a result of this occurrence.

Crosby's insights regarding unintended effects are echoed by the river's decline, which reflects the ecological disruption brought on by outside influences. Fishermen who depended on the river for their livelihood had their way of life threatened. The shortage of fish causes them to abandon and repurpose their canoes, which were once important equipment. The demise of the fishing business serves as an example of how environmental changes have a domino effect on the way of life in the community. "Children began to forget the taste of fish" (34). The youngsters also experience the transition since they no longer recognise the taste of fish, which is a subtly moving illustration of how the transformed environment has affected day-to-day life. The fact that Kosawa now smells like crude oil instead of its original smell draws attention to how pervasive this transformation is, affecting even the villagers' sensory senses. As Thula illustrates a distressing incident, "a pipeline burst and oil flooded the farm of the mother of one of my friends—her family barely had any harvest that year" (34). A pipeline bursts during the first dry season, causing a catastrophic oil spill that destroys a friend's mother's land. The effects are extensive, and her family's crop is drastically reduced. The narrator's gesture of sharing food

during playtime, which reflects the unity that develops despite adversity, highlights the impact of this calamity on individuals. Another spill then turns into a fire that sweeps throughout the farms owned by six different families.

Due to the devastating incident, these families are forced to travel through the forest in search of fresh lands, which leaves them exhausted and physically unable to find a suitable area for farming. The community's vulnerability and the hard realities they must contend with as a result of ecological disruption are highlighted by this disastrous situation. In addition to these difficulties, gas flare activity increases, creating black smoke that worsens the air quality. The constant smoke, which is getting worse, serves as a sombre reminder of the ongoing ecological destruction and how it affects people' daily lives. Gas flares, both during the day and at night, discharge poisonous compounds that cause respiratory issues. Since burning petroleum products causes cancer, higher cancer rates are seen: “We remembered those who had died from diseases with neither names nor cures—our siblings and cousins and friends who had perished from the poison in the water and the poison in the air and the poisoned food growing from the land that lost its purity the day Pexton came drilling” (6). This section highlights the crisis's complexity in more ways than one. There are many different causes of disease, including "poison in the water, poison in the air, and poisoned food. These factors are connected to the degradation of the land, which can be attributed to Pexton's arrival and subsequent actions. The comparison of different pollution sources illustrates how environmental changes and health effects are linked.

In Mbue's story, the catastrophic effects of ecological disruption are explored as they become reality as a wave of infectious diseases decimates the local population. The severe strain placed on the villages as a result of outside influences is strongly illustrated by the unavailability of solutions and the tragic deaths of loved ones. The novel's in-depth analysis of the complex relationship between environmental changes and their enormous effects on human lives is underscored by its exploration of disease and death as themes. Crosby has also included enough room to talk about how agricultural animals were introduced to the Americas by the Europeans. They also brought both useful and harmful items on their journey, such as deadly weapons, contagious diseases, contagious weeds, cultivated plants, varmints, and so on. Farmers' waste piles contributed to a rise in varmint populations (mostly rats and

mice). It caused the spread of many diseases and attacks on the supplies of food for humans (29-30). In his work, Crosby goes into great detail about the unintended consequences of European colonisation of the Americas. Farm animals and a variety of other items were introduced into the new ecosystem, bringing with them both advantageous and detrimental elements. These new elements included deadly weapons, pathogens, insects, and varmints. Notably, early farmers' methods were blamed for the rise of vermin like rats and mice, which posed problems for food supplies and the spread of diseases. In the same way, the novel investigates the idea of outside factors upsetting ecological balance and wellness. The actions of the oil business, which unintentionally brings harmful components into the village's ecosystem, mimic those of the European immigrants. The results are severe: diseases spread, the environment becomes contaminated, and the delicate order of the ecosystem is upset. Just as Crosby's approach emphasises the unforeseen implications of introducing foreign elements, the villagers in the story experience similar outcomes as a result of Pexton's arrival. He questioned if technology was the primary cause of the natives' environment being dominated or whether the success of European imperialism consistently "has a biological and an ecological component" (7). This idea aligns with a theme in the novel. In the narrative, the villagers express their view that all overseas who visit their land have the same goals. Konga, a village madman, talks to other villagers who are seeking assistance from the Western world. but he does not agree with them and says, “You do understand that all people from overseas are the same, don’t you? The Americans, the Europeans, every single overseas person who has ever set foot on our soil, you know they all want the same thing, don’t you?” Europeans first colonised for ivory, slaves, and rubber, and now Americans are colonising for oil.

The people of Kosawa became aware that nothing helpful had arrived. It is clear from the setting of the village of Kosawa that these successive waves of outside influence have not brought much—if any—real benefit for the neighbourhood. This statement highlights a recurrent theme: that foreigners use the resources of the area without giving the indigenous people any real benefits. As we learn from Yaya's story, European colonisers had previously arrived in Kosawa with the intention of establishing rubber plantations. “Rubber was needed in Europe, and it was incumbent upon our ancestors to meet the demand. For the sake of rubber, a generation of our

young men was wiped away. How many men from Kosawa died on those plantations? (226). The novel has a strong emphasis on the effects of European colonisation on the native population, notably with regard to the desire for rubber. The above text highlights how important it is for the Kosawa people to meet European demand for rubber, a resource that is vital to Europe. A large number of young men from the village were lost as a result of this pursuit of rubber, which came at a considerable cost. The subject of disease and death as an unexpected consequence of imperialistic practises, as addressed by Crosby, is precisely paralleled by this terrible result of European action. The misuse of resources, like rubber plantations, by outside forces exemplifies how indigenous populations are negatively affected by so-called progress, leading to destruction and deaths.

Crosby persuadingly maintained that the primary factor in their success was the type of lands they selected for conquest: these regions had native populations and ecosystems that were easily susceptible to the natural world of the invading imperialists. He believed that one important tactic used by colonisers to seize control of indigenous people and their territories was the degradation of the natural environment. “European brutality, advanced military technology, and capitalist intrusions were the reasons why European imperialism had been successful. Oh, and the industrial revolution was a capitalist deception that destroyed the environment” (xvi). Crosby questions the notion that imperial conquests were simply motivated by armed force and commercial motives. Instead, he contends that ecological dynamics—such as the emergence of new species, the spread of diseases, and changes in the environment—were crucial factors in how colonial encounters turned out. In short, Crosby's viewpoint broadens our comprehension of the root causes of imperialism beyond just human intents and deeds by taking into account the intricate relationships that exist between cultures and their environments. As mentioned in the novel, “Trees were felled all over the valley to make room for the oil field and pipelines and Gardens” (75). Kosawa's environment suffered great harm when Pexton cut down trees all across the valley to make more space for the oil field, pipes, and Gardens. As the environment in Kosawa was damaged, children started getting sick because of the polluted air and water. Crosby suggests that human activities are damaging nature, so native people suffered and Europeans took benefits. This is related to the concept of ecological imperialism, in which outsiders exploit nature for

personal benefit. Similar to how Crosby discussed how European actions affected ecosystems, the novel depicts a similar situation in which so-called progress harms the local community and the environment. The example provided encourages us to consider the potential harm that human activity might cause to the environment and to examine whether such activity is ultimately beneficial or harmful. Due to Pexton's unrelenting search for oil, the ecosystem is severely degraded, resulting in soil contamination, water pollution, and health issues for the locals. This work of fiction is based on a scenario that actually occurred in Cameroon, specifically the building of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline.[1]

Due to its negative effects on the environment and society, the Kribi Oil Pipeline, a component of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project, has drawn a lot of criticism.[2] The pipeline has resulted in deforestation, water contamination, and the uprooting of local residents, much like Pexton's acts in Kosawa. The challenges portrayed in Mbue's book are closely paralleled by the deterioration of regional ecosystems and the ensuing loss of Indigenous livelihoods in Cameroon.[3] This comparison emphasises the novel's indictment of ecological imperialism's destructive nature and draws attention to the negative effects that these exploitative tactics have in the real world.

The real-life example of oil exploitation in Cameroon is contrasted with the fictional story of Pexton's deeds in order to highlight the widespread and negative impacts of imperialist endeavours on both fictional and real-life populations. It also serves to emphasise the novel's central point regarding the pressing need for Indigenous rights protection and environmental justice.

4.2.2 Consequences of Anthropocentric Policies on Nature as well as Natives

We need to understand the anthropocentric worldview's foundations in order to comprehend ecological imperialism. Since they have an anthropocentric perspective, the British are primarily responsible for ecological imperialism in its various

[1] United Nations Environment Programme. (2011). Environmental Assessment of the Bakassi Peninsula.
[2] International Crisis Group. (2013). The Gulf of Guinea: The New Danger Zone.
[3] Human Rights Watch. (2009). Cameroon: Oil Wealth and Misery.

incarnations. The Europeans used a mercantilist strategy of colonisation and subjugation to expand into remote parts of the world, usually through armed violence. At the time, the indigenous people were subjected to horrible injustices. They represented the colonised territories' deeds of ecological dominance over nature. As a result, those attitudes still have an impact on the entire world today. According to two well-known critics, John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, ecological imperialism amounted to robbing the periphery of its natural resources and using ecological resources for personal gain, which culminated in the covert exploitation, enslavement, and death of ecology.

Ecological imperialism is clearly shown in the novel. This idea, which is based on Opperman's views on anthropocentric policies and their effects, simply denotes the exploitation of local ecosystems and nature for economic advantage by strong outside forces. We can observe how outside factors, such as the American company Pexton, have impacted Kosawa's natural environment in the novel. The analysis in this section focuses on the changes to Kosawa's environment that are highlighted in the text.

4.2.3 Consequences for Natural Habitats

In the novel we see how the actions of the American company Pexton had a big negative effect on the environment. As metioned in the text “It was then, with the increased wastes dumped into it, that whatever life was left in the big river disappeared” (32). It shows how drastically Pexton's actions negatively impacted Kosawa's large river. They started dumping a lot of dangerous materials into the river, which made it extremely polluted and wiped out all the plants and animals. The river thus become a depressing, dirty place after losing all of its liveliness. The story highlights how anthropocentric practises motivated by financial gain caused devastation on the once-thriving natural ecosystem. The river, which was once a representation of life, has been reduced to a barren, dirty channel. The effects go beyond only the river and have an impact on the entire local ecology, which is currently dealing with the fallout from this ecological calamity. As mentioned, “Children began to forget the taste of fish” (32). The children started to forget what fish tasted like. However, there is more at stake here than just fish; there is a deeper meaning represented. Fish was once a popular and delicious food in their village. People used to catch fish from the river and eat it as part of their meals. But the

Pexton oil company's pollution and other issues caused the river to become so filthy and contaminated that the fish either died or were dangerous to eat. So, when the narrative says, "Children began to forget the taste of fish," it is stating that the pollution from the oil firm has not only affected the environment but also taken something crucial out of these children's life. It serves as a means of illustrating how adverse changes brought on by outside forces like industry and pollution are negatively affecting their world and natural habitat. At the same time the smell of kosawa also changed, which formerly represented life and vitality, gradually changed into the strong, unpleasant smell of crude oil. As stated in the novel, “The smell of Kosawa became the smell of crude” (32). Pexton's actions and their impact on the village's natural environment are directly responsible for the change. This change denotes environmental and air pollution, which affects local plants and animals as well as human senses. As Opperman argues, “Without regard to how well it would benefit the local ecosystems, forced land conversion had a negative impact on indigenous environments, for example, harming not only the non-human resources but also the indigenous peoples themselves” (186). We see a startling similarity to Opperman's point concerning the effects of forced land conversion for profit—often at the expense of native ecosystems and indigenous populations—in the novel.

The powerful American oil company Pexton, which prioritises its financial interests above all else, is portrayed in the novel as such. Kosawa's ecosystem suffers greatly as a result of Pexton's constant pursuit of financial gain through oil production. The corporation has prioritised profit over the health of the local ecosystem, as seen by its deforestation and the disposal of toxic waste into the river. Pexton continuously pursued practises including deforestation and the careless disposal of toxic garbage into the river because it valued profit over the health of the local environment. As mentioned in the novel, “a new spill turned into a fire that ravaged the farms of six families, forcing mothers to go searching for new land deep in the forest, a trek that left many with little strength for toiling” (34). This tragic incident provides a powerful example of how ecological disasters and industrial irresponsibility, such as oil spills, impact local people livelihoods and well-being in addition to the natural environment. It demonstrates Pexton's unrelenting quest of wealth at the expense of the Kosawa region's native population and local ecosystem. This highlights the intricate connection between environmental destruction, corporate

greed, and the misery of indigenous tribes, and the story clearly depicts the catastrophic effects of ecological upheaval. The environmental issues Cameroon faces in real life are quite comparable to this fictitious portrayal. For example, there has been significant deforestation as a result of logging operations in and around Korup National Park, endangering the biodiversity of the area and the means of subsistence for Indigenous populations who depend on the forest.[4] Mbue's story portrays themes of ecological imperialism, which are reflected in the exploitation of natural resources for financial gain, often with minimal consideration for the resulting social and environmental effects.[5] This analysis highlights the broad and disastrous consequences of unregulated resource exploitation by drawing comparisons between the fictitious devastation of Kosawa's natural habitats and the real deforestation occurring in Cameroon.[6] For the sake of protecting delicate ecosystems and the populations that depend on them, both incidents underscore the critical necessity for environmentally just and sustainable activities.

4.2.4 Impact on Native Communities

According to Clark (2004), ecological imperialism is "robbing the periphery of its abundant resources and exploiting ecological resources" (189), which they claim went hand in hand with the "genocide inflicted on the native populations" (188); and "undisguised looting, enslavement, and murder" (189) transformed into a capital in the dominant centre. Similar to Clark's portrayal, the story effectively demonstrates the negative impacts of ecological imperialism. Environmental imperialism entails the exploitation of resources in peripheral regions, frequently at the expense of indigenous peoples. The operations of the fictional American oil firm Pexton illustrate this theme. The environment and the welfare of Kosawa's people are sacrificed in Pexton's unrelenting search for financial gain. Therefore, the company's operations severely degrade the ecosystem and have a negative influence on the local people, highlighting the significance of Clark's explanation of ecological imperialism in the actual world. The term represents the historical pattern in which dominating forces impose their will on poorer communities, harming the environment and inflicting human suffering, motivated by profit and exploitation of resources. As mentioned at

[4] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2020). Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Cameroon.
[5] Global Forest Watch. (2019). Cameroon: Logging and Environmental Impact.
[6] World Wildlife Fund. (2021). Cameroon Forests: Threats and Solutions.

the very start of the novel, the child narrator says “we should have known the end was near when the sky began to pour acid and rivers began to turn green. We should have known our land would soon be dead” (5). Pexton's actions have catastrophic consequences. Kosawa's ecology starts to noticeably deteriorate, reflecting the wider ecological catastrophe. The rivers turning green and the sky turning acidic represent the tremendous environmental damage brought on by the corporation's unrestrained resource extraction. A tragic result of the ecological imperialism that Clark portrays is that the local environment, which was once rich and active, starts to wither and deteriorate. When they saw the warning signs of environmental deterioration, such as acid rain and polluted rivers, they expressed remorse that they did not predict the fatal consequence. This highlights the terrible effects of ecological imperialism on the environment and indigenous communities. As mentioned in the novel, “they own the air we breathe” (101). This demonstrates the level of influence the American oil corporation Pexton has over the Kosawa population.

Consider policies that prioritise what is best for people and their financial interests, with little concern for the environment or the local population. For local communities, these regulations frequently cause issues. In the narrative, Pexton's actions lead Kosawa's air to become seriously contaminated. The act of breathing is no longer healthy. It seems as though the Pexton is claiming ownership of something so fundamental as the air that everyone needs to survive. This indicates that the sickly residents of Kosawa are a result of the poor air quality. Due to Pexton's actions, their lives, which were formerly intertwined with the land and environment, are now troubled. According to Max Horkheimer,

> The concept of having power over something includes deciding for oneself and making use of it for one’s own purposes. But domination over nature ... merely serves as an instrument for individuals, groups and nations which use it in their struggle against one another and, as they develop it, at the same time reciprocally circumscribe it and bend it to destructive ends (412).

Without considering the long-term effects on the environment or the health of the indigenous people, the firm exploits the natural resources of Kosawa, such as oil. As Malabo clarifies to Thula, “Pexton came to Kosawa to get oil so that their other friends in America would have oil for their cars” (35). Pexton's focus on securing oil for American vehicles emphasises the interconnectivity of global economic interests,

where the demands of one group (car owners) drive actions that have an impact on local communities and ecosystems. The nature and people in Kosawa suffered greatly due to the oil, which in America powered the industries and fueled the automobiles. While American ran their machines with the same oil, Yaya, Sahel, Bongo, and Thula could smell it in the air. This is a reflection of the anthropocentric viewpoint, which frequently puts the comfort and convenience of particular people or civilizations before the wellbeing of other people and the environment. In Kosawa, Pexton's dominance over the environment isn't solely driven by its own interests but is part of a larger power struggle involving corporations, nations, and economic interests. These entities seek to control and exploit resources, often without considering the ecological or human consequences. By showing how human-centric resource exploitation and decision-making can cause environmental degradation, harm to indigenous communities, and the prioritisation of short-term gains over long-term sustainability, the concept of domination over nature in the novel is aligned with the outcomes of anthropocentric policies. However, not only the younger generation is struggling; through the character of Yaya, we learn that Europeans arrived first for the rubber trade and how the locals had to endure adversity. How they and their families would be tortured if they were to go back and stop working. As mentioned, “Children were pulled from their huts and beaten in village squares because their fathers had escaped the rubber plantations. Wives were raped” (222). Because their parents fled the place where they were made to labour on rubber plantations, these individuals were not treated well. Due to this, the village's children were driven from their houses and beaten in the centre of the village. These men's wives underwent sexual abuse, which exacerbated the anguish these communities already endured. Mbue tells us a heartbreaking story of how the burden fell on indigenous populations as a result of the need for rubber. “Rubber was needed in Europe, and it was incumbent upon our ancestors to meet the demand” (226). They worked in excruciatingly difficult conditions while they were forced to labour on rubber plantations. Fathers who could not endure the conditions would flee, abandoning their loved ones behind, tearing families apart. Mbue is probably criticising the colonial and exploitation legacy throughout history. She wants us to comprehend how, in the name of encouraging economic benefit, these policies created inequality and suffering. As she mentioned “For the sake of rubber, a generation of our young men was wiped away” (227). It draws attention to the suffering and frequently fatal consequences of a generation of

young men from the Kosawa native population who were forced to work on rubber plantations. Using this statement, Mbue effectively highlights the terrible results of anthropocentric politics. It serves as an example of how the exploitation of these indigenous populations' lives for the sake of business and resources—in this case, rubber—led to innumerable deaths. It invites us to reflect on the extent of the pain and death that these communities experienced when Mbue asks, "How many men from Kosawa died on those plantations?" This question highlights the significance of this loss. As Ania Loomba (1998) stated, "military violence was used almost everywhere... to secure both occupation and trading 'rights': the colonial genocide in North America and South Africa was spectacular". In order to drill for oil, representatives of a foreign oil corporation visit to the village of Kosawa. Aside from industrial equipment, they also have the potential for violence and environmental destruction.

Although the scale of the violence in the novel may not be comparable to the genocides committed during colonial times in North America or South Africa, it does reflect a similar pattern of exploitation and power relationships. As Mbue mentioned, "Soldiers were in the square. Nine of them. Nine guns drawn and pointed at us. One of the soldiers shouted for us to approach" (181). The soldiers represent a certain kind of military force that was employed to impose authority over the indigenous people.

4.2.5 Hegemony of Imperial Power and its Environmental Consequences

The imperial dominion established by Pexton, an American oil company, is the central theme of this story. The Kosawa villager's land and resources are being used for the benefit of a far-off and strong force, and they are caught in a complicated web of control and exploitation. The people' cries for aid and justice are ignored, illuminating the glaring power disparity and the unrestrained authority exercised by the colonial power. As mentioned in the novel, "Every eight weeks we went to the village square to listen to them. We were dying. We were helpless. We were afraid. Those meetings were our only chance at salvation" (5). Every eight weeks the locals meet in the village square, gathering there in a desperate attempt to ask for help and direction. This situation is urgent, as evidenced by how regularly they meet. They get together in the village square because they are well aware of the disaster facing their own community. This dilemma is a direct result of the imperialist behaviour of strong outside forces, including Pexton, an American oil firm. These factors have caused

environmental degradation, which is showing up as sickness and death among the inhabitants. The statement "We were dying" shows how serious the issues facing the village were. The declining health and well-being of the people, especially the children, is directly caused by the environmental devastation brought on by imperialistic exploitation. The villagers see these gatherings as their final chance to find solutions to the social and environmental crises that have seized their way of life. We see the terrible effects of imperial dominion on the ecosystem as the story progresses.

Environmental deterioration as a result of Pexton's unrelenting search of profit is frightening. Kosawa's once-pristine landscapes are now damaged by destructive operations that leave a path of destruction in their wake. The land, water, and air that have supported communities for many generations are polluted, making them hazardous and unsuitable for human. As mentioned, “Our mothers and fathers wanted him to offer specifics on exactly when our air and water and land would be clean again” (9). The residents are concerned about their ability to breathe clean air. They want to know when the air will be cleaned up, safe for them to breathe without worrying about negative effects, and when the dirty air, which is probably causing health issues and discomfort, will be cleaned. A basic requirement is having access to clean, safe drinking water. The people are worried that the polluted water sources they use could spread illnesses and other health problems. When can they expect that their water supply will be free of pollutants? “It was the poison—the baby was too pure for the filth in the village well’s water, the toxins that had seeped into it from Pexton’s field” (11). The infant died as a result of polluted water from the village well, which was meant to be a source of clean and secure drinking water. The dangerous compounds that polluted the well came from nearby fields controlled by the American oil corporation Pexton. The statement "the baby was too pure for the filth" implies that the infant's body or immune system was incapable of handling pollutants in the water. Because of their immature bodies and less developed immune systems than those of adults, babies are frequently more susceptible to the impacts of pollution. This unacceptable loss highlights the serious effects of environmental degradation brought on by Pexton's actions. It demonstrates the harm that can be done to innocent lives, like the babies, when basic necessities like water are polluted. According to Feldman and Hsu (2007), these problems are still associated with the issue of race

because indigenous people are more likely to experience such calamities. Postcolonial countries suffer from exploitation of resources since their infrastructure was built more for the purpose of resource extraction than for ecological sustainability and maintenance. As mentioned in the novel, “Pexton has been paying off people in the district office to shut their eyes, or turn them to the ground, or to the sky, to anywhere but the children dying in front of them” (40). Their resources are stolen, and their cries for environmental restoration and responsibility frequently go unheard. The acts of the American oil company demonstrate the influence and power that strong corporations with imperialistic goals can have over local authorities. Pexton makes sure that those in charge ignore the negative effects of their operations on the environment and public health by buying off individuals at the district office.

As mentioned in the novel, “he (Woja Beki) descended from the same ancestors as us, but Pexton had bought him” (8). This shows how native individuals frequently turn against their own people when large companies create relationships with them to advance their own goals. The fact that Woja Beki, who is related to the villagers, betrays his own people for his own benefit illustrates the splitting effects of such collaboration. Because certain people, like Woja Beki, put their own interests ahead of the welfare of the community and the preservation of their natural habitat, it makes the collective efforts of the locals to maintain their environment less effective. This shows the influence and control a strong corporation can have over local government, which is an example of imperial hegemony. Said in his book *Power, Politics, and Culture*, also discusses how imperialism is based on territorial acts of violence and reclaiming control of the land and its resources. Pexton is an unrecognised dictator who controls everything above and below the Kosawa, as mentioned, "they even own the air we breathe"(101). Pextons destroys the environment, clears the forests, contaminates the water, upends the social order, and, most importantly, kills people out of greed. In the novel *How Beautiful We Were*, it is described how a corporation commits all of these crimes while claiming to be committed to sustainability and development. Indigenous peoples were frequently regarded by Europeans as "uncivilised." According to European standards, the term was used to show that these local people's way of life, culture, and system of government were neither sophisticated or evolved. As mentioned in the novel, “The representatives told them that drilling for oil would bring something called

“civilization” to our village” (74). Pexton, an American oil firm, uses the notion of delivering civilization to the community of Kosawa. They claim that oil drilling will advance the village. Promising of improvement is a technique they frequently use to make what they're doing appear to be appropriate. However, this promise may be just covering up something more dangerous. It may involve endangering the village's inhabitants' lives and the environment. The Pexton representatives ignore possible negative impacts on nature and people in their pursuit of profits. This idea of civilization serves as a lens through which individuals may justify their behaviour, even if they threaten the community and the environment. Kosawa's people disagree with this claim. They seek to prevent changes to their land and way of life. The damage to the environment that we witness in the story demonstrates just how bad things can get when businesses irresponsibly exploit nature for their own gain. The locals who have lived in this village for a very long time are now treated by the large corporation as though they are worthless. They seem to have lost all significance. As Juba said in the novel, “we have no land left to fight for” (367). The people of Kosawa, who have lost their land as well as their means of livelihood and cultural heritage, are left feeling hopeless and depressed. It emphasises the deep and everlasting effects of imperial hegemony and unrestricted corporate power on the environment as well as the lives of the oppressed. This suggests that everything and everyone that was lost—including Malabo, Bongo, Thula, the kids, the mango trees, the big river, and the animals—were lost for no reason. Pexton not only ruined the people's culture and way of life, but also their land and the natural surroundings. Mbue's fictitious village of Kosawa serves as an accurate representation of the colonial hegemony's disastrous effects on the environment and the lives of the indigenous people.

Through the perspective of this story, we see how corporations like Pexton oil company's ruthless pursuit for money and power results in irreparable environmental devastation and the exploitation of the local people. In the novel, imperial powers frequently use the rhetoric of progress and civilization to defend their acts, even when such efforts cause ecological destruction and social stratification. The promise of "Prosperity" is used as a cover for the exploitation of natural resources and the enslavement of indigenous peoples. Moreover, the imperial power's complicity with local rulers like Woja Beki, evoking practices from the colonial past, highlights a

system in which indigenous peoples' land and resources are taken away. This cooperation strengthens colonial powers' hegemonic dominance and further suppresses already marginalised populations. In short, Mbue's novel serves as a sobering reminder of both the dire need to confront ecological degradation and social injustice, as well as the long-lasting effects of imperial dominion. In order to achieve a more equitable and sustainable future where the voices and well-being of indigenous communities are acknowledged and protected, it is important that we acknowledge the devastating legacy of untamed authority. The local political elites' exploitation and abuse of their own people is personified by Woja Beki. As a leader, he puts his own interests ahead of those of the foreign oil corporation Pexton, meaning that the Kosawa villagers suffer more and the environment deteriorates more.

Paul Biya, the president of Cameroon for a long time, has demonstrated activities that have a real-world equivalent.[7] Foreign firms' interests in the nation, especially those of the timber and oil industries, have been criticised by his administration for being supported. Deals with foreign firms have been made under Biya's direction that have resulted in substantial environmental damage and the uprooting of local residents.[8] For example, the administration has received significant support for programmes like the Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline.[9]

The negative effects of government leaders who assist foreign corporate forces while taking advantage of fellow citizens and the environment are highlighted by this complicity, which is reminiscent of Woja Beki's treachery of his people in Mbue's novel. The fictitious and actual situations highlight the need of responsible and environmentally conscientious leadership by illuminating the dire consequences that might arise when local leaders align themselves with predatory outsider forces.

Unlike previous studies,such as "Environmental Neocolonialism and the Quest for Social Justice" in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*"and " Extraction and Environmental Injustices: (De)colonial Practices in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*", my analysis explores a crucial but frequently ignored topic: the cooperation between imperialist forces and Indigenous elites. Mbue depicts how local authorities, such Woja Beki, work with imaginary organisations like Pexton, the oil firm, to take

[7] World Bank. (2007). Cameroon: Reforming Forestry.
[8] Transparency International. (2020). Corruption Perceptions Index 2020: Cameroon.
[9] Global Witness. (2012). The Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline: How Mismanagement and Disregard for Human Rights Endangered People and the Environment.

advantage of their own people and lands throughout *How Beautiful We Were*. This partnership exacerbates environmental deterioration and social inequality, a topic I discuss in great detail about in my thesis. Through an analysis of this intricate relationship, I attempt to draw attention to the ways in which Indigenous elites, motivated by their own interests and power struggles, uphold injustices that worsen the situation of their communities. This thoughtful analysis highlights the critical need for moral governance and authentic Indigenous voice in decision-making processes while illuminating a significant aspect of ecological imperialism.

4.3 Environmental Justice

When it comes to how our actions influence the environment, environmental justice means treating everyone fairly. It implies that when we use or damage the environment, we do not unfairly harm specific groups of people, particularly those from indigenous or minority backgrounds. According to environmental justice, all living things, including people, animals, and plants, should have an equal right to utilise natural resources like clean water and air. And when there are environmental risks, we must protect everyone equally, without demonstrating preference or prejudice. Making sure that no one is unjustly harmed by what we do to the environment is the goal. In Mbue's novel the environmental concerns at the centre of the story are not just scholarly discussions or privileges of those with money. These issues are deeply interconnected into the daily lives and means of livelihood of the characters in the story. As Joan Martnez Alier (2009) points out, their stories demonstrate a direct link between environmental problems and the search for justice. We will explore how the characters' difficulties reflect the larger discourse on environmental justice as we further explore this relationship between environmental conditions and justice. The struggles of the made-up village of Kosawa, which is dealing with ecological imperialism and environmental degradation, are explored in this text. The effects of environmental injustice are highlighted in this story, exposing the unequal access to resources and distribution of environmental harm. We can clearly identify an instance of environmental injustice in the novel *How Beautiful We Were*. The Pexton business, based on power and profit, exploits Kosawa's natural resources with no concern for the welfare of the local inhabitants. As a result of this environmental exploitation, the villagers' environment becomes dangerous and

poisonous, especially for children. As mentioned in the novel, “our siblings and cousins and friends who had perished from the poison in the water and the poison in the air and the poisoned food growing from the land that lost its purity the day Pexton came drilling” (6). This text serves as an illustration of how certain people of the community, especially the most defenceless, suffer disproportionately from environmental degradation. It demonstrates how environmental dangers, like poisoned water, polluted air, and poisonous food supplies, are not equally distributed but rather affect people who are already marginalised. It draws attention to a fundamental principle of environmental justice, which is the understanding that marginalised and underprivileged people frequently bear an unfair share of the harmful effects of the environment. The fact that Pexton, a strong external force, is responsible for this case's environmental pollution highlights the effects of the imbalance of power. Because of the contamination of their surroundings, which has caused the death of loved ones and a decreased quality of life, it shows how the Kosawa villagers are the victims of environmental injustice. Environmental justice primarily addresses how to treat people fairly with regard to environmental responsibilities and benefits while Distributive justice focuses on the fair allocation of opportunities and resources within a society or community.

4.4 Distributive Justice

The aspect of environmental justice (EJ) that is most easily linked to ecology is distributive justice. This refers to the unequal distribution of environmental hazards and advantages based on race, class, ethnicity, gender, or age (Shrader-Frechette 2002). The unfair distribution of environmental devastation is a symbol of the inequities in distribution that imperialistic nations like Pexton continue to impose. The residents of Kosawa are forced to deal with the disastrous effects while the corporation makes tremendous profits from oil production. This striking contrast between the advantaged few who prosper and the disadvantaged many who suffer demonstrates the pervasive problems of distributive unfairness at the novel's narrative's core. The narrator shrewdly observed in the novel that, “the smoke always blew in our direction, never in the direction of Gardens and the hilltop mansion of the American overseer” (36) stressing at the unfairness of the entire project. The smoke always blowing towards Kosawa, where the people are living, represents the

disproportionate amount of environmental harm imposed upon this poor population. They are the ones compelled to breathe polluted air, which may cause a negative impact on their health. One of the characteristics of distributive inequity is the unequal distribution of harm. The description of the hilltop mansion of the American overseer refers to a significant inequality in social status and political power. The overseer most frequently represents the wealthy elite connected to the oil firm or other outside interests. These people lead luxurious, comfortable lives, protected from the pollution that they are directly responsible for causing. The indigenous character of the village, which is frequently associated with racial and ethnic differences, is highlighted in the story. It appears that people in positions of power and authority are not as negatively impacted by the environmental risks as the villagers are. In real life, minority populations frequently face the burden of pollution and its effects, which is similar to environmental racism.

It is interesting to compare current concerns in environmental justice to the historical background of Thomas Jefferson's fight for distributive justice and equal distribution of resources, especially land. Jefferson's emphasis on the equitable distribution of resources, particularly with regard to land, is reminiscent of the tenets of the fight for environmental justice. This movement promotes fair sharing of the advantages and disadvantages associated with natural resources, particularly land. Jefferson supported a more equitable distribution of resources, particularly land, and promoted distributive justice (158). When it comes to accessing and using natural resources, especially land, environmental justice advocates for an equal distribution of both benefits and costs to the environment. Jefferson's call for more equitable distribution of products and resources, particularly land, aligns with the environmental justice movement's goal of resolving the unequal distribution of environmental harms, which disproportionately affect marginalised people. As we study in the novel, “Pexton was thinking about drilling another well. Another well? All those wells breathing poison on us every day, are they not enough? (40). The idea that Pexton has of drilling yet another well reveals an unacceptable injustice. The locals already had the burden of the environmental damage brought on by the existing wells, which release dangerous chemicals into their air, water, and land. Drilling more wells makes the uneven distribution of environmental burdens worse since it has an enormous effect on the community. The principles of distributive equity are clearly violated by

this unfair distribution of harm. The benefits, frequently in the form of cash for Pexton, are enjoyed elsewhere while the health concerns and environmental degradation brought on by these wells are endured by the people, who are mostly indigenous. This situation is a perfect example of the structural inequality that distributive justice aims to eliminate. It highlights the pressing need for a more equal distribution of environmental resources and the environmental effects of industrial activity. Jefferson argued that “In environmental matters, as in other areas of justice, often wealthy people have advantages over poor; often whites have advantages over people of color” (158). The wealth gap is highlighted in the novel, where Pexton, a powerful American oil firm, takes advantage of the poor Kosawa locals. Due to its economic status, Pexton has an advantage over the community in terms of influencing its resources and environment. This echoes Jefferson's remark that the wealthy frequently benefit from environmental advantages. According to Fanon, “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread, and above all, dignity” (44). Thula finally recognises *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon's revolutionary power. Her uncle, Bongo who could not understand it, gifted her this book, along with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *The Communist Manifesto*. Years later, when she travels to study in America, she realises how these works might serve as a model for the emancipation of her people. Through this scene and numerous others, *How Beautiful We Were* deftly creates a multigenerational weave of an oppressed people's desire for justice, with each generation in conversation with the past and future one. Each character asks themselves: Is there an escape out of the brutal process of colonialism, one that develops with globalisation and carefully removes subjugated peoples of their agency and dignity?

4.5 Resource Exploitation Disparities

The inequalities in resource exploitation brought on by ecological imperialism are closely linked to the idea of distributive justice in the novel. The powerful Pexton corporation actively extracts and exploits the natural resources of the Kosawa village due to its profit- seeking objectives. Villagers are at a significant disadvantage as a result of Pexton's power in resource exploitation. Because the villagers depend on these resources for their existence, food, and general well-being, ecological

imperialism keeps a wide gap between them and the outside world. In addition to limiting the villagers' access to these essential resources, the corporation's practises put their health and safety in risk. The main character, Thula, describes how the expansion of oil wells, pipelines, leaks, and excessive waste fills the air and water bodies with unprecedented perniciousness. The water supply is poisoned with toxins, making it "dirty to deadly" (32) to drink despite the fact that poor Kosawans have no access to any other water sources. The air is continuously heavy with smoke. People of Kosawa later realized the seriousness of the situation when Bongo stated, “we now realize the fullness of the curse that came from living on the land beneath which oil sat” (31). Natural resources that were supposed to bring wealth have instead killed children and become a curse for the local communities. The ecology is severely damaged as a result of oil production. The curse symbolises the harm that oil drilling has done to their air, water, and land, harm that has a significant impact on their health and the ecosystem. However, the smell of crude oil making the air unbreathable, the piercing noises from the oil fields disturbing their daily activities, the spilling oil from pipeline breaks damaging their farmlands, and most devastatingly, the increasing toxicities from flare stacks throwing chemical hazards on the wind, which prove fatal for the newborn babies, make even basic survival for the Kosawa people miserable and traumatising. The occurrence of fevers, coughing, and infant mortality has become so commonplace that it is no longer astonishing that "two children had died in one month" (33). Many times, oil spills cause forest fires that destroy the local families, causing them to leave their homes and move to run-down areas. The illness and death of their children as a result of this degradation represents the terrible effects on the village. The inhabitants do not profit from the land's substantial oil reserves. Instead, Pexton makes enormous profits from the resource, widening the gap between rich and poor. Their sense of loss becomes deeper by the oil drilling, which causes environmental disruption and forces them off of their ancestral lands. Kosawa's riches are taken by multinational corporations, leaving its citizens to live in useless poisonous waste. As in the novel Sahal says, “no reason why citizens should lack when the country had bauxite, oil, and timber” (342). Kosawans were in poverty despite having wealth at their reach, not to speak of the worsening of their living conditions. Instead of oil, the Kosawa people required land for farming and rivers for drinking water. Sahal's statement further suggests that these resources have been misused or exploited. It implies that these priceless resources are not being used for

the advantage of everybody, but rather may be favouring a small number of individuals, hence creating distributive injustices.

In the novel, we observe how Woja Beki is benefiting while the rest of the villagers are suffering, illustrating a disparity in wealth and resources. “Woja Beki knows how much the men detest him for living in a brick house and drinking bottled water from Bézam and wearing new shirts and trousers from America” (42). This disparity is a clear illustration of how some people, frequently as a result of their cooperation with strong organisations like Pexton, can enjoy a greater level of life while the rest of the community suffers from ecological degradation. Fair resource allocation is a component of distributive justice. The contaminated river here symbolises the unequal distribution of a crucial resource—clean water. “so much oil had spilled into the big river that the little ones no longer called it the big river, they called it the sad water” (296). Consider this river as a clear, pure body of water where people once went swimming, fishing, and water-hauling for daily necessities. However, as a result of the oil spills, the river's water is now poisoned and polluted. The river is no longer as pure and healthy as it once was. The children in the small village, who are quite perceptive, notice the difference. They observe that the river is no more the lively, moving mass of water that it once was. Instead, it has transformed into something depressing and lifeless, leading people to refer to it as "sad water". For the locals, this uneven distribution has major consequences. The majority of the villagers are forced to use the polluted "sad water," although some, like Woja Beki, may have access to other sources of pure water. The villagers who depend on the river have a clear link between its pollution and their health problems. Due to ongoing exposure to polluted water, those without other options suffer more serious health effects. Understanding how Pexton's hegemony over land and water resources, made possible by government involvement, supports an uneven distribution of river-related benefits and hazards is important. This resource may have been exploited as a result of Pexton's actions and the government's involvement, with Pexton getting benefits and the local population suffering the negative effects. This imbalance highlights how resource exploitation by strong outside forces can leave marginalised people bearing the burden of both ecological and social consequences. It emphasises the unequal way that resources are distributed, where a few numbers of people profit at the expense of the general welfare of society, hence creating social and environmental inequalities.

4.5.1 Land Ownership and Control

According to Huggan and Tiffen, “Land is not just land alone, we breathe into it, [and] it is touched by our modes and memories” (115). For the people of Kosawa, their land is an essential component of their identity and not just a place in the world. It stands for a variety of ancestry, customs, and links to the neighbourhood. They have lived on the land, raised their food there, and interred their forefathers there as well. It is a collection of their past and present. In the novel ecological imperialism is largely represented by the imposing Pexton corporation, which has a significant impact on Kosawa's land ownership and governance. The disparity between those who own the land and those who are exploited by it is exacerbated by Pexton's control on the land resources, which has a direct influence on distributive justice. As mentioned in the novel, “Pexton owned the air we breathe” (101). Pexton claim ownership to the land using the justification that we have the right to exploit it as a natural resource. The corporation claim ownership of the area for resource exploitation, uprooting the locals who had lived there for many generations. This land grab is an important instance of the how ecological imperialism can deprive indigenous peoples of their ancestral lands.

All environmental issues are highlighted by Mbue in the text, including deforestation, oil spills, landslides, fires, sea invasion, and soil infertility. The pipeline network running beneath and over the land of Kosawa also caused great damage to it. For the construction of the oil wells and pipelines, forests were destroyed and trees were felled. Animals, birds, and the area's entire ecosystem were all affected by it. Due to an oil spill and a fire, the ground is not suitable for growing crops. “Farms that had been rendered useless after fires; they examined the shriveled-up products of our soil” (142). The crops that Kosawa's soil once grew to support life there no longer will. A network of pipelines under and over the land symbolised the control and claim Pexton had over the land of Kosawa. The Kosawa poor people, who relied on the land for their survival and heritage, are marginalised as they lose authority over where they live. They have no influence over the land's use or advantages now that Pexton controls it. Because resources that should help all people remain in the control of a foreign firm, the unequal distribution in ownership of land directly conflicts with distributive justice principles. There was a strong sense of belonging to the land among the Kosawa people. It was their past, present, and future; it was more than

simply soil and trees. When the Kosawa children were playing and running around, their laughter could be heard all around the village. They danced beneath the open sky and played close to their huts, while their mothers prepared delicious meals. All of this happened on the same ground where their ancestors had once lived and laughed for many years. But beneath their feet, out of sight, was something that outsiders desired: oil. As mentioned in the novel, “They wanted whatever oil was below the ground on which our children played. They wanted to search for oil beneath our huts. They wanted whatever oil sat idly under the kitchens in which our wives cooked” (266). It also shows Pexton's dislike for the welfare and values of the locals. For the sake of their financial gain, they are prepared to destroy children's play places, reverence of houses (under huts), and even the very centre of family life (kitchens). This interference illustrates how the local’s way of life is not respected. Pexton was specifically given permission by the government to exploit the villager's land. As Thula stated, “Pexton is not acting alone. They only have power over us because our government gave them power over us. The government gave them our land” (280). Pexton has been given legal permission by the government to make use of the land's resources, including oil drilling. The land, which has served as their home for many generations, is now managed by an outside corporation. Due to agreements made between the government and the American oil corporation Pexton, the people of Kosawa have no control.

Mbue's writing reflects her displeasure, as evidenced by lines like this one: "His Excellency had declared that just because our ancestors claimed the entire valley as theirs did not mean that the valley was theirs and ours as a result"(210). The villagers' livelihoods are now in danger as a result of the government's decision to give away the land. This power dynamic is unbalanced. Due to its connections and resources, Pexton, a powerful and wealthy firm, has the advantage. The government's participation in providing them access to the property further pushes the balance against the village people. It becomes clear that Pexton's actions are harming the people. Their way of life is under danger, their environment is being polluted, and their health is declining.The distribution of justice within the small village is directly impacted by the government's choice to permit Pexton's operations. Due to this unequal distribution of resource access, some people—like Pexton and those who work with them— benefit greatly while the majority of the villagers suffer negative

effects. While many people are hurting, but people like Woja Beki, are making money. The Pexton company continues to ignore the frequent oil explosions, waste, and breakages, and when a replacement or repair is requested, the conveniently supplied justification is “why should Pexton replace it when the cost of its negligence [is not to be] borne” by the poor fellows of Kosawa” (28). This is an example of the exploitative dynamics at work, when a strong company takes resources from a helpless community while avoiding taking responsibility for the harm done.

The text highlights economic inequalities and the unjust distribution of environmental advantages and disadvantages, demonstrating how the company's choices create the social and economic problems faced by the villages. In light of this obvious distributive injustice, it highlights the disparity in power between the local community and the corporate and the necessity of environmental justice. On another occasion, Pexton supervisors tested the river water for pollution after receiving numerous complaints, and weeks later they concluded that "the water was fine, but for the sake of caution, it would be best if they boiled it for thirty minutes before giving it to their children" (35). These words from the text *How Beautiful We Were* depict a disturbing case of distributive injustice. The response from Pexton managers is far from satisfying despite the villagers' persistent concerns about the hazardous contamination of their drinking water caused by the company's operations. They ignore the issues by saying the water is "fine" rather than recognising and addressing the pollution. The suggestion that the villagers boil the water for half hour before giving it to their children " for the sake of caution" follows this evaluation, which is a surprising contradiction. The imbalance of power and Pexton's callous disregard for the welfare of the rural people are starkly illustrated by this situation. The corporation may be aware of the polluting the environment but they are unwilling to take the necessary steps to guarantee the community has access to safe water. Instead, they put all the responsibility and burden on the already oppressed people, who must take extra care to protect their children from possibly dangerous water. This example highlights how the underprivileged are disproportionately affected by distributive inequality, in this case, unequal accessibility to clean and safe resources, in the face of corporate carelessness. When their children are sick, they receive the right medical care and are treated by skilled medical professionals. The Pexton supervisors and village leaders benefit from Kosawa's natural resources and use their power over the underprivileged

people, denying them access to the necessities of existence, such as access to clean water for drinking and fresh air to breathe. Even when the common Kosawa people make a concentrated effort to express their terrible experiences and fear of ecocatastrophe caused by the vast amount of pollution created by endless oil extractions, their fears and thoughts are ignored. The father of Thula, Malabo, and several other Kosawa elders try to convince Woja Beki, the head of the village, that Kosawa must act quickly to solve the environmental degradation or face horrifying consequences. To address the complaints, the corporation organises a fictitious inspection and then declares that "the spills were of no harm, the air was fine, [and] Pexton was abiding by the law" (33).

4.5.2 Resistance and Marginalization

Throughout the narrative, marginalised villagers make an effort to be heard by participating in protests, asking for help from the government, and joining together to stand against Pexton's destructive environmental actions. However, Pexton and the government both suppress and ignore their opposition, illuminating the structural injustices and power disparities they face. The distributive inequities embedded in Pexton's ecological imperialism, which disproportionately impacts these alienated villages, are highlighted by their quest for justice. In one of narratives told by the children that make up the omnibus narrator, the Americans' blind contempt for the suffering of the people is depicted as follows: “How could they be happy when we were dying for their sake? Why wouldn’t they ask their friend at Pexton to stop killing us? Was it possible they knew nothing of our plight? Was Pexton lying to them, just as they were lying to us? (72). The deep sense of exclusion felt by the people drives them to resist.

They aggressively challenge the current quo rather than playing the victim. They are unable to accept their marginalisation in the face of ecological tyranny, which motivates their actions of defiance and resistance. The villagers' inquiries reveal their mistrust of Pexton and possible supporters beyond their village. They do not want to be tricked or used, which is why they think Pexton might be hiding how much damage they have suffered. They question the lies that the powerful keep repeating. “No one in Bezam cares about villagers like you, okay? Absolutely no one in the government, no one at Pexton, no one whatsoever” (94). The text emphasises

how isolated and helpless the Kosawa villagers are. They are represented as having been overlooked by Pexton and the administration. Due to the lack of sympathy or assistance from outside sources, this isolation makes them feel even more marginalised. In reality, neither Pexton nor the government are concerned about the consequences of the village's environmental and water contamination. They just care about the money they will make from the oil exploration.

As the story progresses, we see how Pexton disassociates itself from any blame for the harm and losses experienced by the villagers. When the soldiers attacked kosawa and killed its people, Pexton claimed that they were not responsible for this incident. “They said all they ever did was pay the government for the right to drill our land—why should they be responsible for our government’s incompetence? (140). Pexton's statement that they are not accountable for the soldiers' deeds is an example of how corporations frequently deny responsibility for the environmental damage or human rights abuses brought on by their operations. They emphasise their focus on company profits by claiming that they paid the government for the privilege to drill. This calls into question how fairly the responsibilities and advantages are shared. While they make money, the community pays the price in terms of the environment and people. The most important issue is one of accountability. Although Pexton claims to be independent of the government, both have harmed the locals. This calls into question who is responsible. Who is to blame for the misery of the Kosawa population? It emphasises the necessity of systems to hold businesses and governments responsible for their deeds, particularly when such deeds result in injustice and misery. On Kosawa's property, Pexton is still working eight years after the killing. This demonstrates how enduring environmental and social inequalities are. The village's situation has not changed despite the pain and passing of time. The difficulty of correcting such injustices is shown by the prolonged failure to obtain justice and compensation. It illustrates the difficulties marginalised communities—like Kosawa—face in obtaining justice.

4.5.3 Disparities in Benefit Sharing Between Kosawa and Pexton

The villagers, who have lived in harmony with their environment for generations, are left with the ecological and health consequences while reaping few, if any, benefits from the oil extraction. As mentioned in the novel, “Pexton had bought

his cooperation and he had, in turn, sold our future to them" (8). As their leader, the one who was supposed to speak for their interests, attempted to address the gathering of the Kosawa villager's, there was a tense silence that surrounded the area. The villagers paid little attention to him because they were tired and angry. Over time, they lost faith in him. Despite the fact that he was a member of their own tribe and a direct descendant of them, they believed he had abandoned them in favour of Pexton's money. The fact that he had sided with Pexton, their oppressors, had long been known about. The villagers had observed how his way of life had changed, becoming prosperous at the price of their land and general well-being. He and his family were lavished with wealth by Pexton, who used a variety of rewards to win his loyalty. It became customary in the capital city to provide jobs, money, and favours for his sons.

Distributive justice, as defined by Shrader Frechette, is the ethically right distribution of advantages and disadvantages among society's constituents, including wealth, opportunities, education, hazardous waste disposal sites, unclean air, and so forth (159). Pexton, an American oil corporation, enters Kosawa with claims of riches while using its strength and influence in the resource extraction industry. But it quickly becomes clear that the rewards of this resource exploitation are not shared fairly. As Thula asked from her father, "I ask him why the oil fields and surrounding dwellings for Pexton's laborers are called Gardens though there's not a single flower there" (31). In these lines, "Gardens" stands in for the territories under Pexton's authority, where the company exploits and makes money from the area's oil resources. The word Garden, which suggests luxuriance and affluence, stands in stark contrast to the actual environmental destruction and suffering endured by the Kosawa residents. This ironic naming speaks to the larger power systems and Pexton's deceptive narrative. As mentioned in the novel, "Pexton is a different sort of gardener; the oil is their flower" (32). This represents the obvious difference between the interests of the Kosawa locals and those of the multinational corporation. Pexton sees Kosawa's land as a resource to be used for financial gain. Similar to how a gardener takes care of flowers and plants to enhance their beauty and offer food, Pexton takes care of the land to extract oil, which is its valuable resource, rather than to enhance its natural beauty or provide food. In this situation, the oil would be compared to the cherished flower of the gardener. It stands for money, authority, and riches.

The unequal allocation of resources is clearly demonstrated by Pexton's exploitation of the land for financial gain while the villagers suffer consequences. the situation of the people of Kosawa, who have no connection to oil extraction other than the harmful effects it has on their environment. The educational facility, the clinic, and the venue for meetings were all constructed by Pexton, “the path that leads to Gardens, through the supervisors’ offices and the school Pexton built for the children there, past their clinic, into the meeting hall” (50) but they are located in the Gardens, the company's gated neighbourhood, and are only for the use by workers and their families. Such businesses, which are just exploitative and generate no social investment, do not benefit the community.

In the narrative, “they had enough money to buy all of their food from the big market, and Pexton made sure that their water came in through pipes, not from a well, which was why their children were not dying like us” (77). It draws attention to the disparity in access to basic essentials like food, clean water, and treatment between the villagers and the employees in Kosawa. Pipes connect the labourers who work for Pexton to a dependable source of clean water. In contrast, Kosawa's residents are restricted to using well water and do not have this luxury. The locals' health and life are in danger because they must drink potentially contaminated water, which causes their children to get sick and, in some cases, die. This is because they lack access to clean water, which puts them in danger. The workers have the money to buy their food at the large market, where it is likely to be of much better quality and is unlikely to be polluted. However, Kosawa's villagers may lack the resources to purchase food from such marketplaces because of their economic problems brought on by their battles against environmental deterioration. As a result, their health may be further endangered by being around unclean or insufficient sources of food. The presence of a Bézami doctor among the workers, who is compensated by Pexton, is advantageous. As a result, children have access to medical care when they get sick, ensuring their wellbeing and letting their parents concentrate on their jobs. The Kosawa villager's lack of access to such healthcare forces them to deal with disease and death without the aid of professionals. The allocation of basic resources and services is markedly unequal, as shown by these disparities. It serves as an example of how some groups, like labourers, benefit from a more favourable distribution of resources and have access to essential services, while Kosawa's villagers face difficult living conditions

and increased health risks as a result of inequality in society and environmental degradation. The situation is further highlighted by the driver's message, which highlights the villagers' fight for justice and acknowledgment in the midst of a pervasive indifference for their issues. The villagers were advised by Pexton's supervisor's driver that neither Bezam nor any of the company's staff would take them seriously. “You think you’re the only ones suffering?” he says” (99). The driver confronts the Kosawa locals and broadens their understanding of their situation. He emphasises that the problems in their village, in particular the scarcity of water that is safe to drink, are not exceptional but rather are a part of a larger pattern of suffering throughout the nation. He identifies a number of additional towns and villages that are experiencing various types of hardship, including sexual assault, pollution, and land displacement brought on by various organisations and government actions. It demonstrates how powerful companies like Pexton, who have own interests, frequently reap excessively large rewards from resource extraction. On the other hand, marginalised communities like Kosawa suffer the worst effects.

Pexton and similar businesses profit financially from their operations, but communities like Kosawa's face the hard realities of environmental deterioration and its related health effects. They have no access to clean water and experience its negative effects while seeing others—including Pexton's employees—enjoy the benefits of contemporary living, such as water pipes and easy access to healthcare. It illustrates how the wealthy can profit from environmental deterioration at the expense of poorer communities.

4.6 Participative Justice

Fair and equal participation of everyone affected in environmental decision-making processes is a key component of participative justice. It emphasises the need of giving voice to vulnerable or marginalised populations in choices affecting the environment. However, promoting environmental justice requires more than merely distributive justice in the allocation of environmental impacts. Because simply distributive models sometimes ignore the institutional circumstances that affect or decide the distributions, as Iris Marion Young rightly points out, no merely distributive approach is sufficient to advance justice. Young uses the example of local residents organising a protest against a sizable hazardous waste treatment facility in

their tiny town. According to her, the justice of decision-making processes and procedures rather than the fairness of material distributions is the fundamental concern of these protests. They concern the idea that no one should take away the citizens' freedom to assess and maybe reject any dangerous facilities that put them at excessive risk (162).

The impact of outside choices is felt strongly in the lives of the residents of Kosawa, a fictional African community. The villagers discover that their voices are muted, their worries are unheard, and their involvement is marginalised as they struggle with the ominous effects of ecological imperialism and the relentless hold of the Pexton corporation. In this story, the pursuit of participatory justice and environmental justice are intertwined. The idea of participatory justice emphasises how important it is for everyone who is impacted by environmental changes to participate in decision-making. It emphasises how crucial it is to provide voice to vulnerable or marginalised populations who bear the burden of ecological changes. Participatory justice is highlighted in *How Beautiful We Were* as we see the villagers' fight for a voice in issues that affect their land, culture, and way of life. This analysis explores the villagers' battles to participate in environmental decisions while exposing the wider ramifications of ecological imperialism, the effects of anthropocentric policies, and, most crucially, the pursuit of justice.

4.6.1 Community Involvement and Agency

The concept of community involvement and agency in the context of ecological imperialism is a major theme in *How Beautiful We Were*. It is a narrative undertone that highlights the villagers' tireless attempts to be heard and has an impact on environmental decisions. For instance, despite Pexton being mostly to blame for the ecological destruction of their land, the villagers regularly attend meetings that the company organises. They depend on these gatherings for survival; they are their last option for help. As we see in the novel how villagers were making request, “One of our fathers asked if Pexton could in the meantime send us clean water, at least for the youngest children” (12). A group of locals gathered in the lively town square in the centre of the village under the hot sun. They had one hope in mind—relief— and their faces were furrowed with fear and anguish. After every eight weeks, they attended this meeting. “Every eight weeks we went to the village square to listen to them. We

were dying. We were helpless. We were afraid" (6). Those meetings were our only chance at salvation. Despite their dislike for these meetings, they went to them. The only reason was their hope of betterment. Their crops were dying, their children were getting sick, and their waterways were polluted. They had come to the town square out of desperation since these meetings were the only hope they had for redemption. They are trying to express their worries and fears through their participation in order to have a say in the choices that will affect their life. They long for justice and the chance to free their village from Pexton's exploitation. They looked for support, assistance, or anything else that could lessen the anguish brought on by an unrelenting power they were unable to resist or flee.

"Pexton was not in the business of providing water" (12). The Leader stood in front of the group, one who was thought to speak for the interests of the villagers. They made a simple request as a group: could Pexton, the unidentified power that controlled their village, maybe give the youngest kids access to clean water? Their eyes begged for even a small amount of sympathy. But the Leader has already responded in this way. He took a deep breath in as he mentally prepared to say the memorised sentences. He clarified that Pexton was not in the water-supply business. Although his tone gave off the impression of some pity, it soon became clear that this was only a front. In these decision-making processes, we can see how the voices of the villages remained unheard. When it came to making decisions that would affect their children's health, their need for pure water was a sincere appeal for involvement in their lives. However, many felt voiceless and helpless as a result of the opaque, ineffective system. Their attempts to have their complaints heard were relegated to the huge sea of paperwork, demonstrating the lack of true involvement in decisions that had a big influence on their lives. Despite their ongoing efforts, the villagers were caught in a bureaucratic web that suppressed their voices and made them yearn for true participatory justice.

"Papa tells Woja Beki he wants to leave for Bezam as soon as possible to seek an audience with high-level government officials" (39). In the text, Thula's father, Malabo, recognises the severity of the environmental deteriorations that have begun to have an adverse effect on Kosawa's population and seeks to express his concerns and expectations to the Pexton supervisors and the local government. Malabo decides to meet with the state officials in the capital city of Bezam after being ignored by them

because he believes that they will protect the village by taking action against Pexton's demands for maximal extraction and extreme production of waste (with the right communication and information). Malabo sets out for Bezam with five more village men. Along the journey, he discovers the dishonest role played by the government in approving mining and other extractive operations across the nation, even at the risk of displacing or destroying the native population. Malabo's initiative is an essential attempt to involve them in the decision-making procedure that affect their life. It represents the community's effort to be heard and gain the support of higher authorities. It also draws attention to the difficulties marginalised people experience in navigating bureaucratic structures and attaining the power necessary to shape environmental decisions. In spite of the hopes and cries for justice from people like Malabo, the government in Bezam is shown as a brutal organisation the novel. In particular, when it comes to attending to the concerns of disadvantaged residents like those in Kosawa, this image emphasises the severe absence of participatory justice and the authoritarian nature of the administration. Contrary to what the locals expected, the government retaliates violently instead of paying attention to their complaints. Soldiers are given orders to stifle impoverished people's voices, even if that means using violence and murder to keep the situation under control. Malabo's tragic end serves to highlight the oppressiveness of the government even more. Malabo leaves for Bezam with the best of intentions, trying to bring the suffering Kosawa people some justice. His abduction highlights the authoritarian attitude taken by the government towards dissent and raises questions about the dangers that people who rebel against the authority's face. Days later, when Bongo, Thula's uncle, sets out to search for his lost brother, he too suffers the consequences of the government's strict policies. The very people who should be defending their citizens harass him and unfairly imprison him instead of offering assistance or solutions. These incidents in the novel serve as an example of how marginalisation, brutality, and oppression characterise the way the government reacts to the villagers' calls for justice. Instead of ensuring participatory justice, the system promotes distributive injustice and works in the favour of businesses like Pexton.

The imprisonment of Bongo and the disappearance of Malabo serve as a stark reminder of the dire consequences that confront those who daunt to stand up to large c orporations. The real-life action of Nasako Besingi in Cameroon is a reflection of this

fight for environmental justice. Besingi has been leading the charge against foreign firms' land grabs and environmental damage.[10] Besingi has experienced threats and arrests for his brave stance against environmental exploitation, similar to the imaginary characters in Mbue's novel. His actions serve as a reminder of the great dangers and sacrifices that people who strive to safeguard their communities and environment must make.

The similarities between Besingi's real-life experiences and the fictitious story highlight how common these challenges are. Indigenous communities and activists face enormous hurdles, which are illustrated in both the fiction and the real-world example.

In Gasztold's article, "Environmental Neocolonialism and the Quest for Social Justice in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*," the fictitious oil corporation Pexton and its effects on social injustice and environmental damage are examined in great detail. It highlights how the ecosystem is destroyed and Indigenous ways of existence are undermined by corporate greed and money-making objectives. The main points of the article are the risks connected to the extraction of crude oil, the unfair sharing of gains, and the dishonest institutions that support economic injustice. The viewpoints, agency, and resiliency of Indigenous characters are not sufficiently explored, nevertheless.

But my research looks into the actual lives of Kosawa's Indigenous characters, highlighting their agency and resilience. While Bongo Thula's uncle, as prisoner, symbolises the results of resisting corporate and governmental exploitation, Thula, a devastated daughter, rises to prominence. Yaya's narrative links past violations with present difficulties, while Lusaka's experiences as a father who loss his son due to disease brought on by pollution provides a human element. Sahel and other elders participate in important decision-making processes, exhibiting their dedication to participatory justice. Despite experiencing pollution and damage, the children of Kosawa exhibit incredible tenacity, serving as a symbol of hope and rebirth.

Through a thorough examination of these elements, my analysis reveals how Mbue's work presents Indigenous characters in a multifaceted manner, highlighting their perseverance, strength, and leadership. These aspects, which highlight the

[10] Global Witness. (2020). Land and Environmental Defenders.

individuals' proactive involvement in opposing exploitation and pursuing environmental justice, are essential for comprehending the larger ramifications of ecological imperialism.

Unlike Gasztold's approach, which mainly concentrates on the global impacts of oil extraction, my analysis offers a detailed examination of both individual and group agency in the Indigenous society. This approach closes a large gap in the literature and provides a deeper comprehension of the socio-political themes in *How Beautiful We Were.*

4.6.2 Institutional Barriers to Participation

In *How Beautiful We Were* the story presents a clear image of institutional and governmental obstacles that prevent characters and communities from actively taking part in environmental issues. As a result, in the novel, these obstacles greatly exacerbate environmental injustice.

4.6.2.1 Authoritarian Governance

According to the Kosawa people’s complaints, the government in Bezam is authoritarian and unresponsive. The current political system places corporate interests—like those of Pexton—above the needs of its own people. Any attempts by the villagers to take part in decisions that affect their environment are suppressed by this authoritarian rule. The Kosawa villagers are heading to Bézam, the place of power, to meet with representatives from Pexton and the government. Because they are in dire need of assistance to save their property and guarantee a brighter future for their children, they are prepared to do anything it takes, especially humble themselves by bowing down before these powerful men and presenting them with gifts. They are determined to visit these officials again, to keep appealing, and even to present them with land pieces. “We will lay our sick children at their feet, beg them to protect these helpless ones” (92). The people are prepared to offer the officials their sick children in exchange for their safety. villagers, despite their pride, are prepared to go to any extent to improve the future for their offspring since their suffering has made them more compassionate people. The locals want to have open discussions with the authorities. They want to collaborate with them to address their environmental problems. This is consistent with participatory justice concepts, which place a strong

emphasis on open and inclusive communication. Kumbum one of Pexton's captive response to their plan, "when you get to Bézam, no matter what you say there, people will just laugh at you" (98). The dissatisfaction and disdain the Kosawa villager's experience are reflected in Kumbum's response. In simple terms, he informs them that whatever they do in Bézam, a capital where the rulers and other influential people reside, are probably in futile. Regardless of whatever they do or say in Bézam, according to Kumbum, the locals are not going to treat them seriously and probably just have fun at their cries. This answer highlights the villagers' imagined lack of power and the substantial obstacles they go into when attempting to interact with the authorities. It emphasises the difficulties people encounter in attempting to have their problems acknowledged and their voices heard, particularly under a system characterised by authoritarian control.

Participatory justice is constrained by Bézam's authoritarian government, making it challenging for marginalised populations like the Kosawa villager's to properly participate in decision-making and have their issues addressed. This is a prime example of how institutional and political issues can obstruct efforts to attain justice through active participation. In a bitter enlightenment it emerges that the Pexton representatives and the Bézam authorities have completely disregarded the villagers' cries, leaving the villagers with the firm conviction that their pleas will be ignored both in the corporation venues of Pexton as well as within the government offices of Bézam. As Pexton's driver says, "No one in Bézam cares about villagers like you, okay? Absolutely no one in the government. No one at Pexton. No one whatsoever" (97). It focuses on the villagers' absence from meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. They are persuaded that Pexton and the government do not care about their opinions or worries. This feeling of helplessness and marginalisation is a reflection of the institutional obstacles that prevent them from speaking up for environmental justice and their rights.

The concept of "participative justice" emphasises the significance of inclusive decision- making and the equitable involvement of all parties involved, particularly marginalised or disadvantaged groups, in issues pertaining to the environment and justice. It contrasts with authoritarian governance, which places a disproportionate amount of authority in the hands of a small number of people, centralises decision-making, and frequently ignores the demands and opinions of those who live there. As

one of the villagers named Lusaka says, “We know Bézam is where evil has built its house and where it raises its children” (98). The locals' image of the city's government as dictatorial and corrupt is hinted at by their conviction that "evil has built its house" in Bézam. In an authoritarian government, decisions are taken without the agreement or involvement of the governed, which results in a lack of responsibility and frequently leads to actions that are harmful to marginalised populations like Kosawa. The villagers are subtly expressing their hope for a more equitable and inclusive governmental structure within the concept of participative justice. As evidence of their faith that participatory justice, where their complaints and opinions are heard and addressed, may replace the authoritarian practises they witness in the city, they are convinced that there must be nice people in Bézam. As such, they are on the lookout for these people. It serves as an example of how authoritarian government can obstruct participatory justice by suppressing marginalised people' voices and promoting the idea that their complaints would not be taken seriously. This conversation is a reflection of the larger fight for justice for the environment in a culture characterised by authoritarian rule.

4.6.2.2 Power Imbalance and Absence of Transparency

The lack of transparency and power Imbalance in the text *How Beautiful We Were* is a clear institutional barrier to participatory justice. The government, working in secret with influential companies like Pexton, makes important decisions about the environment and the lives of villagers behind closed doors. The villagers are denied the chance to participate in meaningful discussions and make decisions that have a significant influence on their community because of this lack of transparency. It demonstrates a dramatic power disparity where powerful institutions dictate the narrative and the villages are marginalised and without an opportunity to participate in issues that have a substantial impact on their well-being and the environment.

Imbolo Mbue offers a heartbreaking meditation on the mechanics of distributive and participatory justice by vividly describing the power disparity and lack of transparency experienced by the Kosawa villagers. The army and authorities purposefully lie to and trick the Kosawa residents. The fact that individuals in positions of power can sway the villagers' behaviour by manipulating the information shows a clear power disparity. The villagers are exposed since they do not have access

to reliable information. “They lied to us when they said that the soldiers would come for us if they did not return to Bézam after the village meeting” (120). These phrases clearly highlight the lack of participatory justice. The people are effectively rendered voiceless and powerless, unable to actively participate in influencing decisions that have a significant influence on their life. Their reliance on outside information sources—which are governed by the more privileged entities—illustrates how participatory justice is routinely withheld from them. Their lack of resources, information access, and means for raising issues demonstrates the severe gaps in power and authority that support their fight for justice. They are caught up in a system that makes it difficult to find justice or the truth, and in which the dominant forces are free to manipulate the system to their advantage.

Kosawa's people suffer from extreme environmental injustices, mostly as a result of the unchecked plundering of their land by the influential outside company Pexton Corporation. These ordinary people are not included in the decision-making procedures that decide what happens to their land, in spite of the negative effects they experience. Their situation is representative of the unfairness Shrader-Frechette draws attention to because they do not give their free and informed agreement for the environmental risks that are placed upon them. In Shrader-Frechette's view, “communities ought to be able to decline environmental risks if the risks are unfair or if they aren't fairly rewarded for the risks they face” (140). The Kosawan peoples' ability to make this decision is essentially taken away from them. They are routinely kept out of environmental decision-making processes, which leaves them unable to stop the injustices they experience in the environment. Depriving the villagers from their right to decline these environmental hazards has profound consequences. Their lives are characterised by suffering as they deal with the negative health impacts of pollution, the deterioration of their environment, and a variety of social injustices. A terrible cycle of social and environmental degradation surrounds the story as a result of their lack of involvement in decision-making processes.

Their lack of participation in decision-making processes creates a horrible circle of social and ecological degradation that envelops the narrative. The stories of the Kosawa villagers clearly illustrate this cycle in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*. People who directly affect Thula, Bongo, Lusaka, Malabo, Yaya, Sahel, and the elderly are routinely left out of choices that affect their surroundings and way of life.

The collective stories of these individuals show how the suppression of local voices results in the continuation of social injustice and environmental damage. The absence of participatory justice not only makes the villagers' suffering worse, but it also makes it impossible to put long-term fixes into action. Other analyses, like that of Gasztold and Karmaker and Chetty, have not taken into account this element, which is essential to comprehending the entire impact of ecological imperialism. These analyses concentrate more on the general themes of injustice and exploitation without exploring the individual and community resilience of the Indigenous people.

4.7 Governmental Power, Land Rights, and Petro-Capitalist Violence

Mbue skillfully captures the intricate web of power relations and exploitation that are part of petro-capitalism in *How Beautiful We Were*, as highlighted by Michael Watts' framework. The debate between the Pexton Corporation officials and the indigenous people takes place against the backdrop of the imaginary town of Kosawa. As mentioned in the novel, “His Excellency had declared that just because our ancestors claimed the entire valley as theirs did not mean the valley was theirs and ours as a result”(209). This dialogue acts as a miniature illustration of the larger problems related to corporate encroachment, land rights, and governmental power. The Pexton Corporation representatives make an effort to defend their incursion into Kosawa village by using legal precedents and governmental power. They say that although if the native people have historically claimed the land, ownership is now established by law, meaning that the government has the last say over how much land is distributed. This claim illustrates the petro-capitalist model of cooperation between corporate interests and state power, whereby extractive firms use political influence to get access to natural resources. Pexton's claim that the government can provide him property in order to "better the lives of all citizens"(209) further highlights the development and progress narrative that is frequently employed to defend extractive industries in areas wealthy in natural resources. In the framework of petro-capitalism, these kinds of projects—while having a disproportionately harmful impact on local communities and ecosystems—are sometimes presented as advantageous for the general public. The narrative of shared prosperity hides the exploitation that characterises extractive industries, which feeds the vicious cycle of environmental damage and socioeconomic disparity.

This exchange highlights the complicated relationships that exist between socioeconomic inequality, legal systems, and petro-capitalist interests. It also sheds light on the subtle nuances of environmental injustice and political resistance in modern society. As a symbol of the continuous fight against petro-capitalist hegemony and the defence of environmental justice and indigenous rights, the Kosawa village has been resisting Pexton's incursion. It is necessary to oppose the exploitative forces of petro-capitalism and to face the ethical difficulties associated with resource extraction, as made clear by Mbue's story. *How Beautiful We Were* provides a thorough analysis of the interconnecting concerns of power, land, and resistance in the context of current environmental and socio-economic challenges, viewed through the lens of Michael Watts's theory.

4.8 Resource Exploitation by Authorities

In her novel Mbue demonstrates how strong leaders, like previous colonial rulers, take advantage of resources for their own gain. Yaya's story sheds light on the ramifications of the new President's ascent to power. We discover how the inauguration of a new President feeds the cycle of tyranny and exploitation through Yaya's interpretation.” the day he ascended to the top in Bézam, this country became his property. From it he harvests whatever pleases him and destroys whoever displeases him” (229). After assuming office, the new President uses the nation's resources as his own, utilising them to enrich himself and punish those who dissent. This is similar to how petro-capitalist businesses exploit natural resources for financial gain, frequently with little regard for the damage that they may do. The narrative of Mbue shows how this cycle of exploitation carries on, impacting not only the environment but also people. According to Watts's study, petro-capitalism challenges traditional forms of communal power and local governance systems. This is reflected in the novel's portrayal of the current President's authoritarian control. Watts focuses on “how disputes over territory and resources are exacerbated by the presence and actions of oil companies, which upend established power dynamics” (54). Comparably, the text that portrays the President as having exclusive authority over the nation's resources illustrates how petro-capitalism is extractive, with political elites using natural resources for their own benefit frequently at the expense of local residents. Consequently, the novel's examination of the interaction of corporate

interests, political authority, and community dynamics is consistent with Watts's theory, highlighting the disruptive effects of petro-capitalism on socio-political environments and the pressing need for activism and resistance.

This is reflected in the actual situation on the Bakassi Peninsula in Cameroon, where the extraction of oil resources has caused indigenous residents to be uprooted and the ecosystem to deteriorate.[11] Local figures in Mbue's novel, like His Excellency, who take advantage of the nation's riches for personal gain, are mirrored in the involvement of Cameroonian political elites who work with multinational oil firms for financial gain. The hardships portrayed in Kosawa are echoed by the environmental and social ramifications in the Bakassi Peninsula, which underscore the ubiquitous nature of petro-capitalism and its deleterious effects on marginalised communities.· Moreover, Mbue's narrative's subject of indigenous resistance is further highlighted by local protests and opposition to oil exploitation in the Bakassi Peninsula.

The concept of bringing a lawsuit in a Bézam court against Pexton Corporation and the government is rejected as "ludicrous," underscoring the institutionalised power disparities and systematic prejudices in the legal system.It highlights the collective sense of powerlessness and broad suffering in the face of injustice that the community cannot decide whom to feel sorry for most. The fact that Thula struggled to control her emotions in spite of her obvious distress is mentioned, highlighting people's fortitude and resolve in the face of hardship. The fact that Thula has reiterated that "this is not over"(349) nevertheless shows a glimmer of optimism and a will to go on the struggle for justice despite what appear to be overwhelming obstacles. This resolve illustrates both the human spirit's tenacity and the ability of people to work together to bring about change.

However, the community's realisation that this is their final opportunity for restoration highlights just how disastrous petro-capitalism has been for their way of life. The established power structures and institutional hurdles that sustain exploitation and injustice are unresolved despite their best efforts. “The people who owned those courts were the same people who had given our land to Pexton. The judges who would rule in our lawsuit might be the same ones who had condemned the Four to death. We had no chance at justice there” (350). These lines shed light on the

[11] Global Witness. (2021). Bakassi Peninsula: The Impact of Oil Extraction.

cooperation between the judicial and economic elites, mirroring the extractive aspects of petro-capitalism in which corporate interests frequently dominate court decisions against the interests of underprivileged groups. As Watts arguments on “Oil violence is generated by the evil twins of authoritarian governmentality and petro-capitalism (62). Authoritarian governments frequently put the interests of petro-capitalists ahead of the welfare of their people, which results in violence, coercion, and the repression of opposition.

To sum up, the text illustrates the widespread impact of petro-capitalism on society through the convergence of economic exploitation, institutionalised injustice, and authoritarian rule. The community's recognition of the impossibility of pursuing justice within the confines of the current power structures underscores the pervasiveness of corporate supremacy and the structural obstacles encountered by marginalised groups. According to Watts, petro-capitalism and authoritarian regimes work together to create violence and repression, which feeds the cycle of exploitation and suffering. In order to achieve a more just and sustainable future for all, it is imperative that the systems supporting petro-capitalism be confronted and destroyed, as the text poignantly reminds us to do.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* offers insightful information about the complex nature of environmental injustice through its examination of ecological imperialism. In my research, I have attempted to examine the intricacies of how powerful nations take advantage of underprivileged groups for their own financial gain, frequently at the expense of suffering for people and the environment, using the perspective of ecological imperialism. The core idea of this analysis is Crosby's theory of ecological imperialism. It was observed how this theory offers a framework for comprehending the dynamics of natural resource extraction and misuse of the environment in the past and in the present. Crosby explained how colonial powers maintained a process of ecological dominance, which frequently had fatal effects for indigenous peoples. This cycle was exacerbated by the introduction of new species into ecosystems and the consequent ecological imbalances. Building on Crosby's theory of ecological imperialism, I have further investigated a recurring issue in the novel: illness and death. Understanding this theme is essential to understanding the destructive effects of ecological imperialism on the environment and public health.

According to Oppermann, the effects of anthropocentric perspective on indigenous communities are severe and unsettling. The anthropocentric worldview that colonialism imposed on people is one factor in the enslavement of indigenous cultures. In *How Beautiful We Were* Pexton Corporation's efforts marginalise and weaken the Kosawa villagers, who have a strong bond with their land and its natural resources. The villagers see their community's health decline, livelihoods wiped out, and cultural legacy compromised, which forces them into an endless fight for justice. Oppermann's discoveries have practical implications, as demonstrated by the effects on native communities and natural ecosystems. Because it reflects the social and environmental inequalities that continue in colonial contexts, the novel serves as a devastating warning that the impacts of ecological imperialism extend well beyond the pages of fiction.

I have examined the fundamentals of distributive and participatory justice, taking into account Kristin Shrader-Frechette's views because they are inextricably tied to these outcomes and the resulting fights for justice. The moral and ethical implications of ecological imperialism are raised even higher by the concepts of distributive and participatory justice. The striking differences in resource distribution between the powerful Pexton and the marginalised Kosawa people serve as a symbol of the distributive unfairness that is sustained by ecological imperialism. Additionally, I have incorporated the perspectives of Kristin Shrader-Frechette regarding distributive justice, which prioritises equitable distribution of resources. This theory also highlights the structural injustices that the villagers must contend with in light of the uneven distribution of resources. Within the context of participatory justice, the main plot points revolve around the characters' battles against ecological imperialism and their passionate calls for justice. Readers are moved by the villagers' concerns, inquiries, and deeds, which stand as a potent monument to the human spirit's endurance in the face of environmental destruction. Their pursuit of justice is a prime example of the universal human need for meaningful involvement in choices that affect their surroundings and way of life. The distributive and participative justice principles put forth by Kristin Shrader-Frechette are consistent with our analysis. It is clear that there is an unfair division of labour when it comes to environmental advantages and costs because wealthy organisations like the Pexton Corporation gain while underprivileged areas like Kosawa suffer the consequences. The villagers' suffering is made worse and their welfare is put in danger by this obvious imbalance in the distribution of resources. The villagers' agency in determining their environmental future is further limited by the authoritarian government's suppression of transparency and public involvement.

The novel's depictions of power dynamics and exploitation can be understood using the perspective of Michael Watts' petro-capitalism theory. The story shows how corporate interests are given precedence above justice and environmental welfare by authoritarian regimes and economic elites. The issues of land rights, resource exploitation, state power, and petro-capitalist violence highlight the structural obstacles marginalised populations must overcome. In order to support a more just and sustainable future, the text advocates for group action to oppose and undermine these oppressive systems.

Clearly, the novel's main message is to remember that ecological imperialism is a modern problem that still affects marginalised populations around the globe, not a notion from the past. The novel is a clear call to action and change, as well as an image portraying the injustices endured by underprivileged populations. The complexity of ecological imperialism and its devastating effects on people and the environment are vividly depicted in Mbue's skillful narrative. In a time when environmental issues are becoming more pressing, this novel serves as a moving and relevant story that challenges us to reevaluate our relationship with nature and imagine a more just and sustainable future.

Finally, Mbue's story serves as a powerful reminder that even though the perils of ecological imperialism loom large, the tenacity and resolve of people like Kosawa will always encourage our collective desire for a more fair, sustainable, and appealing world. We aspire to a future where environmental justice prevails and the beauty of our earth is safeguarded for the benefit of current and future generations. Nevertheless, despite this goal, we cannot overlook the enduring problems caused by petro-capitalism, which keeps putting tremendous strain on the world's population and environment. So, let us heed the recommendations from *How Beautiful We Were* and work carefully towards a world where ecological imperialism is replaced by ecological harmony. It is imperative that we acknowledge ecological imperialism as a dynamic and ongoing narrative that challenges us to reassess our course towards a sustainable and peaceful future. Not only has reading *How Beautiful We Were* helped me better grasp the ecological effects of imperialism, but it has also made me realise how crucial justice is to the conversation around the environment. It serves as a sobering reminder that fair resource distribution and inclusive involvement in environmental decision-making are essential to our future. As we draw to a close, we are left with the deep sense that every effort made to achieve a peaceful coexistence between humans and nature must have justice at its core.

Mbue infuses her novel *How Beautiful We Were* with a singular and strong viewpoint. Being a native of Limbe, Cameroon, Mbue saw firsthand the environmental and socioeconomic problems her nation faced, especially the exploitation of its natural resources by foreign companies. Her story is realistic and nuanced because of her personal history and her experiences negotiating the diverse cultures of both Africa and America as an immigrant. Her work, especially the

destructive repercussions of ecological imperialism, displays Mbue's deep awareness of the environmental and sociopolitical problems that many African countries face. Her representation of Kosawa, a fictional community, is enhanced by this personal context, which makes the sufferings of its residents more relevant and poignant.

Mbue's early life in an oil-refinery town and African villages gave her a keen understanding of the dynamics around oil. She noted that the riches from oil mostly benefited foreign firms and government leaders, rarely benefiting the local population. This realisation, together with knowledge of Ken Saro-Wiwa's struggle against Shell in Nigeria, had a significant impact on her comprehension of the intricate and frequently unfair nature of oil exploration and its effects on indigenous populations. The story of *How Beautiful We Were* is profoundly framed by these observable and experienced experiences.

This research has significant practical ramifications. This study emphasises the critical need for ecological justice and responsible governance by analysing Mbue's work through the perspective of ecological imperialism and drawing comparisons with real-world occurrences in Cameroon. The investigation shows how local elites assist multinational businesses in their exploitation of natural resources, which puts communities of indigenous people and the environment at risk. This reflects actual circumstances, such as the Bakassi Peninsula's exploitation and the environmental movement by people like Nasako Besingi.

This study also emphasises the agency and resiliency of indigenous populations in their struggle against environmental deterioration. It highlights how crucial it is to include these perspectives in the conversation and policy-making surrounding the environment on a global scale. Through highlighting the relationship between literature and environmental action, this research inspires readers to support fair and sustainable policies that uphold the rights of underrepresented groups and the environment.

In the end, this study advances knowledge about how literature may be an effective instrument for environmental advocacy. In addition to bringing attention to the detrimental effects of multinational enterprises, Mbue's story motivates action towards ensuring environmental justice and resilience.

5.1 Recommendation for Future Research

This study is confined to Ecological Imperialism perspective, but *How Beautiful We Were* can also be studied from Ecofeminist perspective. Mbue's poignant narrative, *How Beautiful We Were,* is narrated from several points of view and takes place in a fictional African village. The focus of the narrative is Thula, who develops from a shy, industrious young woman into a powerful woman dedicated to pursuing justice. She is relatable and inspirational. Her strength of character and spirit of resistance against patriarchal as well as imperial oppression offers fertile ground for postcolonial feminist research on the novel.

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