

**Theorising the environment in fiction: Exploring ecocriticism and ecofeminism in
selected black female writers' works**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Juliet Sylvia Pasi, student 5157-5000 declare that “Theorising the Environment in Fiction: Exploring Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism in Selected Black Female Writers’ Works” is my own work and that all the sources I have used/quoted have been indicated by means of complete references.

Signature :

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Juliet Pasi", written over a dotted line.

Date: 09/02/2018

SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the relationship between humans and the nonhuman world or natural environment in selected literary works by black female writers in colonial and post-colonial Namibia and Zimbabwe. Some Anglo-American scholars have argued that many African writers have resisted the paradigms that inform much of global ecocriticism and have responded to it weakly. They contend that African literary feminist studies have not attracted much mainstream attention yet mainly to raise some issues concerning ecologically oriented literary criticism and writing. Given this unjust criticism, the study posits that there has been a growing interest in ecocriticism and ecofeminism in literary works by African writers, male and female, and they have represented the social, political (colonial and anti-colonial) and economic discourse in their works. The works critiqued are Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006), Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) and No Violet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). The thrust of this thesis is to draw interconnections between man's domination of nature and the subjugation and dominance of black women as depicted in different creative works. The texts in this study reveal that the existing Anglo-American framework used by some scholars to define ecocriticism and ecofeminism should open up and develop debates and positions that would allow different ways of reading African literature. The study underscored the possibility of black female creative works to transform the definition of nature writing to allow an expansion and all encompassing interpretation of nature writing. Contrary to the claims by Western scholars that African literature draws its vision of nature writing from the one produced by colonial discourse, this thesis argues that African writers and scholars have always engaged nature and the environment in multiple discourses. This study breaks new ground by showing that the feminist aspects of ecocriticism are essential to cover the

hermeneutic gap created by their exclusion. On closer scrutiny, the study reveals that African women writers have also addressed and highlighted issues that show the link between African women's roles and their environment.

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KEY TERMS

- Biodiversity
- Ecocriticism
- Ecofeminism
- Human Others
- Earth Others
- Environment
- Environmentalism
- Ecology
- Andropocentrism
- Development
- Anthropocentrism
- Patriarchy
- Conservation
- Hierarchy

ACRONYMS

AfDB – African Development Bank (AfDB)

AIDS – Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome

HIV – Human Immuno Deficiency Virus

ER – Emergency Room

TPVO – The Purple Violet of Oshaantu

ASLE – Association for the Study of Literature and Environment

WNN – We Need New Names

TBN – The Book of Not

NC – Nervous Conditions

WID – Women in Development

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Background to the Study

This study explores the relationship between humans and the non-human world or natural environment in selected literary works by black female writers in colonial and post-colonial Africa. Using the ecocriticism and ecofeminism lens, the study explores the nature of the relationship between human beings and the environment as depicted in four African female-authored novels. It is critical to note that, in literary studies, particularly in Africa, the field of ecocriticism has recently emerged as an important critical perspective that explains how human beings relate to the environment and or how non-humans are presented in fiction. On a basic and simple level, Cheryll Glotfelty (1996: xviii), a pioneer in this field, defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” Some critics have attributed the birth of the term “ecocriticism” to the United States of America critic William Rueckert’s essay, “Literature and ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” According to Rueckert (1978), ecocriticism entails the “application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature.” In other words, ecocriticism is a notion that examines the “interconnectedness of man and nature” (Fenton 2008:2). Fenton claims that the two are inextricably connected; hence a keen understanding of both the natural world and humans is vital in the study of fiction from an ecocritical perspective. An analysis of the selected works in this study enables one to better understand how humans’ relation (in particular women) with the natural world is represented in literature. This corroborates Glotfelty’s (2007: xix) views in “What is Ecocriticism,” who explains that “all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and being affected by it.” It is thus, the aim of this study to demonstrate this intricate unity and symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural world. The selected works will be used to show how literature connects nature and culture so that “one

can better understand [women's] characteristics and weaknesses in relation to the environment" (Fenton 2008:6).

A related but distinct field of study, ecofeminism examines the representations of nature and women. Glotfelty (1996: xxiv), describes ecofeminism as "a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature." Another scholar, King (1983:118), concurs and observes that "[...] the hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing." In other words, ecofeminists claim that there are strong "connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of colour, children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature" (Warren 2000:1). By implication, Saidi's (1978) term "the Other" can be used in reference to "woman" and "nature." Hence, Warren (2000: 1) classifies these "[indisputably] dominated groups" as "human Others" and "earth Others" (such as animals, forests and land)." This observation is useful to the endeavour in this study as it foregrounds the inter-relatedness of humans, in particular women and their environment. As such, the central argument in this study is how ecofeminism helps us understand the alleged connections between the oppression, subordination and domination of women (the human other) and the domination of nature (earth others). Ecofeminism takes a 'feminist' approach to understand women and nature's interconnections and interdependence. It also challenges feminism to consider environmental issues seriously.

This study underpins the notion that nature is a feminist issue. Warren (2000:4) observes that, "what makes something a feminist issue is that an understanding of it contributes in some way to an understanding of the subordination of women." This very argument finds resonance with the aims of this research in that an ecofeminist reading of the female authored

narratives allows an understanding of the woman-nature connections. Thus, the role of ecofeminism in this study is to determine to what extent literary texts with nature as subject reflect the role of women with regards to nature. An ecofeminist evaluation of the selected texts will establish whether women are affected by changes in nature, whether they appreciate it and whether they exploit or conserve it. Concisely, it will emphasise the ecofeminist belief that there are significant connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature. Warren (1987) further notes that an understanding of these connections is crucial to feminism, environmentalism and environmental philosophy. Warren points out that women are often described in animal terms and nature is often described in female and sexual terms. This analogous relationship between nature and women has been revised by some ecofeminists such as Kolodny (1975). The claim is that the language that “feminises nature and naturalises women, reflects and perpetuates the domination and inferiorisation of both by failing to see the extent to which the twin dominations of women and nature (including animals) are, in fact, culturally (and not merely figuratively) analogous” (Warren cited in Zimmerman et al. 1993:265). Thus, to perpetuate the goal of ecofeminism, it is the intention of this study to interrogate and unpack such sexist-naturist language and the power over systems of domination which they reinforce.

Since the starting point of this study is the interrogation of narratives by black female authors, the concept of feminism will be of significance. It is also important to note that feminism as a concept occupies a central place in the theory of ecofeminism and has been a subject of rigorous discussion. Warren (2000) claims that a feminist approach uses gender analysis as the starting point. In other words, gender is the lens through which the initial description and analysis of the texts will occur. In this study, ecofeminism uses a feminist approach when exploring women and nature interconnections. The focus is not on women as humans, as

mothers, as wives, as daughters, as sisters but to “highlight women as women in their discussions of interconnected systems of unjustified domination” (Warren 2000:2). This research will go beyond the mere analysis of gender issues and the environment to theorise and untangle their interconnections. The implication is that nature is not the focal point in ecofeminism; rather, “sex/gender differences are at the centre of their analysis” (Estok 2001:22). According to Estok, it is the second part in “ecofeminism” that has ontological priority. Thus, ecofeminism holds the assumption that it is the human place in nature that is being focused upon and that human beings are not the sole occupants of the planet and they are not the exclusive subject. Such arguments will be the predominant context for the discussions ensuing in this study.

By referring to black female narratives, the study seeks to demonstrate that black female authors such as Neshani Andreas (Namibia), Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe) and NoViolet Bulawayo (Zimbabwe) realise that misogyny and the exploitation of the environment are parallel forms of social injustice and domination. Their texts will also explore major issues that African women writers address and also examine the ramifications of such concerns on the lives of their people (in particular women’s lives) and their lived environment.

This study thus aims to explore representations of ecocriticism in female authored narratives in two African countries, namely, Namibia and Zimbabwe. These were readily available. The study’s text selection was also on the basis of the environmental history, political and social circumstances that occasioned their writing. The texts will be analysed within these larger contexts. The narratives will be located in the African environmental history of these countries from the pre-colonial settlement, during the consolidation of colonial power and the post-colonial dispensation.

It is the aim of this research to demonstrate how conceptions of nature writing, which are at the centre of ecocriticism and environmentalism, are constructed by the historical and political processes obtaining in the human's lived environment. Again, it is the intention of the study to examine literary texts by black African women in light of concerns raised by ecocriticism and ecofeminism and African environmental history. The relationship between these concepts will be interrogated to enable them to contribute to the ongoing discussions and debate on ecocriticism, ecofeminism and African environmental history.

The question that is at the centre of the study is: why focus only on black female writers? Carolyn Martin Shaw in Muponde and Taruvinga (2002:26) submits that, "when women write, they not only create their own stories but by the act of writing they gain authority over their lives." In addition, in identifying women with nature, the writers celebrate and recognise their interdependence and co-existence. However, for some ecofeminists in 'social ecology,' nature fails to bring "comfort to the troubled world and thus, reflects the world through its contradictions and antagonisms" (Shaw 2002: 26). For example, representations of nature in Vera's *Under the Tongue* (1996) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998) illustrate such contradictions. Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1982), can be used as an illustration of nature as solace in a troubled world. Bookchin (2005: 1) also argues that "the very idea of dominating [...] nature has its origins in the domination of human by human." In other words, ecological problems are located in oppressive, patriarchal, hierarchical and elitist structures in human society. Clark (2011) endorses Bookchin's view as he observes that the societal hierarchies are geared to exploit both other people and the natural world as a source of profit. The female writers' views above reveal a complex engagement with nature and the environment in their creative

works. Hence, this study explores how black female writers strive to undress and redress these engagements or connections in their works through nature representations in their texts.

Building on the works of Muponde and Taruvinga (2002), Shaw (2002), Bookchin (2005) and Clark (2011), James et al. (2000: 2) add that “black women writers’ contributions to their societies and the global communities are many and varied and the contributions mirror the complexities, experiences, struggles, and circumstances that women confront in their different environments.” James (2000:3) also notes that black female writers “tell stories about African circumstances and provide a dialogue for informing, educating and building better and stronger institutions necessary to expose the circumstances that need to be changed.” In fact, black women scholars are reshaping the context of academic and policy engagement and they are challenging the past notions of development and governance. Some African women critics and writers are now questioning the relevance of literary work on sustainable African development and the African woman; “what, then, does African literature have to do with sustainable African development and African women?” (Kalu 1996: 21). The answer to this question lies in the contextualisation of literary theories in a bid to show their relevance. This study is thus one such effort that calls for a broad set of environmental criteria based on an analysis of ecocriticism and ecofeminism within texts by black female writers.

The study posits that African writers have shown a strong interest in ecocriticism and this wave of interest has not receded. In fact, there has been a growing interest in ecocriticism and literary works by African writers, both male and female. These creative writers have represented the social, political (colonial and anti-colonial) and economic discourse in their works. This is contrary to Slaymaker’s (2001:684) claims that many African writers have resisted the “paradigms that inform much of global ecocriticism” and have responded to it “weakly” The concomitant question that arises is the diversity of this definition of the

concept as espoused by Slaymaker and other American scholars. It is axiomatic that the Anglo-American framework used by Slaymaker is exclusive. It is also unfortunate that Slaymaker (2001), ascribes the place of ecocriticism in African literature by prescribing a methodological approach to be followed by writers and critics. This approach, unfortunately, underpins an ecocritical orthodoxy that is rooted in the West and uses American and British literature. This study argues that this inscription is rather dubious and limiting as it rests on some 'grand-narrative' that interprets ecocriticism through reference to one overarching principle of explanation; the Anglo- American framework. Thus, the study will show that both ecocriticism and ecofeminism are not single and homogenous entities. The study will also advocate for a more diverse and all embracing ecocritical vision that includes black women writers as well.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Some scholars have argued that many of ecofeminism's critiques stem from a Western/North American point of view (Mies and Shiva 2013), Plumwood (1993), Warren (1987) and King (1983). They contend that African literary feminist studies have not attracted much mainstream attention to raise some issues concerning ecologically oriented literary criticism and writing. However, on closer scrutiny African women writers have also addressed and highlighted environmental degradation and sexist oppression concerns that show the link between African women's roles and their environment. Most of these concerns are linked to the land and have seen "drastic changes following the movement from colonialism, through independence, to the postcolonial era that have (re)shaped African societies, histories and cultures" (Nfah-Abbenyi 2007:708).The study contends that women's lives have been the most affected by these local and global shifts.

The interconnection between women and nature is further developed by Schmidt (1992). She notes that studies in Zimbabwe in the 1970s show that:

The thriving peasant agriculture that threatened the profitability of the settler economy was, for the most part, the work of African women...[While]the wives of migrant men remained in the reserves/rural areas, the lives of these women and their significance to African society remained largely unexplored (Schmidt 1992:3).

Scholars like Ester Boserup (1982) have also pointed out the significant role played by sub-Saharan African women in maintaining and conserving the land. The implications of such omissions for Zimbabwean and other African countries historiography are significant to this study. On the basis of the insights from the scholars above, one can hypothesise that since the early 1970s, African scholars have made a special effort to demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between black African women and their environment. This interconnection might not have been scholarly named, “ecofeminism,” but it has always been in existence. Black women’s roles in Africa were affected by the environment (physical or natural) and the environment was also affected by them. Concepts of manhood, womanhood and femininity were also redefined. Thus, gender roles were also reshaped. In her ecofeministic analysis of Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nfah-Abbenyi (2007) shows how women and the children are the mostly adversely affected by the (post)colonial relation to the environment. Nfah-Abbenyi’s ecocritical analysis of narratives by black women writers in her essay “Ecological Postcolonialism in African Women’s Literature,” shows how ecocriticism and ecofeminism discourses have moved out of the Anglo-American literary environmentalism canons. Caminero-Santangelo in “Different shades of Green: Ecocriticism and African Literature” (2007) also relates to this. She argues that writers like Saro-Wiwa have shown that African environmental activism is not a new phenomenon in African Literature. Unfortunately, his protests against environmental degradation were silenced. The concomitant question that arises is, is it because his environmental concerns were echoed

within a non-American national framework? One is made aware of the different contradictions in ecocritical readings of African literary texts. My study therefore, interrogates and contests new forms of ecocriticism contained in the novels by female African writers. Hence, in this study, I call for an expansion of ecofeminism focus in order to include non-Western point of views and recognise the “double-bind” of being female and colonised.

Recent scholarship in African literary studies in the text *Eco-Critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* (2013), suggests that there is need to think and re-think the definition of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Some Anglo-American literary critics have merely glossed over conceptions of nature writing in African literary studies. Others, have pointed out that African literature draws its vision of nature writing from the one produced by colonial discourse. Furthermore, other scholars like Slaymaker (2001) have linked nature writing by African writers to imperialism. What these insights suggest is precisely the need to think about environmentalism in Africa and celebrate African environmental history in new ways, without downplaying the social and political implications of representations of nature.

Following from the above discussion of the diverse scholarly views on ecocriticism, it is the aim of this study to contextualise the heterogeneity of the ecocriticism paradigm within the selected texts. The purpose of this diversity is to show the multi-vocal nature of ecocriticism and ecofeminism and their applicability to different creative works. The African female authored texts in this study will show that the existing Anglo-American framework used by some scholars to define ecocriticism and ecofeminism should open up and develop debates and positions that would allow different ways of reading African literature. It calls for a transformation in the definition of nature writing to allow an expansion and all encompassing interpretation of nature writing. Hence, in this study I advocate for a kind of dialogue that will enable me to examine women’s African literary texts in view of all the forms of

domination and exploitation raised in ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Such an examination will enable a larger section of African literary works to contribute and develop discussions “within ecocriticism and African environmental history” (Caminero-Santangelo 2007:699). This point is underemphasised in western critical works on ecocriticism by black female writers. Consequently, perspectives on ecofeminism in their works are not recognised and acknowledged as creating conditions for environmental change. The research therefore seeks to challenge a view of ecocriticism as a western preserve by examining different ways of conceptualising woman-nature connections in female authored texts.

In light of the gaps identified and revealed in the background to the study regarding the appreciation of the depiction of nature and the environment by female authors from Africa, the problem statement of this current study can be stated as follows: although African literature has been analysed, much of that literature has been written by male authors, and the theories used to analyze that literature have largely been patriarchally created and elaborated. Recently, female authors have been studied. The problem has been that few female critics have analysed female-authored creative works from an ecocritical perspective. Critics have focused instead, on conventional feminist politics. These feminist approaches have tended to sidetrack the theme of nature, the environment and how these themes are interconnected with women’s oppression and subsequent quest for freedom. This current study intends to reverse the above trends in appreciating female authored literary creations. The gaps identified above can be addressed by focusing on African women’s literary works. Methodologically, a comparative study of how women represent nature and the environment in women’s creative works brings the study of women’s art under one roof. The study also punctures the myths that African women understand and depict nature and the environment in the same way. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of African women’s depictions of connections between women, nature and the environment manifests different rhetorical strategies. Female authors adopt such

strategies to authorise Africa and female centred emancipatory perspectives. Theoretically, the current study acknowledges the pioneering work of western ecofeminists and critics. However, my study argues that these traditional western theories have to be interrogated. Also, some of their convictions have to be rejected before recontextualising those aspects of the western theories that align with the need for Africa and women-centred alternative explanations of the relationships between women, nature and the environment. To this extent, my study adopts the theories of ecocriticism and ecofeminism because these theories enable one to examine the interlocking forms of oppression as represented in the selected creative works in this study. Thus, understanding the ecofeminist concerns in the selected novels contributes to an understanding of the exploitation and domination of the human Other.

1.3 Assumptions of the Study

The main assumptions of the study are that:

- Ecocriticism is not a new phenomenon in African literary canons.
- Ecocriticism is a heterogeneous paradigm that challenges inherited thinking and practices in the reading of literature and culture.
- There are different ways of interpreting environmental representations in a text.
- People's relationship to nature serves as a motive to undertake actions aimed at nature conservation or to neglect it.
- Black female writers' perceptions on ecofeminism are not fully recognised /acknowledged in the environmental canon.
- Scant attention has been paid to the way in which ecocritical theories impact on the analysis of literature on nature.

1.4 Research Questions

The study has the following research questions:

- What makes the environment a feminist issue?
- How does literature, particularly the female authored texts with nature as subject represent the complexities of the relationship between nature and women?
- What can we learn from the representation of nature and crisis-hit and institutionally weak African urban and rural communities?
- To what extent do literary texts with nature as subject reflect the role of women with regards to nature?
- How can imaginative fiction and literary theory reflect aspects of ecocriticism that underpin the social and political implications of representations of nature?
- How can this new understanding on the environment inform attitudes, policies and interventions which recognise and complement the importance of the environment?
- In what ways does ecofeminism manifest itself in the black female authored literary texts?

1.5 Aim of the Study

The study is concerned with engaging the literary representations of humans and the environment in selected African black female writers' texts. The study will contribute to the ongoing discussions and debate on ecocriticism and ecofeminism.

1.6 Research Objectives

The study seeks to:

- Explore the black female writers' contribution to the rapidly evolving ecological debate.
- Stimulate self-awareness and environmental awareness in readers.

- Interrogate the relationship of humans as they interact with landscape and nature as depicted in black female authored texts.
- Investigate whether or not ecocriticism is a new phenomenon in African literary studies. This will be done by examining examples of environmental representation in the selected texts.
- Examine whether or not narratives by black women writers manifest and even contest the ways ecocritical or ecofeminist perspectives are spoken about and theorised.
- Compare and contrast the novelist which best captures the environment in complex ways and explain why.

1.7 Justification of the Study

This study hopes to contribute to an analysis of the selected texts in terms of environmental themes such as land degradation, resource grabbing, gardens of domesticity, development and subsistence economies as depicted in the creative texts by black women.

By examining the different literary works by black female authors from various African countries, the study will expand the appreciation of the field of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. If ecofeminism is about interconnections among all systems of unjustified human domination, (Warren 2000:2) this study will make important connections across disciplines. Besides expanding the area of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, an analysis of the work of writers concerned will demonstrate how literary studies about the environment can play part in solving real and pressing issues of the day. It would appear that environmental concerns are not a new phenomenon in African scholarship, but rather black scholars have not recognised a critical school or movement like the American Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). In Glotfelty's words, "each [is] a single voice howling

in the wilderness” (1996: xvii) and as a result, a lot of projects in the field of environmental literary studies in Africa seem not to have had an impact.

Ecocriticism is a varied and fast-changing set of practices which challenges inherited thinking and practice in the reading of literature and culture. By exploring narratives from the two African countries, Namibia and Zimbabwe, the study will show that ecocriticism and ecofeminism are not a new phenomenon in literary studies in Africa. The study underscores the claim that African texts can be re-imagined exuding an ecocritical or ecofeminist perspective, and hence, studies of this nature “promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the study of the relationship between human beings and the natural world” (Glotfelty, 1996: xviii).

This study will bring to the fore a clearer understanding of Afro-centred literary theorisations, not in opposition but in a complementary manner to the grand narratives and grand theories, ultimately validating the truth-potential of art and how its truth-claims open doors for public debate. As such, the study will encourage “new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research.” (ibid). Glotfelty reinforces Donald Worster’s (1993) view that:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of our ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, off course, but they can help with the understanding (Worster cited in Glotfelty 1996:xxi)

Worster’s (1993) claim suggests that literary studies play an important role in developing and creating an awareness of this relationship between nature and human beings. Thus, this study

endeavours to show that African scholarship have answered the call to understand and also contribute to environmental restoration. As a student of literary studies, I believe a study of this nature will make a substantial contribution to environmental thinking. Also, since we find ourselves in urban society facing an environmental crisis, nature writing plays a significant role in making us appreciate and value our natural surroundings. According to Glotfelty (1996), in the future we can expect to see ecocritical scholarship becoming even more interdisciplinary, multicultural and international. Ecocriticism has been predominantly a white movement, through studies of this nature that foreground the interface between theory and praxis, “it will become a multi-ethnic movement when stronger connections are made” (ibid: xxv).

An ecocritical analysis of the black female authored creative works therefore signifies the contribution the study will have on the socio-economic progress, not only in the selected African countries but in the African continent as a whole. Students doing literature will be encouraged to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature. As critics, Mies and Shiva (2013), Ojaide (2012) and Mishra (2011) have pointed out, one of the reasons that ecocriticism continues to grow as a discipline is the continued global environmental crisis. Ecocriticism aims to show how the work of writers concerned about the environment can play some part in solving real and pressing ecological concerns.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

The study considers only the fiction which is written in English. This means that some fictional works written in local languages will not be explored as they fall outside the scope of the study. In addition, only those with an environmental orientation and written by black female writers will be used. This is in conformity to the scope of the study, which is on the

relationship between black women and the environment. The study will also be limited to the narratives which are set within a specified time frame, the colonial and postcolonial period.

1.9 Theoretical Framework: Ecocriticism and ecofeminism

1.9.1 Defining Feminism

Feminism is a movement that advocates for equality for women. Reddock (1998) defines feminism as “the awareness of the oppression, exploitation and/or subordination of women within society and the conscious action to change and transform this situation.” As an ideology, feminism goes beyond awareness and advocates the eradication of gender differences. It pays attention to women’s position in culture and society and aims to change and transform the oppressive situation of women. Thus, feminism tends to be used for the women’s movement which campaigns for the complete political, social and economic equality (Cornell 1998) between men and women. However, feminism has evolved over time and has seen the advent of different waves as outlined by different scholars, dating from 1960 to the present day. According to Fiona Tolan (2006: 318) efforts to define the term “feminism” show that it has become “fractured, divided and contradictory.” This means that as a theory, feminism defies a single and compact definition. Lunga (2010:28), says that “[...] feminism is a complex, multi-faceted movement whose essence is to re-build, not to destroy society [...] The primary target of feminist attack is patriarchy. The latter imposes male

superiority on women kind, and allows all forms of sexual, economic, political and cultural domination of women and girls.” In addition, Aidoo cited in Etim (2000:71) says that:

...no writer, female or male, is a feminist just by writing about women. Unless a particular writer commits his or her energies, actively, to exposing the sexist tragedy of women’s history; protesting the ongoing degradation of women; celebrating their physical and intellectual capabilities, and above all, unfolding a revolutionary vision of the role of women, he she cannot be pronounced a feminist.

What we need in Africa is social transformation to address the “feminine condition;” a condition that encompasses all those yearnings and desires of women that remain unnamed and unspeakable in most communities. Thus, feminism calls for a social transformation that should benefit women. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) advocates the use of the term “stiwanism” instead of feminism. The acronym “STIWA” stands for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa; a term that campaigns for an all-encompassing and all-inclusive social transformation in an African context. In African society, this type of transformation is not about “warring with the men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:1). The awareness of the existence of male superiority or patriarchy and the effort to liberate women from constitutes the second limb of the term ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is of the view that the domination of nature by patriarchy is synonymous to the oppression of women by patriarchy (Mazumdar 2013). The claim is that there is a significant relationship between the unjustified domination of women and that of nature. Meeker (cited in Glotfelty 1996), reveals that literature can be examined to explore this relationship. He asserts that literature:

Should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behaviour and the natural environment — to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with the world around us (Meeker 1972: 3-4).

Thus, feminists give voice to women and recognize the significance of restoring women to their place in history. A lot of scholarly essays and articles on African literature have been written in this regard. This study's point of departure is that this transformation or restoration has to be examined within a nature-oriented literature. The reinvention of African worlds not only requires rethinking relationships between the black woman and the black man; but emphasises that it is necessary to seek out the domains in which the natural elements and humans can co-exist, co-operate and flourish in the bio-sphere. According to the ecocritic Manes (1996), for example, the reading of a literary work of fiction often impresses on the reader that it is only the human protagonists in the work that are alive, while their natural surroundings are mute and passive. This implies that an ecocritical reading of literature calls for a paradigm shift from the human-centric to the bio-centric and this study is such an endeavour. The ecofeminism theory used in this study will explore how the "wider ramifications of women's lives are mapped, interrogated and reinvented" (Wilson-Tagoe 1997:177) in relation to their natural environment in the medium of the African novel. Interrogating this relationship will also provide a discursive space for relating how black women appreciate or exploit the environment. Thus, ecofeminism will be employed as the interpretive framework that can "unravel both the discourse of the feminine and the politics of its representation" within an African environmental history (Wilson-Tagoe 1997:177).

It must be emphasised that I do not purport at this point to explore feminism and its diverse disciplines. Rather, a clear definition of my premise will give a clearer understanding of the link between 'eco-' and 'feminism' later in my discussion. It will also reveal how and why an ecofeminist analysis of the texts written by black women is relevant in this study.

1.10 Ecofeminism

For the purposes of this study it is important to draw a distinction between ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Estok clearly observes that the two are not antagonistic discourses but rather the two approaches “complement each other and [work] toward defining more fully what each approach envisions.” Glotfelty (1996) contrasts the prefixes ‘eco-’ and ‘enviro-’. According to her, ‘enviro-’ is anthropocentric and dualistic in its view that humans are surrounded by everything that is not us’, namely the environment. ‘Eco-’, on the contrary, implies interdependent communities and integrated systems. This feature of interconnected systems is affirmed by Sun (2006) who explains that people are in fact just one of its elements and not the centre of nature. He further notes that the ecological crises on earth are often directly provoked by people disregarding the rights of the other components of nature. Hence, Estok (2001) disputes King’s (1983:42) argument that “in ecofeminism, nature is the central category of analysis.” Feminism presupposes the existence of the patriarchal system. For ecofeminists, the patriarchal system dominates the environment and also oppresses women. Estok (2001) also points out that “[...] the hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing” (Warren cited in Estok2005:22).Estok’s observation is critical to this research as it recognises the interconnection between the oppression of human and nonhuman nature. The study builds on this ecofeminist view to show how the “same habitual structures of thought, feeling and action that devalue and harm women, also harm nature (Curry 2006:95).

Thus ecofeminism does not prioritise nature but as King notes later, “ecofeminist movement politics and culture must show the connection between all forms of domination, including the domination of nonhuman nature” (King1983:142). Despite these differences, many ecofeminists do agree that their focus lies in sex/gender differences. As such, this study argues that ecofeminism is a limb of ecocriticism that focuses on the relationship between the

“domination of women and the domination of the natural environment” (Warren cited in Estok 2005). The positioning of women and the natural world into object status will be viewed as a feminist and ecocritical discourse in this study.

By analyzing the contemporary literary works, the study will endeavour to show that these authors have adopted an environmental perspective in their works and are thus aware of the outside world. The study is also premised on the notion that continuity of social, religious and economic aspects of life can be sustained by living in harmony with the environment itself. Thus the study draws upon sources from environmentalist criticism and literary studies to investigate the ways in which the selected literary works characterise the natural world. The relationship between women and nature, and how this relationship might influence readers’ attitudes toward the environment, is also the focus of this research. This view is significant to this study. As such, the study examines the relationship between literature and the environment and the treatment of the nature in the selected creative works. The departing point of this thesis is the focus of attention, which is the celebration of the relationship between the African women and the environment. The gender differences in the four texts analysed in this study are implicated in the environmental crisis. At its core, the study locates both the black woman and the natural world into object status. This is vital because in African cosmology, nothing stands alone (Achebe 1989). All forms of oppression are connected hence, the study’s analysis of the different forms of domination and oppression in the four novels.

1.11 Research Methods and Methodology

1.11.1 Qualitative Analysis

This study primarily uses a qualitative, desk top research where contemporary fiction set in different African countries will be the central nerve of the study. There will be no field work but literary analysis of narratives by black female authors from different African countries. From the chosen texts, women and environmental concerns will be critically examined in relation to their representation of the relationship between nature and humans. That way critical concepts and issues will be raised and interpreted. Works by literary critics, study books from different disciplines, journals, the internet, media sources and different publications will also be extensively referenced so as to build knowledge a more comprehensive definition of ecocriticism and also ascertain how ecofeminists are looking at the way representations of nature are influenced by gender.

A qualitative approach assumes that all knowledge is relative. The approach further assumes that there is a subjective element to all knowledge and research, and that holistic, ungeneralisable studies are justifiable (Nunan, 1999:3), especially when researching human phenomena. In addition, to assist in the analysis the internet, journals and critical works on literature in the form of secondary books will also be read so as to bring into focus what other academics think about the area of interest. The other critical tools will be research papers and academic presentations which have a bearing on the study and also the fictional and academic writers' blogs where they post their views on fiction. These instruments will assist the researcher to gather information so that after a critical analysis the writer may be able to come up with original and well informed ideas.

Maritz and Visagie (2006: 26) suggest that good qualitative research methods focus on the research process and textual analysis is one of the tools to be used. As a site of discussion, qualitative research is difficult to define. It has no theory or paradigms that are distinctly its own. Nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods that are entirely its own. Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative content, discourse, archival, phonemic

analysis and even statistics to describe, rather than to interpret. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989:26) describe qualitative research therefore as “ultimately a frame of mind; it is an orientation and commitment to study the social world in certain kinds of ways.” This will help one to understand social and cultural processes in the narratives and also come up with multiple interpretations. This because the qualitative researcher prefers to study the world as it naturally occurs, without manipulating it as an experimental researcher would (Johnson and Christensen 2004:360). Qualitative methodologies are consequently “approaches that enable researchers to learn at first hand about the social world they are investigating by means of involvement and participation in that world through a focus upon what individual actors say and do” (Hitchcock and Hughes 2001:12). Should they, however, opt to additionally quantify the frequencies and compatibility of different actors’ views, it will inevitably lead to validity and confirm the reliability of the collected research data. This means that the researcher can process data immediately, can clarify, summarise as the study evolves and can explore anomalous responses. Qualitative evaluations expect a plurality of experiences and hence diversity. A multiple of narratives can be used to represent a more diverse view on the area of interest. The nature and form of this diversity will not be determined in advance. This kind of research places individual actors at the centre, focuses on context, meaning, culture, history and biography. (Adopted from Flinders and Mills 1993; Hitchcock and Hughes 2001; Soltis 1990)

1.11.2 Textual Analysis

In light of the observations above about qualitative approaches, this study will mainly rely on the textual analysis of the selected black female authored texts. Due to the nature of the research (literature), the data analysis strategy which will be applied is literary or text

analysis. This will synthesise the fictional representations in terms of their thematic inclinations and theoretical revelations. That is, using narrative forms and analysis to come up with the core issues and concerns which spell out the literary representations of the relationship between nature and humans and then present these in narrative form. In fact, Catherine Belsey (2005: 157) contends that “textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism, where cultural criticism includes English, cultural history and cultural studies, as well as any other discipline that focuses on texts, or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in its artefacts.” Textual analysis is in the end empirical; there is room for debate (ibid: 158)

Also, according to Pat Hudson, “Literature research and literary criticism, as currently practised, confine themselves almost exclusively to textual analysis, scarcely ever mentioning or using numbers. (Hudson 2005:131.) She further notes that the literature research is not quantitative because “numbers are employed to convey dates, values and amounts, but are little questioned in relation to emphasis, style or content” (ibid). This does not mean that a narrative analysis entirely escapes quantification. .

However, since my analysis does not employ statistical evidence, I find textual analysis to be appropriate in this case. Again, textual analysis allows debates since it is not exhaustive and does not embrace all the possible readings, past and future (Belsey 2005). This will help me analyse the texts from a different perspective that is the cultural and historical differences they inscribe, thus affording the researcher to come up with new ideas. In fact, delving deeper into the research problem will inevitably open unforeseen avenues that need to be investigated and incorporated into the textual analysis to present a holistic picture. If not, the

research project may remain a mere rendition of hypothesised truths, and thus compromise the validity of the results and conclusions even more seriously.

Data collection deals in words and meanings, seeing to maximise understanding of events and facilitating the interpretation of data. This explains the significance of using textual analysis in this research. Hence, I agree with Martha Nuusbaum's (1995) argument that the "novel is uniquely able to represent the empirical experience of particular individuals and that its *ethical* importance is magnified in a world where most disciplines, and the language of civil society, is so oriented towards aggregated numerical data, statistical evidence and averages" (p. 26-27). Mary Poovey (1994:142) also echoes the same argument. She says that "the individual human being [...] is obliterated by the numerical average or aggregate that replaces him." What eludes such interpretations is the fact that detailed description or narrative shares many of the same problems of categorisation, bias, rhetorical presentation and distortion that afflict quantitative approach. What is vital in any research is that research is expected to make a contribution to knowledge as it uncovers something new.

The complexity of the area under study proves that "there is no such thing as 'pure' reading: interpretation always involves extra-textual knowledge, some of which is derived from secondary sources"(Belsey 2005, p 160). In fact, secondary sources will benefit this research. They will make clear the place of ecocriticism and ecofeminism in narratives written by black female writers, and also provide comparisons which lead to further textual analysis. The researcher will read the sources and compare the analogues, thus will not allow one a single interpretation; instead this ensures that multiple meanings can be secured in the process of analysing the texts. "Secondary sources also provide well-informed, coherent and rhetorically persuasive arguments, which can leave the researcher convinced that whatever can be said has been said already" (Belsey 2005, p. 160).

1.12 Chapter Organisation

The organisation of the chapters illustrates the application of ecocritical and ecofeminist theories in post-colonial Zimbabwe and Namibia, and post-independent Zimbabwe.

Chapter one: This chapter sets the context of the study. It is the introduction which defines the area of study, aim and objectives, the statement of the problem and the justification of the study. It also discusses the theoretical framework and finally the chapter organisation and definition of terms.

Chapter two presents the extended literature review on the connections in ecocriticism and ecofeminism and women in Africa. It reviews literature that enhances one's understanding of the relationship between nature and human beings as represented in literature. The reviewed literature on ecocritical narratives will be divided into four different sections: (1) Understanding ecocriticism and ecofeminist thought, (2) Ecocriticism: the Western perspective, (3) Ecocriticism an African perspective, and lastly, (4) Nature writing from the feminine: black female writers.

Chapter three focuses on Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006). The chapter debates how Dangarembga uses the environment as strategic narratology to deconstruct the rigid divisions that typify gender stereotypes; seeing these not as monolithic, but as permeable and interchangeable. Thus, celebrating the environment is a way of shifting the centre; of giving agency to silent issues and silenced subjects. Using the ecofeminist lens, the chapter will examine the nature of the web of relationships between women and their environment. As such, the chapter examines what relationship women should have to the natural world to defend and conserve it against over-exploitation and

degradation. The different types of environment, that is, the colonial, patriarchal and multi-racial are explored in the light of ecocriticism and ecofeminism.

Chapter four examines Neshani Andreas' *The Purple violet of Oshaantu*(2001). The chapter discusses the symbiotic relationship between women and their environment in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. It debates the point that the strength and resilience that women possess are embedded in nature. The interdependent relationship between women and the environment is also explored to reveal how all life is connected. The historical, symbolical and epistemological connections between woman and the environment are also examined. The chapter concludes by looking at alternatives and liberatory strategies to ensure that both women and men live in a harmonious and non-hierarchical environment. The chapter also delineates how the author engages with postcolonial ecofeminism by exposing the ecological impacts from social, political, and economic colonial decisions on modern-day Namibia. Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*illuminates these influences, especially through the character of Kauna. She challenges traditional ways of "knowing" and reiterates the value of indigenous knowledge and culture, which expands ecofeminism outside of the academic realm. The chapter also celebrates nature and investigates the healing power nature provides to women characters suffering pain and grief.

Chapter five discusses NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* to reveal how her female characters connect with varied forms of the environment. The chapter will also examine how women's oppression is indisputably linked to environmental issues. It will also attempt to break down the dualisms by analysing the metaphorical and symbolic representations of the environment in the text. The chapter will also reveal that the degradation of the environment

parallels the oppression of women. It also argues that although the women carry the greatest burden, they offer the most resistance to environmental injustices.

Chapter six concludes the study by highlighting how black African female writers engage with nature writing and how they have always been concerned with environmental issues. Also, based on the study's findings, the chapter will also suggest recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 2: Extended Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the study's background, outlined the objectives of the study, significance of the study, and debated the theoretical framework and the research methodology. The chapter argued that an understanding of the ecocritical and ecofeminist theories and how they have developed will help shed light on how African scholarship on environmental writing has engaged general theory to date. The chapter also redefined the notion 'environment' giving it a broader scope from the western framework alluded to by a

number of western ecocritical writers. Further, it called for a change in how ecocriticism and ecofeminism are perceived in the African literary context. Furthermore, the chapter argued that African writers have always focused on environmental issues and the effects it has on women. This argument also creates the appropriate context to locate this study into how African black female writers have understood and employed environmental themes in their narratives and how nature and female subjectivities have in the process been re-shaped.

The current chapter sets out to review literature on ecocriticism and ecofeminism extensively to show its fluid nature. The chapter will also reveal that the connection between human beings and nature have always been of concern to the African writers. The thrust of the chapter is to draw interconnections between man's domination of nature and the subjugation and dominance of black women as depicted in different creative works. In other words, this integral relationship in the selected literary works will be used to show that women's survival struggles are simultaneously struggles for the protection of nature (Shiva 1989). Hence, the chapter argues that (1) nature is an archetypal image of serenity/harmony and that its disruption is analogous to the exploitation of women; (2) nature is its own referent as well as a referent of socioeconomic convulsions and identity crises; (3) nature is portrayed as a disputing metaphor of regeneration where women struggle to attain new identities, and that (4) nature is allegorical. The reviewed literature on ecocritical narratives will be divided into four different sections: (1) Understanding ecocriticism and ecofeminism thought, (2) Ecocriticism: the Western perspective, (3) Ecocriticism an African perspective, and lastly, (4) Nature writing from the feminine: black female writers.

2.2 Understanding Western Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism thought

The tradition of ecocriticism came to be formally inaugurated in the meeting of the Western Literature Association in 1980 and thereafter the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was formed in the 1990s. As a theory, ecocriticism focuses on nature writing, the relationship between humans and nature. However, as a relatively new and broad phenomenon, ecocriticism has been described in different ways by different scholars. Such attempts to define ecocriticism by various scholars will be examined below.

In their seminal work, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Glotfelty and Fromm, define ecocriticism as an “earth centred-approach to literary studies” (1996: xviii). A critical point that this study will pursue from this definition is that the environment provides for and sustains human beings, hence, the earth and its wilderness play a significant role in the human world. Unlike the traditional Western anthropocentric approach which placed the human at the centre of everything, ecocriticism places the ecosphere, the ecosystem at the centre of everything. While, anthropocentrism considered all other things marginal, existing only for the benefit of the human being, ecocriticism considers the environment as part of a system in which humanity exists. Hence, it is an “earth-centred” approach that looks at many possible connections between the physical environment and literature.

Kerridge and Sammells (cited in Okuyade 2013:10) complement Glotfelty’s work by suggesting that the “Ecocritics want to trace environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear [...] Most of all ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their *coherence* and *usefulness* in terms of their *responses to environmental crisis*” [my own emphasis]. Broadly interpreted, Kerridge and Sammells (1998) explore ecocriticism in terms of both its “earth-centredness” and aid in response to the earth’s despoliation. The environmental crisis was evident in the late 1980s, when the ecocriticism movement emerged

in the United States. This was a time when the earth's basic life support systems were endangered by not just the development of technology but by human actions. The future of the ecosphere seemed endangered by such environmental hazards as oil spills, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species at an unprecedented rate, global warming, (Glotfelty 1996) among others. For ecocritics, getting through the crisis required an understanding of the impact humans had on nature, affecting it and being affected by it. Specifically, environmental issues had to be seen as human issues. Hence, this study will strive to show that the ecocritical stance concerns itself with how the relationship between nature and humans is reflected in literary texts and how humans contribute to environmental restoration from a literary perspective. The study's departing point is the contention that, to understand ecocriticism, there is need to transcend main-stream literary topics such as gender, politics, racism, sexuality, economics among others, and pencil in environmental issues.

A point of convergence is reached by ecocritics, Glotfelty (1996), Buell (1995), and Kerridge and Sammells (1998), that ecocriticism is concerned with the function of literary studies in the biosphere and how it can be transformed into social action to address environmental crises. By implication, ecocriticism is an attempt to read literary and cultural texts from the environmentalist viewpoint to make some difference to the world outside (Kerridge 1998; Waugh 2006). Hence, it was essential to engage literary studies with the environment. A theory that viewed nature or the environment as an "objective, material and vulnerable reality" (ibid) and voiced its concern for a "spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (Buell 1995:12) was crucial at this point. In other words, literary writers, the African writer included, have to show commitment to the environment through their art. They have to use their art to conscientise people about human activities that lead to environmental degradation and thus, cultivate an eco-commitment in the society at large. As such, the study will critique

the ways in which the African black female writers engage with the environment and also interrogate the usefulness and function of their works towards the preservation of the environment.

Of importance also is Glotfelty's observation that most of the seminal works of ecocriticism by scholars such as Meeker, Rueckert, Evernden in the 1970s were not given the attention they deserved. This is a critical observation by Glotfelty to the study of ecocriticism and how it presents its history and scope. His anthology of leading ecocritics in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) is quite insightful; however, it is worth noting that the anthology is restricted to American scholarship. Since the anthology has eluded a lot of African literary critics, the current study further realises that there is a gap which still needs to be covered. Hence, there is need to explore the field of ecocriticism using a wider spectrum of writers. In this regard, the present study intends to bridge this gap by exploring the field of ecocriticism and ecofeminism using African black female writers. Additionally, the study intends to take a closer scrutiny at the feminist domination of nature in literary works by black female writers from different countries in Africa. This is an area that has been peripherally considered, hence the study seeks to demonstrate how ecofeminism has contributed to both environmental praxis, activism and theorising of nature-woman connections in African literary studies.

This study will align itself to the view that the environment is not a self-contained or unitary entity, but includes human, non-human nature, the physical environment and culture. The physical environment is a contested space and is interpreted differently by different people. However, for a more focused definition, Barry (2007:255) has suggested four areas that constitute the outdoor environment. These are:

- Area one: ‘the wilderness’ (e.g. deserts, oceans, uninhabited continents)
- Area two: ‘the scenic sublime’ (e.g. forests, lakes, mountains, cliffs, waterfalls)
- Area three: ‘the countryside (e.g. hills, fields, woods)
- Area four: ‘the domestic picturesque’ (e.g. parks, gardens, lanes).

The four areas are useful in that they provide an understanding of what constitutes an ecocritical text. However, fragmenting and compartmentalising environmental issues is not that simple as evidenced firstly by the overlap in the four areas and secondly, by the complex and diverse nature of environmentalism. Such fragmentation negates critical environmental issues that concern black African communities, especially women. Also, a closer scrutiny shows that Barry’s (2007) four areas emphasise the physical aspect of the environment and focuses on the protection of the forest. Such a definition which fails to accommodate the political, racial, colonial cultural, spiritual and gendered issues among others is an inadequate approach for the analysis of the narratives in this study.

The current study advocates a more holistic definition of ecocriticism. As suggested by Mazumdar (2013) ecocriticism is concerned with nature writing and ecological themes in all literature. A number of scholars further allude to this ecocritic definition (Srilatha 2011; Garrard 2004 and Mazel 2013). These scholars agree that ecocriticism’s aim is not just to protect the endangered environment but to analyse literature “as though nature mattered” (Srilatha 2011: 2). This means that nature holds an important place in the lives of a people, hence the need to understand the interconnectivity between humans and the non-human nature and to raise awareness against environmental problems that disrupt this relationship. Kroeber (1994) also cited in Mazumdar’s essay affirms that ecocriticism is an “escape from

the esoteric abstractness which afflicts current theorising about literature.” In other words, as an ecological conscious theory, it negates abstractions. Instead, there is need for an “action-provoking” theory not only to safeguard against the environment but also to ensure the survival of the inter-connectedness of all life forms. Mazumdar (2013:3) states that:

Environmentalism is about the story of a loss but mere expression of anxieties about this loss is not enough: we need some sort of activity, both physical and intellectual, to repair it. To bridge the nature-culture, man-environment gap/divide we need a new kind of thought, the “global reparative thinking”, which is an interconnected, interdisciplinary way of thinking and feeling.

The above quote succinctly captures strains of the main argument of this thesis, that ecocriticism theorises the need to understand the human-nature relationship in an age of environmental desecration, the loss of ecology. In this regard, literary intellectuals play a significant role in raising awareness against different forms of environmental destruction. They realise that environmentalism loss cannot be restored through mere anxiety, hence, they raise awareness to contribute to environmental restoration through their different works. In other words:

Ecocritics ... seek to transform academe by bringing it back into dynamic interconnection with worlds we all live in ... social and material worlds in which issues of race, class, and gender inevitably intersect ... with issues of natural resource exploitation and conservation (Schlenz, n.d.).

In the current study, the intellectual transformation as raised in the literary narratives selected for analysis, will demonstrate the relevance of fiction in redeeming nature. Such reparative action can be achieved through an interdisciplinary environmentalist approach. Hence, the prime object of this study is to examine the selected narratives with a new form of alertness that will reflect the ecological nature of the text. From a literary perspective, this means that texts are analysed to reflect their “environmentally harmful or helpful effects” (Kerridge

2006: 530); and from a cultural perspective, beliefs and ideologies are evaluated for their “environmental implications” (ibid), that is how they impact the environment which also includes protecting and conserving nature.

Another very significant perspective of the environment is advanced by Glotfelty (1996) who defines ecocriticism as the study of representations of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment. Also implied in this definition, is the role played by environmental intellectuals in conserving nature. This insight proffers a broader definition from Barry’s (2007) four areas that define the term “environment.” While Barry (2007) focuses on the physical environment, Warren (1997:50), redefines this traditional definition of the environment to include issues of that environmentalists have paid attention to. These include, “power, domination, racism, discrimination, [...] lack of housing for the poor and the homeless, [and] hazardous working conditions” among others. Okuyade (2013:xi) corroborates this line of thought by including all things that are affected and determined by the environment such as food, fashion, technology etc. A similar redefinition is observed by Glotfelty (1996). She transcends the limited anthropocentric Western vision of the environment and advances that literary studies have a critical role in understanding ecocriticism. Of relevance to this study are the questions raised by Glotfelty in a bid to define ecocriticism; these are:

How is nature represented in [literary works?] What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this [narrative] consistent with ecological wisdom? *How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?* How can we characterise nature writing as a genre? *In addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new category? Do men write about nature differently than women do?* In what ways has literacy itself affected human kind’s relationship to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature...? (Glotfelty, 1996: xix [my own emphasis in italics])

The questions raised above are critical to our understanding of the ecocriticism as a multidimensional theory that advocates for an earth-centred approach in our analysis of literary texts. Glotfelty advocates for an all-inclusive ecocritical approach in literary and ecological discourses. Examining the physical environment in literary discourses may cut across language, race, class and gender issues. Thus, the interconnectedness of the human and the natural in any definition of ecocriticism “provides a broad spectrum of inquiry” (Oppermann) in which “everything is connected to everything else” (Rueckert 1996:108). These insights are useful because understanding them helps one understand the subordination of black women, men and children in the novels under analysis.

Despite the broad scope of Glotfelty’s questions, one realises that they share a common denominator, that is, the relationship between human and nonhuman nature. Simply put, “ecocriticism takes as its subject, the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature” (ibid). Altogether, the above questions present a holistic definition of ecocriticism, accommodating its theoretical aspects, usefulness and praxis. Critical to this study is determining whether black women’s nature writing is different from the black men’s. In addition, this study is different from the Western environmental tradition in that it interrogates those environmental issues that are consequential in the life of the black woman. The study will answer questions such as, to what extent is the domination of nature analogous to the oppression of the black woman in the selected narratives? and, how this study serves the important function of “consciousness raising as it rediscovers, reissues, and reconsiders” (Glotfelty1996) literature by African, black women? These are critical questions that inform the current study in its analysis of the

selected narratives and answering them affirms that the female writers have engaged with the environment to adopt an environmental approach to literary studies.

Coupe (2000:705) defines ecocriticism as, “an approach to literature which considers the relationship between human and nonhuman life as represented in literary texts and which theorises about the place of literature against environmental destruction.” This is a critical point by Coupe implying that not only does ecocriticism interrogate the interconnectivity between human and nonhuman nature in literature but it also questions the role of literature against environmental destruction or desecration. Such a destruction of the environment is a result of the hazardous human activities that damage or transform the earth’s basic life support systems; the plants, animals and the forest. For instance, climate change discourses and climate variability are “wrecking havoc and inflicting untold suffering to humanity around the world” (Makwanya, 2010:130). This is evidenced by the occurrence of floods, heat waves, drought etc., and their damaging effects on both the environment and human species in different countries in the world. One is thus justified to argue that the new millenium talks on global-warming and climate change the world over are closely related to the crises that most African and non-African countries are currently experiencing. In a bid to find alternatives to some destructive forms of industrial development, some ecocritics, for example, Carson (1962), Williams (1973), and Kolodny (1975), have explored the possibility of alliance between human species and the wider environment. As such, they argue that ecocriticism studies cannot be performed “without a keen understanding of the environmental crises of modern times.” Hence, in his essay “Ecocriticism and Shakespearean studies,” Estok argues that ecocriticism is more than:

Simply the study of nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is *committed to effecting change by analysing the function* – thematic, artistic, social,

historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise – of the *natural environment*, or aspects of it, *represented in documents* (literary or other) *that contribute to material practices in material worlds* (Estok, 2005:216-17) [my own emphasis].

Two points can be drawn from this quotation. The first is that commitment to effecting change is not merely observing “natural things in literature,” thus defying a homogenous type of definition. The second point entails exploring the representations of nature in selected literary works to define the relationship between literature and the environment and ascertain whether the natural matrix has been recognised. The values expressed should also reflect the environmental wisdom of the time. For example, in Zimbabwe, in some Shona folktales, “the drought in the forest and lack of food, were symbolic of a leadership crisis in the animal world. In fact, folktales and proverbs are derived from the natural environment and acquaint people with their socio-cultural and natural environments” (Pasi 2012: 184).

The folktales are a constant reminder that people of ages gone by were aware of how to survive in their environment, thus establishing a clear relationship between the literal habitat and the ecological habitat. Cook (2008:1) notes that Williams “draws connections between cancer and her extended family and the downwind effect of nuclear testing” while Anna Castillo and Linda Hogan “call attention to environmental justice issues and the effects on minority communities” (ibid). Although these are useful insights, this study seeks to move beyond these Western nature writers to accommodate writers such as Tsitsi Dangarembga, Neshani Andreas, and NoViolet Bulawayo who draw connections between war, poverty, patriarchy, colonialism, the mental and other forms of oppression. The study’s thrust is that these multiple feminist voices draw attention to the inviolable trust between human and nonhuman nature.

Thus the present study takes up this challenge by transforming the literary world into activism; examining black female authored literary texts to raise awareness against the different forms of ecological breakdown and conservation. The study also goes beyond Western environmental parameters to show the impact of such actions on black women in the selected narratives. Thus, as much as literature may fail to restore or transform the environment, the study will show that it raises awareness on ecological issues and how humans can prevent environmental degradation or conserve it.

The implication is that while literary criticism focuses on textual analysis taking into account how the author relates to his/her characters and the spaces around them or the social sphere, ecocriticism goes beyond these boundaries to celebrate the world as a single ecosphere. In this study, literary texts are evaluated to determine to what extent literature with nature as subject reflects the role of humans with regard to their environment. Ecocriticism thus examines the possible relations between literature and nature in terms of “ecological concepts” and also attempts to find a “common ground between the human and the nonhuman to show how they can coexist in various ways, because the environmental issues have become an integral part of our existence” (Oppermann 1999:2).

Further clarification by Buell (1995: 40) extends the meaning of ecocriticism to include the ecosphere. He says it is “the study of the inter-relationship between art and the natural world.” In other words, this type of relationship calls for an understanding of not only the physical environment but the social, the mental, political, historical, anthropocentric and the gendered. Buell’s definition clearly distinguishes ecocriticism from other literary critical approaches. It transcends the social sphere to include the entire ecosphere. Similarly, O’Brien (1994:245) emphasises this connectivity. He holds the opinion that “ecocriticism is indeed a quest for connections: it is intended to strengthen the urge that ‘connects us to all other life

forms.” Thus, agreeing with Commoner’s first law of ecology that, “Everything is connected to everything else” (cited in Glotfelty 1996: xix).

Glotfelty, O’Brien and Buell opine key insights in the narratives analysed in this study. They assert the interconnectedness of all human and nonhuman nature. This study builds on their views by arguing that failure to recognise connections between women, men, children, animals and nature leads to different forms of oppression, a repertoire of violence and ecological crisis. Of significance to the narratives analysed in this study is the ability to demonstrate that different forms of oppression (sexism, racism, naturism) are “mutually reinforcing systems of oppression” (Gaard 1993:5). To address the oppression requires a biocentric view of life that acknowledges reciprocity between human and nonhuman nature. Hence, the study will veer away from the Western traditional anthropocentric view that treats nature as passive. Instead, the ecofeministic lens will enable the study’s analysis of literary texts to focus on the centrality of life which includes humans and nonhumans (includes animals) on earth.

In *The Environmental Imagination: Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*, Buell gives four criteria that can be used to define an ecocritic or environmental text. Firstly, that “the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history;” secondly, the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest, “but the earth or the environment is the centre that connects all things together. Thirdly, “human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation;” meaning that a literary text not only captures nature but makes people realise their role in the depletion of the natural resources. Lastly, he says that “there is some sense of the environment as a process” (cited in Johnson

2009:8). The “process” implies that the environment is not a unitary entity but is still in the making. Ecocriticism as a theory is in itself a contested issue in the ecocritical field and as such, ecocrit scholars should observe that the term signifies “a becoming that is always in the process of adapting, transforming and modifying itself in relation to its environment” (Rosendale 2002:xv). This study becomes part of this process; an effort to enlarge the body of literatures that ecocriticism studies. Such a thrust in the study is a significant gap filler since it is believed that the black females’ works neglected by Western environmental-literary scholars might bring significant contributions to the ecocritic field of study.

Although Buell’s criteria are a major contribution to the field of ecocriticism, it is unfortunate that it is contextualised within the purview of Anglo-American literary texts. He develops this argument further in *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental crisis and Literary Imagination* in which he broadens the ecocriticism parameters by revoking “the dualism between nature and human beings” and including “built as well as natural environments” (Johnson 2009:8). Buell’s observations are very relevant to the current study. Ecocriticism and ecofeminism reject the nature/culture dualism used by patriarchy as a rationale to subordinate women and other nonhuman nature. The study will re-situate such dualisms in a feminist-ecocritical perspective in its analysis of the selected texts.

In his *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Barry (2009) concurs with Buell by noting that ecocriticism is not monolithic and defies a compact and simplified definition because of its multiple manifestations. Arguably, the shifting and changing definition of the terms “environment” and “nature” suggest that the theory can be applied in narratives outside the Anglo-American canons of literature. For instance, some scholars agree that the word nature “can be anything” (Johnson 2009:8, Buell 2001; Morton

2007). In addition, (Johnson 2009:8) points out that the second wave of ecocriticism moves from “unbuilt to built environments, from wilderness to urban landscapes, and ultimately all space including “nonspace.” She cites examples of scholars who have defined the term environment in different ways; Garrard (2004) categorises it into pastoral, wilderness, dwelling, animals and the Earth; Merchant in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* links it to patriarchal authority and societal norms; Harrison’s *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* bases the definition of nature on the Western depiction of the forest.

Glotfelty (1969), Barry (2007) and Buell (2005) provide useful guides to identifying environmental texts. The critics, unfortunately do not critically interrogate all the paradigms in environmentalism and this oversimplifies and straitjackets the complex web of themes raised in environmentalism. This would mean excluding African texts that may bring a meaningful debate in environmentalism issues. My study argues that ecocriticism has multiple perspectives and multiple manifestations. This fluid nature of ecocriticism is important to this study as it broadens critical parameters, thus, enabling one to accommodate narratives by African black female writers that may not have received the attention they deserve.

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty 1996: xviii). This study takes a gender-conscious perspective that is

informed by an ecofeminism approach to examine the interconnections between nature and women. An expansive ecocritical approach is broad, accommodative and includes the ecosphere that transcends the man-centred or anthropocentric world-view.. Ecocriticism presupposes that the earth is at the centre of everything and helps one understand the interconnection between the literary habitat and the environmental or ecological habitat. In this study, literary texts are analysed from a feminist environmental-conscious perspective; with ecological aspects of the text taking the centre stage. Such an environmental approach questions how literary works represent nature to “transmit certain values that contribute to ecological thinking” (Oppermann, 1999). My chosen approach advocates for some reparative and action-provoking thoughts that ensure the connectivity of human and non-human values. The point here is that ecocriticism questions whether the values are consistent with the ecological condition of the environment. This suggests that ecocriticism studies the way representations of nature in a text reflect the cultural values of a particular society. This is valid to this study since it will enable the researcher to evaluate how representations of nature in the black female authored texts reflect the cultural values of society towards black women. Thus, ecocriticism can serve as an agency of environmental awareness as it enables the researcher to explore the relationship between nature representations and female protagonists’ state of the mind and their role as women, with regards to nature.

For the purposes of this study it is imperative to draw a distinction between ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Ecocriticism is a term that embraces both the principles of feminism and ecology. It is also significant that the relationship between the feminism and ecofeminism be clarified if the representation of the human and non-human nature connections in the selected narratives is to be understood.

2.3 The Parameters of Ecofeminism

First coined by Francoise D'Eaubonne in 1974, "ecofeminism," is a term that is concerned with the interconnection between the domination and exploitation of women and the domination and exploitation of nature. This implies that ecofeminism is a feminist theory that is strongly informed by ecology. It extends the concepts of feminism to include the domination of nature. From a Western perspective, King draws a distinction between feminism and ecofeminism; "[Ecofeminism's challenge of social domination extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race, and class and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing" (cited in Warren 1997:21). It is unfortunate that although King embraces the domination of nature in her analysis, she does not accommodate the African perspective. Her view is thus exclusive.

What distinguishes ecofeminism from the other types of feminisms is its claim that the unjustified domination of nonhuman nature is a feminist issue. It is a movement that spells out the interconnection between humans and nonhuman nature. A number of scholars for example, Warren 1997; Howell 1997; Ruether 1992 succinctly capture this connectivity in their works while observing that "nature is a feminist issue." The point here is that there is a connection between feminism and ecology, a point buttressed by Howell in her article, "Ecofeminism: what one needs to know" as she says ecofeminism refers to "a feminist theory and activism informed by ecology" (1997:231). Further, she observes that "Ecofeminism brings together [the] two explorations of ecology and feminism [...] and explores how male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology and in social structures" (1992:2). Ruether (1992) uses cultural and social studies paradigms to analyse ecological issues. According to one of the ecofeminist scholars, VanRine Shiva, "the worldview that causes environmental degradation and injustice is the same worldview

that causes a culture of male domination, exploitation and inequality for women” (cited in Brinker 2009:1). This ecofeminist philosophy is corroborated by Cook (2008) who asserts that there is a link between man’s domination of nature and the exploitation of women. Both Shiva and Cook share a common proposition that there is a link between the culture of male domination and the degradation and exploitation of nature.

The above ecofeminist views offer the fundamental grounding on the subjugation of women and nature in this study. The study’s thrust hinges on the argument that the liberation of women cannot be achieved fully without the liberation of nature. Further, the study intends to pursue the above ecofeminist views to establish the domination of human and nonhuman nature as represented in the literary narratives in this study. Adams (cited in Howell) points out that to understand the oppression of both nature and women, there is need to recognise the twin domination both women and nature. In this respect, ecofeminism transcends the feminism boundaries of sexism, racism, ageism and heterosexism to include the unjustified domination of nature. Thus, ecofeminism extends those issues in feminism that help understand the plight and domination of women and the environment in the selected texts.

However, ecofeminism is open to diverse perspectives and ultimately denies a unified definition, it underscores the presupposition that there is no single ecofeminism. However, within this multi-voiced and plural set of perspectives, some scholars (Warren, 2000; King and Birkeland 1993; Howell 1997; Adams, 1990) have identified common principles that help in defining the core concerns raised in ecofeminism. These will be discussed in this section to establish a clear conceptual framework for the analysis of the narratives in this study. Thus, for the purposes of this study, common features or characteristics of

ecofeminism that inform the analysis of the study's literary texts are that it: (1) explores the nature of the connections between the unjustified dominations of women and nature; (2) critiques male-biased Western canonical philosophical views about women and nature; and (3) creates alternatives and solutions to such male-biased views (Warren 2015). The belief is that such features will help to create spatial boundaries to articulate the black woman's relationship with the natural world in more diverse ways. By embracing such pluralism, the study contends that ecofeminists will continue to search even more deeply for patterns of human-nonhuman connections and also raise awareness about a whole range of African literary works that have been ignored as nature writing.

To shape the contours of ecofeminist thought, the current study will engage King (1989) and Birkeland's (1993) presuppositions. Though these parameters will be isolated as positions, in analysis they are often combined and intertwined. King and Birkeland (cited in Howell 1997) identify four common presuppositions that define ecofeminism. The first presupposition is that for the environment to survive, a social transformation of values that embodies non-dualistic and non-hierarchical relations is required. In other words, dualistic and hierarchical features are oppressive in nature. The hierarchical feature attributes greater power to men and less power to women because they are at the bottom of the social ladder. The hierarchical oppressive feature is relevant to this study since it relates well to the patriarchal structures in some of the texts, for example, *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book of Not*, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and *We Need New Names*. The study will argue that the patriarchal system in these narratives functions to explain the unjustified domination of women and nature. Scholars such as Gray (1981), Griffin (1978), Plumwood (1991) and Ruether (1975) have argued that there is a link between the dominations of women and nature and these links are located in conceptual structures of domination that construct women and nature in male-biased ways. Hence, this study's argument that patriarchal structures construct women and nature in male-

biased ways and as such, a feminist analysis is required to understand women's degradation. In this regard, the study's point of departure is that the oppressive patriarchal structure sanctions, maintains and perpetuates the twin dominations of nature and women (Warren, 1993). Historically, this argument was applied in Western cultures, however, the study intends to stretch this debate further to human systems of domination that are unjustified and use gender to comprehend women's subordination in African literary works.

The second presupposition according to Birkeland (1993) and King (1989) states that social transformation in ecofeminism must include intellectual transformation; a position that questions the dualistic nature of the human-nonhuman relations. This dualistic thinking uses language to problematise the unjustified dominations of women, animals and nature. Thus, language is used to create and maintain the domination of animals and the exploitation and oppression of women. The Western traditional concept of dichotomy is manifested in a range of dichotomies such as male versus female, reason versus emotion, mind versus body, objectivity versus subjectivity and human versus nature. In other words, that which is associated with man and culture is accorded a higher status than that which is identified with motion, body, females or nature (Warren 1993; Vakoch 2012 & 2011; Ortner 1974). In such traditional stereotypes, men have always been associated with superior culture and mind, and both women and animals with inferior nature and body (Weil 2011). The current study argues that these dualisms breed negative interconnections between human and nonhuman nature and function to justify the treatment of women and nature as 'Other'. Premised on the argument that nature is allegorical, the study intends to show how the selected narratives by black female writers portray this negative interconnectivity.

Since the focus of the study is ecofeminism, it will engage ecology in this argument to show how "patriarchy equates women and nature, so that a feminist analysis is required to fully understand the genesis of environmental problems" (Sturgeon 1997:263). In other words, the

representation of the domination of nature in the selected narratives helps one to understand the oppression and subjugation of women. In this regard, the study suggests through the selected works that where “women are degraded, nature will be degraded, and where women are thought to be eternally giving and nurturing, nature will be thought of as endlessly fertile and exploitable” (Sturgeon 1997:263). The goal of the study is to unpack these dualist and hierarchical relations and bring a literary awareness through ecofeminist criticism and activism to demonstrate that the struggles of nature are, in fact the struggles of women. By implication, any social transformation must investigate such dualisms that emphasise negative relations between women and nature. One such intellectual transformation is advanced by Warren (1997, 2000) in which she hones the significance of a feminism that is informed by ecology and an ecology that is grounded on feminism. In other words, by merging “ecofeminist theory and ecological literary criticism, literary theorists and critics can assume a position from which to speak to and listen” (Legler 1997:234) to diverse texts in both Western and African traditions.

The third feature of ecofeminism argues for a “special relationship between women and nature using an historical, cross-cultural, and materialist analysis of women’s work” (Sturgeon 1997:263). This position maintains that because of their crucial roles in agricultural processes, women easily detect any environmental problems. Such a relationship suggests that humans are participants in ecological processes, more so women because of the dominant roles they play in managing resources for household economies (Sturgeon 1997; Howell 1997). In other words, women should be recognised for their intrinsic value and subjectivity. Further, Howell (1997: 235) stresses that power-based dualisms enhance the “exploitation and domination of humans along the lines of class, race, gender, religion, nationality, or sexuality.” If anything, the ecological survival and human well-being is dependent on an all-inclusive philosophy of relationships. Thus, dismantling the dualistic dichotomies between

nature and humans is a major undertaking for ecofeminists because it ensures human and ecological justice. Such insights are useful to this study because an analysis of the selected novels will attempt to show the inadequacies of the western based dualistic models of life. If maintained, dualistic tendencies breed gender inequalities that disrupt the balance between human and nonhuman nature relationships. Hence, justice or survival is meaningful when the interdependence of humans is fully recognised.

The fourth ecofeminist position stresses the effort to reimagine nature and human relationships with the natural world. This position calls for the reconstruction of nature to develop a conceptual shift that values nature in itself rather than a commodity or an object to be used by humans. Ecofeminists like Birkeland (1993) argue that reimagining nature determines the kind of relationships that can exist between humans and the non-human world. However, this presupposition borrows from ecological science which according to Howell (1997: 234) “teaches that life comprises interconnected and interdependent processes”. The problem with this ecological approach is that it does not ascertain fully the hierarchical structure of nature. According to King (cited in Howell 1997) ecofeminism claims “that hierarchy is projected onto nature from the perspective of human social models.” So, to counter this limitation, Howell proposes the use of a biocentric perspective since it rejects hierarchy and advocates a reciprocal type of relationship with nature. According to Birkeland, ecofeminists value biological diversity within nature and among humans (1993:234). This approach is relevant to ecofeminists and as such to this study, since it emphasises the importance of human diversity and suggests that “women, persons of colour, and the poor should be recognised for their intrinsic value and subjectivity” (ibid). This human diversity is relevant to this study as it endeavours to include a “plurality of voices” by giving attention to women writers outside Anglo-American nature writing tradition. Using the presuppositions

and different positions discussed above ensures a type of environmental writing that looks at the relationship between nature and human beings in new ways.

2.4 Ecocriticism in African Male Literature

Ecocriticism as a literary theory and environmental literary criticism defies an overarching and homogenous definition. As a relatively new field, different scholars have defined the term ecocriticism differently. However, they share common ground based on their focus on the relationship between human and nonhuman nature in their works. The existence of such a bond justifies the ecocritical nature of a text. Even then, the dearth in nature writing by African writers and critics is noted by Slaymaker (2001) in his essay, "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses." According to Slaymaker, although Black African critics and writers have embraced nature writing, their focus has been on colonialism and the exploitation of the indigenous resources. Using Buell's definition of ecocriticism, Slaymaker (2001) concludes that this type of literature does not qualify as "genuine ecolit or ecocrit" (2007:563). Slaymaker (2001) further argues that most of nature writing about sub-Saharan Africa by white writers is influenced by Euro-American traditions of thematising landscape hence, cannot be classified under the ecocriticism umbrella. The assumption here is that ecocriticism has a much longer and sustained literary heritage in the West. Consequently, western critics often claimed, with some justification, that ecocriticism was a phenomenon unique to the Western world. In discussing the conditions and limits of ecocriticism, Slaymaker (2001: 684) argues that:

To some African critiques and writers, who directly participated in the liberation of their nation-states from colonialism, what ecocriticism offers is not another theory of liberation like Marxism. Rather, it appears as one more hegemonic discourse from the Metropolitan West[...] Black African writers take nature seriously in their creative

and academic writing, but many have resisted or neglected the paradigms that inform global ecocriticism.

Slaymaker's argument above, problematises the definition of ecocriticism by suggesting that ecocriticism is not to be found outside the Western cultural area and that one could conclude that it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man. Again, what Slaymaker refers to as "global ecocriticism" is imbued with/ is reflective of western traditions of ecocriticism, which presumably is a very restrictive definition. While Slaymaker limits global ecocriticism to the West using what Byron Caminero-Santangelo refers to as "Anglo-American ecocriticism," he fails to realise the diverse and heterogeneous nature of ecocriticism. It is unfortunate that Slaymaker inscribes the evaluative criteria and misrepresents environmental writing in African literature. The dominant ecocritical tradition to which he subscribes is rather myopic and seems to intimate that Africans abuse their environment. The same limitations are noted by Ojaide (2013) that Slaymaker fails to realise the diverse nature of the African environment and that the environment per se "interacts with a multiplicity of issues" (vii). According to Ojaide (ibid), issues of land, agriculture, politics, and economy reflect on the relationship between humans and their environment. Conversely, these issues are related to "ownership of land, oppression and exploitation" (ibid) and as such to establish harmony between humans and non-human nature, there is need for ecological justice. Hence this study argues that Slaymaker fails to realise that African literature can be re-interpreted to reflect a more accurate understanding of environmental writing. In addition, it will show that African writers and critics have developed archetypal images texts on the environment. The result is that ecocritical literary studies have since shifted the boundaries of this enclosed area to include Africa and other non-Western frontiers. Ecocriticism response to the environment is quite diverse and complex. Within this diversity, the ecocritics examine how literature can make people aware of the role played by literature in ecological matters. They are concerned

with how attempt to strike a balance between the human and nonhuman. In corroborating this, Mazumdar (2013: 4) notes that:

Environmentalism means different things to different people. It is not only physical but also mental, social, cultural, anthropocentric, cosmocentric, political, historical, colonial, gendered, ... racial, regional, global, tribal, class-conscious, animal, biological, urban, rural and so on. [...] Understanding the relationship between the literary habitat and the environmental/ecological habitat presupposes an awareness and appreciation of the reality of each of the various and complex positions mentioned above.

Mazumdar's (2013) definition infuses issues of power, the mental, domination, racism and so on into the environmental debate. Environmentalism accommodates diverse and overlapping views which include the human and non-human environment. Such an incisive position challenges the traditional, narrow Western definition of environment. The study's point of departure is that the Western view of the environment did not consider such environmental problematics (mentioned in Mazumdar's quote above) or paid little attention to them. This study thus presupposes that the environmental debate in African literary studies transcends the physical and attempts to change the way environmental issues are looked at. It also argues that the selected narratives by black female authors have tried to appreciate, accommodate and question such narrow and often inflexible Western perceptions of the environment. Thus, an understanding of the broad and often conflicting views (as cited by Mazumdar above) in the current study will help one understand how the oppression of women of diverse geographical locations (Zimbabwe and Namibia) is connected with the unjustified domination of nature. Hence, the argument in this study is that the environmental analysis of the interconnections between human and nonhuman nature will shift from the ethical western perspective (Adams, 1990; Slicer, 1991) to accommodate women-nature connections in African literary works.

Slymaker (2001) and other American scholars also claim that African writers have responded weakly to ecological and environmental issues. Contrary, Vambe (2013:14), articulates how in Zimbabwe the link between the environment and fiction is not at all surprising because the idea of “race” as a marker for identity construction based on skin difference between the blacks and whites was a direct result of forces of colonial capitalistic attempt to control African land and make black people become sources of cheap labor.” Vambe (2013) draws a connection between the coloniser’s domination of the land and the exploitation of the black people. Of importance to this discussion is Vambe’s observation that “the paucity of works on eco-criticism in Africa does not mean that creative writers have not used the environment in their works” (ibid). In fact this is the argument espoused in this chapter and the whole thesis. Furthermore the absence of journals and professional societies on African literature and the environment does not mean that African writers and critics have not focused on environmental issues in the selected texts. Random articles and essays do exist. By the same token, Nixon (2005:720) argues that it is “no longer viable to view environmentalism as a Western preserve.” In other words, African scholars have always shown interest in how humans relate to their environment but as Ojaide (2013: Foreword), points out, “a book-length project dealing with different authors” (ibid: v) covering different varied environmental concerns is what is missing. A similar book-length project, *Regreening Africanscapes: Ecology and the African Imagination*, is so far the only book project I know that brings together varied ecocritical views by different scholars.

While it may be true that many predominant writers in the field of ecocriticism are drawn from the United States of America, the study argues that this does not provide a sound base for dismissing African environmental writers’ views. In a bid to canonise environmental

issues to exclude works by African writers, African-American and black African women writers, scholars like Slaymaker and Rob Nixon conclude that “ecocriticism has developed “de facto as an offshoot of American studies” (Nixon 2007:716). Slaymaker (2001:683) further argues that “the (siren?) call of the Green Wave resounding through much of the literary world has been answered weakly by black African writers and critics” and “the African echo of green approaches to literature and literary criticism has been faint.” Contrary to Slaymaker’s claims, this study will argue that black female African writers have also traditionally embraced nature-nurture (culture) writing in their works from pre-colonial to post-colonial literary works.

Over the last decade ecocritical studies have become a defining feature in African writers’ works. However, until recently attention has been focused on areas other than Africa and its wealth of literatures. While African writers like Chinua Achebe have engaged with nature writing in their works to show how people lived in a harmonious relationship with the environment, some African scholars have been wary of the significance of nature in their livelihood. In fact, ecocritical approaches to African literature have generally been invisible. Reviews and criticism of African literature show a general absence of ecocritical and environmental issues. The study posits that random studies from an ecocritical perspective have been done in African Literature. For example, Wright (2010) in her essay, “Prophesy, Motherless, and the Lake” uses a postcolonial ecofeminism lens to show the “double-bind” of being female and colonised in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*. Similarly, using Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, Sewlall uses a postcolonial ecofeminism lens to illuminate the influence of social, political and economic decisions on modern day South Africa (cited in Campbell 2008). Using the same narrative, Ojaruega (2013), illustrates that environmental issues are human issues. Her analysis does not only pay attention to the desecration of the earth and other

ecological crises, but she goes on to suggest solutions to the problems. Both Ojaruega (2013) seem to agree that literature plays a significant role in environmental issues; that is, to conscientise people on the destructive and conservative ecological forms. They both acknowledge the active role played by the environment to sustain human and nonhuman relationships. For instance, Caminero-Santangelo (2007:702) argues that Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* suggests that "true political and economic liberation will result in a healthy land" and also shows how environmental degradation is used to fight colonialism.

In "Different Shades of Green: Ecocriticism and African Literature," Caminero-Santangelo, explains how an ecocritical approach can be used to interpret narratives by prominent African writers. The contention here is that ecocriticism does not use a unitary approach in its analysis of literary texts. A broader approach to ecocriticism reveals that African writers have also exhibited ecological concerns in their works. The Nigerian poet Niyi Osundare's works and Nigerian writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa are good examples of African writers who have embraced environmental concerns in their works. However, Slaymaker (2001) disqualifies their works because they do not make reference to the theory ecocriticism and also claims that the black Africans experience nature in different ways to white people. While black Africans' nature writing is tied to their daily subsistence, white people derive pleasure from it. Slaymaker (2001) also observes that through his works, Soyinka "connects his love of place and his respect for culturally important natural sites around life" (p. 687). However, the western ecocritical framework used by Slaymaker to classify a piece of writing as environmental disregards Soyinka's works as such. The fact that the ecocritical approach has been used variously by other writers and thinkers is apparently ignored by Slaymaker. Despite all the efforts that show the relationship between the environment and African literature, there has not been a single and comprehensive critique of ecocritical text on

African literary genres. Thus, the arrival of *Eco-critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* (2013), signals an important shift of focus to a more inclusive ecocritical approach. The essays in this volume illustrate a move of traditional ecocriticism beyond borders of the western definition of ecocriticism. Furthermore, the wide array of environmental literature in this collection reflects the growth of ecocriticism in literary studies to acknowledge African critics' voices and to offer new ways of looking at African literature.

Ojaide (2013:vi) points out that "The environment has always played a significant role in African life and society." For instance, one might argue that "African folktales, myths and legends and, in particular animal fables are attempts to provide an explanation of the nature of the African people's relationship to, and with their environment" (Chinyowa: abstract Botswana Conference). Chinyowa further argues that "stories are a product of culture, hence an expression of a people's awareness of the world around them..."(ibid). Thus, as an art form, storytelling arises as a function of people's understanding of their environment. This is corroborated by Mazrui in his documentary, "The Africans" in which he points out that:

There existed in traditional society a partnership between humans and nature. Some animals were domesticated while others roamed the wild. Humans relied on animals and plants for sustenance – food in crops and fruits, fish and animals, firewood for cooking, timber for building ... Man held aspects of nature sacred – mountains, rocks, rivers, trees. The forest was the home of ancestors. In the religions of Africans, nature became an integral aspect of their spirituality in the form of groves, thus giving the environment a spiritual dimension (cited in Ojaide 2013:vi).

As captioned in the above quotation, the traditional partnership between humans and nature captures the essence of the experiences and livelihood of the African community. The study, taking cue from this realisation will examine texts to illustrate their environmental helpfulness and harmfulness. Humans were sustained by plants and animals and the forest was a habitat of ancestors. Thus, it would seem ecocriticism has always played a significant

role in works by African scholars and writers and has always captured their attention. One such scholar is Emmanuel Obiechina. Ojaide points out that Obiechina's seminal work *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (1975), projected some forms of ecocriticism even before the theory gained scholarly recognition in the Western academy (ibid). This has a significant bearing for the analysis of the four novels in this study. The relationship between human beings and their environment is not a new phenomenon in African cosmology and this is reflected in the novels analysed in this study.

According to Slaymaker (2001:683), efforts by black African critics and writers to embrace nature writing have been restricted to land issues and landscape themes that are pertinent to national and local cultural claims (Slaymaker 2001: 684). Nature and environment writing have always been an issue in African literature and have been used to address issues most relevant to women's livelihood. Lundblad (2001:706) acknowledges the existence of diverse positions in ecocritical works, and it is this diversity that denies ecocriticism a universal model. The study thus challenges the positioning of ecocriticism as solely a western preserve and advocates that the centre be moved to reflect the different perspectives of ecocriticism.

The *Eco-critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* (2013), book project engages ecocriticism and ecofeminism by showing how feminist issues and issues in the environment affect and are affected by human and non-human nature in African literature. The text also shows how such issues are recast and remapped in different and complex ways to project the relationship between human and non-human nature. More significantly, the *Eco-critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* (2013), text insists on the importance of ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary approach where "all sciences come together to analyse the environment and arrive at possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation" (Srilatha 2001:7) in the African continent. Thus, the

volume is unique in its “extensive territorial claims, in terms of genre (orature, [poetry], fiction, theatre, and autobiography) and geography, from all regions of Africa and the African Diaspora” (Nnaemeka, 1997, foreword). This diversity is corroborated by Mazumdar (2013) in his essay “Ecocriticism.” Citing Barry (1995: 269), Mazumdar concludes that “ecocriticism is a diverse biosphere.” The two scholars submit that there is no universally accepted model or strategy that can be merely learnt and applied in the reading of literary and cultural texts. Mazumdar substantiates further that:

Ecocritics / ecoreaders do not worry much above up their reading strategy. It is like approaching a text with a new alertness to its environmental dimension which has all along *hovered about the text* [my own emphasis] but which has never occupied the centre of critical attention. The prime object of this cooperative, interdisciplinary approach is to bring the ecological aspect of the text to the forefront of critical attention (Mazumdar 2013: 9).

Mazumdar submits that a text can be read and interpreted differently by different scholars and the fact that a text has not been interpreted ecocritically does not mean it lacks an environmental dimension. For instance, in his essay, “Reading Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* ecocritically,” Fakrul Alam says that the people in Umuofia:

Had become one with place and culture and nature had merged for the Igbo [...] had drawn inspiration from his remembrance of a time when his people had adjusted themselves to their environment and felt that there was something from it that present-day Africans would learn from. He had, it can be said, been inspired by his ecological consciousness to write his narrative of Umuofia and its inhabitants (Alam 2010: 48).

In addition, Mwangi claims that *Things Fall Apart* “typifies African village life and its richness as an organic self-sustaining forest which has almost everything that the West — in its arrogance — claims to have come to introduce.” In his introduction to the *Eco-critical Literature: Regreening African Landscapes* reader, Okuyade also points out that *Things Fall Apart* “gives life to the environment” (2013: xii). Although he agrees that the novel’s focus is

the colonialist's invasion of Africa, he is also quick to note that it "demonstrates how rural people use the symbiotic relationship between man and his environment" (ibid). Another scholar Samuel's analysis of *Things Fall Apart* in "Writing about "Nature and environment in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*," shows how the flora and fauna is used to better understand the Igbo culture and articulate their experience. The different ecocritical approaches to the same narrative, *Things Fall Apart*, show that they defy a unitary ecocritical reading of the same and any other text. In addition, they show how African literature writers have always shown interest to environmental issues. Invariably, they concur that ecocriticism is not a new phenomenon in African literature.

Okolo (2013) in her essay, "Landscaping as a Plot and Character Development Medium in Ngugi Wathiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*" recasts the environment by using it to develop both the plot and characters. Vambe's examination of Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) and Chinodya's *Dew in the Morning* (2001), links the domination of the geography and landscapes by the Rhodesian colonial system to the domination and exploitation of the peasants. This insight suggests the need to rethink about environmentalism in Africa and to celebrate African environmental history in new ways without downplaying the social and the political implications of representations of nature. Similarly, Rwafa re-examines the film *Flame* to redefine the forest as "conceptual spaces for rethinking African identities" (p.17).

On one hand, some scholars such as Uzoechi Nwabara, Stephen Bernard and Macaulay Mowarin explore the poetry genre in their essays. By comparing Ojaide and Osundare's poetry, Nwabara shows the connection between globalisation and the commodification of both the natural environment and human relationships. The essay foregrounds how eco-poetry disproves this relationship and demonstrates how the advent of colonisation affected

the link between human and non-human nature. On the other hand, other critics such as Bernard uses the eco-critical lens to shift from the political concerns usually foregrounded in Ogbowei's poetry to show how the poems interact with nature. His examination of the selected poems reveals how human activities through the multi-national companies have resulted in the degradation of the Niger Delta environment. Similarly, Mowarin's essay, "Poetics of Environmental Agitation: A Stylistic Reading of Hope Eghagha's *Rhythms of the Last Testament* and *The Governor's Lodge and other Poems*" shows how the violation of nature and the Niger Delta environment has resulted in "endemic poverty, numerous disease and infections caused by contaminated water and polluted air, and internal refugee status" (2013, p. 216).

The different black scholars discussed above, examine African literary texts from an ecocritical perspective, thus showing that ecocritical literary criticism should not be restricted to the Western worldview only. Significantly, the various essays by the different scholars suggest that ecocriticism is not a new phenomenon in Afro-literary studies. In fact, the essays suggest that African writers have always contributed to nature writing and environmental issues have been and are a major concern in their works. However, my study differs in that it focuses on a feminist environmental philosophy in black female authored narratives. The study's thrust is on interconnections among black women of diverse socioeconomic positions and geographical locations on one hand and nonhuman nature on the other. The black women's African literary texts in this study will be examined in view of issues raised in ecocriticism and ecofeminism, emphasising similarities between women characters and nature; and revealing the effects of nature on their livelihood and also, how they affect nature. The works cited above written by black male authors, clearly show that the African writer's perspective of ecocriticism is concerned with both the human benefit through proper

conservation of nature (anthropocentrism), the relationship between wildlife and wilderness, human health, food and shelter (environmentalism) and the relationship between woman and nature (ecofeminism). Given these diverse shades of ecocriticism, the study will argue that unlike other literary approaches, the ecocentric view does not focus on animals and plants in the environment but also holds that human beings should be accorded distinct space in the same environment.

2. 5 Nature Writing by Black Female Writers

The interpenetration between women and nature is pivotal in the selected literary works in this study. The study seeks to argue that ecofeminism challenges the dual connectivity between women and nature. Unlike the feminist analysis that underscores the “elimination of male-gender power and privilege, or sexism” (Warren 1997:3), the ecofeminist lens will examine the women-nature connections and also determine which ones articulate liberatory strategies in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, Andreas’s *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*.

While efforts have been made to analyse Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* from an ecofeminist perspective, *The Book of Not* has received little attention from ecofeminists. This is partially because *Nervous Conditions* can easily be claimed by ecocritics and ecofeminists because of the quest by the women characters to connect with the environment for survival. For instance, Nfah-Abenyi’s (1998) essay suggests there are vital links between women and nature in *Nervous Conditions*. She posits that belonging to the land gives one an identity that is deeply anchored in culture (Nfah-Abenyi, 1998: 713). She also argues that nature is an archetypal image of harmony and disrupting it is analogous to the oppression of women.

This analysis is useful to this study because it shows the black female writer's engagement in environmental issues before it gained prominence in African scholarship. It also suggests that as early as early as 1989 when the text was published, nature writing had defied a single and monolithic definition.

Another male critic, Okonkwo (2003), in his essay, "Space matters: form and narrative in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*," argues that the narrative's interest goes beyond colonial, gender and cultural politics. However, he claims that the novel's strength lies in its "superior crafting" (Okonkwo 2003: 54), that is, how the narrative style is "interwoven skilfully and tightly with the umbrella motif of space" (ibid). His thrust is simply how the story is narrated. In addition, Okonkwo mentions some of the areas that have been analysed by critics; these include the "Dangarembga's feminist leanings, her appropriations of Frantz Fanon, her manipulation of food, language, the bildungsroman, psychosis, the poetics of vocal resistance and, in [his] case, the matter of space" (ibid). Sadly, no environmental viewpoint has been used to analyse the text. On closer scrutiny, however, one realises that Okonkwo's women "social and familial spaces" could easily be accommodated under the ecocriticism umbrella, as archetypal and allegorical environmental spaces that contribute to the oppression and exploitation of women. Thus, Okonkwo's "space matters" fail to use the "earth-centred" approach and engages the humanistic approach instead. It does not always mean that female critics are endowed with natural and critical gift to unearth all the dimensions of the depictions of environment in female writings. For example, it seems to me that Nfa-Abenyi (1998), Mabura (2010), and Magosvongwe and Nyamende's (2014) criticisms do not clearly situate the women's struggles in their respective natural habitat. As such, the study argues that overlooking this relationship between the plight of women and their environment means a significant gap is left out to understand nature as a feminist issue

in the afore mentioned texts. The current study attempts to bridge this gap by interweaving environmental issues with the struggles faced by women, and specifically arguing that understanding the environment helps one to understand and create ways to deal with the oppression of women.

The Book of Not is not easily compatible with the ecofeminist claims. But, the study hopes to locate the narrative within the ecofeminist canon by expanding the definition of the environment to include the physical as well as the metaphorical forests. My overarching argument is that Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* uses the environment but very few literary critics have analysed the text from an ecofeminist perspective. It is the aim of this study to fill in this gap by drawing parallels between the literary habitat and the natural habitat in Dangarembga's two narratives. Furthermore, an ecofeminist perspective enables the study to engage in discussions on the rather overlooked relationship between rape, war and environmental degradation. Such an analysis offers new insights concerning environmental issues and other different forms of oppression such as gender, sexuality and race in Dangarembga's narratives.

Also worth noting, is Mabura's (2010), essay "Black Women Walking Zimbabwe: Refuge and Prospect in the Landscapes of Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and its Sequel, *The Book of Not*" which infuses the Zimbabwean landscape with issues of race, ethnicity and class. Mabura's analysis is a manifestation of the diversity of the notion ecocriticism. Mabura's essay also suggests that the study is not just an urge to integrate environmental concerns into literary studies, but is a manifestation of the developing demand among ecocritics for a careful consideration of just what such integration ought properly to entail. While Mabura's observations reinforce the

present discussion on environmental elements, in some ways, his focus serves nonetheless as my departure point. The different systems of oppression raised by Mabura will be used in the analysis of the selected novels to illuminate how they intersect to exploit and denigrate women.

An article by Magosvongwe and Nyamende (2014:189-212), “Urban Youth unemployment in Zimbabwe: an African-centered literary based critique of Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not*,” presents issues of youth unemployment against the backdrop of the post-2000 socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe. The essay is silent on issues related to the environment and hence adopts a social-sphere to chronicle the challenges faced by the youth at that time. According to the ecocritic Manes (1996), for example, the reading of a literary work of fiction often impresses on the reader that it is only the human protagonists in the work that are alive, while their natural surroundings are mute and passive. Magosvongwe and Nyamende’s approach takes a humanistic environmental approach that renders nature inactive. A closer approach to ecocriticism is evident in another article by Magosvongwe and Nyamende, “Land and racial domination in Zimbabwe: an African-centered critical analysis of selected post-2000 Zimbabwean-authored novels”(2013:35-50). In this article, landlessness and land deprivation are viewed as the key issues and major causes of the people’s poverty. The authors observe that “Land among the indigenous African population evokes myriad questions relating to human rights abuses, and social injustices rooted in colonial subjugation and forcible land dispossessions and displacements” (Magosvongwe and Nyamende (2014:40). Even though there is no mention of ecocriticism or ecofeminism in their essay, one may argue that the environment is present as a framing device. What the two critics successfully foreground in their essays, and which are informative to my present study is the the interconnectivity between human history and natural history. In addition, the

current study explores the tenets of ecofeminism, and examines the different criteria that makes a text ecocritical. The study's point of departure is that it explores the nature of the connections between the unjustified dominations of women and nature; and also critiques male-biased Western canonical philosophical views about women and nature (Birkeland 1993).

In an essay, "A piece of a person": Fractured selves and colonial education in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*,"Gugu Hlongwane, (2009), examines how the racist environment overwhelms the female protagonist. The analysis is located within feminist approaches showing the double oppression of the black woman, by patriarchy and colonialism. Significant to this study is the striking distinction between feminism and ecofeminism. While feminism analyses why women are treated as inferior to men, ecofeminism, in turn shows interest in detecting why nature is treated as inferior to culture. Thus, although Hlongwane's critique of *The Book of Not* acknowledges the presence of nature, she does not consider women's relations to nature as central to their problems. Premised on this argument, this study intends to utilise the landscape metaphorically to understand how the lives of women are connected to environmental problems. The above articles inform this study as they reveal how the double bind of the black and colonised female characters has to be understood in the context of the non-Western woman-nature connections.

Thus, while a number of the critics above have analysed Dangarembga's texts from a feminist perspective, Mabura and Hlongwane are some of the few who have attempted to accommodate nonhuman nature in their exploration of Dangarembga's texts. However, in their essays, there are no distinct frames drawn between feminism and ecofeminism in. It is

the aim of this study to fill in this gap by drawing parallels between the domination of the women characters in Dangarembga's texts and the Zimbabwean landscape. The study transcends the feminist lens used by the above scholars to reveal the dual oppression of women and nature in Dangarembga's narratives. Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*(2013) is also one of the texts used in this study to illustrate the vital connections between land degradation and resource grabbing and human nature. The text also indicates the magnitude of the damage in the relationship between humans and their environment.

Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) is a fairly new narrative in African literary hermeneutics studies. The researcher did not come across any literary critics on Bulawayo's narrative focusing on the link between the environment and the black women in the narrative. Although the absence of an environmental perspective in this text is worrying, this study does not claim to present the first attempt to analyse the narrative from an ecocritical perspective. Rather, the study observes that critics on this narrative have been preoccupied with transnational identity issues, immigrants, poverty and the function of names. For instance, while Muganiwa's (2013) review of the narrative reduces it to a mere focus on contemporary issues faced by Zimbabweans both at home and in the diaspora. By using a feminist approach, she fails to provide a holistic explanation of the different types of exploitation that affect black women. She dislocates women's social problems from their environment and treats them in isolation. Muganiwa's (2013) feminist review misses the link between the women's struggles and the degraded environment. A reading of the novel reveals that human greed for domination and possession of land, and inappropriate development policies are primarily responsible for the less privileged Zimbabweans' plight at home. Mention of land issues presupposes a fundamental link in understanding the woman-nature connections in *We Need New Names*. The people's disconnection from the land that sustains them destroys their

wholesome and sustainable lifestyles (Shiva 2014). Muganiwa 's review makes no mention of how the earth's support systems, people's homes included, in Paradise are destroyed by the development of technology and human actions and how such an action affects women in particular.

The current study argues that the displacement, dispossession and deprivation of the people in *We Need New Names* is a result of the development process; the dirt-removal operation. The project uproots and disconnects people from their land. As a result, they are deprived of their means of their resources and means of survival. My study also examines how the lush environment is destroyed by the colonialist's exploitation of the natural resources in the name of development. This dimension offers some key perspectives to this study. The study will show that nature is not just an archetypal image of serenity and harmony, but is also a feminist issue. In this regard, something is a feminist issue because it helps one realize that by understanding environmental problems, one also understands how women's lives are connected to the unjustified domination of nature. Contrary to the Western perspectives on ecocriticism, the study holds the view that the black female writer has always been eco-conscious in her work.

Fitzpatrick's (2015) thesis entitled "From Paradise to Destroyedmichygen: an analysis of the function of names in *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo" focuses on the social sphere. The thesis tries to prove that names in Bulawayo are used to challenge the "oppressive Western discourses of Othering, the act of monolithic entity placing people in a subordinate position based upon their race, age and nationality" (p.3). Fitzpatrick raises issues on the double- colonisation of women; oppressed because they are black and rendered powerless by patriarchy. Fitzpatrick (2015), thesis is silent on environmental problematics; how it impacts

on the black women in the text and how the women affect it. Essentially, Fitzpatrick, and Muganiwa adopt the Western anthropocentric approach that places human beings at the centre of everything else. Anthropocentrism is a man-centric approach, it views “men [as] the measure of all things” (Mazumdar, 2013: 3) and treats the environment as something “passive and unproductive like women” (ibid). Patriarchy is the dominant power and it exploits both the environment and women. The coloniser has also sought to own everything; “women, capital, territory, wilderness, nature, ecology, etc. (Mazumdar 2013: 3). My study will approach the text with a new alertness to its environmental dimension. Using a non-humanistic approach, the study will demonstrate that the domination of the environment by men is identical to the domination of women by patriarchy. The thrust of this logic is vital in this study in that it seeks to examine the representations of nature and the relationship between literature and the environment to understand the plight of women. Of interest in the current study’s analysis is the nature of the environmental praxis in the two worlds in which human and non-human nature are linked. Hence, the study takes up this challenge and argues that the environment exists as a part of humanity, affecting us and we also can affect it. Ecocriticism thus recognises that natural resources have both tangible and intangible utilities that sustain and serve the physical needs of human-beings. As such, my study will also critique the creative authors’ misrepresentation of nature, women and questions of resistance and urgency.

In examining Andreas’ *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Rhode (2003), Mhunduru (2013) and Ogbeide (2013) have focused on the narrative from a post-colonial feminist perspective. Such an approach enabled them to examine the political, cultural and psychological impact of the colonial dominating powers on the black man and woman. In his book, *Fracturing Traditional Boundaries*, Mhunduru examines thematic issues of widowhood, inheritance and violence. Using the African feminism lens, he explores the patriarchal system and how it

oppresses women as depicted in literature ... Similar issues are buttressed by Rhode (2003) in her thesis “The subaltern “speaks”: agency in Andreas’s *Purple Violet of Oshaantu*.” Rhode (2003) problematizes the silenced women subjects and examines how dominant institutions of patriarchy and colonialism perpetrate their “subaltern” status. While Mhunduru (2013) celebrates the strength and resilience of women who fracture and transcend traditional boundaries, Rhode celebrates both the ability of the black woman to speak and her visibility. Both Rhode and Mhunduru celebrate nature as metaphor, represented by the unique and royal purple violets. They also observe that, nature and character are interconnected in Andreas’ *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*,” in the sense that “inanimate objects are given human traits and characters’ emotions are carried out by natural elements” (Kabore 2013: 32). However, Rhode and Mhunduru’s analyses of the symbols are quite simplistic in that the critics do not make an effort to explain why and how understanding the symbolic interconnection between nature and humans is important to environmental philosophy. For example, there is no mention of human benefit through conservation of nature and the symbolic analysis fails to show any relationship between women and nature. This study will transcend the borrowed Western philosophy of feminism that fails to comprehensively reveal how literary symbols are used in a patriarchal context to devalue women and nature. My study will argue that unlike other literary approaches, the ecocentric view does not focus on animals and plants in the environment but also holds that human beings should be accorded distinct space in the same environment. These aspects are used to elaborate the representation of nature, and resistance by women in my own study.

As much as Mhunduru and Rhode may fail to lucidly position their works under the ecocritical umbrella, they both acknowledge the significance of the purple violets in their analyses. Their approach is anthropocentric and thus incapacitated by the fact that they fail to perceive ecofeminism as an active movement that can address urgent social issues such as

violence and provide alternatives to the exploitation of women. Contrary to Mhunduru and Rhode's perceptions of nature in Andreas's narrative, Ogbeide (2013) celebrates the "violet without purple." He argues that wife battering renders woman invisible and also silenced. This study veers from this common analysis of Andreas' text that portrays female characters as helpless victims of patriarchy. While acknowledging that women are at the receiving end of patriarchy, my study argues that in a continent that is not only concerned with gender-based violence but with sustaining the environment and addressing climate change issues, it is not enough to chronicle the black woman as a mere victim. The study argues further that both the environment and the black woman's victimhood are connected. My study thus, builds on the works by Rhode (2003), Mhunduru (2013) and Ogbeide (2013) which reach a consensus that there is hope for the violet to regain its purple colour at the end of the female authored narrative. My study, however, pays more attention to the portrayal of environmental issues with a view to evaluate the extent to which these modes of portrayal impact upon the black woman characters.

The Purple Violet of Oshaantu has also been analysed mostly from a feminist perspective to show how women are dominated and exploited by patriarchy and the colonial system. While feminism emphasises advocates for a restoration of balance and harmony between men and women, ecofeminism emphasises the need of a social transformation that should position not only women but nature as well into object status. Gaard (1993: 5), notes that "The earth is at a turning point, and women's efforts are critical at this time". In addition, Maathai observes that "Things will not just happen" (cited in Gaard: 1993:5). By implication, ecofeminism emphasizes action that results in black women's survival. The study builds on this praxis feature of ecofeminism to examine the Namibian black woman's liberatory and nature preservation strategies that are intimately connected to their survival. My study suggests strongly that action-provoking nature of eco-lit calls for a reconceptualization of the Western

definition of ecocriticism. The shift also enhances the study's argument on the dualistic relations between women and nature. Ecofeminism's task is to advance a symbiotic relationship between nature and women and to debunk the nature/culture dualism which breeds human and ecological injustice.

Hence, the ecofeminist approach transcends the feminist boundaries to accommodate ecological issues, for example, the interpenetration between the land, mine, food, animals and women. Ecofeminists claim that there is a significant relationship between the unjustified domination of women and that of nature. Ruether (1992:232) argues that ecofeminism "leverages a critique of systems hostile to women and nature." The mistreatment of the environment and the exploitation of women are interrelated. This study argues that an ecocritical and ecofeminist approach can be used to analyse Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* as she raises concerns about women, land, colonialism and the environment. Using the project of ecofeminism both extends strengthens and complicates previous analysis of female-authored creative works.

Most approaches by some critics outlined and debated above contend with using a single feminist theory and fail to unravel the distinction between feminism and ecofeminism. My study realizes this knowledge gap and attempts to address it by using the ecofeminist lens which perceives nature as a feminist issue. My study argues that an understanding of the environmental problems in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* will help one understand how and why women are oppressed. Such an earth-centred approach makes this study different from previous examinations of Andreas' narrative.

Using the relationship between nature and women in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, my study will advocate for social transformation that integrates women. In other words, women

should be considered as partners to men in this type of relationship. Precisely, the study will use ecofeminism to examine the different social environments in which women are oppressed, to challenge the patriarchal system that exploits women and to show how the passive and docile woman is replaced by a self-assertive woman who strives to emancipate herself and change her low status in society. These aspects offer a relevant platform to the current study as it draws on the insights of both ecology and feminism. The study will also attempt to show that while feminism advocates for a restoration of balance and harmony between men and women, ecofeminism emphasises the need of a social transformation that should position not only women but nature as well into subject status. The ideological conviction of my study is steeped in the belief that the transformation or restoration has to be examined within a nature-oriented literature. The analysis of the treatment of female characters in this study can reveal that efforts to end women's oppression will not be successful without the liberation of nature (Gaard cited in Wright 2015). The study will also show that the reinvention of African worlds not only requires rethinking relationships between the black woman and the black man; but emphasises that it is necessary to seek out the domains in which the natural elements and humans can co-exist, co-operate and flourish in the biosphere.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that African creative writers are conscious of their environment. Ecocritical and ecofeminist studies have been done on some of the texts. However, more extensive research in African literary works should be carried out. The analysis of African writers and critics' eco-literature reveals that there is still a dearth of such literature on the representation of nature.

The chapter also demonstrated that in all the narratives under study, nature is a feminist issue and that woman-nature connections are the backbone of ecofeminism. The chapter also argued that traditional ecocritical approaches have woefully side-stepped environmental issues in African literature that have gone unnoticed.

This chapter also demonstrated that there is a dearth of ecolo-terary texts and critics in African literature. Most of the critics cited in this chapter are Anglo-American and their focus is on the traditional Western feminist approach. In this tradition, the scholars establish conceptual frameworks that define the values, beliefs and assumptions of ecocriticism. While Slaymaker's framework is limited to British and American literature, Glotfelty's and Buell's are more inclusive and offer key concepts to this study. They offer an earth centred approach that is relevant to this study since it emphasises the interconnectivity of everything in the ecosphere. The current study builds upon this perspective to include human and nonhuman nature. But, this study will transcend the Western philosophy of feminism to show how symbols of nature are used in a patriarchal context to devalue women and nature. The study will expand the ecocriticism lens to include women, men, children and nonhuman nature. As Gaard notes, women alone cannot save the earth; men are also needed (1993:5) to address the unjustified domination of women and nature. This means that nature holds an important place in the lives of a people, hence the need to understand the interconnectivity between humans and the non-human nature and to raise awareness against environmental problematics that disrupt this relationship. Thus, the centrality of the earth in ecocriticism and ecofeminism allows an interrogation of feminist features that have previously been neglected by the Western philosophical tradition. The inclusion of animals, war, immigrants, maldevelopment and food in the analysis of some of the texts in this study, closes the hermeneutic gap created in feminist ecocriticism.

The study also builds on Buells' praxis-oriented view of ecocriticism. There is need for an "action-provoking" theory not only to safeguard against the environment but also to ensure the survival of the inter-connectedness of all life. In its analysis of the black female authored narratives, the study will provide new insights as it seeks to expose liberatory strategies and actions taken by women to conserve the environment.

Feminism and nature provide a backdrop to the analysis of black female authored texts in this study. Quite a number of African critics in this chapter raise awareness against the unjustified domination of nature and black women. Some of the critics reveal that they are conscious of the connectivity between the violation of nature and the exploitation of women. For example, Magosvongwe and Nyamende link social injustices to land dispossession and displacement in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*. Mabura infuses the Zimbabwean landscape with issues of race, ethnicity and class in both *The Book of Not* and *Nervous Conditions*. In addition, Mabura infuses the Zimbabwean landscape with issues of race, ethnicity and class. The study builds on these forms of oppression to show how they intersect oppress both women and nature. Okuyade raises awareness for human beings to preserve and sustain the environment. Hlongwane, transcends socio-political issues to illustrate how the narratives under study exude environmental issues by examining how the racist environment overwhelms the female protagonist. Hlongwane explores the construction of women, the human Other who are dominated by both the patriarchal and colonial system. The study will build on these African ecofeminist insights to ensure a complex representation of the diverse forms of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Firstly, the study will broaden the ecofeminism framework by adopting an earth-centred approach to include human and nonhuman nature, animals included. Secondly, the nature/culture dualism of patriarchal thought will be interrogated in the selected texts to determine the extent it has been deconstructed.

The next chapter examines Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. Using Warren's (1990) ecofeminist ethic, the chapter will examine how feminist issues are used to end the forms of oppression in the narrative. Relationships between women, men and nonhuman nature will be examined. Attention will be paid to the unjustified sexual and environmental dominations of women. Lastly, the chapter will debate African women's active roles to conserve nature as depicted in their writings.

Chapter 3: Revisioning Nature: an Ecofeminist Reading of Tsitsi Dangarembga's

Nervous Conditions and *The Book of Not*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) (hereafter, NC) and *The Book of Not* (2006) (hereafter, TBN) from an ecofeminist perspective in order to show how she delineates the interconnections between Shona women and the environment. Through this connectivity, this chapter intimates that Dangarembga challenges the status quo and critiques the cultural and social systems that are used to marginalise black women and the environment. The ecofeminism lens will be used to explore nature writing in the two literary texts, thus revealing the human-nature relations and the meanings one can draw from them. Also, using the ecofeminism lens, the chapter will explore the nature of the web of

relationships between women and their environment. As such, it examines what relationship women should have to the natural world to defend and conserve it against over-exploitation and degradation. The chapter upholds the realisation that misogyny and exploitation of the environment are parallel forms of social injustice and domination. In other words, women's survival struggles are simultaneously struggles for the protection of nature (Shiva 1989).

In a world where environmental issues such as land degradation, deforestation and global warming have gained great concern, very little has been said about the ecological insights of the text and gender relationships. Hence, this chapter will show that women's relationship to the environment is vital to their daily lives and existence. Women play a significant role in environmental management. In addition, the chapter will exemplify how women also bear the brunt of environmental degradation. *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* can be analysed from an ecocritical and ecofeminist perspective to reveal the interconnections between nature and women. The analysis will also reveal how the domination of human nature parallels the oppression of women in a Shona patriarchal environment.

In her thesis, Rine (2011) explores the presence of *unhu* in *Nervous Conditions* and the breakdown of *unhu*. She examines whether *unhu* exists in small amounts in the text and if so, what its significance might be. In addition, Rine examines the significance of Maiguru's garden as a "utopian place for community building." Although Rine makes no mention of the theory ecocriticism in her analysis, she uses the ecocriticism lens to show the affinity between humans and nature in her analysis. Though Rine's analysis is not extensive, she leaves the reader in no doubt that the Zimbabwean female writer, Tsitsi Dangarembga, has explored nature writing and infused it with the country's political issues in *The Book of Not*.

In addition, this chapter postulates that this exploration is burdened with discrimination in which the political space and eco-warfare are used to denigrate the black woman.

An analysis of Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* will show that she uses the environment in her text but very few literary critics have undertaken the task to determine whether it exists or not. Such an undertaking is precisely the aim of this chapter. As such, the chapter advances the argument that Dangarembga explores the relationship between humans and the non-human world or natural environment in colonial Zimbabwe at a time when the war for liberation is raging on. An analysis of Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* will again show that the relationship between nature and people's livelihood is a clear indicator that African writers have always been concerned with environmental issues.

An ecocritical and ecofeminist analysis of *The Book of Not* enables one to interrogate the narrative's environmental voice. This is in line with Ramya's (2012) argument that feminism is based on the theoretical foundations of feminism and environmentalism. While feminism, analyses why women are treated as inferior to men; environmentalism, in turn shows interest in detecting why nature is treated as inferior to culture (ibid). Premised on this argument, the landscape will be used metaphorically to understand and explore the connections of women and the nature and to deconstruct the nature/culture dichotomy.

3.2 Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Nervous Conditions illuminates the eco-function of the environment. The novel also underscores the interdependence between humans and their environment. Both men and women realise that the environment is the source of their livelihood, hence they preserve it. Although the women are entrapped by both the patriarchal and colonial system, they are not

portrayed as passive victims. They use various liberatory strategies to escape the dualisms that in which they are traditionaaly entrapped.

3.2.1 Conservation and Sustainability in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is set in colonial Rhodesia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Tambudzai Sigauke (Tambu), the protagonist narrates a story of five women, entrapped by both the colonial system in a white-dominated Rhodesia, and the patriarchal system in a Shona community. All the women in the novel are subjected to some kind of suffering under patriarchy and the constraining environment. Tambu, the protagonist, is denied access to education because both Jeremiah and Nhamo insist "she is a girl" (NC, 21). Jeremiah tells Tambu that she cannot go to school because she cannot cook books and feed them to her husband. Instead, she has to stay at home and learn to cook, clean and grow vegetables. Both Tambu's mother and Maiguru are restricted to chores that confine them exclusively to domesticity. Babamkuru also entraps all the women around him; an entrapment that results in Nyasha's and Lucia's rebellion. However, given the harsh realities and challenges that face them in this patriarchal society, the women are not portrayed as victims, but as survivors. They protect the natural environment and in turn, it enables them to survive. The women realise that the natural environment serves a central purpose in their lives and hence preserve the trees for different purposes. Tambu derives strength, a voice and empowerment through connection with the environment and preserving and conserving it. She plants maize crops to raise school fees. Tambu's mother (Mai Tambu or Mai) sustains the family through her garden proceeds. The River Nyamarira, a meeting place for the girls and women, revitalises them and gives them the peace they yearn for. The environment is in fact a nonhuman character that shapes and influences human characters. It is therefore pertinent to note that in the African cosmology the environment is an integral part of the

woman's way of life. The significance of the environment is interpreted not according to its beauty, but according to its function to fulfil women's daily needs.

It is not accidental that Dangarembga exposes us to the flora at the beginning of her narrative, *Nervous Condition*. The opening image of the narrative announces her environmental concerns. The narrative demonstrates that women in rural Zimbabwe have used their livelihood to establish a symbiotic relationship with the environment, what Slaymaker (2001) refers to as the "humanistic survival philosophy." According to Slaymaker (2001), this "instrumentalisation" of the other, "the non-human sentient and nonsentient being" concerns itself with human benefit through proper conservation of nature. For instance, the trees are used to provide shade to protect women from the September to April's harsh and scorching sun; there was always "shade by the fields where clumps of trees were deliberately left standing to shelter [women and children] when [they] ate [their] meals or rested when cultivating strips of land" (NC, 2). The women are protected from the sun by the msasa trees as they sell hard-boiled eggs, seasonal fruit, boiled chicken and vegetables. Conversely, this is a plea by the author "for preservation of nature".

Eco-friendly elements like trees and the river are the core of their livelihoods (lived experiences). The narrator also points out that from the bus terminus:

The road wound down by the fields where there were always some people with whom to pass ten minutes of the day – enquiring about their health and the health of their family, admiring the broad-leafed abundance of the maize crop when it was good, predicting how many bags the field would yield or wondering whether the plants had tasselled too early or too late (NC, 2).

Human existence cannot be divorced from the environment. Women sell maize cobs and vegetables to survive and to sustain their families. The health and sustainability of the environment involves the community's health as well. In the forest people could get wild

fruit like “matamba” and “matunduru”. Rodda (1993:49) also notes that for many people, fruit is “sometimes part of the regular diet, but trees provide many other forms of nutrition”. Thus the “forest is also valued as a source of food supply” (Rodda 1993:49), since trees could provide food in a number of indirect ways. The environment represented in *Nervous Conditions* is “replete with flora, fauna, and landscapes with symbolic meaning” (Ernest-Samuel 2013: 76).

On the way from the bus stop, there were fields with clumps of trees, and maize crops in abundance. In Tambu’s words, “The river, the trees, the fruit and the fields. This was how it was in the beginning” (NC, 3). This was before the Government built the District Council Houses close to the river, where the women washed. This is a clear demonstration of how conceptions of nature writing, which are at the centre of ecofeminism and environmentalism, are constructed by the historical and political processes obtained in the women’s lived environment.

In addition, rural people in Zimbabwe use nearby forests as an important source of both firewood and collecting it, both of which are a woman’s responsibility. Wood is the main source of fuel used in the village. Interestingly, Rodda (1993) also notes that the smoke from the trees also helps keep insects away. Grandmother’s historical knowledge on land reflects how she values “the wisdom intrinsic to nature” (Howell 1997:234). As such, the women in *Nervous Conditions* value and respect nature in itself, not as a “commodity and object,” (ibid.) but as an integral part of their community. This interconnectedness or symbiotic relationship between nature and people’s livelihoods is a clear indicator that African writers have always been concerned with the environment. For this relationship to be maintained, both men and women should play a major role in tree management and conservation. The

community should be involved in protecting existing trees if the specific roles and needs of both men and women are met.

3.2.2 Women as Producers in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

The planting, collection and selling of vegetables are also the responsibility of women. As producers, Tambu and her mother, are involved in the sustainable management of the environment. Tambu shows how her mother worked hard in her garden to produce food for her family and to raise money for fees for her and Nhamo, “She also took vegetables – rape, onions, and tomatoes – extending her garden so that there was more to sell... In this way she scraped together enough money to keep my brother in school” (NC, 15). Mai Tambu is portrayed as industrious seen through the “ferocious swings of her arms as she grabbed and stripped a maize stalk.” Tambu and Netsai worked alongside her and they would “follow in the tracks of their uncle’s car when the sun began to set, herding the cattle back to their kraal... since there was no other young man in their family besides Nhamo to attend to this chore” (NC, 8). Thus, we see the two girls Tambu, Netsai and their mother working to produce basic food while Babamkuru *drives* [my own emphasis] home with Jeremiah and Nhamo leaving the women to toil on their own and then walk home, following in the tracks of Babamkuru’s car. In this regard, one may argue that Dangarembga engages with the land to portray “the intricate webs that that are woven” (NC, 71) between men, women and the land. On one hand, one might argue that through such cultural land practices both the girl-child and the women are subordinated by patriarchy. The women are the tillers of the land and the men control both the land and women. As such, the land and the women are treated historically as objects to be exploited and tamed; both nature and women suffer under patriarchal domination.

Although the women are the backbone of agriculture, they are dominated and oppressed by their male counterparts. It seems that Dangarembga's emphasis on the direct contact between women and the land should not be overlooked. The strength and resilience of the woman in the Shona culture is what one believes is celebrated by the author. Whereas men like Babamkuru consider the land more in terms of commercial possibilities, women see it as "a source of basic domestic needs" (Rodda 1993:47). This analysis is further advanced by Shiva's article, "Let Us Survive: Women, Ecology and Development" (cited in Ruether 1996) in which she points out that representing women and nature as intimately associated is not to say anything revolutionary. Rather, the new insight is that women and nature are associated not in passivity, but in creativity and in the maintenance of life (Shiva 1989). Shiva concludes that, in the perspective of women engaged in survival struggles which are simultaneously struggles for the protection of nature, women and nature are intimately related and their domination and liberation similarly linked. This is the central claim of ecofeminism, that there is a connection between environmental degradation and the subordination of women. Thus, an examination of *Nervous Conditions* in light of the ecofeminist theory transcends a mere representation of women as controlled by the environment and confined to domestic spheres. Instead, an ecofeministic reading of this text shows that Dangarembga invokes nature and uses it as an agent of resistance. This will be illustrated by Tambu's efforts to go to school in the discussion below.

3.2.3 Recasting Nature as Feminist Space in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Although *Nervous Conditions* demonstrates that conservation has been linked to patriarchal domination in the Zimbabwean context, Dangarembga uses environmental concerns to engage in an anti-patriarchal struggle. When Nhamo and Jeremiah make it clear that Tambu will not go to school because she is a girl, she decides to work on the land to raise money for

her school fees. Tambu turns to the land to help her free herself from patriarchal domination and to create a sense of belonging and hope. Only her connection to the land saves her from patriarchal entrapment and subsequently psychological imprisonment. This connection can be traced back to a time when she was small and spent many hours working with her grandmother on her plot of land. From her grandmother, Tambu learns invaluable lessons about her people's history "that could not be found in the textbooks" (NC, 17). Nfa-Abbenyi (1998) also points out that grandmother "subverts work on the farm and uses it as a platform for instruction and the construction of self, for whenever Tambu would plead for more stories, Mbuya as if teasing [her] with the bait, would say, "More work, my child, before you hear more story" (NC, 17). In light of the ecofeminist theory, one would argue that this intricate web between Tambu and Mbuya creates an undomesticated feminist space that views both the land and the women as agents. Thus, Dangarembga embraces the historical connection of women and the natural world to recast the environment as a space that promotes physical and spiritual growth of women. By implication, an ecofeminist analysis of *Nervous Conditions* not only helps one to unravel the oppressive nature/culture dichotomy in the text, but also intimates liberatory strategies.

One such emancipatory strategy is shown when Tambu earns her fees by working on her own field. Mai Tambu works on the infertile and dry land to provide her family with basic needs. The unequal access to fertile land impoverishes women and children as they depend on the soil for survival. The lack of fertile land has a negative impact on women. Mai Tambu has to work long hours in her field, while her husband Jeremiah disconnects himself from this activity. Again, it is the women who thatch the roof of one of their huts. Jeremiah remains insensitive to Tambu and her mother, and any activities linked to nature. Hence, women are devalued because firstly, their work is largely unrecognised; second, because they "cooperate

with nature's processes", and third, because "work that satisfies needs and ensures sustenance is devalued in general" (Mies and Shiva 2014:75). The parallelism between the oppression of women and the domination of nature is made apparent as Jeremiah disengages himself from nature. Both Mai and Tambu suffer at the hands of man. However, while Jeremiah walks away from the fields, detaches himself and disapproves of Tambu's efforts to sell mealies, the teacher, Mr Matimba acknowledges the importance of Tambu's effort to grow and sell maize to empower herself. While Mr Matimba assists Tambu to sell her maize, and she eventually goes to school, Jeremiah's detachment from nature shapes his poverty. One may argue that Dangarembga does not resist the culture/nature binary, but embraces it to create what Alaimo (2000) terms the "undomesticated ground" of feminist possibility. Dangarembga's text uses the environment as an alternative narratology to deconstruct the rigid divisions that typify gender stereotypes, seeing these not as monolithic, but as permeable and interchangeable. The notion of any fixed identity category is seen as problematic and thus, "woman" should be regarded as a constantly shifting signifier of multiple meanings. Ecofeminists thus see their task as interrogating how culture ascribes meaning to the woman category through her connection with nature, thus suggesting that nature has a subjectivity we must respect (Caminero-Santangelo 2007).

3.2.4 Making Women Visible in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu sells the maize cobs to raise fees so as to go back to school. This represents the tendency to empower the girl-child and endow her with intellectual attributes. Hence, when Nhamo steals her maize cobs, Tambu fights him. The fight between Nhamo and Tambu for the maize cobs is not only a fight to challenge patriarchy as represented by Nhamo, but also a fight to assert Tambu and maintain connectivity with the natural environment. Tambu realises that the maize cobs are instrumental in her fight for

education and visibility. Through selling the maize cobs, Tambu is able to fight against what her brother Nhamo represents in the text – a continuation of Shona patriarchal authority and sexism. Significantly, winning this struggle means going back to school. In this regard, Dangarembga explores the development of a separate sphere for the girl-child and goes beyond simply putting women and girl-children back into an existing historical framework. In Alaimo's (2000:16) words, Dangarembga transforms nature into an undomesticated space which she defines as "utterly free from such confining [gendered] concepts, values and roles...". From the discussion so far, it would almost appear that women's history could simply have been subsumed in social history, but ecofeminism rejects this claim by embracing nature and interrogates gendered concepts that "denigrate and silence certain groups of humans as well as nonhuman lives" (ibid:13). At this point, it is important that Warren (2000:4) observes that, "what makes something a feminist issue is that an understanding of how it contributes in some way to an understanding of the subordination of women." Hence, Mai and Tambu's toiling on the land to provide for the whole family helps one understand how patriarchy uses the land to dominate and oppress women. Analysing *Nervous Conditions* in this manner enhances one's understanding of the woman-nature connections as reflected in the text.

3.2.5 The Female Body and Food in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Another prevalent aspect of the narrative that remains true to the ecofeminism lens is the link between the female body and food. The connectivity between land, food and women seen earlier through Tambu's experiences is further enhanced through Mai Tambu and Nyasha. For instance, on realising that there was no money for school fees, Mai Tambu plants vegetables and sells them to pay for Nhamo's fees. This celebration of the connectivity between the land, woman and child links well with ecofeminism. It advances the notion that

the suffering of the oppressed, women and children, can in fact be challenged by an interaction with the earth. Creamer (1994:352) also contends that Mai Tambu transforms food cultivation into education because she understands that a son's education is an investment for the family. She reclaims connectivity with the earth and uses this as a platform to reject suffering and to react to the suffering of others. This remains in line with the ecofeminist tendency to break away from the oppressive patriarchal institution that she finds herself in. Like Tambu, she works so closely with the earthly produce that she uses it to sustain her family. Thus, through this nature-to-human interaction, Mai Tambu personifies ecofeminism.

However, we also see Mai Tambu's fear of the "Englishness" which she believes is destructive. When Nhamo dies and Nyasha becomes anorexic, Tambu's mother blames it all on this "Englishness", of which she says, "It'll kill them all if they aren't careful." This fear of "assimilation" as Nyasha calls it, results in Mai Tambu's breakdown. Her release of anger at Shona patriarchal authority and colonial domination is articulated through her loss of appetite: "she ate hardly anything, and when she was able to swallow something it lay heavy in her stomach" (NC, 57). She withdraws into herself and exhibits signs of severe depression when she "ate less and less and did less and less, until within days she could neither eat nor do anything, not even change the dress she wore" (NC, 187). At this point it is important to note that when her body deteriorates, she also "did not go to Nyamarira to wash, or to the garden" (NC, 187). The illness alienates her and facilitates her disconnection from the 'river space.' As she deteriorates, the garden also is neglected. This is a significant observation which Shiva (1994:9) also makes when she says, "... women are rebuilding connections with nature, and renewing the insight that what we do to nature, we do to ourselves." She further adds that, "There is no insular divide between the environment and our bodies.

Environmental hazards are also health hazards...” (ibid). Seemingly, the earth/garden has been instrumental in Mai Tambu’s fight against the oppression around her and it is this interconnection that enabled her to provide for her family. However, this connection is disrupted when Mai Tambu falls ill and given Jeremiah’s lazy nature, the assumption is that her whole family is affected. This realisation corroborates the ecofeminism argument that environmental concerns are a feminist issue and for “women, health issues and environmental issues are related” (Shiva 1994:2) and are clearly issues of survival.

The novel suggests that to restore Mai Tambu’s health, she needs what Tambu calls “a sort of shock treatment” (188). To achieve this, the first step taken by Lucia is to walk her sister to the Nyamarira River. In addition, the treatment entails bathing and washing her clothes in the river, sitting in the sun and feeding her meat and milk. Lucia works intimately with nature’s substances as she values what they offer for free as healing agents. An important factor here is that women and nature are associated not in passivity, but in the maintenance of life. This view plays well with ecofeminism as Shiva (1994:9) notes, “Beginning *with women’s experiences* [my own emphasis], analysis and actions we will rebuild the connections between [nature] and health, for a more holistic approach to the contemporary [gender challenges]. This contribution is an attempt to reconstitute both ‘woman’ and ‘nature,’ and to show that nature as the ecological web of life is not out there in space and time: it is us” (Shiva 1994:9). This sentiment is also cited by Walker (1988:147) who notes that, “While the Earth is poisoned, everything it supports is poisoned. While the Earth is enslaved, none of us is free... While it is 'treated like dirt,' so are we.”

Nyasha’s breakdown or “nervous condition” is caused by the assimilation of Western ways. Unlike, Tambu who has to challenge patriarchy, Nyasha has to fight this “Englishness” which

has resulted in her hybrid identity. The assimilation of Western values has resulted in her lack of an African traditional frame of reference with which she can identify. She loathes this Western identity and longs to redefine it and hence, rebels. What Nyasha lacks is a strong connection with nature that Tambu alludes to at the beginning of the novel when she says, “the river, the trees, the fruit and the fields. This is how it was in the beginning” (NC, 3). The connection with the smaller tributaries of the Nyamarira River, which Tambu diverted into the beds of onions and rape (NC, 47) to get food and subsequently pay her school fees, is what Nyasha lacks.

Significantly, the two girls and Mai Tambu use food to break away from the tentacles of male domination and colonialism. Thus, Dangarembga uses what Thomas (2003) calls tropologies of food, eating disorders and hunger as speaking positions adopted by Tambu, Nyasha and Tambu’s mother to challenge patriarchy and colonialism. Unlike Tambu who sells the mealies to raise school fees and to fight the oppression around her, Nyasha and Mai Tambu rebel by refusing to “stomach” food. In the text, food becomes a signifier of female resistance and protest against their entrapment within the double bind of “poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other” (NC, 16). In fact, the nervous condition of the black woman is shown through the female body and food connection. In this regard, one might argue that this is an attempt to explain the importance of ecofeminism and its ability to be applied to different situations. Smith (1998) explains this multi-hued nature of ecofeminism when she says, “...the term ‘ecofeminist’ expresses the perception that the degradation of the Earth is of a piece with the subordinating and bullying of women, racial minorities, the poor, and the marginalised...” (Smith 1998:476). Parallels are thus drawn between the oppression of women and the domination of the environment. As such, this

chapter posits that it is by relating the domination over the land to the domination over all marginalised people that Dangarembga qualifies to be an ecofeminist.

The connection between food and the female body is also examined through the anorexic Nyasha. Sue Thomas in “Rewriting the hysteric as anorexic” enhances this argument when she says that in *Nervous Conditions*, “the entry of colonialism [and patriarchal power] is represented as *ingestion*” (my own emphasis) (2003:186) and also the “hysterias of black Rhodesian people are figured as effects of the *ingestion* (my own emphasis) of local patriarchal and colonial English assumptions about gender, race, class [and] sexuality” (ibid: 195). For instance, when referring to Nyasha’s illness, Tambu’s mother says, “you couldn’t expect the ancestors to stomach so much Englishness” (NC, 205). Ironically, as Nyasha “stomachs” the colonial education, Nyasha assimilates Western values which results in her alienation from her own society and African traditional values.

Sadly, as Nyasha is forced to ingest English text-books by “reading and memorising, reading and memorising all the time” (NC, 111), she loses her appetite during preparations for examinations and she wastes away and finally develops anorexia nervosa and bulimia disorders. In an effort to redefine and assert her identity, she succumbs to a mental and nervous breakdown. Again, Dangarembga uses food to describe Nyasha’s rebellion and hysteria; a hysteria which Sue Thomas (2003:185) describes as a “product of precariously repressed rage at patriarchal and colonial domination under conditions of cultural dislocation and disruption of Shona gender norms”. The tension between Nyasha and her father culminates in a food battle. He stamps his authority by forcing her to eat all her food and believes that Nyasha is challenging him when she does not eat (NC, 192-193). Her self-induced vomiting is an articulation of her rebellion. She refuses to embody the Shona ideas of

femininity and thus defies Shona patriarchal authority. Her refusal of food at the family table is a “response to the sexual and cultural politics enacted at it” (Thomas 2003:191). In fact, “anorexia nervosa allows Nyasha to act out the rage symptomatically through the body” (Thomas 2003:191). Her body is the safest way to articulate her final defiance of her father’s patriarchal authority. Thus, after unravelling the oppressive dichotomies of male/female and culture/nature Dangarembga explores emancipatory strategies. These liberatory strategies are in line with ecofeminist ideology as they use the environment to transform gender relationships.

The patriarchal and colonial environment in *Nervous Conditions* is portrayed as stifling. However, women and nature are associated not in passivity, but in the maintenance of life. The text exudes a strong connection with between women and nature, making us realise that human beings are part of nature, hence the web-like existence in which women, health issues and the environment are connected. Grandmother, Mai Tambu, Tambu and Lucia reclaim connectivity with the earth and use this for their livelihood and sustenance. The women are not separate from nature but have an interdependent relationship with it. The next section begins an analysis of Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not*, a sequel to *Nervous Conditions* in which feminist issues are broadened to include the war and racial environments. Of central concern is how Tambu is hemmed in by the multi-racial environment at the Young Ladies’ College of The Sacred Heart resulting in a discontinuous (Plumwood 1993) human-nature relationship.

3.3 Tsitsi Dangarembga – *The Book of Not*(2006)

The Book of Not interrogates forms of oppression including racism, sexism, classicism, speciesism, colonialism and the war environment. These forms intersect to illuminate the link

between the oppression of nature and human beings. The forest space is the link between Netsai and nature. The racial environment at the Sacred Heart College and the Harare Gardens connect Tambu to nature. Both the colonial and racial environment are used to denigrate two young women in a war environment. The violent nature of the liberation struggle and the construction of the District Council houses not only destroys the natural environment, but also affects women more. The female freedom fighters are objectified as sex objects as they are sexually abused by the male freedom fighters. Maiguru's garden is the only space that gives authority and power to women. By the end of the novel, the protagonist Tambu, remains oppressed by the patriarchal, racial and colonial systems.

3.3.1 The environmental voice in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*

The *Book of Not* (2006) is a sequel to Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous conditions*. Set in the 1970s, towards the end of the liberation struggle *The Book of Not* explores Tambudzai's Sigauke's trajectory; the colonial education system and her attempt to redefine herself through the new environment at the Young Ladies' College of The Sacred Heart and the philosophy of *unhu* and the patriarchal environment in Mutare at Babamukuru's farm. Through a feminist gaze, the book explores the plight of the Shona women/girl-children as they try to locate themselves in a seemingly patriarchal and multi-racial environment. In her struggle against oppression and domination, the protagonist, Tambudzai Sigauke, exudes how the black girl-child suffers in the stifling and constraining political and cultural environment. Growing up in a racial social milieu, she is displaced and engulfed by this environment which subsequently denies her personal growth and self-redefinition.

The Book of Not uses the environment but very few literary critics have undertaken the task to determine whether it exists or not. While a number of critics have focused on the cultural and

political realities that black women faced during the liberation struggle, very few have examined how nature and women are connected. For instance, Mabura in her essay “Black Women Walking Zimbabwe: Refuge and Prospect in the Landscapes of Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and its Sequel, *The Book of Not* shows how the Zimbabwean landscape, “complicated by race, ethnicity and class” (Mabura 2010: 89) is used by the women characters to locate themselves in the stifling colonial environment. In another essay, “A piece of a person”: Fractured selves and colonial education in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not*,” Gugu Hlongwane, examines how Tambu is “battered and overwhelmed by the racist environment as a black pupil in a multi-racial school that she succumbs to the very forces that threaten her existence” (2009:449). Thus, the above have analysed Dangarembga’s texts from a feminist perspective, a few have attempted to explore them using an eco-feminist gaze.

3.3.2 Reimagining Nature Amid Toxic Surroundings in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not*

The Book of Not interrogates the relationship between human beings and nature amid “toxic surroundings” as the freedom fighters are locked in war with the Rhodesian forces. The toxicity of the environment is presented in the book’s opening paragraph. The book opens with Netsai’s (Tambudzai’s sister, a freedom fighter) leg having been blown off by a land mine and Babamukuru being beaten by the villagers for being a traitor and for collaborating with the Rhodesian forces. Tambudzai narrates:

Up, up, up, the leg spun. A piece of person, up there in the *sky*. *Earth* and acrid vapours coated my tongue. Silence surged out to die away at the ragged shriek of a *cricket* in the *bushes* at the edge of the village clearing (TBN, 3) [my own emphasis].

The words in italics clearly embrace Dangarembga's concerns with the environment. The domination of both nature and the woman is symbolised by "the leg [which] was caught in an ungainly way in the *smaller* branches of a *mutamba* tree, the foot hooked, long like that *infamous fruit*" [my own emphasis] (TBN, 4). The interconnection between the human leg and the tree branches is symbolic of the devastating effects of war on nature and woman. Adams (1993:1) intimates that the twin dominations of women and the rest of nature is what ecofeminism is about. This gives an opportunity to discuss the overlooked relationship between women, war violence and environmental degradation in *The Book of Not*. Thus, as the tree branches are destroyed by the freedom fighters, Netsai is also fragmented by the patriarchal war environment. In other words, since both have been "Othered" by the "dominant human male" (Primavesi 1991:42), the oppressive image of woman equals nature or nature equals woman is entrenched. Warren (1987, 1991) insists that if ecofeminists' aim is to undo this image then "feminism must include an ecological perspective and ecology must include a feminist perspective." In other words she stresses the significance of the intimate and intricate connectivity between ecology and feminism. Precisely, articulating the nature of this relationship is what ecofeminism focuses on. Thus, in *The Book of Not*, ecofeminism allows an interrogation of these interconnections to better understand them and emphasises the need for social transformations for justice and survival to prevail (King 1989).

The liberation struggle is the link between Netsai and nature. As such, from an ecofeminist perspective, both the tree and Netsai are denigrated; with Netsai reduced to an "*infamous*" fruit not fit for human consumption and the tree bearing "*human fruit*" instead of its own original fruits. The flesh on her leg was shredded and the leg, reduced to a "piece of a person" hangs on the "smaller branches" as if to show how both (Netsai's leg and the tree) are insignificant and inferior to the male freedom-fighter whose "combat suit rippled green like a

Chinese jungle” (TBN, 4). Contrary to the disjointed and fragmented Netsai, the male soldier remains whole; fully rejuvenated like the Chinese jungle that is well known for its biodiversity and its vast and diverse landscape. This shows that the female freedom fighters are treated differently from their male counter parts. This difference is highlighted again when the younger soldier beats Babamukuru as, “He swung his A-K high, like a mortar to pound down into a pestle. His boot ground into Babamukuru’s neck to steady the target” (TBN, 15). In contrast, Netsai walks out of the bush “with a loping joyful stride, *her gun belt rolling around her hip like a string of beads...and the earth beneath her exploded*” (TBN, 15) [my own emphasis]. Ironically, instead of helping Netsai, Dudziro (the other female freedom fighter) was “too satisfied” and “she backed into the bushes” supposedly for shelter and protection (TBN, 17). She is also described in nature terms as “the girl of *ripe* flesh” (TBN, 17) [my own emphasis], thus showing the patriarchal definition of nature that has also been extended to women (Shiva 1994). I argue that this tendency to identify women with non-human nature shows the oppression of women and the “woman-nature connections that ecofeminists claim link the twin dominations of women and nature” (Warren 1993). According to Cook (2008), this parallel between man’s domination of nature and the exploitation of women is one of the key tenets of ecofeminist thought. Using the ecofeminism lens, I suggest that Dangarembga raises questions about the denigration of women and nature and also enters into a dialogue about the subaltern (Spivak 1967) status and plight of both women and nature in a war environment.

However, one may argue that Dangarembga’s treatment of the female freedom fighters tends to belittle their capabilities. She inadvertently, “reinforces the image of the female soldiers as weak and incapable of enduring the rigors of war” (Christiansen 1997:243). The female soldiers are depicted as peace loving where men are war loving (ibid: 245). Christiansen says

that this is because “Women are supposed to abhor war because [their] procreative abilities make [them] “closer to nature” (ibid). Seemingly, Netsai and Dudziro must face “a prejudiced assumption that [they] are ignorant and incompetent about war simply because this culture defines war as a quintessentially masculine activity” (ibid). Ecofeminists argue that this imaging of nature in feminine terms and women as closer to nature reinforces the hierarchical “ways of thinking that justify the oppression of various others in patriarchal culture” (ibid: 228). On the other hand, reimagining nature and possible relationships with the human world may “aid in changing abusive environmental ethics” (ibid). According to Legler (1997:229), this narrow definition has “resulted in a canon that reflects masculinist values and assumptions about the natural world.” Thus, by reimagining human relationships with nature to include the war environment, I believe this broadens the definition of nature writing to include black African female writers who have been ignored as nature writers.

An ecocritical and ecofeminist approach befits Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not* as she raises concerns about women, war and the environment. By so doing, the project of ecofeminism is both extended and strengthened. According to Christiansen (1997:240), one of the major tenets of ecofeminism is that “seemingly disparate and unrelated entities are in fact connected.” In this case, not only is the treatment of the female soldiers related to the treatment of nonhuman nature but it is extended to include war. Thus, I posit that Dangarembga makes efforts to reimage nature to forge a new relationship with and an understanding of nature.

3.3.3 Revisioning Women, Sexuality and War in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not*

The violent nature of the liberation struggle and its effects on humans and the environment demonstrates how the mistreatment of women and the degradation of the environment are

connected. The liberation struggle also provides an opportunity to make a case for the important yet often overlooked relationship between feminist and environmental degradation during times of military activity (Christiansen 1997). In her book review of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, Nana Wilson-Tagoe points out that the narrative shows Tambu's continued "quest to redefine the personal, political and historical forces in her complex world" (Book review, back cover). In addition, Terence Ranger's book review sees it as a book that "reproduces the feel, sight, sound and emotion of an African convent boarding school a quarter of a century ago. He says that it is not about repressed sexuality but about repressed identity" [as Tambu experiences] "emotional violence of a racism which demands that she performs better than a 'native' and then denies her the credit for having done so" (Book review, back cover). On a basic and simple level, this is what *The Book of Not* is about. Major feminist issues that other African women writers highlight as well as their impact on women's lives are what Nana Wilson-Tagoe and Terence Ranger's focus on in their book reviews and there is no mention of environmental issues. Ynestra King (cited in Christiansen 1997:240) elaborates on how this connection is extended to include war issues:

Eco-feminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing ... We are a woman-identified movement, and we believe that we have special work to do in these imperilled times. We see the devastation of the earth and beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors, as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinity mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality, and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way.

King's quotation emphasises the intrinsic value of all living things. In other words, human and nonhuman nature are connected in an ecological web-like existence in which one is an extension of the other. As a social movement, ecofeminists play a significant role in the interrogation of all systems of exploitation. The devastation of the earth in any form

including war and developments projects not only displaces people, but also deprives them of their sense of selfhood. Arguably, the land and the people are inextricably linked and no one can survive in isolation. Women have realised that the same patriarchal violence that oppresses and dominates them is the same driving force leading to the domination of nature. Hence, to defy this patriarchal violence, women should be aware of the new tools of exploitation, such as capitalist patriarchy, economic reforms, commodification of land etc. (Shiva 2013). These tools work together to intensify the oppression and violence against women and children in *The Book of Not*.

King ignores the context of liberation ethos. *The Book of Not* will demonstrate how Dangarembga engages in this debate to show how warfare, the mistreatment of the environment and the exploitation of women are interrelated. Although Netsai's desire was to join the freedom fighters and fight for the African land, the physical forest space also foregrounds patriarchal ideologies. Both male and female freedom fighters are subjected under "brutal colonial conditions" (Rwafa 2013: 324). However, as Rwafa further points out, "the toll is heavier on the woman... African male freedom fighters consummate [the] perception of [female freedom fighters] as inferior" (ibid) and they also view these young girls as sex objects. The objectification of the female body is still enforced as the female freedom fighters are treated thus. The African forest might be a "space upon which they redefine their identities" (ibid: 325) but unfortunately for Netsai, it overpowers her and her victimhood is symbolised by her dislocated self and "shredded" leg. Motivated by the liberation struggle, Netsai becomes a freedom fighter. Fighting for her people's freedom and reclaiming their ancestral fertile land from the coloniser is what drives Netsai to join the war. As Grandmother claims, black people were moved to the dry, stony and infertile lands while the coloniser occupied their rich and fertile landscapes. Hence, as a freedom fighter, Netsai

challenges the system that has exploited her people because of their race and social status. However, she is subordinated and rendered powerless by the patriarchal system in the forest space.

The denigration of the female freedom fighters is reinforced by the fact both that Netsai and Dudziro are objectified as they are treated as sex objects for the self-aggrandizement of the male freedom fighter, Big Brother. We are told, "...love was not mentioned...when he drank too much after the war, he was in love with both of them. Netsai was his first love, picked as she brought *sadza* to this freedom fighter's hideaway (TBN, 5). In his analysis of the African forest, Rwafa (2013:327) also affirms that "The objectification of the female body by male guerrillas enforced traditional roles of women as sexual objects that the war was beginning to allow African girls to question." Netsai is relegated to the feminine roles of cook and sex object. She joins the armed struggle not because there was "this war outside that called her" (TBN, 5) but because "there was another [war] inside which was the way she made the air about her shimmer and sparkle with joy when she spoke of this Big Brother" (TBN,5-6). She loved Big Brother but, he was a "comrade indeterminate and undecided" (TBN, 6) and he "took this young girl, Dudziro, and loved both of them" (TBN, 6). Couched in these statements is the intent to squash the newly found identity of the female freedom fighters as they are sexually abused by their male counter parts. The image of the woman as an inferior being and a sex object is entrenched under the interlocking relationship of patriarchy, war and the environment.

With their status reduced to mere lovers, care givers and sex objects, I posit that the forest ceases to be a "liminal space where [the female freedom fighters'] identities are reconstituted and reconstructed" (Rwafa 2013: 321). The irony is that "the same bush is used by male guerrillas to perpetuate the inequalities between African men and women" (ibid: 327). Both

Netsai and Dudziro are presented as passive and silent. Their role is that of being “patriotic supporters” (Christiansen 1997: 246). Thus, according to Elshtain (1987:164):

In the matter of women and war we [women] are invited to turn away. War is men’s: men are the historic authors of organised violence. Yes, women have been drawn in – and they have been required to observe, suffer, cope, mourn, honour, adore, witness, work. But men have done the describing and defining of war, and the women are “affected” by it: they mostly react.

Women are thus, excluded from combat positions but are affected by the war. Both Netsai and Dudziro do not have any ammunition with them; it is the, “the Comrade, guerrilla, the Big Brother, the *Mukoma*” (TBN, 4) who had “a rifle slung over his back” (TBN, 5) and could use it as an “authorising device for [his] political arguments” (Christiansen 1997: 246). Dangarembga articulates the oppressiveness of the patriarchal order which posits unchangeable masculine tendencies or “hierarchical domination” (Vakoch 2012:6) even in the forest space. I also argue that while the Big Brother asserts his authority and legitimacy in the forest space, Netsai is handicapped and powerless and as such, the forest space ceases to be a liminal space where she can re-configure her identity and live a more fulfilling life, away from the “private sphere” of the home limits” (ibid. 247). As such, the forest emerges as a space where she submits to maleness and power. It is a submission informed by a higher goal; that of liberation

Thus, even though the role of the woman in the liberation struggle is acknowledged, she seems to be engulfed and overwhelmed by the toxic environment of landmines. She can never redefine herself as a heroine or a survivor but she bears the brunt of the degraded environment as the victim. Thus, at the outset of Dangarembga’s narrative, we see the link between the male domination of the forest and the domination of women in a war zone. This dual oppression of women and nature is echoed by Howell (1997:231) when she says,

“Ecofeminism recognizes that historical ideological association of women and nature has not been advantageous for either women and nature.” But it is important to point out that this is not to suggest an ecological revolution that “requires destruction of male power to make way ... for female power or matriarchy, but for new egalitarian gender relations between men and women and between humans and nature” (Howell 1997:232; d’Eaubonne 1981:66-67; Merchant 1990:100).

This dual oppression of women and nature is also symbolised by the “expansion of capitalist agribusiness” (Vakoch 1997:3). This is evident when the colonialists make improvements by building District Council Houses close to the Nyamarira River. Despite the women’s cultivation of a relationship with the river, as a place “in which to rejuvenate” (Mabura 2010:106), and the “river as a trope and liminal space” (ibid), the landscape developments by the colonial powers do not value this relationship. The colonial state “[encroaches] on black women’s bathing enclaves on the Nyamarira without taking into consideration their traditional rights to this space or the negative impact on the environment” (ibid). By constructing the Council Houses close to the women’s bathing place on the Nyamarira, that “portion on the river is converted into a “transit point devoid of all privacy” (ibid:107). The women are thus deprived of their livelihood as represented by the Nyamarira River. In his analysis of the invasion of the Nyamarira space, Okonkwo (2003:60) notes that not only is the native landscape disturbed, but also the “entrepreneurial, commercial and recreational activities it generates among the villagers.” The women’s washing and bathing space is turned into an open ground for anyone on their way to the new shops. The invasion of this space represents a disruption of the women’s authority and freedom. Thus, the river which we see as a liminal space in *Nervous Conditions* declines in importance in *The Book of Not*. This

apparent invisibility of the river as a trope is meant to resonate well with the invisibility of the black women both in the war front and in the “private sphere” of their homes.

In a situation where the environmental degradation, the killing of other human beings and sexual objectification of women are fundamental realities of war, both women and the natural environment are treated as unimportant. Christiansen’s (1997:254) argument that the Nyamarira River, and both the forest and the women are treated not only as secondary but also “play a “background” role for the political and military action.” The women in *The Book of Not*, support the soldiers by providing support services (Rwafa 2013). They cook for them and also provide moral support and sexual release. This role of “being a supportive backdrop is similar to the role played by the ecosystem during the war” (ibid). The forest where the community converges for the *morari* is also perceived as unimportant because it “serves as the background for the use and support of military action. It is easily supposed to give up its resources to the fighting forces without fail” and without [supplanting] the military objective” (ibid). During war times, the forest’s pivotal role is to provide shelter to the freedom fighters and “under the camouflage provided by the bush,” they successfully waged the war of liberation (Rwafa 2013: 323). The forest provided the training bases for the freedom fighters. According to Rwafa, this role played by the African environment is often underplayed. He notes that it formed the “geographical background against which the themes of power struggles within the larger liberation struggles were played out” (ibid: 322).

The destructive nature and toxic nature of the war is also evident when Tambu notes the “bare, blackened hills where leaves no longer [grew] after the army destroyed the elder sibling’s cover” (TBN, 178). When she tries to look for familiar sights she also realises that “the kiosk at Alpha Estate where Babamukuru bought oranges for [her] was not there

anymore” (TBN, 179) and she wonders whether the “farmer still existed” (TBN, 179). The oranges sustained Tambu as a scholar at Sacred Heart. These examples demonstrate the “danger that every war poses to the ecosystem” (Christiansen 1997:254). The very sources that sustain humanity are destroyed. Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not* clearly demonstrates how the environment and women are rendered invisible and unimportant in the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. Ecofeminism challenges this patriarchal twin domination that renders women and nature irrelevant. Christiansen (1997:255) points out that if this “patriarchal conceptual framework is not dismantled and our commitment falters in protecting the ecosystem that sustains us, our next war may be fought not over [land]” but over “water, forests, and fertile soil (O’Riordan, 1990).

The thrust of the argument here is that the war damages on the ecosystems parallel the war atrocities that human beings have to contend with. Later in the narrative, disappointed with Tambu’s A-Level results, Babamukuru compels her to look at the “ragged valley rifted in [his] flesh, where the dagger had gouged to slit the artery, the path long and wide” (TBN, 189) with the “lighter flesh underneath the [arm] where the scars glistened more visibly” (TBN, 187). Tambu’s classmate, Ntombi recounts one of the atrocities in which her baby cousin has been drowned by “terrorists”, “holding its feet, upside down! Putting its head in water! A baby!...she was only nine months old!... She was already full of water, so they had already drowned her. But they still hit her on the rock...” (TBN, 172). The war damage is evident on both the physical and the internal landscapes, leaving scars that may not heal. The narrative thus probes the victimhood relationship between human nature and non-human nature. Ntombi adds that:

[T] hey said my aunt is feeding terrorists ... Yes, she talked because of what they did to the baby. But it was too late. My little cousin was broken, just broken! ... Then my

aunt killed herself, because when it's like that, you'll never live. But they came back and now, at the homestead my sekuru, mbuya, babamunini, cousins! No one is alive! (TBN, 172)

The quotation above aptly demonstrates the nature of the violence that had to be endured by the black women, children and men during the war. Both human and non-human nature are victims of the war. Men, women and children are killed. Homes are destroyed, leaving the villagers destitute and homeless. The violence of the armed struggle leaves people “broken” and “torn” into pieces by “chopping away lips, ears, noses and genitals from the bodies of people’s relatives” (TBN, 198). In addition, Benhilda bemoans the death of her brother-in-law who was just “taken... One day he just wasn't there and no one [could find him]” (TBN, 128). The integral connection between the invisibility and insignificance of humans and nature reinforces their supportive roles for the political and war action. The narrative in this case foregrounds the relationship between nature and the humans and clearly illustrates how Dangarembga relates gender injustices to the exploitation of the environment.

3.3.4 Conceptual Spaces for Rethinking African Identities: the Forest in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*

At a cursory glance, it might seem that Dangarembga's aim is to valorise the African forest as a space where all human beings converge for a meeting as a community unified by a single agenda, the liberation struggle. At this juncture, she intimates that the forest is not solely a male preserve as both man and woman converge for a political meeting within this space. It becomes a political space where humanity seems to be accorded an “equal” status as the meeting is intended for and attended by all; man, woman and child. The environment becomes a response to the urgent mundane socio-economic issues and provokes readers to interrogate them. For instance, in *The Book of Not*, the forest is metonymically a space that allows the marginalised black people to meet and chart the way forward in the struggle for

independence. The war of liberation affects all human beings; men, women and children. The narrator notes that, “The others jiggled the infants wrapped in thin coarse towels” (3) and as they prepare to leave for the meeting, Mai, Tambu’s mother says:

Take a Zambia,” she instructed later when the sun set. She took the hand of Dambudzo, my little brother, and ordered me to stay close to Rambanai, my other sister. ‘Your father’s gone on before with Babamkuru.’... Her eyes gleamed again and she pulled at Dambudzo’s hand unnecessarily. ‘And of course that woman, Maiguru, who thinks she is as much as them decided not to wait for us, just go on with them. ... Now, children, we don’t want crying, not for anything! Not because you are hungry, or because you’re tired! We don’t want any crying for anything(TBN, 3).

There are several things worth noting about this passage. Mai’s “traditional voice” (Hlongwane 2009: 457) is given power. She urges everyone to attend the meeting but her “gleaming eyes” reflect anger at Maiguru and the two men who think they are better than her. In this case, the forest space ceases to be a unifying space as it is fraught with interfamilial divisions that cannot be healed in the meeting.

From an ecofeminist lens, I argue that *The Book of Not* intuits that the African forest is a gendered space that is infused with different meanings and hence can be used to renegotiate identities. Interrogating these meanings will also show that the very concept of nature writing is not a male construct (Cook 2008). Rwafa also (2013:320) asserts, “Besides balancing biodiversity and satisfying certain material human wants, African forests command symbolical meanings associated with how they can be assigned meanings that transform them into conceptual spaces for the renegotiation of African identities.” Thus, contrary to the ecocritical orthodoxy promoted by Slaymaker (2001), I call for a broader and revised definition of environmental writing which accommodates African narratives like Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not* by projecting the African forest not as just a “physical [entity] called the African bush” but as “symbolic spaces [introducing] ambiguities in the meanings that African forests and their ancillary environs can engender” Rwafa (2013:320).

To show these ambiguities, Rwafa discusses the representation of the African forest in different African narratives. However, I will not engage in such a detailed discussion but will limit my discussion on the African forest to *The Book of Not*. Rwafa's (2013) idea is that creative and literary artists in Africa have shown the multi-faceted symbols of the African forest. He argues that the African forest is imbued with several meanings that "become a commentary on the dynamics of power struggles and identity (re)formations and constructions" (ibid 321). *The Book of Not* reveals some of these meanings and identity formations.

A critical analysis of the image of forest in *The Book of Not* includes the physical forest and the metaphorical forest. Drawing on the ecocriticism tradition, the forest is first and foremost the space that provides cover and protection to the liberation fighters. It also accords the community space where "collectively, they pursued a political vision" (Cook 2008:2) which sought to liberate women, children and men from the coloniser. This is contrary to the rather narrow Western perception of the environmental issues as concerning preservation and creation of "an awareness of the effects of its degradation and destruction" (Cook 2008:42). This narrow boundary is expanded as Dangarembga redefines nature writing to include black female writers. She does not focus on the solitary African male figure and the role that he assumes both in the forest and the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. This understanding of the environment comes about when examining "the reciprocity between humans and nature" (Cook 2008:23). The images of the African forest will thus be examined to show how they are perceived as "conceptual spaces for rethinking African identities" (Rwafa 2013:322) on one hand. A closer analysis of the forest space reveals that the African community is fraught with contradictions as illustrated by Babamukuru's beating. The forest ceases only to be a

unifying force and a community building space as disharmony manifests itself in the beating of Babamukuru and when Netsai's leg is ripped off by a landmine.

Interestingly, one can draw parallels between Netsai's fragmented self in the physical African forest and Tambu's dislocated self in the colonial forest symbolised by the Sacred Heart academy. Like the leg that is dislocated from her body, Tambu is isolated from her family, history, language and herself. Both the physical forest and the Sacred Heart forest perpetuate the marginalisation and subjugation of the black woman. For this reason, this chapter agrees with Rwafa's view (ibid: 329) that "African women remember African forests differently." For instance, the presence of the female freedom fighter in the physical forest is acknowledged but she is treated as a sex object and thus it (the forest) can be viewed as a gendered space. In the same space, the female freedom fighter is torn apart by the landmine. Thus, since she is incapacitated, the forest ceases to be a space for the rejuvenation and redefinition of the black woman. After this incident, Dangarembga talks about the liberation struggle but is silent on the role played by Nyarai and Dudziro. Hence, efforts to create new identities in the African forest prove to be futile.

An analysis of the different forests in *The Book of Not*, reveal that the African forest is not a monolith but is "imbued with symbolical meaning so that they take on board more than one explanation of meaning" (Rwafa 2013: 333). The forest acquires different "metaphorical meanings that are symbolic and go beyond traditional efforts at conserving nature for immediate material benefits" (ibid). Thus, although the novel underpins the liberation struggle theme, this does not prevent critics from analysing environmental representations. In fact, in his analysis of the film *Flame*, Rwafa (ibid: 334) concludes that the "African forest as metaphor or liminal space creates meanings of those forests that destabilise our normative

ways of appreciating African ecosystems, as authorised in the discourses of environmental management and conservation.” He also adds that metaphors preserve images of African forests by way of “reordering and suggesting multiple meanings that echo in the cultural and political experiences of the African people” (ibid).

3.3.5 Interrogating the Sacred Heart Landscape in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not*

In sharp contrast to Maiguru’s garden in *Nervous Conditions* is the garden at Sacred Heart in *The Book of Not*. As they enter the mission gates, Tambu’s first impression of the grounds is a sharp contrast of the squashed African Dormitory. While “The grounds were majestically spacious” (TBN, 196), the African Dormitory was barely large enough to accommodate the six beds “arranged that there was barely space to walk between them” (TBN, 198). Despite the fields’ “tranquil green lawns” (TBN, 25) and the roundabout’s centre “peaceful lawns” (TBN, 24) Tambu does not re-affirm an environmental connection. The divide between the black girls and the white girls is quite clear.

In the Sacred Heart gardens, people are constantly in touch with the green environment of the lawns, shrubs and trees. Tambu observes that:

The roundabout itself was serenely green with a lavish, permanently moist lawn, the latter relieved in places carefully selected so that the green would not be too monotonous, by flowering shrubs. Delicate mimosa fluffed puffs of yellow and slivery white, robust poinsettia splashed patches of crimson and peach against the green. Two swans cruised elegantly across a pond in the middle of the lawn and later I found there shoals of goldfish, goldfish which were not a pale imitation but definitely gold. Their rich, ruddy glow flitted in and out of water weeds in the company of more exotic species that shot flashes of red and blue and silver through the gold (TBN, 196-197).

The gardens represent domesticated nature which symbolises authority to control and order nature and lives. The black girls are not accommodated and the gardens remain inaccessible spaces to them. The result is that the black girls are disadvantaged. For example, Tambu cannot attend lessons at Umtali Boys High School when her school suffers from shortage of teachers and has to rely on notes from one of the white students. The African Dormitory is positioned close to the sewer system. Hence, Mabura (2010:91) argues that the British Empire's improvement on Zimbabwe's physical landscape was based on a Western framework that "alienated black women from their traditional liminal and rejuvenating spaces, like rivers, where they could position themselves to effectively resist or overcome what were often predominantly patriarchal and racist societies." Clearly, the beautiful and healthy gardens reveal the significance of nature as a source of power. According to Rotenberg (1995), political views shaped the gardens in which Tambu's philosophy of *unhu* cannot thrive. Samkange (1980:39) defines the *unhu* philosophy as the "attention one human being gives to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people; a code of behaviour, attitude to other people and to life." Tambu and the other black girls at Sacred Heart do not get this attention from Sister Emmanuel or the white students. Instead they live in fear of accidentally touching the white girls (TBN, 59) and when Tracey gets the O-Level best student trophy which Tambu deserved, she (Tambu) cannot fight this injustice.

The Sacred Heart's peaceful and harmonious landscape proves to be a racist environment that engulfs her and disconnects the black students from the white community. As Hlongwane (2009) points out, Tambu and her black peers are shunned because they are a threat to the status quo and "the possibility of black and white students learning on an equal plane clearly threatens the very premise of colonialism." Hence, from an ecocritical perspective,

Dangarembga interrogates the racial, engulfing and oppressive Sacred Heart environment by gesturing toward alternative versions of ecocriticism.

The analysis of the Sacred Heart environment from an ecocritical perspective allows nuanced observations of this racial colonial setting. Having been fully engulfed and assimilated by the colonial system, Tambu labels Nyasha's books "of the inferior African syllabus" beneath the standard of those [she] possessed at Sacred Heart. Because she chooses not to understand African history Tambu fails to understand the importance of land as 'part of the human world and the item needed for the sustainability of human life' and that it has "always been a subject of artistic re-creation of African cultural art forms" (Okolo 2013:15). By implication, she has no idea that "devotion to land is a theme" that runs through most African literary texts. Okolo (2013) points out that "In keeping with [this responsibility], the African writer becomes an environmental advocate, thereby promoting the need to 'regreen' the disappearing ecosystems" (Okolo 2013:15).

As such, I hazard that Tambu's privileged colonial education is not only racist and harmful but also limited. As she sings along with the white girls, "This land is your land! This land is my land!...This land was made for you and me!" she turns a blind eye to the glaring contrasting living conditions between black and white students living in the same environment and geographical space. By singing this song Tambu disregards her grandmother's colonial history lessons about the coloniser's seizure of the black man's land. She also forgets Mbuya's tale that her family was forced to abandon their "original home to a desolate plot of land" (Rine 2011:22). Mbuya's history lessons about the former land inhabited by the Tambu's family clearly show how the black man in Zimbabwe was

oppressed then and at the same time, reveal the affinity between the land and black people has always existed.

In *The Book of Not*, not only is Tambu oppressed and dominated by patriarchy, but she is also marginalised by the alienating and racial atmosphere at Sacred Heart. It is because of this devotion to politics of colonialism and gender issues that critics like Slaymaker (2001) claim that African literature has not contributed much to environmental literature. However, using Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, I argue that Slaymaker's definition is rather limiting and myopic and hence my call for a more encompassing ecocritical vision that transcends this overarching Anglo-American framework. Clearly, Dangarembga shows that the political and gender concerns in African literature have always taken an ecological dimension.

3.3.6 Animality and Women in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*

Central to Dangarembga's re-envisioning of human connectivity with nature and animals, I argue that although she challenges the myth of a "womanless wilderness" (Mcfarland 2008: 42), she does not successfully redefine how women and animals are perceived in the African forest and how they are conceived in African literary texts. In addition, I also suggest that even though Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* engage in "liberation politics and by extension the ordering and reconstruction of the African identity," (Okolo 2013: 17), she also celebrates environmental concerns which qualifies her as an ecocritical writer.

In her struggle against the oppressive and the suffocating colonial environment at the Sacred Heart academy, Tambu seeks refuge in isolated places of the convent. She associates herself

with the landscape and animals. The functionality of the landscape to Tambu has been intimated through her association with trees and the Nyamarira River. Wenner observes that “gender affects the way landscape is seen” and that “when a woman gazes, she is imagining where she fits inside the landscape and how she can position herself to be helped by it” (Wenner in Mabura 2010:92). In a bid to accomplish her goal to be the best O-Level student, Tambu “spent most of her free time at weekends curled up in a spot behind the hall where *nothing* [my emphasis] but *chongololos*, which were silent, came” (TBN, 135). She appreciates the beauty of nature especially the peaceful and tranquil atmosphere symbolised by the millipede. One can draw parallels between Tambu and the millipede. Because it is slow and harmless, a millipede is vulnerable. When threatened, it coils its body into a tight spiral to protect itself. Similarly, one may argue that when Tambu feels threatened by the Sacred Heart racist environment and the girls in the African dormitory, she feels vulnerable and loses her fighting spirit. She “recoils” into the secluded environment where *chongololos* are silent and do not attack her like the other girls in the African Dormitory. For example, Patience says, “So you’re dashing off again? Where to? ... It makes us wonder what we are like now... You’re making us wonder what we are like since now we aren’t the people with whom you can sit down and do anything” (TBN, 135). It is in this isolated environment that Tambu memorises education that is harmful and not Africanised (Chirikure 1994); knowledge that disempowers her and cripples her in the colonial racist environment she lives in.

Tembo’s (2012) analysis of Musengezi’s poem, “Kuzvipembedza” shows how the poet uses the metaphor of a millipede in a similar manner to disclose this self-defeating attitude.

Huyai tizvikoshese is pachedu
Kuti ruzhinji rweZimbabwe rwutipe chiremera

*Kana tagumburwa, toramba kuita hwezongororo
Kuzvikunga kuita hata yavanogona kusenga
Kana kuzvidambura gumbo segurwe
Kuti masvosve agotimomotera
Rogo ngatiise mudonje kwete kunwa
Parafini tiise muzvibani tivheneke
Tiwone nzira, kwete kuzvipisa, kuzviita vivi (p.68).*

(Let us respect ourselves
So that all people of Zimbabwe can respect us
When angered must not do like the millipede
Which folds itself like a cushion which they can carry
Or to injure ourselves
So that ants can come after us
Let us use pesticides such committing suicide
And use paraffin for lighting
So that we enlighten our way not to burn ourselves) (Translated by Tembo 2012: 282)

According to Tembo (2012), women should not adopt the millipede's self-defeating attitude "which leads to surrender to the ontology of defeat" but they should be able to "question the system that marginalises and disempowers [them]" (ibid: 282). Tambu loses the fiery spirit that she exhibits in *Nervous Conditions* and instead, like the millipede, she recoils and feels threatened and victimised. The question to be addressed by this section is whether this literary presentation of the relationship between Tambu, nature and the *chongololos* is used by the author to "challenge traditional stereotypes about women and nature in acts that powerfully resist the erasure of women from wilderness and turn the historically negative equation of women with nature and animals into a positive experience" (McFarland 2008: 42).

Dangarembga describes Tambu's interaction with the *chongololos* on equal ground in a forest space in which both appear to be vulnerable and powerless against the forces that threaten them. Tambu says she feels "cracked and defective, as though indispensable parts leaked, and [she] could not gather energy" (TBN, 28). The only animals she associates with are the silent

chongololos that are not defined in masculine terms because they are at the bottom of the food chain. Similarly, Dangarembga articulates the animalness of Mai Tambu's humanness when she describes her after Netsai's leg was blown off by the landmine. She writes, Mai Tambu "clawed at the ground, slithering forward like a snake" (TBN, 4). Tambu's mother who has will-power, strength and skill to influence others and empower her situation is also equated to an animal, "the snake." Dangarembga equates women and animals in a derogatory manner. According to Carl Adams (cited in Mcfarland 2008:43), "The traditional feminist response to the equation of femaleness with animalness has been to break that association." Ecofeminists on the other hand, transcend this patriarchal version and subvert the "more standard conception of nonhuman animals with "otherness" (ibid: 48). The metaphorical negation of the *chongololo* and the snake in this instance reinforces the othering of animals. Thus Dangarembga articulates the traditional relationship of the female with animals by reinforcing their denigrated nature. While Tambu's otherness is located in the racial Sacred Heart forest, the *chongololo*'s is located in the natural physical forest. Dangarembga connects Tambu's invisibility and vulnerability in the colonial racist environment to that of the *chongololo*. Thus, the equation of animals with animals in this case does not disturb the "metaphor's othering effect" (ibid: 48) and does not help us to "recognise the subjectivity of animals and the agency of women in traditionally exclusionary spaces" (ibid).

Mai Tambu, on the other hand is depicted as slippery and devious as a snake. She blames Babamukuru for the death of her son, Nhamo and the strained relationship with her daughter, Tambu. She suffers from the blow of her son's sudden death and has a psychological breakdown when Tambu gets a scholarship to Sacred Heart. She fears her daughter will be Anglicised like Nyasha and that the "Englishness" will destroy her. She states, "I've had enough; I've had enough of that man dividing me from my children and ruling my life"

(TBN, 184). Thus, although Dangarembga gives her a voice, she uses it in a destructive way. She endangers Babamkuru's life by branding him as a sell-out. Dangarembga animalises Mai Tambu to reflect her insecurity and vulnerability in the forest space as she feels trapped like a snake. By implication, both Mai Tambu and the snake need to be "controlled and domesticated" (McFarland 2008). Thus, Dangarembga articulates the sense of Mai Tambu being both feminine and animal. According to Kate Soper (1995), this "woman-nature equivalence that has served as a legitimation for the domestication of women and their relegation to maternal and nurturing functions" has to be avoided. However, from an ecocritical perspective, Dangarembga's effort to create a relationship between women and other animals is premised in the ecofeminist belief that "everything is a fabric, a whole, a world in which all are entangled irrevocably in each other's oxygen tubes. One big knot" (Zwinger 1991: xi). As such, the text emphasises the interconnectivity of human and non-human nature believing that "animals and women were contemptible and unimportant" (LeGuin 1985:345 in Otto). Drawing parallels between man's domination of the natural world and the oppression of women, the text underlies one of the key tenets of ecofeminism. On the other, it may be argued that the novel fails to recognise the singularity of each and thus, fails to challenge the stereotypes about women and nature in acts that powerfully subvert "the negative equation of women with nature and animals into a positive experience" (McFarland 2008:42). By so doing she underpins the victimhood of both and hence it can be argued that her efforts to equate women with animals, sometimes disempowers both (ibid.). By emphasising the powerlessness, silencing and victimisation of these women through her use of animal metaphors, I posit that Dangarembga "retains the traditional patriarchal image of both women and nature" (ibid: 49). In other words, her efforts to create an intimate connection between women and animals are not subversive and "she does not redefine the

traditional roles of women nor re-empower them in the face of significant environmental challenges” (ibid: 49).

The narrative locates more examples of animality. The animalness of the black girls as an equation intended to denigrate them at Sacred Heart is articulated when Ntombi is compared to a cow. According to Hlongwane (2009), the black girls at the Young Ladies’ College often feel like “exotic animals on display.” Comparing Ntombi’s eyes to those of a cow illustrates this, “The eyes too. Just like a cow’s” and referring to the comment, Tracey says, “It is a compliment, hey Ntombi!” (TBN, 46). The sarcasm is further elaborated by, Bougainvillea when she says:

You know what their eyes are like, hey! And those eyelashes! Whoever’s caught a cow putting on mascara? She laughed again dryly at the thought of a cow peering into its magnifying mirror. ‘Who wouldn’t mind? I wouldn’t mind having eyes like a cow’s. When someone has a gorgeous wide-eyed gaze,’ she turned to Ntombi, ‘we say they’ve got eyes like a cow’s (TBN, 46).

Ironically, Tambu also compares herself to a cow when she studies for her A-Level examinations in the library. She recalls the “sun-washed spot” (TBN, 165) where the *chongololos* crawled quietly; the place where [she] devoured [her] O-Level texts like a cow eating and grass to be regurgitated as cud upon the examination paper” (TBN, 165). She continues to say that she read “until the letters trooped off the page like small black ants...” This analogy re-enforces the “derogatory connection society frequently imposes when equating femininity with animality” (McFarland 2008:45). As such, one may argue that *The Book of Notshows* the connections between the unjustifiably dominated groups, the human others and earth others. This is in line with the ecofeminism which roots the idea that all “living organisms must be seen in relation to their natural surroundings” (Ramya 2012:1). However, instead of undoing the gendered traditions that emphasise the oppression of women

and the domination of nature, Dangarembga does not break this “negative equation of women with nature into a positive experience” (McFarland 2008: 42).

Both Tambu and Ntombi’s subjectivities and realities are “erased or converted into manipulatable objects – ‘the material of subjugation’ – at the mercy of the [racist] manipulator...” (Donovan cited in McFarland 2008:45). In a racist environment where they are forced to be meek, invisible and silent, Tambu, Ntombi and the other black girls are “emotionally torn apart on a daily basis” (Hlongwane 2009:453). They are treated as “intruders” (ibid) and are not allowed to take full credit for their achievements. For instance, Tracey’s name is entered in the honour roll as the best O-Level student instead of Tambu’s. One may conclude that both the metaphorical animals and the black girls are “victims of forces outside their own power to combat” (McFarland 2008: 49).

From an ecocritical approach, Tambu’s association with the tiny and vulnerable animals shows that she knows the environment intimately. Mabura (2010:92) explains that she is “endowed with an eye for aesthetic landscape contemplation and an awareness of how landscape can help her as well.” In the process of her self-development journey, she understands that she has to relate to nature, hence she retreats to the spot with the quiet *chongololos*. According to Zwinger, cited in McFarland (2008), for one to develop a relationship with the environment, one has to “know the landscape intimately, and not just pass through... [and] must develop the “vibrissae of a vole, the nose of a fox, the ears of an owl, the chemical-sensing mycelia of a truffle, the echolocation of a bat, the directional sense of an arctic tern, and the eyes of a bald eagle” (McFarland 2008: 42). In other words, “humans have to be willing to change their sensory relationship with the land in order to better understand its multifaceted ways” (ibid). This re-envisioning of human nature

relationship is the central concern of the analysis of Tambu's relationship with nature and animals. However, despite this intimate relationship between Tambu and nature, I argue that Dangarembga fails to subvert the traditional nature-woman domination relationship. The metaphors of the cow, snake, black ants and *chongololos* do not reflect the subjectivity of nature. The animals remain invisible and do not attain an authorial position other than that of sentient animals.

This is in contrast to the metaphor of the pangolin in Kangira's *The Bundle of Firewood*. In the narrative, Kangira challenges "the myth of a womanless wilderness" (ibid) by allowing the young girl Tariro to go into the forest alone. The pangolin, depicted as powerful and sacred gives the animal an authorial position and is an acknowledgement of the agency of the world around. Discovering and protecting the pangolin enables Tariro to redefine her identity. She is afforded an opportunity to study Veterinary Science and she becomes a successful veterinary surgeon" (Pasi 2012:188). In the same article I argue that, "celebrating the environment is a way of shifting the centre; of giving agency to silent issues and silenced subjects." Thus, unlike the feminist approach, the ecocentric view does not focus on animals and plants in the environment but also holds that human beings should be accorded distinct space in the same environment. In many respects, Warren's (1993) claim that "the interconnections among the conceptualisations and treatment of women, animals, and nature require a feminist ethical analysis and response" is relevant to the discussion in this section. It is therefore the contention of this discussion that the animality of women brings about a realisation that both nature and women are the objects of domination.

3.3.7 Maiguru's Garden in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *TheBook of Not*

From an ecocritical perspective, Maiguru's garden is a significant part of the environment in *TheBook of Not*. Given the toxic environment of the violence of the armed struggle waged by

the Zimbabwean freedom fighters, the garden is the environment that gives Maiguru and Tambu purpose and meaning. According to Rine (2011:54), Maiguru's garden is a "place where people can breathe freely" and it also "oxygenates the soul of the community" (ibid: 56). For instance, Tambu's sense of displacement is disturbed when she establishes a symbiotic relationship with Maiguru's garden. She says, "Maiguru's garden ... was like a lake with bed upon bed of iridescent flowers shining and glowing upon it. Phlox, nasturtiums, marigolds, pansies, African violets, roses, bunny snaps, dahlias and roses cascaded like a burst chest of treasure over the section of earth that was allocated to my aunt..." (TBN, 95-96). Like the river Nyamarira, Maiguru's garden is a "lake" that rejuvenates Tambu. Not only is she able to locate herself in this garden but her struggle to develop a sense of completeness and wholeness is realised in this environment. Significantly, this affinity between Tambu, Maiguru and the land is established "against an intrusive violent background" (Mabura 2010: 96). Tambu is able to use the garden as shelter against the "whirlwinds whipped up by explosions" (TBN, 181). She takes "refuge under the loquat trees that grew on the edge of Maiguru's garden and she rested "under the trees, calmed by the scent of Maiguru's flowers" (TBN, 183). Maiguru uses the garden to provide for the family and the community, what Mabura calls the garden of utility and Rotenberg (1995: 219) refers to as a "garden of refuge aimed at supplementing foodstuffs." Seen in this light, one concurs with Mabura that Maiguru's cultivating of this land can be viewed as signifying a "precolonial era where women had access to land and thus could contribute to the economic base of their societies and families" (Mabura 2010:96). Encapsulated in following passage is Maiguru's physical connection to the land:

This piece of earth in which Maiguru set seeds was a mystery to me and many people... and it seemed my aunt only had to hold a seed in her palm and stroke it, to have it jumping into the earth, where it shot out green and in a short while was profusely blooming. Whether the blossoms and fruit were to be admired or eaten, they

produced prodigiously for Maiguru. Sturdy mango trees towering above her dropped fragrant fruit into my aunt's hand. Papaws plopped at her feet, while leafy covo, rape and kale waved leaves as big as small umbrellas, as thick as a jungle (TBN, 181).

This connectivity gives Maiguru a sense of ownership of this plot of land. Her authority is also emphasised since Sylvester, the gardener was diligent but “he received what was handed over by Maiguru” (TBN, 181). By highlighting the abundance of fruits and vegetables on Maiguru's piece of land, Dangarembga seems to imply that nature is a means for women to discover their potential and wholeness. Thus, she undoes the patriarchal tradition of associating women and land and challenges the debasement that society normally associates with this relationship. According to Schmidt (1992), in pre-colonial Shona society, this connectivity with the environment is also a means of acquiring status and social recognition.

Stated succinctly, ecofeminism articulates liberatory strategies that can be actualised in the real world, in the process transforming everyday life (Carr 2000 cited in Vakoch 2012). For instance, Maiguru's garden promotes “inclusion and offers Tambu an oasis from the struggles of school and war” (Mabura 2010:59). Through her gardening acts, Tambu also develops a close relationship with the land which echoes early ecocriticism writing which views it as the relationship between the physical environment and literature (Glotfelty 1996). Tambu is “calmed by the scent of Maiguru's flowers” (TBN, 183) and she says the garden “perfumed the atmosphere ever more fragrantly with the scent of healing” (TBN, 183). Unlike the alienating and stifling atmosphere at Sacred Heart, Maiguru's garden has a therapeutic effect. Seemingly, Tambu undergoes a healing process from the psychological wounds inflicted on her at the stifling and racist environment at Sacred Heart and the patriarchal homestead. For Tambu, the garden “buoyed her up emotionally and physically”(Mabura 2010:100), “holding a hoe close to its neck, then with a short swing ramming the blade in ripping a clump of broad bladed grass from the humps of Maiguru's potatoes” (TBN, 183). Vakoch (2012:3) asserts

that earlier ecofeminist literary scholarship reveals the oppressiveness of patriarchal thinking. Scholars such as Gaard and Murphy (1998), Carr (2000) and Campbell (2008) are classified in this category. My analysis of Dangarembga's narratives builds upon these works to explore the oppressiveness of racist discourses and also explores emancipatory strategies in the process. Maiguru's garden is one such strategy that gives Maiguru authority and some economic strength and gives Tambu a sense of completeness. The economic strength and contentment is shown by the lack of profit from her garden as Tambu points out, "I lay on the *bonde*, wondering about Maiguru, the lushness she cajoled out of the earth, the eggs and vegetables she sold at prices so low ...as if she was running a charity" (TBN, 183). Maiguru's garden qualifies to be a "liminal space" (Mabura 2010:100) free of patriarchal and racist oppressive norms

In addition, Rine (2011:13) argues that using Maiguru's garden, Dangarembga "subtly criticises her patriarchal culture, and the colonizers by gesturing toward an "alternative and more loving existence, evident in the close friendship between Tambu and Nyasha and Maiguru's community garden." Whereas, ecocritic scholars like Slaymaker (2001) would argue that Dangarembga does not address environmental issues in her narrative, I alternatively make a case for its existence. Tambu realises the importance of nature when she is in Maiguru's garden:

Maiguru's garden stretched out to the side of the house, beyond the dining and sitting room windows, and it was like a lake with bed upon bed of iridescent flowers shining and glowing upon it. Phlox, nasturtiums, marigolds, pansies, African violets, roses, bunny snaps, dahlias and roses cascaded like a burst chest of treasure over the section of earth that was allocated to my aunt... (TBN, 95-96).

In the garden, Tambu experiences a sense of complicity. Despite the raging and destructive war, "the garden was still there" and she is glad that "it was the kind of war where the

mortars didn't tear up beautiful things like Maiguru's garden" (TBN, 96). Tambu also imagines the jeep drivers stopping sometimes to admire Maiguru's garden (TBN, 96). Seemingly, the garden proves to be a suitable refuge site for Tambu, Maiguru and Sylvester, the gardener and even the soldiers. It is a space that allows constant interaction among the human and non-human community; a bond that is crucial for societal growth and renewal. According to Rine (2011:61), when Tambu provides assistance to Sylvester and converses with the people who visit to buy produce, the gestures enable her to "contribute positively to a co-operative effort, symbolising her re-initiation into a community from which she is distanced at Sacred Heart." As such, Maiguru's garden is perceived as a "liminal space where identities are reconstituted and reconstructed" and symbolically, it is a "conceptual [space] for the renegotiation" (Rwafa 2013:321) of Tambu and Maiguru's identities. Of significance, is Tambu's retreat into nature which shows her effort to escape the stifling Sacred Heart racist environment and the oppressive patriarchal home environment.

However, Tambu's re-initiation into this environment does not last. The relief she gets from the garden and her quest for refuge is very shaky and not very convincing. Firstly, Tambu, Netsai and Babamkuru are all "hemmed in and severely damaged by their environment" (Hlongwane 2009: 449). Hlongwane also adds that the wholeness that Tambu yearns for eludes her and this sense of incompleteness is a dominant trope in the narrative (ibid). For instance, at Gaza where she works as a temporary teacher, Tambu experiences a sense of incomplicity again. However, when her students show signs of improving, Tambu compares them to "Maiguru's perennials during the rainy season" (TBN, 196). The garden and the "rainy season" symbolise hope and life in an environment where she feels lifeless, depressed and disinterested in her teaching. This lethargic attitude stops when she visualises Maiguru's garden, "I began to feel I taught the children well. Just as they now had hope of passing, my

own hope in life's potential returned..." (TBN, 196). Thus, despite the fact that the garden is imbued with meanings that reflect the "dynamics of ...identity (re)formations and constructions," Tambu's self-development and identity reformation process remains incomplete.

3.3.8 The Harare Gardens in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*

Using the metaphor of the Harare Gardens, Dangarembga engages in ecocritical issues by exploring what relationship human beings should have to the natural world to defend and conserve it against over-exploitation and degradation. Tambu clearly notes that the city of Harare has neglected the Harare Gardens. She says, "The city of Harare, busy with other tasks, forgot how the public needed the beauty of our Gardens nurtured, and so I considered, as I walked by another bed of shrivelled cannas, it would be far competent to have the place run by a caring team like Maiguru and Sylvester" (TBN, 202). Like the unappealing landscape with the "shrivelled cannas," Tambu feels "cracked and defective" (TBN, 28). This resonates well with one of the tenets of ecofeminism that draws parallels between "man's domination of nature and the exploitation and oppression of women" (Cook 2008:4). The equation demonstrates how nature and woman are both dominated and negated in literary representations. By raising awareness of such exploitation, Dangarembga contributes to the ecofeminist movement and "enters into a dialogue about the plight of women and the environment" (ibid). However, her attempts to revise the nature/culture, woman/man, feminine/masculine, and black/white binarisms are not wholly successful. By emphasising the naturalness and victimhood of the black women in *The Book of Not*, she retains the "traditional patriarchal image of both women and nature" (McFarland cited in Cook 2008: 49).

3.3.9 Gardens of Domesticity in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*

In a review of Rotenberg's (1995) study of the city's green spaces, Selders (1995:1) explains that "landscapers from the baroque era to the present have designed Vienna's parks and gardens to represent particular world views and to legitimate or criticize given power relations." His argument is premised on the fact that political views shaped the gardens and parks in each great period in Viennese life (ibid). It is not the intention of this chapter to discuss the different types and shapes of gardens described by Rotenberg in his book *Landscape and Power in Vienna*, rather, I will examine the 'gardens of domesticity' which I find relevant to my argument in this section.

According to Selders (1995), gardens of domesticity were built after the Napoleonic Wars which drove the middle class from public life into the home and enclosed backyard. They were enclosed, fenced and they guaranteed safety for the middle class from the agents of repression. Thus, their designs were political and symbolised their anti-aristocratic republicanism (Rotenberg 1995:108). Given the colonial set up in Rhodesia in the 1970s, I concur with Mabura (2010:107) that the garden and architecture at Twiss Hostels is a garden of domesticity. It represented a "fortified enclosure shutting out perceived colonial day insecurities such as violence stemming from the black liberation war, and, after independence, guarded its female occupants from the male visitors who were unwelcome guests at the exclusive residence." In other words, Twiss Hostel's enclosed architecture was political and unknown to Tambu, she is one of the "agents of repression" because of her identity as a black woman even in the new Zimbabwe. She fails to locate herself in this garden of domesticity whose structures are a continual reminder of "Otherness." For instance, the elderly matron could not remember her name as she always called her "Isabel" and the folded napkins on the "heavy wooden tables" were like "sentinels to ensure [the girls] did not

too much, thus maintaining both [their] figures and the hostel fees within manageable proportions” (TBN, 202). On one occasion Tambu carries her plate to a table only to be told somebody had booked it and she is forced to “sit alone at the end of the table” (TBN, 223) and yet “the other resident did not come” (TBN, 223) and the seat remained vacant. Clearly, as a garden of domesticity, the Twiss Hostel guarded its white female residents from the black residents who were not welcome. Tambu observes that Twiss Hostel “incorporated in its design some of the serene grace of the grounds of the college in Umtali” (TBN, 202), a college which could not accommodate her when she was doing her A-Levels and resulted in her poor performance.

I also concur with Mabura (2010:107) that the colonial construction of Twiss Hostel resonates with Rotenberg’s definition of the construction of gardens of domesticity:

Because threat from the outside world defined the place, its [the garden’s] through boundaries were concrete and impermeable...Its walls were high and offered no hint of the activities within...The gardens of domesticity shut out the predatory political world. They created a fantasy world in which life was solely within the joys of the family circle (Rotenberg 1995:109).

Tambu is unfortunately not a member of this white family and she remains alienated. Unlike Maiguru’s garden which is inclusive, the Twiss Hotel garden is not accommodative of all and remains an exclusive residence. Even the “wide and generous structure, the reception desk [...] straight away people leaning out and, with courteous enquiries, beckoning” (TBN, 202) is designed as such to represent the views of those in power. Additionally, Mabura (2010) notes the colonial structure of the courtyard “open to a sky too blue in one season, swollen grey with water about to burst in another” (TBN, 202) which resemble Rotenberg’s description of gardens of domesticity. The walls were high and “impermeable” and when Tambu tries to cross these Rhodesian rigid lines of racial segregation, she pays a heavy price.

In addition, there are no trees in the courtyard but one could read “on stone benches” (TBN, 202) which I also believe are impermeable. Though Tambu was able to read in this garden, I argue that she gains no pleasure from her reading and that the sense of wholeness and complicity eludes her. Furthermore, the presence of the bougainvillea bushes in this garden signal the gap between her and the family at Steers, D’Arcy, and MacPedi Advertising agency. Mabura (2010:107) also asserts that the presence of the bougainvillea bushes is reminiscent of the white school girl at Sacred Heart who claimed that blacks had “eyes like a cow’s” (TBN, 46). Through this analogy Bougainvillea reveals a hierarchically ordered world that perceives “reality through the world dominant western cultural paradigm” (Schmah 1998: 10), in this case, colonial Rhodesia. By so doing she demonstrates how both nature and women are objectified and negated in similar ways by the colonial racist system. This analogy reveals the hierarchically ordered world of binarisms of nature/culture, woman/man, feminine/masculine, black/white, emotion/reason etc. which early ecofeminists such as Susan Griffin (1978) and Carolyn Merchant (1980) have tried to deconstruct. Hence, Bougainvillea’s racist tendencies astutely suggest the double oppression suffered by the black woman thus leading to her sense of powerlessness.

Another garden of domesticity is Steers, D’Arcy, and MacPedi Advertising agency. After her studying for a degree in Social Sciences, Tambu subsequently gets a lowly paying job as a copywriter at Steers, D’Arcy, and MacPedi Advertising agency. The Harare Gardens close to the Twiss Hostel where she lived lack the vitality, relief and sense of wholeness that she gets from Maiguru’s garden. I argue that the neglected Gardens are equated to her lowly paying job, low esteem and the stifling racist environment at the advertising agency which is reminiscent of the racist attitude at Sacred Heart. Tracey Stevenson, the girl who gets the

trophy for the best O-Level student is her boss. Tambu is treated as an intruder and with disrespect by most of her fellow workers including the black tea boy Raphael. Dick Lawson, the white senior copywriter, takes the Afro-Shine advertising copy for a hair straightening product as his own and he wins a prize at the advertising awards. The agency's environment with its racist tendencies is just as engulfing and stifling as the Sacred Heart one. Tambu's resilience and creativity is again stifled in this racially toxic environment and clearly, there are no familial ties between her and her colleagues. She resigns and at the end of the novel she finds herself homeless and jobless.

Furthermore, the structural design of Sacred Heart is reminiscent of Rotenberg's gardens of domesticity. On entering the school, Tambu notes that "you passed through a *great wrought iron gate as imposing as St Peter's portal...*" (TBN, 24) [my own emphasis]. In addition, the archway that lay between the dormitories was "supported by ornate plaster pillars in, the Greek style, not the Roman, and above this long archway rose the dining-room and chapel" (TBN, 196). Both the imposing "wrought iron gate" and the "ornate plaster pillars" that support the archway evoke ideas of Rotenberg's garden of domesticity. Thus, using the ecocritical lens I argue that the colonial structures are meant to politicise the environment. The possibility of black and white students learning together is one that is not acceptable since it challenges the status quo. The black students are brought there to "polish their behaviour" (TBN, 63) and not to get a prestigious type of education and prove their intellectual superiority.

3.3.10 The Mountain Landscape in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*

It is in this so called 'serene' and 'peaceful' environment of Sacred Heart that Tambu tries to forget Netsai and her amputated leg. However, even though the menacing mountains provide shelter to the soldiers, they are also symbolic of the trauma and violence experienced by Tambu and Netsai. "I was preventing the appearance of the hopping woman who was a girl. By not paying attention I was making her not come down the mountain" (TBN, 29). In class she vacillates between "being in class and not being there" (TBN, 30) "in case that woman who was my sister came hopping down on the stepping stones of attention" (TBN, 30). As a result, she closes her eyes against the "dark green pine and wattle plantations on the mountain slopes (TBN, 30). The menacing mountains that she glimpses from the Sacred Heart are a constant reminder of the violence of the armed struggle. She recalls Netsai's leg torn into pieces and dangling as they drove to the hospital. Hlongwane (2009:452) convincingly explains that this sense of incompleteness is a dominant trope in the narrative and that Netsai's "dismemberment foreshadows Tambu's metaphorical fragmentation." Thus, from an ecofeminist perspective, the menacing mountains become a symbolic space. Although they offer the freedom fighters shelter they equally are the space where female freedom fighters are ill-treated and victimised.

As such, the mountains on the border to Mozambique, have clear political undertones. They seek to reconstitute a past fragmented by violence. Tambu exclaims, "I would like to point out that "I kept my head down, over where the tears dripped, wanting to close my eyes so there wasn't any chance of looking at the mountain" (TBN, 33). Tambu fears to reconnect with her sister Netsai because her amputated leg reminds her of the violent past. Schramm and Argenti (2010:17) explain that "remembering is oriented not to the past, but to coming to terms with the past in a present that is continuously troubled by it." Tambu is continually haunted by her sister's amputated leg. Hence, in an environment in which Tambu continues

to leave alongside the perpetrators, she resorts to silence. She tries to grapple with both the psychological and the physical pain. The shame and embarrassment with which Tambu remembers Netsai's missing limb is clearly illustrated when she ponders over the thought of Mai bringing Netsai with her to the city. Like the mountains, Netsai's absent limb is associated with terrorism and Tambu wonders how she will explain it to her white acquaintances. Violence reveals itself in an incomprehensible manner to Tambu; a situation perpetrated by the Sacred Heart environment.

In his study on trauma, Jean-Francois Lyotard (cited in Argenti & Schramm 2010:12) identifies what he calls the "paradox of silence at the heart of the initial traumatic shock"; a "shock which is not experienced" at the time of the violent act. In other words, this is not to say the shock did not take place but it is "encrypted, or entombed, within the subject" and will "come to influence the conscious life of a person" (ibid). Similarly, the mountains express the psychological permanence of the trauma that Tambu experienced. The inescapability of the trauma is evident in her memory of the mountains and her refusal to look at them. She says, "I was merely walking, moving along the corridors with arches that framed all of us students into the school on one side, framed the mountains outside on the other – the mountains with menace in their existing there where they did, on the border to Mozambique, so that they were mountains that could not be looked at" (TBN, 35). From an ecocritical perspective, the mountain signifies Tambu's isolation from her family and the Sacred Heart community. It implies some "form of spiritual dislocation" (Rwafa 2013:325) and a discontinuity in identity formation. Hence, the mountain is a significant part of the Sacred Heart landscape. For Tambu, it denotes a "geography of pain" (Mueggler 2001 cited in Argenti and Shramm 2010:25). The violence may have taken place in the past but the mountain becomes a place where pain is re-enacted.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter examined the interconnectedness of black women and nature in Tsitsi Dangaremba's narratives *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. Using the ecofeminism lens, the chapter explored how nature can be embraced to transform gendered concepts that have been constructed to silence women and girl-children, as well as non-human life. It argued that women's survival struggles are simultaneously struggles for the protection of nature. Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions* utilises the historical connection of women and the environment in diverse ways, hence proving that nature writing is not a Western preserve.

The Book of Not also explores the multi-racial education as represented by the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart. An ecocritical and ecofeminist analysis of *The Book of Not* allows one to challenge the Anglo-American narrow and myopic definition of the environment as given by Slaymaker (2001). Whilst the traditional American environmentalism entails the preservation and conservation of the natural environment, this chapter endeavours to broaden and diversify this definition; showing that the "definitions within feminist thought, especially ecofeminist thought, have shifted and changed over the years" (Cook 2008:2). A broader definition of environmentalism and environmentalist philosophy allows a "plurality of voices" and transcends the rather limiting ecocritical orthodoxy that is rooted in the West and that uses American and British Literature. Thus, a more diverse and all-embracing ecocritical and environmentalist vision is important to "consider texts by women that may not have received the attention they deserve" (Cook: *ibid*). Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* are such texts. An analysis of the narratives also showed how conceptions of nature writing which are at the

centre of ecocriticism, ecofeminism and environmentalism, are constructed by the historical and political processes obtaining in the human's lived environment. Thus, the narratives were examined in light of concerns raised by ecocriticism and ecofeminism, and African environmental history, thus transcending the overarching Anglo-American framework of what the environment entails.

Of the two novels, *Nervous Conditions* revealingly debates the link between women, nature and the environment. The novel presents an interdependence between human and nonhuman nature in which human beings rely on the ecosphere for survival. The environment is presented as a character that heals, protects and sustains human beings. Although women and children are treated as devoid of rationality, as oppressed, exploited and dominated by man, they have the strength to fight back. Contrary, *The Book of Not's* mountain landscape, the forest space and the racist Sacred Heart environment are presented as menacing, constant reminders of the liberation struggle. The protagonist Tambu, faces a bleak and uncertain future at the end of the novel. She is engulfed and overwhelmed by the environment resulting in a discontinuous relationship with nature and the environment. Unlike *Nervous Conditions*, *The Book of Not* fails to assert the necessity to end the oppression of the black woman.

Chapter four explores representations of nature, humans and animals in Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*(2001). The chapter continues to trace the historical, conceptual, symbolic and epistemological woman-nature connections discussed in the two novels in chapter 3.

Chapter 4

Woman-Nature Connections: An Analysis of Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* from an ecofeminist perspective. The chapter showed how Dangarembga delineates the interconnections between Shona women and the environment. Through this connectivity, the chapter argued that Dangarembga challenges the status quo and critiques the cultural and social systems that are used to marginalise the black women and the environment. The chapter also illustrated how issues such as war, racism and naturism have disproportionate negative impacts on black women. Further, the chapter showed how the same issues can be used to enhance the environmental debate in African literary works.

This current chapter explores Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (hereafter TPVO). The chapter is anchored in the theories of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Central to ecocriticism is its analysis of nature writing and ecological themes in literary works (Mazumdar 2013, Garrard 2004 and Mazel 2013). These scholars agree that ecocriticism's aim is not just to protect the endangered environment but to analyse literature "as though nature mattered" (Srilatha 2011:2). This means that nature holds an important place in the lives of a people, hence the need to understand the interconnectivity between humans and the nonhuman nature and to raise awareness against environmental problems that disrupt this relationship. Ecofeminism's basic premise is that violence, the environment and women are

interconnected. It examines the dualistic relationship between nature and women to reveal their parallel and mutually reinforcing oppressive relationship. Premised on the ecofeminist lens, the chapter also intends to show how relationships between women and nature contribute to a harmonious and healing environment. Furthermore, it will reveal how environmental problems are analogous to the challenges faced by women. As such, the chapter posits that in a constraining patriarchal Oshiwambo society, the domination of gender, race, sex and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing (Kingcited in Warren 1997). Finally, the chapter realises a female resilience, de-oracisation and visibility in a male dominated society. It concludes that the object of ecofeminism is to unmask the degrading human-nature connections and also deconstruct them.

4.2 *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*: Plot Summary

Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) chronicles the life of Kauna, a young married woman living in Oshaantu village in the North of Namibia. The story is narrated by Mee Ali, Kauna's close friend and confidant. Kauna is married to Shange, an abusive and violent husband. The title of the novel is derived from the purple violet flower found in the village home-steads. Because of her stunning beauty, Kauna is likened to this beautiful flower. However, her beauty is soon destroyed by Shange's beatings. On the contrary, Michael, Mee Ali's husband is considerate, loving and supportive. The story revolves around Kauna and Ali's marriages and their relationships with their husbands. The women are the anchor of their families. Michael works far away in and rarely comes home. Shange works on the mines in a distant village and when at home he divides his attention between his family and his mistress, the woman from the white house. Shange comes home one afternoon and before he eats the food prepared by Kauna, he dies. His relatives accuse Kauna of bewitching and killing him. As per Oshiwambo traditional custom, when the husband dies, the relatives are entitled to all his possessions. Through fraudulent means, Shange's relatives take possession

of his homestead and land, leaving Kauna and the children destitute and homeless. Kauna decides not to fight back; she leaves the land that she has worked on most of her life to start a new life elsewhere.

4.3 Woman-Nature Nonnections

For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to delineate the woman-nature connections. The critic, Warren (1993) believes that the project of ecofeminism is to castigate the ecological domination and oppression of women by men with the aim of fostering liberatory strategies. In other words, ecofeminism's claim is that there is a connection between environmental degradation and the subordination of women (Mellor cited in Vakoch 2012). Ecofeminism's centrality is to unravel these woman-nature connections and where harmful to women and nature, dismantle them (Warren 1993). To better understand this parallel and mutually reinforcing relationship between woman and nature, Warren, identifies eight connections among women, nonhuman animals and nature within Western philosophy. These woman-nature connections are historical, empirical, conceptual, symbolic, epistemological, political, ethical and theoretical. The nature-woman connections are significant to understanding the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the unjustified domination of nature. The analysis of the woman-nature connection in Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* will be premised on some of these connections. To understand the nature and link of the twin dominations of nature and women in Andreas' novel, the historical, conceptual, symbolic and epistemological connections are debated.

4.4 Historical Connections: Women Communion with Nature

The narrative's opening chapter shows the harmonious and tranquil relationship between nature and humans. The narrator, Meme Ali shows a natural connection to the beautiful flora and fauna. The "rich green carpet" that stretches over the land in Oshaakati and the "green award that lies before [her]" signify a climate change that intersects with the people's livelihood. A strong influence of nature is evident as Meme Ali's celebratory tone and ecstasy signifies the importance of the harvest to human life:

It is that time of the year again. The season when our village, Oshaantu, camouflages itself in a rich green carpet and provides a breath taking sight, especially from our homestead, which is built on an incline. I wish time would stand still. We had good rains this year and are promised plenty to eat. My heart is full of gratitude as I look at all the *omahangu*, sorghum, spinach, beans, pumpkins, watermelons, nuts, corn and cabbage. Those of us who worked the extra mile will not have to buy tomatoes, onions, sweet potatoes and guavas for a good while. I gently stroke the rough surface of the *omahangu* millet in appreciation of the abundance of Mother Nature. God is good, I think (TPVO, 1).

The connectedness of the human and nonhuman nature is clearly evident in the above quotation. The description of the rainy season shows that environmental and women issues are preponderant in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. Essentially, seasons in this narrative are a feminist issue because they help to understanding the "connection between the oppressions of women and of nature" (Gaard 1993:4). For instance, plenty of rains mean plenty of food for the community and less work for the women. As such, Warren (1997:4) notes that "Something is a feminist issue if an understanding of it helps one understand the oppression or subordination of women." Thus, the change in seasons can have a negative or positive impact on women. In this case, the abundance of the *omahangu* millet (a staple food in Namibia), sorghum, spinach, beans, pumpkins, watermelons, nuts, nuts, corn and cabbage are inextricably connected to Meme Ali's joy. Phrases such as "my heart is full of gratitude" and "I wish time would stand still" express the mutual kinship between the narrator and nature. Good rains mean plenty of food and men, women and children survive on it. The season as

described by Meme Ali is also a sign of a healthy ecosystem that is sustainable. Such a connection reaffirms the interdependence of all species; a thought that is foregrounded by ecofeminism and ecocriticism. We are presented with a cohesive ecosystem which asserts the “interdependence of living things” (King 1989:119); a world in which “hierarchical structures of dominance” (Gaard 1993:10) are non-existent. Further, the connection demonstrates the futility of divorcing human issues from environmental issues. Women are shown as productive in nature, “Those of us who worked the extra mile will not have to buy tomatoes, onions, sweet potatoes and guavas for a good while” (TPVO, 1). In other words, the women’s family economic subsistence not only depends on the seasons but on their food production as well. As such, the novel’s opening does not adopt the Western thought anthropocentric approach but adopts a biocentric and earth centred approach in which Meme Ali’s encounter with the environment offers her joy and a sense of freedom. The earth is not treated with indifference or contempt, but Ali appreciates humanity’s “finite dependence on Earth” (Berg 2009: 22). A symbiotic relationship between the environment and humans, in particular women, is established from the onset. In such an environment, there are no disparities between the human and nonhuman nature. Instead, the Western belief that “humans are separate from and superior to the natural world” (Cullinan, 2008:15), is debunked. The realisation that humans are only one small aspect of earth (ibid: 16), makes them aware that they are dependent on the earth for survival and they have to treat the earth with respect.

According to the African Development Bank (AfDB) (2009a:121), “disparities in the effect of season changes on men and women exist because of the social positions accorded men and women in the family and community.” For instance, the women characters in rural-Oshaantu livelihoods are based on environment-based activities. They fetch water, firewood, cook and plough the land. Such activities decrease the time available to women to engage in income-generating projects (AfDB 2009a). In addition, their choices are limited by virtue of their

subordinate positions and roles in society as well as injustices in the cultural norms that govern their lives. For instance, Kauna and her children are required by custom to plough Shange's and her own field before the rainy season. There are customs, taboos, legal and time constraints that women face and men do not (Warren 2000).

Another example of a constraining custom in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, is that women do not own property. The implication of these injustices is that new connections are created as more women tend to diversify their livelihoods. As a result, relationships between men and women are reshaped. As such, Garrard (2004) points out that ecofeminism is not in favour of hierarchical relationships but advocates for an end to all forms of domination and oppression. Ecofeminists also realise that “no attempts to liberate women will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate men” (Garrard 2004:132). Shiva (2014:16) complements this thought by noting that “the liberation of women cannot be achieved in isolation, but only as a part of a larger struggle for the preservation of life in this planet.” Both Shiva and Garrard raise a pertinent point that for meaningful relationships to be achieved, an all-inclusive social transformation in which all are human and nonhuman nature are treated with respect, is essential. In fact, the praxis of ecofeminism involves “end[ing] the interrelated oppressions of racism, sexism, classism, and ecological destruction” (Gaard 1993:10). Such a transformation is essential to ensure reciprocity, solidarity and an affinity between human and nonhuman nature to end all forms of oppression.

An implicit bond between the women and the environment is established in the narrative. The centrality of the novel is the village life which is closely associated with the land, the seasons and the physical activities of the women. However, according to Ruether (1975), and Mies and Shiva (1993), socioeconomic conditions are central to the interconnected dominations of women and nature. In a patriarchal society where women do not own the means of production, the result is a gendered division of labour. Mee Karina notes this division of

labour in Oshaantu when she points out that while the men work on the mines, farms, fish factories and beer factories, the women “keep the fire burning for their safety” (TPVO, 118). Thus, while the men engage in cash-based economic relationships with the colonisers, the women remain in the village taking care of all the household duties associated with non-money based and subsistence economies (Karren 2014).

Drawing on the Marxist’s notions of the means of production, Mellor (2005) refers to the “capitalist patriarchy” in which the land is a means of reproduction and factories are forces of production. She also argues against the capitalist patriarchal system, claiming that, the system of predominantly male ownership of the means of production results in a male-based allocation and distribution of a society’s economic resources that systematically disadvantage women economically and exploits nature (Mellor cited in Karren 2014). In Andreas’ narrative, the women “keep the fire burning” and also “head the village” in the absence of the men. However, in reality, they are used by the men for self-aggrandisement. The thrust of the argument here is that socioeconomic factors in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* also contribute to the subjugation of women and the domination of nature.

At the outset of the narrative, the link between the male domination of the land and the domination of women is made evident. This is manifest in the relationship between Kauna and her husband. In response to her daughter’s question, “Whose land is it ...?” Ali responds, “It is Tate Shange’s land” (TPVO, 130). Kauna (Ali’s daughter) aptly notes the injustice as she points out with clenched fists in protest, “But Tate Shange is dead now and he never worked on that land. It was always just my *mbushe* who did that!” (TPVO, 130). In the Oshivambo culture, land is owned by the man. The piece of land that the woman gets is given to her by the man. The man gets the fertile land whilst the woman’s is less fertile. By

implication, women do not own anything. Women's bodies and their sexuality are owned, determined, controlled, used and often violated by males and most women are seen as commodities.

According to Ikhaxas (2008: xxiv), in marriage the woman becomes the property of the husband, who has unlimited access to her body in all circumstances. Thus, a feministic reading of *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* reveals how women are dominated and exploited by patriarchy and the colonial system. This chapter transcends the feminist boundaries to reveal the interconnectivity between women, men and nature. It posits that the domination of women by men is closely linked to the domination of nature by masculine power. Earlier in the narrative, Mee Ali says that Kauna just owned a few goats and two or three pigs (TPVO, 40), meaning that most of the animals were owned by Shange. Although it is customary that a woman brings her own cows, goats and pigs when getting married, Shange discourages Kauna from owning any animals. In addition, because of their strong Christian background, Kauna's parents "believed that taking cattle with her, as most other brides would, could negatively affect [her] marriage" (TPVO, 42). Her mother also adds that, "A wealthy bride is not good for a husband's ego" (TPVO, 42). Surprisingly, elder women in Oshaantu village defended as "iconic symbols of their culture" (WAD, Namibia p.34). This meant that daughters were socialised to submit to the supremacy of the men. Traditional mothers on the other hand, are the perpetrators of this patriarchal system that subjugates and oppresses the younger women. Bösl (2008:34) notes that:

It was clear that harmful cultural practices impeding the development of women had been instituted by men for their own convenience, and for the expression of power over women. It was also clear that the idiosyncrasy of women, defending practices to their own detriment in the name of culture, could only have come about through having been indoctrinated over generations, being stripped of an own opinion, a voice, a choice, their dignity, or any claim to human rights.

This is line with the ecofeminist claim that there is a significant relationship between the unjustified domination of women and that of nature. The above point is supported by Ruether (1992:232) who argues that ecofeminism “leverages a critique of systems hostile to women and nature.” What this means is that the mistreatment of the environment and the exploitation of women are interrelated. This chapter argues that an ecocritical and ecofeminist approach befits Andreas’s *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* as she raises concerns about women, land, colonialism and the environment. By so doing, the project of ecofeminism is both extended and strengthened. Such an analysis not only provides a better understanding of ecofeminism but also complicates its definition.

4.5 Epistemological Ecofeminist Connections

The novel also shows that it is the rural women like Meme Ali’s mother-in-law who are the experts in how to use the environment for different purposes. Meme Ali’s mother-in-law and other women in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* connect with nature to show their creativity and productivity. Warren (2014) refers to this link as the epistemological ecofeminist connection. In addition, Warren (2014) claims that ecofeminist epistemology is an extension of the feminist epistemology’s concerns which reveal how gender influences conceptions of knowledge, the knower, and methods of enquiry and justification. To illustrate how such concerns involve woman-nature connections, Warren (2014) cites the Chipko movement in India in which twenty-seven women had threatened to hug the trees to protect them from being felled. The women were aware of the negative impact of such an act. The trees provided them with food, fuel and fodder. Cutting them down meant that the maintenance of their household economies, which depended largely on trees, would be affected. They had the knowledge on how to use indigenous trees for multiple purposes.

According to Fairfax and Fortmann (1990:267 cited in Warren 2014), these rural women have “indigenous technical knowledge about forest use and production that is based on their daily, lived, gendered experiences in connection with forest and management.” They are the knowers on how such knowledge on the environment can be used in multiple ways. Drawing on ecofeminists insights, this knowledge on the environment contributes to a healthy and functional earth. Unfortunately, such knowledge goes unnoticed by male counterparts in their societies.

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, women such as Meme Ali’s mother-in-law exhibit the indigenous technical knowledge that men do not have. Meme Ali’s mother-in-law sits under the *omunye* tree weaving a basket and Meme Ali sits beside her on a *straw mat* (TPVO, 130). Her mother-in-law “took up her basket and continued to weave it. She does this naturally as if she can weave in the dark” (TPVO, 131). The straw is used by the women in different ways, to make mats, baskets and brooms for sweeping (TPVO, 14). Clay is used to make pots (TPVO, 15). Mee Maita “brought another small clay pot with *ondjove* oil” (TPVO, 16). In addition, Mee Ali notes the “beautiful black and white mat from the *skin* of a once very *big cow*” (my emphasis) that she sits on at Mee Maita’s hut. The *omalovu* (home-brewed drink) that Mee Maita prepares, is stored in a *calabash* (TPVO, 6) (my emphasis) and she pours some of it into “two beautifully crafted *iitenga*” (TPVO, 6). For the *okakungungu*, Kauna:

Brewed *omalovu* using *sorghum flour*[my emphasis] mixed with water. She “poured the ingredients of sorghum and water ... into a *corn bag*[my emphasis] for filtering. [She] dug a *hole in the earth*[my emphasis] and put the calabash into it. Then [she] half-filled the hole. This helped to keep the contents warm and helped to speed up the fermentation process. In the morning, the *omalovu* was ready. [She] added two handfuls of freshly pounded *omahangu* flour to add a fresh flavour”(TPVO, 114-115).

Kauna's actions in preparation for the *okakungu* illustrate that the environment is an integral part of the rural women in Andreas' narrative. The women's use of the natural resources demonstrates their creativity, knowledge and resourcefulness. The activities are a consciousness raising ploy to reveal the importance of the general natural resources to the Oshiwambo community. Such activities are an ecofeminist response that defies the conception of nature as passive and inert. According to Shiva (1994:4), "the passivity and inertia of nature are a patriarchal construct and the interconnectedness of women and nature can be one of creativity, life and intelligence. And, significantly, of resistance." Shiva (ibid.) goes on to add that liberation entails "*recognising the necessary connection and continuity between the human and the natural*" [My own emphasis]. This woman-nature connection enables women to maintain household economies that are dependent on crops for food and drink, and other local species for products for the home. According to Warren (2014), this gendered knowledge of the women is not only based on their daily experiences as women but on what women do and know best. It is also worth noting that these women were involved in various productive projects and hence were progressive in their own way. The women's diverse knowledge on the local species enables them to be productive in the home and they were not limited by patriarchal boundaries which exclude "ecological contributions to the production of economic value" (Shiva 1994:4). Their knowledge is borne from their situated, gendered, concrete, daily experiences as women (Warren 2014). Hence, their activities represent a voice that raises local knowledge to a higher level of female consciousness in a patriarchal society.

However, an ecofeminist epistemological perspective also raises fundamental questions concerning women and nature related, first to the extent women's knowledge is considered as contributing to the economy, and second, whether or not the production boundary as defined by patriarchy is inclusive or exclusive. Ecofeminists such as Shiva (2013) argue that the

patriarchal economic model of growth is very myopic. Not only is the women's work devalued but it is perceived as non-labour. Shiva (2013) also notes that women who produce for their families and community are treated as non-productive and economically inactive. For instance, when the women in Oshaantu village work hard on the land to sustain their families, they are considered as unproductive. The powerful patriarchal forces that control their lives, devalue both the women and their sustenance activities. According to Warren (2014, 2015), the epistemological claim is that a gendered environmental perspective helps us to understand epistemological methods of enquiry and forms of justice concerning women and nature. For instance, it is sad to note that the food that women produce for their families is not counted in "agricultural statistics even though it subsidizes visible agricultural development" (Warren 1997:305). At Kauna's *okakungungu*, Tate Oiva's crazy ex-wife, Mee Namutenya clearly illustrates this point. She:

Sang of how hard she used to work on her husband's land, how she used to be the first wife to finish ploughing before the rains came, how she used to feed her mother-in-law, how she made [Tate Oiva] feel proud of her and how she made him rich, how she did this and that for him and his clan (TPVO, 114).

Despite the hard work on her husband's land which resulted in his riches, Oiva marries a second wife. When Mee Namutenya falls sick and all attempts to restore her health prove futile, Oiva replaces her with another woman. Mee Namutenya, the woman who had "burnt the fire of wealth" (TPVO, 30) for Oiva goes insane. She would undress and stand naked in front of all the men at Mr Jackson's *cuca* shop. Her husband takes her back to her family and would have nothing to do with her. A critical question arises here, that is, "do African women go mad?" Given Mee Namutenya's experiences, I am tempted to say "no." Rather, Mee Namutenya's insanity illustrates how the restrictive patriarchal boundaries of production and growth lead to violence against women. Mee Namutenya works tirelessly on her husband's land just to please him but all her labour is treated as non-labour and non-productive. The

emotional and psychological violence is completed when her husband marries a second wife to satisfy his own ego.

Additionally, because the women's environmental knowledge has been used but not recognised, women's work has been excluded from dominant economic means of production. The patriarchal forms of production thus "deny women and nature a productive role in the economic calculus (Shiva 2014:5). Thus, separatism is used by patriarchy not to acknowledge the rural women's activities into dominant economic thought. According to Warren (2015), failure to acknowledge the significant role of these activities in society renders women invisible. This invisibility explains why Kauna is silenced at the beginning of the narrative. Her efforts to sustain the family and protect the land are rendered unproductive and are devalued.

4.6 Dismantling Oppression: Women-Nature Connections

The women in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* are presented as the preservers of nature and the land. In the absence of the men who work in the mines, it is women like Kauna and Ali who till the land to ensure that the earth provides for and sustains their families. These women find that they are without the labour of their husbands since the Oshivambo society is largely patriarchal in nature. The children are the mainstay of a woman's productive capacity. The women exhibit their "potential to solve ecological issues [and ability to preserve nature] by living in communion with the earth" (Indu2015:1). According to Warren (1997), woman-nature connections are the backbone of ecofeminism and an understanding of these connections is crucial to feminism and environmentalism. What this argument amounts to is that ecofeminism's aim is to make visible these woman-nature connections and, where harmful to women and nature, to dismantle them. This is in line with the chapter's argument that the definition of the environment by Euro-American nature writers is rather myopic.

Hence, an inclusion of the analysis of black female authored texts deconstructs this narrow view.

In the Oshivambo patriarchal context, women do not have direct access to and control over land. The man has authority over “the household resources. He allocates land for cultivation to his wife or wives on the smaller, less fertile plots of ground, while he takes the larger and more fertile land. The husband also decides when to plough, and normally his fields are ploughed first” (Ambunda and de Klerk cited in Ruppel 2008:50). However, the woman feels a responsibility to use the land wisely to sustain the family and to protect it for future generations. Her priority is to optimise production for her family’s benefit (Bryceson1995). The women formed an alliance with other women in the community to maximise their productive capacity on land which they control only indirectly through their husbands. The narrative illustrates how crucial land is to the woman’s identity.

Losing one’s land is like losing one’s identity. For Kauna, leaving the land that she had painstakingly worked on for years, and raised her children in, highlights the pain of displacement. It is pain that is a result of land allotment by the powers that dominate both the black woman and the land. Losing her land reflects the acute pain of displacement she experiences. It is a loss that disrupts her land-based-identity (Harrison 2015). The narrator reflects on the importance and ownership of Kauna’s land after Shange’s death:

What will the Shanges do with Kauna?...will they kick her off the land? If they don’t think about Kauna, will they think about the children? If they ask her to go, where will she go? To Mee Fennie? To her parents? Where? I cannot imagine that they will throw her off the land, the land she loved and worked so hard on. The land that helped her to raise her children. The land she talked to so many times. The land she has shed tears and swear on? (TPVO, 108).

The aspects of land in the above passage demonstrate how crucial the land is to Kauna’s identity and survival. Even though she does not own the land, Kauna is the preserver of

Shange's land. Both the land and black woman are objectified by Shange. An ecofeminist reading of the narrative reveals that masculine power uses the land to exploit and dominate women. The women on the other hand are regarded by the men as the production tools to sustain their families. A reading of the narrative further reveals that it is the responsibility of the woman to ensure that the fields are ready for planting before the rainy season. This explains why Kauna grows anxious and concerned when she fails to plough Shange's field before the rainy season. The ramifications of failing to do so are emphasised by four women in the village. Her friend Mee Ali tells her she will be the laughing stock of the village if she fails to plough her fields before the rains. The wise and elderly and outspoken woman in the village, Mukwankala and Mee Maita also advise Kauna to finish preparations for the rain on time.

The parallel between the debasement of women and the domination of nature is noted when Mukwankala tells Kauna that people will laugh at her if the land is not ready for the rains. They will accuse her of making her husband poor and blame her for being lazy and useless. Both the land and Kauna undergo exploitation in the hands of man. Even the 'mad' Mee Namutenya tells Kauna that Shange will beat her and maybe kill her if he comes back from the mine and finds his land not cultivated. The four women, Ali, Mukwankala, Mee Maita and Mee Namutenya assert the fact that both the land and women are targets of exploitation by the black man. They connect Kauna's abusive and violent marriage with the degradation of the land that she has worked for all her life. This parallel between man's domination of nature and the oppression of women is one of the key tenets of ecofeminism. The women's insights signify that the "ideology which authorises oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities and, species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (Gaard et al. 1993:1). In other words, both nature and woman are

associated with that which is wild, hence they need to be tamed and subdued. The *okakungungu* represents a liberatory strategy that frees Kauna from patriarchal system of violence that has inferiorised both Kauna and the land.

Shange's success and manhood is defined by Kauna's hard work on the land. Significantly, the woman and not the man is blamed should the land be not ready for planting when the rainy season begins. Both the land and the woman are exploited for serving the man's purpose and her life-giving activities are not considered as production. Thus, the chapter argues that the land issue in Andreas' narrative is problematised and raises a number of central questions to better understand concerns related to the ownership and exploitation. Firstly, one may ask, what ownership of land means for a man or a woman in the Oshivambo's cultural context and secondly, how the land's ownership encode the woman's identity. These are crucial questions to this chapter's argument and addressing them requires one to locate the twin dominations of women and nature ecofeminism (Adams 1993) in the ideology that perpetuates the domination of women and nature. Drawing on the insights of ecology and feminism, the chapter posits that the land is an embodiment of male dominance and control.

Both the land and Kauna in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* are dominated and controlled by patriarchy. Whilst the land is exploited for its produce, the woman is exploited for her labour to satisfy the needs of men. Thus, using the ecofeminist approach pleads for an understanding of the parallel domination of nature and the domination of women. This relationship is foregrounded by ecofeminist scholars such as Ruether (1975), Birkeland (1993), Warren (1997), Gaard (1993) and Adams (1993) who stress the importance of ecofeminism as an analytic frame to investigate gender dynamics and the environment.

For Ruether (1975:204), the nature-women connection “leverages a critique of systems hostile to women and nature.” Furthermore, according to Ruether, “women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination” (1975:204). The responsibility of preparing the land for ploughing falls on the woman’s shoulders. It helps us understand how the women in Oshaantu village are exploited. They have no decision making powers with regards to land issues. As such, the land issue is a feminist issue as it disrupts relationships between man and woman. The patriarchal oppression of nature and woman, thus calls for a reimagining of the affinity between human and nonhuman nature. The *okakungungu* is one such project that is aimed at liberating both the land and the woman.

The women who come for Kauna’s *okakungungu* relate to the land in meaningful and functional ways. They interact with the land and understand it in different ways to the man. When they come together to plough Shange’s field, one can perceive this as a form of exploitation in a gender-biased community. While the women focus on ploughing the land as their responsibility, the men focus on rights. However, one can also argue that the women protect the land by ploughing it using conventional traditional methods. Their focus is to ensure that both the land and woman are protected. They acknowledge the significance of the land to their livelihood as they sing songs of joy and hope; with one spirit and in harmony. Essentially, “The women understood Kauna’s situation. There was a wonderful spirit, a spirit of sisterhood. For once, all ill-feeling and hatred were forgotten. [They] were one again, sisters sharing a common cause (TPVO, 116).

A number of significant points are noted from the traditional *okakungungu* activity. Firstly, an overarching theme is the sisterhood as the women work together as “the afternoon intensified with the heat. Sweat dripped down [their] faces and backs, but [they] worked, [they] continued to plough” (116). Secondly, the women acknowledge the ecosphere and

together as sisters, united by the land, they challenge the status quo. Together they fight against “traditional, patriarchal, environmentally exploitive cultures” (Hawkins, unpublished thesis, 2015:2) that are perpetuated by men like Shange. Thirdly, the women are able to resolve ecological (land) issues by developing a close relationship with earth. They come together, in communion with the earth to protect one of their own, Kauna. Lastly, they dismantle dominant male practices relating to land in the Oshaantu community. This awakening female consciousness in the Oshivambo patriarchal community signifies a challenge to the traditional male-centred practices of dominating nature and exploiting women.

The blossoming human-human relationships during the *okangungu* are symmetrical to the human-nature relationships. The spirit of sisterhood that develops as the different women work together, “all ill-feeling and hate ... forgotten” (TPVO, 116) is reverberated in the environment. Even the sun “with its beautiful yellow and orange colours” (TPVO, 16) illustrates how the women work in communion with the environment. Their decision to plough and protect the land before the rainy season, and to protect Kauna from being physically abused by Shange, shows that “women and nature can help each other in resisting male dominance and both can be liberated together from the male-centred society” (Indu 2015:2). The women ensure that both Shange and Kauna’s land are ready before the rain falls and consequently, Kauna will not be humiliated and she is saved from Shange’s abuse. Besides “rebuilding connections with nature” (Shiva 1994: preface), the women also renew “the insight that what people do to nature directly affects them too; that there is, in fact, no insular divide between the environment and their own bodies and health” (ibid). Although Shange owns both the land and Kauna’s body, and has the right to dominate and exploit both, it may be argued that Kauna’s *okakungungu* is an emancipation ideal that can be actualised in

the real world. Thus, the male attitude of exploiting both the woman and the land is to a certain extent dismantled.

Meme Ali is also shown as living harmoniously with nature. After Kauna's beating, she is hospitalised at Onandjokwe hospital. Meme Ali remains puzzled by Shange's behaviour. To ease her own restlessness (TPVO, 61), she "took a walk in the *mahangu* field, wandering down the narrow paths to ease [her] own restlessness (TPVO, 61). Her decision to walk in the *mahangu* field shows nature as the woman's significant helper during times of distress. She is pained at the prospect of her friend, Kauna being beaten to death. The male behaviour of domineering and abusing the woman is alien to her since her husband Michael, is not abusive. Thus, distressed by Kauna's beating, she befriends nature and establishes a communion with it. The Western philosophy of nature based on the self-other dualism is thus deconstructed. According to Indu (2015:1), "ecofeminism propounds that both women and nature will be liberated together from their subordinate status if they help each other." She realises that the land and herself are both objects of exploitation by patriarchy, hence the traditional *okakungungu* activity may be perceived as an ecological feminist response to "reactivate a conscious awareness of, and dialogue with, nature, lifting it out of its patriarchal definition as something passive and inert" (Shiva 1994:4). This is a definition that has been extended to women, such that women were treated like nature, devoid of reason and controlled by men.

4.7 Symbolic Connections: Feminising Nature and Naturalising Women

One of the key tenets of ecofeminism is the reaction against the feminisation of women. By implication, there is no distinction between human sexuality and the fertility of the land. Nature is thus subordinated by feminising it. By ascribing feminine features to nature, its

degradation and exploitation is justified. In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, the woman's life-giving ability and fertility is perceived as analogous to that of the earth. On one occasion, Shange does not return home to eat and when Kauna asks her sister-in-law, Shiwa about Shange's whereabouts, his sister replies, "Okwa yi ku yakweni mbo haya vala" [He went gone to those with fertile wombs!] (21). This analogy does not distinguish between the woman's 'womb' and the earth's 'womb.' In addition, it implies that women's power lies not only in the home but in their nurturance and their sexuality. Plumwood (1993) and Gaard (1993) observe that ecofeminism's thrust is the manner in which nature has been envisioned as feminine. For instance, nature is perceived as being fertile, raped and having a womb. Warren (1993) also adds that timber is referred to as virgin, soil as fertile and not potent and unused land is said to be barren. This ecofeminist thought emphasises the parallel and mutually reinforcing domination and exploitation of women and nature. Pursuing the same line of thought, Adams (cited in Warren 2014), points out that:

Language that feminizes nature and naturalizes women, describes, reflects, and perpetuates unjustified patriarchal domination by failing to see the extent to which the dominations of women, nonhuman animals, and nature are culturally (not just metaphorically) analogous and sanctioned.

In the male dominated Oshaantu community, both nature and women are threatened by masculine power. Asserting feminine values to nature is central to ecofeminist arguments and is also used to enforce the man's domineering nature. In other words, women are seen as part of nature and the converse is also true.

The characteristics that women possess are embedded in nature. For instance, the land in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* is associated with Mother Nature. Nature is given feminine traits of caring and nurturing. Like a mother, the land does not discriminate as it provides for all, plants, animals and humans. In other words, the land is associated with the woman's power of

fertility and regeneration. The land is perceived as the mother who protects, fosters and feeds her people on it. It has the qualities of a mother; “pure, generous and kind, [whilst] man is an outsider to nature and something to be afraid of” (Indu 2015:3). The feminine traits are articulated by Indu (ibid) when he says:

Nature is like a mother to all living things giving them food and shelter. Every living thing draws its sustenance from nature and nature sees to it that everything gets its share of everything thereby maintaining an ecological balance and harmony most needed for the survival of all species.

Indu’s quote above problematises the link between earth and woman. On one hand it posits an essentialist world view with a claim that “women possess an essential nature — a biological connection or spiritual affinity with nature which man do not” (Birkeland cited in Gaard 1993:22; Griffin 1978). One may argue that such an essentialist view fails to recognise the diversity of the earth. In essence, the earth’s regenerative capacity is negated. This means that the earth is denied its intrinsic value and thus treated as passive and inferior. Also, contrary to the essentialist view, ecofeminists believe that the conceptualisation of land or earth as female or woman is patriarchy’s way of inferiorising it (Warren 1997). This point is further emphasised by Legler (1997: 228) when she says:

Constructions of nature as female, as mother, as virgin are essential to the maintenance of this harmful environmental ethic and are essential to the maintenance of hierarchical ways of thinking that justify the oppression of various “others” in patriarchal culture by ranking them “closer to nature” or by declaring their practices “natural” or “unnatural.

However, the above essentialist view is inconsistent with King’s belief that “all life is connected” (cited in Gaard 1993:22). If this is true then it can be argued that “one group of persons cannot be closer” (ibid). This be the case, relationships with humans and nonhuman should be redefined to create a harmonious society in which all are treated indifferently. The challenge is to eliminate institutionalised oppression practices based on gender, race, class,

and sexuality. According to (Warren 1997:228), the elimination of such practices “may aid in changing abusive environmental practices.” Change is thus needed if a more viable environmental ethic is to be realised.

4.8 Symbolic Connections: the Patriarchal Self-Other Dualism

Ecofeminism is an ideology that castigates the dualism that posits the superiority of men over women and of culture over nature. This Western traditional conceptualisation of nature and woman has resulted in the nature/culture dualism that characterises patriarchal paradigms. This meant that anything that was associated with nature was devalued. According to Gaard (1993:6), “whatever is associated with women, emotion, nature, animals and the body is devalued. Conversely, whatever is associated with men, reason, culture, reason and the mind is held in high esteem. The objective of ecofeminism is to identify these self/other connections and where possible, dismantle them.

The symbolic association between the domination of women and nature in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* reinforces the pejorative status of women. The language is also used to justify the patriarchal domination of women, animals and nature. According to Ambunda and de Klerk (in Ruppel 2008), among the Oshiwambo-speaking communities, symbolisms reflected by similes are attached to humanity. For example, “a man is symbolised as an axe” (Ambunda and de Klerk cited in Ruppel 2008:49) because of the belief that in this community, an “axe is an indispensable tool” (ibid.). The man’s roles and responsibilities in the Oshiwambo community are more important than the woman’s. The man looks after the livestock, collects salt from the pans, hunts game for meat, build huts for family shelter and barns storage barns for the *mahangu* harvest, and digs wells to provide water for the family. Hence, the indispensable axe symbol befits the man’s responsibilities in the family. Warren (2014) refers to this comparison or language use analogy as the linguistic perspective of

ecofeminism, whilst Shiva (1994) calls it separatism. Further, Warren (2014) notes that this linguistic perspective demonstrates the role played by language in creating and perpetuating the connectivity between the exploitation of women and animals.

The nature/culture dualism that characterises patriarchal paradigms is represented in different dichotomies in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. The most prevalent are the male/female and human/nature dichotomies. The metaphors used in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* reinforce the gendered dualisms that posit the superiority of men over women and of culture over nature which are rooted in Western civilisations (Vakoch 2012). In the narrative, women are animalised and pejoratively referred to as cows, chicken, goats, pigs, bitches and birds. This line of thought is buttressed by Warren (2014) who says that, “The English language *animalises* and *naturalises* (emphasis in the original) women in cultural contexts where women and nonhuman animals are already viewed as inferior to men and male-identified culture.” Women are referred to in pejorative animal images. Small animals such as cats, and chicks are used to reflect the woman’s vulnerability and powerlessness. Bigger animals like elephants and cheetahs are used when women are dangerous and to reinforce their destructive nature. Hence, they need to be tamed like the wild forest and animals. Warren’s quote above shows that sexist and naturist language is used to describe women. Such language justifies the exploitation of women. By equating women with such animals, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, reinforces the tradition that associates female with animal. The main objective of the equation is to subjugate and denigrate women.

Kauna’s vulnerability is demonstrated when Shange beats her because she discovers the photograph showing the nature of his job in the mine. Firstly, Kauna is described in language that naturalises her, “Kauna and her basket full of water landed on the ground” and “Kauna

was lying on the ground covered in a blanket of sand” (TPVO, 58). Neither Kauna nor the water basket is important to Shange. He disconnects himself from both. Secondly, Kauna is animalised when she is described when Shange kicks in the stomach and she crawled like a “newborn calf” (TPVO, 59). The connection between woman and nature is once again established through the sand that covers Kauna as if to protect her from the violent Shange. Describing Kauna as a “newborn calf” implies that she is powerless, vulnerable and defenceless. Thus, animalising Kauna in this manner authorises her inferior status. Wittgenstein (cited in Warren 1998:12) argues that “language we use mirrors and reflects our conception of ourselves and our world.” As such, animalising and naturalising Kauna, reflects conceptions of woman and nature as inferior, powerless and with less prestige than Shange, the man.

There are other ways that women are equated with animals. In these cases, the female/male dualism is subverted and is replaced by a female/female type of relationship. When Michael informed his family that he was going to marry Ali, his mother does not approve of her. She claims that Ali is a whore, low born and has no class. In addition, she says that Ali’s hands look like “chicken claws” and her “high hips and small legs ... make her look like an old cow” (TPVO, 16). She articulates Ali’s animalness of her humanness in terms that describe her dangerous nature and powerlessness that makes her unacceptable in the family. Thus, as an “old cow” she is sexually unattractive and no longer productive. Important to note is that the status of the “chicken”, the “old cow” and the woman are inferior to the higher status of other humans. Ortner (cited in Vakoch 2012:2), echoes this sentiment when she argues that the “universal devaluation of women relative to men could be explained by assuming that women are closer to nature than men, while men are more intimately connected with the “higher” realm of culture.” This suggests that the woman is positioned where she is kept beneath the man. According to Warren (2014), this notion is predicated on the Western

oppressive framework of *value-hierarchical, Up-Down thinking* and *the oppositional rather than mutually exclusive value dualisms* (emphasis in the original). In the former feature, higher value is attributed to the higher being, the man. Thus, suggesting that there is no equality between man and woman. The latter feature suggests that man and woman do not complement each other. Rather, greater value is placed on the man over the woman (Warren 2014). Ecofeminism calls for an end to all forms of oppression and its main objective is to dismantle the oppressiveness of patriarchal, dualistic thinking.

However, this equation is complicated by the fact that Michael's sister, Sana and mother are part of this higher rank. This suggests that women suffer double oppression and degradation. Firstly, they are exploited by the patriarchal society. As Donovan (cited in Cook 2008: 45) argues:

The anomalous and the powerless include women and animals, both of whose subjectivities and realities are erased or converted into manipulative objects – ‘the material of subjugation’ – at the mercy of the rationalist manipulator, whose self-worth is established by the fact that he subdues his environment.

The males, associated with superior mind and culture are the rationalists and women like Kauna, Namutenya and Maita who are associated with inferior nature testify male domination. The men use nature for their own benefit. Hence, the hierarchical male-constructed-society exercises utmost supremacy and control over the women and nature. Adams (cited in Cook 2008:45) notes that “the traditional feminist response to the equation of femaleness with animalness has been to break that association” and not to “make it universal.” This chapter argues that when Mee Ali and Michael's sister, Sana and mother animalise their fellow women folk, this is an effort to subvert the equation and to break the binaries.

Greater value is attributed to women such as Mee Ali and Michael's sister, Sana and mother. For instance, Ali locates herself in this high status when she refers to Mee Maita as "the old cow" (TPVO, 10). Concerned about Kauna's marriage problems, Ali had approached Mee Maita, a church elder for help. However, Mee Maita does not keep the discussion confidential and the whole village, including Shange and Michael got to know about it. As a church elder, Mee Maita proved that she could not be trusted and was not of assistance to the other women. The metaphor of the old cow suggests that she is disempowered and is of no use to her black sisters. Although the abuse of nature is not stooped by the women, the equation is subverted. Hence, the Western tradition of the self-other patriarchal dualism boundary is transcended at this juncture.

Although the three examples above illustrate how language is used to naturalise women and to reinforce their inferior status, it would be false to claim that men are not denigrated by use of animalising or naturalising them. According to Warren (2014), "men are called wolves, sharks, skunks, snakes, toads, jackasses, old buzzards, and goats." Ali says to Mee Maita, "Men are dogs" (TPVO, 8) and one of Shange's relatives is called a "greedy goat" (TPVO, 40). The dualistic relationship is subverted in both examples. Although in both cases, men are described pejoratively, the former reflects that women can be accorded a higher status to men. In the latter, the "Othering" process involves men alone. Such a realisation problematises the derogatory connection between male, female and nature. The subjectivity of the male is erased as he is converted into a manipulatable object by Maita. Hence, the equation of animality versus Otherness is temporarily disrupted. According to Adams (cited in Cook 2008:45), this is a compelling move since, "The traditional feminist response to the equation of femaleness with animalness has been to break this association." In other words, central to ecofeminism thought, the Western tradition of animalising the feminine has to be rectified. In addition, Cook (2008:49) points out that most feminists challenge the argument

that both nature and the feminine need to be controlled and domesticated. Soper (cited in Cook 2008:45), suggests that there is need to “to avoid linguistically “reproduc[ing]” the woman-nature equivalence that has served as legitimation for the domestication of women and their relegation to maternal and nurturing functions.”

It is also noted that not all animal and nature terms in the narrative are used pejoratively. For instance, to show her happiness at her daughter’s wedding, Mee Maria, Kauna’s mother, “preened herself like a big bird” (TPVO, 51). Another example is when Kauna shows her defiance and refuses to cry at Shange’s funeral. She says, “You want to see me rattling like a snake in the sand pretending to be devastated by Shanges’ death” (TPVO, 49). And when Shange’s relatives demand an explanation for his death, they compare Shange firstly, to an animal and secondly, to a cow (TPVO, 98). Again, the comparison is not derogative, but rather emphasises that Shange was a human being. Animalisation in these examples is in fact used in complimentary terms. Thus, one may conclude that not all animal terms in the narrative are used in a negative sense. When used in a patriarchal context, animalisation functions to reinforce the inferiority and subjugation of women and animals.

4.9 The Logic of Domination in the Mines

The logic of domination is a limb of Warren’s (1993) oppressive conceptual framework. It advances the moral premise that superiority justifies inferiority and domination (Warren 1987, 1990). Arguably, the mines in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* represent the logic of domination conceptual framework. Mining in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* can be viewed as a colonial capitalist adventure intended to degrade both the environment and humans. It is an extension of the colonialist venture to oppress the people in Oshaantu village. Okuyade (2013:50) also affirms this line of thought by saying that such colonial activities are often

“associated with the postcolonial traumas that include the degradation of the environment.”

In other words, the mines as represented in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* have negative effects on both the environment and humans. While the land is desecrated and degraded through the mining process, so is the black man and woman’s labour exploited. The MINEO Consortium (2000:13-14) discerns the following physical effects of mines:

Mining affects the environment and associated biota through the removal of vegetation and topsoil, the displacement of fauna, the release of pollutants, and the generation of noise [...] Mining causes direct and indirect damage to wildlife. The impacts stem primarily from disturbing, removing, and redistributing the land surface. Some impacts are short-term and confined to the mine site; others may have far-reaching, long term effects.

The long term and far reaching effects can be diagnosed in what Warren refers to as the “logic of domination” in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. According to Warren (1993), the logic of domination is oppressive if it explains and maintains relationships of subordination and domination, in this case, the colonial/Other relationship. In other words, it “supplies the moral justification that sanctions subordination” (Kurth-Schai cited in Warren 1994:196). Using the logic of domination lens in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, will help to articulate the unjustified logic for subjugating and oppressing the female body and nature. This chapter argues that the mines are the basis of the oppression and exploitation suffered by some of the women in the narrative. Black men like Shange, Blacky and Victor who work in the mines, are exploited because of their class (working class) for their labour and because of their race. By virtue of their race, the black men are positioned on the less-valued end of the black/white and master/servant dichotomy. This stance is clearly oppressive. However, because of the double oppression that black men face at the hands of the imperial-colonialists, they in turn side with the oppressor and victimise their own kind, the black women. This means the black women will experience a parallel fate to nature under patriarchal domination and will suffer disproportionately the effects of human exploitation of human nature (Warren 1994).

The mine changes the lives of the men who work there, namely Victor (Shange's cousin), Shange and Blacky (Kauna's brother). Blacky had a "crazy lifestyle" (TPVO, 67), "died in a mysterious car accident" (TPVO, 68) and was a womaniser. The hallmark of the development in mining results in the commodification of both nature and woman's body. To Blacky, the worth of a woman is expressed in monetary terms. Oppressed and violated by the mine environment, Blacky in turn sexually abuses the black women, turning them into prostitutes. On the other hand, because of their "location on the fringes and their role in producing sustenance," (Shiva 1994:2) women engage in the struggle for survival. In this regard, the mining environment becomes a feminist issue as both nonhuman and human nature are affected by environmental practices that exploit nature for profit making processes.

Kauna says that Blacky had money, all kinds of friends and whenever he visited, "he had a new car, a different girlfriend and new brand alcohol" (TPVO, 68-69). To a certain extent, the nature of the mine environment influences his behaviour and life style. Kauna affirms this when she says, "I never knew what went wrong. I think it was the mine. It changed him into somebody we could no longer recognise." (TPVO, 69). Blacky was very intelligent and had an opportunity to go abroad to further his studies but he "chose the mine above his education" (TPVO, 69). Alienated from the land and feeling a stranger in his own environment, Blacky turns to this violent lifestyle as a solution to his problems. The end result is a displacement and dislocation of the weaker and marginalised race, as represented by Blacky. They become alienated from the land and more vulnerable. Maybe this is Andreas' way of objecting to the type of development that dehumanises humans and exploits the land for profit. Shiva and Mies (1993:105) argue that:

Colonialism and capitalism transformed the land and soil from being a source of life and a commons from which people draw sustenance, into private property to be bought and sold and conquered; development continued colonialism's unfinished task.

In Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon (1966) attributes the devastating psychological effects to “the political environment – colonialism based on technological power” (Fanon cited in Palmer 1980:13). As a psychiatrist Fanon believed he had to “prevent man from feeling a stranger in his own environment” but also realises that this could not be “achieved by treating the man. It was the environment that had to be changed” (ibid).

The belief that both women and nature are exploited and dominated by the black man is apparent in Shange and Kauna’s relationship. Shange is emasculated, “He works in the mine kitchen ... cooking in the kitchen ... cooking for other men ... he cooks for them, feeds them, washes the dishes, cleans the pots, the kitchen and does all that kitchen work (TPVO, 54). The abusive behaviour is a result of his rage when he sees his photo “wearing a blue overall and white apron. He had a white hat on his head. In the background was a huge black stove against which he was leaning. Everything in the picture seemed so gigantic: huge pots, knives and folks” (TPVO, 54). Shange’s response is to beat Kauna and as she lay on the ground covered in a blanket of sand, “She moved like an old clothe as Shange’s shoes struck her mercilessly all over her body. *The heavy mine shoes sounded as if they were breaking every bone*” [my emphasis] (TPVO, 58). The heavy mine shoes that he uses underground in the mine to exploit the land’s resources are the same shoes that he uses to exploit Kauna, almost breaking her body. This exploitation and degradation of the female and the environment is one of the major concerns of ecofeminism (Gaard 1993). Through Shange, we see that, “black women have a certain history of oppression within African culture ... women’s problems are rooted in custom and tradition. What is certainly very dominant here is that the male had a superior position to the female” (Head, Interview 15, cited in Lionnet 1997:207). Hence, the disregard that Shange has for Kauna is based on the fact that he “regards her as an inferior form of human life” (ibid).

The physical dislocation of Shange, Blacky and Victor from the land impacts on their lives. Emasculated and demeaned by the imperialist mine environment, Shange's eruption of violence is the only means of expressing his pain. This violent reaction echoes Fanon's philosophy on violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon maintains that the only language that a victim who had cast aside his victimhood to become master is the language of force and violence. Shange, as the colonised, embraces violence to protect his freedom. In a patriarchal environment in which he has more power than the female, he "finds his freedom in and through violence" (Fanon 1966:33, 66, 68, 73). According to Fanon, "the victim of colonialist violence could win back his manhood and his emotional wholeness only by using violence himself" (ibid). Hence, because Shange and Blacky's livelihoods are given impetus and shape by the violent imperialist colonisers, they both embrace violence as a hallmark of their manhood. For instance, Shange beats Kauna until she crawls "like a new born calf" (TPVO, 59) and he "breathed like a wounded animal" (TPVO, 59). In addition, Mee Maita observes that Kauna is mistreated time and again and at one time, Shange almost killed her. The narrator also points out that Kauna is left with a scar; "the cut on the left corner of her upper lip left a scar that made it look bigger than the rest of her mouth. A scar that will remind us all, and particularly Kauna, of the horror of physical abuse (TPVO, 64). When talking to Mee Feennie, she says, "Now when he beats me, I simply nurse my wounds" (TPVO, 67). All the examples above are emblematic of Shange's violent nature. Also, significant to note is Kauna's scar, a permanent reminder of the violent relationship with Shange. Because she cannot articulate her pain through language, she expresses her pain through the scar.

Shange, the victim of the colonial system in the mines, becomes the perpetrator. It becomes clear that the cycle of violence begins with colonialism. The physical and emotional violence that Kauna suffers originates from the mine. Hence, the chapter's argument that the mining

environment is a feminist issue. The culture of violence in the narrative suggests that there is no discrete division between the mining environment and women. This connectivity is further shown by the sand that covers Kauna when Shange beats her. The sand covered her face, eyes, nose, ears, mouth and her braids had to be loosened to brush the sand out of her hair (TPVO, 60). The sand and Kauna's body seem to be inseparable, suggesting that bodily trauma and environmental trauma are connected. Such a relationship enhances one's comprehension of the exploitation and oppression of women. Both Kauna's body and the sand covering it can be exploited by Shange. Thus, the link between the woman's bodily trauma and the environmental trauma of the land (represented by the sand), suggests that there is need to understand both for healing to take place. In line with ecofeminism, this connectivity also reveals that what people do to nature directly or indirectly impacts on their livelihood. It is important to note that Kauna cannot just heal by the simple act of removing the sand from her body. Rather, the narrative seems to suggest that it is critical that we understand both bodily trauma and environmental trauma for healing to take place.

One can argue that the connectivity between class, gender and the environment is interrogated through the mine metaphor, hence the logic of domination framework. The mine environment affects the psyche of the black man who in turn exploits the black woman. This recognition that the characters' behaviour is shaped by the environment, in this case the mine and patriarchal environment, is relevant to ecocriticism and ecofeminism ideologies. Although the narrative invokes Blacky and Shange's psychological problems resulting from the mine environment, the principal focus remains on the connection between human and nonhuman nature. Thus, an understanding of the coloniser's mining environment explains why women's oppression is linked with the unjustified domination or exploitation of nature (Warren 2014).

4.10 The Logic of Colonisation and the Body Politic

According to Shiva (1994:2), for women, “health issues and environmental issues are closely related.” Victor’s case illustrates this relationship. Victor, Michael’s cousin, also worked in the mine. He stopped working when he fell sick and the disease proved to be incurable. The narrator notes that,

Victor’s disease was strange. ... He had blisters all over his body ... then the blisters disappeared and sores came instead. He had non-stop diarrhoea. He lost more than half his weight, even though there was plenty of food in his house. ... In the end he was like a baby, he did everything in his pants (TPVO, 103).

Victor had AIDS. Erick, a former colleague of Victor’s and Tate Phillipusa (Kauna’s uncle) confirm that Victor got the disease because he slept around and he “chased every dress and skirt that passed him by” (TPVO, 106). One can only assume that the mine had changed him just as it had changed Blacky. Because Victor had plenty of money from the mine, he could engage in extra-marital affairs. Hence, from an ecocritical perspective, one may argue that environmental issues become health problems (Shiva 1994). Given the fact that mining is a process that sustains life, it means that there is a connection between the “Earth body and the human body” (ibid) through such processes.

Of interest is the analogy that Usher (cited in Shiva 1994) draws between the human body and the earth body. According to Usher, a human body weakened by AIDS shares similarities with, for example, a degraded forest. She argues that metaphorically and materially, “not only is the degraded forest unable to “perform” the functions that were once part of its nature, it becomes increasingly sensitive to unusual pressure from the outside ... Stresses that were once absorbed by the ecosystem without inflicting significant damage now cause damage” (Usher cited in Shiva 1994:2). Both the human body weakened by AIDS and the degraded forest become dysfunctional. Similarly, Victor lost a lot of weight and was like a baby.

Because of his weakened immune system, he became susceptible to outward pressures. His body was covered with blisters and sores. Hence, Mira Shiva (cited in Shiva 1994:2) also elaborates how “health issues and environmental issues are one and the same.” The continuity between the earth body and the human body is clearly illustrated through Victor’s illness. Usher (1994:11) notes that, the “immune-deficiency caused by AIDS, which triggers gradual disintegration of the body’s defence mechanisms, mirrors erosion of the ecosystem which destroys the natural capacity to regenerate.” One may argue that the interconnectivity between the diseased human body and the degraded environment is not subverted in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. Hence, using the ecocriticism lens, parallels are drawn between the debased human body and the exploited nonhuman nature. The destruction of nature through the mining system in Oshaantu village impoverishes both human and nonhuman nature.

On closer scrutiny, more complex and subtle connections can be discerned. Victor’s wife, Mee Sara is blamed for his reckless behaviour and death. Believing that she bewitched her husband, Victor’s relatives strip her of everything. Firstly, she is accused of giving him *muti* (medicine) to make him suffer for that long. Secondly, she is accused of being a murderer. Thirdly, they take all the money from the bank and everything from the house, including electric appliances. As demonstrated through Victor’s death, for women, health issues cannot be divorced from environmental issues. Shiva (1994:2) further observes that “from the perspective of women, environmental issues are quite directly, and clearly, issues of survival.” Not only are the degraded environment and the Victor’s diseased body unable to perform, Sara and her family also become dysfunctional. She is unable to sustain her family. In addition, she is stigmatised and criminalised. Hence, one may conclude that when the environment is degraded, women are also degraded.

Kuku Nameme's death also illustrates the parallel between the environment and the human body. The disintegration of the body politic is shown in the age of Mee Namene and her husband. They were so old that their bodies could no longer perform daily chores (TPVO, 15). Neighbours helped them to fetch water and firewood (TPVO, 15). Their family is also dysfunctional. Their children did not look after them. They only came back to dump their children for their parents to look after. Thus, a striking parallel is drawn between Namenes' livelihood and the environment. The narrator notes that like their disintegrating bodies, their homestead was also falling apart. The sticks of the fence were "old and collapsing" and thus could not serve their purpose. In addition, "not a single decent mud hut existed in their compound" (TPVO, 15). The argument here is that there are subtle connections between Mee Namene's diseased body and the collapsing homestead. When Mee Namene dies, "mourners had nowhere to sit or sleep (TPVO, 15) and "no single animal was slaughtered for the poor woman" (TPVO, 15). Thus, the dysfunctional nature of Mee Namene's body and her ultimate death cannot be divorced from her collapsing environment which can no longer sustain her. Because Mee Namene and her husband live in a weakened environment, their lives are affected. They have no decent shelter and no adequate basic provisions like food. Thus, there is no insular divide between the environment, the human body and health issues. Such an interconnectivity also suggests that the "processes of degradation in the human body and environment linked physically and metaphorically" (Shiva 1994:2)

4.11 Fostering Emancipatory Alternatives

Central to ecofeminism is the articulation of emancipatory strategies employed by literary writers. Given the dualistic thinking and oppressive nature of patriarchy, as exemplified by Gaard and Murphy (1998) and Campbell (2008), this section builds on their examples by

exploring the liberatory strategies employed by the women characters in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. According to Carr (2000), an ecofeminist examination of a narrative should also encompass liberatory strategies that can be actualised in the real world. Thus, an exploration of the women characters in Andreas' narrative will also suggest new ways of relating to humanity and nonhuman nature.

Significant to note in the narrative is the connection between the purple violet flower and the three women characters, namely, Mukwankala, Meme Ali and Meme Maita. The three women have purple violets in their homesteads. The flower is symbolic of their strength, resilience, courage and visibility. The symbol of the purple violet is central to the black woman's reclamation of agency. This section posits that Andreas' narrative challenges the Western self-other dualism by "advancing an ideal of beauty that repudiates patriarchal preconceptions" (Vakoch 2012:3). This type of beauty is represented by the purple violet flower. The argument here is that the purple violet is used symbolically by the author to subvert the Western philosophy of dualisms such as male versus female, and nature versus culture.

The purple violets are presented metaphorically in Andreas' narrative. At the outset of the narrative, Kauna is linked to the purple violet. Mukwankala says that because of her beauty, Kauna was called "the purple violet of Oshaantu. She was so delicate and she came when [the] flowers were in bloom" (TPVO, 148). When Kauna meets the woman from the white house at the well, her friend Ali also sets her mind at ease when she reminds her that, "she [Kauna] is the purple violet of Oshaantu" (TPVO, 26). Although her beauty is destroyed through physical abuse, Kauna remains empowered through her bond with nature, which is the purple violets.

The individual women's vitality and strength is symbolised by the purple violets in their homesteads. For instance, Mee Maita's homestead had "purple and white violets [growing] beside the fence" (TPVO,6). Humiliated and rejected at the last minute by the man who was supposed to marry her, Mee Maita does not hide her anger and bitterness. She believes that "marriage should be one miserable, lifelong experience" in which "husband and wife should fight every day" (TPVO, 6) and the husband should abuse the woman and children. Her marriage to Tate Ekandjo is a loveless one. Realising that she is growing old, she conforms to society's expectations by marrying Tate Ekandjo, a "widower who, unfortunately, had not got over the death of his wife" (TPVO, 112). He finds comfort in alcohol. However, Mee Maita transcends the victimhood status by finding solace in religion. She commands respect in her community as a powerful member of the church and a Sunday school teacher. In addition, she maintains a spiritual connection with the earth through the purple and white violets in her garden. Hence, she articulates a powerful liberatory strategy symbolised by her affinity with nature. This connection keeps her whole and at peace despite her marriage with the alcoholic, Tate Ekandjo.

Like, Mee Maita, Mee Fennie maintains a connection with the land as symbolised by the purple and white violets that had grown around her homestead. After divorcing her husband, Mee Fennie leads a successful life. Working at the market, she managed to sustain her family and sent her eldest daughter to the University of Namibia. She also built a hut for each of her three children and built a concrete bedroom for herself. A structural connection can be drawn between Mee Fennie's success and nature. As more of the purple and white violets grow around her homestead, Mee Fennie gains more strength and resilience. Like the other women characters in the text, Mee Fennie derives strength and will power from her connection with the unique and exotic purple violets. In her unpublished Master's Thesis, Corneliussen (2012:6), notes that "the African women are not only a homogenous mass of disempowered,

inferior “Others” but prove to inherit willpower, skills and strength which make them capable to influence and empower their own situation.” In other words, although their growth is stifled by the patriarchal environment, their diversity is marked by their different experiences and the emancipatory strategies they employ to challenge the status quo. Hence, in line with ecofeminism, one may argue that through the market place, Mee Fennie is recognised for her subjectivity and intrinsic value (Howell1997).In addition, the market environment is all encompassing thus enabling Mee Fennie to transcend binary oppositions of male/female, mind/body and inferiority/superiority. According to Warren (2014), this dualism has functioned historically to justify the dominations of nature and women. The historical connections have in fact reinforced the subjugation and marginalisation of women. Ecofeminism works towards dismantling such connections to create an egalitarian society that recognises both humanity and nonhuman nature.

Though victimised by patriarchal structures that perpetuate their invisibility and dehumanisation, black female characters actively resist this objectification to the extent that Kauna leaves Oshaantu village without knowing what is ahead for her. She looks at the “dusty gravel road ahead of [her] and said, ‘I don’t know what is out there for me and my children, but I will go, I am willing” (TPVO, 174). Mee Fennie divorces her husband and Mee Maita finds strength in religion. Hence, based on the ecofeminist lens, this chapter reveals that Ecofeminist critics try to make visible the connections between women and nature, and dismantle them where they are harmful to women and nature. To analyse these onnections, Warren’s (1993) categories of connections between nature and women, namely, the historical, symbolic, epistemological and conceptual connections, were used as a framework. Despite the overlaps in these categories, the chapter built on Warren’s views by arguing that failure to recognise connections between women, men, children, animals and nature leads to different forms of oppression, in particular, a repertoire of violence. In

addition, the chapter demonstrates that in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, different forms of oppression are “mutually reinforcing systems of oppression.”

The fearless and elderly Mukwankala confronts Shange at the cuca shop after beating Kauna, almost killing her. The narrator, Ali says, “Mukwankala has the stature and grace of royalty. She reminds me of personalities in the many royal folk tales [...]” (TPVO, 147). Like the purple violets around her homestead, she symbolises visibility as she demands to be listened to and to be heard. The self-assertive woman’s demand that Shange should stop beating Kauna, is a plea for social transformation. According to Birkeland, ecofeminism advocates for social transformation for the sake of survival and justice. Birkeland adds that, “social transformation must reassess and reconstruct values and relations toward equality, cultural diversity, and nonviolence in associations that are non-hierarchical, non-competitive, and fully participatory” (cited in Howell 1997: 233). In other words, ecofeminism’s aim is to deconstruct the patriarchal dualistic thinking that results in the exploitation of nature and women. The praxis of ecofeminism is represented in the novel by Mukwankali’s fearless confrontation of Shange, when she says that, “men who beat women are the ones who cannot stand up against other men” (TPVO, 63).

After the confrontation, between Shange and Mukwankala, Shange never beat Kauna again. Mukwankala’s strategy demonstrates a boldness that subverts the female/man, gender/sex and nature/culture dichotomy. Unmasking such binarisms and the connections between women and the representations of nature in literature is essential in forming a more viable environment. Hence, Mukwankala’s confrontation is consistent with ecofeminism thought.

Her confrontation with Shange suggests that a deconstruction of the hierarchical leads to relationships that are founded on reciprocity and mutuality.

Kauna, on the other hand resorts to silence to challenge the patriarchal societal demands at Shange's funeral. In a similar vein, Ibrahim argues that "the victim's silence is also a 'voice,' and a 'mode of uttering'" (cited in Nnaemeka 1997:151). In the same vein, Jones (Interview 97) notes that "Her silences are ... ways of maintaining ... Autonomy." In other words, her passive compliance is a strategy to resist the double bind; a way of maintaining autonomy, what Cixous (1980) has called the "phallogocentric representationalism" (cited in Lionnet 1997:218). Thus, Kauna, "the purple violet of Oshaantu" adopts silence as a liberatory strategy. Her silence is enforced by the blank space on the funeral programme where her name should have been. Ultimately, Kauna's boldness and fearlessness is shown when she pronounces that she will not shed a single tear for Shange and she refuses to speak a tribute to him at his funeral. She boldly states, "I have been angry my whole life. I have been angry about this marriage and with this man, so at this stage I really don't think I care what happens to me if I don't cry for him" (TPVO, 50). Her voice accords her a speaking position, a transformation and a sense of agency that marriage had denied her.

The metaphorical significance of the purple violet is noted when Kauna discovers her voice and strength in nature. Shange's death marks the end of the victimisation and dehumanisation by patriarchal structures. One might argue that she realises that the abuse did not change her; she is still the 'purple violet of Oshaantu.' The *mahangu* millet analogy reflects Kauna's final assertion and transformation. She says to Ali,

You know what happens to the *mahangu* millet? After it has been knocked down, stepped on and *mercilessly destroyed by cattle, it finds the strength to repair itself and grow better*. It is often bigger and more vibrant than the millet that has not been threatened by any danger and cut to the ground (TPVO, 174) [My emphasis].

A correlation between the degradation of Kauna and the degradation of the mahangu millet is established in this analogy. Kauna compares herself to the *mahangu* millet plant. Although cultivated by the women in Oshaantu, the man is responsible for building storage barns and distributing the *mahangu* from the granary if needed by the family. In this respect, it is considered as men's property (Ruppel 2008). It is also one of the most drought resistant crops grown in the Northern region of Namibia. Significant to note, is the *mahangu* millet's vibrancy and strength to repair itself after having been destroyed mercilessly by cattle. By implication, despite having been trodden upon and dehumanised by patriarchal structures, Kauna is able to recast female subjectivity when she decides to leave the homestead with her children. She denounces the patriarchal culture that has owned her body and voice, hence demeaned and degraded her. Her struggle to control her body determines her ultimate act of resistance. When Shange's cousin moves into their nuptial bedroom and her in-laws take ownership of the land, Kauna feels she is being denied the most elementary form of recognition and visibility. Consequently, like the *mahangu* millet, Kauna takes the bold step "to repair" and "grow bigger" and "better." She realises her "own broken past and fragmented self as part of something larger," (Fitzpatrick cited in Campbell 2008:5); "a great brokenness moving, trying to move toward wholeness" (Hogan 1995:85). After all the merciless destruction, there is hope that the purple violet will thrive again as Kauna extricates herself from her oppressive situation.

Andreas gives significance to the work of women in the community. Although their work in the home and fields is not acknowledged as production, the chapter argues that women's knowledge enables them to build connections with nature. With the men moving to the mines, the division of labour pushes the woman to the fringes of society, making them invisible. An examination of the women's knowledge on nature and their activities leads one to implicitly and explicitly question what is meant by 'development' and 'production.' The

chapter concludes that women possess natural knowledge that men do not have. Hence, the patriarchal myopic definition of the term 'production' should be broadened to include women's activities that are essential for ecology and survival.

4.12 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the women's resilience and liberatory strategies in an environment fraught with patriarchal violence. *The Purple Violet of Oshaantuis* is a narrative about Shange's obsessive sexuality and exploitative relationship; a story of male aggression and power. Above all, it is a story about women crafting emancipatory strategies to a culture that has defined her as a *femme fatale*. It is the story of the resilience and survival of the purple violet of Oshaantu, Kauna, and other women. The women's activities as well as their thought processes are controlled and policed by structures of domination that involve complex networks of power vested primarily in the male characters. In a society where the value of the woman's sexuality is repeatedly denied and male sexuality expresses itself in abuse, the women in the narrative craft liberatory strategies to redefine womanhood. As such, the chapter argued that Andreas succeeds in demystifying age-old traditions, providing a textual space where silence speaks (Lionnet in Nnaemeka 1997:209)

The chapter argued that the authority that leads to the domination of nature is the same authority that dehumanises and exploits women (Gaard 1993). According to Warren, ecofeminists have been instrumental in demonstrating the extent to which women's oppression and other systems of social injustice are mutually reinforcing. For this reason, ecofeminist philosophers contend that to effectively address women's concerns, feminism must be redefined as a movement to end all oppression" (Warren 1997:194). The chapter's argument thus transcends feminist boundaries by showing that ecofeminism calls for an end

to all oppressions; arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature.

It was observed that historical patriarchal frameworks perpetuate dualism dynamics that have consistently oppressed women and other non-dominant groups. The patriarchal ideology sanctions and authorises the linguistic forms of self/other, female/male and superior/inferior binarisms to relegate women to the fringes of the society. The women are exploited by animalising and not humanising them. *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, men are also animalised and in some cases, not in pejorative terms. Nevertheless, the chapter concludes that women are the most animalised humans in the narrative. It also concludes that referring to women in animal terms and nature in feminine terms is derogatory when used in patriarchal contexts to degrade women and nature.

However, consistent with ecofeminism philosophy, the chapter argued that Andreas suggests the possibility of overcoming oppression by recasting and restructuring social practices. The Oshaantu community can hope to sustain itself only by moving beyond hierarchical domination. Significant to note is that, the awareness of the oppressiveness of hierarchy extends beyond a repudiation of patriarchy and encompasses a critique of class and racial relationships in the mine.

The point in the above analysis repudiates the nature-culture dualism of patriarchal thought and advocates for a transformation in social practices that exploit and dominate women and nature. The specific nature of the oppressive social practices will be interrogated further in the next chapter. What is to be debated are the themes related to gender, sexism, racism and the lived experiences of the black woman and girl-child immigrant. Thus, chapter five will

focus on resistance and the liberatory strategies employed by women and children to address environmental concerns in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*.

Resistance and the Environment in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013)

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter critically examined the interconnections among women, violence and the environment in Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. Premised on the theories of ecofeminism and ecocriticism, the chapter revealed that the domination and exploitation of the environment parallels the oppression of women and the struggles they endured. The chapter also showed that the Oshaantu women relied on the environment and their knowledge of this environment for survival. Hence, it was argued that a healthy relationship between human and nonhuman nature contributes to a harmonious and healing environment.

This chapter analyses NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), (hereafter WN). *We Need New Names* is set in the twenty-first century. The novel reflects new environmental themes such as resource grabbing, capitalist patriarchy, immigrants and maldevelopment, taking its cue from minority traditions of resistance to injustice. The chapter situates Bulawayo's narrative in terms of socio-environmental justice and argues that *We Need New Names* redefines environment by connecting political and social injustice issues with environmental issues. The novel focuses on environments riddled with social problems such as HIV and AIDS, migrant workers, lack of food, racism and above all the immigrants in America. This chapter thus, sets out to demonstrate the impact the environment has on the black female, male and children characters in the narrative. Highlighting this intricate relationship, the chapter will illustrate how domination by race, sex and nation are seen as ills themselves, as well as practices that contribute to the domination of the environment. An analysis of this web-like symbiotic relationship will reveal the interconnections between the oppression of women and the domination of the rest of nature (Ruether 1992, Birkeland 1993,

Warren 1997). Hence, an examination of the devastated environment in *We Need New Names* leverages a critique of all forms of violence against women and nature.

To incisively analyse the unjustifiable connections between the environment and humans, the chapter uses Warren's (2005) and Plumwood's (1997), Oppressive frameworks to critique the different forms of violence in the novel. While these perspectives are significant, the chapter notes that they are based on the Western philosophy of the environment. By implication, the frameworks are supposed to be universal and appropriating them implicitly shows that theory is human heritage. Hence, the chapter argues that although the traditional Western system on which the Oppressive Frameworks are based, may not exhaustively reveal a *bona fide* woman-nature connection the approaches complement an ecofeminist theory. An ecofeminist approach is more appropriate because it allows the chapter to generate an all-inclusive analysis of environmental issues in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. Because of this, it is important to examine how Bulawayo's text transcends or reinforces these frameworks to accommodate environmental issues that impact on the black woman.

The analysis of the novel also critiques forms of development that do not take environmental degradation and their ramifications on the low-income groups, the under privileged, women and children into consideration. The above perspective is anchored in the view that resistance discourses around the figuring of the environment is "shaped by accelerating processes of globalisation and exploitation of natural resources" (Harrison 2012:4). Resource grabbing, capitalist patriarchy and maldevelopment are used to exploit resources in *We Need New Names*. This chapter argues that, what is construed as development and growth in Bulawayo's novel deprives the marginalised of the vital resources of their lives and livelihoods (Shiva 2014). Hence, this chapter will reveal that Bulawayo's narrative addresses social injustices such as land and environmental degradation, and poverty. It will also show the negative impact such social injustices have on humans, in particular, women and children.

Furthermore, the chapter contends that nature is an archetypal image of serenity and harmony. As such, its disruption is analogous to the exploitation of women and children. Nature is portrayed as a disputing metaphor of regeneration where women and children struggle to attain new identities. Not only are these new identities localised, but they transcend borders to affect the female immigrants in the United States of America.

5.2 Plot Summary: *We Need New Names*

NoViolet Bulawayo's debut novel, *We Need New Names*, is narrated by a young protagonist, Darling. The ten year old Darling chronicles her life experiences from the imaginary city of Paradise where she lives with her friends, Bastard, Chipo, Godknows, Sbho and Stina. She narrates the violence, the poverty and the struggles that they face in the shantytown of Paradise. The early chapters are narrated through the unapologetic and honest voice of a child as she navigates her way through the poverty stricken, diseased and violent world in Zimbabwe. She describes how through Operation *Murambatsvina*, her first home was demolished under Mugabe's rule. After their homes are destroyed, Darling and her friends resort to stealing guavas from the affluent suburb of Budapest where most of the white people live. The two distinct worlds of Paradise and Budapest show the different life-styles between the blacks and the privileged white community. The names given to Darling's friends, Bastard, Chipo, Godknows, Sbho, and Stina allows the reader to identify with their pain, suffering and struggles in the poverty stricken environment of Paradise. The unnamings of the disease HIV/AIDS, Operation *Murambatsvina* and Chipo's pregnancy also enables one to imagine and creatively contextualise the novel in Zimbabwe's history, political and economic struggles from the affected people. Darling moves to America to join her Aunt Fostolina. As an immigrant she is confronted by different challenges that she has to overcome to survive, for example, the change in weather, racism, segregation and missing home. Her journey from Paradise to Michigan enables her to understand the complex nature of the

ambiguous meaning of what upward mobility and life as an immigrant feels like. The ideals that she had about America are dismantled in the process. The ending of the novel is not conclusive as Darling is torn between going to college and memories of her life in Paradise and her friends.

5.3 Oppressive Conceptual Frameworks

According to Warren (2000), the set of beliefs and values that shape and reflect how one perceives oneself and one's world is a conceptual framework. Warren believes that "all systems of domination are justified and maintained by oppressive conceptual frameworks" (Warren 1993:195). She affirms the interconnectedness of all life. In other words, ecofeminism generates a holistic ecological approach that also includes human beings, nonhuman animals and naturism, that is, the exploitation of nature (Gruen 1993:16). Understanding these connections is significant to "understanding why the environment is a feminist issue, and conversely, why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns" (Shiva 1993:13). Using the same logic, both Plumwood and Warren concur that the logic of domination that affirms the interconnection between the domination of women and nature should be abolished. While the two scholars agree that there are differences between men and women, and blacks and whites, they argue that such differences should not be founded on hierarchy and domination. They advocate for a "notion of difference which does not breed dominance" (Warren 1997:124) but promotes reciprocity between human and nonhuman nature and engages practices aimed at ending dominations.

Following the same line of thought, Plumwood (2002) identifies a network of hierarchical dualisms in Western traditions. The set of dualisms include culture/nature, reason/nature, human/nature, male/female, coloniser/colonised, mind/body, rationality/animality etc.

Plumwood argues that these dualisms mutually reinforce each other and create conceptions of women using male-biased terms, hence the inferiorisation of women. As such, a patriarchal conceptual framework that justifies the oppression and domination of women, and that of the environment should be obliterated to end oppression. Hunt (2008:8) also supports this idea by observing that Plumwood argues for the “redefinition or reconstruction of reason in less oppositional and hierarchical ways.” She also advocates for a non-hierarchical and non-dualistic existence of human and nonhuman nature that is premised on reciprocity. In short, one deduces that ecofeminists oppose the logic of domination that locates men “up” and women and nature “down.” Ecofeminism’s primary concern is to liberate women from the systems that links them to a debased nonhuman nature. Hence, in its analysis of Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, this chapter will make visible such patriarchal oppressive frameworks that sanction the exploitation of women and the environment. Further, it will examine the forms of resistance adapted by the women in the text and evaluate their effectiveness.

Warren (2000) additionally identifies what she calls the “isms of domination”. These include racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism and ethnocentrism. She also notes that the isms of domination share common features, namely, value-hierarchical, Up-Down thinking, Oppositional and mutually exclusive value dualisms, power and privilege and logic of domination. The value-hierarchical feature attributes a higher status to men and a lower status to that which is down, women. Thus, men/culture is more valued (Up) and women are accorded a lower status (Down). The oppositional and mutually exclusive dualism places greater status and prestige to that which is associated with the male/culture than to that which is associated with female/nature. Then the power and privilege conceptual framework privileges those who are Up than those who are Down. Warren (2000) uses a classist society as an example in which the poor are less privileged than the wealthy. The former are perceived as less deserving of opportunities just because of their poverty status. Lastly, the

logic of domination oppressive framework is premised on the fact that superiority justifies domination (Warren 2000).

In other words, the Up are associated with the male qualities like reason and the Down lack these qualities. According to Warren (2000:47), “male-thinking follows a logic of domination that promotes the dualistic thinking of male/female). Hence, the subordination of women by men is justified. By implication, man is superior and woman is perceived as inferior. This chapter will use the above oppressive frameworks to interrogate the isms of domination in Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*. The frameworks will enable one to locate the unjustified domination of women in *We Need New Names* and also explore any alternatives as represented by the novel. However, the chapter will reveal that although the patriarchal oppressive frameworks are used as an analytical tool, they do not provide a strong base for analysing the twin dominations of women and nature (Warren 1997). It is also noted that because the frameworks are based on Western traditions, they affirm a singular or monolithic set of experiences that is shared by all women. Ecofeminists on the other hand, oppose this singularity and universality of women’s experiences and victimisation. Instead, they advocate for a more inclusive approach that takes seriously the connections between the domination of women and the domination of the environment (Warren 1997). Such an approach allows this chapter to negotiate the dualisms and interrogate the patriarchal oppressive frameworks that enhance the domination of the environment and the black women in Bulawayo’s text. Plural and diverse women’s voices in the novel are examined to engage with the social, racial, gender and class status issues and then, relate them to environmental issues. Hence, it is believed that an ecofeminist reading of the novel fosters a more holistic understanding of the twin dominations of women and nature in the novel.

As a social movement, ecofeminism distinguishes itself from the Oppressive Frameworks. It rejects the woman/nature and female/male binaries as possible frameworks to establish sustainable human relationships. Although ecofeminism is concerned with the interconnections between the oppression of women and the domination of nature, and presupposes that ecological survival depends on the social transformation of values, it also challenges binary systems based on male/female relationships or woman/nature connections. Ecofeminists like d'Eaubonne (1981) and Merchant (1990) advocate for a revolution that requires "destruction of male power to make way, not for female power or matriarchy, but for new egalitarian gender relations between humans and nature (cited in Howell 1997). In other words, in its bid to liberate women, ecofeminism does not intend to replace patriarchal power structures with matriarchal ones. Instead, it acknowledges the interconnectedness of all life and advocates for non-dominative relationships. Similarly, Birkeland (cited in Howell 1997:232) avers that "Ecofeminism is a value system, a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentricism and environmental destruction." Apparent in the aforesaid ecofeminists' views is the fact that the worldview espoused by ecofeminism cannot be divorced from the political, economic, social and cultural concerns in one's milieu.

5.4 Redefining the Environment

The idea of environment as understood by ecocritics refers to the entire physical surroundings or the entire ecosphere in which the human and nonhuman are interdependent. However, for Anglo-American scholars like Slaymaker (2001), environment refers to nature and the wilderness, which is the deserts, woods, hills, oceans and uninhabited space. The value of this view in the definition of what constitutes the environment is rather myopic and exclusive. Rather, it is more fruitful to think of the environment not as an external and distant phenomenon, but also include "cultivated and built landscapes, and cultural interactions with

those natural elements” (Wallace 2001: 8). Thus, ecocriticism expands the definition of the concept ‘environment’ to include housing, garbage, toxic contamination etc. which might not be suitable for discussion by Anglo-American environmentalists. Corroborating with this line of thought, Shiva (1994:2), defines the environment as a place that women live in and it encompasses everything that affects their lives. This view is also supported by Taylor’s view that mainstream environmental discourses include “issues of power, domination, racism, discrimination, distribution of risks and benefits” (cited in Warren 1994:50). In addition, issues like “lack of housing for the poor and homeless, hazardous working conditions, cancers, and other health effects arising from environmental causes” (ibid) have been added to the environmental debate. The expanded definition enables one to pay attention to political, social and economic. In addition, critiquing Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* enables one to examine the interconnectivity between gender, race and class. Such an exploration deconstructs the traditional canon of Anglo-American nature writing by insisting that the definition of nature writing is too narrow (Warren 1994:229). Using the definition of the environment above, an ecofeminist reading of *We Need New Names* transforms our social consciousness to acknowledge and respect both human beings and the environment (Kingsolver 1994:53 cited in Vakoch 2012:40).

5.5 Ecofeminism and Operation *Murambatsvina*

The destruction of houses and other facilities through Operation *Murambatsvina* speaks to environmental domination and degradation in *We Need New Names*. Bulawayo dialogues implicitly with the Operation *Murambatsvina* but never engages with it in a substantial manner. The traumatic Operation is chronicled from the perspective of a girl-child, Darling Nonkululeko Nkala. The girl-child’s lens is used by Bulawayo to examine the relationship between the environment and society, in particular women and children. Paradise, the shanty residential area is where Darling and her friends, Bastard, Chipso, Stina, Sbhoo, and Godknows

live. Although, Bulawayo does not refer to the bulldozing of the houses by the name, Darling conjures memories of the horrors of Operation *Murambatsvina*. Darling says that “the men knock down our house and Neane’s house and Josephat’s house and Bongi’s house and Sibob’s house and many houses. [...] men driving metal, metal slamming brick, brick crumbling” (WN, 66). And when the bulldozers finally leave, “everything is broken, everything is smashed, and everything is wrecked. It is sad faces everywhere, choking dust everywhere, broken walls and bricks everywhere, tears on people’s faces everywhere” (WN, 66). Through this heinous act, men, women and children are emotionally and psychologically broken. Significant to note is that the people in Paradise are made physically homeless. From an ecocritical stance, they are “uprooted from the soil of [their] ancestors” (Shiva 2014:99). Part of their lives is smashed by the steel jaws of the bulldozers. More significantly, the environment that sustains the people is also demolished. The harmonious relationship between people and their environment is disrupted through human action by using the government ordered bulldozers. This environmental crisis recalls Glotfelty and Fromm’s definition of ecocriticism as an “earth centred-approach to literary studies” (1996: xviii). Glotfelty’s definition suggests that the environment provides for and sustains human beings. Using the same logic, Shiva (1994) asserts the interdependence of human and nonhuman environment. She underscores the belief that causes of environmental degradation simultaneously cause a culture of male domination and oppression of women.

In an effort to restore order in Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, the earth’s basic life systems are endangered and demolished in the name of progress. The land that provided food and shelter for the people is desecrated in a bid by the Zimbabwean government to rid of poor housing communities. The interconnectivity between the people and nonhuman nature is sacrificed in the name of development. The people become “victims of progress” (Shiva 2014:99) as they are uprooted from the very soil “that provides the very essence of their

being” (ibid). The people in Paradise are affected by this “environment of harsh brutality” and in such an environment “all things begin to break down” (Cartey 1970:129). To attest to this, Darling in *We Need New Names* points out that, “We didn’t always live in this tin though. Before, we had a home and everything and we were happy. It was a real house with bricks, with a kitchen, sitting room, and two bedrooms. [...] Everything real” (WN, 62). Implied in Darling’s utterance is that the government was responsible for the great imbalance enacted against the people and their environment. Such an imbalance suggests that the environment is part of a system in which humanity exists (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996). The destruction of the people’s homes simultaneously affects the environment and humans. However, despite their struggles and challenges, Bulawayo gives agency to her female characters and draws attention to important environmental issues that affect black women.

Operation *Murambatsvinais* depicted as being vicious to women. The women pay a disproportionately heavy price in the aftermath of Operation *Murambatsvina*. Mai Tari and Nomviyo offer a visual record of the devastation caused by the Operation. Mai Tari throws herself down in front of a bulldozer to protect her house. But one policeman hits her on the head with a gun and blood gushes out. Nomviyo had left her son Freedom sleeping in the house. They search for him in the rubble. When they find him, “his small body is so limp and covered in dust you think it’s just a thing and a baby” (WN, 67). Such violence not only reveals the lack of sympathy by the ruling elite, but represents a threat to the social fabric and physical survival of a community. The destruction is just deplorable as Godknows points out later, that “There is nothing but trees and dry grass and brown earth [...] and emptiness” (69). In the same vein, the operation leaves men, women and children with nothing but emptiness. The “dry grass and brown earth” represent the lifeless condition of the environment and the people in it. The pain is unbearable as people are left with no other form of accommodation. By giving centrality to the child’s voice, Bulawayo is able to combine the environment, the

feminine condition, the social and the political to give a holistic picture of the impact the destroyed had on the people.

The objective of Operation *Murambatsvina*, “to remove dirt” and cleanse the city of Harare, supposedly implies that Mai Tari’s house and others, and Nomviyo’s son, Freedom are the dirt that the ruling authorities need to get rid of. Chimedza (2008:89), refers to this dirt as the “crawling mass of maggots” [...] “overwhelmingly composed of the economically weakest groups of all: women, children, the unemployed and underemployed, recent migrants from the rural areas escaping droughts and hunger [...]” These marginalised people do not warrant consideration when the ruling elite makes decisions and policies. Nevertheless, as a result of the destruction, Darling and her family move to Paradise where her Mother complains about the tinned house, the food that is not there, the clothes and everything else. It is also significant to note that, as a direct consequence of the *Murambatsvina* Operation, the people in Paradise are deprived of the basic commodities such as food and shelter. As such, both the life-giving processes and human life are devalued. Hence, the violence against human nature, in particular, women and children intensifies. The women are displaced and alienated from their livelihoods and the “natural resources on which their livelihoods depend – their land, their forests, their water, their seeds and biodiversity” (Shiva in Preface, p. xv). Bulawayo’s account of *Murambatsvina* clearly shows that the most vulnerable people are the women and children. Experiences such as these shaped their livelihood. The ultimate devastation of the environment; including food crops and soils is a result of the so-called dirt-cleansing revolution.

Darling's account of *Operation Murambatsvina* reveals how the livelihood of the poor communities is destroyed. The people's history is erased. For instance, the black stool (WN, 74), passed on from generation to generation; representing Mzilawulandelwa's "whole history" (WN, 75) is also destroyed during Murambatsvina and ultimately affirms that what people do to the environment directly affects them. Apparent also, is the important realisation of the connectivity between the environment and the woman and girl-child's livelihood in *We Need New Names*. In the narrative, there is no clear dividing line between the Operation Murambatsvina crisis, the Paradise environment and the women's livelihood. In fact, far from destroying the environment, the women's struggles are struggles for survival and significantly, of resistance. Such struggles are in line with ecofeminism philosophy; as a practical movement, which aims at addressing urgent mundane social concerns ranging from health, sexual abuse, political issues and economic development. MotherLove's resilience keeps the community; men, women and children strong despite having lost their belongings, history and identity during Operation Murambatsvina. In Darling's dream, MotherLove's voice is likened to a swinging ripe fruit that one can put in one's mouth, and taste its sweetness (WN, 68). By naturalising MotherLove's voice, the relationship between women and nature is reinforced. Hence, Twine (2001) cements this view that women are closely entwined to the environment. MotherLove's voice is therapeutic; it heals and soothes the wounded community and hence, brings peace to the community.

Paradise, the poverty stricken residential township, with the tin shack dwellings, provides slums as shelter for many people. However, it is noted that Paradise is a diseased township as seen in Darling's father and the woman who hangs herself; both have AIDS. Hence, the crisis of development, resulting from mistakenly perceiving better infrastructure as satisfying the people's basic needs, displaces people from their homes and deprives them of their integrity and humanity. The brutal violence on the environment affects

the people in a deplorable manner. Darling's voice confirms that they own nothing except the deplorable memories of Operation *Murambatsvina*. With the environment totally wiped out, the community fails to get the essentials; they lack health facilities, education, food and shelter. With no health facilities, even the men had to go to the bush to relieve themselves. Though the men appeared to be strong in the presence of their women and children, alone "they fell apart like crumbling towers and wept with the wretched grief of forgotten concubines" (WN, 76). Displaced from their land and history, the community has to depend on the environment for survival. What seems to be at stake is not just the people's lives but the survival of the whole; the ecosystem, the community and local knowledge (Shiva 1994). In the midst of numerous challenges, it is the women's epistemological knowledge that keeps the community afloat. It is the women who, "gently rose from the hearths, beat dust off their skirts, and planted themselves like rocks in front of their men and children and shacks, and only then did all appear almost tolerable" (WN, 77). For example, it is MotherLove who engages in sustenance and activities to help people to forget. She "appeared with enormous barrels in which to brew a potent liquor that would make people forget. She also appeared with songs in her throat and the most colourful dresses in her sacks. Despite the circumstances, she refused to appear like something coming undone" (WN, 76). She engages her knowledge of the environment to challenge the situation. Thus, one might argue that through their environmental knowledge women are productive. They also realise that environmental hazards are intricately linked to human hazards, hence are inseparable. Thus, they turn to the environment for survival. Usher (1994:40) summarises this argument:

This crisis of ecological collapse demands that to survive, we move instead towards healing, towards the whole. As women, we must learn to become the measure of ourselves, in body and in mind. We must find strength within that is so deep and so rooted that it cannot be undermined.

Given the ecological collapse of the “local natural economy” (Shiva2014:71), the infrastructure and the health system in Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, MotherLove is seen as an activist and symbol of resistance. A new perspective to survival is created through women’s inner strength; a creation of the whole, the biosphere. Her shebeen is not just a drinking place; it epitomises hope and a spiritual rebirth for the people in Paradise. They come together in MotherLove’s shack to embrace the hope and joy of winning the elections. The bond that is created by the men and women could be perceived as a survival strategy. Men and women are ‘temporarily liberated’ from their pain by coming together and helping each other, thus rejecting the male/female dualistic relationship.

5.6 Ecofeminism and the Body Politic

Health and environmental concerns in *We Need New Names* are intricately connected. As such, HIV and AIDS in *We Need New Names*, are perceived not as a public health problem but as “a phenomenon embedded in, and inseparable from other social realities” (Shiva 1994:10) and the environment. Darling’s father comes back dying of the disease, “The Sickness.” He comes back after many years in South Africa, “unable to do anything, vomiting and vomiting, ... and defecating on himself, and smelling like something dead in there, dead and rotting, his body a black, terrible stick; ... “so thin, like he eats pins and wire...” (WN, 89). Darling’s father’s diseased body parallels the diseased and dysfunctional environment of Paradise. According to Shiva (1994:3), there are subtle and complex connections between diseases of the human body, the decay of ecosystems and the breakdown of civil society. The decay in Paradise is represented by the depleted body of Darling’s father’s body. He no longer has hands but “he lifts his bones and pushes a claw” (WN, 90). He feels like “dry wood,” his eyes are “sunken” like “he has swallowed the sun” (WN, 103). Both Darling and her mother are the most affected by both the depleted environment with its shacks and the depleted body of Darling’s father. They lack the basic

fundamentals necessities of life such as space, clean air, healthy food and time. The scarcity of such commodities affects mostly women and children.

For instance, Darling's girlhood is suddenly erased as she transcends to womanhood. She has to "watch Father now, like he is a baby and [she] is his mother. It means that when Mother and Mother of Bones are not there, [she cannot play with [her] friends" (WN, 93). She takes over the adult responsibility of caring for her sick father. The isolation and loneliness affects her relationship with her friends. She hates her father for isolating her from her friends, "because they were the most important thing to [her] and when [she is] with them, [she] feels she is not herself (94). She develops bitterness and hatred towards her sick and bonny father (WN, 96). She wishes him to die so she can play with her friends; she says "... die now because this is not fair" (WN, 96). As a child, she forfeits her independence to nurse her father. She also describes how Mother is affected. She says that, "Mother's eyes are tired and her face is tired; ever since Father came she has been busy doing things for him — watching him and cooking for him and feeding him and changing him and worrying over him" (WN, 97). In addition, Mother goes to the border to sell her stuff for her to sustain her sick husband and family. She has to source family provisions such as food, and medicine. In this regard, the environment becomes a feminist issue as the detrimental effect is more on women and the girl-child than the men. Mira Shiva, cited in Shiva (1994:2) elaborates "how health issues and environmental issues are the same." She demarcates that "diseases as arising from two conditions — deprivation of essentials or an excess of non-essentials; ecological erosion leads to the former, pollution to the latter." In this case, the ecological erosion of the environment deprives the people of basic essentialsthat sustain their livelihoods.

5.7 Un-naming the Nameables: An Ecofeminist Perspective

We Need New Names, gives new names to a number of known events and features. Darling's father suffers from AIDS, referred to as "The Sickness." Chipo's friends refer to her pregnancy as the "the stomach." The Operation *Murambatsvina* event is not named such but is described through Darling's experiences. Darling's narration reveals how, in particular, the women and children are affected by the destruction of the environment. It is an account that reveals that what man does to the environment parallels man's domination of the marginalised, women and children. The disruption of the environment is seen as analogous to the destruction and exploitation of women and the girl-child's livelihood. One of the BBC and CNN people compares the destruction of the people's homes by the bulldozers to a tsunami and says, it's like "A fucking tsunami walks on water, [...] it came out of the water and left all those people dead in that other country (WN, 67-68). The metaphor of the tsunami reflects the magnitude of the environmental destruction. A tsunami is merciless "as it erupts from a ferocious quake within the earth and ferociously gushes onto land and destroys everything in its path..." (Fitzpatrick 2015:11). The tsunami obliterates the environment, displaces people and leaves them homeless. Further, the earth that sustains their livelihood is stripped bare and they are left with nothing to eat, and with no place they called home; no clothes and no hope. Getting through the crisis requires an understanding of the impact humans have on nature, affecting it and being affected by it. Specifically, environmental issues had to be seen as human issues since the ecosystem is positioned at the centre of everything. The relationship between humans and the environment intensifies as both are violated by the actions of those in power. Thus, the earth's basic support life systems are destroyed, not just through 'development' but through man's actions. The bulldozers have "metal teeth" (WN, 65) and when they finally leave, "everything is, everything is smashed, everything is wrecked ... broken bricks everywhere, tears on people's faces everywhere" (WN, 66). The government ordered steel jaws to destroy not only the environment but the

people's lives and dreams are shattered, leaving behind painful memories. Also implied in this destructive process is that, the force of the government was akin to a force of nature, like a tsunami, beyond the people's control (Fitzpatrick 2015:11).

The nature of the relationship between humans and the environment as presented in Bulawayo's literary text is a major concern of ecocriticism. Hence, this chapter's argument that Bulawayo uses the girl-child voice to conscientise the readers about human activities and policies that lead to environmental degradation. Darling is given a voice when she renames this historical event. Thus, the girl-child is made visible as she recounts the incident from an insider's view, after having been silenced through the West media reports. Hence, the connection with the environment affords her a platform to speak and name the un-nameable.

The view that nature holds an important place in the lives of these people as they relocate to Paradise is reflected in Bulawayo's descriptions of their movements. Their movements are animalised. They appeared single file, "like ants; in swarms, like flies and in angry waves, like a wretched sea" (WN, 73). The metaphor of "ants" and "flies" reinforces and justifies the inferior status of the people. By implication, Operation *Murambatsvina* reduced them to nothingness, stripped them of their dignity and individual existence. Their shared, common experience of anger at their loss and their brokenness gives them a singular identity as they all look the same. The state planned Operation *Murambatsvina* not only contributes to the ecological destruction of the environment but also increases their vulnerability. It pauperises millions of people, inferiorising them into "ants" and "flies" (WN, 73). Women, children and men are homogenised into the singular "swarm" (ibid) identity which renders them powerless. They are all targets of oppression and exploitation by the Zimbabwean government's "maldevelopment" (Shiva2014:79) programme. Their anger, represented by the "angry waves" is reflected Rigby (cited in Gaard et al 2013: 129) supports this idea by observing that, "homogenization is intrinsic to the logic of colonisation, whereby the Other is

not regarded as an individual,” but as a “member of a class stereotyped as interchangeable, replaceable, all alike [...] the colonised are stereotyped as ‘all the same’ in their deficiency” (Plumwood 2002: 102).

However, one also observes a subversion of this homogenisation in which the age and gender stereotypes are debunked. For instance, MotherLove is not just portrayed as inherently nurturing and close to nature, but she is an epitome of resistance as she creates survival strategies that help sustain the ‘broken’ community. Her affinity to nature facilitates a strong link between the people and the nonhuman environment. Also, Darling and her friends show how despite the eroded environment, Paradise is a beautiful, peaceful and heavenly habitat. Despite the lack of health and educational facilities, the people are able to survive. The imaginary habitat of Paradise is also described as “all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry; the shacks are the muddy colour of dirty puddles after the rains” (WN, 34). The metaphor of the sheepskin suggests that besides being endangered by the hot sun and weathered like a sheepskin, the soil still sustains a lot of people. What makes Paradise a “paradise” is that it is a home to many. Although the land may be flawed, and may not be the ideal home city home, Paradise is a beautiful haven for those with demolished homes. Darling and her friends are able to identify with it because of its heavenly and inherent beauty. In comparison, places like Budapest and Michigan lack this innate beauty because of their racist tendencies and the extremely cold weather that destroys all plants in the environment.

5.8 The Forest and Mountain Spaces

The forest and the mountain space in *We Need New Names* gives a voice to the girl-child. One may argue that Bulawayo reclaims the forest and mountain space by asserting the girl-child’s existence. Darling and her friends Godknows, Stina, Chipso, Sbhoo and Bastard live in a

world where they are silenced and made invisible because of their age, gender and race. According to Bukenya (cited in Kaschula 2001:33), the African girlchild is a “conspicuously ‘silenced’ person in a conspicuously ‘silenced’ continent” and the marginalised girl child’s position in society is a result of this “silencing or de-oracisation” (ibid). As such, Bulawayo’s re-naming of these children in the forest space is an attempt to draw attention to their visibility in a society that is riddled with political, social and economic problems. Fitzpatrick (2015:3) reinforces this view by noting that, “Bulawayo’s use of naming draws attention to the status of Darling as a subaltern, an individual that is usually one who was colonised and/or a female of colour that is rendered completely powerless because of their social status.” The oppressed and subaltern status of the girl-child is represented by Bulawayo’s renaming of Chipo’s pregnancy and the rape.

Nonhuman nature (the forest) is presented as an archetypal image of serenity and harmony in *We Need New Names*. The forest space is transformed into an Emergency Room (ER) to save Chipo from her “stomach.” A social transformation is already taking place as Darling and her friends obtain new names and new identities. In the forest, they become part of the ecological web of life, not as “masters, conquerors and owners of the Earth’s resources” (Shiva 2014: xxi) but as “members of the Earth family” (ibid). Darling and her friends take responsibility to care for the other weaker and marginalised members of the community like Chipo. They reject binarisms and promote reciprocity with the environment when they use the forest space as an ER. A similar reciprocity is also evident in Mother’s efforts to sustain the family. When Darling and Mother take care of Father, the values associated with the dualistic or hierarchical relationship are polarised. Hence, reading Bulawayo’s novel this way underscores critical features of feminist ecology. An interrogation of Mother’s and the children’s relationships to the environment reveals how ecofeminism is an anti-dualistic and anti-hierarchical form of thought.

Chipo is raped by her grandfather at a very tender age. Bulawayo describes the sexual abuse without naming it per se as 'rape.' The rape is alluded to through Chipo's description of the rape act. She says, "He did that, my grandfather ... he got on me and pinned me down like that and he clamped a hand over my mouth and was heavy like a mountain" (WN, 41). Her pregnancy is not talked about. To the adults in Paradise, her condition is invisible. At the age of eleven, no one questions the pregnancy and the rape. Rather, the society in Paradise reinforces the silencing of the girl-child. Chipo is faced with a system which is based on unequal societal power relations; a system that is a part of the patriarchal agenda and conceives rape as normal. However, an examination of the woman-nature relationship in the text reveals that Bulawayo seems to question the patriarchal hierarchical structure that dominates both nature and women. By implication, she questions the functionality of both her family and society that has consistently and systematically denied her a voice or the "facility of oracy" (Bukenya in Kaschula 2001:33). Amidst an insecure and sterile situation as a girl child in a patriarchal Zimbabwean society; a situation that is further aggravated by the harsh economic climate as well as the HIV and AIDS pandemic, the mountain space restores the girl-child's voice.

Chipo suffers emotional trauma. She has this confusing look; "this look of pain" (WN, 41). After the rape, Chipo stopped talking and if she really needed to say something, would use her hands. The African girl-child is seriously de-oracised. Her power of oracy is stifled by her family and the patriarchal milieu in which she finds herself in. In this regard, she becomes invisible and powerless. Bukenya in Kaschula (2001:33) reiterates that, "productive oracy would entail self-definition, self-assertion, negotiation of relationships, resolution of conflicts, claiming of rights and indictment of their violation." Lack of this productive oracy deems Chipo vulnerable and powerless in the face of men like her grandfather. Sharma (1993:88) says, "The human child is the most helpless and weak being". Thus, children are

accorded a lower status to that of women and men. As such, their powerlessness, vulnerability and low status has meant that their suffering is invisible and unheard.

The children's inability to connect successfully to the environment by virtue of their age, race and class shows their vulnerability. The poverty and lack of essential commodities makes the children and women more vulnerable to other forms of violence and such as rape. This claim is justified by Shiva (2014: xvi) when she says that the "rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked ... in shaping women's everyday lives." It is in this context that these connections are viewed as feminist issues. An analysis of violence towards women and nature from an ecofeminist perspective thus emphasises the children and women's simultaneous struggles against patriarchal abuse and environmental impacts as a result of Operation *Murambatsvina*. Hence, the metaphor of the "eyes of children," in telling their stories of conflict, pain, HIV/AIDS, poverty, trauma and desperation. By using the voice of the Zimbabwean girl-child, the complex roots of pain and trauma in the country assume new meanings and significance.

For instance, believing that the pregnancy will kill Chipo, Darling and her friends attain new names and statuses to help Chipo get rid of her stomach. What is of importance in this strategy is that the boys, Bastard, Godknows and Stina are left behind because this is a "woman thing" (WN, 78). The girls re-define the forest space and thus re-establish the patriarchal order. The setting of this dramatic event is entirely nature. A significant relationship is established between the forest landscape and the children. The landscape is the dominant character and provides the resources that the children need for the abortion process. For Chipo to survive, the children use the environment instead of dominating it. Thus, they reverse the woman/nature dualism by acknowledging the forest space as a co-inhabitant. They plan to carry out the procedure in the forest, "in the mphafa" tree (WN, 79) because it has a "nice big shade" (WN, 79). The eco-function of the tree shows their dependence on

nonhuman nature. Also noted is that the patient, Chipo, lies on the ground, as if to connect with the earth. The forest, where the procedure will take place, is also renamed an Emergency Room (ER). Within the forest space, the children are able to get all the instruments that they need for the procedure; the hanger, the rocks, twisted metal cup, a leather belt and a purple round thing. In the forest environment, the girls attain new statuses of change agents and decision makers concerning Chipo's fate. Darling is renamed Dr. Bullet, Sbho is Dr. Roz and Forgiveness is Dr. Cutter. In order to redeem Chipo, the girls have to undergo this metamorphosis. Thus, an explicit kinship is established between the forest environment and the girl-doctors. Each girl tries to discover a new self or identity in the forest space. Predicated on the ecofeminist theory, this chapter posits that the hardships that Darling and her friends have to endure are illuminated by the natural setting as an intimate relationship between the girls and the forest is established (Smith and Watson 2010).

Problematizing the girl's naming process becomes imperative at this juncture. At a glance, the renaming from African names to English names is a metaphor that reveals how black people had been colonised and at the same time made homeless by their own government. In this respect, one may argue that Bulawayo shows how sexuality and nature interlink to unravel the injustices faced not only by the girl-child, but by the Zimbabwean lower economic community. One may also argue that the girl-children fail to transcend the "Other" boundaries by reinforcing the dichotomy through their new names which reflect the ideals that they have about America, that it is a land of freedom and bounty. As such, the girls' American names imply a continuation of the colonisation process (Shiva 2014:71). Such a naming process also invariably contests this type of development that is premised on the Western patriarchy's worldview. Both the American doctors' names and the ER infuse a political dimension in the human and nonhuman connection. This suggests that connections between environmental issues and the unjustified subordination of women and other

marginalised groups should be taken seriously (Warren 1997). Of significance to this chapter is that the renaming process represents a feminist response that is ecological; that “reactivates a conscious awareness of, and dialogues with, nature, lifting it out of its patriarchal definition as something passive and inert — a definition that has also been extended to women” (Shiva 2014:4). Thus, we are compelled to recognise connections and continuity of life within an organic, evolving, dynamic nature (ibid). Durkheim (cited in Plumwood 1993:50) supports this idea by pointing out that “dualism denies continuity, treating its pairs as comprising ‘two worlds between which there is nothing in common’, worlds between which there is a vacuum.” With ecofeminism, separation is challenged as it emphasises ecological interconnectedness of human and nonhuman natures. In *We Need New Names*, such connections between the girl-children, their environment and their society are not separable by rigid and insular boundaries. The boundaries between them are porous and flexible, allowing interchange and influence (ibid). One may thus argue that such an agenda cuts across dualistic relationships to develop a strong sense of interrelationships and meaningful relationships between human-beings and the environment.

One draws an important relationship between the sexual violation of the girl-child, women, lack of health facilities, poverty and the environment in Paradise. The intertwined issues reveal how the girl-child and the women in Paradise carry an “environmental burden disproportionate to that of their male counterparts” (Crawford 2013: 87). The forest ER represents a failed public health system which in turn impacts on the black woman, a point that is further articulated in their relegation to invisible spaces in the text. Hence, using the forest as an ER represents nature as a congenial site to critique Operation *Murambatsvina* and subsequently, the policies of the ruling party. The forest space “generates bonds of affinity that enable the [children] to awaken to new political possibilities about themselves as agents protective of a natural world” (Smith and Watson 2010:190). Not only do the children protect

the natural world, but they believe they are saviours of the girl-child's, Chipo's life. Ironically, to achieve this, the girls' new names are associated with the United States, a "land they consider knowledgeable and full of resources, just like ER" (WN, 21), since "ER is what they do in a hospital in America" (WN, 84). The ideals that are upheld are those which associate America with success and the availability of resources. By implication, Africa is the "Other", the undeveloped continent that needs to be civilised by the American continent. Amidst the horrific and traumatic effects of Operation *Murambatsvina* and the steel and massive jaws of the bulldozers, the forest gives the children purpose and meaning. They are able to relocate themselves to a different world, the States. They provide a strong statement of ecofeminism by establishing a functional ER in the forest. The children are connected to one another and to the environment in a manner unknowable to the adults in Paradise. By so doing, they escape the invisibility and oppression of patriarchy by creating their own ER and new names for themselves.

Furthermore, practical and liberatory connections are a significant agenda in *WeNeed New Names*. MotherLove is one of the agents who advocates for social reform, social change and security for the children. She saves Chipo from Darling and her friends' plan to remove her bulge. She exudes power and authority over both the environment and the children. Arguably, the open forest space symbolically shows the porosity or the non-existence of once-assumed stable borders (Grewe-Volpp 2013: 223) in both Budapest and Paradise. It is in the forest space that the girl-children and MotherLove assume new identities, go for healing and find sustenance and reassurance. To achieve this, MotherLove and the girls challenge culturally fixed notions of the forest space. Traditionally, adventure in open spaces is a preserve of male heroes. However, Darling and her friends connect with the natural environment to "transform the public space to give it meaning and significance. They reinterpret the local public space making it more conducive to female subjectivity and gender vision (Comer cited in Grewe-

Volpp 2013). This realisation is reaffirmed through the symbol of the butterfly, representing freedom and spiritual rebirth. Significant to note is that the purple butterfly sits on Chipo's head and when it flies away they chase it screaming out for luck (WN, 88). The children connect with the butterfly within the forest space. For Chipo, the butterfly represents a new form of strength and potential that would enable her to have the baby that she is carrying. The butterfly symbolically asserts their freedom and visibility. At the same time, the forest space allows them to create "more democratic relationships with ecofeminist values of equality, care, and responsibility" (Grewe-Volpp 2013:227).

The validity of this position is premised on the fact that the children are at peace and in harmony with their environment. However, one notes that the appearance of MotherLove in the forest ER comes as a surprise to the children. She does not scold the children, instead she allows Chipo to embrace her, thus cementing the reciprocity between human and nonhuman nature. Hence, both MotherLove and the girls are not confined to traditional boundaries of femininity. Instead, they deconstruct and challenge the oppressive frameworks that circumscribe socially sanctioned responsibilities (Weighing :65). This relationship is reinforced by King (1989:130) when she says that the starting point of ecofeminism is "where one uses mind and history to reason from the 'is' to the 'ought' and to reconcile humanity with nature, within and without." In creating the ER in the forest space, Darling and her friends "reason from the 'is' to the 'ought'" (ibid). Instead of being tamed and controlled by nature, they conceptualise strategies to reconcile themselves with nature, thus challenging woman/nature dualistic relationships.

5.9 The Tree Symbol

The tree symbol is used to explain racial, class and gender relationships in *We Need New Names*. Using the daily activities that men, women and children in Paradise engage in, this chapter argues that the tree is an essential environmental element in their lives. Using an ecocritical lens, this section will show how the “tree” is used as a significant symbol in Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*. Trees are utilised symbolically in the novel to evoke interconnections between human beings and the natural world. Heise (2007), explains that the ecocritical approach enables one to perceive nature as both literal and symbolic. Also, significant to note is that the ecocritical approach enables the reader to see the multiple functions of trees in *We Need New Names*.

The “mphafa” tree provides shade to Darling and her friends as they try to save Chipso from her stomach. They also get guavas from the trees in Budapest to satisfy their hunger. The men sit under the jacaranda trees as they play the draught game. The woman in the green dress is found hanging on a tree. After Operation *Murambatsvina*, with all ablution facilities destroyed, both young and old have to relieve themselves in the bush, sheltered by trees and their bountiful leaves. According to Fortmann and Firfax (cited in Warren 1997:7), many Western foresters literally see that “multiculture tree species are useful, that men and women may have different uses for the same tree or may use different trees for different purposes.” The varied ecological functions of the different trees show how the people in Paradise relate to the environment for their optimal existence. Hence, the tree is used symbolically in *We Need New Names* to explain the link or relationships between human beings and their environment. Arguably, the environment affects the lives of the people in Paradise thus reaffirming that what people do to the land affects them and that they depend on the environment for survival. However, what is disturbing about this position is the portrayal of the tree as a life denying factor.

Also significant to note, is that Darling and her friends climb trees to view the proceedings at Bornfree's funeral and to observe the black power uprising in Budapest. According to Warren (2000), how one narrates the experience of climbing a tree is also a feminist issue. Darling says, "I climb to the topmost branches" (WN, 136) to see the coffin and the mourners. Most significantly, the tree allows them to witness Bornfree's funeral and to be part of the angry mourners. Something is a feminist issue if it helps one understand the oppression of women, and why women's oppression is linked with the unjustified domination of nature (Gaard and Gruen 2005). Culturally, the process of climbing trees is a task closely associated with boys and men; suggesting that the environment is also a gendered space. The tree climbing act accords the girls a masculine identity. The feminine identity is deconstructed by Darling and her female friends when they climb the tree in Heavenway and the guava trees. Thus, one may argue that both the tree and the girl child become active participants in this process instead of mere resources (Haraway 1991:207). For the girl child climbing trees is not a mere adventure but the guavas are food to them. The children, victims of the land destroyed by the bulldozers and the land stolen from them by the whites, eat guavas because it is the "the only way to kill [their] hunger" (WN, 16). The appropriation of land and Operation *Murambatsvina*, results in the collapse of service providers such as water, ablution facilities, health and more significantly, the land they relied on for survival. Hence, when the children steal guavas, they demonstrate the harsh realities, a result of lack of resources. Not only are the children connected to one another as they steal the guavas and climb trees, but they are connected to nature for survival. Knowing all this helps one understand how the women's and children's livelihoods are connected to contemporary environmental problems (Gaard and Gruen 2005). The political game that Darling and her friends play after Bornfree's funeral demonstrates that they are ecologically conscious of the harsh economic conditions facing them. Also, after the game, the narrator notes, "We are tired. Our voices are hoarse. Our faces are drained. Our

weapons dangle at our sides, all bloodied. Our clothes are bloodied. The flag of our country is bloodied” (WN, 143). May be after hoping for change and nothing happens, this radical action is what the adults should take to resolve the situation instead of looking “like bones after you have chewed away the meat” (WN, 134). The children conceptualise new identities in the violent drama that they perform at the cemetery. However, this is not to say that people should engage in violence, rather, they should identify possible practical social transformation strategies to address their situation.

5.10 Ecofeminism in Relation to Gender and Development

This section interrogates another form of violence against nature and women, which is development. The mall that is built by the Chinese and Operation *Murambatsvina* are the two forms of development in Bulawayo’s text that will be analysed in this section. An analysis of what is seen as ‘development’ and women issues in *We Need New Names* reveals the unjustified exploitation and domination of women through “the agenda of ‘economic reforms’ set by capitalist patriarchy” (Shiva 2014: xvii), in this case, the Zimbabwean government. Thus, one may argue that Operation *Murambatsvina* is such an agenda, hence, the endeavour to interrogate how the resulting environmental crisis intertwines with gender issues in *We Need New Names*.

Operation *Murambatsvina*’s main project was to ‘develop’ or improve the well-being of all but unfortunately, it “affected hundreds of thousands of poor urban residents (Potts 2006: 273). The government viewed it as an operation to eradicate poverty and restore order in the country. Its main agenda was to eradicate illegal housing and activities from the city (ibid). President Mugabe reaffirmed this agenda on 25 June 2005, during the opening of the 22nd ZANU PF National Consultative Assembly in Harare. He told the delegates that this was a clean-up operation or a reconstruction programme designed to “weed out hideouts of crime

and grime, filthy stalls and encourage the construction of orderly planned and tidy residential and business structures in their place.” However, what this development did not indicate was the “environmental destruction and the creation of poverty associated with this development process” (Shiva 2014:71). Hence, Darling laments that they live in a tin house, where everything is unreal; her parents’ bed is made up “plastic and chicken’s and duck’s feathers and old pieces of cloth” (WN, 63). Mother also complains about the tinned house in Paradise and the scarcity of food. Both the social and the economic orders of their lives are changed completely and what remains is an impoverished ecosystem which can no longer sustain the people. Hence, resource destruction in the name of development is a feminist issue. Shiva (2014:73) further contends that the “scarcity of water, soil fertility, and genetic wealth are considerably diminished as a result of the development process.” Such natural resources form the bedrock of the people’s survival economy. Although their scarcity impoverishes men, women and children in *We Need New Names*, an ecofeminist analysis of the text reveals that it has more of a detrimental impact on women and children than on men. Momsen (1995) also notes that as household managers, women are the first to suffer when access to sustainable livelihoods is unbalanced. Hence, the environmental destruction, a result of Operation *Murambatsvina* helps us understand why Mother has to go to the boarder to sell and why she has a secret relationship with another man. Darling says she doesn’t know what the man looks like but he comes in like a ghost and sneaks away at night (WN, 64).

Essentially, it is women like Darling’s mother and MotherLove whose active roles in environmental issues promote hope and ensure sustenance. MotherLove brews beer and sings to entertain people in her shack. Similarly, Momsen (1995) explains that women shoulder the burden during economic crisis times. She notes that when “the water becomes unpotable, the food stores dry up, the trees disappear, the land becomes untenable and the climate changes,” the women work harder to ensure that their families survive. Darling’s Mother and

MotherLove engage in different activities to ensure that both the community and their families are protected. However, the fact that this “sustenance economy” (Shiva 2008) or production for sustenance is not regarded as development or production suggests that efforts by Mother and MotherLove to sustain the society are treated as maldevelopment. Despite their efforts, the Western dualistic thinking which reflects the inferiorisation of women and nature is not dismantled. Ecofeminism’s agenda is to dismantle such dualistic boundaries in a bid to find solutions to the survival crisis. Ultimately, one may argue that these women are seen as progressive and should be acknowledged for their contribution in the community.

When resources are used for ‘development,’ sustainable lifestyles are also destroyed. For example, the building of the mall in Shanghai by the Chinese means that essential resources such as land and water are also destroyed. The Chinese mall metaphorically represents the link between the rape of the earth (wastage of resources to advance society) and the rape of women. Invariably, this point is very important ecological threatening situations in which resources are eroded but there seems to be no conscious effort to replenish them. Darling narrates that before the Chinese bring their machines, they burned the grass (NW, 43). The machines with their terrible jaws, mauled the earth, “machines grind rocks, machines belch clouds of smoke, machines iron the ground” (WN, 42). This process involves the erosion of the resource base for existence thus denying large numbers of people the means of survival. This is so because the Western notion of development is based on the exploitation and degradation of human and nonhuman nature thus creating ecological imbalance.

With the ecological instability, new forms of poverty are created (Shiva 2014:72) and children and women are the most affected. For instance, as Darling and her friends peep into the tent to see what is inside, they see “two black girls in skinny jeans and heels and weaves walk out” (WN, 45). The black girl-child thus, learns that providing sexual favours was the route to survive (Stein cited in Gaard et al. 2013:191). The destruction of the land and the

resources by the Chinese parallels the exploitation of the black girls as they engage in sexual relationships in order to survive. The mutual inferiorisation of women and the environment is reinforced. Both women and the environment are exploited by the destructive capitalist patriarchal systems. Viewed in this light, ecofeminism reveals the interconnectedness of various social and environmental issues that may not, upon first glance, seem related” (Crawford cited in Gaard et al. 2013:88). As Warren in *Feminism and Ecology* states, “It is only when we dive deep and see the interconnections between various systems of oppression that our feminist theories will hold much water.” Such deep diving will perhaps transform human and nonhuman relations and bring about a realisation that it is possible to live equitably and sustainably (Gaard et al. 2013:197).

The construction of the Chinese mall also reveals how the men are impacted by environmental injustice. Whilst the Chinese believe that the mall with “all nice shops inside, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Versace” (46) will benefit the people, Darling and her friends believe that China is a “red devil looking for people to eat so it can grow fat and strong” (WN, 47) and “should be a dragon [...] that way, it will be a real beast, always on top” (WN, 48). The children are aware that they will not benefit from the mall because they are poor. They are also aware that the Chinese are depriving them of their land as they shout that they should leave their country and go build where they came from. A closer examination of the Chinese development agenda reveals that they present themselves as saviours and guardians of the community in Paradise while in fact their project is to exploit local ecology for capital accumulation. They merely seek easy access to natural resources as well as to human labour. The Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Versace foreign labels are just names for a “system which promises a better life for all but ends in killing life itself” (Mies 2014: xxiv). Darling and her friends seem to realise that nature is life and that ecological degradation implies domination over both human and nonhuman nature. Hence, the children’s feeble shouts are an expression

of their anger and at the same time, a sense of responsibility to end the earth's destruction. Okuyade (2013: ix) also points out that, "Mankind continues to make concerted efforts to ensure that the other worlds are kept alive since the human world solely depends on them for sustenance and existence." The contention here is that both human and nonhuman nature can only live in harmony with each other if they help each other.

In the novel, the children also realise that both their land and the men who are shovelling earth into wheelbarrows are exploited by the Chinese men. The latter have protective clothing while the black men work in regular clothes — torn T-shirts, shorts, trousers cut at the knees, overalls, flip-flops, tennis shoes" (WN, 42). In addition, Darling says that they "look like they've been playing in dirt all their lives — it's all over their bodies, their clothes, their hair" (WN, 44). A value hierarchy relationship is established between the Chinese men and, nature, black women and men. As such, one may argue that Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* shows how colonialism, capitalist patriarchy, racism and gender intertwine and directly link to the environment.

5.11 The Logic of Domination: the Budapest and Paradise Environments

The logic of domination conceptual framework is used to analyse the relationship between Budapest and Paradise. The Budapest and Paradise environments reveal the profound interconnectedness of colonialism, land, race and the environment in different ways. They represent the coloniser/colonised or black/white relationship in which Budapest is superior and Paradise is regarded as inferior. The logic of domination justifies this relationship and ensures that this up-down relationship between Paradise and Budapest is maintained.

While the poor people in Paradise are exposed to environmental hazards, the rich community in Budapest is able to seal itself from the disastrous consequences of an environment caused by the bulldozers. Paradise and Budapest represent the unjust distribution of wealth. This

social injustice becomes patently obvious in the descriptions of the two environments. Paradise is described as all tin, with tiny shack after tiny shack crammed together like hot loaves of bread ...a broken bottle here, a pile of junk over there, a brownish puddle of something here, a disembowelled watermelon there” (WN, 26). Budapest on the other hand has “big, big houses with satellite dishes on the roofs and neat gravelled yards or trimmed lawns, and the tall fences and the Durawalls and the flowers and the big trees heavy with fruit” (WN, 4). It is a place with guavas in abundance and the white people do not know what to do with them. Also noted is the fact that while Darling and her friends look for food, the young woman in Budapest throws away food. How the people in Budapest relate to the guavas shows that nature is not an integral part of their lives. This partnership emphasises the Western worldview in which humans are perceived as rational agents who are separate from and superior to nature (Mazrui cited in Ojaide 2013: 6). This is a hierarchical relationship in which man is the superior being and nature is inferior. However, the dualistic relationship is dismantled through the way Darling and her friends relate to the guavas. They rely on the guavas; guavas are food. Since the guavas are not put to waste, one deduces that there existed a partnership between the children and nature. The children are closely entwined to environmental issues (Twine 2001). The children appreciate the guavas and rely on them to satisfy their hunger. As such, they enforce the urgency to conserve them, thus revealing a symbiotic relationship with the environment. According to Glotfelty, this relationship leads to “an ecologically sustainable human society” (Branch cited in Ojaide 2013: vi; foreword) in which everything is a web. As such, it is ecofeminism’s commitment to interrogate networks of oppression and explain how they participate in what Plumwood (1993:17) calls “a linked network of related dualisms” that operate together to justify oppressions based on race, class, gender, sexuality and age.

According to Fitzpatrick (2015), “Bulawayo chose to name this space, where the upper class white people occupy, after a city in Hungary as it sounds similar to “hungry” to represent a division of race and economic status that has caused the natives of the land to live in poverty.” Darling alludes to this when she says, “I don’t know what the white people were trying to do in the first place, stealing not just a tiny piece but a whole country. Who can ever forget you stole something like this?” (WN, 20). Also, when she looks at her Grandfather’s picture, Darling intimates that he had owned fertile land as “behind him are fields of waist-high maize crops, just endless and endless green” (WN, 24). Darling is conscious of the displacement that has resulted in the lack of resources and poverty of the black community. Hence, the land has always played a significant role in Zimbabwean society. This is the reason why the Black Power gang invades homes in Budapest to reclaim what they believe is theirs, the land. Ojaide (cited in Okuyade: foreword: vii) also affirms that it is this “division of race and economic status that has caused the natives of the land to live in poverty.” The division can be traced to the government’s discriminatory policies of the time.

The Budapest gardens signify the wealth, prosperity and carefree spirit of its white owners. The gardens with their well-trimmed lawns and abundant guava fruits, all enclosed in Durawalls, represent the worldview of the coloniser or ruling class at any given time (Rotenberg 1995). According to Rotenberg (1995), landscapers design parks and gardens to represent this worldview. Selders’ (1995) review of Rotenberg’s study of the Vienna city’s green spaces concludes that Vienna’s parks and gardens are designed to represent “particular world views and to legitimise or criticise given power relations (Selders 1995:1). Using the same logic, the landscaping of the Budapest gardens explains the unjustified domination of the blacks and why they are treated as inferior. Darling narrates that while Paradise has “nothing but trees and dry grass and brown earth ... and emptiness” (WN, 69), Budapest is surrounded with Durawalls and has spacious, well-trimmed, green lawns. The physical

landscape reflects the Western frames of power that segregate and alienate Darling and her friends. When Sbhoo imagines herself living here, she is reminded by Bastard that, “Budapest is not a kaka toilet for anybody to just walk in, it’s not like Paradise” (WN, 14). Because Darling is black and poor, she cannot live in this suburb. The logic of domination is illustrated through the Budapest landscape.

The Durawalls enclose and guarantee safety to the white minorities. Dubey (1999:106), points out that “the walled neighbourhoods are spatial manifestations of a segregated urban order based on unequal distribution of economic resources.” In other words, they represent a rigid patriarchal order which is strictly hierarchical and oblivious to the changed conditions of life and brutal reality outside their walls, that is, in Paradise.

5.12 The Environment and the Immigrant Experience

Detroit Michigan, pronounced by Darling as Destroyedmichygen, is another environment that Darling survives in. Before she leaves for America, Darling associates it with wealth, prosperity, the television show ER, and the Lamborghini Reventón. However, a closer examination reveals that immigrants are not welcome and can never establish a relationship with the host land. Bulawayo succinctly points out that they are unwelcome because they do not belong. It is a land where they “sit on one buttock because they must not sit comfortably lest they be asked to rise and leave” (WN, 146). In contrast, Bulawayo shows that they are connected to their own homeland through their umbilical cords underneath the soil and the bones of their ancestors in the earth (WN, 146). They are torn away from “the soil of their birth, the soil which has provided them with sustenance and which links them to their ancestors in the earth, leaving everything that makes them who and what they are” (WN, 146). There is no line drawn between the between the land and the black men, women and children. They are inextricably linked to the soil. Essentially, their land is their mother who

protects them (Hunt 2008). The validity of this point is premised on the fact that “human culture is woven into the essence of natural processes, and natural processes are intimately connected with human ceremonial observance” (Hunt cited in Cook 2008:11).

When Darling eats the last of the guavas sent to by Messenger, she feels melancholic. The guavas seem to indicate that she needs her ancestral lands to protect her even in this foreign land. Her movement to America removes her from the warmth and care given by people like MotherLove in Paradise to a foreign land that is cold and freezing with hatred. Godknows says that, “we’re hungry but we’re together and we’re at home and everything. Despite the poverty and the hunger, Paradise is a peaceful haven that offers its people peace and above all, a sense of belonging. Paradise is named thus because it is a form of home and “paradise” to Darling and the other children. Even though America offers Darling and her aunt a place to stay, they have to endure the chilling violence as represented by the weather and the gunshots heard in the neighbourhood which is a threat to their livelihood. The unwelcoming and cold environment in America is illustrated through the “greedy monster”, the snow that devours the grass, stones, leaves and ants. From an ecofeminist perspective, the destruction of other forms of nature is in itself an act of violence. As such, America lacks the liveliness and vibrancy that is associated with Paradise. Because of this, Darling vacillates between going home and establishing a new American identity for herself. In the background of Darling’s ideal America, looms a sense of fear, uncertainty and oppression. One argues that Bulawayo dismantles the ideals that Darling had of America. Bastard tells Darling that America is not a land of milk and honey. Rather, black people like aunt Fostalina work in nursing homes, “cleaning kaka off some wrinkled old man who can’t do anything for himself” (WN, 15). Darling also confirms that she has to do several jobs to survive.

In fact, the relationship between the West and the environment is not an interdependent and reciprocal one. For instance, the freezing snow that keeps pouring determines how people

should think and act. Another good example is that of the bone given to Darling by Vodloza as a “weapon” to protect her in the foreign land. The bone is supposed to connect her to her ancestors and her homeland. However, when she goes through the scanning machines at the airport, the bone is detected as a weapon. Thus, the symbiosis that nurtures and sustains life in Darling’s culture is seen as a threat in the western culture, thus showing the different ways the two cultures relate to nature.

Another form of violence noted by Mies (2014: xxv) comes in the form of computer games. According to Mies, the games “teach boys of all ages how to fix on a target and kill an enemy. Boys grow up with this computer technology to fight against virtual enemies in virtual wars.” This is the violence which is instilled in them and which they practise in real life. They attack and kill without feeling. These new wars are “part of the military training which produces men who do not know what a loving relationship to real women and real nature is” (Mies 2014: xxv). TK is exposed to such violence, “bullets and bombs raining on the screen” (WN, 153). The games isolate him from everybody else as he plays alone. Darling played her games in Paradise with her friends, never alone. In the computer games world, the child’s personality is influenced and affected by the violence in this world. Not only are these online games alienating, but they are also dehumanising (Galbreath 1990). The online interactions are also artificial and disconnect TK from a healthy, uncommodified natural world. TK is dissociated from nature and suffers from what Louv (2008:34) calls the “*nature deficit disorder*.” His computer-entertainment world deprives him of any human relationships.

Similarly, the flicks that Darling watches with her friends Marina and Kristal expose them to different forms of sexual violence on the internet. In this online violent environment, they get the impression that life is “cheap, seemingly only worth its entertainment value to a jaded [African] audience” (Galbreath 1990:23). The internet violence in which women are raped,

brutalised and humiliated simply reinforces the power endowed in patriarchy. One may also argue that Darling and her friends find other forms of entertainment given the nature of the chilly weather in the environment and the fact they are alienated and marginalised because of their race. Hence, this chapter concludes that internet violence supports the western worldview of dualisms of male/female, culture/nature and reason/emotion. Ecofeminism calls for a deconstruction of such dualisms and calls for a social transformation that to obtain social justice and equity among all, that is human and nonhuman nature.

5.13 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the relationships between human and nonhuman nature in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. The discussion was premised on the Western philosophy's Oppressive Frameworks. Using the ecofeminist lens, the chapter argued that one is able to draw clear links between violence against women and the exploitation against the land, development, the forest and home environment, and the immigrant environment. The chapter also examined the relationship between the rape of the earth and the unjustified treatment of women in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. However, in line with ecofeminism, the chapter revealed that social transformation is an essential liberatory strategy to ensure survival, equity and sustainability.

This chapter ultimately concluded that Bulawayo should be regarded as an ecofeminist who sought to elevate and defend woman, natives and the natural world. It also concluded that ecofeminism advocates for nondualistic and nonhierarchical forms of thought. As such, ecofeminism questions fundamental assumptions about dualisms of culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, human/animal (Birkeland 1993, King 1989). The chapter concluded that a biocentric existence of human and nonhuman nature which acknowledges

their interdependence should be promoted. Under this principle, women, and the poor should be recognised for their intrinsic value and subjectivity. The next chapter will give a summary of the study's chapters, draw conclusions and then suggest recommendations for future studies on African literature created by female writers.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY

6.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between humans and the non-human world or natural environment in selected literary works by black female writers in colonial and post-colonial Africa. The study interrogated a number of interconnections between the oppression of human (in particular black African women) and nonhuman nature as presented in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, Neshani Andreas' *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. The main

argument was that parallels can be drawn between the domination of nature and the environment, and the exploitation and oppression of women. An analysis of these fundamental connections helped one to understand why the environment is a feminist issue and conversely, why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns (Warren 1991). According to Warren (1994), all forms of oppression including racism, classism, ageism and sexism, intersect to show that the oppression of women parallels the domination of nature. Hence, all these forms are feminist issues because they contribute to an understanding of the exploitation and oppression of women and nature. However, Warren also maintains that ecological feminism's task is to dismantle all social forms of domination.

The study was based on the foremost theories of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. While ecocriticism concerns itself with the relationship between humans and the landscape, ecofeminism proliferates to explain women's relationship to nature and the environment. In addition to issues of race, gender, class and religion, ecocriticism adds ecological destruction. Ecofeminism also explores the "interconnection between the domination of women and the domination of nature" (Ruether 1992, Birkeland 1993). Hence, using the ecocriticism and ecofeminism lens, the study explored the links between "androcentricism and environmental destruction" (Birkeland 1993:18). It explored the link between patriarchy and the different forms of oppression in the creative texts under analysis. The belief is that patriarchy is responsible for both the oppression of women and the domination of nature. Ecofeminism is also premised on the fact that human beings rely on the ecosystem for their basic needs such as water, food and other natural resources (Hinz and Ruppel 2007). As such, the study examined how men, children and in particular, women conserve and sustain nature. Thus, using the lens of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, this study set out to explore the representations of nature and the relationship between literature and the environment in selected black female African writers' literary works. It also drew on a broad range of

African literature in order to explore literary representations of nature and the environment in the African countries represented in the novels.

6.2 Research Questions

The study endeavoured to find answers to the following questions:

- What makes the environment a feminist issue in a colonial and post-colonial African context?
- How does literature, particularly the female authored texts with nature as subject represent the complexities of the relationship between nature and women?
- What can we learn from the representation of nature and crisis-hit and institutionally weak African urban and rural situations?
- To what extent do literary texts with nature as subject reflect the role of women with regard to nature?
- How can imaginative fiction and literary theory reflect aspects of ecocriticism that underpin the social and political implications of representations of nature?
- How can this new understanding on the environment inform attitudes, policies and interventions which recognise and complement the importance of the environment?
- In what ways does ecofeminism manifest itself in the black female authored literary texts?

6.3 Research Questions: Findings of the Study

The study has endeavoured to answer the key research questions and meet the stated objectives. However, it should be noted that the study is premised on the works of three authors, hence only tentative conclusions can be made about African ecocriticism and ecofeminism.

The first question of the study was: **What makes the environment a feminist issue in a colonial and post-colonial African context?**

The thrust of the first question was based on the understanding that the oppression of women and the domination of nature are intricately connected and mutually reinforcing (King 1983). A feminist issue sheds more light on and helps to understand the domination and oppression of women. Hence, believing that ecofeminism takes a 'feminist' approach to understand women and nature interconnections, ecofeminists maintain that the environment is a feminist issue. This study premised its claim on the environmental works of ecofeminists such as Shiva and Mies (2013), Plumwood (1993), Warren (1987) and King (1983). Foregrounded in their arguments is the interconnectivity of humans, in particular women to the environment. As such, the central argument in this study was how ecofeminism helps to understand the alleged connections between the oppression, subordination and domination of women; (the human other) and the domination of nature (earth others). Hence, the repertoire of violence toward black women and the environment was central to the analysis of the four black female authored texts selected in this study. The point of departure in the reading of these works in this study is its emphasis that nature is a feminist issue (Warren 1987). This means that the liberation of women cannot be divorced from the larger struggle for the preservation of all life on the earth (Mies and Shiva 2013: 16). In other words, women's survival struggles are simultaneously struggles for the protection of nature (Shiva, 1989). Thus, ecofeminism advances an end to different forms of oppression believing that no attempt to liberate women and any other marginalised group will be successful if nature remains unliberated (Gaard et al. 1993).

In chapter three, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* explore how the oppression of women and the domination of nature are connected. Women in *Nervous Conditions* connect with the land and use their knowledge and skills to ensure the survival of their families. However, noted in the analysis of the text is the fact that any disturbance or imbalance in this woman-nature interconnectivity bears a negative impact on the women. It is

the women who bear the brunt of any land degradation; hence, land concerns are a feminist issue in *Nervous Conditions*. On the other hand, in *The Book of Not*, interconnections are drawn between patriarchy, the war environment and women. The war leaves scars that cannot heal and also helps to understand how the violence of the armed struggle parallels the violence on women. Given the experiences recounted by Ntombi, Netsai, Tambu and other women in the text, the war's destruction of the environment is closely linked to the violence that women have to contend with. The objectification and inferiorisation of the female freedom fighters is better understood through war issues. Hence, the war environment is a feminist issue as it helps to comprehend the plight of the black woman and girl child during the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. In addition, the colonial experience that disrupted the harmonious relationship between the land and the people in Zimbabwe affected women mostly. Thus, the texts analysed in this study reveal that the "toll is heavier on the woman" (Rwafa 2013: 324) as she struggles to survive and also, sustain the family.

In both *Nervous Conditions* and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, women do not own land. Whilst the women are the tillers of the land, the men oversee and treat both as objects to be tamed and exploited. Hence, an analysis of the historical connections between women and land in the two texts explains how and why women's oppression is linked to the exploitation of the environment. The connection between the degradation of the earth and the domination of women is such that certain ecological damages have more of a detrimental effect on women than the men. Whilst Ma'Shingayi works on the dry, dusty and infertile land in *Nervous Conditions*, Kauna in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, is forced to prepare the land to avoid physical abuse by Shange. As the women in the analysed texts are deprived of the very environment that sustains their livelihoods, they have to work harder and devise alternative survival strategies. The women in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, work together on Kauna's fields to create a land-sisterhood symbiosis that sustains their hope, strength and love. In

Nervous Conditions, Tambu uses the land to educate herself and Lucia the Nyamarira River to enhance Ma'Shingayi's healing process. As such, the social, health and economic problems that women face, are better understood through their relationship with the environment.

In both *Nervous Conditions* and *We Need New Names*, development projects such as the construction of the District Council Houses and the Chinese mall, respectively, are used in the study to illustrate the link between the oppression of women and the environment. These development projects are human constructions that illustrate how "dangerous environmental damage [has] become" (Kerridge 532). The District Council Houses and Operation *Murambatsvina* which is also a human created project results in an unsustainable environment that increases the vulnerability and oppression of women. The impoverished environment and the collapsed health systems illustrate that socio-economic factors are central to the degradation of both women and nature. Hence, the environment is a feminist issue.

Question 2:How does literature, particularly the female authored texts with nature as subject represent the complexities of the relationship between nature and women?

An analysis of the texts in this study reveals that in the African cosmology the environment is an integral part of the woman's way of life. The environment is interpreted not according to its beauty, but according to its ecological function and sustenance. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, women embrace nature and derive peace from connecting with the natural environment. However, while women in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* value and respect nature as an integral part of their lives, and use it to sustain their families, in *The Book of Not*, Tambu connects with nature to escape from the hostile multi-racial environment. Tambu finds solace in Maiguru's utopian green garden in *Nervous*

Conditions. She retreats from the problems associated with the racial reports from The Sacred Heart and family issues and finds freedom. However, in *The Book of Not*, Tambu is hemmed in by the multi-racial environment at The Sacred Heart resulting in a discontinuous (Plumwood 1993) human-nature relationship. Both novels reveal how women use the landscape to shape their lives in an environment complicated by war, race, colonialism and patriarchy. As producers, women engage with the sustainable management of the environment. Similarly, in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, nature is presented as subject or as an integral part of the women's lives. Women use biological resources for their well-being and livelihood. The conservation of the biological resources is therefore crucial to the community since their survival depends on it. A closer examination of the text showed that women work in communion with the earth or environment to sustain and conserve the land. As such, using ecofeminist insights, the analysis revealed that the exclusive patriarchal boundaries that lead to the inferiorisation and marginalisation of women are porous and can be dismantled. In *We Need New Names*, the environmental destruction perpetuates the unjustified domination of women and nature in a patriarchal society. Operation *Murambatsvina* is used analogously to represent the discontinued relationship between human and nonhuman nature. It also reveals the significant role that the environment plays in the people's lives. Thus, as a subject, the environment is perceived as a part of a whole, a biocentric world-view in which humanity, the nonhuman and the environment exists.

Question 3:What can we learn from the representation of nature and crisis-hit and institutionally weak African urban and rural situations?

First and foremost, the study reveals that the subject of the interrelatedness between literature and ecology or environment continues to grow not only in western countries but in contemporary African scholarship as well. It further observes that some work has been done in nature writing in African literary studies, including black female authored works. The

analysis of the texts is thus a new pathway to contest the Anglo-American myopic definition of the term ecocriticism. An analysis of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* in this chapter revealed how the historical and political processes are central to nature writing in the black woman's lived environment. Their analysis close the hermeneutic gap caused by their exclusion in feminist ecocritical literary works. The environment is viewed in a spatial sense to include human and nonhuman relationships in the social, political and economic human world.

In chapter three this interconnectedness or symbiotic relationship between nature and people's livelihoods is a clear indicator that African writers have always been concerned with environmental issues. For this relationship to be maintained, both men and women should play a major role in nature management and conservation. The community should be involved in protecting existing nature and environment if the specific roles and needs of both men and women are met. Chapter 4's analysis of *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* explores liberatory strategies and actions taken by women to conserve the environment. The ecofeminist approach in this text establishes how women allow changes in the environment and whether they appreciate it, exploit or conserve it. Concisely, the reader is made aware of the significant links between human and nonhuman nature in a web-like society. All the texts analysed in this research share a common view that "social transformation is necessary for ecological survival" (Howell 1997: 230). In *Nervous Conditions* and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, both the land and women are defined in feminine and animal terms. It is through this feminisation and naturalisation processes that they are oppressed and dominated by patriarchy. The two texts hold patriarchy responsible for the parallel domination of women and the environment. This however, is not to say matriarchy should take over, but advocates for "new egalitarian gender relations between men and women and between humans and nature" (Merchant 1990:100). On the other hand, while *The Book of Not* puts the blame on

colonialism, Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* creates a new awareness of hierarchical and dualistic structures. In a crisis hit urban environment the latter advocates for nonhierarchical and nondualistic modes of social transformation society in which every being is significant in their own way and all forms of oppression are destroyed.

Question 4: To what extent do literary texts with nature as subject reflect the role of women with regard to nature?

The women in the literary texts analysed in this novel are presented as conservers and preservers of nature. Even though the majority of the women in *Nervous Conditions* are helmed in by the patriarchal environment, they are aware that the environment is a part of humanity that helps them survive, hence their efforts to conserve it. Given the harsh realities and challenges that face them in the patriarchal society in both *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*, the women are not portrayed as victims, but as survivors. They protect the natural environment and in turn, it enables them to survive. The women realise that the natural environment serves a central purpose in their lives and hence preserve the trees.

Again, even though the patriarchal and colonial environment in *Nervous Conditions* is portrayed as stifling, women and nature are associated not in passivity, but in the maintenance of life. The text exudes a strong connection between women and nature, making us realise that human beings are an integral part of nature, hence the web-like existence in which women, health issues and the environment are connected. Contrarily, the women are incapacitated by the environment in *The Book of Not*. The colonial environment does not afford Tambu to play a significant role in the maintenance of the environment as she is segregated from both the white girls and The Sacred Heart College environment. The racist environment does not allow the black girls to transcend race and national boundaries. Nature in this environment is perceived as separate and inferior to humans. However, Maiguru's

garden is presented as a sharp contrast to the hostile environment at the girls' college. The garden shows Maiguru's creativity, potential and productivity. She provides for the whole family and thus, the garden provides a sense of wholeness and freedom to the black women. A similar complicity and interconnectedness is reflected in the women's relationship to the land in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. In instances where nature is used in complimentary terms, the major dualisms of female/male and human/nature are deconstructed and, the Western philosophy of dualisms is subverted. Women are able to weave networks of sisterhood as one of the liberatory strategies and live in communion with the earth in their efforts to preserve it. Such a relationship with nature debunks the culture dualism of patriarchal thought and advocates for a transformation in social practices that exploit and dominate women and nature.

Question 5: How can imaginative fiction and literary theory reflect aspects of ecocriticism that underpin the social and political implications of representations of nature?

The texts analysed in this study illuminate the struggles between human and nonhuman Chapter 3 articulates the link between ecology and feminism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. It reveals that the interconnection between the Shona women in the two texts is a result of their link with nature and patriarchal oppression. Although the women share similar experiences of sexism and domestic responsibilities, and have class differences, what unites them is the consciousness that it is patriarchy that set the agenda (Mbata). Their struggles and suffering are a result of myriad forms of oppressions. However, although entrapped by patriarchy, the women in *Nervous Conditions* use the environment in different ways to challenge the system. Nyasha uses food, Mai Tambu and Tambu use the land to sustain themselves and Lucia realises the therapeutic nature of the

River Nyamarira. By challenging the cultural and social systems that are used to oppress and marginalise women, the chapter revealed that new relationships between humans and nonhuman nature can be established. The image of nature as mother, protectress, provider and nurturer (Vance cited in Gaard 1993:7) is rejected. Instead, nature is perceived as sister based on the common oppression shared by the different women in the two novels. The women derive strength and empowered themselves by embracing nature as a companion not a need. They are able to celebrate the entire spectrum of life.

We Need New Names connects political and social injustice issues with environmental issues. The novel focuses on environments riddled with social problems such as HIV and AIDS, migrant workers, poverty, lack of food, racism etc. The historical *Murambatsvina* event and its impact is relived in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*. As the environment fails to sustain the people, the political implication is apparent when the people leave the country in masses for the so called greener pastures. The diasporic realities of the Zimbabwean immigrants; men, women and children are used to illuminate the social, political and economic crisis that occurred in Zimbabwe. The construction of malls by the Chinese in *We Need New Names* and the District Council Houses in *Nervous Conditions* not only destroy the environment in the name of progress but also the people's livelihoods.

Question 6:How can this new understanding on the environment inform attitudes, policies and interventions which recognise and complement the importance of the environment?

Using the ecofeminism lens, chapter one reveals that nature should be embraced to transform gendered concepts that have been constructed to silence both women and children, and to protect and conserve nature. In the novel, *Nervous Conditions*, living in harmony with the environment is foregrounded to show how such a relationship may sustain the continuity of the social, religious and economic aspects of life. The ecological function of the environment

is highlighted to reveal the strong partnership between the human and nonhuman world. Women used the land to sustain their families, and timber was used for firewood while the men used timber for building huts and kraals. Ecofeminism also advocates for a social transformation that places both the human and nonhuman nature in a central position. The chapter's point of departure was that such a transformation of attitudes had to be explored within a nature/environmental oriented literature, what Glotfelty (1996) calls the relationship between human culture and the environment.

On the other hand, chapter five raises consciousness of the government policies of development that result in the great imbalance enacted against the environment and people. Development forms in the text had destroyed the strong bond that the people had with the environment. For instance, the women's livelihoods and well-being depend on the local resources, hence the destruction of these resources parallels the oppression of women. The destruction of the environment by the Zimbabwean government reveals the negative impact of development policies on the masses. It reveals that health issues cannot be divorced from the environment. The feminised impoverished environment in the fictitious city of Paradise is represented by the degradation of the women's livelihoods and bodies. Young girls engage in sex work with the Chinese constructors in order to survive. The double burden borne by women as workers and homemakers propels them to offer the most resistance to environmental injustices.

Whereas ecofeminism seeks to bring an end to all forms of oppression, it would be difficult to do so if authorities do not recognise the link between the environment and socio-political issues. The texts analysed in this study reveal a need for all, women, men and authorities to change attitudes and realise that the domination of the environment closely intersects with the oppression of human nature. To address the twin dominations adequately, the contributions, knowledge and voices of those affected should be recognised.

The last question is: In what ways does ecofeminism manifest itself in the black female authored literary texts?

As stated in Chapter 1, the study is premised on the ecofeminist theory whose central concern is that there is a connection between environmental degradation and the subordination of women. Thus, in *Nervous Conditions*, the environmental concerns are used to engage in an anti-patriarchal struggle. In the novels, *Nervous Conditions* and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, patriarchy equates women to animals and nature, thus perpetuating the tradition that subjugates and denigrates women. For instance, the women's link to the land helps to understand the oppression of women. The landscape is used metaphorically to establish the interconnection between women and their environment, and also deconstruct the nature-culture dichotomy. Furthermore, an ecofeministic reading of this text shows that Dangarembga invokes nature and uses it as an agent of resistance. For instance, Tambu's connection to the land saves her from patriarchal entrapment and subsequently psychological imprisonment. Thus, *Nervous Conditions* not only helps one to unravel the oppressive nature/culture dichotomy in the text, but also intimates liberatory strategies.

On the other hand, even though the female freedom fighters are motivated by the liberation struggle in *The Book of Not*, they are subjugated by their white and black male counterparts. The black female characters are deprived both physical and spiritual growth by the war and racial environments. Hence, the environment is used allegorically to reveal the disconnection between the black girls and their environment. For instance, in *Nervous Conditions*, the Tambu who preserves and conserves the environment, and derives strength and empowerment from it, is completely battered and overwhelmed by the racist and patriarchal environment in *The Book of Not*. Conversely, in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, nature is

seen as an archetypal image of harmony and its disruption is analogous to the exploitation and oppression of women. An analysis of the novel reveals that the women embrace nature and navigate their lives in the suffocating patriarchal environment. Similarly, in *We Need New Names*, the integral relationship between men, women and children shows that their struggles are simultaneously struggles for the protection of the environment (Shiva 1989). Nature is an archetypal image of serenity and harmony, and its disruption is analogous to the exploitation of women and children. The environment is presented as a disputing metaphor of regeneration where women and the girl-children negotiate new identities. Significant to note is that the liberatory strategies that run across the novels analysed in this research are not meant to disempower patriarchy but to create new ways to perceive the world in a biocentric manner in which human and nonhuman nature are interconnected. In addition, both *Nervous Conditions* and *We Need New Names*, animalise and naturalise women pejoratively to reveal how they are exploited. According to Adams (1990), language that feminises nature and animalises women reinforces the patriarchal domination of the marginalised and voiceless women. Ecofeminism seeks to demystify such connections and in addition, craft new alternatives challenge the patriarchal status quo.

Contribution to ecocriticism and ecofeminist thought

Although the analyses of the novels in this study was premised on ecocriticism and ecofeminism theory, the way the two theories conceptualise the nexus between women, nature and the environment revealed that they share common interests. Each of the narratives examined in the study drew attention to such issues as sexuality, classism, racism, environmental degradation, ecological and gender issues, and social justice issues as experienced by the women characters. Through such issues, the study was able to explore the interconnectedness of systems of oppression and domination and reveal that all forms of

oppression are linked. Also, even though the women in the different novels are presented as victims, the analyses of the texts reveal that the women in the four texts not only bear the brunt of environmental degradation but also play an important part in environmental management. Hence, the study's call for an expansion of ecofeminism focus in order to include the non-Western point of view and recognise the "double-bind" of being female and colonised.

The study's point of departure was to reveal that the interconnections between the human and nonhuman have always been central to literary works by black African writers. Hence the thrust of the study was to draw interconnections between man's domination of nature/environment and the oppression of black women as depicted in the selected literary works by black female African writers. The study noted that since Glotfelty's groundbreaking text, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, there have been many scholarly essays that have examined works by women authors from an ecocritical perspective. However, it is argued that most of the contributions were restricted to the Anglo-American nature writing traditions. Hence, the study is an effort to fill in this gap by analysing female written texts that are outside the Anglo-American boundaries. By including black female authored works, the study realised that there is an inviolable trust between the human and the rest of nature (Gaard, Estok and Oppermann 2013). The study also realised that to understand that environmental issues are human issues, there is need to transcend the traditional Western perspective on nature and create new ways to perceive the world in a biocentric manner. It was thus established that ecofeminism's goal is to castigate the ecological domination and oppression of women by men with the aim of fostering more liberatory strategies for the black women.

Recommendations

In light of the above findings of the study it is recommended that:

- African eco-critics should pay more attention to environmental literature in order to better understand important environmental issues that affect black women.
- African literary critics should use ecofeminism as a lens to seriously acknowledge the interconnectivity between the domination of human and nonhuman nature
- African black female writers should move beyond the limiting conceptions of the feminine and masculine to construct a holistic ethic that encompasses ecological realities.
- African creative writers should use their works as a consciousness raising platform on social transformation required to preserve and conserve life on earth in any meaningful way.
- Society should engage in sustainable forms of development that take environmental degradation and its ramifications on human nature into consideration.
- Future studies should also focus on representations of nature and women in African literary works to identify the twin dominations and also foster liberatory strategies.
- Further studies in future should work with more authors from Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and the rest of fiction from other African countries.

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