

**ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN AFRICAN PROSE NARRATIVES FOR
CHILDREN**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Ecological consciousness, the awareness created in stories through representation of human interaction with the environment, is paramount in African prose for children. Existing studies have focused mostly on style, didacticism and other contemporary issues, to the neglect of ecological consciousness. This study examined the depiction of ecological consciousness in selected African prose narratives for children with a view to revealing the predominant environmental tropes, ethics and symbols employed in them.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's postcolonial ecocriticism and Lawrence Buell and Trevor Cairney's ecocritical criteria were adopted. Eight prose narratives for children were purposively selected from four traditionally-inclined African tales owing to their ecological consciousness (West—Charles Anson-Lawson's *The Greatest Treasure (TGT)*, East—Verna Aardema's *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain (BRK)*, North—George Murphy's *The Enormous Yam (TEY)* and Southern Africa—Charles Mungoshi's *Stories from a Shona Childhood (SSC)*) and four contemporary African stories (West—Mabel Segun's *The Twins and the Tree Spirits (TTS)*, East—Donna Jo Napoli and Kadir Nelson's *Mama Miti (MMT)*, North—Walid Tahir's *Sayeed...Sayeed (SAS)*, and Southern Africa—Ignatius Musonza's *Ike's Plant (IKP)*). The narratives were subjected to critical textual analysis.

The theme of ecological consciousness is depicted through pastoral, georgic and wilderness tropes infused with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), sustainability, mutuality and subtle domination of nature. Verna Aardema's *BRK*, George Murphy's *TEY*, Charles Mungoshi's *SSC*, Mabel Segun's *TTS* and Donna Jo Napoli and Kadir Nelson's *MMT* raise awareness through TEK and establish affective relationship that promotes human connectedness with nature. Charles Anson-Lawson's *TGT*, Walid Tahir's *SAS* and Ignatius Musonza's *IKP* underscores sustainability through conservation of water, plants and animals, and prevention of desertification, loss of species, water and air pollution. Mutuality, balance and synergy as significant elements of co-habitation are explicitly recreated in the contemporary stories but are only implied in the traditional tales. The omniscient narrators in *SAS*, *MMT*, and *TTS* serve as agents of change by projecting ecocentric ethical values, which query flagrant domination of nature through apocalyptic tropes of pollution and land degradation, thereby foregrounding the environmental ethics of restrained anthropocentrism and biocentrism. Water and death are dominant symbols signifying life and death in all the narratives. While water symbolises life for both human and non-human nature, natural death is regarded as a form of renewal. Anthropomorphism and romanticisation of nature are employed in the traditional tales to express the symbiotic relationship between human and non-human nature, while the realistic mode is adopted in all the contemporary tales except *TTS*. To avoid ecophobia while creating ecological consciousness, all the narratives tend towards social ecology.

Environmental tropes of sustainability, mutuality and symbols projecting environmental synergism are used to imbue the young audience with ecological consciousness in African prose narratives for children. Ecocritical discourse should be central in the representation of environmental awareness for African children.

Keywords: Ecological consciousness, African prose narratives for children, Environmental ethics

Word count: 463

DEDICATION

To

The One Who was, Who is, and is to come,

THE ALMIGHTY!

And

My late mother, Janet Jolaade Akinyemi.

Her exemplary life as a wife and mother has been my source of strength.

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by Mrs. H. I. Adhuze in the Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

As a distinct academic discipline, Literature has been variously described as a reflection of life or the social reality of the group of people it portrays. Literature is nourished by the social, economic, and political realities of the society it represents. It is the artistic use of language to tell a story for the purpose of entertainment and education. It is the articulation of a writer's thoughts and creative imagination. Literature is intrinsically linked to language and society. For instance, Wellek and Warren (1973: p. 94) consider literature as a social institution which uses language, a social creation, as its medium.

According to Moody (1971), literature is a means of transmitting and perpetuating cultural values and norms. Through literature, the realities of human situations, problems, feelings and relationships are vividly presented. Kolawole (2005) sees literature as a form of social dialogue which is made to reflect and examine the different experiences of the society it represents (p. 11).

As such, literature occupies a significant position in the national development of the society it represents. Different scholars like Escarpit (1971), Irele (1971), Moody (1971), Ngugi wa Thiongo (1972), Wellek and Warren (1973), Achebe (1974), Roscoe (1977), Eagleton (1983), Murray (1991), Akorede (2006), and Cairney (2011) among others, have acknowledged the developmental roles of literature to man and his society in general. Anpe (1990), observes that literature "is a mirror of the reality that exists in the society" as it serves as a tool for education, celebration and protest (p. 63).

While literature provides an opportunity for escape from reality, it is also an instrument for the awakening of the human consciousness to a better understanding of the world, the sustenance of a peaceful coexistence between man and the natural environment and his duties therein. Robert Escarpit (1971) quoting Vladimir Zhdanov (1956) sees literature as a social phenomenon which projects reality through the

creative imagination of the writer. Since the “writer and his society live in the same place... and art is, and was always in the service of man” (Achebe, 1974: p.24), it is then appropriate to put the art to use in the service of enlightening the people about the need to preserve the earth. This could easily be achieved by getting the interest of the younger generation, through literary texts which address environmental issues, thereby creating awareness among the people.

According to Yetunde Akorede (2006: p. 183), literature reflects the society and refracts from it. This means that literature goes beyond showing or expressing what obtains in the society; it is also used in correcting the ills of the society. In Sartre’s (1949: p. 23) opinion, “the ‘engaged’ writer knows that words are action”. His writings, therefore, are meant to “reveal” and consequently “change” the attitude of his audience. This is in line with the utilitarian school of thought in literature (Bamidele, 2003: p. 1-2) which makes literature didactic.

However, literature entails more than teaching of morals and entertainment. Most literary works transcend creating a form of leisure for the audience. Literature also informs and educates. This agrees with Trevor Cairney’s (2011) opinion that literature has great power to teach, enrich and transform us.

1.1.1 Definition of children’s literature

Different scholars have made some attempts at defining children’s literature. However, it can simply be regarded as a set of oral or written stories meant for children from the nursery stage to the early secondary school level. The focal point of all the definitions, given by several scholars in the field, is “the intended audience” (Hunt, 1996, Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998, Weinreich and Bartlett, 2002, Odejide, 2004) and “the purpose/function” of the literary work for children (Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, 2002, Norton, 1999, Winch, Johnson, March, Ljungdahl and Holliday, 2004, Dasyiva, 2007). A few of the existing definitions would be examined so as to find a way of harmonising them in the context of this study.

Lynch Brown and Tomlinson (2005), define children’s literature as good story books with a wide topical range that is "relevant for the pleasurable experience of children

from birth to adolescence" (p. 3) while Nancy Anderson (2006) regards children's literature as all creative works with a literary value written for children (p. 2).

For Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1992), children's literature are books which children can easily "respond [to] with imagination and pleasure" (p. 18), while Emma Okey Nnabuko (1992) opines that they are "books meant to satisfy [the] spiritual, emotional and intellectual needs of children and provide pleasurable and instructional values to them" (p. 187).

Osazee Fayose's (1991) attempt at defining children's literature for children in Africa is relevant to this study. She describes African children's literature as:

That piece of literary creation which draws its subject matter from the African worldview and which is written in a language and style the African child can comprehend. It must be seen as promoting African culture and enable the child or young adult to understand and appreciate his or her environment better and it must give him or her some pleasure (p. 74).

This definition takes into consideration the specific features which address "the African worldview", the child-audience, "the language and style" not alien to the African child, "promotion of African culture", and the focus on the African "environment". However, Fayose's (1991) silence on the issue of authorship is the only gap that the definition given in this study has identified.

These definitions focus on the targeted audience and the function of the literary works for children. However, limiting the function to "pleasure" which could be regarded as "entertainment and information", without taking cognisance of the purpose of information itself, which is "to educate or instruct", is not expedient. For instance, ecological stories for children are works of imagination meant not only for entertainment, but also to inform, educate and instruct children on the importance of cultivating a non-selfish relationship with nature.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that children's literature is so tagged because it is addressed to children or the 'child-like attitude' in adults who may also enjoy in

sharing the stories with children. A child can only find pleasure in a literary work that is addressed to him and communicated in a language that is within his reach.

To sum up the different views and concepts of literary works for children as examined above, for the purpose of this study, African children's literature is considered as a body of oral and written imaginative works by Africans or non-Africans who are familiar with the indigenous cultural needs of African children with the aim of entertaining, educating and informing them about relevant issues in a way that is understood by them. Such issues may be ecological, sociological, or political in orientation.

1.1.2 The history of children's literature

Children's literature is a branch of literary studies. It is an imaginative creative work which reflects life and is meant to entertain, inform, and educate its young audience. Books specifically written for children before the nineteenth century were few. This was due to the fact that young children were not regarded as a force to be reckoned with when it comes to the rigours of reading and education. However, there came a turn around with a change in attitude towards childhood and children's development. Also, different educational and psychological theories emphasizes on the importance of reading in the mental development of children have contributed towards the publication of books that can aid their cognitive development (A. Credaro 2006). Many authors and scholars like Ann and Jane Taylor, Eugene Field, Edward Lear, the Grimm Brothers, and Han Christian Andersen have contributed immensely to the development and growth of children's literature in the nineteenth century (C. Andzayi, 2002).

For instance, Ann (1782-1866) and Jane (1783-1829) Taylor were sisters who wrote several poems for young children. Their collection of poems *Rhymes for the nursery* was first published in 1806. The most popular of the poems in the collection "The Star" was composed by Jane Taylor but was later modified and set to music by Ann Taylor with the title; "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star". This poem has many adaptations all over the world and it is popular among young children.

Another popular poem by Ann is titled "My Mother". The authorship of the sisters' works is often confused with Jane being credited for most of the works. This is because

their early works were published together without any of the poems in the collection being attributed to the specific writer between the two of them. Their other works include *Original poems for infant minds*, that was jointly written with other authors, was published in two volumes in 1804 and 1805, while *Hymns for infant minds* was produced in 1808.

Another notable author for children was Eugene Field (1850-1895). He was an American journalist and writer who became popular as a result of his contribution to literary works for children. He was fondly referred to as the “poet for childhood”. His poem, “Little Boy Blue” brought him to the limelight in 1888 when it was first published in *America*, a weekly journal. This feat was followed by *A little book of Western verse* (1889), *Second book of verse* (1892), *With trumpet and drum* (1892) where he included “Little Boy Blue”, “The Sugar Plum tree”, and “Wynken, Blyken and Nod”, while *Love-Songs of Childhood* was printed in 1894. In recognition of his literary contribution to childhood, many schools in America were named after him.

Edward Lear (1812-1888) was a very remarkable author of children’s literature. He wrote several stories and poems for his young audience. He popularised “nonsense literature” through the limericks published in his works titled; *A book of nonsense* (1846), *The owl and the pussycat*, *The story of the four little children who went round the world*, *Nonsense songs, stories, botany, and alphabets* were all published in 1871. *The Jumblies*, and *The Dong with a luminous nose and other poems* were published posthumously in 1895, and 1969 respectively.

Another set of siblings who contributed to the growth and development of children’s literature were the Grimm Brothers. Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) were German authors who collected and published folklores in the nineteenth century. Their amazing collections that have remained popular with children, even in the twenty-first century, include: “Cinderella”, “Sleeping Beauty”, “Snow White”, and “Little Red Riding Hood” among others. Their first collection of folktales, titled *Kinder-und Hausmarchen*, was published in 1812 and has seven editions from 1812-1857. The English version of the work is titled *Children’s and household tales*. Their stories were used to promote nationalism during the Adolf Hitler era in Germany, and every family was made to get a copy of *Kinder-und Hausemarchen*.

However, most of their works were not considered suitable for children due to some elements of sexuality, brutality and violence in the stories. This opinion led to a review of some of the stories for the reading pleasure of children. Also, some of these stories have formed the bulk of material for the Disney Movies with the same title or modified versions of their stories in movies for children.

Another writer for children in the nineteenth century was the Danish author, Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875). He could be considered the most remarkable among his peers because of the large volume of works he produced for his young audience. He was best known for his fairytales and he wrote 168 tales. About 30 of these have remained popular up to this present generation. Some of the stories include: *The little mermaid* (1837), *The ugly duckling* (1843), *The princess and the pea* (1835), *The emperor's new clothes* (1837), *Thumbelina* (1835), *The steadfast tin soldier* (1838), *The nightingale* (1843), *The tinderbox* (1835), *The red shoes* (1845), *The wild swans* (1838), and *The snowman* (1861).

The history of children's literature, like other forms of literature in its entirety, as found in pre-literate and literate cultures, is rooted in the oral tradition of the pre-literate age in Africa, and the classical age in Europe, when there was no distinction between adult and children's literature. Chi-Fen Emily Chen (2005) notes that oral literature was used as a means of pleasure in terms of entertainment, instructions with regards to life and living, and a source of passing down the religious or cultural values and traditions of the people from one generation to another. The popular stories recorded for this period belong to the Greek and Roman traditions. The Greek stories include the Trojan War, and the adventures of Odysseus. Also, the Aesop fables, the Roman myths and epics of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were of great importance in the inculcation of both moral and cultural values. Also, in pre-literate era in Africa, stories for children were based on the oral traditions of Africans like myths, folktales, legends, proverbs and chants.

During the medieval period, stories for children were religious tales and biblical stories that were basically didactic. Children's literature gradually witnessed a consistent development through the renaissance period with the invention of the printing technology which facilitated a mass production of books. This development gave many

people the opportunity to a formal education, especially the children of the upper and middle class members of the society. Most of the books produced for children were educational textbooks. The first picture book of John Comenius, *Orbis sensualium pictus* was published in 1658. This was followed by *New England primer* which came in 1690. There was also an increase in moralistic tales and a revival of the classical folktales featuring stories like Charles Perrault's *Tales of mother goose* (1697) in France, the Grimms' Brothers' *Nursery and household tales* (1812) from Germany, and Hans Christian Anderson's *Fairy tales* (1835) from Denmark. Some adult literature like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's progress* (1678), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's travels* (1726), were adopted for children's reading pleasure.

The Victorian Age witnessed a tremendous growth in literary works for children. There was a rise of modern fantasy and realistic stories. Notable among them are Lewis Carroll's *Alice's adventure in wonderland* (1865), Frank Baum's *The wonderful wizard of Oz* (1900) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure island* (1881).

From the twentieth century to the present day, Children's literature has come to be accorded a place of its own in literary studies. More fantastic and realistic stories exploring a wide variety of contemporary themes have been produced. Among the works are *Winnie the pooh* (1926) by A.A. Milne, *The little prince* (1943) by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Charlotte's web* (1952) by E.B. White and the popular *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone* in 1998, the first in the series by J.K. Rowling.

Children's literature in Africa could be said to have developed (albeit not at the same pace) alongside with the adult literature. The need for a cultural integration and assertion which prompted the rise of adult literature in Africa served as an impetus to create literary works for African children as well. The oral tradition, like in other parts of the world, served as a repertoire for literary imagination in Africa, especially among literary writers for children.

Different groups of people from ancient civilizations have a way of passing down their cultures and traditions from one generation to another through words of mouth. This

oral form of communication and preservation of the history and culture of the people is known as oral tradition.

Oral traditions are embedded in different folktales, fables, myths, legends and proverbs. In Africa, different tales are told about creation, the history of the ethnic or group of people who have settled/migrated from one place to another, the relationship of the people with the natural environment, their different worldviews and beliefs about nature—land, rocks, hills, mountains, springs, streams, lakes, rivers, oceans, plants, trees, forests, animals, sky, sun, moon, stars and other wonders of creation. Beside these physical phenomena, Africans believe that there is a supernatural force behind all these things. As such, Africans sense there is a spiritual connection to the physical environment and this connection could only be grasped intuitively.

To ensure continuity in terms of race, traditions and beliefs, African elders transmit the different knowledge they have acquired overtime through their interaction with the natural environment to the younger generation in form of stories, myths, legends and proverbs. Stories—folktales and fables—are usually meant to entertain the listeners but the primary goal is to teach the young child the culture of his people and how to relate with the people and things around him. Myths are a body of stories with mystical or spiritual undertones, while legends are stories about real people, places and events meant to serve as role models for the upcoming generations. Proverbs are pithy sayings that embody different traditional wisdom and experiences of life of a group of people usually coated in metaphors, similes and other imageries. They are often used to express commonly held beliefs and ideas which are transmitted from one generation to another.

All myths, legends, fables and folktales are rooted in orality. A myth usually has a religious tinge, deals with cosmological issues, addresses the question of purpose/meaning of life and it is often associated with a group of people. Legends also evolve in the oral tradition, as they are passed down from one generation to the next. A legend may be regarded as mythical when the historical event, place or person in the narrative is an attempt at explaining a cultural or historical worldview about natural phenomena. Therefore, such traditional cosmogonies which bear some features of any

of the traditional tales—like legends, fables and folktales—could be considered as myths. In other words, any traditional tale with a serious purpose or importance to a culture could be classified as a myth.

With the gale of independence from colonialists in most African nations in the 1950s came a turning point in the production of indigenous stories for children on the continent. According to Mabel Segun (1992: p.27), few countries in Africa have shown interest in publishing literary works for children and most of the books for children are published in Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Cameroon, Ivory-Coast, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique.

Different literary works were produced for children to entertain them and to decolonise their psyche from colonial oppression and subjugation which present the African culture and tradition as being inferior to the Western models. Also, to develop the indigenous languages, literary works for children were equally produced to boost the acquisition of such languages. Therefore, there is a plethora of children stories in indigenous African languages like Kiswahili, Swahili, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulani, and others (Roscoe 1971, Fayose 1995, Dasyilva 2007, Traore 2008, Ngugi 2010).

What could be regarded as an indigenous story for children in Nigeria, written in English language came with the publication of Cyprian Ekwensi's *The Drummer Boy* in 1960 (Fayose, 1995, p. 1). Many authors and scholars like Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Mabel Segun, Biola Odejide, Philomena Fayose, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Virginia Dike, and a host of others have been at the forefront of championing the cause of Children's literature in the country. These scholars are of the opinion that children need reading materials that are specifically addressed to meet their taste in terms of form and content.

In the same vein, in advocating for the revival of the reading culture and language acquisition, Children's literature has been discovered to be an authentic channel for achieving these objectives. According to Amanda Credaro (2006), literature for children is capable of boosting the attainment of different educational roles in the school curriculum. These roles range from "a resource for language development", to being "an extension tool for gifted readers", "a vehicle for meta-comprehension

assessment”, “an alternative text”, “a utility for disabled students” and a vehicle for addressing “equity issues”.

1.1.3 The concept of childhood

Childhood is regarded as a socially constructed idea with a possibility of different concepts and connotations based on a number of variables which are dependent on socially imposed idea(s). For instance, in line with Romantic belief, childhood is often associated with innocence, transparency and simplicity, while children, in many cultures, are regarded as mere appendages to adults, and are thus, only “seen” but not “heard”. However, from the UNICEF’s (2004) standpoint, the child is believed to have transcended the level of being reduced to “beloved pawns” in the hands of adults as they are seen to have qualities for active participation in the issues which affect the society. Lesnik-Oberstein (2011) therefore, argues for “voice” and “agency” as two central issues for approaches to childhood in all fields.

Understanding the concept of childhood, its worldview and experience is largely responsible for the tag “children’s literature”. This is what informs the study of childhood by child development theorists like Maslow (emotional), Erikson (social), Piaget (cognitive), and Kohlberg (moral). Children’s literature is, therefore, categorised in line with the different stages of development. Piaget (1948) identified five developmental stages in accordance with the child’s level of cognitive development. The first level is the sensorimotor stage for children from 0-2years. The second stage is the pre-conceptual thought stage from 2-3years. The third level is the intuitive thought stage from 4-8years. The concrete operational stage, which is the fourth, is for children aged 9-12years. Lastly, children from age 12 and above belong to the formal operational stage which is the last of the stages (Dasyuva, 2007: p.6). This explains the UNICEF’s (2004) definition of childhood as “a space between birth and the attainment of adulthood...a separated and safe space” for growth and development.

In Africa, childhood, according to Okolie, (1998) is considered as “the foundation on which our life is constructed” (p.30). Childhood in the African experience is a period connected with innocence and great capabilities which are expected to be developed in spite of the different challenges of being silenced or effaced by paternal egocentrism in

the course of growing up to become adults. This forms the nucleus of the articles written by different scholars like Inyama, and Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1998) in *Childhood in African literature* edited by Eldred Durosimi Jones. The two aspects of the positive and negative manifestations in life are portrayed during childhood with the aim of showing the importance of proper moulding and upbringing of a child to attain a desired positive change in the society.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto further notes that childhood “embodies the hopes of a people and the struggle to construct a sense of stability out of the chaos of modernism” (p.52). Environmental concerns evolved from the “chaos of modernism”, and if we intend to find a resolution to the issues, we have to approach it through children’s literature which is accessible via a reconstructive reading “that seeks to restore the severed connexions between the innocent “wisdom” of childhood and the educated “ignorance” of adulthood” (Anozie, 1992: p.14). This is achieved as we share the experience of reading and interpretation of the stories with children. Childhood experience, development and socialisation are critical factors for the development of a well socialised future adult. Therefore, children’s literature is a very important tool for shaping the characters of children who later grow into adulthood. In the African narratives examined by these writers, childhood is a thematic concept that is often negotiated through “a didactic or moral stance” of an adult’s recollection of his childhood experiences.

1.1.4 Thematic concerns in children’s literature

Thematic concerns in children’s literature are often laced with one moral or the other, ranging from honesty, loyalty, perseverance, bravery, fairness, obedience and others. Brian Wafawarowa (2006) indicates that besides the traditional didactic folklores which have provided abundant content for the development of children’s literature in Africa, the various socio-economic issues HIV/AIDS, war and displacement, governance and democratisation, poverty, economic development, sport and others, are some of the contemporary issues highlighted in children’s books. These themes are explored through the various classifications of children’s literature.

Apart from the basic genres of Poetry, Prose, and Drama, associated with literature, books written for children are sometimes divided through the different stages of development or by genres. Children's literature delineated according to age includes:

- Picture books (0-5years) for pre-readers: these are lavishly illustrated and meant to teach basic concepts and ideas like associating a word to a picture or drawing, counting of numbers etc. They are essentially information books.
- Early readers (5-7years): are ideal for introducing children to learning how to read.
- Chapter books (7-12years) are suitable for those who have attained a level of mastery in reading.

For the genre classification by Nancy Anderson, we have:

- Picture books for teaching of basic concepts and patterns
- Oral /folk literature
- Fiction
- Non- fiction
- Biography
- Poetry and verse

A more comprehensive classification given by Arbuthnot and Southerland (1972), cited in Akorede (2008: pp.61-62) include: picture stories, fantasy stories, humorous stories, poetry books, printed folktales, animal stories, adventures, realistic stories, and information books dealing with different subjects like science, social science, technology, but written in fiction. These classifications of literature for children are well suited for telling the story of man's relationship with the natural environment, thus setting in motion the healing process of the broken connection between man and nature.

1.1.5 Literature and the environment

Bamidele (2003), in his attempt at showing the connection between sociology and literature, opines that literature is a thorough examination of "the role of man in his environment, as well as the conflicts and tensions between groups and social classes" (p. 4). Looking at the role of man in the society, it is often discovered that man is not only in conflict with himself, but also with other non-human factors around him. This foregrounds *place* as a vital component of literature. And for literature to retain its

relevance in all human endeavours, it has to pay more attention to the effects of the activities of man on his environment.

Buell (2005) opines that “environment first came into use as an English noun” during the industrial revolution with Thomas Carlyle being acknowledged for its first usage (pp. 62 and 140). Environment, in the context of this study, is the natural world as a whole or in a particular geographical area, especially as affected by human activity. The environment can further be classified into three categories: *natural* such as forests, oceans, and so on; *built* like houses, cars, and *modified* environment like a vegetable farm, and a manicured lawn. Although some ecocritics regard “environment” as an anthropocentric term which connotes man’s right to influence/affect nature as he so desires, a thorough examination of the word shows that it could not be taken as being completely synonymous with “nature” because “environment” is sometimes regarded as including not just the physical surrounding, but also culture—values, beliefs and philosophies of a group of people—which has a great influence on the people and their natural environment.

To this end, all scholastic efforts in the sciences and the humanities have been targeted at improving man’s existence on earth, and this undoubtedly has impacted greatly on nature-- the physical environment which could continue to exist with/without human existence. While literary studies have paid so much attention to various human crises like race, class and gender over centuries, which have brought about the evolvement of critical discourses like Marxism and feminism, an environmental perspective in contemporary literary discourse started gaining momentum in America in the 1970s when William Rueckert coined the term “Ecocriticism”. This field of literary criticism/study is aimed at the representation and interpretation of the relationship between man and the natural environment

The natural environment includes all living and non-living organisms in mutual existence. However, with the advent of civilisation/industrialisation, the mutual existence between man and the natural environment has been altered as nature is only expected to serve man without any recourse to the environmental threats posed by modern civilisation (Krutch, 1954, Marx, 1964, Elder, 1985, Love, 1996, White, 1996, and Schaefer, 2009).

As a result of civilisation, there are different activities which have brought about a lot of crises in the society. The desire to annex the natural resources of a region, or expand the territories or frontiers of a group of people has led to the colonisation of different places/regions by the Western world.

Colonialism which is basically the subjugation of a people's culture and resources triggered off a series of conflicts which have been recorded in different literary works. The African experience of subjugation with regards to the land and its resources is reflected in the works of literary artists like Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Weep not child, A grain of wheat, Devil on the cross*, Alan Paton's *Cry, the beloved country*, Alex La Guma's *A walk in the night*, and more recently, in Nigeria, Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, and Tanure Ojaide's *Tale of the harmattan* that painfully depict the devastation of the Niger Delta due to oil exploitation.

Marxism as a literary theory which highlights themes of class conflict came to the fore to expose the ills of capitalism which is closely linked to civilisation and industrialisation. Industrialisation is boosted through the exploitation of labour and natural resources while civilisation thrives on the despoliation of the natural environment causing various environmental hazards like oil spills, deforestation, pollutions, and conflicts over land use, water rights, toxic waste contamination, and others that lead to crises in the society.

Moreover, the racial segregation between the colonialists and the indigenous Africans gave rise to what Liora Bigon (2008) describes as the colonial urban space which is depicted in Anglophone and Francophone novels that deal with the colonial period in Africa (pp. 378-401). While the expatriates live in beautiful houses in tamed environments with paved streets and roads, the natives are condemned to shanties and slums whereas the latter's sweat and resources are drained to improve the living condition of the colonial masters. Even when the colonialists have gone, the native representatives of bourgeoisies and members of the middle class take the reins of oppression from where the imperialist masters have left off, and continue to drain the resources of the masses and that of the natural environment for selfish gains. Conflicts over land and its resources are common themes in African literature as the resources from the minority—not in terms of numbers, but status—areas are used to build the

“white cities” and the imperialist urban centres while the rural areas and towns are left in a degraded state.

This pattern of oppression along the line of race, class, and gender can be seen all over the nations of the world, but it is more prominent in the developing countries. However, the conflicts associated with race, class, and gender have been, and are still being tackled in cultural studies, with a sizeable measure of success, the ecological literary discourse has uncovered the relationship between these levels of human conflicts and the physical environment. Therefore, literary ecology sets out to study how literature both reflects and influences the human interactions with the natural world.

The negative effects of man’s activities on the environment have prompted a “widespread disciplinary reevaluation” that has led to a concerted effort at reassessment of cultural values and “the extension of human morality to the non-human world” (Love, 1996: p.229).

Douglas Burton-Christie (1996) asserted that there is a skilful “synthesis of science and art” in nature writing. Literary works with nature concerns are aptly described as “nature writing”, “landscape writing” or “literature of place”. It is regarded as the “literature of place” because “a specific and particular setting for human experiences and endeavour” forms the focal point for many nature writers. (p. 2) For Barry Lopez (1997), nature writing is connected to geography, “not a subject” but “as a shaping force”. The literature of nature as such, is a perfect blend of geography and ecology. This genre of literary studies is ignorantly seen as being new, when in actual fact, it is one of the oldest branches in literary arts. Lopez further argues that “writing that takes into account the impact nature and place have on culture is one of the oldest—and perhaps most singular—threads in American writing”. (p. 1)

Nature writing is greatly concerned with the detachment of man from nature which inadvertently spells doom for him and the natural environment. Nature writing is, therefore, “in search of a modern human identity that lies beyond nationalism and material wealth” (Lopez, 1997: p. 1). Some nature writers have been accused of being prophets of doom. However, some of these writers have actually brought hope to the

world by making man to realise the need to cultivate a healthy relationship with the natural environment so as to sustain a peaceful co-existence between man and nature. The message of nature awakening is best articulated for man with the scientific and artistic tools employed in nature writing. This is so because the scientific tool deals with probing of “the mystery of nature”, while the artistic tool is deployed for an effective aesthetic description of “what is there”. This explains Douglas Burton-Christie’s agreement with Thomas J. Lyon’s opinion that “science and aesthetic-emotional-intuitive knowledge not only coexist in nature writing, but conspire to suggest something greater, as it were, than the sum of its parts” (Burton-Christie, 1996: p. 9).

1.1.6 The call for environmental sustainability

The environmental debate could be said to have been triggered by the grim picture of the hazardous effects of chemical pollution on the environment painted by Rachel Carson (1962) in the *Silent spring*. This environmental discourse had a profound effect on politics and policies making that have revolutionized the anthropogenic claim to dominion over the natural environment. To this effect, the first Earth Day was held on 22 April, 1970 to create awareness and protest the negative impact of industrialisation on the environment. Before this time however, various environmental organisations have been formed to create more consciousness about the ruinous effects of environmental degradation and to push for favourable policy reforms on the environment.

In 1972, the first major international conference on environmental crisis, sponsored by the United Nations, took place in Stockholm, Sweden. The conference led to the birth of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) with its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. This body is primarily concerned with encouraging sustainable development especially in the developing countries. In 1975, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was inaugurated to see to the reduction on commercial trade in endangered animals and plants. The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer took place in 1987, while an international treaty on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste and their Disposal was signed at the Basel Convention in 1989. The

Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. The summit, organized by the United Nations, dealt with the issues of environment and development. It was agreed at the summit that developed countries should voluntarily cut down on their carbon emissions, while the second agreement pact was on the protection of the endangered species and habitats.

A follow-up conference to the Earth Summit was held in Kyoto, Japan in 1997. A better level of commitment to the reduction of carbon emission by the industrialised countries was sought at this conference. Unfortunately, the United States of America, one of the highly industrialised nation, and a major polluter, refused to sign this agreement to cut back on carbon emissions depleting the Ozone Layer, which is a direct consequence on global warming and climate change. However, Japan and fifteen other countries in the European Union signed this agreement.

At the onset of a new millennium in 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations agreed on a number of goals to guide all round development in all the nations of the world. The set goals was tagged the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The eight goals set for actualization by the year 2015, are: 1) eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; 2) ensuring a universal primary education; 3) promotion of gender equality and women empowerment; 4) reduction in child mortality rate; 5) maternal health improvement; 6) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 7) ensuring environmental sustainability; and 8) developing a global partnership for development. The seventh Millennium Development Goal—environmental sustainability—as noted by Wangari Maathai (2009) in *The challenge for Africa*, is central to the realisation of the other seven MDGs.

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, with delegations from about 200 countries. The outcome of the conference include among others, more commitment to the provision of the technological expertise by the developed nations to facilitate economic growth and development in the developing nations with minimal adverse effects on the environment. Also, there was a proposition for the reduction by half, the number of people who lack access to sanitation facilities by 2015, reduce health and

environmental problems associated with chemical pollution by 2020, and reduce the number of endangered species by 2010.

The recent debacle amongst major world leaders regarding setting limits for carbon emissions at the Copenhagen Summit in February 2010 is one of the many instances when environmental issues have taken the front burner in international relations. Apart from terrorism, environment-related issues are the most debated and often least comfortable amongst nations of the world today. Strange weather patterns along with strange illnesses also confirm the precarious nature of today's world. While attempts at a universal approach to resolving the challenges posed by environmental issues have produced varying results, each country equally seeks its own alternative and sustainable models. Most of these approaches seem to focus on attitude change instead of attitude formation; virtually all models seek to change behaviour rather than on moulding citizens of the world who, in the long run, would have a conscious relational attitude towards the natural environment.

Ecological consciousness is both the process of creating awareness and raising interest in establishing a cordial relationship between human and non-human environment. It is also the condition of understanding and appreciating how plants, animals and people are related to one another and their environment to the extent that man cares about his environment and is interested in preserving it. It is a paradigm shift in the *place* and *role* of man on Earth. It is a process of cultivating a balanced relationship between man and the natural environment, a proper way of "being-in-the world" which places premium on mutuality, balance, and synergy between human and non-human nature. This awareness is needed to raise the human consciousness to assume his ecological responsibility towards Nature, and an understanding required to address the challenges of the present environmental crisis.

To tackle the challenges of environmental degradation, it is important that man should seek to re-evaluate the connection between him and natural phenomena so as to effect a change in his way of engaging with the natural environment. The danger posed by environmental degradation, as a result of human activity, calls for a conscientious effort to stem the tide of imminent destruction of the only planet that sustains life. As DesJardins (1993) observes, "environmental problems raise fundamental questions of

ethics and philosophy” (p. 54). This opinion is equally shared by Evernden (1996) when he argues that “environmentalism involves the perception of values, and values are the coin of the arts” (p. 103). He further asserts that environmentalism as a discourse is better engaged through aesthetics if it is not to be regarded as “merely regional planning”. These pronouncements highlight the need for a re-evaluation of values to chart a sustainable path, especially for the younger generation and posterity.

O’Sullivan and Taylor (2004) in *Learning towards an ecological consciousness* argue that scientific technological activities have alienated man from his connection with the physical world which has always borne the brunt of his scientific adventures. This is largely because man has always had an illusion of being outside the world which he is acting upon and this has fostered an “instrumental consciousness”—a mechanistic, materialistic, and obsessed worldview of dominating and exploiting the natural environment.

The human interaction with the natural environment is basically informed by his understanding and representation of the world around him. This is in tandem with Harre, Brockmeier, and Muhlhausler’s (1999) opinion that:

The [environmental] ‘crisis of our time’ is at root a discursive phenomenon. It comes about through a shift in our way of seeing and assessing what we see, made possible by the taking up into our discursive resources new vocabularies, new judgemental categories, new metaphors and analogies that have promoted awareness of much that was previously overlooked (pp. 3-4).

This observation attests the efforts of ecocritical writers at ‘re-writing’ the environment in human consciousness such that a measure of awareness about the anthropogenic impact on the bio/physical environment is presented to the human species so that they could be mindful of the interrelationship between human and non-human nature.

Potter (2005) posits that “how we represent the world informs how we live in it—either responsive or not to our ecological place” (p. 1). As such, ecological literary works are intended to:

mirror/reflect back our own attitude towards the natural world so as to appeal to our affective recognition which in turn raises the ecological consciousness of the society who is able to see itself in the mirror (p. 2).

These observations underscore the need for an appropriate view of the interrelationship between human and non-human nature to arrive at a suitable environmental ethics for “restitution and recovery”. Dryzek (2005) proposes four major categories of addressing environmental concerns. These include: “ i) environmental problem solving, ii) survivalism, iii) sustainability, iv) green radicalism which is further divided into; green consciousness and green politics” (p. 15).

Another dimension to the effects of human interactions with the environment is highlighted in Al Gore’s pronouncement that:

We have quadrupled the population of the world in the last 100 years. We have magnified the power of our technologies a thousandfold...

...We are the largest force of nature now, and we have to take that into account in the way we relate to the environment (as cited in Dalton, 2006, p.34).

This assertive declaration by Gore identifies two major factors of environmental challenges which are population growth and technological advancement. It also underscores some socially accepted human ideologies which support human dominion over the natural environment. Nonetheless, he warns against unbridled control over the environment by humans. In fact, the enormity of the human responsibility to care for the environment forms the core of this proclamation.

Environmental issues are factors threatening the environment. Some of the factors are population growth, global warming, Ozone Layer depletion, habitat destruction and species extinction, air pollution, water pollution, ground water depletion and contamination, chemical risks, environmental racism, and energy production.

The focus of the study is on African prose narratives for children. This is because our childhood reminds us of the traditional tales we were told which are basically laced

with one moral or the other to make us a worthy neighbour to others—both man and nature—around us. Some of these morals we tend to forget when we become adults and we regard them as nothing but fantasy. However, “fantasy contains truth” and as “the minds of children are still open to the living word” (M. L’Engle, 1977); the gains of environmental sustainability is better presented through stories which enable us to reflect on “life problems and circumstances” and take a stand towards resolving the issues. This is in tandem with Lesnik-Oberstein (1998) opinion that children’s literature is a veritable tool for the explication of “ideas about nature, the environment, ecology and the role of humans in relation to all of these” (p.216). According to Stinson (2002) traditional stories are embodiments of “what we know and value” (p.164).

This discovery of the power of literature is being effectively tapped in other fields of learning in helping the learners in the acquisition of knowledge. For instance, in language, the story context is one of the ways of teaching reading to young learners. Children’s literature inculcates a good reading and learning habits in children. This is because it helps the children develop a reading habit early in life. It encourages the child to be an avid reader which makes him see reading as a pleasurable thing and reading of other texts becomes very easy as the appetite for getting information through reading has been developed. Also, it has been established that other core subjects like the sciences could be easily taught through children’s literature.

Apart from English language, Moyer (2000) opines that children’s literature provides a context through which mathematical concepts, patterns, problem solving and real world contexts may be explored (p.246). Also, Lapp and Flood (1993) emphasise that the use of literature as a complement to science textbooks can help students develop both the skills and motivation to pursue scientific inquiry with enthusiasm and success (p. 71). For an effective teaching and learning, Deborah Wooten (2000) notes that, “there are excellent children’s books on a variety of levels that strengthen and inform with history, science, math, music and every subject area” (p. 7).

Therefore, the campaign for environmental sustainability could effectively be carried out in Africa through the use of literature. However, the new channel should be children's literature. This is as a result of the awesomeness of the magic of innocence and intuition associated with childhood, and in Plotkin's (1999) words, children "are the best environmentalists! They are energetic, curious; and they're dreamers!" (p. 6).

In Africa, children's narratives have been one of the tools adopted in creating awareness. A point in case is the Longman Health Education Readers which have ten titles in its series on HIV/AIDS awareness series. The texts are quite interesting and educative for the targeted audience. The present study is also intended to encourage the use of children's literature in presenting the realities and challenges of environmental degradation and how such texts could be used in helping the younger generation to cultivate an affective relationship with the natural environment.

1.1.7 Environmental issues in Africa

The major global challenge to the environment is Climate Change. The excessive accumulation of greenhouse gases (GHG) is responsible for the depletion of the Ozone Layer which has triggered off a rise in temperature globally. This ruinous human impact on the environment began during the Industrial Revolution in the West. The burning up of fossil fuel and cement production are largely responsible for the destructive emissions to the atmosphere. Every nation of the world is affected by this devastating environmental challenge. Ironically, the developing nations, which are mostly found in Africa, are the ones who bear the brunt of climate variability and climate change in spite of their negligible contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The World Bank (2008) reports that only 14 percent of the world's population live in Africa, 3 percent of the world's energy is consumed in Africa, while the continent is only responsible for 3.8 percent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The devastating effects of climate change are intense in the developing nation like Africa. Some of these include land degradation, flooding, desertification, drought, and loss of biodiversity, malnutrition and disease outbreaks (AEO, 2016).

To address this challenge, in January, 2007, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) acknowledged the risk posed by climate change to "the future

well-being of the population, ecosystems and socio-economic progress of Africa”. This observation was also corroborated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in April, 2007 and Africa is projected as one of the most susceptible continents to the adverse effects of climate variability and climate change. Although African countries are exempted from all the commitments to emission reduction at the United Union’s Climate Change Conference in Bali in 2007, there are still more issues to be tackled to address “indigenous poverty” caused by the ruinous effects of climate change on the environment.

This may be a daunting task for most nations on the continent due to the level of socio-economic development of the nations. However, many African nations are signatories to notable environmental agreements which include:

- Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982)
 - Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1988)
 - Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (1989)
 - Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992)
 - Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)
 - Convention to Combat Desertification (1994)
 - Kyoto Protocol to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (1997)
 - Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (2000)
 - Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001)
 - Convention of the African Energy Commission (2001)
 - African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (2003)
 - International Tropical Timber Agreement (2006)
 - Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa (2008)
 - Statute of the International Renewable Energy Agency (2009)
 - Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (2010)
 - Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (2010)
 - Minamata Convention on Mercury (2013)
- (Adapted from Mitchell, 2014 International Environmental Agreement Database)

Nevertheless, most of these agreements are just on paper as many African nations have not been able to implement them due to the lack of political will on the part of the leaders and/or the socio-economic deprivation of the countries.

It is noteworthy that all the African nations acceded to the Montreal Protocol (1989) and the United Nation's Convention to Combat Desertification (1994), while not less than 75 percent of AU's member nations are concerned with the effects of environmental degradation and the effective implementation of many of the continent's and International Environmental Agreements. Africa is plagued by four major environmental problems—Deforestation, Soil Degradation, Pollution and Climate Change. Out of these, climate change has been identified as a major factor for the exacerbation of environmental degradation, especially desertification in Africa (Wyk, 2010).

Despite this common front to fight the destruction of the environment, independent nations on the continent face different environmental challenges which are peculiar to each nation from the different regions. The major environmental issues from different regions—West, East, North and Southern Africa—chosen for this study is basically responsible for the selection of literary texts for children which give a fair depiction of some of the environmental issues.

Starting from the Northern African region which has the most industrialised nations on the continent, the major environmental challenge in this region is pollution. According to a report of the African Development Bank (ADB, 2001), Northern African countries are the major polluters of the atmosphere on the continent with Algeria and Egypt taking the lead in this regard. Northern Africa is also responsible for about 20 percent of anthropogenic methane emissions in Africa. Other environmental issues in this region include drought, flooding and climate change.

In Southern Africa, although outdoor pollution through GHG emissions is relatively high, drought is a major threat to the environment. Records of drought in the region show that there were instances of devastating droughts from 1967-73, 1981-83, 1986/87, 1991/92, and 1993/94 (AEO-UNEP). There are instances of the ripple effects

of climate change in the region in terms of flora and fauna extinction, flooding, shortage of freshwater and high reduction in food production.

In Eastern Africa, air pollution is not a major challenge as the rate of urbanisation and industrialisation is relatively low. However, drought is also a major strain on the environment. There has been at least one major incidence of drought in each decade as reflected in the following years: 1973/74, 1984/85, 1987, 1992-1994 and 1999/2000. This has resulted in massive crop failure which led to famine especially in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

Deforestation is a major concern in Western Africa. The Sahelian zone of the region is susceptible to severe drought as it happened over a period of twelve years, from 1972-84. Desertification, a consequent result of deforestation, usually occurs in the arid and semi-arid zones of the region. Nigeria is the largest polluter in the sub-region as a result of reckless gas flaring in the delta area of the country. Anthropogenic activities like deforestation and pollution have a deleterious effect on climatic events which spreads across the globe. Climate variability and climate change affirm Buell's (2005) declaration that "there is no space on earth immune from anthropogenic toxification" (p. 41).

In Nigeria, the problem of environmental degradation became a cause for concern sometimes in 1988 when Seun Ogunseitan wrote a report on the dumping of toxic waste in Koko, Delta State. Before then however, there has been a steady devastation of the natural environment in the Niger Delta area of the country as a result of the activities of the oil explorers. To curb the recklessness of the foreign oil company in the region, Ken Saro-Wiwa, a renowned literary artist and an environmental activist, under the aegis of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) took on some forms of peaceful protests to draw the attention of the international community to the plight of the Ogoni people and other ethnic groups of the Niger Delta. His outcry for the unjust treatment of his people and the natural environment eventually culminated in his assassination and nine other Ogoni elders on 10th November, 1995 by the Abacha military regime.

From then on, the restiveness in the area has not seized as necessary actions have not been taken to alleviate the suffering of the Niger Deltans. Amnesty International reported more than 2,500 oils spills from 2008 to 2012 in the Niger Delta, while another occurrence of over 600 oil spills took place between January and September of 2013 in the same region. This is apart from the devastating effect of gas flaring on human and nonhuman nature in the area which has deprived so many people of their sources of livelihood thereby subjecting them to abject poverty, diseases and premature deaths.

To attend to the issue of environmental degradation, the Ministry of Environment has been established in the country by the Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian administration in June, 1999. This Ministry, in collaboration with the private bodies, has taken on the task of creating awareness on environmental sustainability with little achievements to show for their efforts.

A case in point is the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), a non-governmental organisation established by Shafi Edu in 1980, with its headquarters in Lagos. The Foundation is concerned with creating environmental awareness through environmental literacy programmes among target audience in schools at different levels. The body also engages in the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity in the country through partnership with Chevron and BG Group. The Murtala Muhammed Memorial Botanical Gardens (3MBG), founded by Ajoke Muhammed, the widow of Late General Murtala Muhammed, is another non-governmental body involved with environmental sustainability and preservation in Nigeria. She is also the co-ordinator of the Green Belt Movement of Nigeria. Another private body's effort at creating environmental awareness among the younger generation in the country is that of Children and the Environment (CATE), a non-governmental organisation founded by Sola Alamutu. She opines that children can understand environmental issues if it is properly expressed in a way that "makes sense to them". This is because any issue is better explained in the context of a story.

On July 13, 2012, the Lagos State Government in conjunction with Teachright Nigeria UK Limited, distributed free environmental books to pupils of public primary schools in the state.

In Kenya, the issue of environmental degradation is a major concern as depicted in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* according to Senayon Olaoluwa (2012) in his ecocritical article: 'There was a time'. Of equal importance was the contribution of Wangari Maathai who was awarded the 2004 Nobel Peace prize for her environmentalist efforts in addressing the issue of deforestation in Kenya.

In 1994, GreenCOM, an agency commissioned by two USAID bureaus carried out some assessments of environmental education efforts in five countries in Africa. The five countries: The Gambia, Guinea, Madagascar, Namibia and Uganda have developed specific national environmental plans to address some identifiable ecological issues through environmental education in each of the countries. In its report, GreenCOM identified three types of environmental education: formal (through schools), non-formal (through NGOs and other community based activities), and informal (through the media).

In spite of these concerted efforts to stem the tide of environmental exploitation and degradation in Africa, there is little achievement on the part of the various private bodies and agencies as they often face a brick wall of non-friendly environmental policies of governments in various countries on the continent. A case in point is the non-existence or non-implementation of environmental impact assessment (EIA) report before issuing operational licence to various corporations or industries.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The natural environment has been degraded as a result of the exploitative activities of man with its attendant consequences of earth warming, sea pollution, deforestation; oil spillage and others. These problems and the beauty of nature and the environment have remained a source for literary creativity and integration. Although it is acknowledged that studies, in recent times, have given attention to these problems and man's conscious attempt to save the earth from devastation, through literary works for adults and children, especially in the Western countries, little attention has been given to creating ecological awareness in African children's literature. Literature for children in

Africa has gone through various critical approaches ranging from the form, stylistics, characterization, and various thematic features (Odejide, 1981 and 1986; Ikonne, Oko and Onwudinjo, 1992; Fayose, 1995; Jenkins, 2004; Ngugi, 2006; and Dasyilva, 2007). However, only Jenkins (2004) and Sangili (2012) have examined environmental issues in South African's children's literature written in English and East African oral literary tradition of the Maragoli community respectively. None of the other works has paid any attention to examining contemporary ecological concerns in children's literature from the four regions in Africa. This is the gap that this study sets out to fill.

1.3 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to examine the depiction of ecological consciousness in eight selected African prose narratives for children from four chosen regions in Africa in order to investigate the predominant environmental tropes, ethics and symbols employed in the selected narratives.

The specific objectives of this study are, among other things, to: examine how the narratives capture African environmental ethics in the process of creating consciousness and evaluate the texts and ideas in terms of their usefulness as responses to environmental crisis and point out how they succeed in doing so or why they fail to do so. Ecological issues have been explored in different ways by several authors. In some works, it forms the nucleus of the story, while in others; it is secondary to the events in the story. This study examines whether environmental themes are central to the selected texts or are just treated tangentially such that the lessons to be learnt on such issues are deemphasised.

1.4 Research questions

To achieve the set objectives and aims for the study, the following research questions are formulated:

- To what extent do African prose narratives for children attempt to raise the ecological consciousness of their readers?

- What are the types of ecological messages in African prose narratives for children?
- How are ecological messages depicted in African prose narratives for children?
- What kind of space is given to ecological issues in the selected texts from the four regions of Africa to be considered?
- Are the texts useful as responses to environmental crises?
- Which environmental ethic is captured in the text?
- Why do some prose narratives for children fail to live up to ecological standards and why do some live up to it?

1.5 Scope of the study

The scope for this study is limited to eight selected African prose narratives for children whose contents engage environmental issues. Based on geographical spread, the texts are purposively selected from four regions of Africa: West, East, North, and Southern Africa, where considerable efforts are made in creating ecological awareness through literature for children in Africa. Central Africa and the Island nations are not part of the areas included in this study because the countries in Central Africa can easily be subsumed under the West, East, and Southern regions of the continent, while the island nations are excluded because they are not part of the mainland. Also, the selected titles are written by renowned authors of children's literature in their respective regions and the works are published by reputable publishing outfits from 1991 to 2010, the decade regarded to have been characterized by different activities to create awareness on environmental despoliation and call for action to reverse the ugly trend. The selected works are grouped into two categories, four traditionally-inclined tales (West—Charles Anson-Lawson (2009) *The greatest treasure*, East—Verna Aardema (1997) *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain*, North—George Murphy (2002) *The enormous yam*, and Southern Africa—Charles Mungoshi (1997) *Stories from a Shona childhood*) and four contemporary stories (West—Mabel Segun (1991) *The twins and the tree spirits*, East—Donna Jo Napoli and Kadir Nelson (2010) *Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the trees of Kenya*, North—Walid Tahir (2008) *Sayeed..sayeed* and Southern Africa—Ignatius Musonza (2003) *Ike's plant*).

The selected prose narratives are the graded ones for children from the ages of four to twelve. These texts serve as the basis for comparing the contents of the literary works on environmental issues in Africa thereby espousing that literature for children has a lot to contribute to the development of global environmental awareness and instill a sense of 'ecological citizenship' with a duty of responsibility and commitment to nurture the environment.

The study strictly focuses on issues that are significant to the representation of ecological themes through environmental tropes, ethics, symbols and the awareness thus created in the selected African prose narratives for children. The study does not attempt to analyse the mechanisms through which the children interpret the ecological issues and consciousness in the texts, but focuses on what is depicted in the narratives. As such, it does not consider the reader's response to the issues in the texts.

1.6 Significance of study

Although the motivation for this study is engendered from the realization of the effectiveness of literature in enlightening the people, the significance of this study is on the use of prose narratives for children in creating ecological awareness among this targeted audience. Notwithstanding, the study takes a look at how the stories could be effectively used in promoting environmental sustainability, and encouraging other writers for children to produce works with similar contemporary themes on the environment.

The study fills the gap of evaluating and raising ecological consciousness in children's literary discourse by advocating for the use of children's literature as a tool for addressing contemporary issues that are related to the preservation of the environment in Africa. Through this effort, the importance of using literature to inculcate desirable attitude towards nature in children who are capable of influencing the entire society and posterity, is emphasised and thereby the ecological consciousness of children is raised from an early age. Scholars and students with interest in ecology and literature will find the study a resourceful material.

Environmental literacy, of the kind that the current study is, creates a transformative environmental consciousness that facilitates an increasing awareness of the interrelatedness between human and non-human nature. Therefore, this environmental literacy is intended to create in children “a new way of harmonious connection and living with non-human nature” (P. White, 2009: p. 13). This enables the young audience to be more ecologically aware and be at peace with the natural environment.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Children's literature is an important socialization tool for guiding and influencing the minds and actions of the young readers to adequately prepare them for their roles as members of a local or global society. Environmentally-themed literature is found to be more accessible in creating awareness about ecological issues than a scientific approach to achieving the same purpose, especially with a children audience. Louv (2005) has warned about the present generation children's withdrawal from nature due to their preoccupation with technologically produced forms of entertainment through the television, video games and films. From the onset of the twentieth century, children are found to be more engaged in indoor activities than taking part in outdoor activities in the natural environment.

Every society, from the classical age, to this modern time, has a way of getting their members to learn about the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Like other nations of the world, Africans have a rich oral tradition that forms the basis for their relationship with other humans and the non-human nature. Despite this, not much work has been done on eco/environmental issues in contemporary African children's literature. For example in Nigeria, Biola Odejide (1981, 1986) in some of her works looks at the themes of adventures and other contemporary issues like family relations, child abuse, and gender related concerns in children's stories. Also, a study carried out about children's literature research in Kenyan universities by Pamela Ngugi (2012) shows that there is not a single research linking children's literature with ecological consciousness out of all the twenty research works that were reviewed. However, in the course of this study, a few relevant previous works on children's literature and the environment were found and reviewed.

The few that exist are not broad-based because they are isolated works from some countries in Africa.

Traditional stories for children in Africa have always had some elements of environmental issues neatly stashed in them. For instance some aetiological tales used to explain natural phenomenon on earth are basically meant to get children to be fully conscious of their natural environment, and to be grounded in the culture and traditions of the people (Fayose, 1995; Akporobaro, 2012). However, more often than not, the didactic aspects of such stories are usually emphasised to the detriment of the ecological wisdom associated with these stories. Maxwell Okolie (1998) has rightly observed childhood to be a period of introducing the child to the mysteries of nature and existence where the child is made to see nature as his “friend and companion and a well of knowledge from which he could draw from” (p. 32). Going further on this, he regards the theme of childhood as a symbol for “all the moral and natural nobleness that Africa ever stood for” (p.35). However, scant attention has been paid to an assessment of how children are exposed to the mysteries of nature which is what this study attempts to do.

2.2 A critique of existing works on environmental issues in African literature for children

In Zimbabwe, mining of gold and diamond have taken their toll on the environment. Anna Chitando and Angeline M. Madongonda (2012) undertake an ecocritical analysis of a collection of traditional stories on the environment to foreground the importance of traditional ecological knowledge in tackling environmental degradation. They identified the role of the environment as a major factor of development in the Third World. As such, the texts examined are meant to showcase the “indigenous knowledge systems that seek to protect the environment” (p. 5) and promote a symbiotic relationship between human and non-human nature.

The study adopts an ecocritical approach, coupled with semiotic analysis, analogies and other notable features of the stories embedded in the environmental discourse on conservation. The eight stories examined are from Chifunye’s anthology: *Takura and the talking branch*. The stories include “Sacred Bees”, “Kachipapa the Guardian

Spirit”, “Sacred Bird”, “How Tambizodwa became an Anthill”, “The Vengeance of the Locust”, “Takura and the Talking Branch”, “The Clear Water of Chuchu”, and “Chilambe and Kabale”. The environmental issues depicted in the stories are “siltation, climate change, deforestation, wanton killing of animal, illegal mining and panning” (p.9).

The importance of the four classical elements—water, fire, air, and earth—in the preservation of an ecologically sound environment is represented in “Kachipapa the Guardian of the Forest” and “The Vengeance of the Locust” where totems are adopted as symbols for creating a consciousness of oneness with nature among the people. Ecological rules of conservation and preservation are entrenched in all the stories. The stories in the collection foreground the interdependent relationship between people and the natural/physical environment which should be jealously protected by human beings in their own interest.

Chitando and Madongonda (2012) conclude that there are elements of environmental consciousness in each of the stories examined and acknowledge that “children’s literature promotes environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge, and stewardship within the children” (p. 15). It is also recommended that children’s literature should be made compulsory at the primary level, and incorporated into the Environmental Education curriculum. This work is relevant to the present study but it is limited in scope as it has been observed in the review.

In South Africa, Jenkins (2004) acknowledges that the country has a thriving culture in nature writing for children which began early in the nineteenth century. He examines over forty stories written in English language for South African children. He opines that wildlife and the natural environment have not only provided the setting for South African children’s literature, but also forms the thematic thrust in the literary texts for the young audience. This is especially so in the traditional oral literature in the South African indigenous languages.

Jenkins’ effort establishes the contributions of English language children’s literature to the issues of nature conservation, and environmentalism by adopting Wylie’s (2001) tripartite model of “ecologically-oriented criticism”. The ethics projected in earlier

environmentally-oriented stories are unacceptable to the contemporary audience because such ethics of unrestrained anthropocentrism are at variance with the notion of ecological harmony in nature, and between humans and nature, which ecocriticism supports.

Jenkins further notes that a lot of the texts are fraught with different flaws ranging from stylistic to aesthetics and ethical functions. In addition to this, most of the earlier works were a stamp on the authority of the colonialists on not just the people, but also, on the land. He observes that the construction of nature in South African literature has a national or racial undertone. Moreover, the roles of traditional beliefs in modern ecological practices are also highlighted in the English and Afrikaans adaptation and translation of indigenous folktales during the twentieth century. Stories in this mould depict a “close harmony with the animals, birds and plants upon the earth” (p. 117). However, he stated that from 1960, “many books for children have made modern concerns in conservation the focus of the plot” (p.119). Jenkins’ (2004) study is apposite to this present research as they both have environmental focus. The point of divergence, however, is in the scope of study. While Jenkins’ study only engaged English literature for children in South Africa, this present effort examines the portrayal of ecological consciousness in stories for children in Africa.

In another research from Kenya in East Africa, Nabeta Sangili (2012) argues in favour of an African ecocritical imagination through the language and other cultural milieu of the people. Common conversations among traditional Africans are environmentally conceptualised through various tropes and imageries drawn from the immediate physical/natural environment. The interconnection between the African people and nature is foregrounded in the engagement between the people’s cultural practices, the natural surroundings and the totality of the people’s experiences as members of a biotic community.

The ecological merits of some traditional Maragoli songs are examined in Sangili’s (2012) study. The songs examined are categorized into five: i) hunger songs; composed to document the people’s experience during famine, ii) play songs; which familiarize the children with nature, iii) war songs; to depict the warrior’s strength to defeat the enemies, iv) wedding songs; to express love and joy for the newly married couple, and

v) folkloric songs; to emphasise the thematic thrust of different stories or serving as a rhythmical device for sustaining the audience's interest and participation during the narration of the stories.

The author sees a connection between the people and the natural environment as depicted in the oral literature of the Maragoli tribe and advocates for the conservation of the natural environment which serves as the reservoir of literary knowledge and cultural education. Sangili's work is also related to this study while the present effort has a wider focus.

In Tanzania, Traore (2010) examines the relationship between literature and education through the literature written for children in Swahili, produced since 1990s, to disseminate socialist and nationalist ideals to the citizens, especially the young children in the country. Swahili children's literature are produced to promote the tenets of African Socialism (Ujamaa) and for "decolonizing the minds" of the citizens. Out of all the texts considered, only one—*Mtawa na Binti Mfalme (The hermit and the princess)* by W. E. Mkufya could be regarded as an ecocritical story because of its environmental message of conservation. The protagonist, Alifeo, enjoys living in the rural area, is a vegetarian and able to talk to animals. He convinces the princess and her father about the folly of killing animals of the savannah simply for the acquisition of their ivory and leather for economic gains. The text is relevant to the present research, but the ecological theme is not the main focus of Traore's study. Besides, the present effort focuses on the depiction of ecological consciousness in African prose narratives for children.

As attested to by Adugna (2015), little attention has been given to ecological issues in Ethiopian children's literature. Her epochal contribution in this field of study examines the level of importance placed on ecological issues in Ethiopian children's literature published in Amharic. The research explores the ecological subject positions put forward in the literary texts in order to establish the values ascribed to non-human nature. Out of over 50 narratives examined, from 15 Amharic stories for children, only 8 are inscribed with ecological underpinnings thereby showing a dearth of ecological stories for socialising the young citizens towards a pro-environmental disposition. Adugna's research in this regard, has some connection to this study. However, while

her work is restricted to Ethiopian children's literature published in Amharic, this present study has a wider focus, covering purposively selected ecological stories for African children, from the four major regions on the continent, which are published in English.

Not much work has been done on environmental issues in Nigerian children's literature. As earlier noted in this study, Virginia W. Dike (2012), in an interview with Musiyiwa, identifies three major gaps in Nigerian children's literature while reiterating the need for local contents in literature for Nigerian children so as to meet the "growing awareness of environmental issues and the need for environmental conservation and biodiversity" (p.4). Explaining the reason for her foray into nature writing for children, she says her effort is aimed at providing "nonfiction picture books introducing the local natural environment... opening the natural world up to children", increase their knowledge and consciousness of the natural environment; sharpen their sense of observation to appreciate the value and beauty of nature and develop an analytical mind for a reflective and scientific thinking (pp. 3-4).

An assessment of *Children and literature in Africa* (1992), edited by Chidi Ikonne, Emelia Oko, and Peter Onwudinjo shows that environmental issues are relatively new field to be considered as being relevant for any critical consideration in literature for children in Africa. This is clearly the case as only one of the eighteen contributors to the text ventured into discussing any issue that deals with the natural environment. This contributor, Tunde Fatunde undertakes what he calls the "African Pedagogy in Osahon's Stories for Children". In this article, Osahon's Obobo Book series are described as being specially designed to facilitate learning in young children;

to instill pride in our rich history, create self knowledge and confidence, and help in developing logic and reasoning; aiding self as well as adult aided study; teaching spelling; assisting word study and dictionary use; highlighting little known words to improve vocabulary; ensuring broad, well rounded knowledge of science and the arts; making reading visually entertaining, compelling and fun; sharpening wits and triggering curiosity and yet learning a sweet, positive myth for the child to revel in (Fatunde, 1992: p. 160).

Concisely put, Naiwu Osahon's literary works for children are aimed at reviving the traditional African cultural heritage while at the same time exposing the child to the contemporary world of Western education and development. Writers and scholars such as Ekwensi, Achebe, Segun, Nwapa, Ezeigbo, Dike and other notable critics who have made their mark in the development and growth of children's literature in Nigeria, share the same view on the objectives of writing for children. Only Virginia Dike expressly mentioned the need to impart nature consciousness in African children in the process of building a cultural awareness in them.

Although Fatunde identifies the central theme of Osahon's *Madam Universe sent Man* as "the creation of Africa, Asia and Europe... and the role of Africa and Africans in world history", he chooses not to highlight the environmental implication of the story on man and the natural environment. For instance, the anthropocentric view projected in the story should have been further explored to let the readers know the importance of having a sense of interconnectedness with nature for fostering peace among humanity. Osahon's art of presentation is highly commendable as his approach is "universal and humanitarian in outlook" (p. 162). In the same breath, he captures the colonial and postcolonial experience in a graphical manner for the young readers to understand the devastating effects of colonialism on man and nature as the inordinate greed for exploitation of natural resources is actually the bane of civilisation and industrialisation.

This narrative is highly instructional in explicating the concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism which is aimed at seeking reparations for Africans. Also, it perfectly fits the mould of an environmental text as recommended by Buell (1995), and Cairney (2011). This is a work that is not just meant "for rehabilitating African culture and history", but also postulates an environmental ideology of stewardship/responsibility of man towards the nonhuman entities on earth.

In fact, there are a lot of environmental lessons in Osahon's classic text which are left unharnessed by Fatunde in his critique of Osahon's *Madam Universe sent Man* and *Right –on Miss Moon*. This is the gap that the present study fills by critically examining ecological consciousness in African prose narratives for children.

Also, Mabel Segun's article in the same volume which mentioned some children's narratives like *The first corn*, *The twins and the tree spirits*, and *Birds of our land*, which are texts with ecocritical undertone, are only listed as examples of well illustrated books or information picture book.

As earlier noted, most writers and critics of children literature in Nigeria have advocated for cultural integration through children's literature. This is to enable the African child to be firmly rooted in his culture, know and play his role as a member of an evolving world so as to address the challenges of his changing environment and recognise his place as a responsible citizen of the earth. Most of the stated roles, however, should be based on the right application of his knowledge about the human and non-human nature on earth so as to maintain balance in the relationship between man and non-human nature for conservation, biodiversity and sustainable development.

It is noteworthy that the advocacy for environmental sustainability is in Nigeria and it has claimed its first martyr in person of the Ogoni-born environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. Other notable writers like Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, and more recently, Kaine Agary, have explored environmental issues in some of their works respectively, but the works were not produced for a children audience. Even, the adult audience often view the works from the Marxist point-of-view as it is widely believed that the socio-political problems in the country overshadow the environmental problems. This is because there is a failure to acknowledge the fact that environmental injustice results in socio-political problems.

The need to get the children involved in spreading this message has recently been boosted through the public, private, participation (PPP) embarked upon by the Lagos State Government and Teachright Nigeria Limited, a private educational support outfit committed to qualitative education in the country. In an article tagged "LASG: Engaging children on climate change" written by Luke Onyekakeyah, and published in *The Guardian* on 14 August 2012, the columnist lauded this collaborative effort on "the issue of climate change that the project is out to promote". He notes further that:

Climate change is a global issue. Different countries are taking proactive actions to address the problem. Public

enlightenment is crucial in the effort to tackle climate change and other environmental problems.

Getting children to appreciate issues on environmental care is an important way of redressing the mistakes of the past. Children who are made to appreciate the environment early in their life will be better custodians of the environment. The environmental books given to the pupils will help to inculcate environmental consciousness in the children (2012: p. 79).

From the foregoing, it is evident that ecological consciousness has not received much attention in contemporary prose narratives for children in Africa. It is this identified gap in African children's literature research that has prompted this study.

2.3 Children's literature and ecological consciousness

Outside Africa, the 1977 inter-governmental meeting held in Tbilisi advanced the use of children's books with environmental focus for "Environmental Education" in order to provide "ecological literacy" for the younger generation and create awareness on ecological responsibilities to tackle the challenges associated with environmental crises and depredation. The long tradition of nurturing children through literature is echoed by Carolyn Sigler (1994) through her assertion that "Children's literature [has a] long tradition of nurturing ideologies and issues that the prevailing literary culture regards as subversive or insignificant..." (p. 148). In the same vein, Lesnik-Oberstein (1998) observes that children's literature is a rich mine for the study of the role of man in connection with the natural environment. Nonetheless, a curious look into the field of ecocritical study reveals that little interest has been shown in this regard because children's literature has often been ignored, especially in the field of critical study in African literature (Emeyonu 2015).

Another scholar, Massey (2009) opines that literature is very crucial in creating environmental awareness through the representation of ecological subjectivities in the ecocritical stories targeted at them. Such stories are meant to groom the young children as "responsible global and local citizens" with a sense of mutuality for non-human species. This aligns with Baratz and Abu's (2012) opinion that "ecological story is a

means of expanding global knowledge as a way of life” (p. 34). They equally agree that literature is an instrument of change that could be properly channelled in children’s education to facilitate the needed environmental conduct.

Ecologically conscious literature for children usually portrays the child protagonists as agents of change to support Qvortrup, Cosaro, Honig, and Gubar’s (cited in Lesnik-Oberstein, 2011) explanation on the importance of “agency” and “voice” in childhood studies. The child protagonists in such texts are made to be actively involved in transformational attitude that supports a familial relationship with nature and being actively engaged in proffering solutions to environmental problems.

To this end, for several decades, children’s narratives with ecological commitment have continued to flourish. Identifying Pedley’s *Dot and the Kangaroo*, first published in 1899, Massey (2009) notes that, the literary text, has an environmental consciousness undertone right from the peritext. The dedication page expresses a concern for the protection of the endangered species: “To the children of Australia in the hope of enlisting their sympathies for the many beautiful, amiable, and frolicsome creatures of their fair land, whose extinction, through ruthless destruction, is being surely accomplished” (Pedley, 1899/1933, cited in Massey, 2009: p. 13). Also, she identifies a clear ethic of environmental stewardship inscribed in Gibb’s dedication page of *Snugglepoot and Cuddlepie* (1918/1977) with a plea to be “kind to all bush creatures and don’t pull flowers up by the roots”. This appeal connotes a moral of respect and care for both fauna and flora. This anthropocentric view of stewardship accentuates the human’s duty to act responsibly towards the natural environment.

Seuss’ *Lorax* which was published in 1971 is another popular example of such ecocentric literary narratives. Sigler (1994) posits that the publication of “Seuss’ *Lorax* [which] first spoke “for trees”, is the impetus needed by publishers to continue ‘greening’ children’s literature at an extra-ordinary rate” (p. 149). She links this proliferation to the contemporary global concern for the non-human environment and the role of humanity within that environment which is connected “to the literary and cultural transformations that accompany the development of children’s literature in the eighteenth century” (p. 148).

In Seuss' *Lorax*, a small boy notices at the end of a desolate street on the edge of town, a decrepit house with a memorial – a stone with the inscription UNLESS on it - to the 'Lorax'. He becomes curious as he gazes at the home of the Once-ler? The Once-ler narrates the story of the Lorax and the once beautiful Truffula trees to the boy. The story of greed, mindless exploitation of natural resources and environmental destruction ends with the Once-ler giving the boy the last seed of a Truffula tree. This gesture indicates a hope of correcting the evils of the past, if only the young generation would be courageous to take the right action to right the wrongs of the older generation. This is in tandem with Ezenwa-Ohaeto's (1998) conception of childhood as "indicators of the image of the future adult" and the fact that "the child [is] a symbol of hope" (pp.48-49). The admonition: "Unless someone like you...cares a whole awful lot...nothing is going to get better... It's not" on the inner page of the front cover of *Lorax* is a call to action for the young audience of this classic literary text.

Another interesting eco-story for children published in 1970 is Bill Peet's *The wump world*. The metaphoric tale is about environmental degradation and its effects on the world. The Wumps once had a beautiful world before the rude invasion of the greedy Pollutians from planet Pollutious which has been rendered inhabitable as a result of environmental degradation. The presence of the Pollutians in the wump world takes its toll on the Wumps and their environment. This story, although written by a non-African, beautifully depicts the invasion of Africa by the colonialists whose sole aim was for their own selfish gains. Also, with the recent discussions by various postcolonial ecocritics, Africa and her people are victims of the consequences of environmental deprivation fostered on the people under the guise of industrialisation and lopsided development.

As with every other areas of learning, literature has been found to be a veritable tool in facilitating a better understanding of different concepts. This is because abstract concepts are clearly depicted in a story form for a better conceptualisation of ideas and theories. This literary vehicle is especially effective in communicating various learning concepts to children. In the acquisition of the necessary knowledge about the environment, ecopoetic children's literature "can provide factual basis to encourage greater comprehension of ecocritical issues in their environment" (Goins, 2004: p.31).

This “interactive exposure” provides the needed opportunity for children to “become more ecologically literate” (p. 32).

This view is also shared by Bradford *et al* (2008), as they opine that “children [are] citizens in the making” and as such, literary texts for children should be “environmentally informed” (p. 9). They support “utopian transformation [which is not necessarily] located in the future”, [but as a] part of [the] transformation in the now” (p. 4). They recommend the ‘environmental’ approach as against the ‘ecocritical’ approach to children’s narratives because they believe “the environmental approach ensures that any environmental literature remain anthropocentric in emphasis, rather than engaging with biocentrism or ‘deep ecology’ ” (p. 9). This kind of approach is inadequate for children to really grasp the intensity of the environmental challenges being faced by the present generation.

The questions that come to mind here are: 1) what is the difference between anthropocentrism and biocentrism? And 2) why is anthropocentrism a deficient approach in exposing children to the environmental problems being witnessed presently?

Anthropocentrism is an environmental ethic which places a premium on human interests over and above any consideration for the non-human members of the biotic community, while biocentrism or ecocentrism is an earth/nature-centred approach to the well-being of both human and non-human members of the “biotic web, network, or community” as equal “citizens” of the earth, with equal “rights”. Anthropocentrism, otherwise regarded as an environmental view of human dominion over the natural environment is often considered as myopic, and detrimental to the sustenance of life on earth, especially with regards to man.

In the words of Lynn White, Jr. (1996), “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them”(p. 9). To this extent, anthropocentrism is believed, by a sizeable number of ecocritical scholars, Naess (1972), Lovelock (1982), White, Manes, Fromm, Howarth, Evernden, Rueckert, Campbell, Love, (1996), Snyder (1999) and others, to be a deficient approach to exposing children to resolving the environmental crises being faced by this present

generation as this concept has been found to be responsible for the present ecological depredation. However, several scholars have claimed that the ecocentric ideologies are problematic and difficult to represent in narratives.

For instance, deep ecology propounded by Naess (1989), advocates for equality between human and non-human species, as members of the same biotic community. It is hinged on a “nature-centred” system of values as opposed to the “human-centred” Western philosophy which supports anthropocentrism (Garrard, 2004: 21). This position has often been challenged as Garrard argues: “if value resides everywhere, it resides nowhere, as it ceases to be a basis for making distinctions and decisions” (p. 22). Also, deep ecology is said to be misanthropic as some practitioners of this eco-philosophy, like Dave Foreman and Christopher Manes have once proposed “inhumane and ill-informed statements about population control”, thus suggesting that population growth is a threat to the non-human world and as such, the latter’s interests should take precedence over those of human beings. However, Arne Naess, the proponent of deep ecology has recognised the need to accede to ‘vital’ human needs in some instances where this may be deemed necessary.

Conversely, the representation of ecocentric views in texts is complicated as all environmental discourses are human prerogatives “to speak for nature”, and this naturally confers on the latter the right to determine the human role in addressing different ecological issues. Moreover, to give room to logic, there is the tendency to oscillate between the two value-systems—anthropocentrism and biocentrism/ecocentrism.

In his foreword to Robert Herendeen’s (1998) *Ecological numeracy: quantitative analysis of environmental issues*, David W. Orr asserts the need for ‘ecological numeracy’ for building “ecologically smarter communities and a more durable culture” (p. xiii). This is a knowledge which is better transmitted through environmental literature which has “the land ethic” as its focus by giving equal recognition to the intrinsic value of all members of the biotic community.

Sobel (1996) however sounds a note of warning in exposing children to environmental issues. This scholar is of the opinion that there should be a “balance in exposing

children to environmental threats and promoting the development of environmental empathy and environmental literacy” so as to prevent ‘ecophobia’ in young children. This could be achieved through building upon the children’s “interest in, if not fascination with, the natural world in their own community, which they can experience as being alive and dynamic” (p. 11). This note of caution is important to an extent especially if the targeted audience are children between 3-4 years old. However, it is better to make older children see the realities of the present environmental challenges so as to develop a protective and friendly attitude towards the environment thereby having a sense of responsibility “as members of political communities and ecological communities” (Orr in Herendeen, 1998: p. xiv).

Geraldine Massey (2009) whose research examines the representation of human interactions with the environment in Australian Children’s Literature and how these ecological subjectivities could influence the young readers’ disposition to environmental issues is relevant to this present study. The focus of the work, however, is restricted to environmental narratives for children in Australia, while this present endeavour explores the tropes, ethics and symbols depicting ecological consciousness as reflected in African prose narratives for children.

Gonen and Guler (2011) in the article titled “The environment and its place in children’s picture story books”, identify that children from three years old can be introduced to environmental issues through picture story books which usually appeal to young children as a result of the beautiful pictures and illustrations which attract and sustain the attention of the young reader, as well as enhancing the themes of the stories being narrated. Environmental issues depicted in children stories, in Guler’s opinion, may include themes about air, land, minerals, water, energy materials and resources, plants and animals, human beings and communities, structures and industrialism (Guler, 2010 cited in Gonen and Guler 2011, p. 3633).

Guler (2010) identifies some eco-friendly behaviours children can exhibit from 3-6years. For instance, three-year old children can learn behaviour that does not harm the environment, such as not stepping on flowers. At four, they can cultivate a protective attitude towards animals and plants. This observation aligns with Goins (2004) opinion

that plant science picture books written in story form could facilitate a better personal understanding of plants among children.

Furthermore, Guler (2010) posits that five-year old children can identify the most encountered plants and animals, and can have an idea about life-threatening events like forest fires, air and water pollution, and other anthropogenic disasters. At six, they are matured enough to develop protective behaviour for nature which is usually displayed in their friendly dispositions towards plants and animals around them. This enables them show interest in gardening, and taking care of pets like cats, dogs, goats and other domesticated animals.

According to Gonen and Guler (2011), children's narratives with environmental issues are broadly divided into two groups; those that introduce the environment and those showing the damage done to the environment through human errors (p. 3634). The introduction texts explain geographical structures like sea, rivers, lakes, vegetation, animals and their place in the ecological order. Also, there are storybooks and information books about all kinds of animals, life under the sea, bugs and their characteristics and other issues. There are also books of maps showing the different flora and fauna of different countries and continents. The stories depicting environmental crises caused by the harmful interaction of man with the environment highlight the folly of mindless anthropocentrism which privileges man above the non-human members of the natural environment. They reiterated the fact that children's literary texts with environmental concerns are more popular in developed countries like the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Italy and Scandinavian countries among others. Their research focuses on the environmental themes in picture story books for 2-12 years old children in Turkey.

Allen (2012) focuses on environmentally-themed literature in the curricula of elementary school in Walla Walla, Washington in the United States of America and posits that environmentally-themed literature is a non-scientific alternative approach to creating awareness and teaching ecological issues to young children at the elementary level. The thesis examined the representation of gender, class and ethnic identities and their connection with environmental messages, and how these variables affect the

audience perception of the message through an ecocritical analysis of Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*.

She opines that the personal identities of a reader in terms of age and gender are significant factors which influence the reader's interpretation of environmental message(s) in a literary text. It is also noted that most of the environmentally based literature for children only address individual's effort at solving environmental problems without a serious engagement of the role of corporations and industries, government and policy-makers towards the same issue.

This present study gives some attention to the impact of individual's efforts at solving environmental problems but does not consider students' responses to environmentally-themed stories for children. It interrogates the depiction of ecological consciousness in African prose narratives for children with a view to revealing the effectiveness of the identified environmental tropes, ethics and symbols within the selected texts in doing this.

In Africa, however, there are few detailed ecocritical studies examining to what extent literature for children dealing with nature and environmental issues can be used as tools for creating environmental awareness while at the same time helping the young readers cultivate ecological empathy for nature. This present study is significant in this regard as it explores the environmental issues in African children's literature and the effectiveness of such ecocritical texts in addressing environmental sensitivity, love for nature, and skills that could be gained to protect the environment through such literary endeavours.

Ambika Bhalla (2012) undertakes a study of how children's literature could enhance eco-consciousness in children by examining some ecocritical works in children's literature and concludes that there is a nexus between children's literary texts and their environmental experience. Although the work is relevant to this present study, African literary texts for children are left out of it and this is the lacuna the study fills.

Another study which is relevant to this work is that of Natov (2009) where two literary texts for children are examined to show the therapeutic effect of nature on the psyche of an individual trying to get over an emotional torture—rape in the case of the two

protagonists depicted in Bryan Talbot's (1995) *The tale of one bad rat* and Laurie Anderson's *Speak* respectively. Natov alludes to the role of pastoral images in connecting us to pristine nature which is often brought to the fore through a childlike consciousness. As such, Natov's work serves as a springboard to this study in spite of its foreign background.

In Africa, there are almost no detailed scientific studies showing the role of children's literature in addressing environmental issues. *An annotated bibliography of children's literature with environmental themes* shows that all the works in the collection are produced from outside Africa, and mostly authored by African-American. Not a single title from the eighty-six collections is from the African Continent, while nineteen of the titles are said to be either out of stock or out of print. With this given statistics, the so called 'proliferation' is questionable as eighty-six titles are extremely inadequate to create enough awareness about environmental issues across the globe. However, in another bibliography, compiled by Tessa Michaelson and Megan Schliesman (2008), *Eco reading: selected books for children and teens about our earth and the environment*, the collection highlights contemporary Children and Young Adult Literature (the audience range is from 2-18years), with environmental concerns and inspirational stories to invoke action for positive change. The collection is described as contemporary because most of the works are produced within this present century, with only sixteen of the titles produced during the late twentieth century. Unlike the former bibliography mentioned earlier, this anthology produced by the Cooperative Children's Books Center of the School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, is uniquely divided into three categories:

- In My World: Loving the Earth
- What Happened Here? Environmental Challenges and Change
- Taking Action: Planet Pioneers

Each of the group is further sub-divided into Fiction, and Non-Fiction. The first group has seventeen fiction and sixteen non-fictional titles. The second group has eleven fiction, and ten non-fictional titles, while the last group is kitted with seven fictions, and sixteen non-fictions, giving a total collection of seventy-seven titles. The categorization of books in this anthology somehow aligns with the four ways of

exploring environmental issues in Children's Literature as proposed by Trevor Cairney (2011).

For an ecocritical analysis of children's literature with ecological or environmental issues, Sigler (1994) suggests the "anthropocentric" and "biocentric" dialogical pastoral traditions in Children's Literature for a critical assessment of what William Empson would call "some versions of pastoral and environmental literature for children". Although ecocriticism favours biocentrism/ecocentrism over anthropocentrism, it however, seeks a balance in the interconnectedness of the human and nonhuman nature. As such, a contemporary ecocritical work for children is expected to expose them to the importance of the non-human nature, and the need to foster a sustainable coexistence between man and the natural environment.

Early women writers like Barbauld, Dorothy Kilmer, and Sarah Trimmer, as identified by Sigler, have contributed immensely to the development of Children's Literature in the eighteenth century, and used the biocentric model to their advantage in putting forward a more feminized view of nature for nurture and sustenance. This is "a radical break with the masculine Cartesian model of nature as mechanical and with Rene Descarte's assertion that developing an objective identity requires the rejection of childhood and its associations with subjectivity and sense-experience" (p. 149).

Sigler opines further that Jean-Jacques Rousseau addressed this issue in "his philosophical and pedagogical treatise *Emile* (1762, trans. 1763), a fictional account of an ideal education [which] was instrumental in legitimizing childhood as an important state, [and] establishing Children's Literature as a significant and even necessary field... in forcefully articulating the physical, moral, and intellectual benefits that children can derive from nature" (p. 149).

According to Sigler, Rousseau encourages eighteenth century parents to cultivate a love for the natural environment in their children, and to avoid any form of cruelty towards animals. His poetics depicts non-human nature as a metaphorical representation for anthropocentric issues. This anthropomorphic ethos is a metaphor for "the innate goodness, simplicity, and freedom of childhood, as well as a place

where a child's natural instincts and the rules and decorum of society'' can thrive (p. 149).

This is facilitated through ecocritical tropes which underlie the environmental imagination of the ecocritical writer. Tropes are figurative ways of imagining, constructing and depicting nature in literary and cultural study. Therefore, ecocritics examine the cultural construction of nature, while acknowledging nature as the object and basis for ecocritical discourse. The tropes examined in the ecocritical texts under study, are the ones couched in metaphors, genre, symbols, and discourses bordering on the environment. According to Garrard (2004), tropes are conceptualised within "their wider social context" as there is a connection between their ancient derivation and modern inflection (p. 8).

This study adopts an ecocritical standpoint which critically examines the representation of the "human experience primarily in a naturally and culturally shaped world; [that expresses] the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence and fears of loss and disaster" (Cohen, 2004:10). To this end, ecocriticism has a moral and political undertone which is tied to a 'green' consciousness. The genesis of environmental crisis is linked to the western philosophy which promotes the dualistic separation of humans from nature. Therefore, ecocriticism is a contention against dualism. Ecocritical propositions are meant to establish the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. Kerridge (1998) opines that "the ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations... [in order to] evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis" (p. 5). The environmental ideas and representations in ecocritical texts are usually tracked down through a close analysis of the tropes engaged in the text. Close attention is, therefore, paid to the environmental discourse employed in the texts through different tropes like metaphors, allusions, allegory, genres, ethics and symbols which portray the interdependent relationship between humans and the natural environment.

Ecocritical works (fictional and nonfictional) from British, North American and Australian scholars, examined in the course of this study could be broadly grouped under four environmental tropes identified by Garrard (2004): i) pastoral, ii),

wilderness, iii) georgic, and iv) apocalypse. Most of the environmentally-oriented literary texts for children in Africa could be classified under the pastoral and the georgic genre. The pastoral trope usually mourns the loss of a glorious past; celebrates the idyllic present of abundance, while the future is longed after through utopian creative imagination that connotes restitution and recovery. The georgic genre, in Garrard's (2004) words, is linked with a "conception of 'dwelling' upon the Earth" which is often represented in nature writing and indigenous ecological knowledge as probable prototype for ecological stewardship and practicable sustainability.

Wilderness as a literary trope is a process of imagining and depiction of pristine nature devoid of any anthropogenic influence. This trope is central to preservationism. The concepts of wilderness and pastoral in literary narratives share similar motif of "escape and return" to nature for psychological and physical renewal from the stress of conurbation. On the other hands, the apocalyptic trope is a literary construction meant to connote a gradual decline/decay of the world. It is the basic impetus for environmentalism and the green consciousness as we have it today. It is a trope fraught with different imageries of decay, pollution, and degradation at all levels of human interactions with non-human nature.

Also, accounts of anthropomorphised literature for children have been used to project the influence of the environment on human beings especially in Africa. Pastoral literature has always focused on the impact of the environment on the human, and anthropomorphised literature has always been seen as materials for children's literature. Huggan and Tiffin (2010), in *Postcolonial ecocriticism* try to put forward the formative roles played by the environment and animals in shaping human lives.

In this review we have tried to take a stock of children's literature in general using the catalogue of the popular Macmillan Readers for Africa. The choice of this publishing outfit is because of its long history of publication activities in Africa. Also, the publishing outfit is committed to exploring contemporary issues in children narratives from its stable. The collections in the catalogue are divided into fourteen groups. The books are graded according to the age range of the expected audience:

- The ready-go group is for children between ages 4-8
- The hop-step-jump group is for ages 6-12

- The reading worlds category is for ages 4-12
- Macmillan Writer's Prize for Africa 8years and above
- Today's children 10-14years
- Mactracks 9-15years
- Macmillan Bible Stories 9-12years
- Living Earth 8-13years
- HIV-AIDS Action Readers 5-14years
- Living Health 8-13years
- Young Lives 10-15years
- Macmillan readers 13-16years
- Trendsetter/Pacesetters 12-16years and above
- Stories to Remember 14years and above (Macmillan Catalogue 2010: pp. 2-3)

From the above categories, there are nineteen narratives with a special focus on the environment. However, from the total collection; there are other seventy-five titles which treat the environment as a secondary focus of the text. In total, there are ninety-four books with environmental themes. Given the fact that much ecocritical literature in Africa are basically meant for the adult readers, we can safely say that the effort of Macmillan in this regard is laudable. Another notable factor is that most of the writers are either Africans or have a long resident in Africa. As such the stories are very relevant to the African ecological experience. However, there is a huge challenge with regards to distribution as Macmillan offices are only located in eighteen countries out of the fifty-four independent nations on the continent. The decision to use some of the titles on the environment in the catalogue is based on the fact that Nigeria is the only country with two major Macmillan office outlets in Africa. These Southern and Northern regional outlets are to service the needs of other sub-outlets located in each state capital in the country.

In spite of the abundant treasure of materials for ecocritical issues in African literature, children's literature and the natural environment is a recent development in children's literary discourse in Africa, and especially in Nigeria. Most of the scholars in children's literature have focused their attention on the didactic and some other contemporary issues like the challenges of growing up, socialisation, child abuse, effects of war on children, gendered childhood, drug abuse, parent-child conflict, and other themes exploring other relevant issues in a modern society.

From this review, it is evident that much scholarly attention has not been given to the relationship between children's literature and the natural environment in Africa. The earlier attempts are not comprehensive enough and are done in isolated aspects. This study is, therefore, driven by the need to fill the gap that has been noticed in the works of some earlier scholars. The present study is wider in scope as it attempts to examine ecological consciousness in children's literary works from different parts of the four major regions in Africa which are: West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, and Southern Africa. This is to find out the peculiar environmental challenge being faced in the different regions as depicted in the purposively selected African prose narratives for children in the separate designated regions.

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The study examines ecological consciousness in African prose narratives for children using a purposive sampling method. This approach is used in selecting the texts from the four major regions in Africa based on the high integration of the ecological issues in them.

The analysis is descriptive and draws heavily from Trevor Cairney and Lawrence Buell's models for ecocritical analysis of literary texts. The study adopts Cairney's criteria for considering environmental issues in children's narratives and Buell's "ecocritical determinants" in conceptualizing the ecocritical concepts in children's literary texts. According to Trevor Cairney (2011), environmental issues in children's narratives are presented from the following points of view:

- (a) Environment as creation and the metaphysical experience of our world.
- (b) The relationship of people to the environment.
- (c) The negative impact of humanity on the environment.
- (d) A celebration of the environment: its beauty and wonder.

Along with the highlighted views, the four prerequisites for considering the ecocritical standards of a text, recommended by Lawrence Buell (1995), in *The environmental imagination* are also considered (pp. 7-8). The four determinants as paraphrased by Helen Adhuze (2012) are:

- (a) The presence of natural history in the human history,
- (b) The interactions of both human and non-human characters in the story,

- (c) An ethic that creates a consciousness of man's responsibility to nature, and
- (d) A process of understanding nature's power of change and transformation (p. 452).

To this end, this study is deeply indebted to the theory of ecocriticism, especially postcolonial ecocriticism, which mainly addresses environmental issues in postcolonial territories. Huggan and Tiffin (2010), aptly describe the aim of postcolonial ecocriticism as a way of contesting the issue of dominion, and at the same time, providing "viable alternatives to western ideologies of development" (p. 27). Postcolonial ecocritics want to dissuade people from exploitation and colonisation of the land. They opine that Western mode of environmentalism might not be practicable in the Third world. It is, therefore, suggested that the indigenous knowledge about the environment should be harmonised with those of the Western models so as to fine-tune the environmental ethics which is compatible with the economic realities of the developing countries.

This study proposes two eco-models, by harmonising the ecocritical standards separately given by Cairney and Buell, for critical analyses of texts with environmental issues. The proposed models are:

- (a) The synergy of inter-relatedness between human and non-human nature;
- (b) The re-invigorating power of Nature.

Also, "eco-synergism" is proposed as an environmental ethic which emphasizes the sanctity of preserving the interconnectedness of man with nature. This is a relationship which man is obliged to keep as the last co-tenant of the Earth. The fact that sustenance of life on earth has been on for several millennia before man came into being shows that he could easily be dispensed with, if his technological arrogance and greed is not checked. If he fails to do this, natural order of things will, because according to Barry Commoner's third law of Ecology: "Nature knows best." As such, this study is interested in adding to the list of existing critical works on Children's Literature.

3.2 Ecological consciousness through ecostories

The current study explores eco-stories for children. Ecostories have a tinge of science, environmental issues, sustainable development and environmental literacy. They also have a touch of romanticism as the stories celebrate the beauty of the earth, man's responsibility towards it, and offer hope that some things could be done to save the planet's future. They emphasize natural innocence through fantasy, myths and legends.

The selected narratives for children are the graded ones for children from the ages of four to twelve. Presently, there are a handful of children's narratives with environmental themes in Africa. Eight African prose narratives for children have been selected for this study. The texts are randomly selected from different writers for children in Africa. Some of the chosen texts are traditionally-inclined tales that have been documented in writing, while the others are contemporary stories for children. The texts chosen from West Africa are Charles Anson-Lawson's *The greatest treasure* and Mabel Segun's *The twins and the tree spirits*. From East Africa, *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain* by Verna Aardema and *Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the trees of Kenya* by Donna Jo Napoli and Kadir Nelson are selected.

Ignatius Musonza's *Ike's plant* and Charles Mungoshi's *Stories from a Shona childhood* are from Southern Africa while the selections from North Africa are George Murphy's *The enormous yam*, and Walid Tahir's *Sayeed...Sayeed*.

These narratives for children serve as the basis for comparing the contents of the literary works on environmental issues in Africa thereby establishing that children's literature has a lot to contribute to the development of global environmental awareness. It also instills a sense of 'ecological/environmental citizenship' with a duty of responsibility and commitment to nurture the environment. The focus of the textual analysis is to critically examine the ecocritical discourse which underlies the texts; and to scrutinize the important environmental tropes, ethics and symbols which enhance the construction of ecological consciousness in the selected narratives for children.

Secondary library sources are mainly on ecocriticism/environmental criticism with a focus on postcolonial ecocriticism as it affects African countries. Also, the study engages a diachronic study of ecocritical issues in African children's literature in English to reveal the predominant environmental tropes, ethics, and symbols espoused in the narratives, and to establish whether ecocritical issues are alien to African children's prose narratives or not.

3.3 The emergence of environmental literary studies

Environmental perspective in contemporary literary studies began in the later part of the twentieth century. It started as a result of the concern for a literary solution to the environmental crisis which has reached an all time high. Literary scholars saw the need to respond 'to contemporary pressure' posed by the natural environment, and, therefore, came up with an ecological approach to literature. The concern for the natural environment, however, dates back to the beginning of creation as recorded in the various accounts of creation, especially the one proposed by the Greek and the Judaeo-Christian traditions.

According to Simon Estok (1996), "Ecocriticism really has three birthdays: one for the term, one for the critical school, and one for the beginning of ecocritical publishing" (p. 235). William Rueckert coined the term 'Ecocriticism' in 1978 in an article titled: "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". In this work, using Barry Commoner's phrasing, he agrees that the first Law of Ecology is "Everything is connected to everything else". As such, Rueckert proposes "an ecological poetics by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature".

Therefore, Rueckert's proposition could be regarded as the foundational thesis for environmental literary studies (1996: pp 105-123). The critical school in Ecocriticism began in 1993 when Patrick Murphy started an umbrella body for environmental studies: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE), a publication of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). With Scott Slovic as its first elected president, ASLE's mission statement as reproduced in *The ecocriticism reader* is: "to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural

world” and to encourage “new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research” (1996: p. xviii). Cheryll Glotfelty’s *The ecocriticism reader*, an anthology of eco-poetical thoughts in America, co-edited with Harold Fromm, and Lawrence Buell’s *The environmental imagination* formed the foundational texts.

In the United States of America, the modern environmental movement is rooted in a philosophical movement known as transcendentalism. The movement was spearheaded by the renowned poet and essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the naturalist and author, Henry David Thoreau. The two, in their individual works, *Nature* (1836) and *Walden* (1854) respectively, expressed their concerns for nature and its value to the sustenance of life and humanity on earth.

The great turning point on the literary debate on the environment in America began with the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent spring* in 1962. This book is a metaphor for the doomsday being triggered off by the indiscriminate use of DDT and other pesticides that have grave effects on the environment. The success of *Silent spring* could be attributed to Carson’s power of imaginative creativity rooted in the artistic use of language. This language has been effective in communicating a mental imagery to the audience. The metaphor generated a form of “energy” to propel the people to take the necessary action to salvage the environment and man, himself. The work moved the people to a new level of consciousness and awareness concerning the environment and its sustainability.

However, literary advocacy for the environment has started long before the twentieth century. As Ogunpitan (2011) rightly observed, literature has always been involved with “the relationship between man and his sociocultural world” (p. 3). The myths, legends, fables and folktales are rooted in “man’s interaction with himself, with the gods and with the surrounding community of other diverse creatures” (p. 3). The neo-classicists, the romanticists and the naturalists have their works linked to nature. To the neo-classicists, nature is subjective. The romanticists regard nature as a source of inspiration, and the naturalists see nature as wielding a strong influence on man in terms of his responses to the events around him.

Although environmental literary studies began in the mid-eighties in America, and blossomed in the early nineties, spreading its tentacles to Britain and other parts of Europe, it has gradually started to take roots in Africa through various ecocritical efforts in African literary studies.

While the efforts of African critics in assessing the relationship between literature and other forms of social consciousness such as morality, politics, psychology, pedagogy and philosophy are commendable, a more conscious research into the study of environment in criticism would go a long way in a better understanding of literature and the appreciation of the art's interaction with other forms of human practice. The 2004 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Professor Wangari Maathai, a non-literary scholar, in recognition of her contributions to the environment. This shows that more conscious attention should be paid to it among African literary scholars. It is, therefore, imperative that a closer look be given to environmental issues in literature and solutions should be offered in addressing to the crisis between man and the environment as instantiated in the works of Ogunpitan (2011), Olaoluwa (2012), Neimneh and Muhaidat (2012).

The challenge of maintaining the environment has been on, long before the global summit organised by the United Nations, at its headquarters in New York, and attended by 149 Heads of States and Government and high-ranking officials from over 40 countries. The summit, held on 6-8 September, 2000 led to the signing of the Millennium Declaration which contains the eight developmental goals. Since then, various channels have been used in getting the people informed about the goals, and how the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) could be realised. However, the call for environmental sustainability started immediately after the creation of man as recorded in the Holy Bible:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and *replenish* (italics mine) the earth... and have dominion... over every living thing... (Gen.1:28).

Also, some African mythology supports the issue of human dominion. For instance, the Shona creation account and the myth of Naiteru-kop of the Maasai of Kenya establish this issue. According to this myth, Naiteru-kop was the first man created by Enkai, the Supreme God, and he was given a woman partner to assist him on his duty as the mediator between man and God on earth.

The couple was sent to the earth with one hundred head of cattle, goats, and sheep. The couple discovered the earth was rich in natural resources—rivers, lakes, forests, plains, minerals and wildlife. Enkai gave them control over these things provided that they would be good custodians and hold all of creation in trust for posterity. This myth explains the Maasai's reverence for nature and their spiritual attachment to livestock.

The issue of “dominion” has generated so much controversy amongst ecocritics. Beginning with Lynn White's argument, later documented in Glotfelty's co-edited *Ecocriticism reader* (1996), Christianity is identified as one of “the historical roots of our ecologic crisis” (p. 13) because it is “the most anthropocentric religion” (p. 9) which conferred absolute superiority of man over all other things on earth. He states further:

Since both *science* and *technology* are blessed words...modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and...modern technology [could] be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and mastery, over nature (p. 12).

And he concludes that there is no respite in sight unless “we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man” (p. 14). In Christopher Manes' (1996) view, in the same anthology, nature is regarded as being “silent in our culture” while man is regarded as the only “speaking subject” (p. 15), and as such, “an ethics of exploitation regarding nature has taken shape and flourished” (p. 16), and the present ecological crisis is a result of human arrogance towards nature. He, therefore, recommends “the language of ecological humility” advocated through “deep ecology” (p. 17).

Before the spread of Christianity and Islam in the fourth and fifth centuries, there were accounts of safe agricultural practices like irrigation and crop rotation by ancient Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans. These practices fostered the conservation of the earth's resources. However, industrialisation—a product of science and technology—and the increase in human population has led to the destruction of some of these earlier practices in agriculture.

The connection between literature and life (i.e. nature) is enshrined in the Platonic theory of transcendence. This is a philosophical concept which opines that the knowledge of absolute goodness and reality (particularly that of the existence of a Higher Being), is only opened to man through his intuition. Thus, transcendentalism, (Emerson 1839, Thoreau 1854, Marsh 1864, Burroughs 1871, Muir 1894, Leopold 1894, Carson 1964, Abbey 1968 and 1989, Tinker 1974, and Heat-Moon in 1982 and 1991), like Christianity, Islam and Judaism could be linked with this basic philosophical concept.

Man's flight "from transcendence to obsolescence" is graphically plotted in Harold Fromm's essay with the same title. According to him, man chose to embrace transcendence:

as an escape from [his] vulnerable position in his battle with Nature. It was not that man's aesthetic sensitivities to the Idea of the Beautiful were any more developed in past history; rather, man's need to escape from an intolerable physical life was infinitely greater than ours, for our physical lives are not very oppressive: That "other", "better" world offered by religion could not have been worse than the "real" one, even in the duties that it required on earth, and as a mere fantasy it offered extreme gratification. When I speak of man's previous need for transcendence over the insupportable conditions of physical life, I do not refer to the needs of great creative people- artists, thinkers, craftsmen- who by their temperaments can never be satisfied with any status quo. I speak of the masses of people whose spiritual lives were necessary to make their physical lives endurable and who, had choice been possible, would certainly have preferred physical comfort over spirituality. This situation does not for the most part now exist: television

and toilets have made the need for God supererogatory (1996: p. 32).

When he excludes “great creative people- artists, thinkers, craftsmen”- from the need to be shielded from Nature through transcendence, a gap in his line of thought is shown as many of the so called “great creative people”—of antiquity like Plato, the father of transcendentalism, who later had disciples like Emerson and others mentioned above—were at the fore front of transcendentalism. In spite of his caveat for not pursuing whether there is a need for transcendence today or not, the curious question is: How true is the Frommean opinion that modern technology has artfully concealed Nature? Recent devastating disasters and illnesses traced to man’s disrespect for nature have shown Nature to be ubiquitous, and the ‘need for transcendence [whether] based on satiety [or] on deprivation is non-negotiable. In the real sense of it, one comes to realise that technology is a product of man’s interaction with nature because his understanding of the cosmos has facilitated his technological inventions which did not emerge out of a vacuum.

This explains some ecocritical scholars’ divergent view from that of White. For instance, Frederick Turner (1996), using the metaphor of gardening, advocates for a proper channelling of the power of ‘our technology’, and emphasizes the need to “*take responsibility for nature*” (emphasis is mine) as “the lords of creation” who have been entrusted with “service to the greater glory and beauty of the world we have been given to look after” (p. 50).

As earlier observed in this discourse, several facts establishing the relationship between literature and science (be it natural or social) abound. A case in point is the collaboration between James Lovelock, a scientist, and his friend, a renowned literary artist, William Golding. Lovelock proposed a scientific theory in 1969, for which Golding suggested the name “Gaia” (Garrard, 2007: pp. 102; 172-175 Borlik, 2010: pp. 50-54.). Golding could be said to be on a familiar terrain. His classical novel *The lord of the flies* (1954), is a testimony to the fact that human beings can manage to survive anywhere on earth if a peaceful co-existence between man and nature is maintained by no other, but man himself.

The Gaia theory has been suggested to form a rallying point for all scientists to reduce the extent of the adverse effect of human activities on earth. This proposition was made by the British environmentalist, Sir Crispin Tickell. The name Gaia was derived from the ancient Greek Earth goddess. According to Lovelock (1982), the name is “made comprehensible by its metaphor, the living Earth”. He further asserts that “the public understanding of science benefits from powerful names and metaphors”. A metaphor is nothing but a creative and imaginative use of language which brings forth a picture in the human mind! This is equally supported by Wellek and Warren (1973) when they opined that “fictionality, invention or imagination is the distinguishing trait of literature” (p. 9).

Also, a former president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, brought out the ethical relevance of the Gaia Theory in a speech in 1994, in Pennsylvania. Quoted by Lovelock (1982) in defence of his theory, he said:

According to the Gaia Hypothesis, we are part of a greater whole. Our identity is not dependent merely on what we do for ourselves but also on what we do for Gaia as a whole. If we endanger her, she will dispense with us in the interests of a higher value- that is, life itself. (pp. 107-108).

However, the Gaia Hypothesis became outdated with the release of *A manifesto for earth* by Ted Mosquin and Stan Rowe. In a review of the manifesto, “Editorial: an earth-centered (Eco-centric) manifesto”; John Livingston describes the treatise as an overruling statement against the Gaia Hypothesis which is a metaphoric representation of Earth as an Organism. He emphasizes further: “the Ecosphere in which we live is a web that envelops all organisms and ecosystems that gave rise to life in the first place, and that sustains it now. Every organism and every ecosystem is a full participant” (Livingston, 2004: p. 4).

A critical contemplation on the precarious state of the natural environment due to negative effects of man’s activities in it has brought a relatively new school of thought in literary field known as ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, according to Glotfelty (1996), the first Professor of Environmental Literature, came as a result of the realisation of the

fact that “earth’s life support systems were under stress... [from] oil spills, lead and asbestos poisoning, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species... [depletion of] the ozone layer, predictions of global warming, acid rain, loss of top soil...” (p. xvi) and other devastating effects on the earth.

Tracing the genesis of the present ecological crisis, Lynn White (1996) aligns with Aldous Huxley’s assertion that man’s unnatural treatment of nature always has a negative impact on the environment. However, more often than not, the ruinous practices are unintentional. They are often borne out of man’s ignorance and lack of effective planning for a balanced sustenance of humanity and nature, while some are compelled by necessity. He observes further that “our ecologic crisis is the product of an emerging entirely novel...culture”- the fusion of science and technology (pp. 3-8).

Meanwhile, there seem not to be any respite in sight as most of the developing countries still depend on some natural resources like crude oil, precious metals and stones as sources of revenue for the sustenance of the nations’ economy. Unfortunately, the processes of extracting these minerals endanger the earth and its inhabitants. While the developed countries have seen the need to curtail every unfriendly environmental practice, the developing countries are lagging behind in the fight for the survival of the earth. This is because the leadership lacks the goodwill to channel an environmentally friendly path to economic, scientific and technological advancement of the society. The fact that some nations could still afford to carry on with activities that endanger the earth and her inhabitants is a pointer to the greed and corruption among the capitalist nations especially with the connivance of the developed countries. This is the problem which postcolonialist ecocriticism sets out to address.

3.4 Anatomizing the ecocritical theories

Ecocriticism is a general term used in referring to any environmentally focused study of literary arts and cultural studies and to the theories that underlie such critical practice. It articulates the politics of ecological problems socially and economically. It is a critical discourse that attempts creating an ethical balance in the relationship between man and the natural environment. Like racism, ecological problem is a

broadly cultural issue which has drawn the attention of all well meaning individuals from different fields including the academia (Glotfelty, 1996, Garrard, 2004, Buell, 2005). Although “problems in ecology” seem to be within the purview of the sciences, Glotfelty and her colleagues in “environmental humanities”, using Buell’s coinage, have proven they have a stake in resolving the environmental crisis that is threatening to engulf life on earth. Buell (2005), in the preface to his work titled *The future of environmental criticism: environmental crisis and literary imagination*, articulates this role further;

For technological breakthroughs, legislative reforms, and paper covenants about environmental welfare to take effect, or even to be generated in the first place, requires a climate of transformed environmental values, perception, and will. To that end, the power of story, image, and artistic performance and the resources of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural theory are crucial (vi).

Ecocriticism as a critical and literary discourse is relatively novel especially in a developing continent like Africa. As earlier noted, ecocriticism may appear to be a new concept, but its concerns are firmly grounded in the anthropocentric nature of our spiritual, social, and economic belief systems which places premium on man’s exploitation of nature without a proper reflection on the ripple effects of this mindless treatment of the natural environment.

Ecocriticism generates different reactions from different groups of people and scholars. While some see it as a timely intervention in the much needed ecological literacy, some opine that it is an alarmist interruption in the natural order of the relationship between man and the natural environment—a belief system that is hinged on the erroneous opinion that nature is solely meant to serve man. For instance, some postmodernists like Jean Baudrillard and historian Peter Coates opine that “the belief in the existence of a global environmental crisis is just another grand narrative” which does not call for any universal action to stop the trend of the environmental threats. This in effect means that postmodernism is against the propositions of ecocritics that “environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms,

because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection” (G. Garrard, 2004: p. 14).

In recent times however, ecocriticism has gained momentum as more people are coming to realise the fact that man’s existence on earth actually depends on the sustainability of the environment. This shows that man has a responsibility or duty to keep the environment vibrant and safe for his own survival on earth. Therefore, ecocriticism is an avenue for the provision of the needed ‘ecological’ knowledge in a simplified manner. In the words of Worster:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how 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 the understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding (Glotfelty, 1996: p. xxi).

The prefix ‘eco’ seems restrictive and problematic as any layman may simply associate it with ‘pure science’, whereas ecocriticism is a hybrid term connoting the relationship between literature and the environment—the surroundings of an individual person, a species, a society, or of life forms generally. Based on this premise, the study attempts a critical appraisal of some definitions of ecocriticism as given by some notable scholars in the field.

Beginning with the Rueckertian thesis, ecocriticism is described as “ecology of literature” or “ecological poetics” which deals with the application of “ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature” (W. Rueckert, 1996: p. 107). This implies a cross-fertilization of ideas in science and literature—as a reflection of man and his interaction with his environment, both ‘natural’, and ‘built’.

Another definition to be examined is that of Glotfelty (1996: pp. xviii-xx) given in the introduction to *The ecocriticism reader* thus:

Simply put, 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-centered approach to literary studies (p. xviii).

This definition further establishes the hybridity of this ecocentric theory which has resulted in its different brands like ecofeminism, eco-Marxism, ecotheology, and other ecocentric environmentalism. It is then obvious to see the interconnectedness between the human community and the bio-community as mutual entities which need one another for survival on earth. As such, ecocriticism examines the relationship between literature and the environment using ecological concepts as the media of understanding and channelling a right attitude towards nature. Similarly, Wylie (2001) opines that an “ecologically-oriented criticism

...pursues some satisfactory triangulation of the dynamics of: a) observed social, scientific, and environmental contexts; b) a stylistically or aesthetically based criticism of literary works being produced within those contexts; and c) an ethical standpoint which is neither narrowly sectarian and masking of the complexities of the works themselves, nor disengaged from the real-world effects of the works (p. 83).

To Greg Garrard (2004), ecocriticism examines the literary imagination of “the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production, from Wordsworth and Thoreau to Disney and BBC nature documentaries” (p. i). Therefore, “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (p. 5). This reflects a logical explanation for the interrelatedness of things devoid of any biases or exaggeration of ideas for or against anthropocentrism—as human-centered environmentalism and/or ecocentrism—an earth-centered environmental concept. The focus here is a transition from “ego-consciousness” to “eco-consciousness” (G. A. Love, 1996: p. 230).

According to Lawrence Buell (2005) ecocriticism is an omnibus term for the expression of environmental concerns in literary and cultural studies (p. 1). Although a notable scholar in environmental literary imagination, he is wary in using the term 'ecocriticism' because it "still invokes in some quarters the cartoon image of a club of intellectually shallow nature worshipers" (p. viii). This has been the burden of the first wave ecocritics who have been adjudged guilty of idolizing wilderness/pristine nature. Also Stephanie Sarver (n.d.) , in her ASLE article titled "What is Ecocriticism?", has expressed her opinion on the "vague and perhaps misleading" nature of the term 'ecocriticism' as she does not see the correlation between ecology –a scientific study of the relationship between organisms and literature – a literary study of the relationship between human and the natural environment. In her words:

'Ecocriticism' has proven to be more jargon than a descriptive term. It describes neither a philosophy nor an activity; it is meaningful only to the exclusive audience I address here. If I utter the word 'ecocriticism' to a room full of ecologists, they will wonder to what activity I am alluding. If, however, I call myself an environmentalist who studies literature, both academic and non-academic audiences generally will understand what values inform my work (p. 4).

She further argues that ecocritical works are not united "by a theory but by a focus: the environment" (p. 5). The kernel of this argument is that ecocriticism that is devoid of some kind of terminology and theorization remains an empty shell.

However, the effort of Patrick D. Murphy towards the enhancement of solid theoretical ground for ecocriticism needs to be acknowledged here. Murphy (1995) observes that ecocriticism "remains theoretically unsophisticated. Too often, there remains an anti-theoretical naive, realist attitude expressed in ecocritical works" (p. 19). The result of his effort in this direction supports the Bakhtinian theory of dialogics which has given nature "a voice" through the Romantic "pathetic fallacy".

According to McDowell (1996), a scholar who prefers to use the term 'landscape writing' to describe environmental writings, dialogics emphasizes the contradictory

voices in landscape writing. This emphasis on “contradictory voices” enriches the intertextuality of the text and this “leads to the discovery of connection between a literary work and its past, present, and future environments” (p. 374). Therefore, environmental discourse continues to evolve due to its “open-endedness”. This attribute is actually an expression “of the writer’s humility” and “an ethical stance that recognises that no individual and no era have a monopoly of truth” (p. 376). Buell (2005) corroborates this by describing rhetoric “as a means of refiguring the world” (p. 47). Also, Lawrence Buell agrees with other scholars like William Rueckert, William Howarth, and Gary Snyder that “‘ecocriticism’ suffices if ...one is careful to use the term in mindfulness of its etymology and of its metaphorical stretch” (p. 13).

Further on the controversy over the methodology of ecocriticism, Todd Borlik (2010) says:

While there remains some disagreement about the field’s methodology, the majority of ecocritics today...share an activist bent and see their works as promoting ways of reading literary texts that can, however indirectly, motivate and guide us to strive for a more ethical co-existence with the rest of the biotic community (p. 10).

In spite of the cautious use of this environmental *cum* ecocentric literary theory, Garrard (2004) observes the uniqueness of ecocriticism as a literary and cultural theory because of its link “with the science of ecology” (p. 5) which equips it with multidisciplinary boundaries for the development of a robust “ecological literacy” for the purpose of enlightenment and restoration of balance between man and the natural environment (YU Yan, 2011: p. 170). Moreover, the adoption of ecological terms in ecocriticism “functions more as *aesthetics* than as *methodology*” (Buell, 2005: p. 13, Buell, 1995: Armbruster and Wallace 2001).

Ecocriticism as a literary/cultural analysis of ecological problem shows ecocritics belief that “problems in ecology” are purely “scientific issues”, whereas “ecological problems”, are matters to be resolved through “ecological literacy”. As such, literary works like Carson’s *Silent spring* is a cultural argument against the pollution of the

natural environment through the use of chemical pesticides. Thus, Garrard (2004) argues that Carson turns “a (scientific) problem in ecology into a widely perceived ecological problem that was then contested politically, legally, and in the media and popular culture” (p.6). This further proves the uniqueness of ecocriticism in terms of its commitment to the intrinsic value of nature, and “its commitment to making connections” (Estok, 2001: p. 225).

Silent spring is meant to graphically present the intensity of the damage caused by the use of these pesticides to wildlife and to human health. Carson has succeeded in her scientific argument against the use of pesticides with the help of “the rhetorical strategies, use of pastoral and apocalyptic imagery and literary allusions” (p.2). This style has made scientific materials more accessible to literary/cultural studies’ scrutiny. It agrees with Richard Kerridge’s (1998) opinion that “the ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear... [and most importantly] seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (p. 5). Ecocriticism is, therefore, a literary and a socio-political mode of analysing the ecocritical issues in a text.

Different environmental tropes are employed by ecocritical writers to drive home the import of their environmental praxis. Garrard (2004) identifies four of such tropes which are: pastoral, wilderness, georgic and apocalypse. The pastoral trope features in ecocritical works which eulogise the pristine qualities of the rural or ‘edenic’ setting with ecological representation of bliss, and abundance.

Pastoral as a trope has greatly influenced the concept of nature. Deeply rooted in the classical period and Western culture, pastoral has been a great reference point in ecocriticism. Citing Terry Gifford (1999), Garrard (2004, p.33) has identified three types of pastoral: a retreat from the city to the country side, a description of the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban, and lastly, a romanticized presentation of rural life that obfuscates the realities of labour and hardship. Garrard further designated the pastoral into classical, romantic, and American culminating into what he describes as ‘pastoral ecology’ which has “promoted notions of nature’s essential harmony that are still prevalent in environmental discourse today” (p. 34).

Garrard also opines that there are three thrusts of pastoral in terms of time: the elegy, the idyll, and the utopia. While the elegy laments and seeks a lost glorious past, the idyll extols and celebrates a bountiful present, and the utopia projects into a redeemed future (p. 37). These classifications clearly show a connection between pastoral and the Judaeo-Christian conception of time. This is further wrapped up in Lynn White's (1996) opinion that Christianity is responsible for the present ecological crisis as the tenets of the religion encourage anthropocentrism—an environmental ethic that emphasizes and celebrates the superiority of man over nature.

The pastoral tropology fits Buell's (1995) ecocritical mould for assessing ecologically oriented works. It also has some metaphorical underpinnings of the environment as female. This ecofeminist stance, according to Westling (1996), accounts for "the strange combination of eroticism and misogyny that has accompanied men's attitudes towards landscape and nature for thousands of years" (p. 5). This trope has produced a fertile field of study in ecofeminism where environmental despoliation is connected with androcentrism and the patriarchal domination and oppression of women (Merchant 1995, Plumwood 1993, Kolodny 1996, and Westling 1996). This representation of nature as female or Mother has both historical and cultural implications in human relationship with the environment.

The wilderness trope is another environmental discourse which is similar to the pastoral in terms of the conception of a rural environment as an elixir for the deleterious effects of a corrupt and degraded urban setting. It also connotes an undomesticated landscape with all its attributes of wildness. The wilderness trope is, however, problematic because it often gives the impression that the white colonial settlers were the first to discover pristine wilderness, whereas most indigenous natives have "sojourned" and "inhabited" the wilderness before the intrusion of the colonialists.

The georgic trope is shaped by Judeo-Christian monotheism, Heideggerian ecophilosophy, American agrarianism, and animistic belief systems of indigenous cultures which promote a mutual co-existence between human and the natural environment. Georgic puts the contentious issue of "dominion", as foregrounded in

Judaean-Christian theology, in proper perspective. It conceptualises a “harmonious relationship” between human and the environment in terms of the formation of a positive attitude of sympathies for non-human nature in the process of “dwelling on the land” thereby cultivating an act of responsible stewardship towards nature. An affective relationship with the natural environment is essential because, in Berry’s (1990) words, “To be well used, creatures and places must be used sympathetically, just as they must be known sympathetically to be well used” (cited in Garrard, 2004: p. 113). This accentuates the ecocritical idea of dwelling *in* nature, which is, having a firm grasp of being “a part” of nature, and not “apart” from it.

Apocalyptic narratives connote a sense of urgency in the disintegration of the world order marked by massive environmental destruction. This trope encapsulates different depictions of drought, famine, war, and death in line with the biblical Book of Revelation. This perception of a colossal annihilation was inherited by the Judaean-Christian religions from Zoroaster, an Iranian prophet (Garrard, 2004: p. 85). Apocalyptic rhetoric enhances the message of contemporary environmentalism about ecological prudence, alertness and consciousness, and supports a biocentric ethic guided by a well-informed anthropocentrism—referred to as restrained anthropocentrism in this study.

3.4.1 The first-wave and second-wave movements

The emergence of ecocriticism as a literary movement is divided into two major phases: ‘first’ and ‘second’ wave or using Buell’s preferred term, “palimpsest”. According to him, the “first-second distinction [does not depict] a distinct succession [as] most currents set in motion by early ecocriticism continue to run strong, and most forms of second-wave revisionism involve building on as well as quarrelling with precursors” (2005: p. 17).

The first phase of the movement placed premium on the subject of “earthcare” and the conservation of the “biotic community”. They advocate for the conservation of pristine nature with little or no human interference. These first-wave ecocritics critically appraised the realms of the “natural” and the “human” which have been basically constructed in a horizontal perspective whereby man is placed at the apex of

creation, and nature at the base, as being subject to man. The focus was to contest this culturally conceived perception of nature by “celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (Howarth, 1996: p. 69). Therefore, the eco-philosophy of the first-wave in ecocriticism is rooted in deep ecology. Due to this stance, first-wave ecocritics have been pronounced guilty of misanthropy and idolizing wilderness/pristine nature (Borlik, 2011: pp. 38-41). Buell also describes the efforts of early ecocritics “as a way of ...reconnect[ing] the work of (environmental) writing and criticism with environmental experience – meaning in particular the *natural* world” (p. 6). Notable scholars of the ‘first wave’ with samples of their works include Henry David Thoreau, 1854: *Walden*, John Muir, 1875: *Studies in the Sierra*, Rachel Carson, 1950: *The sea around us*, John Hay, 1969: *In defence of nature*, Wendell Berry, 1972: *A continuous harmony*, Annie Dillard, 1974: *Pilgrim at tinker creek*, Barry Lopez, 1986: *Arctic dreams*, others are Raymond William, Joseph Meeker, Carolyn Merchant, and Terry Gifford.

The second-wave ecocritics are revisionist in nature and engage more discourses in science and literature equipped with principles from “ecology, ethics, language, and criticism...as each discipline stresses the relations of nature and literature as shifting, moving shapes” (Howarth, 1996: p. 71). In Borlik’s (2011) view, second-wave ecocritics are engaged in the task of redefining the past to shape the present ecological consciousness/enlightenment. This he further describes as putting “old wine ... into new environmentally friendly bottles” (p. 11). This modern environmentalism seeks eco-efficiency by projecting technological and scientific solutions to tackle ecological problems. These second-wave ecocritics also support sustainability; a practice in growth and development with little adverse effects on the natural environment so as not to jeopardize the interest of future generations.

The second-wave literary and critical scholars express concern for both human and non-human nature, extends the scope of ecocriticism from local to global, and also attempts a re-reading of culture and nature from the classical times to the early modern period so as to locate the origin of our ecological problems. This task is actively carried out by Todd A. Borlik in his illuminating work *Ecocriticism and early modern English literature: green pastures*. Undertaking a close examination of different works

of notable writers like Keith Thomas, Philip Sidney, Michael Drayton, William Shakespeare, the Pastoralists, John Milton, Diane McColley and Ken Hiltner, Borlik's effort proves that "the early modern period [is not] ecologically benighted [but should be regarded] as one of the pivotal moments in the environmental history of the planet" (p. 6). However, he agrees with Buell that many of the canonical texts of Renaissance literature would fall short of the criteria for an environmental text (p. 15).

The criteria for considering a text as having environmental concerns are proposed by Buell in *The environmental imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture*. The four criteria are: (1). Human history is implicated in natural history (2). The human interest is not the only legitimate interest (3). Accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation, and (4). A sense of the land as a process. Borlik cites Michael Drayton's anthropomorphic *Poly-Olbion* as an example of a text which meets these criteria and he believes the text is a good example of advocacy in bio-regionalism.

The activities of the second-wave ecocritics which began in the late nineties, have broadened the horizon of ecocriticism as the umbrella term for other brands like ecofeminism which examines gender stereotypes as social construct in describing the human/nature relationship, while social ecocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism cross the boundary of 'natural' environmental concepts to 'built' in order to show more commitment in environmental justice. Second-wave critics, like Todd Borlik have advocated for a reinvention of the Great Chain of life for a better understanding of the interconnectedness of life on earth. To this end, more ecocritics like Buell, who had formerly adopted the initial straitjacketed mode of "nature and the protectionist agenda" in ecocriticism, are progressively shifting to the more contemporary "discourse of urbanism and environmental justice". As such, Buell postulates that:

[this] newer environmental criticism is likely to continue to press for more cosmopolitan ways of understanding the work of ecodiscourse in the canon of original concentration, even as it takes in a wider range of literary history so as ultimately to include, in principle, any text whatsoever. (2005: p. 27)

Apart from Lawrence Buell, other ecocritics of the second-wave include Val Plumwood, Jonathan Bates, Greg Garrard, Lance Newman, Linda Hogan, Ana Castillo, and a lot more.

The uniting factor of both first-wave and second-wave ecocriticism is the consideration of ecocritical issues as a product of imagination and reality whereby the “word – world” connection is drawn between the text and the reality of the human interaction with the physical and natural environment.

3.5 The concerns of ecocritics

Ecocriticism accentuates the literary representations of the natural world. The practice goes beyond environmental activism as its argument for harmony between man and nature are based on a balanced and well informed analysis of ecological problems. Ecocritical concerns usually borders on “thematic, historical and geographical particularities of environmental discourse” and are better conveyed through the prism of “environmental tropes”. Therefore, ecocriticism as a critical discourse deploys “constructionism” in the explication of a set of culturally engendered behaviour/relationship between man and the natural environment (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2004; Buell, 2005).

A case in point is Cohen’s (2004) response to what he considers to be the concern of ecocritics when he opines that:

Ecocriticism focuses on literary (and artistic) expression of human experience primarily in a naturally and consequently in a culturally shaped world: the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence, and fears of loss and disaster (p.10).

From the arguments above, the promotion of the well-being of the earth and its inhabitants forms the nucleus of the “agenda” for ecocriticism. Apart from the basic concern for fostering a better mutual relationship between the human and the nonhuman communities, some major concerns of the ecocritical ideology have

emerged. Ecocritical concerns are addressed from different philosophical, social and economic approaches. Each of the approach examines the issues of environmental crisis from a unique point of view arriving at a political agenda to change the *status quo* through lobbying, activism, and general public enlightenment.

3.5.1 The different shades of ecocriticism

There are so many arguments against the ecocritics “exaggerated fear about the environmental threats posed by modern civilization”. The quasi-environmentalist posture which Greg Garrard (2004) describes as “cornucopian” posits that the earth has enough resources to take care of its inhabitants. They opine that “the dynamism of capitalist economies will generate solutions to environmental problems as they arise” (pp. 16-17). The cornucopians believe that nature could only retain its worth in terms of its usefulness to man. They are not bothered about the “intrinsic or inherent value of nature” which many environmentalists hold dear. Cornucopia as an idea supported by capitalist economists and demographers, equates increase in population to increase in wealth which is expected to take care of any environmental need. It is a consumerist oriented approach which does not recognise scarcity as an ecological problem. Beckerman and Simon are staunch advocates of cornucopia which is racially tilted to favour the “environmentalism of the rich” as against the “environmentalism of the poor” (Guha, 2000: p. 196, Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: p. 2).

Garrard acknowledges this when he notes that:

Capitalism mobilises problem-solving capacities in human that it would be wise not to underestimate. However, this position suffers from a major inconsistency: many of the environmental improvements enjoyed by post-industrial nations have not only been achieved by moving damaging industries to developing countries, but have been driven by the political agitation of the environmental campaigners cornucopians now claim are obstructing economic and technological progress. It is not capitalism alone that produces the solutions cornucopians identify, but entrepreneurs responding to morally motivated consumers and government regulations (2004: p. 18).

Another philosophical position identified by Garrard in resolving ecological problems is “environmentalism” or “shallow ecology”. This is a term used in describing a wide range of people with ecocritical/environmental concerns like pollution, climate change, population explosion, deforestation, land pressure, desertification, nature conservation/preservation and the like. They belong to various environmental bodies/organisations like Environmental Defence, Friends of the Earth, the Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, Green Speak, Green Party, and others like them in Britain, America and other parts of Europe. They seem to pay attention to the identified concerns only through advocacy and creation of public awareness. The financial commitment to address these myriads of problems is expected to be shouldered by the governments and Non-governmental Organisations with a preference for technocentric solutions.

For instance they propose family planning as against State-sponsored sterilisation to check population growth. They are actively engaged in enlightening the populace about recycling of waste, green consumerism, and practising conservation. Their philosophy is basically anthropocentric with the tools of technology to solve environmental problems. The achievement of this group has to do with the ban of CFC based products championed by the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent spring*.

Deep Ecology is the most influential and radical form of environmentalism with members in various organisations like: Friends of the Earth, Sea Shepherds, and Earth First!. Arne Naess, George Session, Christopher Manes, Dave Foreman, and Gary Snyder are notable advocates pushing the frontiers of deep ecology. The body’s cardinal ethic is hinged on the intrinsic and inherent value of non-human life on Earth, and the fact that the prospect of both human and non-human existence is dependent on a manageable human population. Deep ecologists are of the opinion that environmental challenges like poverty, waste management, land pressure, and deforestation are made worse by the over-population in both developed and developing countries. They therefore propose a long-term reduction in human population to combat poverty related ecological problems in the Third World countries, and wealth related environmental problems like domestic waste disposal, and greenhouse gas emissions in the developed

countries (p. 21). Deep ecologists are often accused of misanthropy as their ecological philosophy is seen to be totally against humanity. The eco-philosophy of deep ecology is ecocentrism—a nature-centred ethic. Its spiritual base is in Taoism, and Buddhism. In fact, Stan Rowe (1994), in an article titled “Ecocentricism: the chord that harmonizes humans and earth”, openly advocates for the entrenchment of ecological ethics in theology as he enthuses in the Biblical Sermon on the Mount style:

Blessed are those who make sacrifices to preserve and sustain the non-human, human-containing world. Cursed are those who wilfully destroy Earth’s creativity and beauty. If religions cannot incorporate such ethics in their theologies, they too stand condemned (p. 107).

Ecocentrism is a nature-centred eco-political philosophy, and it is opposed to anthropocentrism, a human-centred ethic. As a system of belief, it upholds the fact that both human and the non-human nature possess an independent intrinsic value which makes them to be connected and interdependent thereby promoting a “biospherical egalitarianism”. According to Rowe:

The ecocentric argument is grounded in the belief that...the whole Ecosphere is even more significant and consequential: more inclusive, more complex, more integrated, more creative, more beautiful, more mysterious, and older than time. The ‘environment’ that anthropocentrism misperceives as materials designed to be used exclusively by humans, to serve the needs of humanity, is in the profoundest sense humanity’s source and support: its ingenious inventive life-giving matrix. Ecocentrism goes beyond biocentrism with its fixation on organisms, for in the ecocentric view people are inseparable from the inorganic/organic nature that encapsulates them (1994: p. 106).

Environmentalists with an ecocentric view condemn ecological imperialism, do not seek technological solutions to ecological problems, rather, they seek the need for justice, prudence and temperance by man for a peaceful co-existence with the natural environment. They claim that non-human nature as a whole should be given the

necessary moral consideration before the enactment of political, economic, and social policies.

Critics of ecocentrism have berated its anti-industrialisation and anti-capitalist stance as being anti-humanist. They believe its inordinate consideration for non-human nature threatens human survival on earth.

Another mode of interpreting environmental challenges is through a socio-political philosophy known as Ecofeminism. Its position on ecological problems is based on the androcentric nature of man which accords undue recognition to the male sex. Ecofeminist queries the “logic of domination” which has associated women with nature, the material, the emotional, and the particular, while men have been associated with culture, the nonmaterial, the rational, and the abstract which is permitted to dominate (Davion, 1994: p. 9, and Warren, 1994: p. 124).

Australian Ecofeminist, Val Plumwood (2001), examines ecological imperialism in terms of an andro/anthropocentric attitude “that view nature and the animal ‘other’ as being either external to human needs, and thus effectively dispensable, or as being in permanent service to them, and thus an endless replenishable resource” (pp. 4-5).

Therefore, Garrard (2004), citing Ynestra King (1989) describes ecofeminism as “a decentralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence” (2004: p. 27). Ecofeminism has adopted the tools of environmental justice activism to address the issues of environmental racism and oppression with regards to environmental crisis. Environmental injustice is the undue imposition of the burden of environmental despoliation on the indigenous communities who are often deprived of the gains of the natural resources extracted from their lands. A case in point is the pathetic situation of the Ogoni in Nigeria who are faced with “indigenous poverty” due to the adverse effects of crude oil extraction by the oil conglomerates on their land.

Also, Social Ecology and Eco-Marxism are entrenched in the belief that social problems and environmental problems are inter-related. Apart from anthropogenic effects on the environment, social ecology and eco-Marxism are entrenched in the idea that ecological problems plague the human society as a result of the “exploitation of

humans by other humans” (Garrard, 2004: p. 28). Social ecology is rooted in Murray Bookchin’s (1982) treatise—*The Ecology of freedom: the emergence and dissolution of hierarchy*. Social ecologists, therefore, see a nexus between anthropocentrism and tyrannical tendencies of humans against one another. They are however, sceptical about the mystical and political engagements of deep ecologists, and condemn the irrationality of fixated ecocentrism. To demystify the notion of ecological limits, a political restructuring of the society is proposed to ensure that the demands for real needs take precedence over crass materialism, just as democratic principles are made to supersede despotism. Egalitarianism—a concept based on equality and complementarity—is, therefore, the basic ethical and environmental principle of social ecology.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism is another example of a socio-political ecocritical theory. It is an alliance of two critical/theoretical schools of thought in cultural studies which brings about a fertile discussion in ecocritical imagination for addressing the challenges of global environmental crisis for the transformation of the political horizon both in the developed and under-developed worlds (Huggan, 2008: p. 64).

Postcolonial ecocriticism is bedevilled with the problem of definition in terms of the “basic interpretative methods or fundamental ideological concerns and internal divisions between broadly Marxist and post-structuralist stance within postcolonial studies, or those between environmental and animal rights activism within ecocritical/environmental studies” (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: pp. 2-3). However, the two fields are connected as they are committed to social and environmental justice, while they differ in terms of the “unproblematized division between people (on the postcolonial side) and nature (on the ecocritical one)” (p. 3).

A way of solving this problem is by taking a critical look at the ecological implications of colonialism in “both ‘colonising’ and ‘colonised’ societies of the present and the past” (p.3). This is what Alfred Crosby and Richard Grove, prominent British environmental historians, have set out to achieve in their postcolonial ecocritical work which engages ecological imperialism/biocolonization as a trope in environmental studies.

Biocolonization is a term that is synonymous with ecological imperialism. The terms are adopted by various environmental and bioscientific scholars to describe the biopolitical implications of recent efforts in technological experiments and trends. Some examples include biopiracy—an act of plundering indigenous natural-cultural property and embodied knowledge,—and genetic modification. This hubristic attitude is based on the “saving potential of science which is used in projecting the selfish needs and political agenda of the West” (p. 4).

Ecological imperialism also wears the garb of environmental racism, a term defined as “the connection in theory and practice, of race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other” (Curtin, 2005: p. 145). Environmental racism is a two-pronged term with both positive and negative connotations. The positive side is associated with the familiar trope of the “ecological Indian”, a term which signifies a harmonious co-existence with nature (Garrard, 2004:pp. 120-127), and the negative side is a representation of some eco-suicidal acts associated with some particular race based on their cultural attributes. It is a sociological phenomenon that details the oppression of the socially marginalized group – for instance the poor communities of the Third World countries – which are made the dumping ground of for the rich communities or the First World countries/economy. At the extreme level, Plumwood (2001) sees environmental racism as “hegemonic centrism”, a factor responsible for racism, sexism and colonialism which in turn is culpable in the exploitation of nature and a disregard for “non-human claims to [a shared] earth” (p .4).

3.6 Postcolonial ecocriticism - Nature, ‘Otherness’, and Silence

Postcolonial ecocriticism performs the function of advocacy for a transformation of the real world. It challenges hegemonic centrism which is accountable for an entrenched speciesism that promotes the exploitation of animals (and animalised human) ‘others’, a practice “that is at least a couple of millennial old” (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: p. 8). According to Plumwood, the compartmentalized definition of human into “civilized” and the “uncivilized” forms the basis for the colonisation of non-European lands and the people and animals that inhabited them as ‘spaces’, unused, underused or empty (2003: p. 53). The Western culture of technological advancement regards nature as a

commodity, product, resources and oil in the wheel of 'progress'. This conceited ego of the so called civilised world has silenced "the uncounted voices of nature", and the result is the present ecological crisis. Western civilisation has led most people to believe that nature is silent and as such could be easily subjected to ruthless exploitation (Manes, Meeker, Phillips, 1996).

Christopher Manes (1996), traces the origin of silencing nature to "a pastiche of medieval hermeneutics and Renaissance humanism, with its faith in reason, intellect and progress, [which] has created an immense realm of silences, a world of 'not saids' called nature, obscured in global claims of eternal truths about human difference, rationality and transcendence" (p. 17). He, therefore, recommends "the language of ecological humility" endorsed by deep ecology. This knowledge unlocks "the secrets of nature" making man to realise that language is not a prerogative of human, but that "the nonhuman world... is filled with articulate subjects, able to communicate with humans", only if we are willing to listen. He gives a wake-up call from the illusion of human transcendence to rediscover our place and role in nature as stewards of the Earth.

The Western world has not only silenced nature, the colonised world has been given the same treatment of being less than human, and classified with the nonhuman as 'others'. In Anthony Vital's (2008) "Towards an African ecocriticism: postcolonialism, ecology and *Life and times of Michael K*", he suggests that postcolonial ecocriticism could be navigated by considering the intricacies of social history, especially the construction of the natural world through language, and how language both shapes and presents such interactions. (p. 90). In this regard, racism and speciesism are regarded as the two sides of the same coin.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010), in their highly illuminating *Postcolonial ecocriticism literature, animals, environment* identify the relationship between postcolonial zoocriticism and postcolonial ecocriticism in "the exploration of conflicted areas and problems such as wildlife protection and conservation on land needed for poor human communities; human communities evicted from their homeland to make way for game parks to benefit wealthy tourists; and contained within these and other examples, a deep concern for rights" (p. 18).

Postcolonial ecocriticism, they argue, seeks a redress of the injustices of colonialism in terms of the human, in relation to animals and the environment. It is “thus interested in the philosophical possibility of wrongness of rights while remaining committed to the moral imperative of righting wrongs as well” (p. 19). It is further argued that postcolonial ecocriticism challenges western ideologies of development which is considered as a technocratic tool of the Western world.

Using the works of different writer-activists, like the Nigerian eco-martyr, Ken Saro-Wiwa from Africa, and the India-born Booker prize winner in 1997, Arundhati Roy, from Asia, postcolonial ecocritical texts are seen as a testament against the brazenness of the social and environmental abuses perpetrated in the name of ‘development’. The critics propose “alternative social and environmental knowledges (sic) that are neither acknowledged nor necessarily understood by development experts in the West” (p. 20).

Huggan and Tiffin assert that:

human liberation will never be fully achieved without challenging the historical conditions under which human societies have constructed themselves in hierarchical relation to other societies, *both human and nonhuman*, without imagining new ways in which these societies, understood as being ecologically connected, can be creatively transformed (p. 22).

From the foregoing discourse, it is clear that developing countries, especially the ones on the African continent, need a modified version of ecocriticism/environmentalism to address the challenges of environmental degradation on the continent. This task is what postcolonial ecocriticism sets to achieve as it traces the root of the ecological crisis in Africa to its immediate colonial past. “What makes sense as a preservation strategy in the first world” argues Curtin (2005), often has disastrous consequences in the third world” (p. 65).

Ecocriticism as a predominantly white movement is ill-equipped for a multicultural and cross cultural concern (p. 66). Therefore, the imposition of its ecological philosophy on the third world would simply be nothing but an imperialistic arrogance

which “mourn[s] what they themselves have helped destroy” (p. 66). The contributions of non-western environmentalists are needed to address the peculiar nature of the effects of environmental ruin in developing countries. A breath of fresh air came with the recent adoption of indigenous knowledge in environmental conservation during the earth Summit held in Rio (Rio+20), tagged Climate Change 2012.

This indigenous knowledge otherwise known as traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) became popular in the 1980s. It is regarded as a body of indigenous knowledge acquired over a long period of time based on the human engagement with the environment. Berke (1993) defines it as:

...a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment (p. 3).

In other words, TEK is the study of indigenous ecological relationship held by a group of people or culture. It is an aspect of ethnoscience (folk science)—the study of a particular cultural or indigenous knowledge of a group of people in terms of classification of “the objects, activities, and events of its universe”. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development:

Tribal and indigenous peoples ... lifestyles can offer modern societies many lessons in the management of resources in complex forest, mountain and dryland ecosystem (WCED: 1987: 12).

Quoting Hughes (1996), Garrard (2004) also alludes to the concept of ‘an ethnic science’ while describing indigenous Indians as being:

...keenly observant and rational, but would make explanations that would be excluded even as hypotheses by modern Western science, because they were often subjective and mystical. But they were always based upon empirical observation and experience (p. 132).

TEK is, therefore, a collection and acquisition of indigenous skills in sustainable development.

Environmentalism in the third world countries queries the injustice in the unfair distribution of the advantages and disadvantages of economic growth among the developed and developing countries. This “environmentalism of the poor” refutes the claim that environmental damage is caused by poverty. Rather, the movement opines that the rich and powerful are responsible for environmental despoliation through the mindless use of natural resources for the expansion of their business empires which further drives the indigent populace into abject poverty as they have been deprived of their sources of livelihood from the land hijacked by the state and different corporate bodies.

The ruthless exploration of natural resources by these bodies, especially foreign industries and corporations, has equally adversely affected the culture, health and independence of the different people in the Third World. Environmentalism of the poor has its academic allies in ecological anthropology, agro-ecology and political ecology. For instance the contributions of South Asian scholars like Ramachandra Guha and Vandana Shiva are noteworthy here. Guha’s sociological and historical account of the Chipko anti-deforestation activism of the 70s in Northern Himalayan region is a paradigmatic example of the Third World environmentalism – the “environmentalism of the poor” (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997). In the words of Sunderlal Bahaguna, Guha’s work implies that “the ecological crisis in Himalaya is not an isolated event [but] has its roots in the [modern] materialistic civilization [that] makes man the butcher of Earth” (Guha, 2000: p. 179). Guha examines the role of modernity/industrialization in “pauperizing millions of people in the agrarian sector and diminishing the stock of plant, water and soil resources at a terrifying rate” (p. 196). Shiva’s qualitative analysis of the disastrous effects of the Green Revolution on the rural Punjab communities also serve as an eye-opener to the interconnectedness of environmental issues with social justice and human rights (p. 66). Besides depriving the poor land owners access to their land, the arable lands which were acquired for the green revolution became degraded due to salinisation—the effect of a poorly managed irrigation system that was practised during the scheme.

Contemporary examples include the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Ogoniland, the Ijaw and other groups in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. These various groups protest against the damage caused by oil extraction by Shell and other foreign oil magnate in the area. Other examples are the protest against the replacement of forests with plantation in places like Kenya, and Thailand, agro-industries and biopiracy. The enforcement of Western forms of environmentalism is more often than not, counter-productive in the Third World. This is because the so-called developmental activities being undertaken in the developing countries end up benefitting the imperialist nations and their lackeys.

Postcolonial ecocritics like Guha seek reconciliation between the hypocritical Northern environmentalism of the rich and the genuinely heroic Southern environmentalism of the poor. He calls for the bridging of the ecological and economic gap between the colonizer and the colonized. His work examines the possibility of co-habiting 'post colonial' and 'ecological' issues, in spite of their egalitarian virtues, to achieve a selfish, national and transnational interests. He believes that postcolonial ecocriticism is a viable instrument for tracing "the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature...[as well as] social, historical and material coordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species" (Pablo Mukherjee, 2006: p. 144). Postcolonial ecocritics are concerned with the reassessment of the legacies of colonialism and imperialism based on ethical, political and environmental issues (Buell, 2005: p. 27, Cilano and DeLoughrey, 2007: p. 84).

3.6.1 Environmentalism vs. 'Developmentalism'

Environmentalism is concerned with the issues of sustainable development with minimal negative effects on human and non-human nature, while 'developmentalism', using the words of Arturo Escobar (1995), is the consolidation of the social, cultural, and political authority of the West in postcolonial countries (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: p. 28). Many scholars (Escobar, 1995; Sachs, 1997; Sen, 2000; De Rivero 2001; Ikejiaku, 2009; Huggan and Tiffin, 2010 and a host of others) have contested the idea of western development and its true goals and objectives in the Third World.

Citing Walter Rodney, Ikejiaku (2009) describes development from a socio-economic premise as “a process of increasing the ability, capacity and capabilities of a people to exploit the resources of their environment, so as to satisfy their needs at any given time” (p. 34). He argues further that political development can only be achieved when the people are actively involved in “the act of governance” (p. 34). Although some scholars have insisted that political development through autocracy is a prerequisite for economic development, the reverse has been the case in most countries in Africa which have witnessed one form of political dictatorship or the other without any commensurate economic advancement in the countries. As such, Ikejiaku defines development as “an increase in the economic growth; properly harnessed by leaders toward both economic and political enhancement of the citizens” (p. 37). With this assertion, he agrees with the proposition that political development is a basic ingredient in the realization of a sustainable economic development in Africa.

This has prompted Huggan and Tiffin’s scepticism about the role of colonialism and postcolonialism in the development of Africa. In their seminal work, *Postcolonial ecocriticism*, they proclaim their intention:

to contest [as well as] provide viable alternatives to western ideologies of development. These contestations have mostly been in alignment with radical Third-Worldist critiques that tend to see development as little more than a disguised form of neo-colonialism, a vast technocratic apparatus designed primarily to serve the economic and political interests of the West (2010: p. 27).

Environmentalism and the issue of development are wrapped in the politics of class, race, gender and culture. The identified variables are responsible for the human, economic and environmental destructions around the world. The environmental track of human activities in Africa can be broadly located in the historical development of the continent from the pre-colonial to the colonial, and the post-colonial period. The pre-colonial period was marked with traditional values and practices with communalism as a basic philosophy for a productive and peaceful co-existence between the human and non-human nature.

However, with the invasion of the colonialists, the Western civilization and its touted development led to the imposition of western values on the Third World. This development is characterised by a “top-down, ethnocentric and technocentric approach” whereby people and cultures are regarded as “abstract concepts, statistical figures to be [arbitrarily] moved up and down the charts of ‘progress’” (Escobar in Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: p. 29.). This unwholesome practice is still sustained in the post-colonial period with the connivance of the neo-colonialist elites of the former colonies.

The developmental drive which started shortly after the Second World War, sponsored by economic giants like the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, is meant to fight poverty among the poor nations. Ironically, this activity turns out to be the conduit pipe for siphoning the natural and human resources of the developing world for the gratification of the political and economic needs of the self designated Big Brother(s) of the world and their cronies from the Third World. This concept is re-echoed in Shiva’s (1988) *Staying alive: women, ecology, and survival in India*, where the conceptual and historical roots of development is linked with western patriarchal ideology which emphasizes economic profits over and above the discourse of sustainability thereby complicating the issues of ecological deprivation in the developing nations of the world.

According to Shiva (1995), ‘development’ was meant to be a post-colonial concept which is devoid of economical and ecological oppression and exploitation. At conception, development was meant to cater for “the improved well-being of all”. However, the concept became a stillborn idea with the imposition of values that promote industrialisation and capitalism which are propelled by colonialism and neo-colonialism which triumphed over ‘natural economy’ (p. 1). Therefore, development wears a garb of wealth accumulation through commercialisation of the economy as well as a culture of poverty and dispossession.

The above extensive discussion on ecocriticism/environmentalism is meant to establish the theoretical framework on which this thesis is hinged. The work is basically meant to look at the exploration of environmental issues in African children’s literary narratives written in English. Along this discourse, starting with the traditional tales,

we undertake a review of some selected narratives for children with a primary/secondary focus on environmental concerns. The traditional tales are to establish the fact that environmental issues are as old as human history of existence on earth, while the contemporary ones are meant to prove the urgency of the message of environmental sustainability for a meaningful co-existence of both human and non-human nature.

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CHAPTER FOUR

TRADITIONALLY-INCLINED TALES AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES IN AFRICAN PROSE NARRATIVES FOR CHILDREN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the connection between mythical reconstructions and ecological consciousness in an attempt to establish whether or not there are ecocritical issues raised in African traditional oral narratives for children. The various classifications of children's oral literature: myths, legends, and folktales usually presented through anthropomorphic tales with ecological undertones are examined as attempts to explain different fundamental issues about creation, the connection between a group of people with their natural environment, and how this connection has affected their ways of life in terms of occupation, religion, and other customs and traditions. Some of these issues which are instantiated in retold oral narratives by Aardema in *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain*, Murphy's *The enormous yam*, Mungshosi's "The hare and the animals of the jungle", and "The slave who became chief" from his collection of stories titled: *Stories from a Shona childhood*, and Anson-Lawson's *The greatest treasure*, are compared to see the similarities in their representation of ecological consciousness and their ecological messages.

Traditional tales which are documented in writing, audio recording, or film are believed to be a reconstruction of the original tales belonging to a particular group of people. Consequently, such documented narratives are re-told tales with different imaginative embellishments by the narrators. This often accounts for the different versions of the same traditional tales. Myth and its reconstructions in children's literature have some connections with ecological issues because of the cosmogonic nature of such tales. These kind of traditional stories are otherwise known as aetiological tales. Hence, the focus of this study under this chapter is to examine

ecological representations in four selected traditionally-inclined narratives for children in Africa from four chosen regions on the continent in order to reveal the predominant environmental tropes, ethics and symbols employed in the stories.

The specific objectives of this study in this regard are, among other things to: examine how the narratives capture African environmental ethics in the process of creating consciousness and evaluate the texts and ideas in terms of their usefulness as responses to environmental crisis and point out how they succeed in doing so or why they fail to do so. For instance, the legends of Sango, and his three wives—Oba, Osun and Oya among the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria, could be viewed as mythical stories based on the cosmogonic contents in them. The legends have some elements of truth because according to history, Sango was actually the third Alaafin of Oyo and was said to have married Oba, Osun and Oya. However, the stories surrounding their deification, especially for the wives who were said to have metamorphosed into three different rivers which were named after them is mysterious as people may find it difficult to relate with. Also, a legend, as instantiated above, may be a myth because of the sacred or religious element associated with the story, but not all legends are myths.

While a fable is a short anthropomorphic tale, a folktale may be a short or relatively long story with human characters or a combination of both human and non-human characters. These two forms of mythical reconstructions like some other myths and legends evolve with oral storytelling and are prone to have many versions based on the background and versatility of the narrators from one generation to the next. Fables and folktales are often didactic in nature and meant to instil vital cultural values of the people from which the stories have originated. Aetiological tales are mythical as they attempt to explain natural phenomena, but some tales cannot be classified as myths.

4.2 Myths—an overview

Human beings have always been fascinated with creating stories in an attempt to seeking meaning to the course of their existence on earth. Stories and different works of imagination are embedded in mythical creations whereby stories are invented to enable humans grasp the realities of their existence and their relationship with the natural environment so as to seek and maintain balance while appealing to their psyche

that life has meaning and value. The human mind is wired with the tool for imagination. According to Armstrong (2005: p. 5), the human mind is endowed with ideas and experiences which appeal to the depth of his inner core. Therefore, religion and mythology are products of the imagination. Campbell (1991: pp. 12 and 16) opine that a myth is the “experience of life” or “stories about the wisdom of life”. Although mythical creations have often been dismissed as baseless and self-indulgent, scientific and technological ideas and discoveries that have enabled human beings to survive and be more effective on earth are also products of the human imagination. Accordingly, mythology and science are intertwined as they both equip humans to understand the balance in nature, the meaning for existence and the need for a mutual relationship between humans and the natural environment (Campbell 1991, Armstrong 2005, Lugira 2009, Akporobaro 2012).

In her exploration of myth-making titled *A short history of myth* (2005), Karen Armstrong notes five major features of myth. First, it originates from the experience of death and extinction thereby emphasizing the process of birth, death, and regeneration. Second, myth is interconnected with ritual because many myths are better understood through ritual performance. Third, myth is an expression of the unknown which appeals to the intuition and not the intellect. An experience of a reality that goes beyond the physical realm usually resonates in the human soul and often repudiated by logic. The fourth feature of myth is that it serves as a guide. It is the manual needed by man for navigating his world and understanding his place and role in nature. It equips man with the knowledge to become fully conscious of his world which transcends the physical realities. Lastly, myth is referred to as the “perennial philosophy”. It is an early form of psychology which helps people cope with their emotion through the interpretation of classical myths by Freud and Jung. Myth awakens man to the reality of the spiritual dimension that surrounds him which could only be perceived intuitively, but a natural part of his existence.

Joseph Campbell (1991), in his conversation with Bill Moyers on *The power of myth*, identifies four functions of myth: mystical, cosmological, sociological and didactic.

Myth is a form of spiritual instruction which enables an individual to have a glimpse of the mystery surrounding his existence so as to awaken in him a sense of awesomeness and appreciation of the world around him.

The cosmological function is embedded in philosophy and science. It shows how mythical stories are used as illustrations to explain the origin of the universe and how it functions.

The sociological and didactic functions are inter-related. While the sociological aspect shows how myth is used to explain and establish the customs and traditions of a group of people to foster a peaceful relationship among the people and the outside world, the didactic function is meant to inculcate in an individual valuable morals to promote an egalitarian society and a peaceful co-existence between the human and the non-human environment.

The above mentioned attributes and functions of myth are in tandem with Sam Keen's and Anne Valley-Fox's (1989) opinion that myth may be "creative or destructive, healthful or pathological" as it provides a bigger picture of things through stories so as to offer an explanation for 'why things are as they are'. To this end, myth presents:

consensus, sanctifies the social order, and gives the individual an authorized map of the path of life. A myth creates the plotline that organizes the diverse experiences of a person or community into a single story." (pp. xii-xiii)

To Carl Jung, myth is a part of the archetypes that are embedded in the collective unconscious. Myth originates from the realm of dream and art. The fact that many myths revolve around similar themes confirm the existence of a common collective unconscious. However, the treatment of the themes may differ based on the various cultural influence of the group of people involved.

Akporobaro (2012)) opines that myth include legends, allegories and folktales which are used to explain to ourselves "who we are, how the world and we are created, how we relate with nature and the elements, where we come from (as particular tribes or

racess), and what is the origin of our social institutions, laws, rites and codes of conduct” (pp. 196-197).

Myths, as aetiological tales, illuminate our thoughts and venturing into new horizons by asking the right question “what if? - A question which has propelled us into outstanding “discoveries in philosophy, science and technology” (Armstrong 2005: p. 7).

Mohamed Larbi Bouguerra (2010), citing Campbell, reiterates the importance of myth as it enables man to have a firm grasp of the “collective conscience as regards the construction of speech and the contributions of experience.” Myths are also linked with symbols as vehicles for the expression of man’s imaginary world and symbolic thoughts dealing with key issues of life.

Paula Gunn Allen (1996) opines that mythical creations among the American Indian peoples are intended:

to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated, private self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of the majesty and reverent mystery of all things, and to actualize, in language, those truths that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity (p 242).

A myth may not be factual, but its effectiveness at helping man cultivate positive attitude makes it real/true. Mythology is, therefore, an art form that predates history but encompasses timeless issues that border on human existence and reality (Armstrong 2005: p. 7).

Mythology as stories about experience of life and wisdom for being actively alive in creation are essential in teaching the young and adults alike about the workings in creation. This is to help them in developing and cultivating an awareness of the interrelationship between human and non-human nature through a vicarious experience of the traditional stories.

4.3 The four classical elements and mythology

Most cosmogonies from different cultures are woven around the four classical elements—water, fire, air and earth—responsible for sustenance. The four states of matter – liquid, plasma (ionized gas), gas and solid are also linked with them. This is because all matters are believed to be a composition of all of these elements in one form or another and this concept forms the building blocks for philosophy and science.

The four elements are reflected in different ancient mythologies like those of Egypt, Greek and the Chinese cosmogonies. In Yoruba mythology, the four elements are associated with four deities: Yemoja (water), Sango (fire and air), and Elegba (earth). Also, in popular culture, the four elements are portrayed in different works like James Cameron's *Avatar*, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, and the Nickelodeon series—*Power Rangers*, and the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

Water is essential to life on earth especially for humans, animals and plants. About 70 percent of the earth surface is covered in water. Ninety-Seven percent of water on earth is saltwater while only 3 percent is fresh water. Water plays a very crucial role in the economic empowerment of any group of people. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has declared that “water is not only an economic and environmental threat, but also an existential one”.

Water, the most essential of the elements, has the largest collection of stories connected to it. Different scientific researchers have also shown that water is the origin for the earliest life on earth (Mazzucco, 2015). This is also established in the plethora of water-themed stories for children meant to help the young ones value and appreciate the importance of water as part of the ecological, economic, social and political balance needed for a successful development and stability of any society.

Most creation stories of ancient cultures—from those of Greek, Roman, India, China, Egypt in Africa, and the Judaeo-Christian tradition—have a theme of life emanating from water. In Bouguerra's words:

It is true that myths and symbols are fundamentally necessary to human beings and through them are expressed man's imagination and symbolism. They

enable man to face the key issues of life, death, and afterlife and questions of what is profane or sacred, forbidden or permitted. Water is often their vector and interpreter through innumerable approaches such as religious perception, by way of beliefs, spiritual calendars, rites and prayers (p. 6).

This is in line with Seneca, the Roman philosopher's advice that "Where a spring rises or a water (sic) flows there ought we to build altars and offer sacrifices".

In terms of beliefs, ancient African beliefs, religious rites and prayers are couched in myths related with the elements responsible for the emergence and sustenance of life on earth. Most African Traditional Religions are based on accessing the power to control these elements for man's benefit (Mbiti 1969, James 1988, Lugira 2009). Many Africans believe that life is made possible by the availability of water and the reverence of different sources of water through actual acts of worship and rituals are meant to appease this vital element. The importance attached to water is reflected in mythical creations and proverbs from various cultures in Africa and the deification of many sources of water is a clear attestation to this fact. For instance, the longest river in Africa, The Nile, has been acknowledged as the bedrock of the Egyptian civilisation and still continues to be indispensable to the economic, social and political relevance of Egypt and other riparian nations like Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda (Tadesse 2010).

Also, the third longest on the same continent, the Niger River, has played a significant role in the growth and development of ancient African empires like those of Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and the Mandinka. Some kingdoms like Ife, Oyo, Benin, and others found in pre-colonial Nigeria also benefitted from the natural endowments of the Niger to boost the economic productivity of the various kingdoms. Among the Yoruba, the Niger River is known as "Odo Oya". Oya was one of the wives of Sango, the third Alaafin of Oyo who was deified as the god of thunder. The other wives were Oba and Osun. The three wives were believed to have turned to the three different rivers which were named after them.

River is also a natural landmark that is often used in demarcating boundaries between villages, towns, cities, states and countries, while some of these places are named after different rivers. Examples abound in Nigeria as most of the human communities and states are named after different rivers found at different locations in the country. Indeed, two countries in Africa derived their names from the Niger River: Niger, and Nigeria. The major tributaries of the Niger found in Nigeria are: the Benue, the Kaduna, the Sokoto, the Anambra, and other rivers like Ogun, Osun, Osse, and Cross are watershed of the Niger which flow directly into the Atlantic Ocean. Elaborate festivals are often celebrated to honour river gods and goddesses and to request for their blessing upon the people. Even in eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and their western counterparts; Islam and the Judaeo-Christian form of worship, water plays a symbolic role in the various purification and cleansing rites for the adherents.

In almost every tradition, fire as an element is venerated and fire worship is one of the earliest forms of worship among traditional cultures. Every mythology from the Greek legend of Prometheus, to the African mythology on “the finding of fire”, are various accounts of how man was able to get fire to ease his mode of living on earth. Apart from water, fire is the key element needed for cooking. Fire has also helped man in fashioning different tools, weapons and implements needed in farming, hunting and self-defence. Like water, fire is ambivalent in nature as it could be beneficial and destructive. Water and fire mythologies are meant to enable young children to appreciate these gifts of nature and be fully aware of taking responsibility for the use of these elements and the devastating consequence that may result from any careless attitude with regards to their usage as drought and wildfire have accounted for the destruction of many civilisations.

Ancient cultures were basically agrarian. Therefore, the earth is regarded as a divine gift from the Almighty. In many accounts of creation, the earth in form of soil or clay played a vital role in the creation of man and animals. Many plants would not have survived without the soil/land on which they grow. To this end, a collection of traditional tales are passed from one generation to another to register the importance of land/soil for the sustenance of life on earth. Among different people, there are different forms of worship associated with the veneration of the earth. In Africa, like other

ancient civilisations, earth and water goddesses are symbols of fertility and productivity. Festivals are held during the harvest season to show gratitude for Nature's providence and to pray for a bumper harvest in the coming season.

As such, different collection of myths, legends and folktales are woven around the relationship between humans and the natural environment especially in their interactions with the natural elements and the spirit beings associated with them. These traditional stories are meant to foster the symbiotic relationship between human beings and Nature and to ensure the preservation of this mutual benefit from one generation to another.

4.4 Cosmogony and African mythology

There are many views and opinions about the origin of the universe among Africans. Creation stories in Africa are often woven in aetiological tales and myths in an attempt to unravel the mystery behind creation and “help us to identify with all our fellow-beings”—human and non-human (Armstrong 2005: p.48). Africans concept of the origin and workings of the universe, like other ancient cultures—the Greeks, Romans—are linked with a supernatural force often regarded as a Supreme Being/God, who is believed to be assisted by some minor/lesser gods and goddesses. Like the Western cultures, Africans also have some records of myths attributing “dominion” over nature to man. However, they do not believe that man was created in the “image and likeness” of God.

As noted by Adeoti, Awopetu, and Badejo (2015), in their separate explications of Fagunwa's five novels written in Yoruba, in a book titled *Inside African forests, new perspectives on D. O. Fagunwa's novels* (2015) edited by Gbemisola Adeoti, it could be observed that the supremacy of man over all other beings on earth is acknowledged in Fagunwa's works. Adeoti (2015) reiterates that man is expected to “recognise the being of others, respect them and their right to full life” (p. 7). This is to curb a flagrant exploitation of nature by man, thereby fostering harmony and peace between human and non-human nature.

According to some scholars who have carried out various researches about ecological ethics in Africa, the words “nature” or “environment” are somewhat ambiguous in African vocabularies. Nonetheless, there are some words in different African languages which could be used to connote similar meaning(s).

Some traditional cosmogonic tales are examined to establish their ecological relevance. This is done through a comparative analysis of such stories from different ethnic groups in Africa to highlight their similarities and points of departure from other creation stories from other cultures. Many creation stories in Africa affirm the creation of heaven before the earth followed by man and other things on earth. Some Africans also hold the belief that the world was created out of nothing. These concepts are similar to the Judaeo-Christian belief about creation.

Starting with the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria, there is a plethora of aetiological tales which have been retold by many narrators or writers. Among the Yoruba, Olodumare/Olorun, with the assistance of Obatala and other orisas, was responsible for creation of man and other things on earth. At a point in time, man requested to take charge of running the affairs of everything on earth. The orisas/deities were sceptical of man’s ability to do this and thus advised Olodumare against granting the request. However, Olodumare granted this request—which foregrounds the gift of freewill to man. Within a few days, the balance in nature was violated and man was faced with a myriad of ecological problems like air and water pollution, and over exploitation of natural resources due to human greed.

Other creation stories in Africa are often linked with the reason “why the sky is far away from man”. This is a popular story among different ethnic groups in Africa, and as such has different versions. Among the Yoruba, in a tale retold by Mabel Segun (1989), titled *The first corn*, human beings had access to the sky because it was within their reach. They were even allowed to have a piece of the sky for food whenever they were hungry. But there was one rule which was not adhered to by man:

Nobody must break off more than he could eat at a time.
For some time the people obeyed this rule. Then they became greedy. They started breaking off more food than they could eat. They broke off big pieces of food and

threw away what they could not eat. A lot of food was wasted (p.2).

The Sky King warned them against wasting his resources but man failed to listen. To end this non-chalant attitude, the sky was withdrawn from the reach of man and they had to learn how to farm to produce food for consumption as a result of their disobedience. This story could form the basis for teaching the need for conservation of resources in an ecological related lesson for young learners.

The Akan version of the story is a bit different. God was said to be within the reach of man although he lived in the sky while man was on the ground. God decided to move his habitation—the sky—further from man due to the constant noise being made by an old woman who liked pounding “foofoo” every time. Noise pollution is one of the environmental problems which have been identified by environmental scientists. Another version, which stated that it was the long pestle used in pounding the “foofoo”, that was always used in hitting God’s eyes and he had to withdraw from man to forestall further assault, has no ecological undertone.

In all the versions of the story, man was warned to desist from abusing the relationship between him and the Sky King/God. This aspect of the story removes the element of “fatalism” that is often associated with some cosmogonic tales on the continent which portrays man as being “helpless” in the face of the vagaries of nature.

Myth gives prominence to cosmogonic tales because it is believed that an insight into the workings of the universe will enable man to understand his place and role in whatever environment he finds himself.

4.5 Retold African aetiological tales and ecological consciousness

In this study, some traditionally-inclined narratives are examined to establish their cosmogonic importance and ecological relevance to children in building an ecological consciousness in them. The selected texts for this study are based on the four categorizations separately given by Cairney and Buell. However, the categorizations are intertwined with the proposed ecocritical standards for evaluating ecocritical texts

in this study: (a) the synergy of inter-relatedness; and (b) the re-invigorating power of Nature.

The synergy of the inter-relatedness between human and non-human environment forms the nature of the ecological consciousness in the texts in focus. For instance, in *Why Cock crows* by George Kamau, an etiological tale (i. e. ‘how/why’ story) which attempts to explain a natural phenomenon or the reason for a natural occurrence, affirms Cairney’s categorisation of the ‘environment as creation and part of the metaphysical experience of our world’. The major environmental issue raised in the story is the discovery of an aspect of agricultural practice, animal husbandry or domestication—a method of conservation—of some animals by man. Through the story, the young reader is able to discover some of the reasons (like the non-dangerous features of the chosen animals and birds, the need to protect these set of animals from other animals that prey on them) for this act of kindness by man. Also, the children are able to learn the peculiar sounds made by some animals (a way of learning how to identify some animals) like cat, duck, and the pigeon who tried to teach the cock how to sing. The story resonates with Buell’s assertion about ‘the presence of natural history in human history’ as some nonhuman animals were tamed to live with man in the built environment.

Anthropomorphic tales like this one in focus is intended to show the plight of the natural world, and the interdependent relationship between human and non-human environment. The morals of consideration for the welfare of others, forgiveness, and selflessness, reinforce the need for a peaceful co-existence between man and the natural environment. Domestication of non-human nature is often linked with domination and subjugation—a major concern of postcolonialism and ecocriticism—as attested to in Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* eponymous hero’s survival strategies on a lonely island for several years. It is pertinent to note that the issue of domestication in this story is borne out of care for the non-wild animals to protect them from the vagaries of living in the wild. Domestication of animals as a form of subsistence farming which is usually practised among indigenous cultures is only a way of curbing the menace this act of kindness might cause man. Animals tamed in this manner are usually properly cared for and not maltreated in any manner because of the shared

ecological ethic of inherent value attributed to everything in nature by Africans. It also gives a message of hope that our world could be preserved if man is ready to take up the responsibility of being a ‘steward of the earth’.

The built environment to which some of the animals have been brought is a domesticated landscape for shelter and other purposes. This is further highlighted in *The enormous yam* by George Murphy. The farmer in this story had a small vegetable garden in front of his house where he suddenly noticed an enormous yam which had been growing there. In his bid to harvest the yam, he was assisted by members of his family, his dog and a rat before he could successfully pull out the yam from the ground. The fact that the man needed the assistance of not only the members of his family, but also those of the animals around him underscores the synergy of inter-relatedness between man and the nonhuman members of his environment. While they were happy at the prospect of finding a tuber of yam which was big enough to feed them for at least a week, the farmer discovered something which was of a greater value to their existence. They all rejoiced at this discovery as “the water in the hole lasted for a long, long time” and the farmer was able to domesticate some other plants like yam and corn on his farm as a result of his easy access to water for the growth of the plants. Water is essential to living in terms of drinking, cooking, increasing food cultivation and production, sanitation, and the possibility of having a source of livelihood especially for farmers and those who trade in farm produce. This fact accentuates the importance of water to life and the re-invigorating power of Nature.

Every human civilisation owes its existence and development to nature’s providence, especially with the provision of water. The survival of any human being right from the womb is dependent on water. Quoting Andre Guillerme (1983) Bouguerra affirms the importance of water as “the origin of all things and the ultimate equalizer”. He recalls Leonardo da Vinci’s assertion that “water is the driving force of all Nature”. This is captured in many mythical creation stories where life on earth is believed to have originated from water.

The beautiful illustrations in *The enormous yam* enhance a better understanding of the story as the young reader is able to note the difference between the scrawny vegetable

farm before the discovery of the water and the lushness of the same farm due to the regenerating power of the water now close to the farm. The reader can easily imagine the positive change this valuable discovery has brought to the family and consequently the human and non-human nature around them. Water as a major symbol of life for both human and non-human nature re-vibrates in three of the four stories in Charles Mungoshi's collection of folktales titled *Stories from a Shona childhood* and Verna Aardema's *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain*.

The ambivalent nature of water as a regenerating and destructive force echoes through three of the four stories in Mungoshi's *Stories from a Shona childhood*. Two of the stories in the anthology considered in this study are: "The hare and the animals of the jungle" (pp.3-19), and "The slave who became chief" (pp.30-39). Although the two stories are didactic in nature based on the morals put forward in each of them, the importance of water to the sustenance of both human and non-human nature is the scaffold for the stories. The moral of the first story is that wisdom is greater than might as the trickster, the little hare, like the tortoise in many Yoruba trickster tales, outplays the other animals in using water from the "communal well" which he did not take part in digging. The severe drought that took over the land where all the animals lived led to their coming together as a unified force to tackle the problem in spite of their differences and animosities. The Lion, the convener of the meeting, rose to address the other animals:

Friends, we are in danger. If it doesn't rain soon, then all of us, big and small, will die. So, I suggest that we put our heads together because we must find water to drink. I know we don't all like one another, but this is not the time to let our differences show. Instead, let us unite and find a way to save ourselves... (p.3. Italics mine).

Seeing their predicament, all the animals, except the Hare, agreed to dig a communal well so that all of them would have water to drink. Their effort was eventually fruitful and the Hare who refused to take part in the communal effort had to result to all kinds of tricks so as to gain access to the water as he realised he could not survive without it. This turn of event which sets the Hare against all the other animals foregrounds the

adage that “water has no enemy”. In spite of his indifferent attitude to the digging of the well as a result of his laziness, the Hare could not sustain this attitude as he knows that he needs water for his survival and as such, he resorted to trickery to get water from the well dug by the other animals. This puts to the fore the importance of water to all living things thereby showing the young readers that water is essential to life and the quest for water could make people set aside their differences and work in harmony to attain their desire. Also, the need for water could be a cause of conflict between/among communities, and even the family as shown in this story, and “The spirit of the ashpit”, which is another story from the collection, respectively. The other animals would not have had any problem with the Hare using water from the communal well if he had taken part in the digging. This is to let young children know that every individual has a role to play in making life better for every member of the society, age or size notwithstanding.

Water as a unifying force is also re-echoed in “The slave who became chief” by virtue of his possessing the power to make rain which eventually puts his captors at his mercy. Kakore, the slave, lived a lonely life and was often looked down upon by the other people in his master’s village because they believed that “his life was in their hands” (p.31). However, with the passage of time, the table turned against the people when the village was struck by a severe drought and Kakore, the slave who happens to be a rainmaker, was the only one who had access to “cool clear mountain water” from the rock where he usually sat under a musasa tree to watch the grazing animals. The musasa tree, among the Shona tribe of Zimbabwe in Southern Africa and some other places like Tanzania and Zambia in East Africa, is a metaphor for shelter as the tree produces a lush green leaves on its elaborate branches which serves as shade for people and animals from the scorching sun especially during the hot season. It is also known as “the only one left behind” which probably connotes its sturdiness in harsh weather condition.

Kakore always brought the water in his goatskin bag while returning from the pastures. He sometimes gave some village boys some of this water to quench their thirst. He had to come to the rescue of the village from total destruction as the lack of rain has gradually led to the dislocation of human and non-human nature as:

...the trees failed to bring forth new spring leaves. Rocks and boulders in the nearby hills spilt and set fire to the mountains. The wild game on which people lived, left the land to search for greener pastures. The only food available was lean meat from the cattle that were dying in their hundreds (p.32).

This scenario shows that a severe drought could lead to wildfires or even volcanic eruptions in a situation whereby the “rocks and boulders in the nearby hills spilt and set fire to the mountains”.

The famine portends death for the people and to prevent a total annihilation of his people, Chief Chisvo led his people to beg Kakore to help them, a request which the slave granted by singing his rainmaking song to revive the parched land. As a mark of gratitude, “Chief Chisvo handed over his instrument of chieftainship to Kakore, the former slave and rainmaker” (p.39) and also gave his eldest daughter in marriage to “help the new Chief run the affairs of the guta”. Kakore would have been helpless like his captors in the face of the devastating effects of the drought on the land if he had lacked the indigenous ecological knowledge of rainmaking which he acquired at a tender age before he was taken captive by Chief Chisvo’s army. This knowledge which must have been passed on to him through the culture and traditions of his people embedded in mythical performance became a very useful weapon to deliver him from slavery and attain the highest position in his land of captivity. Culture as an expression of man’s appreciation of his natural environment enhances the survival of a group of people and the protection of the environment. The story has a satirical undertone to sound a note of warning to the Western world, the coloniser of the Third World, that they are not the custodian of all forms of knowledge, and that they can still cull from the indigenous ecological wisdom of their former colonies.

This is highlighted in Kakore’s attachment to his people’s culture of rainmaking, despite his separation from the land of his birth. This knowledge serves as his anchor and strength in the face of adversity even when “the animals were his only audience” while “singing the rainmaking songs of his now distant land” (p.31). Chief Kakore became the most memorable chief as the proverbial musasa which serves as a place of

rest or refuge for the weary. He was immortalised as the people go to pray for rain where he was buried under the musasa tree on the hill, whenever they are in need.

The art of rainmaking was widely practised among many indigenous people in different parts of the world. The task is highly spiritual and mystical as it entails different rituals and ceremonies among various communities. This practice is not alien to Africans as there are different traditional stories associated with rainmaking among the people. These different stories draw attention to the fact that water is fundamental in determining people's disposition to different attitudes and values. The amount of rainfall in an area determines the weather pattern and the lifestyle of the people. To this end, the art of rainmaking is often practised among agrarian communities where rain is critically essential to their livelihood. The interconnection between human and non-human nature is foregrounded as the rainmaker needs to be in tune with Nature and all other elements for a successful intervention against drought.

According to John S. Mbiti (1969), the agrarian nature of African societies makes their dependence on rain very vital to their continued existence. He notes a few societies which "associate God and rain so closely that the same word, or its cognate, is used for both" (p. 53). Other ethnic groups personify rain as one of the divinities, while some people believed rain to be God's saliva or urine (p. 41). Many Africans associate some spirits and deities with different bodies of water (p. 54). Rain is noted as a sign of God's care and providence for humanity and the world. This is why rainmaking is a very important ritual among Africans.

The importance of this traditional ecological knowledge is further depicted in Aardema's *Bringing the rain to Kapiti Plain* through the pastoral, georgic and wilderness tropes. This is a well illustrated picture-story book for young learners from age 4-7. The colourful illustration and the soothing rhyme with which the story is presented makes it very fascinating to read or listen to while being read to young children who are just learning to read. The Barry Commoner's first law of ecology which states that "Everything is connected to everything else" reverberates through the story as the natural environment is presented as "creation and the metaphysical experience of our world", "the relationship of people to the environment", while in the

same breath celebrating the beauty and wonder of the environment in accordance with Cairney's (2011) observation. In the same vein, all ecocritical stories like this one also illuminates Buell's (1995) ecocritical determinants for adjudging an ecocritical text.

Bringing the rain to Kapiti Plain instantiates "the presence of natural history in human history" because rain is associated with life and fertility among people, plants and animals. This underscores the reason why water is always connected to creation/origin myths in Africa and other parts of the world. Nature's abundance and splendour is on display in the captivating illustration and lyrics where the great Kapiti Plain is described as:

All fresh and green / From the African rains- / A sea of
grass for the / Ground birds to nest in, / And patches of
shade for / wild creatures to rest in; / With acacia trees
for / Giraffes to browse on. / And grass for the herdsman
/ To pasture their cows on. (p. 2)

Through the pastoral trope, human connectedness with nature is reified as human and non-human characters are made to interact in the rainmaking story. Ki-pat, the herdsman, used the feather which dropped from the eagle to make an arrow which he used in shooting down the "The big, black cloud//all heavy with rain" to bring about a transformation of the precarious situation in which man, plants and animals existence is being threatened just like the scenario presented in Chief Chisvo's village in Mungoshi's "The slave who became chief". With rainfall, there is a revitalization of the natural environment as:

...the grass grew green, / And the cattle fat! / And Ki-pat
got a wife / And a little Ki-pat - / Who tends the cows
now, / And shoots down the rain, / When the black
clouds shadow / Kapiti plain. (p. 6)

This last stanza is an attestation to the re-energizing power of Nature which is made possible through the understanding of the process of rainmaking which has facilitated a positive change and transformation which halted the destruction that was imminent

from the lack of rain. The georgic trope is signified in the process of working the land and the continuation of the cycle of life. This is also reflected in the renewal of the greenery, the fattening of the cows, the birth of “a little Ki-pat who tends the cows... and shoots down the rain” whenever the need arises. Rainmaking stories have always shown the profoundness of water as one of the four elements that shapes human history and imagination. As such, every human civilisation development and continued existence is dependent on the cultural values attached to water and its sustenance among the people. The cultural value of water to Africans is further highlighted in Charles Anson-Lawson’s story titled *The greatest treasure*. This story is one of the Macmillan Series tagged “Living Earth”. Stories in this collection are meant to teach the importance of preserving the planet Earth for the survival of humans, animals, and plants. The story is meant to teach young children that water is more valuable than any precious stone.

Esi is a young girl who is a little bit careless about the proper use of tap. She often forgets to turn off the tap properly after fetching water from it. This is a typical attitude of most young children as they do not attach any importance to little drops of water because they are oblivious of the fact that potable water is exhaustible. Also, more often than not, children love playing with water and sometimes find a dripping tap fascinating. When Esi’s mother, Madam Konadu, finds a dripping tap carelessly left by her daughter, she is alarmed by Esi’s penchant for wasting water in spite of the several warnings she has given to discourage this attitude. Esi’s response that “It wasn’t dripping a lot”, and the query: “Does it really matter so much?” reflect a typical attitude of people, especially young children, to water which they do not struggle to fetch from well or rivers and streams that require some exertion in terms of pulling heavy buckets from the well or long distance trekking to different streams and rivers with containers full of water on their heads or shoulders.

To show how precious water is, Esi’s mother tells her the story of Iddi Musa who went on a treasure hunt for “the greatest treasure” in the world because he wanted to become rich. Treasure hunt is one of the common themes for folktales and legends among various civilizations. Some stories from the collection titled *Arabian nights* like “Aladdin and the magic lamp”, “Sinbad the sailor,” popularized through the English

translation made by Edward William Lane, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, follow this fashion. Such stories, though meant to teach the triumph of good over evil, inadvertently promote the tenets of capitalism which encourage greed and the despoliation of natural resources.

Iddi Musa's experiences in the desert showed him that "water is the greatest treasure of all", as he had to give the last treasure—diamonds—he had on him for water to refresh himself from exhaustion. This aligns with the Arabian proverb which says that "a drop of water is worth its weight in gold." Underscoring Abbe Bauron's (1893) attestation to this, Bougerra (2010) asserts that "water is the magician of oases and turns a desert into a lovely garden." Iddi Musa could probably have been able to take some of the treasures home if he had heeded the advice that he should take whatever he *could* carry and should not forget "the greatest treasure of all" (p. 16). But his greed overtook his sense of reasoning to recognise "the spring of pure clear water bursting from the wall of the cave" as the most important treasure he would need to strengthen and refresh him on his way back home. This part of the story emphasises the adverse effect of selfishness and greed even on the perpetrator. This resonates with Barry Commoner's (a biologist and one of the founding fathers of modern environmentalism) first law of ecology which states that "everything is connected to everything else" and when man cultivates a sense of "responsibility to nature", as opined by Buell (1995) and Turner (1996), he gets to know that this is ultimately for his own good and that of posterity.

At the end of the story, Esi has learnt her lesson, as she acknowledges that "Water is a treasure. It is the greatest treasure. Without water all living things will die." And she gets up "to make sure the tap is turned off!" (p. 23). This is unlike Sam's attitude in Ridgway and Ford's *Turn it off!* The story is a contemporary written narrative about the young protagonist, Sam who could not afford to waste water when the village had no tap. However, his easy access to water with the setting up of a large tap made him think he could use water anyhow. His carelessness by leaving the tap on after use leads to some unfavourable situations in the village. After helping to salvage the ugly incidence, he still forgets to turn off the tap in spite of the harm his forgetfulness and carelessness about the proper use of tap has caused the people around him. This shows

that children need to be often reminded that “It’s very bad to waste water!” and taps should always be turned off after use.

The story of Iddi Musa’s adventure coupled with the fact-file on desert found in the text is suitable for a literature-based instruction in a science lesson. All the facts presented in the story and the captivating illustrations on desert environments are good teaching materials for young learners to learn about the importance of water to life and how desert plants and animals are able to adapt to a life with very little water. This kind of story equips young children with the right information about the desert and it enables them to appreciate the biodiversity in the tropical and temperate regions.

Mythical stories as discussed in this chapter are a repository of traditional wisdom and cosmology. The stories in African mythology are meant to reinforce the different beliefs, culture and traditions of the people. The mythical reconstructions also establish the strong connection between nature and culture among Africans thereby showcasing the ecological consciousness of the people through the stories examined. For instance, *The enormous yam*, *Stories from a Shona childhood*, *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain*, and *The greatest treasure* underscore the importance of water to the existence of all forms of life on earth. All the traditional tales except *The greatest treasure* raise the level of ecological awareness through indigenous ecological knowledge, and establish affective relationship that promotes human connectedness with nature. Also, mutuality, balance and synergy as significant elements of co-habitation are implied in all the tales.

While all the stories are reworked versions of different folktales with the message deconstructed to show that aetiological tales are not just about didacticism, but could also project other contemporary issue—ecological consciousness—effectively even when there is no authorial intention to this end, *The greatest treasure* is clearly aimed at creating awareness about the environment with a focus on “deserts”.

To this end, the interconnection between mythology and science is underscored as the stories examined could serve as building blocks for scientific discussions or lessons thereby reifying the abstract concepts in science and highlighting the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature.

CHAPTER FIVE

A POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICAL READING OF SELECTED CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PROSE NARRATIVES FOR CHILDREN

5.1 Introduction

Using Mabel Segun's (1991) *The twins and the tree spirits*, Ignatius Musonza's (2003) *Ike's plant*, Walid Tahir's (2008) *Sayeed...sayeed*, and Donna Jo Napoli and Kadir Nelson's (2010) *Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the trees of Kenya*, this chapter attempts a diachronic explication of four selected written narratives with ecological underpinnings for children in Africa. The chosen texts were purposively selected from samples of African children's prose narratives with environmental focus. Some earlier texts are noted to have been written without any conscious efforts by the authors to infuse any ecological consciousness in them, whereas, in the contemporary narratives, there is an obvious authorial intention in creating awareness about environmental issues. The harmonised ecocritical standards of Lawrence Buell (1995) and Trevor Cairney (2011) coupled with postcolonial ecocritical theory are used to assess the depiction of ecological issues and ethics raised in the four selected contemporary written narratives for children to determine their usefulness in creating environmental awareness in the young children so as to encourage them in developing an affective relationship with the environment.

Postcolonial ecocriticism is used to highlight the conflict engendered through the dominion or colonisation of a group of people over another, and how man has assumed the role of "lord" and "master" over the natural environment to his own detriment. This ecocritical theory is also used in engaging the worth of "development" at the expense of the natural environment and how this critical assessment underscores the need for the adoption of traditional ecological knowledge alongside the Western model.

From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, environmental texts have been dominated by Western socio-cultural ideologies of relating with the human and non-human

environment, and as such, stifling the indigenous voices of nature-relatedness. The postcolonial reading of the texts examined in this chapter is to challenge the Western dominance of ecocritical discourses and highlight the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) embedded in the texts in focus, especially Segun's (1991) *The twins and the tree* spirits and Napoli and Nelson's (2010) *Mama miti*.

Anthropogenic factors are responsible for a myriad of environmental challenges in Africa as the case is in other parts of the world. The most culpable of the human induced environmental problems is over-population as some scholars like Malthus (1970), Ehrlich (1972), and Maathai (2009) have pointed out. The natural resources in Africa are being stretched to the limit by humans occupying this geographical space as a result of negligence or non-commitment to sustainable environmental practices and outright greed of the political leadership. The negative impact of population growth and technological advancement is underscored in this pronouncement by Al Gore as cited in Massey, (2009 p. 1):

We have quadrupled the population of the world in the last 100 years. We have magnified the power of our technologies a thousand fold. And the combination has radically transformed the underlying relationship between the human species and the Earth.

We are now capable of having a destructive impact on the ecological system of the entire planet. We are the largest force of nature now, and we have to take that into account in the way we relate to the environment.

The ambivalent touch to this declaration, however, is that man needs a shift from "ego-consciousness" to "eco-consciousness" to take on the duty of responsible stewardship of the Earth.

Adhuze (2012) also identifies population growth, global warming, depletion of the Ozone Layer, habitat destruction and species extinction, air and water pollution, groundwater depletion, and contamination, chemical risks, environmental racism, and energy production as some of the basic factors responsible for environmental

problems. These factors, according to her, are fundamental to the different issues in environmental discourse.

5.2 Environmental problems in Africa

Anthropocene as a term for describing the present geological era encapsulates the enormity of the human impact on the environment. This is evident in terms of over population, urbanization, food production, indoor and outdoor pollution, flora and fauna extinction and the wasteful use of natural resources (Reeves, 2006 cited in Massey, 2009). Concerns over a re-evaluation of human needs against the preservation of life on earth have been articulated by several international bodies like the United Nations (UN) through GEO4 reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2007; the declaration of 2005-2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and the proclamation of 2008 as the International Year of Planet Earth.

Some environmental problems have become endemic in Africa as a result of its colonial history, and other factors which are peculiar to the continent. Such challenges include domestication of the natural landscape for conservation, game reserves, and wildlife watching, a practice which many Africans, as a result of abject poverty “can neither afford nor directly benefit from.” (Maathai, 2009: p.230). Other challenges that have taken its toll on the natural landscape in Africa include: over-cultivation of land, over-grazing, poor agricultural methods, deforestation, drought, desertification, soil degradation, war, air and water pollution, fauna and flora depletion. As in other climes, these issues are intricately linked to population explosion in Africa. As noted by Maathai (2009):

The rate of urbanization in Africa is the highest in the world, with city populations doubling every twenty years. Sprawling cities and slums have gobbled up vast tracts of forest and agricultural land...With the onset of climate change, arable or grazeable land is likely to become even more precious. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), degradation of land is a serious concern in thirty-two African countries, and 65 percent of the continent’s farmland has sustained damage (p. 227).

She further observes that the situation in Africa is exacerbated through bad leadership and governance, while Alam (2011) in his “Reading Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart ecocritically*” posits:

Colonization induced a sense of strain in the African’s connection to nature; among the things that fell apart in the continent with the coming of the white man, he [Achebe] implies through his inaugural novel, was the oneness of African nature and culture (p. 2).

With the arrival of the colonisers on the continent, the intimate connection between Africans and the natural environment was severed as the indigenous cultures were discarded for the foreign culture which is highly capitalist and technocratic. As such, Africans lost the reverential connection they had with nature and came to regard natural resources as mere commodities to be exploited to gratify man’s greed.

The colonialists’ predilection for creating an environment similar to their countries of origin brought about some environmental disturbances in Africa as large forest areas were cleared for housing and relaxation purposes while some non-indigenous flora and fauna were introduced to African soil. Also, sizeable portions of lands were taken over by the colonial government and private colonial landowners, especially in East and Southern Africa colonies. For instance, as at 2005, in South Africa, 96 percent of arable land belonged to the white farmers while their counter parts in Namibia controlled 50 percent of arable land. This unequal distribution of prime land jeopardized the interest of indigent farmers to practise sustainable farming as they had little parcels of land for growing crops and pasturing. This resulted in the loss of soil nutrients, drought and famine due to over-population. Therefore, there is a mass migration of people to the urban areas scrambling for the little infrastructural facilities. The drive for the white-collar job led to the disintegration of the family unit paving way for crimes like robbery, burglary, prostitution, illegal mining, as exemplified in Alan Paton’s *Cry, the beloved country*. Deprivation of the sources of livelihood, pollution, deforestation, oil bunkering, militancy, prostitution

and other nefarious activities are depicted in Kaine Agary's *Yellow yellow*, while land struggle is the main focus of Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Weep not child*, and *A grain of wheat*.

Massive logging, extensive mechanised farming, and large-scale replacement of forested areas with cash crop plantations like cocoa, rubber, oil palm, tea, tobacco and others, led to the subsequent decreases in forest areas. Consequent upon these unsustainable economic growth practices, deforestation, land degradation and desertification are the main environmental challenges facing the Africa nation and her peoples. The unbridled greed of African elites for accumulation of wealth with the connivance of their foreign cronies, and huge foreign-debt servicing by the various nations on the continent account for the enormity of the environmental problems on the continent. Instances of some of the ruinous practices which heightened the environmental challenges include: large-scale shaving of the forest for timber, sugar-cane plantation, over tapping of rubber tree plantation, exploration and exploitation of natural resources, building of private and the ostensibly government-owned industrial and housing estates, while the indigent natives scramble to use the left-over lands for agriculture, shelter and fuel needs. A large number of poor families in Africa depend on wood as fuel for heating and cooking. As such, deforestation becomes inevitable in the once richly forested equatorial region, while this untoward event has exacerbated desertification on the continent.

Deforestation also accounts for massive loss of flora and fauna due to the extensive damage done to the exotic pharmaceutical plants and other biodiversity during logging and construction of highways along rich tropical forest regions to provide vehicular access for the transfer of various extracted raw materials to the production plants and the final consumers in towns and cities. Other ripple effects of deforestation like erosion, soil degradation, drought, famine, air and water pollution—due to carbon emission and improper disposal of industrial waste, climate change and global warming bring untold hardship on the populace, especially the less privileged.

Pollution, as a resultant effect of mindless deforestation and agricultural expansion, is a major trope in environmental discourse. The founding text of modern environmentalism, as acknowledged by Garrard (2004), Buell (2005) and others is hinged on the discourse of

pollution in Rachel Carson's "A fable for tomorrow" (*Silent spring*, 1962) as she sounds this note of warning:

The most alarming of man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irrecoverable. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world—the very nature of life. (Carson, as cited in Garrard 2004: p.95)

In spite of this apocalyptic declaration over four decades ago, man does not seem bothered about the devastating effects of unguided knowledge and capitalism—products of science and technology, on the natural environment. Cases of pollution have been on the increase—from nuclear pollution, oil spillage, gas flaring, careless disposal of chemical waste, to poor urban waste management.

Aside deforestation, other causes of pollution in Africa include, burning of wood and charcoal for fuel which pollute the air thereby adding to the volume of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The epileptic public power supply in many African countries is also culpable in this regard as the use of generators in different homes and establishments largely contribute to the pollution of breathable fresh air by the people. Industrialisation, expansion of urban areas, poor transportation systems are other factors responsible for air pollution. Moreover, the poor environmental impact assessment policies and poor sanitary facilities—which are non-existent in most cases—aggravate the environmental challenges which the poor Africans have to grapple with.

5.3 Ecological consciousness and trends in contemporary prose narratives for children

Contemporary writers of literature for children with a concern for environmental sustainability have taken up some of these issues in their environmental poetics for the

young audience. Such literary works are meant to educate the upcoming generation and to enable them appreciate the need to cultivate an environmental friendly attitude for a sustainable future. As, such, this chapter sets out to examine four of such literary works so as to assess the nature and level of environmental consciousness and ethics propounded in the narratives and also authenticate their relevance to environmental discourse.

The colonisation/domestication of the natural environment/landscape for the expansion of the built environment is given a critical assessment in Mabel Segun's *The twins and the tree spirits*. This story is a typically African contemporary pastoral which underscores the anthropogenic environmental challenge associated with over population and mass migration to urban areas which exerts a lot of pressure on the infrastructural facilities in such areas causing different forms of pollution (air, land and water). Coping with such ecocatastrophe through human ingenuity leading to the expansion of such places thereby claiming more flora and fauna, and displacement of both biotic and organic ecosystem suggests a high level of anthropocentrism which the authorial voice warns against in the course of the story. This aligns with Bavidge (2011:208), quoting Fyfe's (1998), observation that "the Western street is a place for gazing rather than (sic) communicating...marked by deprivation in all sensory capacities, contemporary Western streets are marked by their non-sensuality". The pastoral trope is foregrounded in the conception of the rural environment as an antidote to the suffocating atmosphere in the city induced by anthropogenic factors.

Grandpa's intending neighbour's plan to relocate to the suburb due to the different forms of pollution in the city is a pointer to the negative effects of conurbation on the environment. However, without a proper enlightenment like the one offered by Grandpa to preserve some of the trees on the land acquired for building, the likes of this rich man would end up degrading the serenity of the natural environment that has attracted him to the suburban in the first instance. The "big and fat" man with all the appurtenances of an indulgent capitalistic lifestyle: big car which has the tendency for a large amount of carbon emission, coupled with a fat cigar dangling on his lips, implicates him as an accomplice to the environmental degradation he claims to be tired of in the city. Moreover, the proposition for a mansion near grandpa's serene environment represents the Western cultural idea for individual dwellings which promotes the twin traits of individualism—

selfishness and greed—as against the African traditional style of communalism which fosters altruism.

The importance of interrelatedness of things which also forms the core of Ogungbemi's (1997) thoughts on African environmental ethics is equally accentuated in *The twins and the tree spirits*. It is a fantastic story about a set of twins, Tinu and Tola and their adventure with two tree spirits. The story shows “the relationship of people to the environment” as well as “the negative impact of humanity on the environment”. This story also has a connection with the African metaphysical belief which shows that there is a “force” behind every being – human and non-human. As such, every being has an intrinsic value and are interrelated (Akporobaro, 2012: p. 199). This thought is also echoed by Maathai (2009) in *The challenge for Africa*. While advocating for the conservation of natural resources, she affirms that:

It is what is *not* human that ensures that we [humans] continue to exist. Without human beings, the creatures and plants and trees would flourish; but without those species, human beings have no hope of survival. This is why in thinking about *human* rights, we need to reach another level of consciousness to appreciate that these other species, too, have a right to their existence and their piece of the Earth (italics in the original, p. 288).

This belief, that there is an inherent value in everything in nature is responsible for the African's treatment of everything with some measure of respect which can be linked with animism and Arne Naess' (1973) Deep Ecology. This ecophilosophy advocates a “shift from a human-centred to a nature-centred system of values” (Garrard 2004: p. 21). This same ecological standpoint is succinctly captured in Aldo Leopold's ecophilosophy of “the biotic community” in the *Sand county almanac* (1949) where he opines that:

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise (pp. 218-225).

Segun's *The twins and the tree spirits* also indicates that environmental challenges could be both natural and anthropogenic as implied at the beginning of the story when a big storm destroyed Oroko Tree, one of the trees the twins have fallen in love with, and when the rich man sent "the bulldozers to uproot the trees" (p. 21) to make way for his new mansion. An environmental issue like conservation of natural resources like trees and other endangered species is also portrayed here. This is reflected in Grandpa's efforts at restoring Erike Tree that was partly uprooted by the bulldozer before the twin's intervention which made the driver leave this tree and five other ones which the land owner had promised to preserve. Through the story, the young readers are enlightened about the role of "the Conservation people...who care for trees and wild animals...which are dying out" (p. 32). This is also the polemical stance of Musonza in *Ike's plant* in which there is a strong advocacy for preservation of not just animals but plants as well. Like Chifunye's *Takura and the talking branch*, Segun's *The twins and the tree spirits* and Napoli's and Nelson's *Mama miti* focus on the importance of trees conservation to the survival of human and non-human species. For instance, when the twins notice that Oroko tree has fallen due to a heavy storm, their grandfather expresses the need to plant "some new trees" (p. 7). The twins sadness for the fallen tree and the fact that it has to be chopped down and used as firewood by the poor foregrounds the concern of postcolonial ecocritics who opine that the level of poverty in the Third World is a major challenge which has to be solved before any meaningful impact could be made in solving any environmental problem to reduce the negative impact of the people on the environment as a result of their dependence on the resources of the natural environment for sustenance. This is also corroborated in Umelo's *The river of hope* where some "men had been secretly mining gold" (p. 53) thereby polluting the only river in Pantiko.

Through Grandpa's explanation to the twins, the reader learns a lot about trees: their lifespan, the fact that "everything that grows must die", and as man replenishes his stock through reproduction, man should take the responsibility of replenishing the natural resources around him for his survival and the preservation of the non-human environment. He tries to explain the inevitability of death to both human and non-human species to the young children thereby underscoring the belief that death symbolizes renewal. He muses further:

A man is like a tree. He grows and becomes weak and then one day he dies a natural death, like that tree over there...sometimes he is knocked down in an accident and dies even before he is old like the Oroko Tree or he falls ill and dies like some trees which are attacked by pests or disease...But whichever way he dies, others must replace him – young ones like you (p. 8).

This is an express statement of “an ethic that creates a consciousness of man’s responsibility to nature” thereby “developing a sense of oneness with the environment” (Willnot: 1983, quoted in Massey 2009: p. 50). As such, Grandpa re-emphasized the importance of replenishing the earth by making an imperative declaration that: “We *must* plant new trees” (p. 8 italics mine). Segun’s *The twins and the tree spirits*, Napoli and Nelson’s *Mama miti*, like Chifunye’s *Takura and the talking branch* focus on the importance of tree conservation to both human and non-human survival. The onus therefore lies on man to care for the natural environment/tend the primordial garden which has been placed in his care. Moreover, the possibility of developing an affective relationship with nature is alluded to in Tinu’s display of affection to the Erike Tree by hugging it, and the author’s dedication of the text to “all Lovers of Trees”. The tree hugging by Tinu is reminiscence of the environmental activism of the Chipko movement in India in the 1970s to discourage massive deforestation for industrial and agricultural expansion purposes which threatened the sources of livelihood of the peasants who were largely women. This underscores the ecological wisdom in understanding the interconnectedness of man with the natural environment. This could be seen in the chain of action and reaction as shown in the destruction of species and dislocation as shown by Grandpa, Mr Mwanza, and Sayeed’s parents in *The twins and the tree spirits*, *Ike’s plant* and *Sayeed...Sayeed* respectively, and how the different protagonists, with the help of some other characters depicted in the stories, had to take the initiative to preserve the natural environment.

The ‘beauty and wonder’ of the interconnectedness of human and non-human nature is laid bare as Mr Mwanza enthuses:

Wild plants and animals depend on each other to live. If we pick too many of the plants, the animals that eat them

will starve and die. If we get rid of one kind of plant, others may grow too fast and too big. They will choke the ground, and the soil will be spoilt. Then our crops will not grow properly (pp. 4-5).

The wealthy chief who plans to relocate from the city as a result of air and noise pollution is another instance of man's penchant for colonising the natural environment to make room for the built environment. The reasons given by Grandpa to convince his intending neighbour to preserve some of the trees around are both ecocentric (nature-centered) and anthropocentric (man-centered). This is to emphasise the need for deep ecology ('dark green') and other non-radical environmentalism ('light green') proponents to find a meeting point to address environmental issues for the good of all—human and non-human.

The task of rejuvenating and replenishing the natural world is equally seen as a task for both old and young, as the twins' grandfather shows them how to plant new trees to replace the fallen ones, and by encouraging them to join the "Conservation Foundation...[because] Anybody can" (p. 33). Also, Ike is mentored by Mr Mwanza and given the necessary support and assistance needed by his teachers and parents to nurture his dream of becoming a curator of a herbarium, while Sayeed, encouraged by his parents, also requests for the support of all in transforming the environmental landscape in Egypt. The subject of utopian transformation is beautifully presented. The stories also show a clear "interaction of both human and non-human characters" as the twins are able to establish an affective relationship with the tree spirits because they understand "Tree Talk", while Ike considers the place where "he liked looking at the plants that grew in the bush behind the school" as "[his] secret place" (pp 3&6). This accentuates 'the re-invigorating power of Nature' as can be seen in Anthony Umelo's *The river of hope*. In the story, the reader learns about a polluted village with the prospects of positive transformations if the natural resources found there are wisely utilized. The pollution of the village is a pointer to "the negative impact of humanity on the environment".

The ecocritical issues here are cleverly shown in the course of the narration. Need for positive and responsive actions to be taken by individuals and governments to protect the natural environment, and ensuring that the availability of extractable natural resources in a place need not be a “Dutch Disease” or “resource curse”, but a blessing to the people, are stated in the story (Adeola, 2009). Towing the line of the ecological message in Rachel Carson’s *Silent spring* (1962) and Bill Peet’s *The wump world* (1970), Umelo reiterates the fact that the effect of people’s carelessness and selfishness is always unpleasant, not only on the people, but also on the natural environment. Moreover, a purposeful and considerable use of natural resources gives rise to sustainable development in the society. Through this, there is a hope of having a more stabilized family and society where the people are not displaced/dislocated mentally or physically. For instance, John and his parents suffer a physical dislocation when they had to leave Tabushka, a place with which they had established a sense of belonging, for Pantiko. As such, they find it difficult to connect with their new environment with all the degradation all around. This situation is also connected to John’s father seemingly nonchalant attitude—a sign of mental dislocation—and of drunkenness and being “full of nonsense” (p. 12), coupled with his mother’s vituperation to vent her frustration. Asumang’s *Leaving our village*, is another story hinged on displacement of people as a result of intensive drought in the protagonist’s village. Man’s option of relocation to another environment in the face of anthropogenic or natural disasters sparks of his ingenuity to resolve environmental problems, thereby coping with ecocatastrophe. Unfortunately, this arrogant display of taking charge portends serious problems for both human and non-human environment. The mass movement of people from one place to another put further pressure on marginal lands leading to massive land degradation. This unpleasant situations lead to conflicts over access to resources which often result in inter-tribal and civil wars.

Amazingly, John, the young protagonist in *The river of hope*, is the one who knows the right place to seek solace—being close to nature—and getting reconnected to the possibility of renewal and reinvigoration through nature, our life-support system. This pastoral image of healing or the therapeutic effect the natural environment could have on the psyche of an individual is also corroborated in Natov’s (2009) explication of Talbot’s *The tale of one bad rat* and Anderson’s *Speak* where the protagonist in each of

the texts found solace and healing in their interactions with the natural world which helps them in overcoming the emotional torture of rape which they had to deal with as individuals. This accentuates Cobb's (1977), and Evernden's (1996) opinion about the aesthetic relationship a child has towards the natural world. The fact that John did not give up on the village despite its "terrible state" by "wonder[ing] what could be done to make things better" (p. 14) reinforces a sense of responsibility on the child by 'taking action' to resolve the problem of environmental depredation.

Asumong's *Leaving our village* is a story of dislocation due to drought. There are different accounts of drought in various parts of Africa as recorded by various environmental historians like Richard Grove (1997) in his *Ecology, climate and empire*. Many traditional tales in Africa, as noted in the Chapter Four of this study, take on the issue of drought as it affects both human and non-human nature. The most recent severe drought on the continent was the East Africa drought which occurred in July 2011 and lasted till August 2012. The drought caused acute food shortage, mass migration to neighbouring countries, epidemics, famine and loss of lives, cattle and other wildlife animals.

The experience of the people faced with this kind of environmental challenge forms the kernel of the story, *Leaving our village*, as the narrator describes the harrowing experience of young Agidi and other children whose lives are disrupted by drought and famine. They had to leave their village to seek for refuge in another part of their country so as to survive. Through this story, the young readers learn about what happens in a drought, the art of survival during such period, the possibility for a drought leading to air pollution as more animals die of starvation and the "smell of decaying carcasses [would be] everywhere [because] nobody has the strength...to bury these animals" (p. 3). Another effect of drought is famine—a situation whereby there is total dryness of various sources of water, land and having no "single seed [left] to plant" (p. 5). The harsh weather condition also signifies eventual death for the people as Agidi observes: "When our water goes, we will die. If not, the stench from these carcasses will kill us. There is disease in the air" (p. 9).

The story, through the apocalyptic trope employed in the narration represents the recurrence of environmental disasters on a large scale in different places all over the world as a daily occurrence and not a futuristic occurrence. The story also showcases the importance of courage, ingenuity and tolerance as the tripod stand for mutual help and understanding when people are faced with such man-made or natural disaster. These attributes are exhibited by the protagonist, Agidi and the other children in the story. The responsibility of 'taking action', to relocate in this instance, often rests on the younger generation as the elderly ones usually have some misgivings about relocating to another place. This is clearly evident in Agidi's attempt at convincing his father, Baba Musa, that "[they] must leave the village" so as to avail themselves the opportunity to survive (pp. 8-11). Baba Musa gives a myriad of excuses for his reluctance which ranges from "not have[ing] the strength to walk", not wanting "to be treated and fed like a beggar", not willing to abandon "[his] village [because he is] the chief", refusing to "be a refugee", and not willing to go to the southern part of their country because "They are Christians in the south...[and he] can't trust Christians"(pp. 8-11).

In spite of Agidi's reminding his father that: "...this is no longer a village..." (p. 9), establishes the fact that a physical landscape is only suitable for human habitation when all the necessary elements for human survival are present and this confers on the space/place the spatial designation of "a village, town or city" depending on the size of the place for human habitation. Also, to further his argument of convincing his father to relocate, the protagonist tries to jog his father's memory that: [He] taught [Agidi] not to hate anybody just because I don't share the same faith with them or come from the same tribe..." (p. 11) his father, however, remained adamant and unreasonable. This is a clear pointer to the reason why a lot of elderly people do not survive a disaster because of their emotional attachment to their roots with which they have developed a 'sense of place'.

The art of survival during such condition is also embedded in the narrative. For instance, the reader is able to learn that food could be roasted, especially during a drought, to conserve water, while kola nuts could be eaten to suppress hunger (pp. 13&19). The consequence of failing to take a prompt action is also implied as the

children who left with Agidi “left the village too late” and had little provision to sustain them on their journey to the south to get help for the others left along the way and their “parents back in the village” (pp. 26-27).

Interconnectedness, conservation, and developing an affective relationship with the natural environment is the focal point of Walid Tahir’s literary argument in *Sayeed...Sayeed*. The story is for very young readers from two years and above. Sayeed, the main character, whose name connotes happiness, is disturbed by the gradual disappearance of Egypt’s flora and fauna. His love for trees, flowers and birds prompts him to ask his parents how this ugly situation could be rectified.

As a story portraying “the negative impact of humanity on the environment”, it places the task of ecological restoration on man who in the first place was responsible for depleting the natural resources through his negligence by not giving a thought to “giving back to nature”.

In a manner of Dr. Seuss’s *Lorax*, urgent persuasion to its audience that: “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better...” Sayeed’s mother hinted at the fact that there is need for cooperation among people “because environmental problem is everyone’s problem” (p. 19). The therapeutic effect of a clean environment on the inhabitants of an area is also implied in the narrative as a healthy environment enhances the psychological development of the people because when “Our country becomes clean...we become happy...happy” (p. 21). Sayeed with the other characters (Sayeed’s parents) in this story also extend this call for action by telling the readers: “And you, too: Let’s think about it together...and work together...so that Egypt’s environment becomes clean and beautiful and healthy” (p. 22). This call for action re-echoes John’s concern in *The river of hope* and shows that children should also be involved in the task of saving the environment.

Although anthropocentric solutions to environmental challenges are offered in the story, the need for eco-synergism, the environmental ethic propounded in this study, is hinted at in the need to “plant trees” which helps in the purification of the polluted air and water. This reinforces the need for man to acknowledge the intrinsic value of the non-human nature in maintaining the homeostasis in life.

Napoli and Nelson's *Mama Miti* is an inspirational biography for children and adults alike. The story is about the laudable efforts of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate of 2004, Wangari Maathai in reversing the devastating trend of environmental degradation in Africa, and particularly in Kenya. It is an inspiring narration of the enormous impact of a committed individual to restoring the lost forests of Africa and positively impacts the lives of other people for a sustainable growth and development. The importance of passing the baton of indigenous culture and tradition, especially Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), is emphasized as little Wangari grew to love nature and "respect trees", a duty she eventually committed her entire life to.

In this narrative, about twelve different species of trees are mentioned. Unlike *The twins and the tree spirits* where imaginary names are used for the anthropomorphic trees depicted in the narrative, the local names of the trees and their functions are explained in the course of the story in *Mama miti*. This knowledge enables the readers to learn more about trees and their importance to the sustenance of life on earth. For instance, fruit tree like the *mubiru muiuru* is a good source of nutrition for the family. The *mukinduri* "makes good firewood". The *muheregendi* "leaves are good animal fodder." The leaves of *muthakwa wa athi* "cure gall sickness in cattle." The *mukawa* has thorns to "keep out predators." A *muluhakuha* is "good building poles." *Murigono* branches are "good stakes for training yam vines." *Muhuti* could serve as "a living fence around [the] animal yards." *Muigoya* leaves, for ripening bananas, *muringa* could be used for timber and beautify the environment because of its refreshing white flowers, the *mukuyi* is a natural filter to clean dirty streams, and the *miinu* is an ornamental tree that could also be used for pharmaceutical purpose.

The use of Kikuyu in identifying the different species of trees is a feature of postcolonial decolonisation of the African worldview to reinforce the value of indigenous knowledge on the workings of the natural environment. This choice of Kikuyu vocabularies to describe the trees identified in the text underscores the fact that ecological knowledge is not a preserve of Western culture. This is a symbolic representation that other African nations have their own unique way of relating with the environment through traditional languages and other cultural signifiers.

The importance of the natural environment to the sustenance of man on earth is variously depicted in this biography. From the opening paragraph which serves as a kind of prologue to the narrative, the reader is made to see the impact of the natural environment on the lives of Africans as represented by the relationship of the people of Kenya with nature, especially during periods of natural crisis like drought when:-

...Creatures suffered. / Plants wilted. People fought. / So the men held ceremonies under the/ mugumo—the spreading sacred fig tree—/ and the skies blessed them with shimmering / rains to slake their thirst and water their farms. / Village elders placed staffs from the / thigi tree between angry men, / And enemies became friends.
(Unpaged, italics in the original)

The scenario depicted above shows how environmental disaster could lead to other ripple effects of untold hardship for human and non-human nature, how such hardship could degenerate into war among people when there is little or no resources for sustenance, and such crisis could only be resolved when Nature decides to bestow her blessing [of rain—which signifies water, the source of all life on earth] on man and other living things on earth. Also, it is implied that peace could only be sustained among people, when man has learnt to be in tune with nature.

The enhancement of spiritual and psychological development through oneness with nature is also hinted at in the story as Wangari is reported to have “planted trees in her backyard and sat under them to refresh her body and *spirit*” (unpaged, italics mine). This is also instantiated in *The twins and the tree spirits* where Grandpa acknowledges that he was able to cope with loneliness by “Planting the trees [which] made [him] feel better” (p. 33). This opinion resonates in the concept of holistic education as propounded by some scholars like Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori, and Steiner who emphasized the relevance of spirituality in human development (Miller, 1997). Indigenous cultures and traditional ecological knowledge reveal that man’s existence is intrinsically connected with beliefs, often described as “spiritual”. Spiritual development is not necessarily linked to religion as it is essentially meant to enhance self-realization in an individual and enable him shun materialism, the bane of man’s

existence in life. Spiritual development awakens man to appreciate “the wholeness of life and the unity of all natural phenomena”. This is in consonance with Fritjof Capra’s (1996) definition of “spirituality” as a sense of belonging, a sense of connectedness to the cosmos. Therefore, “ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest essence”. This reinforces the belief that “the whole of the universe is more than the sum of the parts” (Purpel, 2013: 47). It is further argued that there are no separate entities in life as the whole universe is systematically woven together. This is the holistic view which Capra tries to capture through the metaphorical title given to his book: *The web of life* (1996).

Given the fact that Wangari positively impacted other women lives to transform her immediate natural environment in Kenya accentuates the reality of the negative impact of environmental degradation on women and children. Using her botanical knowledge of trees, she led a crusade of reforestation by establishing two Non-Governmental Organizations, the Green Belt Movement and the Green Belt Movement International. Through her tree-planting efforts, in her words, ideas were planted to empower people, “most of them poor and most of them women—to take action, directly improving the lives of individuals and families” (p. 321).

Wangari’s monumental effort in impacting lives is succinctly expressed in the last paragraph of the story, *Mama miti*:

Wangari changed a country, tree by tree. She taught her people the ancient wisdom of peace with nature. And now she is teaching the rest of the world. She is known these days as Mama Miti—the mother of trees. A green belt of peace started with one good woman offering something we can all do: “Plant a tree” (unpaged).

The repetition of the Kikuyu “*Thayu nyumba*—Peace, my people” (italics in the original) foregrounds the need to care for the environment so as to foster peace among all the nations of the world.

On another level, these contemporary ecological narratives for children encourage the reader to develop a positive relationship with the environment by making the effort to explore nature and preserve the natural environment. Some concepts about the study of

plants are explained in the stories. Especially in *The twins and the tree spirits*, *Ike's plant* and *Mama Miti*, the importance and process of conservation and restoration of damaged flora and fauna are explained. The details of mounting a plant sample for preservation and transplant is stated as Mr Mwanza instructs Ike: "it is very important that we look after our local wild plants" (p. 4).

Sustainable development as an environmental discourse is also highlighted in some of the stories examined like *The twins and the tree spirits*, *Ike's plant*, and *Mama miti*. For instance, this issue is explicitly stated in Grandpa's effort at persuading his wealthy intending neighbour to spare some of the trees on the land where he has planned to erect his new mansion. The same issue is also raised by Mr Mwanza while explaining the importance of plant preservation to Ike and his other classmates. This is further buttressed by Mr Tanuri's reassurance to the people of Pantiko that the commissioner had "promised [they] would get first choice jobs...invest some money in cleaning up the mess [and the river]...and Pantiko will be transformed into a big, busy and wealthy town!" (p. 54). In *Mama miti*, readers are made to realise that women and children are the ones who usually bear the brunt of environmental despoliation. To get a reasonable measure of relief from the untold hardship this greed has brought on them, they need to depend on the abundance of nature and have to learn how to use these resources sustainably so as to protect the interest of the unborn generation.

The last ecocritical standards: "A celebration of the environment: its beauty and wonder", and "a process of understanding nature's power of change and transformation" as stated by Cairney and Buell respectively, could be regarded as an acknowledgement of "the re-invigorating power of Nature" and an invitation to experience an Arcadian world for relaxation and spiritual rejuvenation. This is a needed experience for man to connect with nature to awaken to a consciousness of the fact that he is "not man / Apart" and "the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, [and] not for consumption" (Jeffers: 1926, and Marsh: 1864, quoted in Felstiner, 2009:p. 170, and p. 10).

The postcolonial ecocritical reading of the texts supports the use of different approaches to textual analysis to emphasize the undue marginalization of voices and

perspectives of the Third World countries, represented by Africa in this study, and how writers and critics from such countries inscribe their own norms and practices through their works so as to break the dualistic repression of the Non-Western world. Postcolonial ecocriticism establishes the acknowledgement of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as an indigenous way of relating with the environment and encouraging an affective relationship that strengthens the symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural environment. To sustain this interdependent relationship between human and non-human nature, mutuality, balance and synergy are underscored in all the contemporary texts as prerequisite elements for sustenance of the human life on earth.

Behavioural attitudes targeted for development with regards to the environmental themes enunciated in the texts are; learning about the earth and its formation, love of nature and knowing nature, the importance of water and trees, protection of living things, sensitiveness to environmental pollution, growing plants and trees.

From the texts examined, poverty stands out as the sore point hindering sustainable development in Africa. This is because a large proportion of the populace depend on crude agricultural practices to eke out a living while most of the foreign multi-national corporations have been negligent in taking responsibility for maintaining world standard practices for sustainable development with minimal negative impact on the natural environment. This accentuates the postcolonial ecocritical stance against the pretence of the First World countries/the Global North to resolving environmental crises, and the imbalance distribution of negative environmental impacts where the Third World nations/the Global South bear the brunt of capitalism, an economic ideology that overstretches the natural resources to gratify materialistic fetishism.

The importance of tree and its preservation for the sustenance of life reverberates through four of the narratives examined: *The twins and the tree spirits*, *Ike's plant*, *Sayeed...sayeed*, and *Mama miti*. This is an important ecological call to action to arrest deforestation, restore the lost ecosystem to rescue the endangered flora and fauna, and to minimize the effect of climate change and global warming. Also, all the narratives examined in this chapter subscribe to environmental sustainability, a process whereby

the need of future generation is not jeopardized by ensuring that economic growth and development for the present generation is attained with minimal negative effects on the environment as well as taking care of the interest of the people and posterity.

On the other hand, sustainability as an environmental discourse is problematic as it privileges the Western point of view as against the quest for survival by the poverty stricken people of developing countries who are groaning under the burden of colonialism and neo-colonialism which have subjected the African nations and their environment to flagrant despoliation in order to satisfy the western capitalistic tendencies thereby driving the majority of the Global South populace further into abject poverty.

Of equal importance is the adoption of eco-synergism as an environmental ethic for all. This is the environmental ethic put forward by this study as it harmonizes all the previous ethics of care proposed for relating with the natural environment. Eco-synergism proposes a concerted effort by all shades of ecocriticism/environmentalism in saving the planet Earth, our *oikos* (home) by taking up our rightful position as “stewards of the earth”, shunning tyranny, greed and androcentrism.

In all the contemporary written narratives examined, environmental issues are central to each of the texts. This indicates a viable ecocritical response to the call of the global green from African writers and critics for children’s literature, and establishing their ecocritical voice in environmental discourses which seem to have been dominated by the Western world. The texts examined situate African writers and critics of children’s literature, and Africans in general, at the centre rather than the periphery of this call for global green as implied by Slaymaker’s (2001) article titled “Echoing the Other(s): The call of the Global Green and Black African Responses”.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to examine the construction of ecological consciousness in selected traditionally-inclined tales and contemporary prose narratives for children in Africa. The environmental ethics inscribed in the texts examined were subjected to critical analysis to identify the traditional ecological knowledge as espoused in the African environmental ethics proposed in the oral narratives, while the contemporary texts were scrutinised to establish any authorial intention in foregrounding any environmental ethics or dispositions.

All the texts considered were evaluated in terms of the ecocritical ideologies put forward in them. Also, their relevance or usefulness as responses to resolving environmental crises was assessed. The study found that the environmental themes projected in the traditionally-inclined narratives were tacitly stated and reinforced by the pedagogic role of the stories. The contemporary prose narratives were, however, explicit in their ecocritical propositions thereby emphasising the need to take action to reverse the rate of environmental despoliation and preserve the environment for the present and future generations.

More often than not, the environmental discourses that inform Western environmental texts for children encourage anthropocentrism. However, in Africa and other indigenous cultures, there is a blend of anthropocentrism with ecocriticism to reinforce the role of human beings as the stewards of the earth who ought to take responsibility for ensuring the maintenance of ecological equilibrium. This indigenous ecological position is synonymous with the Western contemporary environmental discourse of sustainability.

The texts were analysed based on various environmental tropes which could be basically categorized into three: (i) human dominion—flagrant and subtle, (ii) Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and (iii) Environmental Sustainability drawn

against the backdrop of Buell (1997) and Cairney's (2011) criteria for considering ecocritical texts. The conceptual framework for the study, however, did not preclude any other form of ecocritical analyses or readings because the environmental issues put forward in some of the texts have ambivalent undertones.

Each of the texts examined in this study aligned with at least one of the ecocritical standards propounded by Buell (1995) and Cairney (2011) respectively, which were earlier identified in the study. Each of the four prerequisites for assessing an ecocritical text, separately suggested by these ecocritics, aligns with one another and forms the basis for the nature of ecological consciousness in the stories: (i) Environment as metaphysical experience, (ii) Relationship between human and non-human world, (iii) Human moral disposition to Nature, and (iv) Acknowledgement of Nature's power of transformation. To further sum up the ecocritical models, this study advocated two eco-models to review ecocritical texts. The first eco-model underscored the interdependent relationship between human and non-human environment. This model essentially projected how the texts in focus captured the environmental ethics in each of the narratives. The concept of nature-relatedness signified the importance of the human role of stewardship towards the environment to attain a peaceful co-existence between human and non-human environment. In the texts, therefore, the young readers were encouraged to cultivate ecological consciousness. This conferred on them a sense of responsibility, and an affective behaviour towards the sentient members of the biotic community thereby making human beings responsible global citizens who are aware that their actions or inactions affect the generality of the human and nonhuman members of the environment all over the globe.

The theme of ecological consciousness created in the texts examined support interrelatedness between human and non-human world by emphasizing biocentrism/ecocentrism and stewardship on the part of man. In the traditionally-inclined tales and the contemporary prose narratives, biocentrism and eco-synergism were compared to establish the anthropogenic tinge in every environmental ethics: both traditional and contemporary models. Eco-synergism, an environmental ethic proposed in this study, views the interest of human as being interwoven or subsumed in that of the biotic community. The level of ecological consciousness in the contemporary prose

narratives is very high because the major focus of the texts is based on creating awareness and raising the ecological consciousness of the readers. This is achieved through the different environmental issues like, species loss, desertification, conservation, and pollution, negative effects of conurbation, and environmental sustainability which were directly addressed in the contemporary narratives. Moreover, the readers were led to be inspired through the roles played by the young protagonists in each of the stories to resolve the environmental challenges they were faced with. The four traditionally-inclined tales had domestication of animals, plants, and land as exemplified in *The enormous yam*, *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain*, and “The slave who became chief”, also the importance of water to life is the major environmental symbol in *The enormous yam*, *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain*, “The hare and the animals of the jungle”, and “The slave who became chief”—in *Stories from a Shona childhood*, and *The greatest treasure*. Drought, loss of species, and famine, as signifiers of death and destruction, are the major focus of *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain* “The hare and the animals of the jungle”, and “The slave who became chief”. However, natural death symbolises a form of renewal as explained by Grandpa in *The twins and the tree spirits*.

The analysis of the texts affirms the aim of the study to investigate the depiction of ecological consciousness through the environmental tropes, ethics and symbols woven into the stories. This is highlighted through Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), sustainability, mutuality, subtle, and flagrant domination of nature. The traditionally-inclined tales were found to be basically didactic with the use of anthropomorphism and romanticisation of nature to lend a voice to the relevance and the intrinsic value of the non-human members of the biotic community and human’s responsibility to nurture this intricate relationship. TEK is instantiated in the traditional narratives except “The hare and the animals of the jungle” in Mungoshi’s *Stories from a Shona childhood*. Also, in the contemporary narratives, TEK is underscored in Segun’s *The twins and the tree spirits*, where the twins’ Grandpa who knows many things about nature transfers this knowledge by teaching Tinu and Tola, his grandchildren how to nurture the environment. Moreover, in Napoli and Nelson’s (2010) *Mama miti: Wangari Maathai and the trees of Kenya*, young Wangari is depicted to have grown up with her people’s knowledge of the environment which has helped them in establishing

a cordial relationship with the other members of the biotic community, and she is poised to pass on the baton of this indigenous knowledge, gained from her forebears, to her generation and posterity.

The ecological conscience of the children is awakened through a phenomenological experience of the different nature and level of ecological consciousness explored in the stories. The nature of ecological ethics highlighted in the stories: ethics of care and ethics of nature-relatedness; restrained anthropocentrism; biocentrism or ecocentrism, all have different underpinnings with regards to the moral obligation or responsibility of humans towards nature. There is a human-factor linked to all the ecological ethics highlighted in the texts which suggests a re-evaluation of “dominion” – from mindless exploitation of nature to responsible stewardship (Bertens, 2008: p. 198).

As observed, the issue of environmental ethics is highly contentious, the authorial voice in *The twins and the tree spirits* expresses the need for conciliation among the ethicists (both Indigenous and Western) when he opines that “all the reasons were good” (p. 21) to move humanity forward in resolving the environmental crisis before we are all engulfed by it. This foregrounds the African ethics of care and nature-relatedness which places the responsibility of nurturing the non-human nature squarely on human's shoulder. It is also noteworthy that the writers have been able to make a point for the sustenance of nature without creating an atmosphere for ‘ecophobia’ in children or turning them into ‘eco-warriors’. Through the stories examined, the readers are encouraged to be a part of the solution for the positive transformation of the natural environment through practical steps shown in addressing some environmental challenges like waste of resources, desertification, drought, famine, loss of biodiversity and pollution.

This work advocates an ecological reading of children's literature in Africa because the texts are relevant in exposing the children to the natural environment and learning about the importance of sustaining the sanctity of the inter-relatedness between man and the non-human world for the sustenance of life (especially humans) on earth. The ethics espoused in the works underscore sustainability and the responsibility human beings have to care for the natural environment thereby making the works relevant in

addressing the challenge of environmental crisis. Furthermore, the study affirms the usefulness of the texts and the ecological ideas expressed in them as responses to environmental crises by demonstrating that the contemporary ecostories for children are intentionally infused with ecological ideologies to create awareness for the cultivation of ecological consciousness among the readers of the texts. The narrative strategies employed in the texts offer moral consideration for the non-human members of the biotic community to attain sustainable development and growth with little or no damage to the environment. This aligns with the African environmental ethic of “bio-communalism”. The ecological ethic of interconnectedness, as against flagrant anthropocentrism is foregrounded in the texts thereby supporting “eco-synergism”, the environmental ethic advocated in this study.

As such, the study establishes that ecological consciousness as the process and condition of understanding the relationship that exists among plants, animals, man and their environment is not alien to the African culture. In fact, there is a solid bond between nature and culture among Africans. Moreover, the interrelationship between the human and non-human environment is recognized and highly respected among the indigenous people of African descent.

The nature of ecological message in the traditional and contemporary narratives for children in Africa which were examined in this study depicts the concept of *inter-relatedness* between human and non-human nature. This is further established in Evernden’s (1996) proclamation that “things are inter-related if a change in one affects the other” (p. 93). Here lies the subversiveness of ecology. As a result of this, the study proposes two eco-models for a critical analysis of texts with environmental issues: (i) The synergy of inter-relatedness between human and non-human nature, and (ii) The re-invigorating power of Nature.

All the texts examined reverberate with a guiding general principle of the symbiotic relationship between man and the natural environment thereby accentuating the first eco-model, while seven of the texts: *The enormous yam*, *Bringing the rain to Kapiti plain*, *The greatest treasure*, *The twins and the tree spirits*, *Mama miti*, *Ike’s plant* and *Sayeed...sayeed*, attest to the second eco-model—how Nature is capable of evolving

anew on its own, and how man can find a refreshing experience through an affective relationship with the non-human world which can only be initiated by man himself.

Based on the findings of this study, it is noted that ecological representations like the natural, built, and modified environments are not just a frame for most of the works examined, but form the central theme for issues highlighted in the stories. This shows the high level of ecological consciousness in the texts and as such it is established that African prose narratives for children is replete with ecocritical issues which could be harnessed for creating an ecological consciousness in young children and get them acquainted with the natural environment. It is also important to note that African metaphysical belief system supports the fact that all things are interconnected. This is clearly shown through the traditional African folktales, myths and legends which can serve as background knowledge for scientific studies and environmental literacy for the upcoming generations. This is instantiated through Mungoshi (1997), Murphy (2002), Aardema (1997) and Segun's (2006) anthropomorphic tales. The ecological issues reflected in the texts and human's responsibility towards the natural environment are effectively presented as the audience are made to realise there is hope if the necessary actions are taken to cultivate a healthy relationship with the environment – the natural, the built, and the modified.

Another observation made in this study is the need for collaboration between the First World and the nations of the Third World to tackle environmental problems. This could take the form of tapping from the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the indigenous nations “as preserved in myths, rituals, fairy tales”, and by recognizing the “true humility” in “tak[ing] responsibility for nature” (Turner, 1996: pp. 49-50).

Of equal importance too is the fact that abstract concepts in science and other related subjects are better explained and internalized/comprehended using story-telling as a method of teaching as exemplified by Musonza's *Ike's plant*, Segun's *The twins and the tree spirits* and Anson-Lawson's *The greatest treasure*. It is, therefore, suggested that Literature-Based Instruction method could come in handy in dealing with some abstract concepts and other issues which may be better explained in stories. In the light of this, children's narratives with environmental issues should be recommended in

schools to ensure that the younger generation are exposed to the reality and enormity of the present environmental challenge and the role they can play in confronting these issues by developing a new orientation to re-value nature and their relationship with the non-human world by recognising themselves as ecological citizens who need the other members of the biotic community for survival. This entails a conscious effort by human beings to cultivate and adopt culturally beneficial ways of engaging with the environment and the story mode is a very effective way of achieving this. As the study has clearly established, ecocritical discourse is essential in the depiction of environmental awareness for children in Africa.

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