

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The lives of people are extremely dependent to the environment they live in. As we keep blooming the world with technologies and inventions to support our needs, the environment also begins to change. In recent decades, developments that lead to environmental deterioration have become huge concerns for people. The issues of climate strike, virus outbreak and other environmental crisis caused by progressive developments correlated to the situation the world is in from the last few decades. By mentioning progressive developments, it refers to the activities mostly done by big corporations. Millions of people are starting to raise awareness about the crisis and even demand big corporations to take responsibility. Huge scale of environmental deterioration leads to domination from people who are highly privileged. Moreover, the domination results into injustice to the non-privileged people (Ravichandran, 2014).

According to a report presented in *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* by Christian Aid in 2019, countries that have the least responsibilities on climate change are the ones who have the most damaging impacts to their lives. As Mukherjee contextualized this kind of problems with the late 20th century India's agricultural crisis, where farmers are highly indebted due to the high-price of corporate-owned seeds, ended up killing themselves (Mukherjee, 2010). While their lands are also barreled because of the chemical waste from the

nearest corporate-owned factories, the farmers chose to commit suicide. This shows how much developments and corporations have affected people that do not have the power to fight over their own environmental rights.

In correlation to that, Kramer and Ware (2019) reported on how climate change has negatively affected the food insecurity index from the poorest countries (particularly in the Global South). Richer countries are often more secured in terms of food supplies but poorest countries are not. The responsibility is in the hand of the richest countries. Regarding their carbon intensive developments path that causes climate change, however these countries do not seem to take serious action towards problems they created. This phenomenon shows injustice within the modern society. Rich countries are keeping themselves safe by the power they have to preserve natural resources and keeping up with the developments, while poor countries are suffering from the effect of climate change caused by carbon emission.

Another phenomenon is from the 21st century Civil Rights movement in America in which African-Americans demanded the government to be equal in making the environmental policies. In noting that environmental justice is an important part of the struggle to improve and maintain a clean and healthful environment – particularly for African-Americans is racial discrimination in environmental policy making and the unequal enforcement of the environmental laws and regulations (Brown, 2020). With President Donald Trump castigating the science of global warming, it is little wonder that today's environmental

policies not only target people of color when it comes to the placement and operation of unhealthy facilities. They also exclude people of color from being a part of the policy making process – even though they are the ones who are usually most directly negatively impacted by environmental injustices.

Similar issues occur also in Margaret Atwood's work *Oryx and Crake*. *Oryx and Crake* is a story about human manipulation of the nature, that is, human is the cause of the disastrous events happened in this earth. The shifting time between human and post-human beings in order to take over the civilization of the earth is addressed. Nature is irreversible once it is being destroyed it cannot easily go back as it was before. Atwood is trying to convey what is being called as speculative-fiction. Atwood compares *Oryx and Crake* to Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol* as a nightmarish attempt to warn us to our recent path. She notes in a 2004 MIT presentation that *Oryx and Crake* is a "cheering sort of book" because "we do still have time and we've got a second chance" (Galbreath, 2010, 6).

However, despite the huge environmental deterioration, the injustice also happens within the society. *Oryx and Crake* is set in the future somewhere in Global South and the United States, where people are divided into two groups. The first group lives in a Compound, a preserved place for rich scientists that are beneficial for corporations, where they are being protected from the danger from the outside world. The second group lives in Pleeblands, a place outside the compound, where they are petrified with virus outbreak, and dangerous climate strike. In the midst of the near-apocalyptic condition happened in the world, there

are still discriminations that affect the poorest individuals. Near-apocalyptic condition in *Oryx and Crake* is represented through the world-scale ecological crisis that happens in all parts of the world.

Phenomenon like the scarcity of food and livestock, air pollution, genetic modification also occurred hand in hand within the dystopian society displayed in *Oryx and Crake*. Big corporations' activities and their exploitation of the natural resources cause social conflicts and then result in a pandemic. The pandemic is caused by a virus that is created by the novel's antagonist. *Oryx and Crake* depicts Ecological Imperialism and how the society within is affected by it through the experiences of Jimmy – the novel's protagonist. The thesis focuses on how Jimmy experiences the ecological imperialism and how he (who belongs to the privileged society) sees the outside world in chaos, while living in a safe place.

Ecological imperialism is not always by the means of colonizing inferior culture by controlling a colonized region's natural resources. Ecological imperialism would also occur through some resilient ways to make it hard for people to differentiate thus to go against them. As depicted in the novel *Oryx and Crake*, the ecological imperialism issues unfolded through genetic modification, society division, and scientific advancements or developments.

Oryx and Crake, published in 2003, has been nominated to various awards including Man Booker Prize for fiction and Orange Prize for fiction. Man Booker Prize for Fiction is an English based award for any novels written and published in the United Kingdom. Back then, the only eligible author to be nominated in this

award is limited but now it has become more diverse. Man Booker Prize for Fiction brings significance to the book and also to the author as it is acknowledged by a lot of people and thus –influential.

The first book of the trilogy is interesting since the famous author, Margaret Atwood, deploys a Pre-Apocalyptic condition with a large scale spectrum. Correspondingly, the plot of the story does not go all over the place since it does not have one definite setting. As Squier mentioned in her review about the book that *Oryx and Crake* is “*A Tale Meant to Inform, Not to Amuse*”. This implies that *Oryx and Crake* serve as visionary speculative writing to educate their readers. Another interesting fact about the novel is that the author, Margaret Atwood, is being given the title “the prophet of dystopia” by The New Yorker. As Rebecca Mead explains that “Her fiction has imagined societies riddled with misogyny, oppression, and environmental havoc. These visions now feel all too real”. The fact that the title given to Atwood was released in early 2017 despite *Oryx and Crake* publication year (2003) proved that Atwood’s work of speculative fiction is timeless. As she is always scrupulous about including nothing that did not have a historical antecedent or a modern point of comparison, this become more accurate following what has happened in the present time world.

The novel *Oryx and Crake* has been studied several times and some of them used the same ecocritical approach but different issues and findings. For instance, study from Mosca (2013) discussed about ecocriticism binary opposition – anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. This study later contributes to the thesis in adapting the anthropocentrism and ecocentrism aspect in the novel. In addition,

Bone (2016) also discussed about how the aftermath of the apocalypse in the novel contributed to the future of childhood in terms of utopian thinking. Owing to the fact that this study talks about the apocalypse, it will later support the arguments proposed by this thesis.

Another study from Phillips (2017) discussed about how the novel depicted collapse, resilience, stability and sustainability. As well as Dillon (2018) who stated that the notion of apocalypse as a strong and enduring theme in literature. Additionally, one related study found in Universitas Airlangga by Ispriadi in 2017 about the portrayal of Ecological Imperialism within the novel of Tessa Harris's *The Dead Shall Not Rest* that discusses about how Ecological Imperialism is carried out through various political agendas. Outside the literary field, *Oryx and Crake* also has been studied from different field. This one is from Spiegel (2010), discussed the novel through the lens of International Relation theory known as Neo-medievalism.

Although the previous studies have discussed *Oryx and Crake* as environmental writing, none of them entrusts a consideration to the issue of Ecological Imperialism within the novel. Nevertheless, this study offers to divulge the issue as it is a new epitome of colonialism occurred in a speculative fiction set in the future. In preliminary studies, the discussion of Ecological Imperialism remains in the range of historical influence, which is European invasion and colonialism. However, the novel *Oryx and Crake* is posited in the future where society can barely draw the line between colonizers and the colonized. This study

aims to reveal how Ecological Imperialism occurred and in what kind of society it occurred in a new world environment.

This study used the approach of Postcolonial Ecocriticism to examine the issues of Ecological Imperialism brought by the novel. Postcolonial Ecocriticism that rooted in the issues of developments discussed by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, which also brought the issues of Ecological Imperialism proposed by Alfred W. Crosby. In order to be able to contextualize the contemporary condition within the society depicted in the novel, this study will also use the approach of Pablo Mukherjee; Postcolonial Environments.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Regarding the issues of Ecological Imperialism within the novel, this study will discuss how environmental racism, dualistic thinking, and biocolonisation unfolded within the novel by answering the question below:

1. How is the depiction of Ecological Imperialism in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the question that is being proposed in this study regarding Ecological Imperialism issues, this study will draw its utmost objectives on:

1. To reveal the depiction of Ecological Imperialism in the novel and how it is carried out from the formal elements chosen.

1.4 Significance of the Study

On recent occasion, the issue about environmental crisis in literature is discussing beyond the wilderness that changed into urban landscape. However, this study aims to convey how Ecological Imperialism is being portrayed through formal elements in speculative-fiction. Thus, the discussion starting to look at how the indirect impact of literary works to the real world became one of the acts of activism. However, this postcolonial ecocriticism approach to the novel will presumably not provide the vivid solutions to the problems introduced by the story. Hence this study will serve a new point of view that may be useful to the readers in perceiving the information towards such issue. Once the readers have acquired ecocritical awareness, the value they attribute to the novel may influence its popularity and authority. Moreover, this awareness allows for alternative readings and may informed individual who is able to denounce political campaigns as deprived of environmental concerns or harmful to environmental issues.

In addition, this study will contribute to the English Department of Universitas Airlangga since there has been little discussion regarding the approach of Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Furthermore, this study will (hopefully) sheds light to the students who are in the same journey in analyzing environmental writing, especially works of fiction.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Ecological imperialism : best defined as a way Europeans (in this matter, the colonizer) take whole control and maintain the natural resources over their settlements.

Environmental deterioration : the destruction or the extinction of nature and its parts usually caused by human activities.

Post-colonial ecocriticism: a study with a convergence between formerly colonized people and those who have been subjected to the political, economic, and ecological domination of powerful population

Pre-apocalyptic society: is a society that lives within the collapsed of the world caused by environmental deterioration happens in the world

Scientific advancement: massive developments and improvements of science to conduct inventions to preserve the lives of the people through technology