GAZİANTEP UNIVERSITY
JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Journal homepage: http://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/jss

Araştırma Makalesi ● Research Article *DOI: 10.21547/jss.1700302*

Postcolonial Ecocritical Analysis of The Color Purple: Colonialism, Resistance, and Environmental Destruction

Renklerden Moru'nun Postkolonyal Ekoeleştirel Analizi: Sömürgecilik, Direniş ve Çevresel Yıkım

İbrahim KOÇ[a]*

[a] Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Ordu Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, Yabancı Diller Bölümü, Ordu / TÜRKİYE
ORCID: 0000-0001-9510-3376

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received: May 15, 2025
Accepted: October 14, 2025

Key Words:
Postcolonial Ecocriticism,
Slow Violence,
Environmental Justice,
The Color Purple.

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a postcolonial ecocritical analysis of Alice Walker's The Color Purple, emphasizing Nettie's letters from Africa as evidence of extractivist colonialism and its environmental consequences. Instead of perceiving "Africa" as a uniform entity, the study interprets Walker's imaginary Olinka and its surroundings as a representational locus where land, law, and labor are restructured through infrastructure, agriculture, and water appropriation. The work methodologically integrates close reading with a focused theoretical synthesis encompassing postcolonial ecocriticism, plantation/plantationocene discussions, gradual violence, and accumulation by dispossession. The paper demonstrates how situations like the tarmac road, the elimination of roofleaf plant, the repression of yam production, and the privatization of wells facilitate the transformation of ecological commons into colonial capital, while also delineating modes of resistance and transnational solidarity (e.g., the Mbélé). The article reinterprets Walker's novel as an environmental justice narrative that connects gendered and racialized violence to changes in land and resource systems. The contribution is twofold: it repositions Nettie's letters within Walker studies and updates the critical discourse by associating the novel with contemporary discussions on plantation infrastructures, food and water imperialism, and decolonial environmental humanities.

MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Makale Geçmişi:
Başvuru tarihi: 15 Mayıs 2025
Kabul tarihi: 14 Ekim 2025

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Postkolonyal Ekoeleştiri,
Yavaş Şiddet,
Çevresel Adalet,
Renklerden Moru.

ÖZ

Bu makale, Alice Walker'ın Renklerden Moru adlı eserine yönelik postkolonyal ekoeleştirel bir analiz sunarak, Nettie'nin Afrika'dan gönderdiği mektupları, ekstraktivist kolonyalizmin ve bunun çevresel sonuçlarının bir kanıtı olarak öne çıkarmaktadır. Çalışma, "Afrika"yı tek tip bir varlık olarak algılamak yerine, Walker'ın kurgusal Olinka köyü ve çevresini, altyapı, tarım ve su tahsisi yoluyla toprak, hukuk ve emeğin yeniden yapılandırıldığı temsili bir yer olarak yorumlamaktadır. Çalışma, metodolojik olarak yakın okumayı, postkolonyal ekoeleştiri, plantasyon/plantasyonosen tartışmaları, kademeli şiddet ve mülksüzleştirme yoluyla birikim gibi konulara odaklanmış bir teorik sentezle birleştirir. Makale, asfalt yol, çatı yaprağı bitkisinin ortadan kaldırılması, yer elması üretiminin engellenmesi ve su kuyularının özelleştirilmesi gibi durumların ekolojik ortak mülkiyetin sömürgeci sermayeye dönüşümünü nasıl kolaylaştırdığını gösterirken, aynı zamanda direniş biçimlerini ve ulusötesi dayanışmayı (örneğin Mbélé) da tanımlamaktadır. Makale, Walker'ın romanını, cinsiyet ve ırk temelli şiddeti toprak ve kaynak sistemlerindeki değişikliklerle ilişkilendiren bir çevre adaleti anlatısı olarak yeniden yorumlamaktadır. Makalenin katkısı iki yönlüdür: Nettie'nin mektuplarını Walker çalışmaları içinde yeniden konumlandırmakta ve romanı plantasyon altyapıları, gıda ve su emperyalizmi ve sömürgecilik sonrası çevre beşerî bilimleri üzerine güncel tartışmalarla ilişkilendirerek eleştirel söylemi güncellemektedir.

* *Sorumlu yazar/Corresponding author*.
e-posta: ibrahimkoc@odu.edu.tr

Introduction

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel that explores the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and colonialism through its protagonists' personal and political journeys. While much critical attention has focused on Celie, her sister Nettie's letters from Africa offer a parallel and equally significant narrative that critiques the colonial/missionary reshaping of African societies. As a Black woman navigating both American racism and African colonialism, Nettie occupies a marginal position within imperial structures; yet her epistolary voice becomes a site of resistance, documenting the human and environmental costs of imperial expansion and enabling Olivia to perceive "the many ways women are objectified in different societies" (Barros & Almeida, 2022, p. 361). Nettie's experiences thus reveal, alongside ecological harm, the sustained subjugation of women.

Nettie's letters illustrate the way imperial infrastructures reorganize land, livelihood, and legal frameworks in Walker's fictional Olinka [1]: enforced displacement, ecological degradation, and the commodification of communal land accompany the inland road construction from the harbor, the transformation of biodiverse forests into rubber monocultures, and the depletion and privatization of water resources. The letters transform the plot into evidence, transitioning the interpretation from summary to analysis: the road serves as an extractive means rather than a neutral "improvement"; plantations alter subsistence ecologies into export regimes; and land lacking title under colonial law becomes land devoid of rights. Nettie's testimony contextualizes Olinka within a broader historical framework of imperial ecology while adhering to the novel's representational parameters.

These ecological devastations are intimately linked to the sociopolitical subjugation of colonized peoples. Nettie's portrayal of the Olinka people's loss of land rights and cultural autonomy parallels the exploitation of Black women in the novel's American context. As Kaur (2018, p. 37) notes, the victimization of the land is "similar to the victimization of black women," both being rendered as objects for maximum extraction and control. This parallel reinforces Walker's broader critique of intersecting systems of domination, where racial, gendered, and environmental oppressions are not isolated but mutually reinforcing.

From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, *The Color Purple* reveals how colonialism is not only a political and economic force but also an ecological one. Postcolonial ecocriticism merges environmental and anti-colonial critique, foregrounding the imperial foundations of ecological exploitation. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010, p. 3) argue that colonialism extends beyond territorial occupation and economic plunder to include the reduction of both landscapes and indigenous peoples into commodities within imperial systems. This claim echoes Frantz Fanon's assertion that "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" (1963, p. 44). Nettie's letters embody this understanding, documenting how the replacement of communal agriculture with monocultural rubber plantations not only disrupts food security and traditional medicine but also undermines the cultural dignity of the Olinka people.

This imperial transformation corresponds to Vandana Shiva's notion of *food imperialism*, through which colonial and postcolonial powers impose capitalist agricultural

[1] Regarding terminology, I refer to Walker's fictional Olinka (and the surrounding areas as depicted in the novel) rather than to 'Africa' as a whole. This phrasing avoids essentialism and keeps the argument aligned with the representational status of the text. Where 'Africa' appears, it refers to the setting as it is presented in the narrative, not to the continent's diverse realities.

models that erode indigenous knowledge and enforce dependency on imported goods. As Shiva (2019) urges, "We need to decolonise our food cultures and our minds." Nettie's observations of the Olinka people reveal this process, as their food sovereignty and ecological balance are undermined by imperial intervention. Yet Walker also situates resistance within this landscape: Nettie's encounter with the Mbélé liberation movement marks her shift from passive witness to political awareness, affirming that colonial domination inevitably provokes collective defiance. The inclusion of an unnamed African American in the Mbélé camp underscores the novel's vision of transnational solidarity, echoing Fanon's assertion that decolonization "introduces a new language and a new humanity" (Fanon, 1963, p. 36), where political and ecological liberation become mutually transformative.

Recent scholarship in the environmental humanities suggests that current ecological crises should be analyzed in relation to the historical contexts and representational practices associated with imperialism and globalization (DeLoughrey, Didur, & Carrigan, 2015, p. 3; see also p. 10). This framework illustrates Walker's Olinka letters as indicative of what Haraway (2015) describes as the Plantationocene— "the devastating transformation of diverse kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations" (p. 163). World-ecology, within the framework of political economy, posits that capitalism functions as a method of organizing nature (Moore, 2015, p. 37) and highlights the importance of Cheap Nature in the context of long-term accumulation cycles (p. 188). However, the closing of frontiers and the consequences of ecological degradation indicate the inadequacy of these strategies (p. 305). This approach aligns with decolonial environmental humanities, recognizing the interdependence of environmental and social-justice struggles (Wald & Vázquez, 2019, pp. 6, 17-20). Postcolonial ecologies emphasize the ongoing importance of humanistic approaches—such as listening, interpretation, reading, and ethics—in understanding the disparities in environmental damage (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011, p. 35).

This study situates *The Color Purple* within postcolonial ecocriticism by foregrounding its engagement with environmental justice and anti-colonial resistance. Although the novel has often been examined through the lenses of race, gender, and trauma, its critique of ecological imperialism remains less explored. Through Nettie's letters, Walker challenges the colonial conception of land as a passive resource, portraying it instead as a living entity intertwined with cultural memory and resistance. In doing so, she expands colonial critique beyond language and religion to expose how imperial enterprises restructure Africa's ecologies and knowledge systems, making environmental degradation a deliberate instrument of control. By intertwining ecological destruction, cultural erasure, and acts of defiance—ranging from storytelling to organized resistance—Walker reframes the novel as a call to reclaim both autonomy and ecological balance, demonstrating that the struggle for liberation is inseparable from the struggle for the land itself.

Methodologically, this article combines (1) close reading of Nettie's letters with (2) a focused theoretical triangulation drawing on postcolonial ecocriticism, plantation/Plantationocene studies, and concepts such as slow violence and accumulation by dispossession. This combined approach traces how specific narrative moments—road-building, eradication of roofleaf plant, cash-crop monoculture, and water appropriation—materialize colonial ecological transformation while also registering local and transnational resistance. Marxian terms are used instrumentally, only insofar as they clarify ecologies of extraction (enclosure, commodification, coerced labor), so that the analysis remains anchored in a postcolonial ecocritical frame.

Nettie's Letters: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Perspective

The novel consists of approximately ninety-two letters, though the exact number varies depending on the edition and section numbering[2]. Most of these letters are written by Celie, who initially addresses them to "Dear God" as a means of coping with the traumas of domestic violence and sexual harassment. Over time, Celie gains a sense of independence, partly through her deep, homoerotic bond with Shug Avery. Shug's encouragement plays a pivotal role in facilitating Celie's individual transformation (Lianghong, 2019, p. 969). As Celie becomes stronger, her power dynamic with her husband, who for years has withheld Nettie's letters, begins to shift. This marks a significant turning point in Celie's emotional development and her connection to the world beyond her immediate suffering. As she reclaims her voice, she also begins to write to Nettie, signaling a broader engagement with identity, family, and the global community.

Nettie's twenty-two letters to Celie extend *The Color Purple* beyond the personal and domestic sphere into the colonial and ecological realities of Africa. Her correspondence not only maintains a transatlantic bond with her sister but also transforms into a vehicle for Walker's critique of imperialism, missionary intervention, and environmental exploitation. Through her partnership with Reverend Samuel—a figure whose evolving awareness of race, gender, and colonial power mirrors her own—Nettie exposes the contradictions of missionary work and its complicity with colonial capitalism (Pratt, 2007, p. 9). In documenting the disruption of indigenous life and ecology, her letters become a postcolonial ecocritical testimony that links familial memory, faith, and land to broader questions of autonomy and resistance. Eventually, both Nettie and Samuel come to acknowledge the inherent contradictions of missionary work and conclude that the "missionary venture in Africa" was a "failure" (Chukwumah, 2014, p. 119).

Although *The Color Purple* is frequently examined through themes of race, gender, and sexuality, Nettie's letters introduce a vital ecological dimension, revealing the deep interconnection between colonialism, environmental destruction, and identity formation. Through her observations, Nettie comes to understand how colonial expansion displaces not only human communities but also the landscapes they have nurtured for generations. Her evolving ecological awareness underscores the profound ties between land, culture, and selfhood, transforming her correspondence into what has been described as "a series of socioeconomic lectures" (Petry, 2007, p. 44) on anticolonial resistance.

Nettie's letters serve as a powerful lens for examining the far-reaching consequences of colonialism in both personal and environmental terms. Her writings present a dual ecological narrative: one that reflects the harmonious relationship between African communities and their land and another that exposes the devastation brought by colonial intervention. Before the arrival of white settlers, the Olinka people had already faced environmental challenges, which taught them to live in balance with their surroundings. Their inherited wisdom instilled a deep reverence for the forest and its trees, which they regarded as sacred. However, these traditions prove insufficient in the face of "the aggression of the white colonists," which once again plunges them into an ecological crisis (Lianghong, 2019, p. 971).

Walker's portrayal of Africa as a place of ecological richness, systematically dismantled by colonial forces, highlights the novel's overarching condemnation of imperialism. Nettie's letters document the commodification of land, the extraction of natural resources, and the

[2] The present study employs The Color Purple's 1992 edition published by The Orion Publishing Group.

disruption of indigenous agricultural and ecological systems. Colonial powers, viewing the land merely as an economic asset, undermine both the environment and the cultural fabric of local communities. Through this lens, *The Color Purple* challenges imperialist assumptions that separate land from human identity, illustrating instead that ecological destruction and cultural displacement are inextricably linked.

Nettie's reflections on Africa begin in her fourth letter, which is notably longer than the previous three. This letter marks the start of her extended journey with Reverend Samuel and his wife, Corinne, both members of the African American Missionary Society. Within the broader context of the novel, its most significant revelation is that Celie's long-lost children, Adam and Olivia, were adopted by Samuel and Corinne. Unbeknownst to Celie, her stepfather, Alphonso, subjected her to years of sexual abuse and, without her knowledge, gave away the children she bore to a childless minister and his wife in town. Rather than telling Celie the truth, he cruelly deceives her, claiming that both children have died.

Nettie opens the letter by reflecting on African Americans' limited understanding of Africa. This lack of connection has been acknowledged and critiqued by many African American writers. Among these critiques, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* offers perhaps the most direct and unambiguous portrayal. In the play, Mama Lena responds to her daughter's interest in Pan-Africanism with the question, "Why should I know anything about Africa?" (Hansberry, 1994, p. 30). This response reveals not only her ignorance but also invites the audience to consider the complex relationship between geography, identity, and cultural memory. Mama Lena, an African American woman who has lived her entire life in the United States, has never been to Africa, so why would she be expected to know about it?

In her later letters, Nettie discovers that the ignorance separating Africans and African Americans is mutual: while her teacher, Mrs. Beasley, once depicted Africa as a land of "savages who didn't wear clothes" (Walker, 1992, p. 118), Samuel and Corinne portray it as the ancestral homeland of the oppressed, thereby challenging colonial stereotypes and earlier missionary assumptions that faith alone could redeem Africa (p. 118). Nettie's reflections also expose how the alienating effects of colonialism and racism transcend geography; her encounter with Sophia—who "erased herself" when greeted—reveals the dehumanizing persistence of segregation in the United States, suggesting that the so-called civilized world mirrors the moral darkness it attributes to Africa (p. 118). Moreover, Nettie's discovery that some African groups participated in the slave trade complicates her admiration for Africa and deepens her awareness of moral ambiguity, turning her letters into a meditation on diaspora, identity, and the intertwined legacies of oppression and complicity (p. 119).

The following letter begins with Nettie's realization of the deceptive portrayal of everyone as white in biblical illustrations. Referencing the biblical phrase "Ethiopia Shall Stretch forth Her Hands to God," she explains, "it means that Ethiopia is Africa! All the Ethiopians in the bible were colored" (p. 120), suggesting that Jesus was also Black. While it is not explicitly stated here, the implication that missionary activities have been co-opted by imperialist colonialism is undeniable. Chukwumah (2014) addresses this issue in his article "The Missionary Question in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Color Purple*," beginning his study with the sentence "The Christian missionary as the harbinger of colonialism in Africa" (p. 111). Nettie makes an observation that could be considered a foreshadowing of the skeptical statements to be heard from Samuel years later: "the Missionary Society of New York," which they visited before going to Africa, "did not say anything about caring for Africa, but only about duty" (Walker, 1992, p. 122). As Chukwumah (2014) underlines, "with missionary work comes merchandise; with Christianity comes commerce" (p. 118). However, it was known at the time the novel was written that this commerce would not result in a profit for the Africans. The colonized peoples' belief in a religion that promises eternal happiness after a life of poverty and

suffering facilitated the colonizers' efforts. This can also be explained by the Marxist theory that institutionalized religions function as a repressive ideology and enable people to ignore exploitation and settle for their share in the world[3].

On the train to New York, Nettie describes the enforcement of Jim Crow laws, or segregation laws. However, the economic conditions and lifestyles of African Americans in Harlem bring her joy. The Christian community's enthusiasm for aiding Africa underlines the ideal of Pan-Africanism. Nettie joyfully shares her observation, "They love Africa" (Walker, 1992, p. 121), with her sister, noting that despite the centuries since African Americans were forcibly removed from their homeland and sold into slavery, ethnic affinity and a shared sense of destiny persist. This detail elucidates the foundations of anticolonial resistance, which will be more prominently featured in subsequent letters.

The white European woman missionary who preceded Samuel expresses the prevalent belief in African inferiority: "She says an African daisy and an English daisy are both flowers, but totally different kinds" (p. 122). This attitude exemplifies the 'White Man's Burden' justification for colonialism, which is also seen in the attitudes of the 'New York Missionary Society.' Additionally, her approach echoes Edward Said's invocation of Karl Marx's assertion that "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented," a phrase originally referring to the political voicelessness of the French peasantry. Said, who used this statement as an epigraph to his book *Orientalism* (1978), applies this idea to colonial discourse, emphasizing how Western imperial powers systematically denied non-Western peoples the agency to define or speak for themselves. Within this framework, colonialism legitimizes itself by propagating the false and dehumanizing notion that non-Western populations, particularly black Africans, are inherently inferior and thus incapable of self-representation, thereby justifying their subjugation and the imposition of Western authority. In summary, Western imperialism has assumed the position of authority over Africans, acting in accordance with its own self-interest. This assertion is supported by Nettie's correspondence, which provides numerous illustrations of this phenomenon.

In subsequent letters, Nettie is in Africa, having started her missionary work. Towards the end of the sixth letter, she addresses the humanitarian and economic devastation wrought by colonialism and the slave trade:

> And it is easy to forget that Africa's 'hard times' were made harder by them. Millions and millions of Africans were captured and sold into slavery you and me, Celie! And whole cities were destroyed by slave catching wars. Today the people of Africa having murdered or sold into slavery then strongest folks are riddled by disease and sunk in spiritual and physical confusion. They believe in the devil and worship the dead. Nor can they read or write (Walker, 1992, p. 124).

In Monrovia, the palace scene registers comprador elitism rather than an ethnographic detour: the spectacle of a state that "looks very much like the American White House" coexists with the disqualification of "natives" from cabinet and visibility (p. 127). The passage widens the novel's target from European empires to local collusions without diluting its environmental emphasis: the same elite discourse that regulates belonging also licenses the plantation routes that will later enclose Olinka.

---

[3] In context, Marx did not critique personal faith or the fundamental nature of religion; rather, he analyzed how, in exploitative circumstances, religion may provide solace to "the oppressed creature" while being utilized by dominant authorities to justify suffering and suppress opposition. His renowned critique of religion as the "opium of the people" targeted its social utilization as ideology, notably in colonial missions, and the circumstances that necessitate such solace, rather than believing itself (Marx, 1844/1978, p. 54).

In the seventh letter, we encounter a significant instance of the novel's postcolonial ecocritical critiques: the ecological and cultural devastation caused by colonial intervention as white settlers commodify land, disrupt natural cycles, and erase indigenous practices. Villagers laboring in Liberia's vast cacao plantations reveal the dual impact of colonialism on nature and people. "Nothing but cacoa trees as far as the eye can see" (p. 127). A historical element lending credibility to the narrative is the exploitation of indigenous Africans by the Dutch, who owned the cacao trees depicted in the book. African farmers toil under harsh conditions to produce a cash crop on land that rightfully belongs to them, land they once cultivated for subsistence.

The physical condition of Africans is a significant detail in the context of the novel, as it challenges the Eurocentric perspective that asserts white supremacy. It is important to note that the debate concerning who is superior to whom is not a central theme of the novel. The primary emphasis is on the destructive consequences of coercive intervention in local culture and economy. As will be demonstrated subsequently, external intervention in the form of coercive measures invariably results in the disruption of the balanced lifestyles of African natives, which have evolved over thousands of years. This intervention renders their physical superiority meaningless, and consequently, they become more vulnerable and weaker to diseases.

Nettie's journey from the harbor to Olinka reveals an awe at Africa's lush vitality—"trees and trees and then more trees on top of that" (Walker, 1992, p. 156)—a landscape that, as Lianghong (2019, p. 967) observes, embodies ecological harmony soon to be shattered by colonial intrusion. This vibrant environment, later transformed by "civilization," stands as both symbol and site of resistance, defying the colonial trope of Africa as an empty or chaotic wilderness. As Huggan and Tiffin (2010, pp. 136–137) note, imperial discourse has historically reduced non-European ecologies to exploitable resources, yet Walker's portrayal reclaims the African forest as a self-sustaining, creative force that resists commodification. The Olinka's sustainable dwellings, built from local materials and devoid of excess (Walker, 1992, p. 137), further exemplify an ecocentric ethos that challenges Western capitalist notions of progress. In this sense, Walker aligns with Plumwood's (2003, p. 53) critique of Eurocentric anthropocentrism, exposing how colonial ideology dehumanized indigenous peoples by equating them with nature even as it exploited both.

The Olinka people's self-sufficient way of life exemplifies what Shiva (2016) terms "earth democracy," a system in which human societies thrive within the ecological limits of their environment rather than exploiting it for short-term profit (p. 1). Their reliance on the land for sustenance, without engaging in overconsumption or resource depletion, sustains ecological balance and reflects a deeply rooted relationship between African communities and nature, one characterized by reciprocity rather than domination. In this way, the Olinka resist the extractivist logic of colonial modernity, presenting an indigenous model of sustainability grounded in respect for natural systems and cultural continuity.

This extractivist logic, commonly critiqued in postcolonial, ecological, and political discourses, prioritizes short-term economic gain over long-term environmental and social well-being. It frequently displaces indigenous communities and violates their land rights, dynamics that are clearly reflected in Nettie's observations and experiences in colonial Africa. As Chagnon et al. (2022) explain, "Phenomena resulting from extractivist operations, such as the depletion of raw materials, natural resources, land and soil degradation, climate change, species extinctions, biodiversity loss, and deforestation, are wedded to capital accumulation and the drive for continued exponential growth of the world economy" (p. 762). Through Nettie's letters, *The Color Purple* exposes the environmental and cultural violence wrought by such extractivist practices, contrasting them with the Olinka people's earth-centered ethos.

Towards the end of the eighth letter, there is a story of how capitalism was introduced to African soil. Similar to the fictional stories used by Marx and Engels to explain capitalist exploitation in their works, this poignant story is a parable about how the past ecological degradation of their village affected the lives of the people of Olinka. As Nettie tells it:

> But once, a long time ago, one man in the village wanted more than his share of land to plant. He wanted to make more crops so as to use his surplus for trade with the white men on the coast. Because he was chief at the time, he gradually took more and more of the common land, and took more and more wives to work it. As his greed increased he also began to cultivate the land on which the roofleaf grew. Even his wives were upset by this and tried to complain, but they were lazy women and no one paid any attention to them. Nobody could remember a time when roofleaf did not exist in overabundant amounts. But eventually, the greedy chief took so much of this land that even the elders were disturbed. So he simply bought them off with axes and cloth and cooking pots that he got from the coast traders.
> But then there came a great storm during the rainy season that destroyed all the roofs on all the huts in the village, and the people discovered to their dismay that there was no longer any roofleaf to be found. Where roofleaf had flourished from time's'beginning, there was cassava. Millet. Groundnuts. (Walker, 1992, p. 137).

The roofleaf parable formalizes a shift from commons to commodity, turning cultural ecology into exchange value; its catastrophe reveals how short-term surplus sabotages long-term habitability. Rather than general ecology maxims, the scene is better read as Walker's narrative model of enclosure—a miniature of how colonial capital reorganizes social-ecological systems.

From Nettie's eleventh letter onward, the environmental and social costs of imperial intrusion emerge starkly through the construction of a tarmac road that cuts across Olinka's forests and fields. Initially welcomed with hospitality—"Each day is like a picnic" (Walker, 1992, p. 148)—the project soon exposes its true function as an extractive infrastructure that transforms communal land into colonial property. What appears as progress becomes, in Walker's postcolonial ecocritical lens, an instance of *slow violence*, where displacement and enclosure masquerade as modernization. The villagers' sense of betrayal—"They stood by helplessly… as their crops and then their very homes were destroyed" (p. 153)—embodies how infrastructure weaponizes time and trust. As the chief's report reveals, the road ends in a plantation zone where biodiverse forests are replaced by rubber monocultures, leaving the land "flat and bare as the palm of his hand" (p. 153). This conversion, which Louis Warren (2014, pp. 408–409) identifies as a hallmark of imperial "productivity" rhetoric, parallels the villagers' legal dispossession: lacking title deeds, they have no claim to their own land, exemplifying how ecological exploitation and juridical expropriation sustain the same colonial logic.

As Ugo Mattei and Laura Nader assert in *Plunder: When the Rule of Law is Illegal*, this situation exemplifies how colonial legal systems, far from ensuring justice, often functioned as instruments of expropriation. According to them, "the rule of law is a model that promotes expropriation," legitimizing the seizure of indigenous lands under the guise of legality (Mattei and Nader, 2008, p. 2). Central to this process was the concept of terra nullius, a legal doctrine used by colonial regimes to claim ownership of lands perceived as unoccupied simply because they lacked European forms of documentation. This legal situation entirely disregarded pre-existing indigenous systems of land tenure and governance. Mattei and Nader (2008) highlight the fundamental contradiction in colonial "civilization" narratives, which promoted the ideology of law and order while simultaneously denying legal personhood and political agency to indigenous peoples. As they explain, such frameworks "undermined the very principles of justice and equality they purported to uphold" (p. 3). Moreover, Mattei and Morpurgo (2009) argue that "law has been constructively turned into a technology and a mere component of an economic system of capitalism, thus hiding its intrinsic political nature, and annulling the relevance of local political systems, now impotent in front of the dynamics of global law" (p. 18). This ethnocentric imposition of legal ideology, what Mattei and Nader describe as a "Euro-

American use of 'rule of law' ideology as key to colonial and imperial projects," facilitated the expansion of Western capitalist interests at the expense of indigenous sovereignty and ecological sustainability (Mattei and Nader, 2008, p. 1).

The story of the Olinka village exemplifies the environmental and humanitarian devastation wrought by imperialism in many parts of the Global South. It also underscores the structural barriers that prevent colonized societies from accessing universal values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The tarmac road—ostensibly a symbol of progress and civilization—functions in reality as a tool of exploitation. It destroys centuries-old trees and displaces entire villages, cutting inland from the harbor like a dagger driven into the heart of Africa. This metaphor of the road as a dagger underscores its violent function: forcibly penetrating and reshaping indigenous landscapes to facilitate colonial extraction and control.

The displacement of the Olinka people and their subjugation to external economic forces reflect the broader consequences of imperial expansion, wherein indigenous land is seized, communities are uprooted, and environments are permanently restructured to serve imperial interests. As Rob Nixon (2021) notes, this process marks a central tension between American environmental discourse and postcolonial literature: one of the major schisms between American environmental discourse, which emphasizes deep-rooted connection to place, and postcolonial literature, which focuses on the concept of displacement (p. 237). Nettie's letters capture this schism by documenting how imperial infrastructures violently disconnect people from their ancestral environments, revealing that what is often framed as development is, in fact, a mechanism of dispossession and ecological degradation.

To add to the injustice, the Olinka people were now required to pay rent for the land they had lived on for generations and even for the water they used. This final indignity encapsulates what David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession," wherein capitalist expansion depends on the expropriation of resources from marginalized groups. Harvey (2003) defines this concept as a modern continuation of what Marx termed "primitive accumulation" (p. 144). According to Harvey (2003), it refers to "the continuation and proliferation of accretion practices" rooted in coercion, fraud, and violence, which are used to dispossess people of their land, labor, and resources (p. 144). He explains that these processes "are not relics of a pre-capitalist past" but rather ongoing mechanisms in contemporary capitalism that facilitate "the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations" and "conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusively private property rights" (Harvey, 2007, pp. 34-35). By imposing financial obligations on the very people whose land had been stolen, the colonial administration reinforced the economic structures that perpetuated their subjugation. This mirrors real historical events, such as the Hut Tax in British colonial Africa[4], which forced indigenous populations to participate in a cash economy by taxing them for residing on their ancestral land.

[4] The British colonial authorities imposed the Hut Tax, a property tax, on the African residents of Natal as a revenue collection system to fund the administration of African affairs. This taxation system was a groundbreaking innovation in its era, as it marked a significant milestone in the collection of revenue within the British imperial system. It was a successful administrative vehicle that taxed Africans with minimal expense and coercion, and it was enduring from the British perspective. It is hypothesized that the hut tax was a component of a more extensive scheme to instill a Western capitalist ethos and to promote a colonial system of governance in the African society of Natal (Ramdhani, 1986, p. 12)

When the villagers expressed their desire to fight back, "We will fight the white man," the chief somberly reminded them of the harsh reality: "But the white man is not alone. He has brought his army" (Walker, 1992, p. 154). This moment exemplifies the asymmetrical power dynamics between colonizers and the colonized, as well as the systemic violence and exploitation embedded in imperialist practices. It echoes Fanon's analysis, where he describes the militarized force behind colonial oppression: "The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression" (1963, p. 38). The huge imbalance of military power makes rebellion an almost impossible endeavor for indigenous peoples. As a result, the road construction in *The Color Purple* has become a symbol of destruction and displacement rather than progress, leaving the Olinka people to grapple with the loss of their land, culture, and way of life.

Thus, Walker's depiction of the Olinka people's plight not only critiques the environmental devastation of colonialism but also exposes its deep entanglement with economic exploitation and racial subjugation. By weaving together themes of ecological destruction, legal subjugation, and violent displacement, *The Color Purple* presents a powerful indictment of imperialist expansion, challenging the reader to recognize the ongoing legacies of colonial exploitation in both human and environmental terms.

From the thirteenth letter onward, Nettie's correspondence paints an increasingly bleak picture of the Olinka village and its inhabitants. The fields that once sustained the villagers with essential crops have been uprooted and replaced with rubber trees, a direct consequence of imperialist exploitation. Furthermore, the construction of the tarmac road and the expansion of rubber plantations have driven away the game animals: "The village is due to be planted in rubber trees this coming season. The Olinka hunting territory has already been destroyed, and the men must go farther and farther away to find game" (Walker, 1992, p. 156). Hunting was one of the vital sources of livelihood for the Olinka. Men now travel farther to hunt, often returning empty-handed, which disrupts the delicate balance of their daily diet and leaves them more vulnerable to diseases. This transformation, framed as progress and development, reveals the destructive logic of capitalism and imperialism, which prioritizes profit over the well-being of local communities and the environment.

In the seventeenth letter, Nettie recounts Corinne's funeral, after which the next phase of imperial extraction comes into view. Engineers from a British rubber company arrive to survey the village environs—especially the perennial wells (p. 171). Although their manner is condescending and the villagers gradually grasp their motives, Olinka hospitality prevails. The village's proximity to year-round water makes it a target: because water is indispensable to rubber processing, the company inventories and effectively reclassifies the wells as industrial inputs. This is a textbook instance of colonial appropriation of ecological commons—what Shiva (1991) describes as cash-crop regimes creating local scarcities by alienating land and redirecting water toward export economies (p. 26). In narrative terms, a communal resource becomes a commodity, and "technical expertise" becomes the language of enclosure.

Control of water here is not ancillary but constitutive of dispossession. *The Color Purple* shows how surveying and classification extend extractive power from road and plantation into the everyday metabolism of the village, binding subsistence to rent and wage [5]. By

[5] On the recognition of access to safe drinking water and sanitation as human rights, see United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/292 (2010). Since 2015, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council

foregrounding the seizure of wells, Walker links ecological transformation to legal-economic subordination and anticipates later debates about water as a basic entitlement. This completes the Plantationocene infrastructure: not only land and labor but life-support systems (water) are folded into the plantation's accounting, binding survival to rent and wage (Haraway, 2015, p. 163).

The novel's critique of environmental and cultural destruction extends beyond Africa, revealing the global reach of imperial exploitation. In one of Celie's letters, Shug Avery reads about a dam project on Native American land that will submerge an ancient tribal settlement, remarking, "People insane… Nothing built this crazy can last" (Walker, 1992, p. 190). This episode mirrors the Olinka's displacement and exposes, as Nixon (2021, p. 19) terms it, "displacement without moving," where indigenous communities are erased through projects justified as development. Shug's reaction underscores Walker's transnational critique of environmental imperialism, revealing that when driven by capitalist and colonial imperatives, "progress" becomes an instrument of violence and ecological devastation.

Nettie later reinforces this theme when she recounts the history of Corinne's family, mentioning the forced migration of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia to Oklahoma. She writes, "The Cherokee Indians who lived in Georgia were forced to leave their homes and walk, through the snow, to resettlement camps in Oklahoma. A third of them died on the way" (Walker, 1992, p. 212). This tragic event, known as the Trail of Tears, underscores the international scope of colonial dispossession and the moral bankruptcy of a system that displaces and destroys indigenous communities, whether in Africa or the Americas. The Trail of Tears was the forced displacement of about 60,000 people of the "Five Civilized Tribes" between 1830 and 1850, and the additional thousands of Native Americans and their enslaved African Americans (Littlefield, 1978, p. 68). The Trail of Tears exemplifies the long history of settler colonialism in the United States, where indigenous peoples were systematically uprooted to make way for economic expansion. The parallels between this event and the Olinka people's dispossession illustrate how colonial and neocolonial systems operate through similar mechanisms of forced displacement, resource extraction, and cultural erasure. By drawing these connections, Walker presents colonialism as a global and ongoing structure rather than a historical episode confined to Africa. The dispossession of the Olinka is not an isolated event but part of a larger pattern of indigenous oppression, from the Trail of Tears to modern-day environmental destruction driven by multinational corporations.

The novel vividly portrays the devastating impact of imperialism on the Olinka people through Nettie's letters, which detail both her missionary experiences in Africa and the profound changes that unfold as the story progresses. One of the most striking accounts describes the radical transformation of the Olinka village due to the activities of the rubber company:

> During that time, they must buy water from the planters. During the rainy season, there is a river, and they are trying to dig holes in the nearby rocks to make cisterns. So far, they collect water in discarded oil drums, which the builders brought. But the most horrible thing to happen had to do with the roofleaf, which, as I must have written you, the people worship as a God and which they use to cover their huts. Well, on this barren strip of ground, the planters erected workers' barracks—one for men and one for women and children. But, because the Olinka swore they would never live in a dwelling not covered by their God, Roofleaf, the builders left these barracks uncovered. Then they proceeded to plow under the Olinka village and everything else for miles around, including every last stalk of roofleaf (Walker, 1992, p. 205).

---

have treated the rights to water and to sanitation as closely related yet distinct entitlements.

The rubber company's operations removed the Olinka village from its ancestral land. The new settlement suffers from severe water shortages, forcing villagers to buy water during the dry season. This further worsens their economic hardships. The destruction of the roofleaf, a sacred plant used for roofing huts and deeply intertwined with their cultural and spiritual practices, symbolizes the broader erasure of their traditions and way of life. With the roofleaf extinct due to industrial agriculture and land clearing, the Olinka must now buy corrugated tin for roofing, adding financial strain to their already precarious existence. This account exemplifies how imperialism ruthlessly dismantles local economies, cultures, and ecosystems. The rubber company's actions, displacing the village, destroying sacred vegetation, and imposing industrial agriculture, highlight the exploitative and dehumanizing nature of colonial enterprises. The Olinka people's plight underscores the interconnectedness of environmental degradation, cultural erasure, and economic exploitation, revealing the far-reaching consequences of imperialist interventions on indigenous communities. Through Nettie's letters, the novel critiques the destructive logic of colonialism and its disregard for the lives, traditions, and environments of the people it subjugates.

When their mission in Africa collapses under the weight of Western imperialism, Samuel and Nettie travel to England to seek aid and reassess their situation. Although the novel does not provide exact dates, contextual clues in Nettie's letters suggest that this journey occurs just before the outbreak of the Second World War. This detail in the novel underlines the interconnectedness of colonial expansion and global conflict, aligning with Fanon's argument that imperialism not only exploits the colonized but also destabilizes the imperialist nations themselves, setting the stage for wars driven by the competition for global dominance. In his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the World*, Jean-Paul Sartre explains this as follows: "Europe has multiplied divisions and opposing groups, has fashioned classes and sometimes even racial prejudices, and has endeavored by every means to bring about and intensify the stratification of colonized societies. Fanon hides nothing: in order to fight against us the former colony must fight against itself: or, rather, the two struggles form part of a whole" (1963, p. 10). The approaching World War II is a reminder that colonialism, far from being a benign civilizing force in the hands of the white man, has fostered violence on a global scale.

During her voyage to England, Nettie meets Doris Baines, a white missionary whose feminist and anticolonial insights expose both the universality of patriarchy and the global machinery of imperial exploitation. Baines's blunt summary of colonial "development"—"First, there's a road built… Then your land is planted with something you can't eat. Then you're forced to work it" (Walker, 1992, p. 206)—reveals how infrastructure, extraction, and coerced labor operate in sequence to convert nature and bodies into commodities. Yet her critique remains ambivalent: despite condemning "bloody roads" and "rubber plantations" (pp. 208–209), she speaks from within the same colonial circuits that enable her privilege. As Walker presents her, Baines bridges moral outrage and systemic critique, reinforcing the novel's argument that dispossession is not accidental but structural—a policy embedded in the intertwined logics of empire, capitalism, and patriarchy.

In England, Samuel's appeals to the Christian Missionary Society for the Olinka, who have been displaced by a rubber company, are met with inaction. The Mission's refusal to confront corporate power exposes how religious institutions are complicit in the colonial political economy, forcing Samuel's disillusionment to pivot the narrative from charity to solidarity. This inaction highlights the moral contradictions inherent in Christian evangelism, which advocates for compassion while remaining silent in the face of exploitation, reflecting the dynamics described by Nkrumah (1965) as the cultural and religious infiltration of neocolonialism (p. 37). Frustrated by institutional inaction, Samuel erupts—even contemplating violent resistance as Olinka's only viable option (Walker, 1992, p. 210). The

shift marks his recognition of the systemic violence embedded in economic imperialism and dovetails with Fanon's claim that revolutionary force may restore dignity after absolute dehumanization; as Sartre puts it in his preface, colonial power seeks to "dehumanize" and to "wipe out [a people's] traditions," foreclosing peaceful paths to reclaim humanity (Sartre, 1963, p. 15). Within this horizon, the Mbélés—a movement resisting colonial rule—figure the necessary radical response, challenging both the extractive economy and the ideological structures that sustain subjugation.

After their marriage in England, Samuel and Nettie return to an Olinka remade by imperial logistics. The new site is treeless and resource-poor; villagers are compelled to pay rent for housing, fuel, food, and even water, a burden that drives all over the age of eight into wage work. The passage from self-provisioning to coerced labor exemplifies Harvey's accumulation by dispossession—the conversion of common resources into private assets that force communities into dependency (Harvey, 2003, p. 144)—and echoes other histories of enclosure across colonial geographies.

Diet becomes policy. When planters plow under the yam fields and substitute canned and powdered rations, health collapses: "the planters destroyed what makes them resistant to malaria… the Olinka have been eating yams… for thousands and thousands of years" (Walker, 1992, p. 232). In Plantationocene terms, this shift rewires the village's metabolism from subsistence diversity to an import-dependent ration whose timing and composition answer plantation throughput rather than community health (Haraway, 2015, p. 163).

At stake is not only nutrition but knowledge. Replacing polycultural agriculture with cash-crop monoculture exemplifies what Shiva calls food imperialism—the disruption of indigenous food systems and the imposition of dependency on foreign goods; "Farmers are robbed of their freedom to choose what they grow, and consumers… of their freedom to choose what they eat" (Shiva, 2000, p. 11; see also Shiva, 2019). The loss of yams thus signals both bodily vulnerability and the erasure of ecological expertise transmitted across generations.

Samuel's anger also turns inward, toward the seductions of commodity desire: "Mirrors and shiny cooking pots… Things!… Bloody things!" (Walker, 1992, p. 210). His outcry names a deeper cultural erosion in which material accumulation becomes the measure of worth. Said's account of cultural imperialism clarifies the mechanism—where the colonizer's worldview becomes the dominant frame (Said, 1994, p. 291)—and Ngũgĩ gives its psychology a name: the "cultural bomb" that "annihilate[s] a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment… and ultimately in themselves," redirecting identification toward the very forces that desiccate local life (wa Thiong'o, 1986, p. 3). In Walker's scene, these abstractions take concrete form: some villagers begin to equate dignity and progress with imported goods, even at the cost of autonomy. The shift mirrors broader colonial practice—dismantling communal economies, imposing wage labor and commodity exchange, cultivating dependence on imports—so that desire itself is retooled as an instrument of rule.

Yet Samuel's trajectory is not only diagnostic; it is practical and solidaristic. As a Black clergyman shaped by U.S. poverty and segregation, he concludes that conscious, organized resistance is the path to liberation, and his call to join the Mbélés affirms a politics that links African and African American struggles. Du Bois's formulation—"the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line" (Du Bois, 2003, p. 1)—frames this transnational horizon, where racial capitalism binds continents and resistance must do the same. Together, these scenes reveal Walker's central claim: colonialism devastates both ecosystems and cultures by reorganizing life around extraction, yet it also generates counter-forces of resistance rooted in dignity and survival. *The Color Purple* reframes the colonial "civilizing mission" as an exploitative system that erases indigenous knowledge and disrupts ecological balance, while

envisioning a more humane alternative founded on sustainability, cultural continuity, and justice.

In Olinka, not everyone accepts the devastating changes brought by imperial resource appropriation peacefully. Similar reactions emerge in neighboring villages facing the same struggles. In her final letters before leaving Africa, Nettie reflects on the growing anti-colonial resistance movements across the continent. She also hints at the international dimensions of this resistance, including its echoes in the United States. In her twenty-second letter, Nettie describes their preparations to return to America and mentions a significant but enigmatic figure: an unnamed man "from Alabama" (Walker, 1992, p. 251) who has joined the Mbélé, a fictional African resistance group fighting against colonial oppression.

The Mbélé, though fictional, symbolizes the spirit of real-life African resistance movements that emerged in the early 20th century to challenge European colonial rule. These movements, ranging from armed uprisings such as the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya[6] to political organizations like the African National Congress in South Africa[7], were direct responses to the violent economic and cultural subjugation imposed by colonial regimes. Nettie's acknowledgment of their existence marks a pivotal shift in her perspective: from passively observing the colonial impact on the Olinka as a missionary to actively recognizing the organized resistance taking shape across the continent. Her transformation aligns with Fanon's assertion that "for the native, life can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler... The practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence" (1963, p. 93). For Fanon, this revolutionary awakening is not merely a political necessity but a profound existential transformation. Nettie's realization thus serves as a narrative pivot, reinforcing the idea that resistance, rather than resignation, is the natural and necessary response to oppression.

The inclusion of the Alabama man within the Mbélé camp serves as a powerful symbol of solidarity between African and African American struggles against racial and colonial oppression. Alabama, a state deeply tied to America's history of slavery, segregation, and racial violence, evokes a parallel history of subjugation. The unnamed man's presence in the Mbélé camp suggests a transnational fight against racial injustice, aligning with historical movements like Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa initiative. Garvey, the leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and a staunch advocate for Black nationalism (Prakasa and Soelistyarini, 2016, p. 97) sought to encourage African Americans to abandon the United States and resettle in Africa, where they could build a self-sufficient Black nation. The main aim of this movement was to reconnect African Americans with their ancestral homeland and to support its liberation. This connection also resonates with W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of double consciousness, in which African Americans grapple with a dual identity, both American and African, while facing systemic racism. In the preface to the 2003 edition of The Souls of Black Folk, Farah Jasmine Griffin provides a detailed definition of this concept. She writes,

---

[6] The Mau Mau revolt commenced in 1952 in response to disparities and injustices in British-occupied Kenya. The colonial authorities responded with a severe repression of the insurgents, leading to numerous fatalities. By 1956, the revolt had been decisively suppressed; however, the magnitude of resistance to the British administration had been unequivocally illustrated, positioning Kenya on the trajectory toward independence, ultimately attained in 1963. (South African History Online, 2016)

[7] The African National Congress (ANC) is a political entity established in 1912 that significantly contributed to the resistance against apartheid and the advocacy for the rights of black South Africans. It arose as a national liberation movement intended to unify the varied populations of South Africa in their opposition to racial discrimination and colonial governance, striving to construct a democratic society (Fiveable, 2024).

> Du Bois provided a basic vocabulary and foundational language for scholars and students of African-American history and culture. Double consciousness defines a psychological sense experienced by African Americans whereby they possess a national identity, "an American," within a nation that despises their racial identity, "a Negro." It also refers to the ability of black Americans to see themselves only through the eyes of white Americans, to measure their intelligence, beauty, and sense of self-worth by standards set by others (Griffin, 2003, p. x).

Thus, by having an African American man join the Mbélé camp, Walker highlights the idea that the fight against racial subjugation is not confined to a single geography but is part of a broader, global struggle.

Walker's decision to keep the man anonymous emphasizes the collective nature of resistance, shifting the focus from individual heroism to the broader, grassroots struggle against oppression. His anonymity also reflects the countless unnamed individuals who, though absent from historical records, played vital roles in challenging colonial rule. However, the dominant historical narratives controlled by the colonizer powers marginalized and erased their names from history. By leaving the Alabama man unnamed, Walker symbolically restores the presence of those who resisted but were never given a voice in written history.

This brief but significant reference in Nettie's letter reinforces *The Color Purple*'s broader themes of resilience, solidarity, and the interconnectedness of struggles against colonial and racial oppression. It ties Nettie's personal journey to a larger historical movement, highlighting the enduring fight for justice across the African diaspora. The convergence of African and African American struggles in the novel anticipates the later Pan-Africanist movements of the 20th century, which sought to unite people of African descent worldwide in opposition to racial capitalism and imperialism. In this way, Walker's novel aligns with the broader historical arc of resistance that stretches from the transatlantic slave trade to anti-colonial liberation movements and the modern fight for racial justice.

At the end of the novel, Nettie, Samuel, Celie's children Adam and Olivia, and Adam's Olinka wife, Tashi, safely return to Georgia despite the risks posed by the Second World War. While their journey concludes on a hopeful note, the fate of the Olinka village and the ongoing colonial exploitation in Africa remain unresolved. The novel's relatively happy ending for Celie and her family contrasts with the persistent struggles of the colonized African villages. Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted as an omission; rather, it should be regarded as a reminder of the necessity for constant resistance against cultural erosion and colonial violence. This lingering tension reflects Said's assertion that "there are enough poetic and visionary suggestions to make the case for liberation as a process (italics in original) and not as a goal contained automatically by the newly independent nations" (Said, 1994, p. 274). Nettie's narrative thus highlights the partial and uneven nature of liberation, emphasizing that while individual lives may find closure, collective emancipation from colonial legacies remains an unfinished project. Finally, *The Color Purple* does not merely document oppression but insists on the necessity of resistance, whether through personal liberation, collective struggle, or transnational solidarity. By weaving together themes of racial, gendered, and colonial violence, Walker presents a vision of history that recognizes both suffering and resilience, challenging readers to acknowledge the unfinished work of decolonization and justice.

Conclusion

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* offers a powerful critique of colonialism, environmental destruction, and cultural erasure through the epistolary voice of Nettie. As a Black woman navigating American and African colonial landscapes, Nettie occupies a uniquely marginalized position, yet her writings serve as a counter-discourse to dominant imperial narratives. By documenting the ecological and human devastation wrought by colonial expansion, her letters expose the inextricable links between environmental exploitation and

systemic oppression. In doing so, *The Color Purple* aligns itself with postcolonial ecocriticism, demonstrating that imperialism is not merely a political or economic force but an ecological catastrophe that reshapes landscapes, displaces communities, and redefines cultural identities.

Nettie's literal and ideological journey challenges conventional narratives of exile and return. Unlike traditional colonial narratives in which return signifies redemption or closure, Nettie's homecoming is fraught with disillusionment, as she finds colonial legacies deeply embedded in both Africa and America. Her experience illustrates that the impact of imperialism transcends borders, reinforcing the idea that resistance must also be transnational. The novel thus presents home not as a fixed, idyllic refuge but as a contested space shaped by historical injustices, displacement, and ongoing struggles for autonomy.

Furthermore, *The Color Purple* focuses on cultural and environmental resistance as a vital response to colonial intrusion. The Olinka people's fight against land expropriation, their use of traditional agricultural practices, and their spiritual connection to the land emerge as acts of defiance against imperial domination. Through Nettie's observations, Walker critiques the colonial perception of land as a commodity, instead affirming its intrinsic relationship to cultural identity and survival. Such an ecological perspective challenges the imperialist notion that nature exists only for economic exploitation, advocating instead for the recognition of land as a living entity intertwined with memory and resistance.

This study demonstrates that colonialism operates not only through military occupation or religious conversion but through the very redefinition of land, water, and food systems. Walker critiques extractivist capitalism, imperial infrastructures, and cultural imperialism as interconnected mechanisms of dispossession. Through her detailed portrayal of the Olinka people and their struggle to maintain ecological harmony and cultural sovereignty, Walker calls attention to the silencing of indigenous knowledge and the enduring legacy of colonial violence.

The novel also highlights the commodification of both nature and human life under colonial rule. Nettie's accounts demonstrate how imperial enterprises reduce landscapes and indigenous communities to mere economic assets, thereby reinforcing capitalist ideologies of control and extraction. This perspective mirrors broader postcolonial critiques of environmental degradation as a deliberate strategy of imperial domination, spanning from the plantations of the Global South to the forced displacement of Native American communities. The interconnected epistolary structure of *The Color Purple* reveals the global reach of colonial violence, showing how similar patterns of ecological destruction and cultural oppression have shaped histories across continents.

Finally, *The Color Purple* insists on the necessity of resistance, not only through armed resistance, as suggested by Samuel's approval to join the Mbélés, but also through storytelling, solidarity, and the preservation of cultural identity. Nettie's letters, though hidden from Celie for years, symbolize the struggle of subaltern voices to be heard in a world that seeks to silence them. Yet, by documenting these injustices, her writing ensures that the histories of Olinka and other colonized peoples are neither erased nor forgotten. This act of bearing witness aligns with Walker's broader literary and political vision: a call for justice, liberation, and the collective reimagining of a world free from exploitation. The novel thus lets us apprehend the Plantationocene not as a distant label but as a lived structure that scripts roads, crops, water, and bodies into a single extractive design.

Walker's novel does not merely criticize colonialism; it urges readers to recognize the enduring legacies of imperialism and to engage in the ongoing struggle for equity and environmental justice. By weaving together the narratives of African and African American communities, *The Color Purple* underlines the interconnectedness of global resistance movements, affirming that the fight against oppression is not confined to any one nation,

people, or time period. In this way, Walker not only reclaims marginalized histories but also envisions a future in which solidarity and justice triumph over exploitation and erasure.

References

Barros, L. A., Almeida, R. S. (2022). Colonization of women in Alice Walker's *the color purple*. Revista PHILIA: Filosofia, Literatura & Arte, 4(1), [pp. 350-63].

Chukwumah, I. (2014). The missionary question in *things fall apart* and *the color purple*. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 6(10), [pp. 111-27].

Chagnon, C. W., Durante, F., Gills, B. K., Hagolani-Albov, S. E., Hokkanen, S., Kangasluoma, S. M. J., Vuola, M. P. S. (2022). From extractivism to global extractivism: The evolution of an organizing concept. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 49(4), [pp. 760-92]. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2069015

DeLoughrey, E., Didur, J., & Carrigan, A. (Eds.). (2015). *Global ecologies and the environmental humanities: Postcolonial approaches*. Routledge.

DeLoughrey, E., & Handley, G. B. (Eds.). (2011). *Postcolonial ecologies: Literatures of the environment*. Oxford University Press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (2003). *The souls of black folk*. Barnes & Noble Classics.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press.

Fiveable. (2024, August 13). 2.4 African resistance to colonial rule – history of Africa – 1800 to present. Retrieved May 1, 2025, from https://library.fiveable.me/africa-since-1800/unit-2/african-resistance-colonial-rule/study-guide/dDur1oe3zWpkND4R

Griffin, F. J. (2003). Introduction. In W. E. B. Du Bois, *The souls of Black folk* (pp. ix–xxiv). Modern Library.

Hansberry, L. (1994). *A raisin in the sun*. New York: Vintage Books.

Haraway, D. J. (2015). Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: making kin. *Environmental Humanities, 6*(1), 159–165.

Harvey, D. (2003). *The new imperialism*. Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. (2007). Neoliberalism as creative destruction. The *annals of the American academy of political and social science*, 610(1), [pp. 22-44].

Huggan, G., Tiffin, H. (2010). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: literature, animals, environment*. Routledge.

Kaur, J. (2018). Ecofeminist concerns in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities* (IJELLH), 6(12), [pp. 28-48].

Lianghong, W. (2019). Reading *The Color Purple* from the perspective of ecofeminism. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(8), [pp. 965-72]. http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0908.11

Littlefield, D. F. Jr. (1978). *The Cherokee freedmen: from emancipation to American citizenship*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Marx, K. (1978). *Contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right: introduction* (R. C. Tucker, Ed.). In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx–Engels Reader* (2nd ed., pp. 53–65). New York, NY: W. W. Norton. *(Original work published 1844).*

Mattei, U., Morpurgo, M. (2009). *Global law and plunder: The dark side of the rule of law.* Bocconi School of Law Student-Edited Papers, 2009-03/EN. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1437530

Mattei, U., Nader, L. (2008). *Plunder: when the rule of law is illegal*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Moore, J. W. (2015). *Capitalism in the web of life: Ecology and the accumulation of capital*. Verso.

Nixon, R. (2021). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.

Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-colonialism: the last stage of imperialism*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons.

Petry, A. H. (2007). Alice Walker: the achievement of the short fiction. in H. Bloom (Ed.), *Bloom's modern critical views: Alice Walker* [pp. 33-50]. New York: Infobase Publishing.

Plumwood, V. (2003). Decolonizing relationships with nature. In W. H. Adams & M. Mulligan (Eds.), *decolonizing nature: strategies for conservation in a post-colonial era* [pp. 51–78]. London: Earthscan.

Prakasa, B., Soelistyarini, T. D. (2016). Back to Africa movement: a new historicist reading of Lorraine Hansberry's drama *a raisin in the sun*. *Allusion: Journal of Literature*, 5(2), [pp. 96-103].

Pratt, L. H. (2007). Alice Walker's men: profiles in the quest for love and personal values. in H. Bloom (Ed.), *Bloom's modern critical views: Alice Walker* [pp. 5-17]. New York: Infobase Publishing.

Ramdhani, N. (1986). Taxation without representation: the hut tax system in colonial Natal 1849–1898. *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 9(1), [pp. 12-25]. https://doi.org/10.1080/02590123.1986.11964243

Said, E. W. (1994). Culture and imperialism. New York: Vintage Books.

Sartre, J. P. (1963). Preface. In F. Fanon, *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans., pp. 7-31). New York, NY: Grove Press. (Original work published 1961)

Shiva, V. (1991). *The violence of the green revolution: third world agriculture, ecology and politics.* London: Zed Books.

Shiva, V. (2000). *Stolen harvest: the hijacking of the global food supply*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Shiva, V. (2016). *Earth democracy: justice, sustainability, and peace*. North Atlantic Books.

Shiva, V. (2019, June 18). The industrialisation of fake food. *The Ecologist*. Retrieved May 2, 2025, from https://theecologist.org/2019/jun/18/industrialisation-fake-food

South African History Online. (2016). Mau Mau uprising. Retrieved May 1, 2025, from https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/mau-mau-uprising

wa Thiong'o, N. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: the politics of language in African literature*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational.

United Nations General Assembly. (2010). The human right to water and sanitation (A/RES/64/292).

Wald, S. D., Vázquez, D. J., Ybarra, P. S., & Ray, S. J. (Eds.). (2019). *Latinx environmentalisms: Place, justice, and the decolonial*. Temple University Press.

Walker, A. (1992). *The color purple*. London: Orion Publishing.

Warren, L. (2014). Owning nature: towards an environmental history of private property. in A. C. Isenberg (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of environmental history* [pp. 398-425]. Oxford University Press.