

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATURE
AND HUMANS IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* AND DOMINIC
MULAISHO'S *TONGUE OF THE DUMB***

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LUSAKA

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DECLARATION

I, Victor Muyumba, hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work, has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university and does not incorporate any published work or material from another dissertation.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with establishing and investigating the similarities and differences in the relationship between nature and humans in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Dominic Mulaisho's *The Tongue of the Dumb*. Further, it was concerned with establishing the significance of such similarities and differences in light of African literature and ecological content. In pursuing this key aim of the study, the researcher adopted a qualitative research design with desk research as the main means of data collection. The main means of analysing the two selected texts were the ecocritical and social constructionist approaches, with the former being the overarching theoretical tool. The findings revealed that, first, the Igbo and Nsenga people as presented in *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* respectively are both associated with nature-cultures and nature-religions. In their interaction with nature they ensure that there is harmony with nature and their religions are means of establishing an equilibrium in the delicate act of interacting with nature and natural phenomena. In both cases the ancestral spirits and gods are a key bridge between nature and humans. Second, in both texts the people are so close to nature that they personify it. Nature possesses the capacity to express emotions and to speak through various natural phenomena. Third, both texts exhibit an ambivalence, on the part of the people, in their attitude to natural phenomena – sometimes they perceive nature as friendly and at other times as a bitter destructive foe. Fourth, in both texts land is a central aspect of the people's interaction with nature. Both the Igbo and Nsenga practise a land-based culture. While there are major similarities in the findings from the two texts, the differences are few and minor. One difference is that there is a more explicit portrayal of witchcraft in *Tongue of the Dumb* than in *Things Fall Apart*. In the former, witches are believed to have the power to manipulate nature and natural phenomena while in the former such belief is only implied. Further, while in the former destructive floods are among the means by which nature expresses its anger or dissatisfaction with the people, in the latter there are no floods. The findings suggest that the greater number of similarities compared to differences is due mainly to the fact that both texts deal with traditional African societies with similar ecophilosophies. The findings, however, cannot and should be applied to all African traditional societies but specifically to the two texts that were studied.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to my beloved wife Selenia, my two sons Luumuno and Lubono, and my two daughters Lubomba and Lumba. There is absolutely no doubt in me that without their understanding about the valuable time I denied them during the process, I would not have completed this research project.

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between the literary text and the environment. In their co-edited seminal work consisting of a collection of definitive essays entitled the *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996: xviii) Glotfelty and Fromm define ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”. Other scholars prefer to use the term “green studies” instead of ecocriticism. However, the two terms both refer to a critical approach that began in the USA in the late 1980s and in the UK in the early 1990s. Explaining the focus of ecocriticism, Glotfelty and Fromm (1996: xviii) state: “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-centred approach to literary studies.” Apart from terms ecocriticism and green studies, other scholars use the terms ecopoetics, environmental literary criticism, and green cultural studies.

The acknowledged founder of the ecocritical movement in the United States is Cheryll Glotfelty who in 1992 also co-founded the Association of the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE). The following year the association launched its own journal, ISLE, short form for *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (Barry 2002: 248). The ecocritical movement has since grown around the world.

According to Barry (2002), however, ecocriticism as a movement was preceded by ecocriticism as a concept in the late 1970s during a conference of the Western Literature Association (WLA) in Cour d’Alene, USA, whose main area of interest was literature of the American West. The first time the term ecocriticism was used, according to Michael P Branch, was in William Rueckert’s essay entitled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (1978). On the other hand, the related term “ecological” was first used in the context of literary criticism by the American ecocritic Kark Kroeber in an article entitled “‘Home at Grasmere’: Ecological Holiness” which appeared in the journal *PMLA* in 1974 (Barry 2002: 248). The two terms ecocriticism and ecological, according to Branch, somehow lay unused in the critical vocabulary until the 1989 WLA conference. It was at that conference that Glotfelty, at the time a graduate student at Cornell University, not only revived the term ecocriticism but also

advocated its use when referring to the critical field which had earlier been known as “the study of nature writing” (Barry 2002: 249).

In the mid-eighties as scholars collaborated on the study of the environment in literature, the field of environmental literary studies was established but it was in the early nineties that it grew. There was a sustained push to include literature in environmental studies and vice versa. Thus, for example, in 1985 Frederick O Waage edited *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources* which included course descriptions from nineteen different scholars and concerned itself with the relationship between literature and the environment (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996). Similarly, in 1989 Alicia Nitecki founded *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* which concerned itself with the publication of works on literature and the environment, and the writings were in the a variety of forms such as essays, books reviews and classroom notes. Some universities began to offer courses on literature and the environment.

Ecocriticism developed not only in the United States but also in the United Kingdom. Before Glotfelty and other Americans lent their thoughts to ecocriticism, there were some nineteenth-century American writers who developed ideas that provided some bearings for the latter theorists. As Barry (2002) argues, three of the major writers whose work celebrated nature and the wilderness as experienced in America are Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Emerson’s first book, a short one entitled *Nature*, was first published anonymously in 1836 is an essay reflecting on nature’s impact on him (Barry 2002: 249). In her first book *Summer on the Lakes, During 1843*, Fuller gives a powerful personal account of her interaction with the American landscape. She writes of her encounter with the Niagara (Barry 2002: 250):

For here there is no escape from the weight of a perpetual creation; all other forms and motions come and go, the tide rises and recedes, the wind, at its mightiest, move sin gales and gusts, but here is really an incessant, and indefatigable motion. Awake or asleep, there is no escape, still this rushing round you and through you. It is in this way I have most felt the grandeur – somewhat eternal, if not infinite.

Nature writing manifests in a variety of ways as writers deal with ecological issues in literary works. The ecosystem affects humans as humans affect the ecosystem. Humans and nature

have interacted from time immemorial, although industrialisation and technological advancement have over the centuries changed the type of interaction human beings have with nature. From the earliest times when human life was in its most primitive form human beings were closer to nature than they are today. In fact, as has been argued on various fora, human advancement in terms of science and technology has been detrimental to nature – hence the debates about global warming and climate change.

From the earliest times of their existence human beings have had to explore the environment in which they lived and, in due course, have had to learn how to overcome the challenges of their existence in the context of nature. Humans learnt to exploit nature's offerings for their own good and for the betterment of their lives. For food and sustenance, as well as healing from illness and injury they have had to turn to nature.

The interaction between nature or the environment on the one hand and human beings on the other hand has, among other things, led to the production of works of literature. As writers are influenced by the environment in which they grow up, it may be argued that literary works are to some degree a produce of the environment in which they find themselves. In this regard the environment need not only be social but also political, economic, religious or physical – which is where nature comes into the picture. Some writers, such as the Romanticists, have written directly about nature: land masses, landscapes, rivers, streams, lakes, flora and fauna, wildlife, among others. Thus, the physical environment is not there just to provide the writers with the setting of their narrative, but also to provide them with the opportunity to appreciate nature's offerings.

However, the interaction between humans and nature generally exhibits the former's dominance over the latter. Hence White (1996: 8) opines: "Man and nature are two things, and man is master." From time immemorial humans have sought to understand, dominate and even manipulate nature to meet their own needs and interests. There are therefore two sides to the interaction between humans and nature: the positive and the negative, the productive and the destructive. Global warming and climate change are largely a result of the destructive use of nature by human beings.

Literary texts are replete with behavioural and emotional complexities involved in humans' interaction with nature. This interaction may border on, inter alia, psychopathological, aesthetic and/or religious grounds. Psychopathological interaction is manifested in humans' destructive behaviours towards nature while aesthetic interaction is man's appreciation of the beauty of nature. Religious interaction between human and nature may have both psychopathological and aesthetic aspects.

It may be argued, with justification, that human beings have been writing about nature for much longer than the birth of ecocriticism or environmentalism as movements. It may also be argued that, since English literature predates American literature – as the English nation the American – it is worthwhile to look at early modern English literature for evidence of writings about nature. Of the works of some of the early modern English poets, Borlik (2011: 3) writes:

While it would be anachronistic to cast early modern poets as modern ecologists, it would be equally erroneous to assume that they were oblivious or indifferent to the environmental developments unfolding around them. Philip Sidney, for instance, had a keen interest in botany and a profound regard for animal and plant life that made him suspicious of both hunting and agrarian capitalism. Michael Drayton openly opposed the draining and enclosure of the fens in Lincolnshire. His chorographical epic, *Poly-Olbion*, portrays these wetlands not as desolate wastelands, but as a flourishing, picturesque habitat for a variety of fish and waterfowls, co-existing alongside the local human population.

Borlik adds that in some of his poetry Drayton bemoaned “the destruction of forests throughout England, particularly in his native Warwickshire” (3). He argues, further, that the early modern period of English literature should not be perceived as “ecologically benighted” but as “one of the most pivotal moments in the environmental history of the planet” (6).

Therefore, this study shall endeavour to examine the interaction between humans and nature in the two literary texts in question. The texts are not by any means self-evidently about nature but will be examined with a new alertness to the human-environment interaction. Although the texts are fictitious, the study proceeds from the premise that they reflect and are based on life as it is lived by the characters, who are a representation of human beings. The study intends to examine both positive and negative forms of interaction between humans and nature. In doing

so, the study will situate its analysis in the context of the culture and beliefs that influence the behaviour of the characters in the two selected texts towards nature and natural phenomena.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ecocritical reading of literary texts has remained on the academic periphery notwithstanding the existence of such organisations as the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) whose main objective is to carry out Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE). Thus, the promotion of exchange of ideas and information vis-à-vis human relationship with the environment based on literary texts has not burgeoned. The implication of the above is that most literary texts have not been subjected to ecocritical examination, though they have been subjected to other forms of literary criticism. In making an ecocritical analysis of the two texts, the research will focus specifically on the interaction between nature and humans.

In addition while *Things Fall Apart* has been subjected to some ecocritical analysis, *Tongue of the Dumb* has not. Worth noting also is the fact that no comparative ecocritical study has been conducted on *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb*. Put in question form, therefore, the problem being investigated is: *What are the similarities and differences in the relationship between nature and humans in Things Fall Apart and Tongue the Dumb?*

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the relationship between people and nature in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Dominic Mulaisho's *Tongue of the Dumb*.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

- (i) To explore the relationship between nature and humans in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Mulaisho's *Tongue of the Dumb*;
- (ii) To examine the similarities and differences in the relationship between nature and humans in the two texts under study;
- (iii) To evaluate the significance of the similarities and differences in the relationship between nature and humans in the two texts.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (i) What is the relationship between nature and humans in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Mulaisho's *Tongue of the Dumb*?
- (ii) What are the similarities and differences in the relationship between nature and humans in the two texts under study?
- (iii) What is the significance of the similarities and differences in the relationship between nature and humans in the two texts?
- (iv) How do the characters in the two texts react to natural phenomena?
- (v) How do cultural beliefs influence the relationship between nature and humans in the two texts?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A number of works have been written on Mulaisho's *Tongue of the Dumb*, among them a dissertations by Joseph Mbuyu and John Chileshe. The two works focus on general aspects of the quality of the works and do not handle anything about the ecocritical elements. This text, on the other hand, focuses on an ecocritical study of the text, especially as relates to the relationship between people and nature in the text. Further, while a number of works have been published on the ecocritical elements of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, none of the works take a comparative approach – that is, comparing ecocritical issues in *Things Fall Apart* with those in *Tongue of the Dumb*.

This study, therefore, not only provides an opportunity to explore Mulaisho's work from a unique ecocritical perspective but also an opportunity to contrast the two works, set in West Africa, and the other in Zambia. Further, there is no available ecocritical study on any Zambian work of fiction. This is the first of its kind. The study is therefore significant not only for researchers on the relationship between nature and humans in literature in general, but in the two texts in particular. In addition the work will be helpful to environmentalists who are concerned with the interaction between human beings and nature, or how human beings relate to their natural environment both from the historical perspective and in contemporary situations.

1.6 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on two theories – ecocriticism and social constructionism - with the former being the overarching theory in the process of analysis and the latter being used for purposes of triangulation.

1.6.1 Ecocriticism

A number of definitions of the concept of ecocriticism have been proffered by a variety of scholars, among them Rueckert (1996) who suggests that ecocriticism is “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world”. For Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) as indicated above, ecocriticism is the study of the interaction between literature and the physical environment. In agreeing with the latter definition, this study argues that literature is a product of human beings while the physical environment is largely a product of nature. As Barry (2002: 255) indicates, nature may manifest itself in terms of the wilderness – which includes deserts, oceans and uninhabited land masses (such as the north pole or south pole, for example. Related to these expressions of nature are rivers, lakes, mountains, cliffs, waterfalls, and forests such as the Amazon.

However, since nature and human beings interact, there are also case of the latter intervening in the processes of nature – which intervention might be meant to either enhance nature or impede its existence. It might be argued, for example, that the parks, gardens and lawns grown and tendered by nature are a form of expression on the part of nature. Human beings, for example, have intervened to prevent or impede desertification by growing trees, just as they have acted to save endangered species. On the other hand, nature sometimes interferes with human development through such phenomena as floods, wild fires, hurricanes, among others. It would be argued, therefore, that the interaction between human beings and nature can be either positive or negative; can be harmonious or disruptive.

Ecocritics acknowledge the importance of culture in the humanity-nature equation. That is, they do acknowledge that, since human beings are creatures of culture, they interact with nature through their cultural baggage; they interpret some objects of nature, or natural phenomena, based on their own lived experience within the specific cultural context of which they are products. Ecocritics further argue that in their interaction with nature human beings can eventually move

from seeing nature as nature to seeing it from a cultural perspective; that is, moving from nature to culture (Barry 2002: 255).

Be that as it may, ecocritics reject the notion, common to many theories in the humanities, that reality is a linguistically or socially phenomenon rather than a fixed entity independent of cultural interpretation. While acknowledging that attitudes to or interpretations of natural objects or phenomena might differ according to cultural orientation, ecocritics contend that the attitudinal and interpretive variations do not bring the fact of the existence of the “reality” into question (Barry 2002: 254). In essence ecocriticism argues that nature plays a significant role in the interpretation of reality and may therefore help us understand some nature-related cultural practices.

Ecocriticism allows its practitioners to read or re-read literary texts with a focus on bringing out the role of nature in literature and its manifestation thereof as an entity or symbol. Nature should not be perceived only as a backdrop to a narrative or the setting, so to speak, but as an important ingredient in the development and understanding of the narrative. This is because narratives are about the human experience, and since nature is a factor in the human experience, it means nature is a critical player in the formation and transformation of human society. Hence, in analysing the intercourse between humans and nature in *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb*, this study proceeds from the premise that nature is not a passive ingredient of the narrative, but an active one.

1.6.2 Social Constructionism

The main argument of social constructionism is that reality is not a fixed or independent entity but is socially constructed. It is therefore concerned with how knowledge is constructed using the medium of language and how the daily interactions between people determines the construction of reality. The ontological concerns of social constructionism are related to the question of how culture influences our perception of reality.

The reason this theory has been adopted as one of the tools of analysis is that it supplements the ecocritical theory on the question of perception and the constructedness of reality. In other words, while this study uses ecocriticism as the main theory, it however takes the view that the role of culture in the interpretation of and creation of attitude to reality, in this case nature,

cannot be ignored. Hence the decision to include social constructionism so that the cultural elements embedded in the interaction between the characters and nature in the two novels under study may be taken care of. As ecocriticism itself acknowledges, different people react differently to natural stimuli, a phenomenon which is largely due to differences in cultural orientation.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative research design, with the desk approach being the main avenue of collecting data. The research instruments were the two selected primary texts, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Tongue of the Dumb* by Dominic Mulaisho, as well as a notebook which was used in data collection. The collected data was then subjected to critical analysis using the ecocritical and social constructionist approaches. Secondary data was collected from reading other relevant books and online sources. The findings from the two primary texts were then subjected to a comparative analysis to determine the similarities and differences.

1.8 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Things Fall Apart is deemed as the most famous African novel and has received more translations into other world languages than any other African work of fiction. *Tongue of the Dumb*, on the other hand, has not received as much scholarly acclaim or attention in terms of literary criticism. Be that as it may this study limits itself to a comparative ecocritical analysis of the two novels, although other elements of the two novels might be referred to as part of arguing out a point. Also, ecological comparisons might be drawn with other texts but the focus is still on the two novels.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One is the General Introduction and lays the basis for the whole study by dealing with critical foundational issues such as the background of the study, the aim or purpose of the study and its objectives and research questions; the statement of the problem as well as delimitation and significance of the study. It also deals with the methodological approach to the process of conducting the study. The second chapter, Literature Review, is concerned with the examination of texts that are related to the main focus of the study so as to contextualise it and demonstrate the knowledge gap being pursued. The third chapter is preoccupied with presenting synopses of the two selected texts,

Things Fall Apart and *Tongue of the Dumb*.

Chapters Four and Five are concerned with the ecocritical analysis of *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* respectively, while Chapter Six goes a step further by conducting a comparative analysis of the findings of the fourth and fifth chapters. Chapter Seven is the Summary of Findings and Conclusion.

1.10 DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

Natural phenomena: All phenomena that are not artificial.

Animism: The attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena.

Anthropomorphism: The attribution of human qualities to a non-human animal or to an object.

Cultural orientation: The inclination to feel, act or think in a way that is influenced by one's culture.

Nature-culture: A culture which is developed around nature and natural phenomena.

Nature-religion: A religion in which nature and natural phenomena play a central role.

Afroecophilosophy: An ecophilosophy centred on African beliefs and customs.

Afroecocriticism: An Afrocentric approach to ecocritical analysis.

1.11 CONCLUSION

This is the foundational chapter of the study. It focuses on key aspects upon which the rest of the work is based: the background to the study, the statement of the problem, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, theoretical framework, purpose of the study, objectives, research questions, and the definition of terms used in the study. The next chapter focuses on the literature reviewed in the course of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is the review of literature related to the study, particularly works that concern themselves, wholly or partially, with the relationship between literature and nature or the physical environment. It also concerns itself, to some extent, with what has been written about the two texts of interest, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Mulaisho's *The Tongue of the Dumb*. The main aim is to see what has been written from an ecocritical perspective, if any, about the two texts – but also what has not been written, with a view to situating the study's research question.

2.1 African Ecocriticism and Afroecophilosophy

Ecocriticism, as has been demonstrated in chapter one, has Anglo-American origins. However, its application goes beyond Anglo-American literature and, in the broadest sense, it can be applied to literatures written in any culture and to literatures produced before the birth of ecocriticism as an academic approach. In other words, environmental issues can be deduced from many written works, and, in the case of oral societies, even oral literature. This is because ecocritical analysis may be applied not only to works of fiction, such as the two novels which this work focuses on, but also other genres of literature such as poetry, drama and even non-fiction prose. Almost any literary work may be read as an environmental text in this sense.

If we are to stand by the argument that the literature of each society contains environmental issues, it follows that there are some environmental issues that are unique to some societies because of their unique nature. Uniqueness, in this regard, is not only in the geographical sense, but also in the cultural sense, especially because any landscape is also a culturescape – as has been argued by some scholars such as Syned Mthatiwa in his article “Animals, Nostalgia and Zimbabwe's Rural Landscape in the Poetry of Chenjerai Hove and Musaemura Zimunya” (2016: 276). Thus, if landscapes are culturescapes, it may be argued that it is not possible to separate a landscape from the cultural ethos and practices of the people that occupy it. It may be argued, further, that the geo-cultural context of a text should be taken into account when analysing its environmental content.

As a consequence of the above position, it would be justified to posit that there are some environmental issues that are peculiarly African and or peculiarly Zambian as we conduct an ecological analysis of African or Zambian texts. Thus, as the two texts of interest to this study – *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* – are subjected to ecocritical analysis, it is on the premise that they are an epitome of Nigerian and Zambian culturescapes respectively. Classified together, the two novels may be considered examples of African culturescapes.

It is in part because of the argument that landscapes and culturescapes that some scholars have contended that there is such a thing as African ecocriticism. Anthony Vital, the first scholar of African literary studies to use the term African ecocriticism, emphasises the need to pay attention to regional and national differences as well as colonial history when engaging in ecological analysis of African literature (2008: 88):

Ecocriticism, if it is to pose African questions and find African answers, will need to be rooted in local (regional, national) concern for social life and its natural environment. It will need too, to work from an understanding of the complexity of African pasts, taking into account the variety in African responses to currents of modernity that reached Africa from Europe initially, but that now influence Africa from multiple centres, European, American, and now Asia I the present form of the globalizing economy.

In using the term African ecocriticism, as is evident from the above statement, Vital does not suggest that it is an approach that is only peculiar to Africa. What he suggests, however, is that in applying the principles of ecocriticism we must adapt them to the peculiarities of the African historical and socio-cultural contexts. In other words, an ecocritical approach to African literature should be both global and local in application. This study agrees with this position and adopts it in the analysis of the two selected texts.

In another article entitled “Critical Intersections: Ecocriticism, Globalised Cities and African Narrative, with a Focus on K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*” (2016: 171), Vital states:

For an ecocriticism within and for Africa, the task would be to think of all that makes African worlds distinct, both in relation to worlds on other continents and within Africa – while also acknowledging points at which Africa participates in global realities. Such ecocriticism would incorporate available natural and social- scientific

scholarship reflecting local concerns, while advancing understanding of the formal features of African literary discourse.

Wu (2016: 146) holds a similar view to Vital, advocating an “Africa-focused ecocriticism”. Wu further argues that

ecocriticism in Africa involves interdisciplinary and contextual understandings of African environments. For example, without gaining a rich, complex understanding of indigenous African cultures as historically situated and politically diverse entities, one may not fully grasp the meaning of an indigenous African ‘kincentric’ attachment to the land (157).

Similarly, Slaymaker (2007) advocates for an increase in the number of “Afroecophilosophers” or advocates of what he terms African “ecophilosophy” or “Afroecophilosophy”. Afroecophilosophy is essentially what Vital terms African ecocriticism. This study adopts both terms but also suggests the use of a term based on a conflation of Vital’s terminology: Afroecocriticism.

In tackling the question of African ecocriticism, Wu (2016: 141) asks some pertinent questions: “What is African environmental literature? What environmental issues are revealed in African literature? How do African authors represent African environments?” It may be argued that African environmental literature, from Wu’s perspective and in the context of this study, is any African literature that deals with environmental issues. Wu’s third question may be applied to this study: How do Achebe and Mulaisho represent African environments in *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* respectively?

Proponents of African ecocriticism are just among the literary scholars or ecocritics who argue against a universalist approach to ecocriticism. Wu (2016: 143) argues, for example, that since environment “is not a universal concept” it follows that “ecocriticism cannot be founded on universal principles”. The main currency of this position is the argument that – as stated earlier – every society is unique, so is the environment in which it is situated. Geo-cultural, spatial and chronological factors make it inadvisable to adopt a universalist approach to ecocritical analysis. This study agrees with this position because ecocriticism, as a theoretical approach, developed from Anglo-American nature writing – in a particular geo-cultural space at a particular period of history. Thus, while some elements of ecocriticism are of universal

application, some are not. Therefore, the best approach is to consider the local conditions, or the conditions of the setting, when conducting an ecocritical analysis of literary texts.

It has been argued by some scholars, for example, that in view of the differences between colonial and postcolonial literature it is not possible to apply the same approach when analysing the two literatures ecologically. DeLoughrey and Handley (2005), who are among the pioneer ecocritics of postcolonial literature, particularly Caribbean literature, warn against the dangers of universalism. Similarly, Wu (2016: 143-4) deals with the danger of universalism by drawing a contrast between the land of the coloniser and that of the colonised, and between the land of the conqueror and that of the conquered:

Although Anglo-American nature writing targets the impact of modernity, especially that of industrialism, capitalism and technology, on colonial societies' home environments, it pays less attention to the fact that both modernity and industrialism go hand in hand with European colonial expansions into non-European regions, and that colonialism had led to environmental degradation in these places. In addition, modernity, followed by capitalism and industrialism, is not a universal development in human cultures (as many Anglo-American writers tend to assume). Instead, it was introduced to or imposed on non-European lands and cultures. For example, although British Romantic writing criticises the impact of industrialism and the enclosure system on British rural lands, it might ignore the dispossession of non-Europeans and the exploitation of their lands caused by British colonisation. Likewise, although American nature writers like John Nuir in the late 19th century and Edward Abbey in the mid 20th century appreciate American wilderness and argue for its protection in their writings, they tend to ignore the fact that the American wilderness cannot exist without the removal and dispossession of Native Americans from their homeland.

Wu (154) draws a direct contrast between Anglo-American ecocriticism and African ecocriticism:

To be more specific, whereas Anglo-American environmental literature critiques the impact of modernity, industrialism and technology on human society, such as the alienation of humans from nature, and pollution and climate change, African environmental literature critiques the impact of colonialism/neocolonialism and globalisation on African environments, such as the weakening of indigenous inhabitants' attachment to the land and dispossession of the land.

Wu argues, further, that it is critical to confront the question of what ‘environment’ means in the African context and the related question of what shapes the African environmental consciousness (144). What does environment mean to specific African ethnic groups? It is imperative, Wu contends, to consider the causes of environmental crisis and ecological degradation in Africa as well as the question of how African literary writers approach environmental issues in their works (144). Without an exploration of the roots of African environmental literature and criticism, Wu (145) cautions, “non-Africanist scholars may be inclined to treat ecocriticism in Africa more or less as an extension of globalised Anglo-American ecocriticism, as if the former has to participate in global environmental issues under the guidance of the latter.”

While agreeing with the argument against universalism in ecocritical analysis, Caminero-Santangelo and Myers suggest, in their seminal collection *Environment at the Margines: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa* (2011), that there is need for interdisciplinary ecocritical studies in Africa-focused efforts. They emphasise “the need for dialogue across disciplines to develop better understanding of different discourses regarding African environments and people’s relationships with them” (2011: 2). It is the position of this study that cross-discipline ecocritical studies can help understand African environmental issues – meaning, therefore, that ecocriticism can draw lessons from the findings of environmentalists and climatologists, *inter alia*.

That said, however, this study is confined to an analysis of the two selected literary texts and will not venture into the findings of other disciplines on matters of the African environment. In addition, the main guiding principle of this study is that the peculiarities of the African environment, specifically those of Zambia and Nigeria as projected in *Tongue of the Dumb* and *Things Fall Apart* respectively, will be taken into account when conducting an ecocritical analysis of the texts. Further, the analysis will take into account the historical context of the two texts – that is to say, the fact that both texts are situated in the colonial era and very traditional African set-ups.

2.2 Literature on *Tongue of the Dumb*

The volume of critical studies on *Tongue of the Dumb* is far below what is available on *Things Fall Apart*, not just for the obvious reason that the former work is less famous than the latter, but also for the equally obvious reason that the writer of the former is less famous than the writer of the latter. In his 2007 dissertation Muyendekwa focused on images of women in a

number of Zambian novels including *Tongue of the Dumb*. He argues that Mulaisho's work exhibits a patriarchal Nsenga society in which women play peripheral roles economically, politically and socially and are stereotyped negatively.

An earlier work is a paper entitled "Jesuit Missionary Types and Nsenga Responses in Dominic Mulaisho's *The Tongue of the Dumb*" published by Hal in 1999. The study focuses on the interaction between the Jesuit missionaries and the Nsenga people especially in view of the differences in beliefs and practices. In addition the paper concerns itself with the factors influencing Mulaisho's religious and cultural perspective as projected in the narrative of the novel. Further, the work interrogates the theme of racism as exhibited in the novel. In 2005 Macola published a study entitled "Imagining Village Life in Zambian Fiction" which also concerns itself with the cultural beliefs and practices of the people of Mpona village. Additionally the study concerns itself with the behaviour of selected characters in the face of racial prejudice and oppression.

On the other hand William Purcell's study (2012) focuses, in part, on Mulaisho's interrogation of the missionisation process of the Nsenga people in *Tongue of the Dumb*. The study suggests that Mulaisho's missiological views are motivated and shaped by the Jesuit theology propagated by Pedro Arupe – particularly the idea that an exemplary Christian life was paramount in the process of Christianisation. Mulaisho, according to Purcell, projects Arupe as the epitome of Christian living. He is presented as the opposite of Father Oliver who, instead of living a life of genuinely serving the people and promoting justice, discriminates against the local people.

None of the works highlighted above concerns itself with ecological issues of *Tongue of the Dumb*. This is the gap that this study, in part, seeks to fill as it is concerned with conducting an eco-critical analysis of the novel.

2.3 Literature on *Things Fall Apart*

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is not only the best known, most internationally translated and best-selling African novel: it has also received the most attention from literary critics and scholars within and outside the African continent. It is therefore not necessary – and indeed not possible – to review of what has been written about it since its publication in 1958. The critical works on *Things Fall Apart* include not only what he himself wrote, but also what others wrote. For example, in his collection of essays, *The Education of a British-Protected Child* (2009)

Achebe expresses his views on a variety of issues pertaining to the nation of Nigeria and its history, and also on some aspects of his literary works such as *Things Fall Apart*. Another critical work which also comments on some aspects of his works such as *Things Fall Apart* is *Home and Exile* (2003), a work in which, among other things, he attempts to deal with the common assumption that his university classroom encounter with Joyce Carey's controversial novel *Mister Johnson* is largely what prompted him to write *Things Fall Apart*.

Among the many critical works written about his works in general and *Things Fall Apart* in particular is the collection of essays, *Tributes and Reflections* (2014), written as a tribute to him upon his death in the United States in 2013 at the age of 82. One of the contributors to the book, Nadine Gordimer, says of *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's maiden work: "Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe's first novel, is also the founding creation of modern African imaginative literature, the opening act of exploration of African consciousness in terms that took full right to use traditional modes of expression along with those appropriated from colonial culture, particularly the English language" (2014: 28).

2.3.1 Ecocritical Literature on *Things Fall Apart*

In order to narrow the focus of the review of works written about the novel, this study will concentrate on some of the works written about it from an ecocritical perspective. *Things Fall Apart* has been analysed and criticised using all manner of critical approaches – Marxist, feminist, deconstructionist, psychoanalytical, historical, postcolonial, moral/philosophical, structuralist, *inter alia*. However, as Wu (2016: 141) posits, the novel "can also be read as an environmental novel". Wu further contends (142):

I argue that Achebe represents the indigenous Igbo relationship with the land and the earth goddess (Ani) – a relationship between ancestral spirits, gods, use of the land, harvest and community sustainability – in order to critique how the advent of British colonialism undermines that relationship....recent environmental readings of Achebe's novel remind us that to understand environmental issues in the context of the Igbo society represented by Achebe, we need to understand not only the physical environment of Igboland, but also the Igbo people's relationship with it through spiritual and social practices. Achebe's novel therefore represents traditional Igbo cultural life as intertwined with environmental concerns that are also necessarily social.

What Wu says of environmental issues in *Things Fall Apart* vis a vis Igboland and culture is also applicable to *Tongue of the Dumb*: it is important to situate the analysis in the context of the relationship between the Nsenga people and their land as historically and culturally presented by Mulaisho. The link between the land and ancestral oversight is very important.

In reading *Things Fall Apart* as an environmental novel, Wu (142) warns against the temptation to look at it from the perspective of Anglo-American environmental literature. According to Wu, the “indigenous environmentalism” (142) of the novel is critical because it might make it difficult for an Anglo-American ecological perspective to see the environmental issues. Even the question of what constitutes environment cannot be answered the same way by the Igbo and the western reader (142): “In the case of Achebe’s novel, the environment refers to the Igbo land as a *whole* – composed of the inhabitants, the gods and ancestral spirits they worship, the village compounds, as well as the forests surrounding the community.” It may be argued that the conception of environment by the Nsenga people of Mulaisho’s fictional world is closer to the Igbo view than the western one.

Wu’s argument is similar to Nchoujie Augustine’s view in his work “Things Fall Apart Fifty Years After: An Ecological Reading” (2009: 107) in which he concerns himself with the “ecological component” of *Things Fall Apart*. The article focuses on how Achebe weaves his environmental consciousness into the novel through such aspects as the imagery of the African forest and how the forest relates to Igbo customs and the people’s sustainability. Augustine’s position is worth noting because it is not possible to conduct an African eco-critical reading of an African novel set in the traditional African context without having to deal with the question of the relationship between the land the customs and sustainability of the inhabitants. Hence issues of land and its relationship to the people is a key concern of this study.

Wu (2016) suggests that *Things Fall Apart*, in dealing with environmental issues, to some extent – and in a subtle manner – subverts the colonial enterprise as experienced in Igboland. DeLoughrey and Handley lend weight to this argument by drawing attention, in the introduction to the book *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011: 7), to what they refer to as the “narrative shift” of *Things Fall Apart* from an oral, Igbo-centred narrative (as reflected in the first two parts of the novel) to a written, colonial-dominated narrative (as revealed by the District Commissioner’s book *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Lower Niger* in the last part of the novel). The narrative shift, DeLoughrey and Handley postulate, suggests Achebe’s critique of the environmental transformation of Igboland

caused by European colonisation and Christian missionisation. It might be argued, in support of this view, that the Evil Forest, sustained by centuries of beliefs and customs by the indigenous people, becomes threatened when the missionaries gladly accept the offer to build their church there. It is worth noting, at this juncture, that the twin forces of European colonisation and Christian missionisation are also a factor in the environmental issues of *Tongue of the Dumb*.

Another work that deals with environmental issues in *Things Fall Apart* is an article entitled “An Eco-Critical Study of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*” written by Moslem Zolfagharkhani and Reyhaneh Sadat Shadpour and published in *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* (2013). The article analyses the novel ecocritically, problematising the process and fact of colonisation. The article argues that Igbo society had a strong bond with nature before the dawn of colonisation and tried to defend this bond from the invasion of colonisation. Further, the article attempts to illustrate this argument via reference to various events and characters in the narrative of the novel. This study is inclined to agree with this argument and the related argument that the bond between nature and the Igbo people is one of the elements that falls apart in *Things Fall Apart*.

Zolfagharkhani and Shadpour are not alone in expressing the view that colonisation, as presented in *Things Fall Apart*, led to environmental degradation. Gitanjali Gogoi also published a work entitled “An Ecocritical Approach to Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*” in *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (2014). Departing from the premise that the combination of ecocriticism and postcolonialism has given a new impetus to the whole critical thought of giving new insight to the ideas of race, land, environment and wilderness, *inter alia*, the article posits that pre-colonial African society lived in an inviolate state of nature and that it was the colonial enterprise that led to environmental degradation. This study, however, goes beyond the argument that colonisation led to the degradation of the environment in colonial Africa: it also concerns itself with the whole relationship of the Igbo and Nsenga people to their environment as understood from an indigenous perspective.

Apart from being subjected to ecocritical analysis by non-African scholars as demonstrated above, *Things Fall Apart* has also been ecocritically analysed by African scholars. A case in point is the study by Nigerian scholar Stella Okoye-Ugwu entitled *Going Green: An Ecocritical Reading of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart* (<https://oer.unn.edu.ng>. Accessed on 15 February 2019).

At the core of the study is the argument that human culture is connected to the physical world and that ecocriticism is therefore concerned with, or should be concerned with, the interconnection between culture and nature. It is against the backdrop of this argument that Okoye-Ugwu analyses the ecological issues of Umuofia as presented in *Things Fall Apart*. As already demonstrated, repeatedly, the current study acknowledges the centrality of the relationship between culture and nature.

As indicated earlier, there are numerous studies on the content of *Things Fall Apart*, and that even the works on eco-critical analysis of the novel discussed above do not constitute an exhaustive list. In some general and even specific respects there will be similarities in the concerns of the works reviewed and those of this study. However, the gap that none of these studies deals with is the comparison between *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* in terms of the ecological content.

2.4 Review of Other Texts

2.4.1 Relationship between Nature and Culture

Apart from some of the scholars whose works have been reviewed above, there are other scholars that also view the relationship between nature and culture as foundational to and indispensable in any ecocritical study especially of African literary texts. On the other hand, as Borlik (2011: 14) argues, there are some scholars who view nature as a cultural construct, meaning each one of us possesses “a cultural apparatus that conditions our experience of the world”. Borlik’s argument is central to the approach taken by this study – that is to say, that an understanding of the cultural dynamics of the two texts, *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb*, is critical to the process of ecocritical analysis and the findings.

On the opposite end of argument that nature is a social construct is inextricably linked to culture is the argument, as explained by Borlik (2011), that nature is independent of culture; that it exists on its own and does not depend on any person’s experience or interpretation of it. This study, however, is more inclined – as already stated – to side with the argument that nature, or the interpretation therefore, is tied to culture. That is not to say that nature bears no physical reality. The argument is that culture determines how the physical reality is interpreted; that in some ways culture constructs nature.

There is a third school of thought, however, to which Buell and other scholars subscribe: what Borlik refers to as “mutual constructionism” (2011: 15). According to this view, it is not just culture which constructs nature but that the opposite is also true – that nature also constructs culture. From the perspective of this study, however, the impact of nature on culture is minimal compared to the reverse process.

2.4.2 Land and Mythology

Musiyiwa places land and its relationship to Shona mythology front and centre of his article entitled “Shona as a Land-based Nature-Culture: A Study of the (Re)Construction of Shona Land Mythology in Popular Songs” (2016). He proceeds from the premise that the interpretation of the meaning of land is not the same in all cultures. “... the dictionary definition of land is that part of the earth’s surface not covered by sea, as a concept, and has often been interpreted in different ways by societies and historical eras in terms of its value and the benefits that humans accrue from it” (Musiyiwa in Moolla 2016: 51). Further, Musiyiwa contends that the Shona cultural orientation of land is responsible for their interpretation of land. He thus advances the case for a Shona land mythology which according to him is shaped by the “cultural beliefs and practices about land that appears in traditional narratives, songs, verse and rituals, and which have historically shaped the Shona people’s interaction with land” (53).

Musiyiwa argues that the terms myth and mythology, like the term land, are equally subject to differences in interpretation because of their fluid nature. As Kirk (1974: 19) contents, the meaning of the two terms may vary according to sociocultural and historical contexts in which they are applied. Thus, as Leach (1954: 6) posits, whereas in its ordinary sense the term myth refers to something untrue, that is not the case with traditional stories told in the context of mythology because such stories are “true for those who use them”. It would be possible, therefore, to apply this argument to the story of creation in the Bible: while some people might dismiss it as no more than a myth, for most Christians the story of Adam and Eve is true. It might be further argued, especially in view of the content of the two texts studied in the current work, that what to some outsiders might be interpreted as mere superstition is considered true by the indigenous people.

Musiyiwa sees such a close relationship between nature and Shona culture as exhibited by Shona land mythology that he insists that the culture of the Shona is a “nature-culture” (2016: 53). Apart from the centrality of land to this nature-culture, Musiyiwa is of the view that orality is critical to the projection and interpretation of African mythology in general and Shona

mythology in particular. He opines, further, that the interpretation and function of mythology in oral societies, which is essentially what traditional African society was, is not the same as in literate societies. In oral societies, according to him, mythology should be seen as “a body or corpus of myths that belong to a particular culture, and tell about heroes and heroines, and gods and other supernatural beings” (52).

Be that as it may, this study recognises the fact that every literate society developed from an oral one – that oral literature preceded written literature as we now know it. It further recognises the view taken by Bulfinch (1981: 10) that “mythology is the handmaid of literature” – meaning it plays a critical role in understanding literature. He argues that without the knowledge of mythology it would not be possible to understand some literature or allusions in literature because where reference is made to, for example, some aspects of Greek mythology (such as Helen of Troy) such references are “lost to the reader ignorant of mythology” (1981: 10). This study recognises the fact that the first recorded work of western literature is Homer’s the *Iliad*, originally produced and transmitted orally.

Bulfinch states – and this study agrees – that what was originally part of the oral era of Greek history is still an important part of the arts (1981: 13):

The religions of ancient Greece and Rome are extinct. The so-called divinities of Olympus have not a single worshipper among living men. They belong now not to the department of theology, but to those of literature and taste. There they still hold their place, and will continue to hold it, for they are too closely connected with the finest productions of poetry and art, both ancient and modern, to pass into oblivion.

Similarly, Evslin (1966) talks of the fact that Greek mythology contains aspects of the gods (such as Zeus, Aphrodite, Hermes and Poseidon), demi-gods (such as Atalanta and Daedalus), fables (such as those about Midas and Pygmalion), and nature myths (such as those about Prometheus, Pandora, Orpheus, Narcissus, among others). He states (1966: 205):

Many of the characters, events, and places of the Greek myths have entered the English language. It is interesting to see how these words have been derived from Greek tales, and how the names of gods, goddesses, heroes, and monsters have become a part of our everyday speech.

It must be noted, however, that at the time when the Greek religion was practised, the adherents believed that did indeed exist and that what we consider Greek myths, according to them, were

events that actually occurred. Thus, for example, that the likes of Oedipus and Odysseus had indeed walked the earth and interacted with the gods, and that events such as the Trojan War did actually take place in the ancient world.

2.4.3 Nature, Food and Foodways

Human beings depend on nature to survive – or more specifically the land, with its water bodies, flora and fauna. They grow food on the land and so, in examining the relationship between human beings and nature, it may help to determine the foodways of a particular society. This idea may be extended to the ecological analysis of literary texts, a view which Highfield (2016: 27) appears to support when he states: “Paying attention to food in African narratives – considering what is eaten and how it is grown or procured, and by whom – influences one’s understanding of what is happening in the story.”

What Highfield postulates is of great relevance to this study, which will make an effort to examine the food and foodways of the Nsenga and Igbo people as presented in *Tongue of the Dumb* and *Things Fall Apart* respectively. Highfield asserts – and this study agrees – thus: “Food and foodways are the bridge between human culture and the natural environment” (27). He argues, therefore, that the food and foodways of any society cannot be detached from environmental issues.

2.4.4 Nature and Traditional African Religion

In his seminal article, “The Environment as Significant Other: The Green Nature of Shona Indigenous Religion” (2016: 79), Mapara postulates:

The central principle of African indigenous religions is the importance of all life forms. This is why these religions can be considered biocentric – in other words, their doctrines include the necessity to preserve life. Although some African indigenous religions practiced human sacrifice most of them did not.

Mapara draws our attention to the sacrifice of Ikemefuna in *Things Fall Apart* – an example of one of the cases where a human being is sacrificed. However, he argues that that is an exception rather than the rule.

Mapara postulates that African traditional religion may be classified as green religion (2016: 94):

African indigenous religions, also called African traditional religions in other circles, can be called green religions, not because the practitioners and believers worship nature but because the preservation and use of natural goods in a sustainable manner are at their core. The major tenets of these religions are practices known as taboos, which set out rules that have to be adhered to if one is not to upset the ancestral and alien spirits, believed to provide guidance to the living. The observance of taboos has also gone a long way in promoting biodiversity in communities where these practices occur.

Taboos are a common feature of traditional African societies – and the societies as portrayed in *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* are no different.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on reviewing literature: starting with literature that deals with the question of African ecocriticism and Afroecophilosophy. The study agrees with the argument that a universalist ecocritical approach is not appropriate for the study of environmental issues in African literature. The study argues that, on the contrary, African ecocriticism is a helpful tool in dealing with environmental issues of African literature. Further the study notes that there are more critical works on *Things Fall Apart* than on *Tongue of the Dumb* and that while there are ecocritical works on the former there are none on the latter – a situation which leaves a clear knowledge gap for this study to fill. The fact that none of the ecocritical on *Things Fall Apart* do not draw any comparison with *Tongue of the Dumb* is another knowledge gap that this study will address.

CHAPTER THREE

SYNOPSIS OF *THINGS FALL APART* AND *TONGUE OF THE DUMB*

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on presenting synopses of the two novels selected for the study – *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *The Tongue of the Dumb* by Dominic Mulaisho. It therefore neither goes into details nor deals with the ecocritical issues of the two texts.

3.1 Things Fall Apart

First published in 1958 by the Heinemann Education Books, *Things Fall Apart* was written by Chinua Achebe, arguably Africa's best known and most widely read author. The novel itself is in fact the most famous and most widely read African work of prose fiction, with more than eight million copies sold in English and translated into at least fifty languages around the world. It was written in Nigeria before the country obtained independence from the British.

The novel is set in colonial Nigeria, just when European missionaries were settling on the continent in general and in particular this part of West Africa. More specifically most of the action occurs in rural Nigeria, particularly Umuofia and Mbanta villages of the Igbo people. Weaved around Okonkwo as the protagonist, *Things Fall Apart* is thematically concerned with the conflict between traditional Igbo culture and western culture.

The author, Achebe, himself an Igbo and therefore well-versed in Igbo culture, was born in 1930 in Nigeria, in the Igbo town of Ogidi. He was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, the child of a Protestant missionary. He received his early education in English, attending the Government College in Umuahia from 1944 to 1947. He graduated from the University College, Ibadan, in 1953. In college Achebe studied English, history and theology. He however developed a profound interest in his indigenous Nigerian culture, which might explain why, while at university, he rejected his Christian name, Albert, in preference for his Igbo name, Chinua.

Achebe derived the title of the novel from the first stanza of the poem by William Butler Yeats entitled, 'The Second Coming' (Roberts and Jacobs 2007: 999):

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

The essence of 'The Second Coming' is that a new era is coming and an old one passing away. The phrase 'the second coming' generally refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ for the salvation of believers and the damnation of the wicked. According to biblical prophecy, the second coming would be preceded by epidemics, famine, wars between nations, and other calamities and confusion. Societies and nations would no longer be stable. In terms of the content of *Things Fall Apart*, the concept is that Igbo society has fallen apart, and a new era has dawned to replace the old era.

Most of the action of the novel evolves around Umuofia, which is part of nine connected villages. The protagonist, Okonkwo, is one of the high-ranking and respected members of his tribe, having accumulated wealth and some titles because of his own hard work. Okonkwo raised himself up to higher heights through hard work because his father, Unoka, left him nothing from which to start his adult life. This is due to the fact that Unoka was lazy, poor, indebted and a non-achiever. Okonkwo rejects his father's lifestyle and works hard to be different.

Unlike his father, Okonkwo is a warrior of the clan and a wealthy farmer. He worries that his twelve-year-old son Nwoye might end up like Unoka because he exhibits signs of laziness and femininity. On the other hand he is proud of his daughter, Ezinma, whom he sees as expression of masculine qualities that are missing in his son. However, as part of a conflict settlement with the neighbouring clan of Mbaino, Umuofia is offered a virgin and a fifteen-year-old young man, Ikemefuna. The latter is given to Okonkwo to look after by the village elders, collectively known as the *ndichie*, an entity of which Okonkwo is part. Ikemefuna stays in Okonkwo's

household for three years and develops a close relationship with Nwoye – a relationship which helps transform Nwoye into a more masculine person.

However, in the course of time Ogbuefi Ezeudu, one of the village elders, informs Okonkwo that the Oracle of Ezeudu has declared that Ikemefuna must be killed. He further advises Okonkwo not to participate in the killing of the boy who now calls him ‘father’. Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna that he has to be returned to his village. As the men of the village walk with the boy through the forest, they attack him. He runs to Okonkwo for help. However, fearing that he would be thought weak, Okonkwo finishes off the Ikemefuna, contrary to the declaration of the Oracle. When Okonkwo returns home, he is unable to sleep or eat because of depression. Nwoye is able to tell that the men had killed Ikemefuna. It is only when Okonkwo visits his friend Obierika that he feels better.

However, Okonkwo’s participation in the killing marked the beginning of his downfall. When Ogbuefi Ezeudu dies, Okonkwo attends the funeral. However, his gun accidentally fires, killing Ezeudu’s sixteen-year-old son. However, because killing a clansman is an abomination against the earth goddess, Okonkwo and his family have to go into exile to atone for the crime. Thus he goes to Mbanta, his maternal village, where he stays for seven years as part of the punishment. The men of Ogbuefi Ezeudu’s family burn Okonkwo’s buildings and kill his animals to cleanse the village of his abomination. He is received by his mother’s relatives, particularly his uncle Uchendu.

During his time in exile Okonkwo receives briefs about happenings in his village from his friend Obierika, who visits him whenever he can. In Mbanta, however, Okonkwo has to start afresh after losing his property in Umuofia. In the second year of Okonkwo’s exile, Obierika brings several bags of cowries, which were used as currency - proceeds from selling Okonkwo’s yams. Obierika also informs Okonkwo that Abame, another village, has been destroyed by the white colonial government for killing a white missionary.

Not long after this six missionaries led by Mr Brown visit Mbanta accompanied by an interpreter called Mr Kiaga. They try to convert the villagers to Christianity. However, Mr Brown dies and is replaced by Reverend James Smith. While Mr Brown was tolerant and flexible in his approach to evangelisation, Smith is intolerant and strict. Hence some of the converts become hardliners, among them Enoch, who dares to unmask an *egwugwu* during the

annual ceremony to honour the earth goddess. To the villagers, this act is equivalent to killing an ancestral spirit. The next day the *egwugwu* burn down Enoch's compound and Reverend Smith's church building.

However, the burning of the church angers the District Commissioner, who then throws the elders of Umuofia in jail, where they endure insults and physical abuse. When the elders are released from prison, the clansmen hold a meeting at which they discuss how to react to the white man's humiliation of the elders. However, two court messengers arrive on the scene and order clansmen to desist from breaking the law. Angered by the messengers' order, Okonkwo strikes one of them with a machete, killing him on the spot, while the other escapes. He kills the messenger on the assumption that his clansmen will join in the rebellion. However, none of the clansmen is willing to join the fight, and Okonkwo realises he is doomed. Hence he hangs himself. None of the men of Umuofia is willing to pull Okonkwo's body from the tree where it hangs because, according to custom, suicide is a grave sin and none of Okonkwo's clansmen may touch his body.

3.2 The Tongue of the Dumb

The Tongue of the Dumb is a Zambian novel by Dominic Mulaisho and first published in 1971 under the African Writers Series of Heinemann Educational Publishers. In 1989 it was reprinted by Multimedia Zambia Publications, and then again in 2007 by Maiden Publishing House. The author, Mulaisho, was born in Feira, eastern Zambia. He was raised Roman Catholic, an identity which is reflected in the content of the novel in that the missionaries in the narrative are Catholics.

The events covered in *The Tongue of the Dumb* take place between 1948 and 1949 and are mainly woven around the village of Mpona under the leadership of Chief Mpona and Katondwe mission. The village is economically impoverished and morally challenged. Witchcraft and superstition form part of the ethos by which the villagers live. There are constant threats of hunger and instability. The chief, Mpona, had run mad at some point and, at the start of the story, had returned to rule. During his absence the chiefdom had been run by one of his councillors, Lubinda. The novel is a clash between the Christian religion (and its agents the missionaries) on the one hand and, on the other, indigenous culture and traditional authority.

Lubinda, whose name literally means "the argumentative one," dominates the narrative and events in the village, and epitomises, to a large extent, the cultural clash that ravages the village of Mpona. A sophisticated and wily schemer, Lubinda manipulates people and situations with the ultimate purpose of taking over the leadership role from Mpona. He is also the village medicine man, so people even

suspect him of being behind Mpona's running mad. Instead of protecting and advising Chief Mpona, Lubinda plays the chief against the whites and against the villagers. He hopes to benefit from the confusion and resulting mistrust. Apart from being an evil schemer, Lubinda is also characterised by lust and greed. The main target of his lust is Natombi, a widowed woman whose husband, Dulani, perishes in a flood that devastates the area. He also targets Aphunzitsi, the teacher who falls victim to Lubinda's scheming and is driven from the village.

The floods that kill Dulani mark the start of a series of unfortunate events that plague the village of Mpona. A plague of locusts destroys everything green leaving the fields and forest bare. Leprosy eats up the limbs of some of the eldest people and a cyclonic whirlwind ravages part of the village. The colonialists impose poll tax on the Mpona villagers and a rifle explodes and kills Silwamia, a village elder, during a game hunt. In addition frost burns out all the maize crop. Famine ravages the village and breeds despair, fear and uncertainty.

While these unfortunate occurrences could be attributed to nature, Chief Mpona is convinced that they are a result of anger and displeasure on the part of the ancestral spirits because of the failure on the part of the villagers to follow the long-held traditions. Lubinda takes advantage of the situation to convince some villagers that the occurrences are due to witchcraft on the part of some individuals. Once he convinces the villagers, Lubinda goes further to convince them to bring in a *kamcape* to identify and deal with the witches and wizards in the village. However Lubinda manipulates the process.

In the end a number of people are declared practitioners of witchcraft, among them Nyalutila and Chief Mpona himself, who is placed under house arrest while awaiting the return of the *kamcape* after a month. During this period Lubinda manages to heighten suspicions against Mpona, the teacher and Natombi. So entrenched is the witchcraft suspicion that when Nyalutila returns to the village with a delegation of Christians with food aid, the villagers refuse to accept it. In the end, though, the truth comes out: Lubinda's evil schemes are exposed and he fails to take over the chieftdom. Lubinda's body is discovered already in a rotten state and peace is restored to the village.

3.3 CONCLUSION

The main concern of the study is to reread the texts from an ecocritical perspective and identify elements that deal with the interaction between nature and the villagers. What aspects of the events are due to nature, which due to religion and or witchcraft? What is the relationship between superstition and nature? The next chapter focuses on the ecocritical analysis of *Things Fall Apart*.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF *THINGS FALL APART*

4.0 Introduction

Having, in the earlier chapters, established the foundational issues of the study and especially the aim and objectives, this chapter shifts focus to the analysis of the content of the two novels. In this particular chapter the focus is on the ecological issues arising in *Things Fall Apart*. The analysis shall be conducted by means of the ecocritical approach and social constructionism, the former being the main tool of analysis. The role of the social constructionist approach is to contextualise the ecological issues from an African perspective. The analysis shall be conducted by compartmentalising it into themes.

4.1 Interaction with Nature

Since the social constructionist approach is a complementary tool of analysis in this study, it might be imperative to indicate from the outset that the interaction with nature on the part of the Igbo people as presented in *Things Fall Apart* is informed and influenced by their belief system and their perception of natural phenomena. In other words, the ecophilosophy of the Igbo people, or the Afroecophilosophy as Slaymaker (2007) calls it, is cardinal to the relationship of the Igbo people to nature because, as Borlik (2011: 14) argues – and as already conceded above – our cultural ethos “conditions our experience of the world”.

It might be argued, however, that even an individual’s own experience with nature, or attitude to natural phenomena, may lead to differences in perceptions of nature. Thus, for example, while the Igbo people as portrayed in the text are hardworking and place a high premium on farming, Okonkwo’s father Unoka has seasons which he likes and those which he dislikes. While his son is a hard worker and will not shy away from tough work such as tilling the land, Unoka – by any standard a lazy man – hated the seasons of planting and harvesting. On the contrary “his happiest moments were the two or three moons after the harvest when the village musicians brought down their instruments, hung above the fireplace” (Achebe 1958: 4). The text adds that Unoka would play in various places where he was invited because this is the time people would be celebrating their harvests, his face “beaming with blessedness and peace” (4).

Thus, while other people saw the season of planting and harvesting as a gift from nature, Unoka saw it as a disturbance, like an unwelcome visitor. To the bulk of the Igbo people the season

of rain was welcome not just for the purpose of growing crops but also because it was “the time for treading red earth with which to build walls” (148). Unoka did not see it that way, and that is why he was unable even to feed his family. What the text further says about Unoka and his preferred season is quite revealing (4):

Unoka loved the good fare and the good fellowship, and he *loved this season of the year*, when the rains had stopped and the sun rose every morning with dazzling beauty. And it was not too hot either, because the cold and dry harmattan wind was blowing down from the north. Some years the harmattan was very severe and a dense haze hung on the atmosphere. Old men and children would then sit round log fires, warming their bodies. Unoka loved it all, *and he loved the first kites that returned with the dry season*, and the children who sang songs of welcome to them. He would remember his own childhood, how he had often *wandered around looking for a kite sailing leisurely against the blue sky*. As soon as he found one he would sing with his whole being, welcoming it back from its long, long journey, and asking it if it had brought home any lengths of cloth (emphasis mine).

From the textual evidence above, Unoka preferred the warm season when the rains had stopped. He loved the sight of the dazzling beauty of the sun as it rose in the morning – as if nature was smiling at him. Even when the harmattan was severe, forcing old men and children to warm themselves by the fire Unoka was happy. His eyes feasted on the sight of the returning kites.

One detail is worth noting here: that Unoka enjoyed the season so much that he would become nostalgic, remembering the days of his childhood when he would welcome the season and the birds that announced its arrival. It is worth noting, further, that Unoka would wander around, watching the heavens, “looking for a kite sailing leisurely against the blue sky”. This suggests that Unoka’s laziness did not arise in his youth or adulthood but bedevilled him from childhood. Why would he particularly look for a kite flying “leisurely”? It is almost as if he saw, in this natural flight of the kite, a model of what he wanted his life to be: a life of leisure and enjoyment, and easy life. It might be argued, in light of this observation, that Unoka’s relationship with nature was ambivalent: he only liked what suited his lifestyle and preferences. This view is given further currency by the textual revelation that Unoka would ask the kite that flew leisurely whether it had brought any pieces of cloth home. Since the kite did not need the cloth, it might be argued that Unoka would have wanted the cloth for himself; a free gift from nature.

Unoka's attitude to work stands in stark contrast to that of his son Okonkwo, about whom we read (13): "During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cock-crow until the chickens went to roost. He was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue. But his wives and young children were not as strong, and so they suffered." To Okonkwo, therefore, the rains are welcome, as is the season of harvest. It is partly because of his hard work on the land that he earns an esteemed name and titles. He is prosperous largely because of his farming exploits; he is "a wealthy farmer" (7). The text further says of him (13):

Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or *chi*, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the obi. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it.

If Okonkwo is the Igbo epitome of hard work, Unoka is the epitome of the opposite. While the former exploits the provisions of nature to feed himself and his family, Unoka only exploits other people's labours on the soil.

The ambivalence in Unoka's relationship to nature, however, is not peculiar to him: it is suggested throughout the text. Nature is both friend and foe of the Igbo people, both welcome and unwelcome, both ally and nemesis, depending on the situation. This appears to be the case, for example, with regard to the people's relationship with locusts which, despite being a destructive force to the livelihood of the people, are still appreciated as food. The locusts come with a deep sense of foreboding; their arrival a precursor of the coming disasters that contribute to the falling apart of the Igbo nation as presented in the novel (50):

And then quite suddenly a shadow fell on the world, and the sun seemed hidden behind a thick cloud. Okonkwo looked up from his work and wondered if it was going to rain at such an unlikely time of the year. But almost immediately a shout of joy broke out in all directions, and Umuofia, which had dozed in the noon-day haze, broke into life and activity. "Locusts are descending," was joyfully chanted everywhere, and men, women and children left their work or their play and ran into the open to see the unfamiliar sight. The locusts had not come for many, many years, and only the old people had seen them before.

The sight of the locusts is welcome to the eyes of the people of Umuofia. The locusts come “like a boundless sheet of black cloud drifting towards Umuofia” (50) and yet this ecologically ominous sign is still welcomed by the people because it is a wonderful cuisine: “For although locusts had not visited Umuofia for many years, everybody knew by instinct that they were very good to eat” (50-1).

The sight of the swarm of locusts, as perceived through the eyes of the people of Umuofia further underlines the ambivalent attitude of the people towards nature or natural phenomena. The text says the black cloud of locusts presents, to the people of Umuofia viewing it, “a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty” (50). They see the cloud as beautiful because it holds within its blackness the promise of plenty of good food. On the other hand, the “power” is the power of the locusts to destroy, to wreak havoc in their path.

The element of the power of the locusts sets the stage for us to discuss the other possible reason why the people of Umuofia welcomed the locusts: they had already harvested their crops and their yam was safely in the barns. Had that not been the case, the locusts would have destroyed all the food crop and caused hunger if not famine. Instead the locusts descended on the available vegetation, wreaking absolute destruction (51): “They settled on every tree and on every blade of grass; they settled on the roofs and covered the bare ground. Mighty tree branches broke away under them, and the whole country became the brown-earth colour of the vast, hungry swarms.” Despite this calamitous destruction of the vegetation, the people only saw the food, a gift from nature’s bountiful supplies (51): “Then all Umuofia turned out in spite of the cold harmattan, and everyone filled his bags and pots with locusts. The next morning they were roasted in clays pots and then spread in the sun until they became dry and brittle. And for many days this rare food was eaten with solid palm-oil.”

From an ecocritical perspective, however, it could be argued that there is presented to us here a dichotomy of nature as both provider and destroyer. This is not very different from the dichotomy, already discussed above, of nature as a bringer of sadness to Unoka during the seasons of rain and harvest while at the same time being a bringer of joy to Okonkwo during the same season.

Similarly there appears to be an ambivalence about the perception of the night or darkness. It is a relationship of fear of the night and appreciation of it at the same time. The text says of the attitude of dread towards the darkness of night, a natural phenomenon (9):

Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called a string.

The dark night is associated with silence (9): “It was always quiet except on moonlight nights.” This suggests that people fear the thick darkness and dare not venture out; they do not make merry outside their homes; children do not play in the courtyard. On such a night the dreadful silence of the night is only amplified by the noise made by the insects of the forest: “...a vibrant silence made more intense by the universal trill of a million million forest insects” (9). It was as if the noise of the insects was part of the silence.

By contrast, as the text states, when the night is lit by the moon the silence is replaced by the noise of human interaction (10): “On a moonlight night it would be different. The happy voices of children playing in open fields would then be heard. And perhaps those not so young would be playing in pairs in less open places, and old men and women would remember their youth.” Thus, the night may be embraced or dreaded, depending on the situation.

One of the positive and welcome aspects of the dark night, however, is the opportunity it provides for the women to narrate folk tales to their children. Since the children cannot play outside in the dark night they sit indoors to listen to the stories their mothers tell them – and they enjoy the stories. In Chapter Eleven of *Things Fall Apart*, for example, the dark night provides Okonkwo’s wives with the opportunity to tell stories to their children. The text says of the night at the beginning of the chapter that it was “impenetrably dark” (86); so dark that, without the palm-oil lamps in the four huts of Okonkwo’s compound “it would have been impossible to eat; once could not have known where one’s mouth was in the darkness of that night” (86). The night was characterised by silence except for low voices, “broken now and again by singing” (87) from the huts of Okonkwo’s wives “as each woman and her children told folk stories” (87). Ekwefi, seated on a mat with her daughter Ezinma, tells the story of the birds and the tortoise. Thus, if the children cannot play due to the impenetrable darkness, they can stay indoors and listen to folk tales.

The folk tales are part of the oral culture of the Igbo people and it might be argued, as Musiyiwa argues of the Shona culture, that Igbo culture is a “nature-culture” (2016: 53). In other words there is a close relationship between nature and the culture because, from the perspective of Igbo mythology as present in its oral culture, there is harmony – or ought to be harmony -

between nature and the culture of the Igbo people. Hence nature is given human characteristics in the oral tradition or, specifically, the oral narrative tradition. It might be argued, therefore, that the relationship between nature and the Igbo is characterised by some form of anthropomorphism which is largely expressed through the folk tales and some beliefs. For example, the moon is given human characteristics in Chapter Eleven (95): “When the moon rose late in the night, people said it was refusing food, as a sullen husband refuses his wife’s food when they have quarrelled.”

Humanising the moon, a part of nature, in this manner presupposes a belief in a synergy between nature and human life. Similarly, in Chapter Seven the texts says of the locusts (49):

The elders said locust came once in a generation, reappeared every year for seven years and then disappeared for another lifetime. They went back to their caves in a distant land, where they were guarded by a race of stunted men. And then after another lifetime these men opened the caves again and the locusts came to Umuofia.

According to Igbo mythology, then, the locusts work hand in hand with a race of human beings – except these men are stunted, or small in stature. The idea that the locusts are guarded suggests that their movement is controlled by nature; they can only descend on Umuofia when allowed by the guards. It also suggests that nature protects them from harm – conserves them, in environmental terms. The locusts are messengers or labourers of nature.

The anthropomorphism in *Things Fall Apart* goes as far as presenting animals as though they are actually human. Aside from assigning them the ability to speak and to engage in human courtesy, the text – in the story of Tortoise and the birds – presents the animals as humans. Although the setting is “in the world of animals” (87) the birds are invited to “a feast in the sky” (87) – an event associated only with humanoid beings. The birds “painted their bodies with red cam wood and drew beautiful patterns on them with *uli*” (87) – a very human activity; to be specific this is a transposition of Igbo behaviour.

Upon learning of the feast in the sky, Tortoise, suffering the effects of a famine, decides to ask the birds to take him along with them to the feast. When they show reluctance to carry him along due to his past treacherous behaviour, Tortoise says (87): “I am a changed man. I have learnt that a man who makes trouble for others is also making it for himself.” Worth noting here is the fact the Tortoise refers to himself as a “man”. Further the narrator says that apart from agreeing to give him feathers with which he makes wings, the birds also choose him “as

the man to speak for the party because he was a great orator” (87-8). Thus, Tortoise is a not just a male version of his species of tortoises: he is a *man*; and he and the birds are *people*. Thus he says to the birds as he flies to the feast with them (88): “There is one important thing which we must not forget....When *people* are invited to a great feast like this, they take new names for the occasion. Our hosts in the sky will expect us to honour this age-old custom” (emphasis added).

When it is time to return to earth after the feast the birds, having been duped by Tortoise during the feast, decide to punish him by taking back their feathers, making it impossible for him to fly back. Stranded, Tortoise pleads with the birds to tell his wife to bring out all the soft things in his house to the compound so that he would land on them upon jumping from the sky. Parrot takes the message but, as a measure of revenge on behalf of the offended birds, changes the message: he tells Tortoise’s wife to bring out all the hard things in the house (90): “And so she brought out her husband’s hoes, matchets, spears, guns and even his cannon.” Evidently the listed items are human possessions used in agriculture, hunting and war. Thus these animals are not only anthropomorphic in nature and behaviour; they are also placed in human situations.

The Igbo anthropomorphism suggests that even in the world of nature, as in the world of humans, there is conflict and disharmony which need resolving and which can lead to disequilibrium. Thus, while Okonkwo prefers to tell his sons “stories of the land – masculine stories of violence and bloodshed” (48) his wife, Nwoye’s mother, prefers to tell them folk tales about “tortoise and his wily ways” (48). However, she also tells them stories about “the bird *eneke-nti-oba* who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by the cat” (48). Thus, just as humans engage in conflict, so do animals – but even the wrestling contest is human in nature. It is a transposition of the wrestling engaged in by the Igbo as highlighted in the first chapter of the novel, when Okonkwo the young man defeats Amalinze the Cat. Could it be that, in calling himself the Cat, Amalinze is inspired by the exploits of the cat that defeated the bird in the folk tale?

As Chapter Seven of the novel demonstrates, the story of *eneke-nti-oba* is not the only one that Nwoye’s mother is fond of telling; she also often tells the story of the quarrel between Earth and Sky – another example of human conflict being mirrored in the world of nature. According to the story, the quarrel prompts Sky to withhold rain for seven years, leading to famine on earth; the victims in this case being humans. The story appears to suggest that human beings

are helpless in the face of disharmony in nature – a theme we shall return to later. The drought is severe and there is need for some intervention to save human life.

At last Vulture was sent to plead with Sky, and to soften his heart with a song of the suffering of the sons of men. Whenever Nwoye's mother sang this song he felt carried away to the distant scene in the sky where Vulture, Earth's emissary, sang for mercy. At last Sky was moved to pity, and he gave to Vulture rain wrapped in leaves of cocoyam. But as he flew home his long talon pierced the leaves and the rain fell as it had never fallen before. And so heavily did it rain on Vulture that he did not return to deliver his message but flew to a distant land, from where he had espied a fire. And when he got there he found it was a man making a sacrifice. He warmed himself in the fire and ate the entrails (48).

It would be possible to argue that the drought affects not only the human beings but also the animals, including Vulture, which explains why he is sent by Earth to plead with Sky on behalf of the creatures of the earth. Vulture bears anthropomorphic features: he is able to speak and sing. When he returns to earth he settles by a fire made by a man and eats the entrails of the sacrifice prepared by the man – presumably the man is making a sacrifice to plead for rain. Thus there is harmony between bird and man, between Sky and Earth, and between Nature and man. The equilibrium is maintained.

Harmony between the various elements of society and between society and nature is, one would argue, the bedrock of existence in an African traditional context. This element is reflected in the art forms developed by such society: harmonisation rather than unresolved conflict is the ultimate goal. Thus the Vulture in the above story intervenes to bring about harmony. What Nkosi (1981: 5) says in his seminal critical book *Tasks and Masks* is worth invoking:

Naturally, the art forms that any society develops are intimately related to the kind of social structures which it has built up. Thus the kind of art which was prized above all others in the Old Africa was the one which promoted *harmonisation* of the potential areas of conflict within the community by psychological project or the externalisation of opposing forces of good and evil through ritual and communal forms of art.

In light of the above, the relationship between human beings and nature is expected to be characterised by harmony, not disharmony. Human beings are therefore expected to live in such a way as to ensure that they are in harmony with nature.

Chapter Four accords us an example of human effort to avoid disharmony with nature (31):

And now the rains had really come, so heavy and persistent that even the village rain-maker no longer claimed to be able to intervene. He could not stop the rain now, just as he could not attempt to start it in the heart of the dry season, without serious danger to his own health. The personal dynamism required to counter the forces of these extremes of weather would be far too great for the human frame.

It would appear, from the caution exhibited by the village rain-maker, that he allows nature to take its course; the rain comes, there is no need to disturb it – doing so would in fact be akin to fighting nature and therefore taking a big risk. The text goes on to say (31): “And so *nature was not interfered with* in the middle of the rainy season. Sometimes it poured down in such thick sheets of water that earth and sky seemed merged in one grey wetness” (emphasis added).

Worth noting here is the fact that the word nature is actually used by the narrator: “nature was not interfered with” so that harmony would prevail between nature and the people of Umuofia. The job of the rain-maker is to intervene – to interfere with nature – when there is no rain and people are threatened with famine.

While the Igbo ethos advocates harmonious co-existence between nature and human beings, it does recognise the fact that nature can sometimes act in ways that are not favourable to human beings. The destruction of the vegetation by the locusts is an example – despite the fact that the people of Umuofia welcome the locust invasion because it offers an alternative and rare cuisine. Another example of the destructive side of nature is the drought that ravages Umuofia (21):

The year that Okonkwo took eight hundred seed-yams from Nwakibie was the worst year in living memory. Nothing happened at its proper time, it was either too early or too late. *It seemed as if the world had gone mad.* The first rains were late, and, when they came, lasted only a brief moment. The blazing sun returned, more fierce than it had ever been known, and scorched all the green that had appeared with the rains. The earth burned like hot coals and roasted all the yams that had been sown. Like all good farmers, Okonkwo had begun to sow with the first rains. He had sown four hundred seeds when the rains dried up and the heat returned. He watched the sky all day for signs of rain-clouds and lay awake all night. In the morning he went back to his farm and saw the withering tendrils. He had tried to protect them from the smouldering earth

by making rings of thick sisal leaves around them. But by the end of the day the sisal rings were burnt dry and grey. He changed them every day, and prayed that the rain might fall in the night. *But the drought continued for eight market weeks and the yams were killed* (emphasis added).

From the perspective of the Igbo ecophilosophy, nature has gone mad; meaning it is not behaving according to expectation. The weather is not behaving according to the expected pattern and the rains are nowhere to be seen. This is another case of anthropomorphism: nature is given the human attribute of going mad; meaning there is disharmony between human beings and nature.

Such is the madness exhibited by nature that the weather drastically shifts from absolutely no rain, or drought, to heavy rains. The narrator presents a graphic picture of the situation (22):

But the year had gone mad. Rain fell as it had never fallen before. For days and nights together it poured down in violent torrents, and washed away the yam heaps. Trees were uprooted and deep gorges appeared everywhere. Then the rain became less violent. But it went on from day to day without a pause. The spell of sunshine which always came in the middle of the wet season did not appear. The yams put on luxuriant green leaves, but every farmer knew that without sunshine the tubers would not grow. That year the harvest was sad, like a funeral, and many farmers wept as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams. One man tied his cloth to a tree branch and hanged himself. Okonkwo remembered that tragic year with a cold shiver throughout the rest of his life.

The narrator paints a gloomy picture of the effects of nature gone mad, leading to sadness among the people of Umuofia. That one man had to commit suicide is indicative of the extent of the depression that he underwent because of the madness exhibited by nature.

The experiences of the people of Umuofia during the drought and the heavy rains that followed gives the impression that human beings are on the receiving end of irresistible and unstoppable destruction brought about by natural phenomena. The suggestion is that, while human beings may strive with nature especially in times of disharmony in the relationship between man and nature as in the cases described above, it is nature whose power ultimately triumphs over that of human beings. This appears to confirm what is visible in real life: while human beings have successfully managed to control or manipulate some aspects of nature, there is a point at which

human effort fails and nature reigns supreme and has its way. Human beings have repeatedly been helpless in the face of adverse weather or due to the effects of climate change in various parts of the world – for example in situations of drought, flooding, or wild fires.

As has been demonstrated above through the folk tales involving animals, the Igbo folk tradition drew from nature to propagate moral, spiritual and practical lessons for its people. A further example is the use of animals and other aspects of nature in the composition and propagation of proverbs. The text exhibits an abundance of proverbs that draw from nature. In Chapter One, for example, there is a proverb which says, “Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them” (7). Unoka appropriates this act of nature to indicate that he first has to pay the biggest debts before he can pay the smaller debts such as Okoye’s. In Chapter Two, we read of another proverb (10): “When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk.” By this proverb, the Igbo acknowledged nature’s ability, through the moon, to empower the people to do what they want when it is dark. Other proverbs refer to animals within the Igbo ecosystem. In Chapter Three, for example: “Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wings break.” In the same chapter, another proverb reads: “A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing.” In the same chapter there is another proverb which evokes the images of the lizard and iroko tree: “The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did.” In Chapter Eight there is a proverb which says, “When mother-cow is chewing grass its young ones watch its mouth.” These proverbs are, in their own right, an indication of the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, when human beings learn wisdom from nature.

4.2 Relationship with the Land

Musiyiwa (2016) argues that land is central to Shona mythology and that the Shona exhibit a land-based nature-culture. The same may be said of the Igbo world presented to us in *Things Fall Apart*. The Igbo ethos or mythology divides land use into at least five categories: one, land as a dwelling-place; two, land as a source of natural sustenance; three, land as a space for food production; four, land as sacred and dedicated to the gods; and five, land as sacred and dedicated to evil spirits.

4.2.1 Land as a Dwelling-Place

Umuofia has nine villages for human habitation. Okonkwo's homestead in Umuofia, and the village where he lives while in Mbanta, are an epitome or microcosm of village life among the Igbo. Of Okonkwo's household in Umuofia the text says in the second chapter (13):

Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or *obi*, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the *obi*. The barn was built against one end of the red walls, and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. At the opposite end of the compound was a shed for the goats, and each wife built a small attachment to her hut for the hens. Near the barn was a small house, the "medicine house" or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm-wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children.

It would be possible to argue that the land is very pivotal to the survival of the family in the homestead. Apart from the fact that the structures in the homestead are built using materials from nature's provisions such as mud (from the soil), grass and wood, there are also some domesticated animals such as chickens, and the yam grown on the land is also stored in the barn. It may then be posited that the Igbo people depend on the provisions of nature and that is partly why they need to live in harmony with nature.

Apart from the dwelling quarters, each of the villages also set aside space called the *ilo*, where assemblies for sports such as wrestling, discussions, large-scale celebrations, special events and children's play take place. Thus, for example, Chapter Ten starts with a communal ceremony characterised by "large crowds" (79) – a trial centred on Mgbafo and her husband Uzowulu. Thus, the distribution of land in the typical Igbo village reflects not only the beliefs but also the priorities of the people. There is space to sleep and eat, space to gather for celebrations and other communal activities, and space to worship the gods as well as to store food.

There were times, however, when the land as dwelling-place also plays the role of refuge for those who committed certain crimes. Thus, when Okonkwo kills a clansman in Chapter Thirteen he is allowed to flee to his mother's village in Mbanta to seek refuge. The reason he

is allowed to flee is because he commits the female version of murder – the inadvertent killing of a kinsman. As long as Okonkwo and his family are in Mbanta, they cannot be killed. It would be a violation of the justice of the earth goddess, Ani, to follow Okonkwo to his mother's village and kill or harm him. Okonkwo spends seven years in exile in Mbanta.

4.2.2 Land as a Source of Natural Sustenance

This refers to natural provisions of the land such as rivers and streams where people drew water for cooking, drinking and bathing. The waterways also provide the people with the opportunity to catch fish and alligator which, according to the textual evidence in Chapter One, is partly used to make pepper (5). Additionally, as earlier indicated, the coming of locusts on the land is welcomed by the people as it is nature's provision of food (50-51).

The land also provides firewood for the people and materials for building structures in their homesteads. In addition, nature provided, through its flora, plants for medicine to treat various types of illness and disease. Thus, for example, when Ezinma falls ill in Chapter Nine, Okonkwo takes his machet and heads for the bush "to collect the leaves and grasses and barks of trees that went into making the medicine" to treat her (69).

4.2.3 Land as a Space for Food Production

Away from the homestead the people of Umuofia till large pieces of land to grow food such as yam. To understand the culture and beliefs of a people, one must understand their food and foodways. The same can be said of the people of Umuofia. For example, kola nut and palm-wine are an important part of the socialisation processes of the Igbo people – at least as presented in the novel. When one receives a visitor, it is a sign of courtesy to share with them kola. Thus, for example, when Unoka is visited by Okoye, he breaks a kola nut and shares with his visitor after praying to the ancestors "for life and health, and for protection against their enemies" (6). Palm-wine, on the other hand, is associated mostly with occasions of merry-making such as feasts.

The most important crop in Igboland and Igbo culture as presented in the text is yam, which is referred to as "the king of crops" (21). That is not all, however: the yam "was a man's crop" (21), meaning it is associated with manliness (30): "Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was a very great man indeed." Yam, it may be argued, is a phallic symbol. Thus, lazy men like Unoka who do not plant yam are not respected.

The Igbo ethos draws a gender dichotomy on the crops grown on the land. While the yam is a man's crop – and therefore the king of crops in this patriarchal society – there are crops that are categorised as “women's crops” (21), and these include “coco-yams, beans and cassava” (21). If yam is a man's crop, it is because it demands hard work – suggesting that women cannot handle hard work or are too weak to handle tough tasks (31):

Yam, the king of crops, *was a very exacting king*. For three of four moons it demanded hard work and constant attention from cock-crow till the chickens went back to roost. The young tendrils were protected from earth-heat with rings of sisal leaves. As the rains became heavier the women planted maize, melons and beans between the yam mounds. The yams were then staked, first with little sticks and later with tall and big tree branches. The women weeded the farm three times at definite periods in the life of the yams, neither early nor late (emphasis added).

Only men, it would appear, are expected to meet the demands of the “exacting king”. The women only help with the weeding and plant women's crops between the yam mounds – and the list here also adds maize and melons to the list of women's crops. Yam, however, is so important in the Igbo ethos that an important annual festival called the Feast of the New Yam, which happens after harvest, was dedicated to it. The new yam harvest is celebrated as the people honour the earth goddess and source of all fertility, Ani (33-4).

As Chilala (2019: 333) indicates in his article “Gendered Spaces in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: Text, Context and Pretext,” even the manner in which the yam is planted relative to the “women's crops” reflects its importance as a phallic symbol:

The utilisation of farmland enhances the image of the yam as a central phallic symbol of *Things Fall Apart* and Ibo society as portrayed in the novel....It is worth noting that the mounds in which the yams seed is planted enhance its image as a phallic symbol because the mounds themselves are of phallic significance, jutting, as it were, out of the ground. It is almost as if the king is placed on the throne when the yam is planted in the mound. This perception is further enhanced by the fact that other crops – of less significance – are then planted between the mounds, these being maize, melons and beans. The yam is exalted, they are at the feet of the mounds as though in perpetual worship of “the king of crops”.

In a patriarchal society such as that of the Igbo, gender considerations are key in the distribution of space or land. Thus, for example, the *obi* is a male zone, while the women are confined to their huts and fireplaces, where they cook for their families and their husbands in particular.

Apart from the yam, another crop which according to the text of *Things Fall Apart* is central to the social being and interpersonal relationships of the Igbo and helps define who they are is the kola nut, fruit of the kola tree which is indigenous to the tropical rain forests of Africa. In the text we read of the pivotal role the kola nut plays in matters of social etiquette. In Chapter One, for example, when Okoye visits Unoka the latter brings kola as a gesture of welcoming his guest. "I have kola," he announces as he passes the disc containing the kola nut to Okoye (5), whose response is indicative of the importance of kola in Igbo society (5): "Thank you. He who brings kola brings life." The kola then is an important symbol of hospitality, respect, friendship and togetherness. Also, in Chapter Two, when we learn that in worshipping his personal god and ancestral spirits Okonkwo, among other items, offers kola nut (14).

Kammampool and Laar, in their article entitled "The Kola Nut: Its Symbolic Significance in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" (2019: 39) say of the use of the kola nut in Igbo society as reflected in the novel:

In this fictional work, the kola nut is depicted as a symbol of hospitality, friendship and respect. It is presented to guests at important meetings, social events such as weddings, funerals, and infant naming ceremonies throughout the novel. Despite its multiple purposes, the kola nut is broken and eaten when a host welcomes a guest into his home, and constitutes for that matter a powerful symbol of respect in the community. Chinua Achebe presents the kola nut as a fruit which has great cultural value and fulfils crucial socio-cultural functions though it is offered as a mark of hospitality, and considered as an important gesture of friendship and comradeship. In this work, for the essence of kola as a cultural symbol of to be appreciated, the simple act of its presenting, offering and breaking constitutes in itself a serious ritual enactment. Right from the beginning of the novel, the breaking of the kola nut is not only a solemn ritual, but it is also a piece of drama during which a whole community lights up, reflecting the spiritual and social realities, their mores as well as relationships.

The kola nut, therefore, takes the same place of prominence as palm-wine in matters of interpersonal relationships. It is to be served with reverence and is not to be broken in haste especially by individuals considered unworthy. That is the reason why when Unoka serves the

kola to Okoye, the two of them initially argue about which of them should take the honour of breaking the nut. No unworthy individual should break the kola.

In the Igbo ethos, the kola, like all other crops, is a gift from the earth goddess and is a reminder of the benevolence of the goddess and the earth, or nature. No one whose relationship with the earth goddess is severed, or who offends her, is fit to offer or break the kola. This explains why, when Okonkwo beats his wife during the sacred Week of Peace in Chapter Four, Ezeani – the priest of the earth goddess in whose honour the ceremony is observed – rejects Okonkwo’s offer of kola. When the priest visits Okonkwo in his *obi* after hearing of the beating, he visits Okonkwo in his *obi*. Being the host, Okonkwo offers kola nut to Ezeani, but the priest responds (27-8): “Take away your kola. I shall not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for our gods and ancestors.”

4.2.4 Land as Sacred and Dedicated to the Gods

Not only do the Igbo people in *Things Fall Apart* exhibit a nature culture; they also exhibit a nature religion – that is, a religion centred on nature; a religion that seeks harmony with nature. It sees the gods in nature and nature in the gods. Thus, for example, Agbala is the Oracle of the Hills and Caves and is consulted by people from far and near, as we read at the start of Chapter Three (15): “They came when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbours. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers.”

In line with the name, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves is believed to dwell in the hills and caves – and there its shrine was found (15):

The way into the shrine was a round hole at the side of a hill, just a little bigger than the round opening into a hen-house. Worshippers and those who came to seek knowledge from the god crawled on their belly through the hole and found themselves in a dark, endless space in the presence of Agbala. No one had ever beheld Agbala, except his priestess. But no one who had ever crawled into his awful shrine had come out without the fear of his power.

To the Igbo, then, the hills and caves are not only the symbols of Agbala but also his dwelling-place. Anyone who wants to petition Agbala goes to the caves and hills, not anywhere else. Thus, for example, Unoka goes to consult the priestess of Agbala in Chapter Three and, in Chapter Eleven, Chielo takes Ezinma to the caves in the hills because Agbala wants to see her

(91). The priestess refers to Agbala with a variety of names (97): “the owner of the future, *the messenger of earth*, the god who cut a man down when his life was sweetest to him” (emphasis added). Agbala is the god of the future. Through the worship of Agbala, therefore, the people sought peace and harmony with the earth.

In their quest to live in harmony with the earth the Igbo people worship Ani, “the earth goddess and the source of all fertility” (Achebe 1958: 33). This is the most important god of the Igbo and is “the ultimate judge of morality and conduct” and, since the ancestors are committed to the earth upon dying, she is believed to be in close communion with them (33). Worth noting, in this connection, is the fact that when Okonkwo kills a clansman in Chapter Thirteen, he is deemed to have committed a crime against the earth goddess (113), and the men who destroy his compound and property when he flees are said to be merely implementing Ani’s justice (113). It is quite revealing that the earth goddess is at the core of Igbo religion; this fact in itself suggests that the Igbo revere nature as manifested through the earth. They worship Ani not just for purposes of ensuring human fertility, but also fertility of the land when they plant their crop. That is why the Feast of the New Yam is centred on honouring Ani and the ancestral spirits buried in her bosom.

Another nature-centred god of the Igbo is Amadiora, god of thunder and lightning. Thus, while Ani reigns on earth, Amadiora reigns in the skies. When the rains fall and thunder strikes, the Igbo attribute the phenomenon to Amadiora. When “Amadiora’s thunder” (31) rumbles the Igbo choose to stay indoors, safe from the god’s wrath.

4.2.5 Land as Sacred and Dedicated to Evil Spirits

While believing that Ani is the earth goddess, the Igbo also believe that she allowed part of the land to be set apart for malevolent spirits and people who committed evil, or undesirable and cursed people. As the text states, there are as many evil forests as there are Igbo clans – meaning, in effect, that each clan allocates land to be classified as “evil”. Thus we read at the start of Chapter Seventeen (135):

Every clan had its “evil forest”. In it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they died. An “evil forest” was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness.

At the close of Part One of the novel *Obierika*, Okonkwo's closest friend, ponders over the system that forced him to throw away his twins into the evil forest because they were considered a bad omen. He wonders what crime his infant twins had committed to suffer the fate of being discarded in the evil forest. He provides an answer to his own question (114): "The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender."

It is therefore a point worth noting that when the missionaries approach the people of Mbanta for land to build their church, the elders allocate them land in the Evil Forest. They consider the missionaries and their steadily growing number of Igbo converts to be *efulefu* or worthless men. We read at the start of Chapter Eighteen (141): "If a gang of *efulefu* decided to live in the Evil Forest it was their own affair. When one came to think of it, the Evil Forest was a fit home for such undesirable people." The mere act of allocating "evil" land to the Christians illustrates, quite poignantly, not only the Igbo people's contempt for the Christians, but for the Christian religion. In the Igbo ethos, the Christians, their religion and their god are evil and would be consumed by the malevolent spirits that dwelt in the Evil Forest.

Apart from dumping twins in the Evil Forest, some of the Igbo clans also regard people who die during the Week of Peace as evil and therefore not deserving of a proper burial. The bodies of such people are cast in the Evil Forest as stated in Chapter Four (29). Critical to the practice of dumping people in the Evil Forest is that, first, those who are taken there alive are not killed by the people but left to be "killed" by the forest – with no food and water, and no human company; second, the people taken to the Evil Forest do not deserve a grave because they are rejected by the earth goddess. Thus, for example, Okonkwo's father Unoka is left to die without a grave in Chapter Three (16-7):

Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a bad *chi* or personal god, and evil fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to this death, for he had no grave. He die of the swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess. When a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die.

That the Evil Forest is associated with judgment and destruction of the wicked is reflected in the fact that, at the trial in Chapter Ten, the leader of the *egwugwu* or masquerades is called Evil Forest. If the women and children are overcome with fear and take to their heels (80) upon

the mere appearance of the *egwugwu*, then they fear the Evil Forest *egwugwu* most. The mask worn by Evil Forest is such that smoke “poured out of his head” (81). Smoke symbolises fire and judgment or wrath. Hence the *egwugwu* says of himself at the end of the trial (85): “I am Evil Forest, I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth, I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots.”

4.3 Other Uses of Nature’s Endowments

The Igbo, as portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*, exploit nature’s gifts in a variety of ways to meet the needs of everyday life. Musical instruments such as the flute and drums, for example, are made out of nature’s offerings, as are cloth and beds – Okonkwo sleeps on a bamboo bed (9), while his father Unoka sleeps on one made of mud (5). Mud is used to not only build beds but also walls and huts. Cowries are the currency used in trade (7).

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter concerned itself with analysing *Things Fall Apart* from an ecocritical perspective, focusing on the interaction of the Igbo people with nature. The findings of the analysis include the following:

- (i) That the interpretations of nature and interactions with nature is largely determined by the culture and ecophilosophy of the Igbo people;
- (ii) That the interaction with nature is not always determined by the collective wisdom or ethos, but also – in exceptional cases such as that of Unoka – by the individual’s lifestyle and personal philosophy;
- (iii) That the Igbo people’s interaction with nature was in some cases ambivalent – an example being the interpretation of the locust invasion. While from the strictly ecological perspective the locusts were a danger to the sustenance of the people of Umuofia, they were on the other hand welcomed as a once-a-lifetime provision of food by nature;
- (iv) There was in the Igbo ecophilosophy a tendency to lean towards anthropomorphism – attributing human characteristics to natural phenomena such as the weather;
- (v) While disharmony might be experienced in the relationship between the Igbo people and nature, as in the case of drought or unabated heavy rains, the ultimate goal is to ensure harmony between human beings and nature;
- (vi) Where there is disharmony between nature and human beings, nature turns out the stronger, with human beings left at its mercy, as in the case of drought;

- (vii) The Igbo depended on land for much of their survival because the but their interaction with land is reflected in the division of land use into at least five main categories: first, land as a dwelling-place; second, land as source of natural sustenance; third, land as space for food production; fourth, land as sacred and dedicated to the gods; and fifth, land as sacred and dedicated to evil spirits.

The next chapter will focus on the analysis of *Tongue of the Dumb*, particularly how the people of Mpona village and the surrounding areas interacted with nature.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF *THE TONGUE OF THE DUMB*

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues with the ecological analysis of texts except it focuses on *The Tongue of the Dumb* by Dominic Mulaisho. Specifically, just like the previous chapter, this chapter is concerned with the interaction between humans – in this case the people of Mpona village and the surrounding areas – and nature in its various manifestations, including land. A thematic approach will be applied to the analysis.

5.1 Interaction with Nature

The people of Kaunga village in the Kaunga village exhibit an ambivalent relationship to nature; meaning that sometimes the relationship is harmonious and at other times adversarial. Sometimes nature makes them smile and at other times it makes them sad. As an ally, nature speaks, like a living being, to warn the people of danger or to let them know of a positive event to come either in the near or the distant future. In other words, nature can present either a good or bad omen, depending on the situation. The culture of the people of Kaunga valley, or more specifically the village of Mpona, is a nature culture – a culture in close affinity with nature. In relating to nature, the people of Kaunga seek to create and maintain harmony with it. When in need, they speak to nature through their ancestors, and nature speaks to them through various natural phenomena.

Thus, for example, when Dulani meets Lubinda in the first chapter of the novel, the two discuss encounters with nature and what those encounters mean in relation to their lives. Dulani asks Lubinda, the village medicine-man, to explain his sighting of black ants. “Friend,” he says, “when black ants cross your path, what does it mean?” Lubinda, who had been laughing, becomes “pensive” and states that the phenomenon was “strange” (5). He asks his friend if the ants were marching in a single file and if they were “making a roar like fermenting beer as they passed” (5). When the response is in the affirmative, Lubinda convinces Dulani that it is a bad omen. To the two men, therefore, while black ants are a feature of nature, their act of crossing Dulani’s path, in the manner they did, is not considered natural. It is cause for worry – a case of nature foreshadowing a calamitous or sad occurrence. By contrast, the appearance of red ants is considered to be a good omen - sign that rain is about to come. This indeed is the

argument used by Lubinda to dispute Dulani's assertion that the rains will fall: "I haven't seen any red insects coming out of their holes, so how can it rain?" (4).

Lubinda adds to the worry and fear by telling Dulani that he too had seen something strange (5): "Two cicadas mating. I've never seen that before." By adding that he had never seen anything like cicadas Lubinda worsens the sense of foreboding. Lubinda then draws Dulani's attention to the owl in a nearby *masau* tree, which to him is nature's further warning of looming disaster (5): "Look, look. There's an owl there. Don't chase it away... What you saw, my friend, and I saw and what we see now is taboo. It means that something bad is going to happen today. Maybe tonight. Maybe in the village. And maybe somewhere else."

When Lubinda sees that Dulani agrees with the notion that nature is warning of some looming disaster, he manipulates the situation to suit his own selfish interests. He tells Dulani that it is a warning of the danger posed by the teacher Nyalutila, commonly known as Aphunzitsi ("teacher") – a man Lubinda hates. He also uses the situation to drive a wedge between Dulani and his wife Natombi, whom Lubinda has been unsuccessfully pursuing for years. Similarly, when later Dulani shares his experience with the black ants with his wife, she also agrees that it was a taboo. However, like Lubinda she uses the situation for her own selfish ends: to suggest that he is just worried about the safety of his mistress – her cousin who now lives in town. While it is true that Lubinda and Natombi attempt to manipulate the information, it is also true that all the three – Lubinda, Dulani and Natombi – agree that the phenomenon of black ants crossing the path is a taboo, an unnatural occurrence, but a warning from nature all the same.

Later, when the men of Mpona village unsuccessfully search for Dulani – who gets lost and loses his life in the floods brought about by heavy rains – lightning strikes a tree outside Chief Mpona's house. When the people run out of their homes to check on the tree, they find it burning due to the lightning strike. They become even more terrified, and to Natombi it is nature's signal that her husband Dulani has been bewitched. This is especially because the search parties have been unsuccessful. Such interpretations fit within the mythology of the people of the Kaunga valley. Lubinda once again heightens the dread and sense of foreboding (14): "Black ants... and now lightning has struck the tree under which we pray to the spirits for rain, and Dulani is missing."

When there is harmony between nature and the people of Kaunga, nature warns them of danger. However, the danger can come from nature itself – a case of disharmony between nature and the people. Thus, for example, the heavy rains that fall when Dulani goes missing lead to

terrible floods which claim his life. Does nature conspire against Dulani? Why is it that, after warning him through the appearance of black ants, nature brings heavy rains and lightning on a dark night when he is supposed to find Mwape his son who goes missing? As he calls out his son's name in the night there is no response because nature ensured that Mwape was born dumb? Or could it be a case of Dulani being so out of touch with the workings and language of nature that he fails to understand that going out to look for his son, who is in fact discovered not to be lost, would lead to his death? Why do the floods come and only he of all the people in the village dies? Why does Dulani get crushed by a python which dies alongside him in the flood?

Next morning they found Dulani washed away by the floods, his body anchored against a submerged anthill. Thrust into his nostrils were two red fangs which filled both the nose and mouth with a slimy liquid. The body was limp and boneless and the skull cracked. Sprawled out parallel to his body and meeting it at the head was a python (14).

The people of Mpona village and the other nineteen villages in the Kaunga valley, according to their mythology, interpret the events leading up to Dulani's demise, and the nature of his demise, as an indication that the ancestors, buried in the soil of Kaunga valley, are upset with the people. The women cry as they approach the funeral house (15):

Mpona, your village is going to finish us. Mpona, Lubinda, is this how you rule us now, sending us to share a deathbed with pythons, the pythons which are being sent by the spirits because we no longer remember our ancestors? Mpona, our world is coming to an end, children are now growing upper teeth first like goats, and snakes are mating in our presence. They have eaten our man..."

When the spirits are angry, when the ancestors are offended, from the perspective of the mythology of the kingdom of Kaunga, they express their discontent through natural phenomena. When the spirits and ancestors are offended, nature is offended, because the spirits and ancestors are one with nature. For what the people practise is nature religion or animism.

When there is disharmony between nature and the people, the result is conflict – and nature always triumphs over human beings because it is more powerful despite human efforts to tame or interfere with it. The people, for example, are helpless in the face of the heavy rains and the lightning and thunder that attend their visitation. The river Kaunga breaks its banks (14) and

the resulting floods destroy some of the crops grown by the villagers. The people are grateful that the floods recede quickly, allowing the surviving crops to stand up again (48):

They had feared that the whole maize crop would be ruined by the floods that had killed Dulani. However, one by one the maize plants were standing up again and the fields were green once more. Most of the crop had been spared, since the floods had receded so quickly. Now the flowers were beginning to shoot and soon the fields would be a golden sea. So the people did not worry unduly about the floods. It was one of those things; no rain beyond a brief shower for many years, and when it came, floods.

As the above passage suggests, the people have no control over nature; on the contrary nature controls how people live. When nature chooses it withholds the rains despite the people yearning for it; again, when it chooses, it unleashes destructive floods that disrupt the livelihood of the people and even take away lives, as is the case with Dulani.

It would appear, however, that nature's anger with the people of Kaunga does not end with the flood. For when the people begin to find their feet and their laughter again after the burial of Dulani and the receding of the floods another disaster strikes: locusts invade the valley. In Mpona village, as the three men Silwamia, Cumba and Simtowe discuss current affairs, they hear the children shout "zombe" (49), the local term for locusts. The men are filled with terror (49):

The men's knees trembled and fear masked their faces. They looked up into the sky, and there was a brown sheet of locusts sailing across it. The sheet rolled over to the ground and they could now see, against the setting sun, how large a swarm it was. These locusts could be going to one place only – the maize fields. The cloud of despair, which has lifted after the maize had begun to recover from the floods, was descending again upon the village; it was a nervous people that gathered at the Chief's court, to plan a strategy against this new invasion.

The people know that from Mpona village the locusts will spread to other parts of the kingdom and wreak more destruction. The men therefore gather at Mpona's village, which is also the seat of the kingdom, to fight the locusts. "These locusts must be fought here and not allowed to go farther into the kingdom," Mpona says to his people as he prepares them for the fight

against the locusts (50). “If we don’t catch these insects, even the little maize which has survived the floods will go,” he adds.

There is, however, an ambivalence in the people’s attitude to the locusts. While on the one hand they are seen for what they are – a destructive force – on the other hand they are welcomed as food. We see here, therefore, both the friendly said of nature and the destructive side. For while the men are scared at the sight of the blanket of locusts the children, who spot them first, are happy to see them (49). They make improvised bows and arrows and begin to shoot down the locusts for fun (49): “The village was full of the shrieks and laughter of the children. Tonight they would fill their frying-pans with them. If the insects tasted like *nthonthwa*, the small, fat green grasshoppers, then they could with for no better delicacy.” The children, most of whom had not yet been born when the locusts last visited seven years ago, are not aware of the destructive nature of the locusts.

It is not only the children who take pleasure at the sight of the locusts; even the adults see a positive side to the arrival of the insects – the fact that they can collect them for food. They toil through the night to stop the locust invasion (50-1):

By first cock-crow, when the earth turns quiet and the night cold, the men and women of Mpona, of Mkando, of Kanaventi, and of Ciwera were in the fields of Mpona village, shivering, sweeping the locusts off the maize stalks and tree branches into their baskets and jars. *You don’t need any incentive to catch locusts, because once you fill a jar with them you will have relish for a long time to come.* They harm the maize but, on the other hand, once they have come you can’t just catch them and then destroy them as if they were snakes. Thus, what had set out to be a counter-attack on the locusts, *actually became a pleasurable harvest.* There was even something exhilarating about going into the deep of the maize stalks in the dark hours of early dawn with the cold green leaves washing against one’s bare body, the locusts drumming into one’s jar like a landslide into the water, while all the time they were chewing up the leaves. One didn’t worry about the sharp, prickly legs of the insects; one just pushed them into the jar until it was full, and then fetched another jar. The villagers did not notice the passage of time. They did not always remember that they had come out to crush dangerous insects. *From being a crucial battle, it turned into a sports; then into a hunt for food if they were in need of relish.* (emphasis added).

It is only when the morning light comes that the men realise the extent of the destruction wrought by the invading locusts (51): “every leaf had been eaten, and even stalks had been chewed. There was nothing but desolation. This time hunger had come.” The locust invasion, against the wishes of Mpona and his people and despite their efforts, spreads beyond the village of Mpona. “The marauding cloud went from one village to the other until, in the end, the whole kingdom was a scorched battlefield of blackened maize stalks” (51). In the face of nature’s wrath, the people are helpless and as defenceless as their crops.

When the people are on the receiving end of natural disasters, their recourse is prayer to the spirits and ancestors, the custodians of the land. There is therefore a link between the people’s religion and their ecophilosophy. When they live in harmony with nature – or with the spirits and ancestors – they receive blessings; when disharmony sets in, they suffer. Thus, for example, they would pray to the Rain God for rain and “offer sacrifice to it” (1). At the time the people of Kaunga valley were settling down in the area, a dry spell of rain would be attributed to discontent on the part of the Rain God, while good rains would be a sign that the Rain God had shown them favour: “Because of this favour which the spirits were beginning to show to the valley, the people prayed again, hoping that, with the passage of time, the Rain God would forget their sins of omission and give them rain regularly” (1).

The people of Mpona village believe that their prayers for rain receive answers. Thus, for example, when Lubinda and Dulani discuss the celebration of the coming-of-age of the Chief’s daughter, they are wary of the possibility of a downpour of rain spoiling the fun. Dulani says, “We shouldn’t have prayed for the rain yesterday” (4). While Lubinda thinks it might not rain, it does rain on this night – leading to floods and the death of Dulani. When the people pray for rain they do so under a tree located outside Chief Mpona’s house – the tree that is consumed by fire emanating from a lightning strike (14).

When natural disasters or bad omens become overwhelming, it is a sign of discontent on the part of the spirits who are the custodians of nature. It is a sign of lack of equilibrium between nature and the people. Therefore, natural disasters are a sign of disharmony between the people and nature. This indeed is the interpretation Mpona renders to the happenings in his kingdom which, as he indicates to Simbeya one of the elderly people in his village, surprise him. He adds (51):

What has this village done to deserve all this? First there was the strange death of Dulani, my own cousin, and that after so many strange things had happened.

Then came the whirlwind, a whirlwind which went straight for my roof. And now the locusts! It was my field they settled on first. What can all this mean? If I stay, Simbeya, there will be more disasters until we are all dead.

According to Mpona, therefore, the spirits are not happy and he is the cause. They are using natural phenomena to express their displeasure with his leadership and the people, who are now suffering the pangs of hunger in the wake of the locust invasion, are merely collateral damage. In Mpona's mind the people are merely suffering vicariously. The only way to save them is for him to step down from being chief. "This village is possessed with ill omen," he says. "This kingdom is doomed. I can fight one man. I can fight two, many more and even the whole kingdom. But I cannot fight the spirits of our ancestors. I cannot" (52).

However, Simbeya, who being the eldest in the village also doubles as de facto advisor to the chief, argues that Mpona is not to blame but the witches in the village. What Simbeya suggests is that, according to the belief system or mythology of the people of Kaunga, witches have the power to manipulate nature. They can cause natural disasters. Therefore natural disasters might not always be a sign of discontent on the part of the spirits. He does not see the spirits as malevolent but as good. He says to Mpona (52):

That is where you go wrong. The spirits of our ancestors are all good spirits. They do not torture goodness. I may be an old man, Chief, but I see what I see. Someone in this village is doing all these things to embarrass you because he does not want you here. It is this someone that you must fight. Fight, fight! That's the only answer. And in the end, and if this fails, do not despair. You must call in a witch-diviner. If you leave it to others to do so then it will be you, Mpona, that the diviner will find guilty. There are witches in this village.

According to Simbeya, the chief witch is Lubinda, who throughout the narrative proves to be Mpona's greatest nemesis. It is worth noting, however, that while Simbeya sees Lubinda as a wizard, the latter is also the main medicine-man of Mpona village. The people distinguish between a witch and a medicine-man. While both use nature to conduct their business, the former uses it with evil intent, while the latter uses it to heal the people. Thus, when Dulani dies and a dead python is found beside his body (14), Lubinda, in his role as medicine-man, cuts off the head of a python "in order to concoct a prescription to protect the village against these things happening again" (15). The death was not considered natural but a result of witchcraft, as is evident when Simbeya's wife says to Natombi, Dulani's widow (189): "...your

husband did not die a natural death”. It would appear that, because there is a suspicion that Dulani was eliminated by a witch using a python, the antidote or protection is the blood of a python.

Lubinda, ever the manipulative schemer, takes advantage of the people’s belief in the power of witches over nature to turn the people against Chief Mpona and his supporters such as old Simbeya, Sipopa, Natombi and the teacher, Nyalutila. He says to the gathered villagers (235):

And now, my fellow people, the death of Dulani. How can I explain it? ...How can I explain the indignity of a member of your royal family going to the bed of death with a python? How can I explain the floods, the locusts, the strange whirlwinds, the frost? How can I explain anything?

There is in the midst of all the suspicions a strong belief that nature has some human qualities. It can get angry or offended, it can speak to the people through various natural phenomena or signs. In short, the personification of nature, or giving nature anthropomorphic qualities. Thus, for example, the narrator perceives the clouds as “quarrelling” (22) thus leading to lightning, thunder and heavy rain. This suggests disharmony among the various elements of nature. When Dulani, a member of the royal family, dies, a brief shower of rain follows, “literally out of the clear blue sky of the morning sun” (26). This unexpected rain is interpreted as nature’s way of acknowledging the death of a member of the royal family. The people say to each other: “It is because a member of the royal family has died that it rains so” (26). The river Kaunga is given animate qualities (26-7): “This was the Kaunga, which became a vicious and vengeful terror during the rainy season, which had become clouded with the mud of turbulence and roared and galloped downstream in a mad bid to seek revenge.” Not only is the river seen to have the human capacity of getting angry; it is also seen as having the capacity to seek revenge against an offender. It is, in addition, seen as being capable of temporary madness when offended.

Another example of nature being given animate qualities is when the *kamcape* (witchfinder) hired by Lubinda to accuse Mpona of being a witch by forcing him to drink the deadly *mwabvi* is filled with a sense of guilt and fear. The text says (245-6):

The kamcape searched the distant hills for an answer, for a way out. In a clear bright light of the bending sun those hills were not vague darkness but an avalanche of grit, sand, and stones which appeared to be rushing at him, scraping his brain until it was all blood. *Those hills would see that which was about to be committed,*

and they would be witnesses unto eternity. He looked up at the branches of the tree nearby. The fleshy leaves, blowing gently in the wind, appeared to droop towards him, their tips smelling, seeing and listening to what was being done below. *They too, even if they might fall in the coming season, would remain witnesses.* The sun too lingered around the scene, walking reluctantly backwards towards the horizon. *It also seemed intent on recording the events of that day.* The goat in the doorway to the Cave swayed to and fro in the sudden gust of strong wind. The doorway remained calm and expectant. The jaws of the crocodile...(emphasis added)

The *kamcape* fails to carry out the task of forcing Mpona to drink the poison because he thinks nature is rebuking him, telling him not to commit the abominable act of having an innocent man killed at the instigation of Lubinda. The distant hills, the nearby tree, and the sun – they all seem to be speaking to him not to do it. Nature sees, listens and speaks. In this case it speaks to correct a man about to go astray.

The *kamcape*'s decision to listen to nature and excuse himself from administering the *mwabvi* is vindicated when disaster befalls Lubinda with the return of Mwape, the boy whose absence he had manipulated to turn the people against Mpona and his supporters such as Natombi, Mwape's mother. When Mwape returns and Lubinda's lies are exposed, Lubinda escapes from the angry villagers. However, his dead body is discovered two weeks later by a traveller from another part of the country, "its flesh eaten out by vultures" (249). He had been killed by a leopard. It is almost as if nature meted out justice through the leopard and the vultures on a man who had committed so much evil.

The evil committed by Lubinda, it would appear, follows him to the grave. When what remains of Lubinda's body are lowered into the grave, a python appears "from nowhere" (249) and creeps into the grave. Upon settling on the coffin, it dies. The narrator suggests, from the nature of the narration, that the appearance of the python is a sign, perhaps from nature, perhaps from the supernatural realm. It should be noted that the python acquires motif value in the story. When Dulani dies, a python is found next to his body (14). To protect the villagers from facing a fate similar to Dulani's, Lubinda cuts off the head of the python (15). When he dies a python collapses on top of the coffin bearing his corpse.

It would appear the narrator is suggesting, or even hinting, that Lubinda the medicine-man – whose main claim to fame was to accuse the chief and others of being witches – is himself a witch. As a witch he uses his powers to manipulate nature, or the python, to kill Dulani. That

a python follows Lubinda into the grave and dies on his coffin might symbolise the end of his manipulation of nature's creatures such as the python. His link to nature is terminated, and nature swallows his body when he is buried. The narrator's final words, also the story's final words, are in the form of an old African proverb: "A poisonous snake bit my mother-in-law. It died – of poisoning." The narrator appears to suggest that Lubinda was a poisonous snake which is destroyed after, or because of, biting others.

The proverb underlines an important aspect of the people's culture: they draw lessons or wisdom from nature and natural phenomena. Animals are used in folk tales and also in dissemination of wisdom through proverbs and wise sayings. Thus, for example, in Chapter Eight proverbs created around animals and animal behaviour are used – suggesting that the proverbs are created after observing the behaviour of certain animals. For example (108): "Listening to too much hearsay destroyed the squirrel's marriage." This appears to be an allusion not only to the squirrel's attentive ears but also to a folk tale teaching women do avoid listening too much to what others say about their husband. There is, in Chapter Thirteen, another allusion to a folk tale. The women say to Lubinda, who still eyes the throne, not give up "like the wild pig that cried as the rope around its neck was about to snap" (190). There is another proverb which says, "Beware, hungry vixens who pound their way to your husbands' hearts" (108). This is aimed at Natombi who is being likened to a fox – dangerous and scheming.

If the fox is associated with scheming, then the hyena is associated with evil and witchcraft. Thus, in Chapter Eight, in order to hurt the feelings of Natombi, who is suspected to have bewitched her husband Dulani, one man shouts to another as Natombi passes nearby (108): "The meat of a hyena!" The other man responds, "Only witches eat it." The first man continues: "The meat which never finishes," and the second man responds: "It is human meat." The scavenging habits of the hyena, it would appear, cause the people of the Kaunga valley to associate it with witchcraft. They see a parallel in behaviour between the witch or wizard and the hyena.

A more striking parallel, however, is drawn between the hyena and the man who comes to "test" a girl at the end of her initiation ceremony. According to this practice, the girl is expected to put into practice all she learns during the period of her confinement at the hands of the women assigned to teach her the duties of a cultured woman and wife. Thus, when the chief's daughter is about to be released from her period of seclusion, Lubinda's wife – who is one of

her trainers – says to her (10): “Tonight you will hear the hyena open your door...Do not cry or call for help, but let the hyena in. If you do not let him in then you will not be regarded as a real woman, and you will lose this man who has been chosen by us to become your husband.” Thus, just like the hyena, in real life, scavenges on what belongs to others, the “hyena” performs ritual sex with a girl who has reached puberty – but she will be married by someone else, the husband chosen for her.

There is another function of the “hyena man” in this culture. He may be hired by a childless couple – in a case where it is the man who is impotent – to impregnate the woman on behalf of the man. This is in fact what occurs between Lubinda and Dulani. The former convinces the latter that he can help him produce a child, so he is hired to impregnate Natombi. However, the wife refuses to give in to the hyena; in this case Lubinda, who develops a deep hatred for Natombi. Despite hiring Lubinda, however, Dulani thinks his wife gave in to Lubinda and still despises her for that. “There were times when Dulani hated Natombi for having, as he thought, given in to Lubinda, even though that had been his wish” (3).

5.2 Relationship with the Land

5.2.1 Land as a Dwelling-place

There are twenty villages in the Kaunga valley, Mpona being one of them. Mpona village is a microcosm of life in the twenty villages aside from the fact that it is the epicentre of the kingdom of Kaunga since it is the seat of authority; the village where Chief Mpona lives. The rest of the villages are under councillors, of whom the medicine-man Lubinda is one. While the chief answers to the missionaries and the district commissioner, the councillors answer to the chief in a system typical of the British indirect rule imposed during the colonial era. This administrative set-up has an impact on how land is distributed and used. Thus, while on the one hand we have the villages in the valley, on the other we have the mission centre occupying part of the land. In addition the colonial government, which in this part of the territory is led by the district commissioner, also occupies land for administrative purposes.

To have an idea of the set-up in villages of the Kaunga valley, which are all located in close proximity to the river, it might help to take a close look at the set-up in Mpona village in relation to the use of land. Broadly speaking, there is land for homesteads, for cultivation of crops, for hunting and for burying the dead. The staple food of the valley is maize (1). However, the distribution and use of land is a political and spiritual issue. As far as the people of Kaunga are

concerned, the land is under the protection of the ancestors who are buried in it, and cannot be given away anyhow. On the other hand, the colonial government and missionaries want more land in order to have a firm grip on the people. Lubinda urges the people to resist the encroachment of the Christian faith on the valley. He sees the building of a school in the village of Mpona as a danger to the kingdom. He thus says to Chief Mpona (20-1): “When I ruled this country in your absence, the other white man who died some years ago tried to establish his church here. We all refused and we did not have misfortune. How can the spirit hear our prayers for rain, for rain that will not destroy, when we admit the worship of an unknown spirit in our own village – the centre of the kingdom?”

Herein lies the seed of the conflict over land: Lubinda and his supporters see the land as a spiritual entity that ties them to their ancestors and defines the worth of their kingdom while the missionaries see it as a mere stepping-stone to the advancement of the kingdom of God. Thus to Lubinda and likeminded villagers, allowing the white people and their faith to advance their cause by way of building the church and school is a betrayal of the ancestors who are custodians of the land.

Hence Nyalutila the teacher, more commonly known as Aphunzitsi, is seen as the agent the white people are using to advance their cause. They do not regard him as one of them but as an outsider, not just because he professes the Christian faith, but also because he is not from Kaunga but Nyimba, a different part of the territory (23): “But he was also an outsider because there were people who did not like his presence, people who felt that as a foreigner from Nyimba, when he came to sorrow with them he came to mock their misfortunes. He was not a son of the soil. He worshipped a strange god.” The people of Kaunga have a strong affinity to their land, a spiritual relationship only possible for those born there, not for foreigners. The people and their soil are one. Burying a foreigner on the land, or allowing them to settle there without the sanction of the ancestral spirits, would be an abomination.

In terms of the location of places in relation to each other, the text tells us in Chapter Three that while the villagers dwell in twenty villages scattered in various parts of the Kaunga valley, the white people are located in two main places. First, Katondwe Mission of the Catholic Church and, second, the colonial administration at Feira Boma. Mpona village itself is located twenty miles away from the mission, which in turn is located “half-way between Mpona’s village and Feira Boma” (37). This suggests, therefore, that the boma is forty miles away from Mpona village. Thus, three types of authority lay claim to the land: first, the traditional authorities

epitomised by chiefs such as Mpona; second, the missionary authority under Father Gonzago and, third, the colonial authority under the district commissioner.

On paper the traditional leaders have the authority to decide who to give land, how much of it, and where. In reality, however, the missionaries and colonial government are still in a position to impose their authority over that of the traditional leaders and get the land they want. Thus, for example, even if initially – as indicated above – Lubinda had during his brief reign resisted giving land for the establishment of the school in Mpona village, in the end the school is still built. The missionaries know they can depend on the aid of the colonial authorities to impose their will on the people of the villages. Thus, when the villagers attempt to close the village school in Chapter Three, Father Chipwanyanya rides to the village on his motorbike to ensure the school continues to operate.

While the villagers can attempt to close the school they cannot dare fight for the removal of the mission at Katondwe or the colonial administration at Feira. The traditional authorities have no jurisdiction over the land occupied by the white people – and this is a source of conflict between Mpona and some of the villagers who are not happy that people that are not sons of the soil can occupy huge swathes of land. The narrator says of the mission at Katondwe that “although it was within Mpona’s area it was not part of his kingdom, because the white men inhabited it” (37). What this means is that the more land the white people annexed, the less territory the traditional leaders had under their jurisdiction. In the mind of Lubinda and other villagers the presence of the white people and their structures – or symbols of power – on Kaunga land is tantamount to desecration of the land; an offence in the eyes of the ancestral spirits. Land is sacred.

The location of the mission, on a knoll in the Kaunga valley, suggests that it is a phallic symbol representing the power of colonisation and Christianisation. The mission sits on elevated ground, overlooking the valley below where the villages are located. The narrator says of the mission station (37):

The mission stood on a knoll in the great Kaunga Valley. This part of the valley was rocky and arid and the mopani trees, which normally belong to the hills, had to push their roots deep down into the ground to avoid drying up. On the highest point of this rocky knoll stood the little chapel. Built of red brick and large, smooth rocks, it was a beautiful example of Polish architecture.

A prominent feature in the valley, the mission station is an epitome of the growing power of the white settlers over the land of the people of Kaunga and the abundant natural resources it offers. To the missionaries and the colonial authorities there is no such thing as land being sacred or reserved for sons of the soil. They see no harm in even creating burial places for themselves on the land. The narrator says of the burial place created by the missionaries:

A mile away from the mission proper could be seen a low muddy wall with a plain cross before it: the cemetery for the burial of white men and Christian natives. You might think this the greatest outrage against nature, that the dead should be buried among the people, as if death was nothing! If you had entered the cemetery and turned left, you would have found there a small house into which the white man shelved the bodies of all his fellow white men who had died.

From the perspective of the narrator, therefore, the very fact that the cemetery is located in the Kaunga valley – in Mpona’s kingdom yet not part of it – is “the greatest outrage against nature”. Nature is land, and land is nature.

It may be argued, therefore, that the presence of the white people and their structures in the kingdom of Kaunga is, from the perspective of defenders of the land such as Lubinda, an outrage against nature; and if an outrage against nature, then an outrage against the ancestral spirits who are the custodians of the land. To allow the white people and their religion to gain ground in the kingdom and actually settle on the land, in whatever form, is therefore an offence against the ancestors. Thus Lubinda, though driven by selfish motives, is against the reopening of the school in Chapter Three, and bravely says to Father Chipwanyanya (44): “You despise us, and you do not respect our customs. This village is going to be destroyed by the spirits of our ancestors if we agree to this.” In the mind of Lubinda and other likeminded villagers, therefore, the disasters befalling the valley are due mainly to the mistake of allowing the white people to settle in the area and build structures such as the mission, the school and the boma. The spirits are angry with the people.

It is in this context that the people’s resistance to the instruction, by the colonial administration, to build pit latrines should be viewed. The pit latrines, though intended to protect the environment and enhance hygienic living, are seen as an abomination – an outrage against nature and the cultural practices of the people. Lubinda leads the resistance to the construction of the pit latrines, arguing (90):

It is impossible for us to agree to this....The white missionary cursed us and brought water to drown our crops, and then, through his teacher, caused the death of Dulani. Now the white bwana comes and we must dig latrines. How far shall we go in obeying these people without skin? The time has come for us to tell them to kill us, if that is what they want....How can we go to the same hole as our mothers-in-law when we cannot even eat in each other's sight? Are we mfungo?....Does he want us to stink like mfungo?....That is the animal the latrine should be dug for, because it always excretes in one place.

A number of other reasons are forwarded for rejecting the digging of pit latrines, but the most critical is that the latrines go against the cultural practice. As theirs is a nature culture, the people of Kaunga see anything that does not uphold their cultural practice as offensive to nature. That is why later in the narrative Lubinda, in trying to topple Mpona, accuses him of allowing “unnatural” and “untraditional” acts by agreeing to the digging of pit latrines (239):

Mpona had let the white man do some very unnatural things. For example, the latrine pits. All the other chiefs in this part of the word had refused to dig them because it was untraditional. But he had agreed to violate the custom; he did not mind about the spirits of the ancestors.

In the mind of Lubinda and his supporters, therefore, agreeing to the digging of pit latrines is tantamount to offending the spirits of the ancestors – the custodians not only of the traditions of the people, but also the sanctity of the land. To do anything unnatural and untraditional is to offend nature; and to offend nature is to offend the ancestral spirits. Thus not only do the villagers avoid digging the pit latrines as demanded by the District Commissioner, they also avoid using them to answer the call of nature (106).

The use of land in *The Tongue of the Dumb*, therefore, is determined by the element of functionality. This is also evident at the microcosmic level of the village. Mpona village provides us with an example of what exists in the villages. Apart from the huts where the people dwell, there is also space reserved for gatherings such as ceremonies, as is the case in Chapter One when a ceremony is held to commemorate the coming-of-age of the chief's daughter. It is also in this space that a ceremony is held to commemorate the harvest of the new maize crop – a thanksgiving ceremony. In the ceremony the people would give a few cobs of green maize to the Chief as the representative of the spirits of the ancestors and express their gratitude. Thus, in Chapter Eleven, with Chief Mpona almost toppled by the scheming Lubinda, it is to Lubinda

that the people of the kingdom bring the crop of thanksgiving (165). In addition the village also boasts a court at Mpona's house, where important issues of the land are discussed by the leaders of the community (41, 164).

Also located near the chief's house is a shrine in the form of a tree under which the people "pray to the spirits for rain"(14). The shrine is important because it helps the people maintain their links with the ancestors, their guardians. Another important feature of the village is the *nsaka* or shed where the men of the village gather to discuss issues of the day but which also acts as "an arts and crafts for all the men" (45). Here, the men gather "after their labours in the fields to repair their hoes, sharpen their axes, weave new baskets, both for their women and for catching fish, and do many other odd jobs" (45). The *nsaka* is a phallic symbol because only men are allowed to gather here.

Worth noting perhaps is the significance of trees in the nature-culture and nature religion of the people of Kaunga. As earlier indicated, there is in Mpona village a tree that is sacred because it is a shrine for prayers to the ancestral spirits. The *nsaka* is also constructed around a big tree which also provides shade for the men. When the villagers descend on Dulani's homestead for his funeral, the men gather under a tree near the funeral house (15). It would be possible to argue, in light of the significance of trees, that the people of Kaunga conserved some trees within the village to fulfil some functions, but this also amounted to nature conservation. In this nature culture, nature's endowments are used to construct the school, pit latrines, sheds, and even houses, as is demonstrated at the start of Chapter Seven when Banda is seen carrying a bundle of rafters with which to build his mother-in-law's hut (85).

5.2.2 Land as a Source of Natural Sustenance

The land, as already demonstrated above, is a key element of the lifestyle and livelihood of the people of Kaunga valley. Its rivers and streams help to sustain the people, providing them with water for drinking, cooking and bathing, as well as fishing. They also hunt in the forest. When the people want to build, they use trees and grass from the forest. The land is also a key aspect of their food security – they till the land to grow the main crop, maize, and other crops. However, the people also use the land to bury their dead. Thus, for example, when Lubinda dies they dig a hole and bury him (249), albeit reluctantly.

When the people fall ill they turn to the land for medicinal herbs. Father Gonzago, who is the Father Superior at the mission, believes that herbal medicines of the indigenous people are able

to cure certain diseases. Father Chiphwanya, on the other hand, insists that the villagers should be made to abandon their local medicine and go to the hospital each time they are sick. Hence in Chapter Fourteen, when Father Gonzago struggles with illness, he engages in a serious debate with Chiphwanya about the question of whether or not traditional African medicine, totally dependent on nature's offerings, is to be relied upon. When Father Chiphwanya attempts to coerce the Father Superior to go to the hospital for treatment, the old man responds to the younger clergyman (220): "It is not necessary to go to the hospital, because even here there are many African medicines, Father, which can cure this yellowness which you consider to be a disease."

When Chiphwanya argues that believing in African medicine is pagan, the old priest retorts (221): "Pagan! What is pagan about African medicine? How do you think I have lived all this time without touching your quinine, which makes my ears sing? Pagan? That is foolish talk, Father Chiphwanya." Father Gonzago is convinced that the African people's knowledge of the use of plants should not be dismissed. He further states (143): "The Africans have a plant which frightens away snakes."

5.2.3 Land as Sacred

Apart from the shrine under the tree in the village, there is one other important sacred place outside the village – a cave, also known as the Big Cave (244). The cave is used as a dwelling-place for outcasts such as those with smallpox. At some point, it would appear, even lepers were exiled to the cave but are saved by Mpona who decrees that they should be allowed to live in the village; which is why old Simbeya, a leper, still lives in the village and is a close advisor and confidante to the chief (51).

The cave is therefore associated with uncleanness and evil, a place for not only the outcasts but also witches – which is why when Lubinda accuses Mpona of witchcraft his plan is to have him dumped inside the cave. The people believe that a witch is an abomination and should not even be buried as that would pollute the land and offend the ancestral spirits (246): "It would not be right to leave the body of a witch overnight in the village. This would only bring more misfortune upon the trouble community." The cave is the place for the abominable beings and nothing that enters the place may be touched or associated with (244): "No one could touch anything that had come so far as to reach the Cave. If Mpona died after drinking the *mwabvi* his body would also have to be thrown into the Cave, never to be touched by any human being."

The body of a witch, like that of one with an abominable disease, is unclean and giving it a proper burial would amount to defiling the land.

The Cave is not only sacred but also dreaded. No one dares enter it. It is believed that there is a huge monster man in the cave as well as “many poisonous snakes, bees, and other things” (210). Father Chiphwanya, who is aware of the beliefs relating to the Cave, wonders whether the people suspected of bewitching Dulani would be thrown into the “bowels” of the Cave (36) which, according to the version of the myth communicated to him, is occupied by “a long white snake, bees, and a one-armed giant” (36). It is further believed that none of the people that dare enter it ever come out. The Cave its sacredness partly from the fact that it is also a shrine where sacrifices are made to the ancestral spirits through the chief. Thus Mpona is said to have conducted a ritual sacrifice there (208).

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter focused on an ecocritical analysis of *Tongue of the Dumb*, particularly related to the interaction between nature and the Nsenga people of the Kaunga valley of what is now eastern Zambia. The findings of the analysis include the following:

- (i) The relationship between the people and nature is largely determined by their cultural beliefs and in particular their mythology and ecophilosophy;
- (ii) The culture of the people is a nature-culture, meaning it is centred on respect for nature in all the facets of life;
- (iii) In their interaction with nature and natural phenomena, the Nsenga people seek harmony, although harmony is not always possible and they sometimes find themselves in conflict with nature – which conflict manifests itself in natural disasters, suffering even death;
- (iv) Whenever the people are in conflict with nature it is nature that proves more powerful, as when the people are overwhelmed by floods, drought, famine, locust invasions, among others;
- (v) The relationship between the people and nature is ambivalent: sometimes the people see nature as an ally, other times as an angry punisher;
- (vi) The people see a vital link between their ancestors and nature, for the ancestors are the custodians of the land, which is the best endowment given to them by nature; hence the ancestral spirits are an important bridge in the relationship between the people and nature. To offend nature is to offend the ancestors, and vice versa;

- (vii) There is a tendency for the people to attribute human qualities to natural phenomena – a form of anthropomorphism. Nature, according to them, has eyes to see and is able to speak to them. Thus, for example, when Lubindas see cicadas mating or when Dulani's path is crossed by black ants (Mulaisho 2007: 5) it is nature's way of speaking about events soon to come;
- (viii) The religion of the people of Kaunga is nature-based; it is a nature-religion, with nature being at the core of the belief system associated with the religion. Hence their religion may be deemed animist;
- (ix) Both wild and domestic animals, being part of nature, are an important aspect of the life of the people. Hence animals are also part of the folklore of the Nsenga people as exhibited by the proverbs and narrative tales;
- (x) Witchcraft is a key element of the people's interaction with nature and their interpretation of natural phenomena. According to them witches or wizards have the ability to manipulate nature for malevolent purposes. Thus, for example, the fact that a dead python is found lying by Dulani's corpse is interpreted as a sign that Lubinda used the serpent, through his powers, to kill Dulani;
- (xi) Land is very central to the life of the people of Kaunga and their interaction with nature, hence it is divided and allocated according to functionality; theirs is a land-based culture;

The next chapter will focus on the similarities and differences in the findings emanating from the analyses in chapters four and five.

CHAPTER SIX

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATURE AND HUMANS IN *THINGS FALL APART* AND *TONGUE OF THE DUMB*

6.0 INTRODUCTION

From the general perspective, *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* have some similarities and differences some of which are worth mentioning as a way of contextualising some of the findings. One of the key similarities is that both novels deal with events relating to the pre-independence periods of life in Nigeria as captured in *Things Fall Apart* and Zambia as portrayed in *Tongue of the Dumb*. They both deal mainly with village life. In *Things Fall Apart* there are nine villages ruled by elders while in *Tongue of the Dumb* the villages are twenty and ruled by headmen with a chief as overall ruler. However, it is important to note that while the setting of the former is the period in the late nineteenth century when missionaries were still establishing themselves in Igboland and the colonial government was still strengthening its grip on political power, the setting in the latter is the early twentieth century at a time when the colonial authorities and the missionaries were already well established. Thus, for example, while in *Things Fall Apart* the missionaries have to ask for land to build their church and the elders have to decide where to allocate them land, in *Tongue of the Dumb* the missionaries appear to have had the opportunity to build their mission at a strategic location.

This distinction between the two settings is a factor in terms of how the people of Kaunga and those of Igboland practice their traditional beliefs – and by extension how they relate to nature. Thus, for example, while in *Things Fall Apart* the practices associated with the Evil Forest, such as the dumping of twins and outcasts in the Evil Forest, are still being practised, in *Tongue of the Dumb* the colonial authorities, and even the missionaries, appear to have authority to intervene to stop what they consider to be “evil” practices. When an attempt is made to close the mission school in the village, Father Chiphwanya rides down to the village to intervene. The colonial authorities also demand that lepers be taken to the hospital and not be quarantined outside the villages; they also instruct the villagers to dig pit latrines and stop using the bush to answer the call of nature – an order which meets with resistance from the villagers.

This difference in setting should be borne in mind when dealing with the similarities and differences in the findings of the last two chapters. In this chapter the focus is on specific similarities and differences of the findings of chapters four and five.

6.1 SIMILARITIES

6.1.1 Nature and Culture

In both novels, there is a strong link between the culture of the people and nature – that is to say, both are nature-cultures; they respect and seek to establish harmony between the people and nature. This is evident from the way the people live their daily social lives to the way they practice religion, which, by contrast to Christianity as propagated by the missionaries, is nature-based religion.

In their practice of traditional religion, both the Nsenga people of the Kaunga valley and the Igbo of Umuofia regard nature as a phenomenon of spiritual significance – hence in both cultures every effort is made to ensure harmony between the people and nature. Where disharmony or conflict arises between the people and nature, it is the people who suffer as nature's wrath is expressed through natural disasters. Thus, for example, in both texts there is drought and locust invasions which lead to famine and suffering. Nature is more powerful than the people and should not be provoked. In *Tongue of the Dumb* when nature is offended – by offending the ancestral spirits who are custodians of nature's blessings – the result is not only drought or locusts but also destructive floods.

It is not only when in need to help that the people consult the ancestral spirits or gods – they also pray to thank them for blessings, particularly good harvest. Thus the people of Umuofia hold the annual festival called the Feast of the New Yam which is “an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility” (Achebe 1958: 33). Being the earth goddess and therefore associated with the land, Ani plays a critical role in the lives of the people. This in part is because when the fathers of the clan died their bodies were committed to the earth – and she is the earth goddess (33). Thus the festival is held each year before the beginning of the harvest “to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan” (33). This suggests a close relationship between the land, as an expression of nature, and the ancestral spirits. That is why, as suggested earlier, the ancestral spirits are custodians of the land. That the feast is centred on the yam is of significance because the yam is the main crop of the people, the king of crops.

Similarly the Nsenga people of the Kaunga valley hold an annual festival of Thanksgiving for good harvest, except that for them the king of crops is maize. The ceremony, as the text of *Tongue of the Dumb* says, is meant “to mark the new crop” once the maize is ready for harvest (164). During the ceremony part of the maize harvest would be taken to the reigning Chief Mpona who would then be addressed thus (164): “Here, lord of the village, the spirits of our fathers have blessed us with a good crop, we are offering this to you as the representative of our spirits.” Thus, as in the case of the Feast of the New Yam, the ceremony is based on the belief that the ancestral spirits are custodians of the land on behalf of the gods or God. To fail to thank the gods is to fail to thank the ancestral spirits; it is to offend nature and invite its wrath.

6.1.2 Personification of Nature

In both texts there is a tendency to personify nature – a form of anthropomorphism. Thus, as can be seen in *Things Fall Apart*, nature can get angry or run mad – as when the weather becomes erratic and destructive. Thus we read on *Things Fall Apart* (22): “But the year had gone mad. Rain fell as if had never fallen before.” To the people of Kaunga, nature speaks through natural phenomena and omens. When Lubinda, Chief Mpona’s nemesis, hires a *kamcape* to accuse Mpona of practising witchcraft and have him banished, the *kamcape* fails to carry out the mission because he feels guilty and scared under the gaze of nature (*Tongue of the Dumb*, 245-6). The mating of cicadas, red ants crossing one’s path, the whirlwind, the coming of locusts, the presence of a dead python beside Dulani’s corpse, among other natural phenomena, as seen as messages from nature.

In both texts wild animals feature prominently as an element of both nature and human existence. The animals are made part of the folk traditions as expressed through proverbs oral narratives such as the story of the tortoise in *Things Fall Apart*.

6.1.3 Ambivalence of Attitude to Natural Phenomena

In both texts there is an ambivalence of attitudes towards natural phenomena particularly as expressed in the interpretation of the locust invasions that occur in both texts. While on the one hand the locust invasions bring terror to the people because of the destruction of crops and the ensuing hunger, on the other hand the coming of locusts is welcomed because of the fact that locusts are a much-loved cuisine. Thus, while we see in both texts the joy of the collecting and

eating the locusts on one hand, on the other we see the sorrow due to the destruction of crops. The locusts are seen both as blessing and nemesis, provider and destroyer.

In the text of *Things Fall Apart* we read of how the locusts “settled on every tree and on every blade of grass” (Achebe, 1958: 51) and destroyed the livelihood of the people of Umuofia. On the other hand we read that the people saw locusts as “very good to eat” (51). Similarly, we read in *Tongue of the Dumb* (2007: 50-1):

You don't need any incentive to catch locusts, because once you fill a jar with them you will have relish for a long time to come. They harm the maize but, on the other hand, once they have come you can't just catch them and then destroy them as if they were snakes. Thus, what had set out to be a counter-attack on the locusts, actually became a pleasurable harvest.

6.1.4 Centrality of Land

In both texts the people exhibit a land-based nature-culture. Land is central to their mythology and lifestyle. The villages are strategically located, close to water sources, but within the villages the land is also apportioned according to functionality. Thus, there is within the villages land for building homesteads, land for playing and for large gatherings, as well as land set apart as shrines.

The Igbo and Nsenga apportion land for the growing of crops apart from the fact that they gather some food from the forest, where they also hunt. The main crops of the Igbo is yam while for the Nsenga it is maize. The forest is also a source of traditional herbal medicine. Thus, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Lubinda in *Tongue of the Dumb* – who is a medicine-man - are known to gather herbs for use as medicine. When the people of Igboland and Nsengaland build houses they use natural means – trees, grass and mud.

Land is a political and spiritual matter in both texts and its distribution and apportionment to a large extent depends on who has the authority to do so. In *Things Fall Apart* the *ndichie* or elders have power to apportion land. Thus when the missionaries ask for land to build a church the elders of Mbanta, who consider the message of the missionaries as inimical to the traditions and religion of the people, allocate them land in the Evil Forest. Their reasoning is that the missionaries and their blind followers will perish in the forest, consumed by the evil that lurks therein. They see Christianity as an abomination which cannot be sanitised or dignified by allocating the missionaries land in any of the villages. They also reason that an abominable

religion such as Christianity would defile their land and is only fit for the Evil Forest (Chapter Seventeen). Christianity is therefore seen as an antithesis of nature.

Similarly, when the missionaries settle among the Nsenga there is some resistance to the building of the mission school in Mpona village. The chief's decision to allow this, in fact, is manipulated by Lubinda in his quest to unseat the chief – arguing that the chief has allowed an abomination to be built on the land against the wish of the ancestral spirits. He argues that the village of Mpona faces the danger of being destroyed by the ancestral spirits if the village school is allowed to continue (44): “This village is going to be destroyed by the spirits of our ancestors if we agree to this.” He similarly argues against the order by the District Commissioner to the villagers to dig pit latrines, insisting it was against tradition and nature (239): “Mpona had led the white man to some very unnatural things. For example, the latrine pits. All the other chiefs in this part of the world had refused to dig them because it was untraditional. But he had agreed to violate the custom; he did not mind about the spirits of the ancestors.” Even the decision by the missionaries to locate their cemetery – for the missionaries and converts – in the Kaunga valley, within Mpona's kingdom, is considered “the greatest outrage against nature” (37). Eventually, however, the colonial administration takes over all the land, as also happens in *Things Fall Apart*.

There is a link, it would appear, between the mythology and ecophilosophy of the people of Nsengaland and Igboland on one hand and the apportionment of land on the other, as is suggested by the fact that each clan in Igboland would apportion an area as an “evil forest”. The text of *Things Fall Apart* says in Chapter Seventeen (135): “Every clan and village had its ‘evil forest’. In it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they died. An ‘evil forest’ was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness.” Similarly, in *Tongue of the Dumb*, some land is allocated for those suffering from leprosy and smallpox– outside the village, specifically in the Big Cave. Even witches, who are considered evil, are thrown into the cave when found guilty (36, 210, 244). The people thrown into the cave, as those thrown into the evil forest, are considered unworthy of proper burial.

However, there is also land allocated for worship. In *Things Fall Apart* there are two types of shrine – individual shrines such as what Okonkwo has in his compound (13):

Near the barn was a small house, the ‘medicine house’ or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped

them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm-wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children.

The other type of shrine is for the gods of the Igbo nation such as Agbala. Thus, for example, we read in Chapter Three that Agbala is the Oracle of the Hills and Caves – hence the hills and caves are not only a symbol of the god but also his dwelling-place. In Chapter Eleven Chielo the priestess of Agbala takes Ezinma to the shrine of Agbala in the sacred hills and caves. Similarly in *Tongue of the Dumb* there are shrines in the villages such as the one at Mpona, the seat of the Kaunga kingdom. Even the sacred Cave is also used as a place for offering sacrifices.

6.2 DIFFERENCES

There are more similarities than differences that arise in the ecological analysis of *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb*.

6.2.1 Witchcraft

While there are no cases of witchcraft indicated in *Things Fall Apart*, the practice – or at least the suspicion of the practice – of witchcraft appears to be a prominent feature in *Tongue of the Dumb*. There is within the belief system of the Nsenga of Kaunga valley a strong inclination to associate certain natural phenomena with the practice of witchcraft. Lubinda is quick to accuse others of being witches, including Chief Mpona although, as it turns out later, he manipulates the people's gullibility in matters of witchcraft to undermine and eventually attempt to overthrow the chief. In the end, however, he who had a propensity to accuse others of practising witchcraft is suspected of having practised it.

The belief in witchcraft is an important factor in the ecological analysis of *Tongue of the Dumb* because it is part of the culture of the people of Kaunga and, as argued above, the cultural beliefs of the people shapes their attitude towards and interaction with nature – as well as their interpretation of natural phenomena. The people of Kaunga perceive witches as having the power to manipulate nature and use it to achieve evil. They are believed to have the power to use lightning or wild animals to harm others. Dulani's death is perceived as a result of a witchcraft attack, and the python found lying dead beside his body is seen as confirmation of malevolence. When the villagers dig a grave to bury Lubinda after he is killed by a leopard while fleeing from justice, a python creeps into the grave before it is buried and falls limp on top of the coffin. This seems to suggest that Lubinda had manipulated the power of the python

in his witchcraft charms and that the death of the python marks the end not only of Lubinda but also of his powers of witchcraft (249).

It is worth noting, however, that Lubinda is mauled by a leopard, which however he fights to the death. The carcass of the leopard is found lying beside his vulture-devoured corpse (249). The fact that the wizard who manipulated nature is killed by a leopard and his corpse eaten by vultures suggests that nature takes its revenge on him, and proves its superiority to him, through the leopard and vultures. His charms could not save him from the leopard or the vultures. Nature's power once again proves its superiority to human power – as it does when it overwhelms humans with rains, floods, locusts and famine.

The lack of preoccupation with witchcraft in *Things Fall Apart*, however, does not mean it is totally absent from the society of the people of Umuofia. The text says in Chapter Two (11):

Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours. It was powerful in war and in magic, and its priests and medicine-men were feared in all the surrounding country. Its most potent war-medicine was as old as the clan itself. Nobody knew how old. But on one point there was general agreement – the active principle in that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In fact, the medicine itself was called *agadi-nwayi*, or old woman. It had its shrine in the centre of Umuofia, in a cleared spot. And if anybody was so foolhardy as to pass by the shrine after dusk he was sure to see the old woman hopping about. And so the neighbouring clans who naturally knew of these things feared Umuofia, and would not go to war against it without first trying a peaceful settlement.

Although the narrator of *Things Fall Apart* does not mention the words witch or witchcraft expressly as does the narrator of *Tongue of the Dumb*, there is implied in the use of the word “magic” the possibility of both noble and malevolent use of such power the individuals or even medicine-men that bear them. In *Tongue of the Dumb* Lubinda is considered a powerful medicine-man, yet by the end of the text he is classified as a witch, suggesting that during his lifetime he had the ability to use magical powers for both constructive purposes – such as in healing or protecting the people - or for destructive purposes.

Lubinda's opposite number in *Things Fall Apart* is Okagbue Uyanwa, the powerful medicine-man of Umuofia who is engaged by Okonkwo to perform *ogbanje* rites on Ezinma his daughter in Chapter Nine. There is no suggestion that Uyanwa uses his powers to harm others, neither

is there any suggestion that he invokes his powers to interfere with the course of nature. What is apparent is that the village rain-maker had the capacity to intervene during times of drought or when there is too much rain. However, the intervention of rain-makers – a phenomenon also evident in *Tongue of the Dumb* – is only possible when the rain-maker prays to the ancestral spirits and gods, the real custodians of nature and the land. The rain-maker's powers are not his own but an ability only obtained from the ancestral spirits and the gods. We read of the rain-maker in *Things Fall Apart*, Chapter Four (31):

And now the rains had really come, so heavy and persistent that even the village rain-maker no longer claimed to be able to intervene. He could not stop the rain now, just as he would not attempt to start it in the heart of the dry season, without serious danger to his own health. The personal dynamism required to counter the forces of these extremes of weather would be far too great for the human frame. And so nature was not interfered with in the middle of the rainy season.

6.2.2 Floods

Both texts have narratives of weather gone mad. However, while heavy rains and locusts characterise both texts, there is one difference: in *Tongue of the Dumb* there is occurrence of floods leading to the death, early in the story, of Dulani. Thus, while in both texts nature is portrayed as capable of bringing suffering and misery, in *Mulaisho* also portrays it as a terminator of life.

6.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The fact that there are more similarities than differences in the way that the people of Igboiland and those of Nsengaland interact with nature suggests that the cultures and ecophilosophy of the two peoples are largely similar despite the fact that the settings in the two novels are spatially and chronologically different. Both cultures are nature-based and land-dependent. Their religions are nature-based and both seek harmony with nature rather than disharmony or conflict. The cultural beliefs and mythology of the two peoples are pivotal to their interpretation of and interaction with nature and natural phenomena. The ancestral spirits are central to the existence and survival of the two peoples because they are custodians of the offerings of nature. Since the bodies of the ancestors are buried in the soil the land and ancestors cannot be separated. The land is divided and allotted according to functionality – some of the land is ordinary and meant for ordinary use; some of it is sacred and meant for spiritual use.

Finally, the fact that there are thousands of kilometres separating the setting of *Tongue of the Dumb* – which is in what is now called Zambia - and that of *Things Fall Apart* in what is now Nigeria suggests that traditional African societies, regardless of their location on the continent, have a lot in common in terms of how they perceive and interact with nature and natural phenomena. In their interaction with nature and natural phenomena, they acknowledge the indispensability of the role of ancestral spirits. This approach to nature brought these cultures into direct conflict with the tide of colonisation and westernisation which introduced different ways of interpreting and interacting with nature. This conflict was evident in the early stages of colonisation, as demonstrated in *Things Fall Apart*, as well as in the latter stages – as we see in *Tongue of the Dumb* whose chronological context is 1948 and 1949. It may be argued that some of the traditional beliefs about nature, as reflected in the two novels, have survived even in contemporary times.

It would neither be justified nor possible, the above observations notwithstanding, to assume that all African traditional societies have the same types of similarities as outlined in the study. We may opine, however, that what is certain is that these similarities exist between the traditional societies of the Igbo and the Nsenga without going as far as concluding that the same or similar findings would emerge from a comparative analysis of the ecophilosophy of any two traditional African societies.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on drawing comparisons between *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* in terms of the people's interaction with nature. The findings suggest that there are more similarities than difference between the two texts in this regard. Further, they suggest that the interpretation of nature and natural phenomena is largely guided and shaped by the cultural ethos of the people in the two novels. Additionally the findings suggest that the cultures of the Igbo and Nsenga clashed with those of the western colonisers and missionaries in part because of the differences in the interpretation of nature and natural phenomena. The next chapter is concerned with the summary of the findings in relation to the original objectives of the study. It will also draw the conclusion.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Having developed the study from the introductory chapter to the stage of analysing the selected texts in chapters Four, Five and Six, we shall not turn to the final chapter where the findings resulting from the analysis are highlighted. This chapter also proceeds to draw the general conclusion to the study. The chapter shall proceed by first of all restating the aim and objectives of the study and indicating the findings related to each of the objectives. The objectives were as follows:

7.1 OBJECTIVES AND FINDINGS

7.1.1 OBJECTIVE ONE: To explore the relationship between nature and humans in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Mulaisho's *The Tongue of the Dumb*.

7.1.1.1 Things Fall Apart

The findings were as follows:

- (i) That the interpretations of nature and interactions with nature is largely determined by the culture and ecophilosophy of the Igbo people;
- (ii) That the interaction with nature is not always determined by the collective wisdom or ethos, but also – in exceptional cases such as that of Unoka – by the individual's lifestyle and personal philosophy;
- (iii) That the Igbo people's interaction with nature was in some cases ambivalent – an example being the interpretation of the locust invasion. While from the strictly ecological perspective the locusts were a danger to the sustenance of the people of Umuofia, they were on the other hand welcomed as a once-a-lifetime provision of food by nature;
- (iv) There was in the Igbo ecophilosophy a tendency to lean towards anthropomorphism – attributing human characteristics to natural phenomena such as the weather;
- (v) While disharmony might be experienced in the relationship between the Igbo people and nature, as in the case of drought or unabated heavy rains, the ultimate goal is to ensure harmony between human beings and nature;

- (vi) Where there is disharmony between nature and human beings, nature turns out the stronger, with human beings left at its mercy, as in the case of drought;
- (vii) The Igbo depended on land for much of their survival because the but their interaction with land is reflected in the division of land use into at least five main categories: first, land as a dwelling-place; second, land as source of natural sustenance; third, land as space for food production; fourth, land as sacred and dedicated to the gods; and fifth, land as sacred and dedicated to evil spirits.

7.1.1.2 Tongue of the Dumb

Below are the findings emanating from the analysis of *Tongue of the Dumb*:

- (i) The relationship between the people and nature is largely determined by their cultural beliefs and in particular their mythology and ecophilosophy;
- (ii) The culture of the people is a nature-culture, meaning it is centred on respect for nature in all the facets of life;
- (iii) In their interaction with nature and natural phenomena, the Nsenga people seek harmony, although harmony is not always possible and they sometimes find themselves in conflict with nature – which conflict manifests itself in natural disasters, suffering even death;
- (iv) Whenever the people are in conflict with nature it is nature that proves more powerful, as when the people are overwhelmed by floods, drought, famine, locust invasions, among others;
- (v) The relationship between the people and nature is ambivalent: sometimes the people see nature as an ally, other times as an angry punisher;
- (vi) The people see a vital link between their ancestors and nature, for the ancestors are the custodians of the land, which is the best endowment given to them by nature; hence the ancestral spirits are an important bridge in the relationship between the people and nature. To offend nature is to offend the ancestors, and vice versa;
- (vii) There is a tendency for the people to attribute human qualities to natural phenomena – a form of anthropomorphism. Nature, according to them, has eyes to see and is able to speak to them. Thus, for example, when Lubindas see cicadas mating or when Dulani's path is crossed by black ants (Mulaisho 2007: 5) it is nature's way of speaking about events soon to come;

- (viii) The religion of the people of Kaunga is nature-based; it is a nature-religion, with nature being at the core of the belief system associated with the religion. Hence their religion may be deemed animist;
- (ix) Both wild and domestic animals, being part of nature, are an important aspect of the life of the people. Hence animals are also part of the folklore of the Nsenga people as exhibited by the proverbs and narrative tales;
- (x) Witchcraft is a key element of the people's interaction with nature and their interpretation of natural phenomena. According to them witches or wizards have the ability to manipulate nature for malevolent purposes. Thus, for example, the fact that a dead python is found lying by Dulani's corpse is interpreted as a sign that Lubinda used the serpent, through his powers, to kill Dulani;
- (xi) Land is very central to the life of the people of Kaunga and their interaction with nature, hence it is divided and allocated according to functionality; theirs is a land-based culture.

7.1.2 OBJECTIVE TWO: To examine the similarities and differences in the relationship between nature and humans in the two texts under study.

The findings pertaining to this objective were as indicated below:

7.1.2.1 Similarities

(i) Nature and Culture

In both novels the people are close to nature and seek to live in harmony with it; they exhibit a nature-culture. Even the religions of the Igbo of *Things Fall Apart* and the Nsenga of *Tongue of the Dumb* are nature-religions. Thus in both texts Christianity is perceived as a threat to the delicate balance between the people and nature. Where disharmony develops in the relationship between nature and the people it is nature that triumphs over human beings, unleashing unbearable punishment in the form of erratic weather or locusts.

In both texts there is a link between nature and the ancestral spirits, for the land is under the custodianship of the ancestral spirits. To offend the ancestors is to offend nature, and to offend nature is to offend the ancestors. Thus by living in harmony with nature the people are assured of the protection and blessing of the ancestors. Similarly by living in harmony with the ancestral spirits, which is by means of following the customs and practices they put in place, the people live in harmony with nature and enjoy its abundant endowments. In addition, living

in harmony with nature and the ancestors also means that the people, in both texts, have to hold thanksgiving festivals – to the ancestors and gods – for good harvest. The land is under the custodianship of the ancestral spirits and the gods.

(ii) Personification of Nature

Both texts are characterised by a form of anthropomorphism: attributing human qualities to natural phenomena. The Igbo and Nsenga interpret some natural events as expressions of the mood of nature or some aspects of nature such as the weather. Nature can get angry, can warn of coming disasters. Even animals are in some contexts humanised. This in part underlines the role of animal characters in African narrative tales intended to teach children and help them handle the socialisation process. This is in tandem with the views forwarded by Chilala in his work “The African Narrative Tale as a Tool of Education” (2011).

(iii) Ambivalence of Attitude to Natural Phenomena

In both texts, nature is sometimes considered an ally or friend, at other times an adversary to be feared. This ambivalence of attitude is best expressed in the way the people react to the locust invasions which occur in both texts: while on the one hand the people welcome the invasion as it means they will have plenty of locusts as food, on the other hand they suffer the consequences of the destruction of their crops and the ensuing famine.

(iv) Centrality of Land

Not only are the cultures of the Igbo and the Nsenga nature-based, they are essentially land-based. Land is a core element of not only the lifestyle of the people but also their mythology. Not only is land the dwelling-place and generally a source of sustenance and medicinal provisions; it is also a facilitator of the worship of the ancestral spirits and the gods. Land is as sacred as the ancestral spirits and gods who are its custodians and stewards, and must therefore be utilised in a manner that does not offend the gods or the ancestral spirits. Hence in both texts Christianity is seen generally as an invading religion whose presence in the land is an abomination that has to be resisted or uprooted. There is also a link between the allocation of land and the belief system and mythology of the people.

7.1.2.2 Differences

There are more similarities than differences between *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb* in terms of the way the people interact with nature. It would appear this is largely due to the high degree

of similarities between the cultures of the Igbo and the Nsenga, both being African peoples. Be that as it may, there are a few differences, as indicated below.

(i) Witchcraft

The Nsenga people, as presented in *Tongue of the Dumb*, believe that witches or wizards have the capacity to not only tame but also to manipulate nature or natural phenomena to fulfil their own selfish and often malevolent agendas. They can control or manipulate the weather and animals in their pursuit of evil. In *Things Fall Apart* there is no preoccupation with the work or power of witches, although there is clear evidence of their belief in supernatural power and therefore in the existence of both noble and ignoble uses of supernatural power. There is in *Things Fall Apart* however no suggestion of human beings having the ability to use their supernatural power to tamper with the flow of nature.

(ii) Floods

When human beings are in conflict with nature – when they offend nature – the result is that nature reacts with anger, from the perspective of the people of both Igboland and Nsengaland. However, while in both texts nature’s anger is in part expressed in the form of locust invasions, in the case of *Tongue of the Dumb* there is the element of floods as an expression of nature’s anger – a phenomenon not present in *Things Fall Apart*.

7.1.3 OBJECTIVE THREE: To evaluate the significance of the similarities and differences in the relationship between nature and humans in the two texts.

The findings suggest that there are more similarities than differences in the way that the people of Igboland and Nsengaland interface with nature in its various manifestations: land, weather, crops, vegetation, rivers, birds and animals. The mythology and other cultural and religious beliefs of the two peoples are indispensable to the process of formulation of taboos and guidelines on how nature should be treated. The similarities between the two nature-cultures, however, should not be reason to conclude that all traditional African societies have such similarities. It is important to note that setting, both spatially and chronologically, is a critical factor in determining the nature and extent of the differences in the findings.

7.2 CONCLUSION

This chapter was concerned with presenting a summary of the findings from chapters four, five and six, as guided by the aim and objectives of the study. The main aim of the study was to conduct a comparative analysis of the relationship between humans and nature in *Things Fall Apart* and *Tongue of the Dumb*. The findings exhibited more similarities than differences. The researcher has been careful

not to generalise the findings as applicable to every other traditional African society or every other African novel. The findings therefore only apply to the comparison of the two selected texts and not to all African literature. Further, there is no basis for arguing that the findings constitute or are symptomatic of the writing tradition of Nigeria or Zambia. (The question of a Zambian writing tradition has been handled by Chilala in his 2019 seminal article “Anglophone Zambian Literature: Tradition or Transition?”. See also: Chilala 2013, “Through the Male Eyes: Gendered Styles in Contemporary Zambian Fiction”).

It is imperative to note that one common aspect between the two texts in term of the relationship between nature and humans is that among humans, in the two texts, it is men who are in control of society. The Ibo and Nsenga societies are patriarchal. However, while noting that there are some elements of the cultural practice that might be deemed as degrading to women, such as the ill-treatment of Natombi in *The Tongue the Dumb* and the general marginalisation of women in *Things Fall Apart*, this study agrees with the observation by Chilala (2004) that “there are some elements of African culture that exalt women”; further, that these elements are also evident in the two novels under analysis. Although Natombi’s life suggests that nature ultimately comes to her rescue through the demise of Lubinda her main tormentor, her life is still overshadowed by the question of whether a woman can attain true and lasting freedom from male domination (See Chilala 2003).

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