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CENTRE DE RECHERCHE ET FORMATION
DOCTORALE EN ARTS, LANGUES ET
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UNITE DE RECHERCHE ET DE FORMATION
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**THE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE IN ACHEBE'S
THINGS FALL APART AND JEANNE MARIE ROSETTE
ABOU'OU'S *LETTRE À TITA***

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SPECIALISATION: COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

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DEDICATION

To My Parents and first teachers

IKUANA ANATOLE

AND

NGAMVENG GISELE

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ABSTRACT

This work entitled “Environment and Culture in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Abou’ou’s *Lettre à Tita*” tackles the problem of the connection between African culture and environmental problems in a bid to demonstrate that the degradation of some African cultural values goes hand in glove with that of the environment.

Set in distinct geographical and cultural contexts, both novels under study depict the complex relationship between human societies and the natural world. Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, set in pre-colonial Nigeria, examines the Igbo community’s deep connection to their ancestral land. The environment shapes their social order, religious beliefs, and agricultural practices. Therefore, disruption of this harmony, through the arrival of Europeans, leads to cultural clashes and the erosion of traditional ways of life. *Lettre à Tita* by the Cameroonian author Abou’ou, for its part, offers a contemporary perspective. It explores the environmental consequences of modernisation and globalisation, highlighting the tension between progress and the preservation of cultural heritage.

By comparatively analysing the corpus, the research shed light on three major aspects. Firstly, how cultural beliefs and practices are shaped by the environment; then the impact of environmental change on cultural identity and tradition; and finally the role of literature in representing the relationship between environment and culture. Using cultural studies and ecocriticism as theories, this comparative analysis offers a deeper understanding of the multifaceted relationship between environment and culture evident in both Achebe’s classic and Abou’ou’s contemporary work. The said theories are complementary as they permit to examine the symmetrical environmental and cultural degradation in the selected corpus.

The study demonstrates that the change in cultural habits brought about by the Western intrusion in Africa has a patent impact on the preservation of the environment. Colonisation, followed by globalisation and modernisation, have led to a rise in anthropomorphism, with human beings living for the sole satisfaction of their egoistic interests, to the detriment of nature. The novels under study are therefore calls to promote communality by living in harmony with nature. Thus, the study concludes that the reassertion of African cultural values is a means of raising awareness of the need to conserve and preserve of the environment.

RESUME

Ce travail intitulé « Environnement et culture dans *Things Fall Apart* d'Achebe et *Lettre à Tita* d'Abou'ou » aborde le problème du lien entre la culture africaine et les problèmes environnementaux dans le but de démontrer que la dégradation de certaines valeurs culturelles africaines va de pair avec celle de l'environnement.

Mettant en scène des contextes géographiques et culturels distincts, les deux romans étudiés dépeignent la relation complexe entre les sociétés humaines et l'environnement. *Things Fall Apart (Le monde s'effondre)* d'Achebe dont l'histoire se déroule dans le Nigeria précolonial, examine le lien profond de la communauté Igbo avec la terre de ses ancêtres. L'environnement façonne leur ordre social, leurs croyances religieuses et leurs pratiques agricoles. Aussi, la perturbation de cette harmonie par l'arrivée des Européens entraîne des chocs culturels et l'érosion des modes de vie traditionnels. Le roman *Lettre à Tita*, de l'auteure camerounaise Abou'ou, offre quant à lui une perspective contemporaine. Il explore les conséquences environnementales de la modernisation et de la mondialisation, en soulignant la tension entre le progrès et la préservation du patrimoine culturel.

L'analyse comparative du corpus permet ainsi d'éclairer les trois aspects majeurs de la recherche. Tout d'abord, la manière dont les croyances et les pratiques culturelles sont façonnées par l'environnement ; ensuite, l'impact des changements environnementaux sur l'identité culturelle et la tradition ; et enfin, le rôle de la littérature dans la représentation de la relation entre l'environnement et la culture. En s'appuyant sur les théories des études culturelles et de l'écocritique, cette analyse comparative permet de mieux comprendre la relation multiforme entre l'environnement et la culture, évidente à la fois dans l'œuvre classique d'Achebe et dans celle contemporaine d'Abou'ou. Les théories susmentionnées sont complémentaires parce qu'elles permettent d'examiner la dégradation symétrique de l'environnement et de la culture dans les romans sélectionnés.

L'étude démontre que le changement des habitudes culturelles provoqué par l'intrusion de l'Occident en Afrique a un impact patent sur la préservation de l'environnement. La colonisation, suivie de la mondialisation associée à la modernisation, ont conduit à une montée en puissance de l'anthropomorphisme avec des êtres humains qui vivent désormais pour la seule satisfaction de leurs intérêts égoïstes, au détriment de la nature. Aussi, l'étude conclut que la réaffirmation des valeurs culturelles africaines est un moyen de sensibilisation à la nécessité de conserver et de préserver l'environnement.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This dissertation entitled “The Environment and Culture in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou’ou’s *Lettre à Tita*” seeks to bring out the link between the environment and culture in two African novels. It demonstrates that the degradation or preservation of the environment is in one way or the other, related to the destruction or preservation of African cultures.

Background and Introduction to Study

Francisco Sionil Jose posits that “Writers are historians, too. It is in literature that the greater truths about people and their past are found” (*Brainy Quote*, Par. 8). This statement reveals that literature is closely related to human beings, and it is worth noting that human beings are determined by their environment and culture. The environment and culture are permanent and recurrent concepts in literature as well as in all the disciplines that focus on man. As Lisbeth Witthøfft Nielsen points out, “the concept of nature cannot be seen apart from its cultural context” this illustrates that “nature operates on different levels and in different context(s)” (*Global Bioethics* 32).

Many sociologists consider environmentally unfriendly behaviour as the leading cause of environmental degradation. Consequently, environmental conservation heavily relies on individuals stimulating, reinforcing and pro-environmental behaviour henceforth (PEB). According to Waqas Riaz, Sehrish Gul and Yoonseock Lee in their article titled “The Influence of Individual Cultural Value Differences on Pro-Environmental Behavior among International Students at Korean Universities” (2023), PEB refers to “any action that enhances the quality of the environment, either resulting or not resulting from pro-environmental intent” (*Sustainability* 1). Individuals who engage in PEB aim to take measured efforts to promote positive environmental changes and limit the impacts of human neglect. Environmental degradation is a global issue addressed by many researchers from various points of view. In our study, we emphasise the interrelationship between the environment and culture, precisely the impact of African cultural values on the preservation or degradation of the environment. Examining and comparing two novels by the African writers Chinua Achebe and Marie-Rosette Abou’ou is our strategy to tackle the issue of the environment and its relation to culture, hence to man.

From time immemorial, the ecosystem is part and parcel of human life and imagination. However, The development of environmental literary criticism only began in the middle of the 1970s with Joseph Meeker's monograph study *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972) closely followed by William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978). The latter forged the term "ecocriticism," which became an umbrella term for those modes of literary criticism that deal with nature-culture relations in a critical perspective. Since the 1990s, when ecocriticism was institutionalised, first with the help of Anglo-American journals and associations and later with a more international outlook, it has branched out into an interdisciplinary field of scholarly inquiry that encompasses a plethora of approaches and subjects all around the world. Nowadays, it is no longer merely concerned with the representation of concepts of "wilderness" and "nature" in literary texts which was a focus of early ecocriticism. It is now increasingly dealing with more inclusive conceptualisations of the term "environment" and has included post-human, postcolonial, and various other theories. This currently brings about a consolidation of the field as well as an outlook for new perspectives. Therefore, a broader visibility across disciplinary borders can be seen in the plethora of handbooks and collections that have recently been published. A close look into these handbooks led a critic to observe that while they all give testament to the ever-increasing field of the "Environmental Humanities" and show that the interrelationship between culture and nature has come to the fore as a central subject in literary and cultural studies, their focus clearly lies on early modern and modern times. This mainly had to do with a new sensitivity to issues of environmental decline and degradation in the second half of the twentieth century, which led to heated debates across a wide socio-political spectrum and to a renewed cultural interest in humanity's place in the world (*Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity 2*).

Environmental literary criticism focusing on the relationship between human beings and culture is highlighted in the first seminal anthology of essays on Ecocriticism edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996). The book initiated the ecological debate on ideas that should concern ecocritics, how they write and what are their objectives or the methods of analysis. In his book, Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). Later on Richard Kerridge extended this definition by including environmental ideas in cultural spaces. Greg Garrard further widened the catchment area of Ecocritism by introducing three new phases: 'the study of the relationship of human

and non-human', 'throughout human cultural history' and 'entailing critical analysis of the term human itself' (Garrard 1).

Enhancing his approach with the inclusion of more practical facts in a book entitled *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries and Fields* (2009), Patrick D. Murphy examines environmental literature and environmental cultural issues through both theoretical and applied criticism. He questions issues of referentiality, simplicity, the nation-state and virtual reality in contemporary environmental literature. He traces analogies between ecosystemic and socio-cultural phenomena, for instance between environmental destruction and self-destruction through drug abuse, that question the nature/culture boundary as such and subvert anthropocentric impositions. According to him, good books are those which depict environmental problems correctly and do not give the reader an 'alibi' for passivity and non-involvement. Therefore a writer should not fail "to convert sceptics or to hold the interest of younger readers" in the environmentalist cause (Murphy 57). Murphy regards the extension of traditional disciplines as a necessary step towards an effective environmentalism. He calls for a holistic approach to environmental issues and for courses designed around thematic cores that include texts from a variety of genres, fictional and nonfictional. He explains this by the fact that the influence of popular fiction, non-fictional genres and media on the public awareness of environmental issues is stronger, or at least more immediate, than that of canonic texts.

In *Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity*, a publication dated from 2017, Christopher Schliephake posits that ecocriticism sets out to show how nature is not only the background to cultural processes of symbolic meaning-making, but it is central to any literary exploration of the world. Human impulse to make meaning of what surrounds us is a response to the presence of nature and that real or fabricated presence is crucial to our sense of being humans. Ecocriticism articulated this sentiment and gave it an analytical framework. Ingrained in this sentiment is a cultural anthropological impulse which presupposes that humankind's reflection on the environment began as soon as the first meaning-making sign systems evolved tens of thousands of years ago. Schliephake further develops on to bring the study of the reception of the classical tradition together with cultural ecology as more than an intellectual exercise, for both paradigms of cultural analysis can complement each other in their functional approach to human sign systems. While cultural ecology has mainly been concerned with studying the interrelations between the nonhuman world and cultural formations, classical reception studies have explored how classical texts or images have constantly been reemployed, reintegrated, and transformed by subsequent cultures all around

the world. And although cultural ecology has dealt with how human culture has been transfused by ecological processes found in nature and classical reception studies have been interested in the way in which societies have used the ancient tradition to renew their own cultural formations and to construct their collective identity, both fields of research have more in common than one would usually suggest. Both paradigms are very much about renewal: where cultural ecology studies the way in which evolutionary processes akin to those found in nature are necessary for the dynamic and vibrant power of cultural expression, classical reception studies explore the way in which the new or renewed is made out of the old, which is both a cultural archive and a foil upon which to remake the world. They are also both informed by a post-structuralist approach (269-270).

Cultural ecology is based on the interaction of culture, man and the environment. According to its principles, people can better adapt to their settings and stay within the bounds of the environment if they have a strong set of cultural concepts and traditions to guide them. Julian Steward, who was a pioneering anthropologist, also considered to be the founder of cultural ecology, focused on understanding cultural ecology at the national and local levels. After becoming fascinated by how societies change, Julian Steward researched on how modernisation works. The study of human ecology is divided into two parts: human biological ecology and human cultural ecology. The dualism which separates the study of “natural environment” from the study of “human environment” had effectively worked in the past to isolate the natural sciences from the social sciences.

Cultural ecology is a subset of the broader field of human ecology. Steward felt that the relationship of man to the environment had to be considered separately from the relationship of culture to the environment. Following this way of thinking, ecology was neither considered an anthropological subdiscipline nor even a standardised approach in anthropology. However, Michael Gunn, in his article titled “Cultural Ecology: a Brief Overview” published in 1980, posits that “in recent years the number of studies dealing with the interaction of man, culture, and the environment has increased tremendously. The linking of anthropology to ecology is expanding beyond the original ideas of cultural ecology to what many are now calling ‘ecological anthropology’ or ‘anthropological ecology’” (*Nebraska Anthropologist* 22). Therefore, if cultural ecology is a science of the interactions between living things and the surroundings, it includes the views of human surroundings and their impact on the surroundings. The focus of cultural ecology is on humans, who they are, and their actions concerning the rest of nature.

It is worth noting that as environmental literary criticism evolves, and considering environmental degradation worsening around the globe, writers lay more and more stress on the capital role that men and their cultures play in this disastrous situation. As a matter of fact, in her dissertation titled “The Effect of Cultural Practices and Perspectives on Sustainable Community-based Ecosystem Management in Lake Baringo, Kenya”, Mary Karigu mentions Odaba et al.’s study where they identify socio-cultural factors such as cultural beliefs as key contributors to the degradation of the ecosystem (xi).

According to Angela Kesiena Etuonovbe quoted in Karigu’s work, environmental degradation is the deterioration of ecosystems as evidenced by the diminution and pollution of resources such as the soil, air, water, the damage of habitats and extinction of wildlife (1).

In the same vein, Vimbai C. Kwashirai argues that Africa’s terrain – lands, deserts, hills, mountains, rivers, lakes and coasts – have endured several millennia of modifications. Fauna and flora are substantial factors of nature; however, humans are probably the key determining factor in African environmental history. According to him, human actions, beliefs, notions, labour and tools have played a critical role in changing African environments. Technology has enhanced human capability to transform local environments driven by global commodity markets, especially for minerals, food and cash crops. Central to environmental change in Africa are multi-layered interactions involving the physical world, flora, fauna and human activity. These interactions also encompass traditions, beliefs, ideas, perceptions and prescriptions regarding habitats and inhabitants. Environmental history studies interactions between the social and natural systems, natural history examines lives of species and ecological history concerns itself with ecosystems. Indeed, the African environment comprises both tangible and intangible, human and non-human activity, and the resulting phenomenon (*World Environmental History* 3).

In his article titled “Ecocriticism- Understanding the Relationship between Literature and Environment in Indian English Novels”, Geeta Sahu enunciates the relationship between nature and literature as well as the reflections of ecocriticism in literature. According to him, the close relationship between nature and literature has been reflected by writers and poets throughout different cultures across the world. A variety of novels, poems, and other expressions of literature have been depicted on the backdrop of issues concerning nature. Nowadays, environmental issues have become a matter of concern for many departments and disciplines of knowledge and development. It is an interesting study for a literary critic to study the texts of writers who have discussed the close relationship between man and nature.

From the above and considering the capital role of culture either for the preservation or the destruction of nature, we want to pay a particular attention to African culture and environment through literature. As such, our study entitled “The Environment and Culture in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou’ou’s *Lettre à Tita*” focuses on two African novels that constitute our case study to analyse the relationship between the environment and culture and its representation in the texts selected. As aforementioned, conducting such a study is necessary in order to examine how African authors display the link between the environment and culture in their writings. Both *Things Fall Apart* (TFA) and *Lettre A Tita* (LAT) reflect the features of ecocriticism as the authors explore cultural and environmental issues in a way that is central to the novels. Hence, this dissertation analyses the literary representations of the reciprocal relationship between the environment and African cultures at two different points in time. It is a comparative study which aims at finding out the similarities and differences in the depiction of the environment and culture in the African context by a Nigerian author in the early years after independence and a more recent representation by a Cameroonian author.

Statement of Research problem

Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Marie Rosette Abou’ou’s *Lettre à Tita* have been mostly studied in relation to African cultural values. Unlike most of the critical works on these books, our dissertation tackles the issue of the connection between African culture and environmental problems in a bid to demonstrate that the degradation of some African cultural values goes hand in glove with that of the environment. The preservation of the environment and the reassertion of African cultural values are nowadays fundamental concerns for African authors. This is because in the last decades, there have been a progressive degradation of African cultural values accompanied by the deterioration of the natural resources. Therefore, it seems interesting to compare two African authors from two different generations and linguistic backgrounds in order to bring out their similar views on the relationship between the environment and African culture.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide our study:

- 1) How does literature shape the conceptualisation and perception of the environment and culture?

- 2) How are culture and the environment represented in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Abou'ou's *Lettre à Tita*?
- 3) What are the differences between the Western and African perceptions of the environment and culture?
- 4) How do the two authors promote the preservation of the environment and that of African culture?

Hypothesis

Our tentative answer to these questions or hypothesis is that Achebe and Abou'ou belong to the generations of African writers whose literary works show the link between the degradation of African culture and that of the environment. They therefore promote the preservation of the environment through the rehabilitation of African cultural values. This African perception of nature and culture is somewhat different from that of the West.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this work is to critically examine the contribution of African culture to the preservation or destruction of the environment. We want to scrutinise what the environment represents in African culture. Therefore, our work focuses on the environment (nature), its representation in the novels selected, its transformation by man and its preservation.

The second objective of this work is to look into the relationship between man and nature as represented in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Abou'ou's *Lettre à Tita* (2013) in order to compare this African vision to the Western perception.

Significance of the Study

This study is of importance because it involves two authors whose works, from the best of our knowledge, have not yet been compared in relation to the environment and culture. This comparative study is therefore a contribution to the fields of cultural and environmental studies. Nowadays, some cultures are threatened in the global context and they are thus exposed to extinction. Likewise, some practices by human beings are harmful to the environment. Consequently, the protection of both cultures and the environment is currently a major cause of concern.

This dissertation focuses on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Abou'ou *Lettre à Tita*. However, other critical works related to the topic, authors and novels will be used to analyse the texts selected.

Motivation of the Work

This study is motivated by the need to investigate the link between the environment and culture from an African perspective. The genesis of this motivation is that in high school, several years ago, I received an award whose content was some copies of *Lettre à Tita* — Volumes 1 & 2 — and I enjoyed this epistolary novel emphasis on the environment and culture. Then, later, after reading Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the context of a university course on English African Literature, I was marvelled by Achebe's depiction of African culture and environment before colonisation. These two readings gave birth to a desire to compare how the aforementioned authors represent African environment and culture in their respective texts.

The choice of the two writers and these specific works therefore stems from the fact that Achebe's TFA and Abou'ou's LAT share the common idea of the harmonious connection between man, his environment and his cultural values. Equally, the same intrusion of new systems — colonisation in TFA and modernism in LAT — brought radical changes in what were once the authors' social reality and their lifestyle. In the two novels, there is the same call for the reconstruction of a ruined land. Both novelists use similar processes to describe Africa as a beautiful and flourishing place that finally and progressively fell apart.

Definitions of Key Terms

To tackle our topic in a scientific way, there is necessity to proceed with clear definitions of the key concepts, stating the context of usage. The work relies on two fundamental terms, namely “culture” and “environment”.

The term “culture” is used in this work to refer to the sum of values, norms, institutions, community – specific artefacts (lifestyles, habits, religious beliefs, ways of thinking, linguistic expressions, etc...), that is a civilisation determined, including all its forms (*Intercultural Communication: Evolution and Development Issues* 55). *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “culture” as “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life, and social organisation of a

particular country or group”. Another definition from the same source is “the beliefs and attitudes about something that people in a particular group or organisation share”. The preceding definitions have something in common: culture is a set of values, beliefs, attitudes and community-specific artefacts shared by a specific group of people.

Mary Hawkes Greene quoted in Meg Pier’s online article “People are culture” states that:

Ideally, culture is (a) kind of collective set of beliefs, values, and norms that define how we are and how we live, and what’s important to us (...) It’s what gives us our identity, we’re bound together by being on the planet but within that, then the specific culture related to the areas and the places and the societies we live in is what differentiates us and makes the world (the) interesting place it is. Particularly in this age of globalisation, it really is vital that we’re aware of our own culture and the other cultures that enhance the rich tapestry of life. (Par. 5)

This definition presents culture as human identity, specific to each individual; something we must be proud of since it makes the world a better place.

In the same vein, in *Culture, History and Comparative Literature: John Steinbeck and René Philombe* (2009) Manyaka Toko Djockoua quotes the English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) who holds that: “culture or civilization taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (6). This definition of culture as a complex whole is reiterated in “Language and Culture”, published in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* by Sepora Tengku and Jafari Sepideh who observe that:

Culture is learnt through relation with other people. Therefore, culture is not natural, inborn and will-less; it is a social product. Some factors are considerable and momentous in this transmission such as information and knowledge in a society, social changes, social relations and mass media (...) Words are the significant tools of cultural symbols. That is to say, poems, stories, fictions, epics and myths are the main ingredients and components of a culture in a society (...) On the whole; the elements of culture are the entirety of socially transmitted and common behaviour patterns, prototypes, samples, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. (232)

From the above quotation, we can underline that culture is genuinely related to society and the essence of society itself is mankind. Human beings are therefore the vector agents of any

existing culture. It is through them that cultures are represented and conveyed. There are no cultures without men and each man is representative of at least one culture.

Our working definition of “culture” for this work is the set of beliefs, arts, customs, lifestyles, values and habits that constitute a people’s way of life. Culture is an open gate to discover and get in touch with any people.

As concerns the term “environment”, *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives two definitions of this term: the first one is the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates. The second definition refers to the natural world, as a whole or in a particular geographical area, especially as affected by human activity.

There are various types of environments; however our focus in this study is the natural environment. According to Lawrence Buell, a proponent of ecocriticism, the environment and place are as much social, cultural and ideological entities as they are physical ones. Reconstructions of larger landscapes or immediate surroundings are always inevitably selective and fragmentary; the world sieved through a number of filters: perceptual, ideological, and literary. We shall start with the ideological filter. Buell writes that there is the tendency among American writers to represent the country as close to nature as it is, yet “the conception of represented nature as an ideological screen becomes unfruitful if it is used to portray the green world as nothing more than the projective fantasy or social allegory” (Qtd. in Speek 161).

There is a powerful connection between the environment and culture through the existence of man who is at the heart of the said connection. According to Margaret Mead, “We won’t have a society if we destroy the environment” (Par. 1). This shows that the society’s balance largely depends on the environment which is specifically the natural area in this context. In agreement with M. Mead, Lady Bird Johnson also holds that “The environment is where we all meet; where all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share” (Par. 9). Once more there is this undeniable connection between the environment and society and men by the same token. It implies that, human beings need the natural environment and culture to come into bloom. Also, it is generally accepted that culture embodies the way humans live with and treat others and how they develop or react to changes in their environment. Therefore, we can say that culture is a part of the environment; precisely, it is that part of the environment which has been created by human beings. Culture represents what differentiates human beings from other species and it is at the same time what

distinguishes them in the multiplicity of their beliefs, customs, values, behaviours and even material objects that constitute a people's way of life. So the human beings' environment is made up of the society and all the surroundings influenced in some way by humans; it includes all the relationships, institutions, cultures, and physical structures.

Tiiu Speek, in his work entitled "Environment in Literature: Lawrence Buell's Ecocritical Perspective", mentions Buell's opinion about the environment. Speek particularly enlightens Buell's discussions of cultural and ideological influences of literary representations of the environment and place, as well as his vision of non-fictional nature prose as a new way of conceiving the relation between human consciousness, imagination and the larger world (*Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics* 162). Speek further comments that while literature can reduce nature to a specific ideological or humanistic agenda; it can also represent an alternative kind of human-nature relationship that facilitates green consciousness and place bonding. Which side gets stressed depends on the writer but also on the reader. Thus, our reported contacts with our surroundings are always culturally mediated, intersocially and intertextually constructed; but they are also responses to nature, and the environment is one of the variables that influences culture, text, and personality.

Our working definition of the environment is the natural world or ecosystem which includes human beings and nature (fauna and flora).

Biographical Background

Authors can be considered as doors through which the readers enter in their writings. As such, it is important to have a minimum of information about an author for a better analysis of his/her work.

Chinua Achebe was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe on November 16, 1930 in Nigeria. Being the child of a Protestant missionary, he received his early education in English, but his upbringing was multicultural since the inhabitants of Ogidi, the community he belongs to, still lived according to many aspects of the traditional Igbo culture. In college, Achebe studied history and theology. Besides, Achebe's parents at that time had been converted to Christianity but his grandparents were still firm believers in their traditional culture. These are the main reason why he came to know both the British culture as well as the Nigerian culture. Interestingly, he also developed his interest in indigenous Nigerian culture, and he rejected his Christian name, Albert, for his indigenous one, Chinua. From the above, it is already obvious that Chinua Achebe developed a great propensity for his identity and culture long ago and this

natural disposition is obvious in his productions as a writer. In the 1950s, Achebe was one of the founders of a Nigerian literary movement that drew upon the traditional oral culture of its indigenous peoples. In 1958, he published *Things Fall Apart* as a response to novels such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which presents Africa as a primitive and cultureless continent. Tired of reading white men's accounts of how primitive, socially and linguistically backward native Africans were, Achebe sought to convey a fuller understanding of the African culture and in so doing, give voice and prominence to underrepresented colonial subjects. This was done through some literary major works such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966). Achebe's novels mostly deal with the social, historical and political problems facing his country. He also wrote other books, poems and essays including "Chike and the River" (1966), "How the Leopard Got His Claws" (1972), *The Drum* (1977), *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (1975), "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (1977), *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983), *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), *Africa Tarnished Name* (1998), *Home and Exile* (2000). (www.sparknotes.com/lit/things/context/)

Cited in the London *Sunday Times* as one of the "1000 Makers of the Twentieth Century" for defining "a modern African literature that was truly African" and thereby making "a major contribution to world literature", Achebe has become renowned throughout the world as a father of modern African literature, essayist, novelist, and Professor of English literature at Bard College in New York. With his vast number of awards and honorary degrees, he has come to be considered one of the leading African writers of his time. According to Lewis Nkosi, Achebe is "universally regarded as the progenitor of modern African Literature in English, the producer of at least three novels sure to remain part of the canon modern African Literature so long as it requires a canon" (qtd. in *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research* 185). However, Achebe's achievements are more concretely reflected by his prominence in Nigeria's academic culture and in its literary and political institutions. In 1984, he founded *Uwa ndi Igbo*, a bilingual magazine containing a great deal of information about the Igbo culture. His criticism, his championing of the Heinemann African Writers Series, his founding of the journal *Okike: A Nigerian* (later, *An African Journal of New Writing*), and finally, his work as journalist and politician in support of freedom of expression, all contribute to the central goal of what he calls in his book *Home and Exile* "re-storying" the voices of people who have been "knocked silent by the trauma of

(...) dispossession” (O’Brien 10). Achebe died in 2013 after an illness in Boston, Massachusetts, and was laid to rest in Nigeria.

The above biographical background is relevant to this dissertation because it shows that Achebe as well as the inhabitants of the community he belonged to were still rooted in their culture and concerned with care for the environment. This is clearly depicted throughout Achebe’s ideological battles and great achievements in order to reassert and showcase African culture and identity. Also, most of his literary works are concerned with the permanent quest for men’s consideration and the preservation of nature.

TFA, which is part of our corpus, is Achebe’s first novel. The author tells in three sections the story of a man named Okonkwo. The sections correspond to Okonkwo’s youth in his fatherland Umuofia, his seven years of exile in his motherland Mbanta, and his eventual home return. Part one of the novel focuses on Okonkwo’s struggle to build a reputation that will distance him from his lazy and weak father. It is also in this opening part of the book that the readers have an overview of the pre-colonial Igbo cultural world. Achebe showcases a good number of Igbo cultural values: religious beliefs, ritual practices and the power of nature to provide the reader with a sense of the Igbo world.

The second author Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou’ou was born on August 14, 1969 at Sangmelima in the South Region of Cameroon. She holds a PhD in Human Rights and Culture of Peace, a DESS (Diplôme d’Études Supérieures Spécialisées) in Human Resources Management; a Certificate from the IHEDN (Institut de Hautes Études de Défense Nationale) in France; and a Double Certificate from ENA (École Nationale d’Administration / National School of Administration) in Paris in Public Service Management, then in Public Policy Design and Evaluation (www.laboutiqueafricavivre.com/s/27216/jeanne-marie-rosette-abouou). Marie Rosette Abou’ou has 10 years teaching and research experience in Peace and Security / Human Rights; then, 22 years’ experience in Human Resources Management and Management of Organisations. From December 2022 to date, she has served as ambassador in charge of political, peace and security Issues of ROSCAO (Réseau des Organisations de la Société Civile de l’Afrique de l’Ouest / The West African Network of Civil Society Organisations) at Cotonou, Benin. She is alternatively in charge of studies in the Minister’s office and permanent expert teacher at EIFORCES. In the midst of all these functions and occupations, Abou’ou finds time to write. She is a freelance writer, author of 9 literary works on African culture and social education with 3 titles, including LAT, approved for secondary school curricula in Cameroon, Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal (cm.linkedin.com/in/jeanne-

[marie-rosette-abou-ou-5a209b63](#)). It is worth noting that Abou'ou was privileged to spend her childhood in her native land and to take her first steps in her cultural environment before her studies led her abroad where she also came in contact with another culture, the European culture. She could have easily turned her back on her traditional values and used globalisation as a pretext to adopt the foreign culture, but her first novel, *Lettre à Tita*, published in two volumes, is the proof that her discovery of a foreign land even made her more rooted in and attached to her African cultural identity. African culture is the culture that, as a young author, she has deliberately chosen to celebrate and reassert in her first novel.

This biographical background is closely related to our topic on the environment and culture because it shows how, along her life; Abou'ou has been in close contact with her cultural environment. Therefore, we can easily understand her choice to pay homage to her African cultural identity and to nature that are revered in her novel.

For this comparative study, we selected the two volumes of LAT. In both volumes of her novel, Abou'ou depicts African cultural riches which are progressively lost to the benefit of globalisation. The first volume is a nostalgic depiction of the daily life in a traditional setup. The second volume, which is the letter proper, is still a representation of the same village which is now affected by modernity that has transformed the traditional mindset of its society.

LAT is an epistolary novel in which the main character, Edima writes a letter to his late grandfather Tita. From the prologue, Tita is referred to as “le dernier survivant d’une génération lointaine. L’homme qui, jusqu’à cet instant, était le garant des valeurs essentielles de la communauté Zilan (...) Le repère historique de tous les fils et filles du village, et même de la contrée” (21, (translated as the last survivor of a remote generation. The man, who up to that moment was the guarantor of the essential values of the Zilan community (...) The historic landmark of all the sons and daughters of the village and even the land).

In his letter, Edima takes upon himself the mission to inform Tita about the great changes which are taking place in their village, Zilan-village. He complains that traditional values which were so revered by his grandfather are now despised and trampled on by the villagers who have embarked on the train of modernity. LAT is an occasion for the author, through the voice of her narrator, to make a nostalgic description of a “bourgade enfouie dans la forêt équatoriale” (a village buried away in the equatorial forest) before the intrusion of foreign customs, usages or traditions, at a time when nature and man were still living in harmony. Therefore, LAT is deeply concerned with the themes of culture and traditional

values as well as the environment or nature. Zilan-village, from the outset of the novel, is described as a place where man was expected to live in harmony with his environment and cultural values.

Abou'ou other works include the novels *Mooh... Mon double* (2020); *Kongo, l'envers du succès* (2020) ; and the non-literary books *Convoiter la performance en organisation : agir sur les hommes et sur le système* (2020) ; *Courage, Honorables Soldats* (2022).

From the preceding information about the authors as well as the comments on their novels which constitute the corpus of this work, Chinua Achebe and Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou'ou can be considered as representatives and even ambassadors of their culture, the African culture that they proudly showcase and promote in their writings. This makes them suitable authors to address the topic of our research work: "The Environment and Culture in African literature".

Structure of the Work

This work is divided into a general introduction, four chapters, and a general conclusion.

The general introduction consists of a background and introduction to the study, the research problem, the research questions that this work seeks to answer, the hypothesis, the research objectives, the significance of this study, the scope of the work, the definitions of key terms and the structure of the work.

The first chapter, "Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Literature" will discuss the major works related to the theme of the environment and culture as well as the theoretical framework. The first part will discuss ecocriticism and cultural studies, theories at the heart of this analysis. Then the second part will critically examine works from prior researchers in order to highlight the contribution of this study.

The second chapter entitled "Conceptualising the Environment and Culture in *Things Fall Apart* and *Lettre à Tita*" focuses on the relationship between the environment and culture in our selected corpus. In this chapter, we will analyse the settings, characters, themes and plots of the novels under study which constitute tangible factors to unveil the relationship between man and nature.

The third chapter, "African and Western Perceptions of the Environment and Culture" will establish a comparison between African and Western perceptions of the relationship

between the environment and culture to show that place is a fundamental element to take into consideration when we discuss the scope of the incidence of men's activities on nature.

The fourth and last chapter, "African Culture and the Promotion of the Preservation of the Environment" will shed light on the role that African culture plays in promoting the preservation of the environment. This will be done based on Achebe's and Abou'ou's depictions of the African society, culture, environment and ideology in their novels.

The last part, the general conclusion, is concerned with the discussion about the findings and the suggestions of avenues for further research.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural studies and Ecocriticism are used as theories in this dissertation to analyse the selected corpus. Both theories are appropriate and complementary for this work because they permit to put together the environment and culture. Given that the work is a contribution to the fields of cultural and environmental studies. Achebe and Abou'ou through their novels demonstrate that the change in cultural habits has a patent impact on the preservation of the environment. Since African culture is closely related to African ecosystem or environment, cultural studies and ecocriticism will enable us to examine both novels as calls to promote communality by living in harmony with nature as opposed to the increasing anthropomorphism brought by capitalism and colonialism which concentrate everything on Man. This chapter also reviews similar concerns in other works on cultural and environmental issues.

Theoretical Framework

It is worth mentioning that our work is an analysis of two literary texts following a comparative approach. Our major concern is to compare Achebe's TFA and Abou'ou's LAT so as to figure out how a cultural change might affect humans' relationship to their environment. In her introduction to *Culture, History, and Comparative Literature*, Manyaka Toko Djockoua quotes some definitions of comparative literature. She mentions Edward O. Ako's observation that "comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and of the relationships between literature and the other arts, social sciences and sciences" (Djockoua 1). A definition in which Ako includes the encompassing nature of comparative literature since it transcends national and linguistics boundaries. In *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application* (1998), Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek expatiates on this point of view as he states that:

First, Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc. [...] Comparative Literature has intrinsically a content and form which facilitate the cross-

cultural and inter-disciplinary study of literature and it has a history that substantiated this content and form. (qtd. in Djockoua 2)

Tötösy lays emphasis on the international, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary dimensions of comparative literature. The comparative approach involves the dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and other disciplines which results in promoting comparative literature as a global and inclusive discipline of international humanities with focus on literature.

In this regard, the definition proposed by the Association of Comparative Literature of America (ACLA) is of interest to be mentioned here as it shed more light on the content and methodology of the discipline. ACLA posits that “comparative literature has as fundamentals the analysis of relations between and among writers, works, languages, traditions, cultures, nations, continents, and histories, and the exploration of the methods and mechanisms by which those relations create meaning” (qtd. in Djockoua 4). In this study we carry out a parallel analysis of the Nigerian culture portrayed in English language by Achebe’s TFA and the Cameroonian culture depicted in French language by Abou’ou’s LAT.

Also, it should be noted that the comparative approach is generally used to increase understanding between cultures and the societies. The ethics behind this method is summarised in Yves Chevrel’s *La littérature comparée* as he says:

L’éthique comparatiste est une éthique de la découverte – Faut-il dire de l’esprit d’aventure – il n’y pas de huis clos pour la recherche comparatiste, et l’Enfer ne saurait être les autres ! Si le comparatisme a une ambition, c’est d’essayer de contribuer à une forme moderne d’humanisme, qui accorde du prix à toute expression de l’esprit humain. (...) L’humanisme aujourd’hui implique que chacun accepte de découvrir les valeurs de toutes cultures auxquelles la littérature, en particulier, permet d’accéder. Nous sommes peut-être à l’aube d’un humanisme enfin planétaire...

Comparative ethics is an ethic of discovery – should we say of the spirit of adventure – there is no close door for comparative research, and Hell cannot be the others! If comparativism has any ambition, it is to try to contribute to a modern form of humanism, which values every expression of the human spirit. (...) Humanism today implies that everyone agrees to discover the values of all cultures to which literature, in particular allows access. We may be at the dawn of a global humanism... (14)

Here, we can notice that Chevrel’s description of comparative ethics is that of an inclusive and open world view. For him, if there is a goal to achieve in comparative research it is a modern humanism which values every expression of human spirit. This mostly implies that

there should be no more rejection of difference. Comparing our cultural values to those of others does not mean criticising theirs. Comparing is discovering, and not rejecting.

In the same vein, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek in his book titled *Comparative Literature Theory, Method, Application* (1998) presents the discipline of Comparative literature as:

A method in the study of literature in at least two ways. First Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other. (13)

Zepetnek's and Chevrel's views and comprehensions of comparative literature are alike; both advocate inclusion, respect and acceptance of the Other.

The comparative method is used as an attempt to understand human literary behaviour by examining both texts. The focus is on the analysis and comparison of the literary works to create meaning. In literary comparative research based on a case study, data are collected primarily by observation, and the goal is to determine similarities and differences that are related to the particular theme which concerns the different elements of the selected corpus. In this dissertation, TFA and LAT, which constitute the corpus are compared and contrasted on the theme of the relationship between the environment and culture over the last decades, following the independence of African countries.

Our comparative approach will be backed up by two essential theories namely ecocriticism and cultural studies. Both theories are useful for an integral analysis of our corpus. Therefore, it is necessary to alternately stress on ecocriticism and cultural studies in this part of our chapter. According to Heise K. Ursula, "ecocriticism has imposed itself as convenient shorthand for what some critics prefer to call environmental criticism, literary-environmental studies, literary ecology, literary environmentalism, or green cultural studies" (*Modern Language Association* 506). This shows the undeniable connection between environment and culture even from the conceptual perspective.

In *The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies* (2004), Chris Barker traces back the history of cultural studies as well as all the concepts and major works and opinions associated with this theory. The aforementioned book shows that the domain of cultural studies can be understood as an interdisciplinary or post-disciplinary field of inquiry that explores the production and inculcation of culture or maps of meaning. Cultural studies can also be

grasped as a discursive formation; that is, a group of ideas, images and practices, that provide ways of talking about, and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site. That is, cultural studies is constituted by a regulated way of speaking about objects (which cultural studies brings into view) and coheres around key concepts, ideas, and concerns that include articulation, culture, discourse, ideology, identity, popular culture, power, representation and text. It is also important to note that cultural studies is, and has always been, a multi- or post-disciplinary fields of inquiry which blurs the boundaries between itself and other disciplines. Indeed, “cultural studies” draws important concepts from other theoretical domains amongst which psychoanalysis, Marxism, structuralism, poststructuralism to name only these few ones. Cultural studies writers have consistently identified the examination of culture, power and politics as central to the domain. To that effect, “cultural studies” makes value judgements about culture. However, these are characteristically ideological and politic judgements (42).

In *Culture, History and Comparative Literature: John Steinbeck and René Philombe* (2009), Manyaka Toko Djockoua refers to Wilfred L. Guerin et al. in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, who themselves quote Patrick Brantlinger as they posit that “cultural studies” is not ‘a tightly coherent, unified movement with a fix agenda,’ but ‘a loosely coherent group of tendencies, issues, and questions.’ This movement which flowered in the 1960s embraces a wide range of fields such as

Marxism, new historicism, feminism, gender studies, anthropology, studies of race and ethnicity, film theory, sociology, urban studies, public policy studies, popular culture studies, and postcolonial studies: those fields that focus on social and cultural forces that either create community or cause division and alienation. (4-5)

From the above, Djockoua points out that “‘Cultural Studies’ questions inequalities within social power structures; it thus makes no distinction between “high” and “low” cultures. This school of thought fosters the analysis of all forms of production in relation to other cultural practices” (ibid 5). Thereafter, she refers to Paul Brians who, in his article “Postcolonial Literature: Problems with the Term”, indicates that Postcolonial theory functions as a subdivision within the even more misleading named field of “cultural studies”. According to him, “cultural studies” is:

The whole body of generally leftist radical literary theory and criticism which includes Marxist, Gramscian, Foucauldian, and various feminist schools of thought, among others. What all of these schools of thought have in common is

a determination to analyze unjust power relationships as manifested in cultural products like literature (and film, art etc.). (*World Literature Index 1*)

The implication of such a wide array of domains in cultural studies finds its essence and justification in the emergence of cultural studies which, according to Barker, can be thought of as “a body of theories generated by thinkers who regard the production of theoretical knowledge as a political practice” (*The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies xviii*).

The history of cultural studies emerged from the formation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University (UK) in the 1960s. CCCS was founded in 1964 as a postgraduate centre initially under the directorship of Richard Hoggart (1964-1968) and later Stuart Hall (1968-1979). However, it is during Hall’s directorship that one can first speak of the formation of an identifiable and distinct domain called cultural studies.

The initial focus of CCCS was on ‘lived’ culture, with an emphasis on class cultures that chimed with the work of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams. However, this moment of ‘culturalism’ –formed from an amalgam of sociology and literary criticism – was surpassed by the influence of structuralism, particularly as articulated with Marxism. At this level, the decisive intellectual resources were drawn from Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser and, most crucially, Antonio Gramsci. The key conceptual tools were those of text, ideology and hegemony as explored through the notion of popular culture as a site of both social control and resistance. The substantive topics of research included the mass media, youth subcultures, education, gender, race and the authoritarian state.

“Cultural studies” has acquired a multitude of institutional bases on a global scale under the functioning of CCCS. Further, the influence of post-structuralism has eclipsed structuralist Marxism as the decisive theoretical paradigm. In 1988, CCCS ceased being a postgraduate research centre and became a university department that included undergraduate teaching before it closed in 1990. Since that time, cultural studies has extended its intellectual base and geographic scope and proliferated across the globe. Following the proliferation of this field, there are self-defined cultural studies practitioners in the United States, Australia, Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe with each formation of cultural studies working in different ways. This said, it is necessary to have a particular interest in the formation of cultural studies in Africa which is our contextual research area.

In his article “Cultural studies and the African Global South” (2019), Keyan G. Tomaselli tracks back the evolution of cultural studies in Africa. He states that while cultural studies is transnational, applications of it tend to be narrowly national. In this way, different regions in the world have generated their own organic cultural studies trajectories, sometimes connected to the UK variants. Handel Wright traces back the beginnings of cultural studies in Africa. According to him, its first instance was the 1970s Kenyan Kamiriithu theatre project led by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ngugi wa Miiri. This was a short-lived grassroots intervention that eschewed transmission of communication models. Dialogical in nature, their theatre drew on popular African performance dramaturgy that elaborated rural villagers’ quotidian concerns about the failure of independence to deliver people’s liberation. The plays and theatre group were banned, Ngugi wa Thiong’o was imprisoned, and the open air theatre was destroyed by the army. The events that it generated resulted in the exile of both wa Thiong’o and wa Miiri, with wa Miiri later implementing their popular mobilising performative strategies in Zimbabwe and Zambia. It was Ngugi wa Thiong’o who first brought out the question of how to decolonise the mind.

Wright’s second reference to the genesis of African cultural studies was to the Birmingham-influenced Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit (CCSU, 1985) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. CCSU drew on each of the debates mentioned above, including the performative strategies generated by the Ngugis, read through social theories, such as Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, African philosophies and visual anthropology. This moment of resistance to apartheid was theorised and mobilised via communities of struggle that included activist projects with black township cultural groups, media collectives, and popular social movements. The resistance phase was followed by the Centre for Communication Media and Society (CCMS) working with the transitional multiparty political agencies like the Convention for a Democratic South Africa in developing cultural films, and broadcasting policies for the immediate post-apartheid era after 1990.

Third was Wright’s challenge to Northern Cultural Studies, “Dare we De-centre Birmingham?” This intervention, first presented as a keynote address at the inaugural meeting in Finland of what was later to be formalised as the Association for Cultural Studies, was not developed within the pages of the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* where it appeared, except as an unrequited milestone identifying “Africa”. On its twentieth birthday, this journal’s editors recalled Wright’s argument for recognition of cultural studies from Africa. However, the ring-fencing by the editors of the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* of the

field to just three publications produced from the UK but edited by academics spread across the North Atlantic delimited the preferred geographical terrain of the field to this region. Omitting mention of other journals published and/or edited from other hemispheres also occurred in the face of Wright's life work that has focused on ensuring the recognition of cultural studies' African originations. Critical Arts, established under conditions of political siege 10 years before the first appearance of the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, and others such as *Continuum* edited from Australia, were absent in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* editorial. The Birmingham initiative however remains crucial in that it offered strategies for opposing oppression—as in the UK, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

The subsequent shifts at CCSU, from resistance to policy drew on the Australian cultural policy moment that had emerged in the early 1990s in that country. Where UK cultural studies offered a critique of both Thatcherism and Stalinism, in Australia, this critique was recalibrated through a Foucauldian analysis of “governmentality” into cultural policy studies in this much less class conflicted society. This rearticulation from resistance to policy revealed that cultural studies did not just have to remain as oppositional as it was and remains in the UK. The Australian rearticulation demonstrated that, when cultural studies intersected with less conflictual class relations, it could be repurposed to affirmatively contribute policy work to, and project implementation within, prevailing governmental institutions in spreading social access via state infrastructures. Where resistance was the principle of cultural studies in the UK and apartheid South Africa, during the 1990s in Australia and South Africa, the field was actually freed up to work with state institutions.

As with the Australian approach, following Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wright asks the question, “What is cultural studies for?” How can it address social repression through action rather than just critique and explain the relationship between resistance and oppression? As Van der Smit S. A. observes:

In appropriating the traditional cultural forms in their indigenous languages Ngugi ensured that the whole community participated so that the theatre became a communication...that grass-roots theatre has power and a significant impact when a community is actively involved. (qtd. in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 261)

Such was also the case of worker theatre during apartheid and state policy generation during the transition from apartheid in the 1990s when academics joined with unions, professionals, state bureaucrats, and politicians in devising new policies across all cultural and media

sectors. From the above, it is obvious that for a new vision to gain ground, people from various domains should adhere to and carry the said vision.

The fourth cultural studies moment which impacted Africa has been the indigenisation of some trajectories of cultural and media studies as read through Southern African conditions. These initiatives try to mesh the local with the global, but from the perspectives of the locals themselves. For example, the University of Oslo introduced cultural and media studies to the Postgraduate Diploma in Media Studies hosted by the English Department at the University of Zimbabwe. This collaborative trajectory drew on British cultural studies, Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere, and the approaches informed by CCMS. However, at the time of the Oslo–Zimbabwe collaboration, from the mid-1990s, the autocratic tendencies and genocidal behaviour of the Zimbabwe government were becoming evident. While in South Africa, cultural studies was now being incorporated into post-apartheid policy making in the form of visions and missions and the restructuring of the state and private enterprise into racially inclusive democratically led operations, in Zimbabwe, the Norwegians and cultural studies-as-critique framework stood helplessly by as the government engaged in postcolonial dismantling and the destruction of the state, agriculture, and even of capital.

In his article, Keyan Tomaselli draws conclusions that cultural studies from the South are indeed area studies, but they should not be ring-fenced as such because their analytical frameworks can, indeed, be transnational and transcultural when applied with due contextual sensitivity (*Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 265).

One of the central problems of cultural studies relies on how we can ground or justify cultural theory and cultural politics. Also, cultural studies would not warrant its name without a focus on culture. As Stuart Hall puts it in his book titled *Representations*, “By culture, here I mean the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society. I also mean the contradictory forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life”(qtd. in Barker 7). For Hall, that which differentiates cultural studies from other subject areas is its connections to matters of power and politics and in particular to the need for social and cultural change. This implies that the improvement of social life, human habits and cultures which influence the environment is one of the major concerns of cultural studies. Thus Tony Bennett understands cultural studies to be an interdisciplinary field in which perspectives from different disciplines can be selectively drawn on to examine the relations of culture and power (qtd. in Barker 43). Here cultural studies is concerned with those practices, institutions and systems of classification that enable

a population to acquire particular values, beliefs, competences and routines of life. Further, “cultural studies” seeks to develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be used by agents in the pursuit of change. It is worth noting that change is the goal that “cultural studies” aims at achieving.

As regards the key methodology in cultural studies, Barker mentions that researchers use both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, qualitative methods are mostly favoured because of their focus on cultural meaning. Works in cultural studies are therefore centred on three kinds of approach, namely:

- Ethnography, which has often been linked with culturalist approaches and a stress on “lived experience”;
- Textual approaches, which have tended to draw from semiotics, post-structuralism and Derridean deconstruction;
- A series of reception studies, which are eclectic in their theoretical roots.
(*Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* 32)

For this comparative study, textual approaches happen to be more relevant. In this line, our analysis focuses on semiotics, narrative theory and deconstruction which are the gist of what Barker calls the three outstanding modes of analysis in cultural studies. Our reference texts are therefore analysed as signs, narratives and deconstruction for the main reasons that follows:

- Texts as signs for semiotics explores how the meanings generated by texts have been achieved through a particular arrangement of signs and cultural codes.
- Texts are narratives because texts tell stories and as narratives are they are the structured form in which stories advance explanations for the ways of the world. They offer frameworks of understanding and rules of reference about the way the social order is constructed and in so doing supply answers to the question on how human beings shall live.
- Deconstruction is associated with Derrida’s ‘undoing’ of the binaries of Western philosophy and the extension of this into the fields of literature and postcolonial theory.

To deconstruct is to undo, to tear apart, in order to seek out and display the assumptions of a text. Deconstruction therefore involves the dismantling of hierarchical conceptual oppositions

such as man/woman, black/white, reality/appearance and nature/culture to mention only these few.

Therefore a blend of the aforementioned textual approaches, that is an eclectic approach, is necessary for a detailed analysis of the novels under study.

In addition to cultural studies, Ecocriticism is also used in this comparative study as a theory to examine concepts related to the ecosystem and environment. Ecocriticism is a current critical theory which is distinctive amongst modern literary and cultural theories. It was born as the result of the environmental crisis and the desire to improve the way humanity treats the natural environment. Ecocriticism emerged in the mid-1990s, as a study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment and explores the relationship between the environment and literature. The human being is an element of nature that influences literature and arts, as well as literature and arts influence human life too. Consequently, the quality of the natural environment determines the standard of human life.

Ecocriticism is a term derived from Greek root 'Oikos' latinised as 'Eco-', which can often be found in economics as well as in ecology. In his article entitled "Ecocriticism and its Perspective: an Analytical Study", Dipti Das refers to Dokom, who lists the Indo- European root 'Weik' from which Greek 'Oikos' derives, which means "Village; House" (qtd. in *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research* 160). The root 'Eco' is shared by ecology and economics, hence, etymologically, the first would be the study of the "House" and the second would be the management and account of the "House". Not simply about the house and its management but the two disciplines also share other aspects than mere etymology. As Teri Wynn highlights, "Ecologists research natural systems and economists research human systems" (ibid). The balance and wellbeing of the general system, of the whole, constituted by the natural world and by the human world, depends upon the relationship of ecology and economics, that is the way in which nature and human beings interact. Ecocriticism indicates the critical writings which revolve around the relation between literature and nature. William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism", coins and defines the term ecocriticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world" (qtd. in Kumar 13).

Ecocriticism is considered to be a rapidly growing field in literary studies. Ursula K. Heise traces back its institutional formation in her article titled “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Ecocriticism”. According to her, various projects and publications involving the connection between literature and the environment in the 1980s led to the founding of ASLE, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, during a convention of the Western Literature Association in 1992. In 1993 the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* was established, and in 1995 ASLE started holding biennial conferences. Seminal texts and anthologies such as Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Kate Soper’s *What is Nature?* (1995), and Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s *Ecocriticism Reader* (1996); followed, as well as special journal issues: *Murphy, Ecology, Ecocriticism*. At the same time, newly minted ecocritics began to trace the origins of their intellectual concerns back to such seminal works in American and British literary studies as Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* (1950), Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City* (1973), Joseph Meeker’s *The Comedy of Survival* (1974), and Annette Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land* (1975). An explosion of articles and books in the field occurred following the steadily increasing urgency of environmental problems for ever more closely interconnected societies around the globe (*Modern Language Association* 505).

Under the influence of mostly French philosophies of language, literary critics during that period took a fresh look at questions of representation, textuality, narrative, identity, subjectivity, and historical discourse from a fundamentally sceptical perspective that emphasised the multiple disjunctures between forms of representation and the realities they purported to refer to. In this context, the notion of nature tended to be approached as a socio-cultural construct that had historically often served to legitimise the ideological claims of specific social groups. Quoting some major authors, Heise mentions in her *Hitchhiker’s Guide to Ecocriticism* that from Roland Barthes’s call in 1957 “always to strip down Nature, its ‘laws’ and its ‘limits’, so as to expose History there, and finally to posit Nature as itself historical” (*Mythologies* 175; Heise’s translation) to Graeme Turner’s claim in 1990 that “Cultural Studies defines itself in part (...) through its ability to explode the category of ‘the natural’” (qtd. in Hochman 10), the bulk of cultural criticism was premised on an overarching project of denaturalisation. This perspective obviously did not encourage connections with a social movement aiming to reground human cultures in natural systems and whose primary

pragmatic goal was to rescue a sense of the reality of environmental degradation from the obfuscations of political discourse (ibid).

By the early 1990s, however, the theoretical panorama in literary studies had changed considerably. New historicism had shaded into American cultural studies, which styled itself antitheoretical as much as theoretical, signalling not so much the advent of a new paradigm as the transition of the discipline into a field of diverse specialties and methodologies no longer ruled by any dominant framework. Ecocriticism found its place among this expanding matrix of coexisting projects, which in part explains the theoretical diversity it has attained in a mere dozen years. But this diversity also results from its relation to the sociopolitical forces that spawned it. Unlike feminism or postcolonialism, ecocriticism did not evolve gradually as the academic wing of an influential political movement. It emerged when environmentalism had already turned into a vast field of converging and conflicting projects and given rise to two other humanistic sub-disciplines, environmental philosophy and history. This diversity resonates in the different names by which the field has been identified: ecocriticism has imposed itself as convenient shorthand for what some critics prefer to call environmental criticism, literary-environmental studies, literary ecology, literary environmentalism, or green cultural studies (see Buell's *Future* 11-12 qtd. in Heise 505-506).

Changes in the perceived cultural relevance of biology also helped to open up the conceptual space for ecocriticism. Sociobiological approaches that had been rejected in the 1970s re-entered debate in the 1990s as genetic research and biotechnologies began to shed new light on old questions about innate and acquired behaviour. While many of these questions have remained intensely controversial among scientists and humanities scholars and while many ecocritics are highly critical of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, there can be no doubt that the 1990s offered a climate very different from that of earlier decades for investigating the relation between nature and culture. The so-called science wars, brewing since the 1980s, came to a head with Paul Gross and Norman Levitt's polemical rejection of constructivist approaches to science in their book *Higher Superstition* (1994). The physicist Alan Sokal's faux-poststructuralist essay on quantum mechanics entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum gravity" published in the journal *Social Text* in 1996 took the confrontation between scientists and their critics to a new level of ferocity as well as public awareness. Ecocriticism, with its triple allegiance to the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, and the political

struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world, was born in the shadow of this controversy.

There are basically two waves of ecocriticism as identified by Lawrence Buell. The first wave eco-critics “focused on nature writing, nature poetry, and wilderness fiction” (qtd. in *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 138). They are used to uphold the philosophy of organism. Here environment effectively means natural environment (qtd. in *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 21). The eco-critics of this wave appraised “the effects of culture upon nature, with a view towards celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (Howarth 69). So ecocriticism initially aimed at earth care.

The second wave eco-critics inclined towards environmental justice issues and a ‘social ecocriticism’ which considers “urban landscape as seriously as natural landscape” (Buell 22). This wave of ecocriticism is also known as revisionist ecocriticism. It seeks to locate the vestiges of nature in cities and exposes crimes of eco-injustice against society’s marginal section. The eco-critics interpret nature writing texts. At the same time, they use them as a context for analysing the principles and customs of our society in relationship to nature. Often, the result is a critique of how our culture devalues and degrades the natural world. Now ecocriticism is said to be in the third wave as stated by Glotfelty, Scott Slovic and others initiating feminist perspectives in the study of eco-literature. It is worth noting that the second wave-ecocritics absolutely suits this work.

Buell in the essay, “Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends”, published in 2011, after a thorough analysis of the European, British, American, Japanese, Chinese and Indian schools of ecocriticism, directs the future of ecocriticism to the ecocritical scope in the Third World countries. This said, it is important to look at Ecocriticism from an African perspective.

In her dissertation entitled “Towards an African-focused Ecocriticism: The Case of Nigeria” (2016), Chengyi Coral Wu explores early African environmental literary criticism which can be traced back to the 1960s. She defines Africa-focused ecocriticism as a practice that emerged in order to critique the impact of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the more recent globalisation on various African environments. And she distinguishes the said African-focused ecocriticism from the early Anglo-American ecocriticism, an environment-oriented approach developed originally from Anglo-American literary criticism in the 1990s, in response to the global environmental crisis. Her dissertation demonstrates how African

environmental literature enables critics to see culturally, historically and geographically particular representations of African environments. Moreover, according to Wu, an approach to environmental literature relies on a definition of nature as pristine and untouched, while in the African context, there is instead an idea of nature as interdependent with human culture (ii). The latter consideration of nature is obviously what is appropriate for this work.

In the aforementioned dissertation, Chengyi C. Wu refers to Anthony Vital as the author of the first essay in African literary studies that uses the term “African ecocriticism” in “Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology, and Life and Times of Michael K.” (2008). In this essay, he emphasises the importance of paying attention to “regional” and “national” differences as well as to colonial history in treating environmental issues in an African context. He states that

Ecocriticism, if it is to pose African questions and find African answers, will need to be rooted in local (regional, national) concern for social life and its natural environment. It will need too, to work from an understanding of the complexity of African pasts, taking into account the variety in African responses to currents of modernity that reached Africa from Europe initially, but that now influence Africa from multiple centers, European, American, and now Asian in the present form of the globalizing economy. (Wu 88)

While Wu underlines that Vital reminds ecocritics of the geographical and historical particularity of African environments, she also quotes Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers, whose anthology, *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa* (2011) is considered to be the first collection of essays that aims to create dialogues between African literary studies and African environmental issues.

Caminero-Santangelo and Garth Myers hold that

The two key questions that we focused on were how African literatures and modes of analysis drawn from literary studies might contribute to ways of reading the environment in the other disciplines and how African literary studies might productively draw from studies of African environments. These questions point to the need for dialogue across disciplines to develop better understandings of different discourses regarding African environments and people’s relationships with them. (2)

These authors foreground the interdisciplinary nature of developing an Africa-focused ecocriticism. The key questions that they focus on in their book show that to understand and develop ecocriticism in African literary studies, one cannot simply follow already established

methodologies in ecocriticism and in African literary studies. Instead, one has to question how these two disciplines must adjust to each other and learn from each other's provenances.

Quoting William Slaymaker's essay "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses" (2001), Chengyi C. Wu mentions that the essayist emphasises the potentiality and the need to "spread" ecocriticism to African literary studies:

The 1990s was the decade of rapid and global environmentalist literary growth, and anthologies, literary histories, and the like are notoriously behind the times. Bibliographies of back African literature that appear in the first decade of the twenty-first century will likely reflect a significant growth of interest in ecocriticism and environmental literature. The low visibility of ecolit and ecocrit in recent black African writing is temporary. The green revolution will spread to and through communities of readers and writers of African literature, 'ecoing' the booming interest in other parts of the literary world. (qtd. in Wu 7)

From the above we can read Slaymaker's call for an African-focused ecocriticism. He compares the evolution of ecocriticism across the world to that of Africa. According to him, though ecocriticism is not highly developed in African literary studies, African literature is potentially rich in environmentalist discussions. In this way, Slaymaker perceives an impending green revolution in African literary communities of writers and readers to catch up with the global tendency.

Ojung Ayuk's 1982 essay entitled "Environmental Decadence: A Theme in Post-Independence African Fiction" is an environmental critique produced in early African literary studies. In this essay, Ayuk analyses issues of "environmental decadence" represented by African fictions published in the 1970s. According to him,

Decadence is a process or a period of decline or deterioration ... in the present essay, the word *decadence* is used to denote the subject or theme in recent African fiction that is as reflected in an author's preoccupation with the decline in the physical environment from a state of normality or excellence. This decadence entails the destruction of the splendid landscape that characterises much of the African physical environment and the well-structured and peaceful way in which most Africans have traditionally lived their lives, as well as the installation of the devastation and the degenerate atmosphere that are manifest features of most colonial towns and urban centers inherited by the new nations upon decolonisation. (*Africana Journal* 142)

From the afore-mentioned, it is obvious that the degradation of the environment in Africa increased with the advent of colonisation that promotes capitalism as opposed to the initial

way of living characterised by communality. Decadence therefore arises in a simultaneous loss of cultural identity and degradation of the environment.

In *Carribbean Literature and Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (2005), Elisabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson and Georges B. Handley point out the impact of modernity (and attendant developments in industrialism, capitalism and technology) on colonial societies and their home environments. Moreover, they lay emphasis on the fact that both modernity and industrialism go hand in glove with European colonial expansions into non-European regions, and that colonialism has led to environmental degradation in these places. DeLoughrey et al. also pinpoint that treating modernity, capitalism and industrialism as universal developments within human cultures may gloss over the complexity of environmental issues caused by colonialism/neo-colonialism and/or related to inequalities due to racial, class and gender differences. Indeed, African cultures used to promote communality as opposed to capitalism brought by colonialism. In the African traditional setup, men were living in harmony with nature; they were one with the environment. But since African cultures have been hybridised with the intrusion of capitalism, this brought a fundamental change in mentalities and cultures so that new habits came up and men began to consider that nature is there to serve them as well as their personal interests. Thus, man's new vision is that nature should enrich him, feed him, and protect him without any efforts from him to preserve the environment natural equilibrium.

Because of the diversity of political and cross-disciplinary influences that went into its making, ecocriticism is not an easy field to summarise. Somewhat like cultural studies, ecocriticism coheres more by virtue of a common political project than on the basis of shared theoretical and methodological assumptions, and the details of how this project should translate into the study of culture are continually subject to challenge and revision. For this reason, ecocriticism has also become a field whose complexities by now require the book-length introductions that have appeared over the first years: Dana Phillips's *The Truth of Ecology* (2003), Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004), Buell's *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), or Walter Rojas Pérez's *La ecocritica hoy* (2004), *Ecocriticism Today* (my translation).

An important factor to be mentioned at this level is the tension existing between realist and constructivist approaches in ecocriticism. A tension that crucially involves questions about how human beings' perception of the environment is culturally shaped and how that perception is mediated through language and literature. One strand of ecocriticism critical of

modernist thought has tended to privilege philosophies and modes of writing that seek to transcend divisions between culture and nature, subject and object, as well as body and environment. The European phenomenological tradition has provided some of the most powerful impulses for thinking beyond such dichotomies. Therefore, it is obvious that there is an undeniable connection between the environment and culture as they tend to mingle to form an interdependent and interrelated pair.

According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), in a paper titled “Culture: A Driver and an Enabler of Sustainable Development” (May 2012): “Throughout the past decades, statistics, indicators and data on the cultural sector, as well as operational activities have underscored that culture can be a powerful driver for development, with community-wide social, economic and environmental impacts” (3). From this statement, we can easily take note of the crucial importance of culture in almost every domain of life. This said, any sustainable development is determined by cultural realities.

Besides, the same paper further on mentions that:

Cultural factors also influence lifestyles, individual behaviours, consumption patterns, values related to environmental stewardship, and our interaction with the natural environment. Local and indigenous knowledge systems and environmental management practices provide valuable insight and tools for tackling ecological challenges, preventing biodiversity loss, reducing land degradation, and mitigating the effects of climate change. (4)

This statement shows the undeniable relationship between the environment and culture. Culture happens to have a great incidence on the preservation of the environment because human beings’ habits and individual behaviours will inevitably influence or affect the natural environment that surrounds them.

In her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryll Glotfelty’s definition of ecocriticism focuses on the relationship between culture and nature and the “interrelationships”, especially the arts and culture of language and literature. Glotfelty states thus:

What... is Ecocriticism? Simply, put, Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and 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. (xix)

Ecocritical literature examines the relationship of the environment to other forces. It examines how the land is represented in metaphors, values, and culture. According to Glotfelty in “What is Ecocriticism?” ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound environmental implications.

Espousing Glotfelty’s view, Donald Worster, the environmental great historian, in his work *Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (1993), suggests that today we are facing a global crisis not because of the function of ecosystems but because of the way our moral system works. It implies that, to overcome this crisis, human beings must change their mentalities. Thereupon, Richard Kerridge in his paper “Environmentalism and Ecocriticism”, accounts for situations where we do not seem to realise the gravity of the environmental crisis. According to him, human beings do not connect imaginatively with the dreadful consequences of their small and seemingly inconsequential actions. Kerridge posits that: “Environmental problems are frequently invisible, differed; gradual and too small (...).often we are not confronted with the environmental harm we do because it happens later and elsewhere” (*Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide* 534). Human beings’ negative attitudes and actions have consequences both on their immediate and distant environment. Nature simply sends back what it receives from men.

Human nature is typically anthropocentric because man concentrates everything on him as he focuses on his wellbeing only. Ecocriticism, as a revisionist movement, tries to rectify this anthropocentric vision so that we may save our earth from a catastrophic end. Being environmentally conscious therefore means questioning our own consumerist behaviour, and Kerridge puts it succinctly when he says that “environmentalism seems to be all about things we should stop doing” (ibid). Ecocriticism does not promise anything else than survival and improvement of our ecosystem, but it requires a rethinking of our customary lifestyle or a culture of nature. The culture of nature is the way we think, teach, talk about and construct the natural world; it is the place and the importance that culture gives to nature. Every part of ecocriticism has the profound thought that human beings are connected with the natural world, thus influencing it. Ecocriticism connects culture and nature, especially the culture and art of language and literature.

As aforesaid, cultural studies as a set of theories is interested in the process by which relationships of power organise cultural artefacts. It is therefore a useful approach to scrutinise African culture and its relationship to the environment in Achebe's TFA and Abou'ou's LAT. The major aim is to develop ways of thinking about culture and power that can be used in the pursuit of social and cultural change. Cultural studies, as an interdisciplinary field encompassing perspectives from different disciplines, permits to examine the different practices, institutions and systems that enable a population to acquire particular values, beliefs, competences and routine; and their incidence on social life, human habits and cultures which in turn influence the attitude towards the environment. Cultural studies is complemented in the present work by ecocriticism. Ecocriticism mainly focuses on how nature is portrayed in a work of art or literature; what role the geographical or physical surroundings play in the structure of a text and in which way human culture is associated with the natural environment. This theory is used for the articulation of an environmentalist perspective on culture. Indeed Ecocriticism permits to examine the symmetrical environmental and cultural degradation in the selected corpus. The impact of the degradation of some of African cultural values on that of the environment is depicted by both Achebe and Abou'ou in their respective novels. The themes, the characters, the plots, the settings convey in one way or the other, interconnection between the environment and culture and permit to foretell how human beings' disconnection from authentic cultural practices can lead to uncontrolled environmental crises.

Literature Review

The topic under study is "The Environment and Culture in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou'ou's *Lettre à Tita*". Our focus is on the relationship between the environment (nature) and culture, nature's transformation by man and its preservation following lifestyle behaviours and cultural principles. There are many works and analyses on Achebe's TFA from cultural and environmental perspectives. However, given that Abou'ou's LAT is a more recent novel, there are very few critical works published on it.

The review can be divided into two sections: the first part covers issues related to the relationship between the environment and culture while the second part analyses what has been written on both novels so far in connection with the topic. This section reviews a good number of critical writings related to our topic so as to highlight the contribution of this

research work. It should be mentioned that, to the best of our knowledge, there is not till date any comparative study carried out on the issues of culture and environment in Achebe's TFA and Abou'ou's LAT.

In "Culture and Environment" (1916), Alexander Goldenweiser analyses the relationship which can be established between the environment and culture. He points out that the dependence of culture on physical environment is a time-honoured-problem; therefore, the degree and nature of their interrelations have been variously estimated by different writers and continue to occupy the minds of ethnologists, historians, and sociologists. Goldenweiser sums up his concern in a specific objective: to discuss the general relations of culture and the environment in order to clarify some of the theoretical issues involved (*American Journal of Sociology* 628).

Goldenweiser examines the proposition, often made, that the material culture of a group, particularly in primitive society, is determined by its physical environment. He points out that generally, tribes even in primitive societies, used in daily life materials not found in their own locality. And as we move from primitive to more civilised conditions, the dependence of the material culture of a group on its physical environment becomes less and less conspicuous. While it may be stated as a general proposition that the materials used by a group for its dwellings, means of conveyance, clothing, and food are largely dependent on the flora and fauna of the region, the determination thus disclosed has, according to Goldenweiser, a limited cultural significance. He illustrates this viewpoint by considering that if one classifies the cultures of a number of tribes according to the materials that they utilise in their industries and for food, the resulting grouping will not represent the cultures of the tribes but the flora and fauna of different regions. This is because there is more to a house or canoe or garment than the material it is made of, more to food than the animal or vegetable substance it contains (630).

Another substantial element tackled in Goldenweiser's analysis is his stand against any attempt to represent the physical environment as a determinant of culture when we consider that culture is essentially dynamic while the environment is static. He argues that, notwithstanding the conservatism inherent in every culture, the cultures of the most primitive groups change as the generations go by, while the physical environment remains unchanged. And even in historic society, the physical environment changed but little when compared with the tremendous transformations of culture. Goldenweiser therefore implies that as culture progresses, it makes different uses of the same environment, and different cultures make

different uses of similar or identical environments. The environment absorbs culture and becomes saturated with it, and while it continues to be an active factor, it is no longer the environment alone which acts, but the environment plus culture (631). Therefore, despite human beings' dependence on culture and the environment, certain unknown features may favour or hinder the appearance of inventors, innovators, reformers. However, the specific contributions of these individuals may still depend altogether on culture. To illustrate this view, the author mentions some famous people whose achievements in life would have been influenced by their cultural context. For instance, "Beethoven, if a native of China, would certainly have written some of that music which jars so terribly on our ears" (632). Similarly, in abstract thought, in literature, in decorative art, in ethical theory, the specific contributions of the original minds of all times were determined by their cultural settings.

However, Goldenweiser considers that the culture-environment relationship may be looked at from another perspective. According to him, every culture may be conceived of as a resultant of invention and imitation, of progress and inertia, of radicalism and conservatism. In both of these respects, culture is independent of the environment. All cultures, finally, are historical complexes. Every culture combines traits that have originated within its own borders with other traits that have come from without (from other cultures) and have merged with the recipient culture. Now these foreign traits are obviously independent of the environment of the recipient culture. Thus, as a historical complex, every culture is largely independent of its environment. Through these remarks, he indicates that a large set of environmental influences, while actual, are not significant for culture; that in another set of cultural phenomena, culture and environment co-operate and must be regarded as co-determinants; that in two of its fundamental aspects (invention and imitation), culture is independent of the environment; and that, finally, every culture is largely independent of its environment in so far as it is a historical complex (633).

Although Goldenweiser also discusses the relationships of culture and the environment, his consideration that "culture must be regarded as a closed and to a large extent self-sustaining system", makes a great difference in our opinion. In the present study, culture and the environment are regarded as counterparts to better analyse their incidence on human beings.

Almost a century later, in "Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours across Cultures" (2002), P. Wesley Schultz posits that one of the fundamental aspects of culture is the relationship it prescribes between individuals and the environment. According to him, if one

questions himself/herself on his/her relationship to the natural environment (am I part of it? separate from it? Or perhaps superior to it?); the answer will influence the attitudes that individuals within a given culture are likely to develop, the types of environmental behaviours that they are likely to adopt, and more generally, beliefs about how to solve environmental issues across cultures. Therefore, Schultz distinguishes between egoistic environmental attitudes, and biospheric environmental attitudes; and summarises recent cross-cultural research on the relationship between cultural values and attitudes about the natural environment.

Schultz notes that the last 100 years have seen the transformation of the daily lives of millions of people living in industrialised nations. Scientific discoveries and technology have changed every facet of our daily lives – from how we work, travel, and obtain food; to recreating and maintaining social relationships. Nowadays, most people spend a large portion of their lives mediated by technology and it is not without consequences. One in particular is the damaging effect of consumptive lifestyles on the natural environment. The cumulative result of technology and economic development has wreaked havoc with global proportions on the natural environment (*Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 3).

Targeting environmental problems, Schultz describes them as particularly insidious because they develop slowly. As long as the change occurs slowly, one adapts to the surroundings, and is unlikely to detect a change. From one day to the next, there seems to be little change in our lifestyles or the natural world around us. Yet, if we were to jump 10 years into the future, we would likely notice a substantial change.

As concerns understanding and solving the above mentioned environmental problems, Schultz indicates that the science of psychology can play an important role. Indeed, environmental problems are caused by human behaviour, and solving these problems will require changes in behaviour. Psychology, as the science of behaviour, can therefore make a substantial contribution to this change. Schultz suggests that psychologists work to develop theories of human cognition and behaviour that lead to environmental problems. Psychologists should also develop and assess programmes that move us towards sustainability, or study the impact of culture on environmental attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours. He adds that at the very core of environmental problems is an individual's understanding of his or her relationship with the natural environment. Quoting Clive Ponting in his book titled *A Green History of the World* (1991), he reminds that all cultures that exist

today, and throughout history, have addressed the issue of the relationship between individuals and the natural environment (5).

Schultz concludes that just as every culture has prescribed a set of rules for social interaction, culture also frames the relationship between the individual and nature. As environmental problems have become more apparent, our understanding of the problems and the solutions the author develops to address the problem, occur through the filter of culture. According to him, cultural values are the ideals and goals that are viewed as guiding principles in a person's life. The results of Schultz's research indicate that values focused on the individual are associated with egoistic attitudes about environmental issues, while values focused outside the self are associated with more altruistic and biospheric attitudes. Biospheric attitudes may be an extension of "relationship" with others to include the natural environment. It is a concern for plants and animals, and aspects of nature to the point of including them in one's notion of self.

Despite the pertinence of this analysis, we found that it remains lacking as concerns the inclusion of more practical solutions to solve environmental problems using culture.

In her master dissertation entitled "Development, Environment and Indigenous Peoples' Culture: Gaps in Environmental Assessment Instruments" (2008), María Teresa Colque Pinelo focuses on the environmental changes generated by development interventions and the fact that even after they have been assessed by formal instruments, and thus impacts are identified and mitigation measures are taken, they could lead to social impact, precisely to cultural changes among indigenous communities. She therefore identifies the main socio-cultural aspects affected by environmental change due to development projects. Her research is concerned with the impacts that environmental change has on indigenous peoples' cultures. More specifically it explores the link between environmental change and socio-cultural change. According to her, the way in which indigenous peoples conceive nature is shaped by – and shapes – their culture. Environmental change thus has a direct impact on it (7). She mentions that, from an indigenous perspective, culture is not this fashionable package of colourful clothes and rituals that we look for when travelling to exotic places; it is instead a way of life, the normal day to day practices performed to survive. In sum, it is the base of their identity, of what they are now and how they relate to nature. In this sense, nature is seen as an inherent part of indigenous people's identity.

Pinelo indicates that indigenous people all over the world have been heirs and guardians of a rich cultural and natural patrimony. The indigenous worldview is based on the harmonic and holistic relation between all the elements of the “Mother Earth” to which the human belongs but do not dominate. Traditional cultures keep closer relation to their environment given that they rely mainly on subsistence activities and thus depend on the availability of natural resources, and their knowledge is constructed based on this relation. However, the environmental change induced by development projects forces these people to adapt to new environments. Also, most of the efforts to improve their living conditions are based on the idea that to develop, they must sacrifice their culture and identity in order to assimilate or to integrate themselves into the national/global economy and social patterns. Pinelo calls this a “paternalistic approach that promotes dependency, turning out to be a new kind of colonialism” (19).

Pinelo points out three cases of what she calls “harming” developments namely: the Inter-oceanic highway and the Peruvian Amazonia; the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline and the Nam Theun 2 (a Hydroelectric Project located on the Nakai Plateau, in Khammouane province). For each case, she highlights the negative impacts of the project, its incidence on environmental and cultural aspects as well as the non-respect of some aspects of the formal requirements in the design and implementation of the projects. She concludes that the different aspects of culture that shape the relation human-nature are not given the same attention that other social aspects receive. For her, the imposition of development without considering local values accelerates the pace in which social change is generated and harms these livelihoods by impeding them to adapt progressively as it should and has always been (42).

Although María Pinelo also examines the relationship of the environment and culture, her perspective is different from that of this work. She analyses the causal link between projects, environmental change and cultural loss. Also, we found her work limited as far as the inclusion of cultural issues in impact assessments is concerned. Indeed, she develops more on environmental prejudices caused by environmental projects than on their practical incidence on indigenous cultures.

Nurul Hikmah, in his master dissertation “The Impact of Anthropocentrism on the Environment in Colin Thiele’s *February Dragon*” (2021), investigates the relationship between human behaviour and natural environment focusing mainly on the impact of anthropocentrism on nature and environment in an Australian novel. Indeed, the damaged natural environment, the conception of the human-natural relationship, and the urge to raise

knowledge and care for the environment through literary work inspired, have constituted, according to Hikmah, the motivation to undertake a literary and environmental analysis. He therefore proposes an eco-critical reading of the novel entitled *February Dragon* by Colin Thiele so as to elucidate the influence of human-nature relationship on the environment as revealed in the novel.

Hikmah elaborates the human-nature relationship and the human position in the universe as revealed by the characters in the novel, then analyses human beings' position, whether it is described as equal to nature or anthropocentric. To support this analysis, he uses two approaches namely Glotfelty's ecocriticism and Abrams' mimetic approach. Based on the elaboration of human-nature relationship, Hikmah analyses both negative and positive impacts of human behaviour on the environment; and he includes some solutions to eradicate environmental degradation (20).

Targetting human-nature relationship and anthropocentrism, Hikmah examines the impact of human-centered beliefs on the natural environment as reflected in Thiele's *February Dragon*. He points out that anthropocentrism comes from the Greek words 'Anthropos', which means 'human being' and 'kentron' that means 'centre'. Therefore etymologically, anthropocentrism corresponds to human-centeredness; thus it can be said that anthropocentrism refers to the belief that human beings are the centre of the universe. However, anthropocentrism is sometimes associated with the arrogance and ignorance of human beings that can affect the environment negatively and therefore be an opposite to eco-centric or nature-centeredness (32).

Hikmah highlights that human beings' control over the earth is a significant factor that leads to a multitude of environmental degradation. It is believed that after The Fall, the time when Adam and Eve were sent down to earth, the original condition of nature, which was once perfect, began to degenerate. This degeneration originates from the fact that humans have begun to take advantage of the planet to support their daily lives. Human activities from pollution to overpopulation have profoundly changed the environment since the Industrial Revolution. This said, Hikmah insists on the fact that as from the 1990s, climate change in literature and literary studies cease to be a marginal topic. On the contrary, it has become one of the major topics of interest as many writers and authors have documented nature and the relationship between humans and nature in their writings (7).

Environmental fiction has several benefits and positive externalities that make them a fitting object for analysis. In line with this statement, Matthew Schneider-Mayerson argues that most human beings believe that, regardless of our print position, researching texts that are environmentally involved is a worthwhile and even more critical endeavour, not just because this work is interesting and gratifying, but also because these texts matter, socially, culturally, politically. Researches on environmental fiction will increase environmental awareness and help to find solutions to the ecological problems that are recurrent nowadays (qtd. in Colin Thiele 7). The writer and literary scholar proposes various practical solutions to protect the environment. According to him, practising recycle, reduce and reuse constitutes one of the realistic efforts to protect the environment. Managing the waste people produce; creating new stuffs from old ones; reducing the use of plastic bags and bottles and saving energy including water and electricity to name only this few, are actions that would create a great impact in maintaining and sustaining the environment and promoting the efforts to save it from destruction if implemented.

However, what differentiates our work from Hikmah's own, are the perspectives. Indeed, Hikmah focuses on the elaboration of human-nature relationship and human position in the universe as revealed by the characters in the novel, then analyses human beings' position, whether it is described as equal to nature or anthropocentric; then scrutinises both negative and positive impacts of human behaviour on the environment so as to end up with practical solutions to eradicate environmental degradation. Whereas the present study relies on a literary comparative analysis to scrutinise the relationship between the environment and culture, the transformation of the environment by man and its preservation following lifestyles, behaviours and cultural principles.

In the same vein, Li Hou, Jianjun Kang and Yongli Xu posit that the geographical environment can have a great influence on the cultural and psychological structure of literary writers, and thus on their creations in practice. In their work titled "A Study on the Influence of Human Cultural Environment on Literary Creation from the Perspective of Eco-criticism" (2022), they focus mainly on the relationship between the environment and culture and its influence on literature. According to them, in the creation of works, writers often integrate the ecological concept of coexistence between human beings and the environment with their thoughts on individual identity, and they put their rich imagination into different regional literary creations; while these works awaken human beings to regain their sense of place and homeland, writers also eventually heal their trauma caused by the loss of their homeland and

realise the construction of their own identity, thus completing the writing of place and space (*Atlantis Press SARL Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 69).

This important contribution of the ecological environment and human culture to literary creation constantly gives new symbols to the regional environment to enrich its image, and the two have influenced and promoted each other. Li Hou et al. state that human beings have formed an inseparable link with culture and the environment, and they have continuously explored and rubbed together in the process of getting along with nature, and then formed a way of life and specific regional culture adapted to the environment.

Hence, the authors consider that excellent literary works reveal the relationship between people and land. They expose an interaction between human beings, the environment and culture that is apparent in literary works. For them, human culture and the environment in eco-critical perspective shape the cultural character of the writer and the external perception of the world. Therefore, human culture and the environment in the eco-critical perspective, bring indelible historical traces to literary creation. In the field of eco-criticism, writers transform the different cultures in different kinds of human cultural environments into their aesthetic orientation through literary creation. The objective is to awaken the profound ecological conscience of human beings so as to move towards an eternal state of harmony in peaceful coexistence with the environment (74).

Li Hou et al. therefore come to the conclusion that ecocriticism criticise a human-centered value and life production method, trying to build a natural, ecological, and sustainable production and lifestyle with the purpose of ecological overall interests, that is a new type of relationship between humans and nature. So the major solution they suggest to environmental degradation is the idea of harmony between man and culture which advocates that man is the protector of nature. However, our criticism for this work is that the authors consider ecocriticism as the major solution to environmental problems without taking into consideration the cultural incidence.

Having this in mind, we move on to the second part of our review which is made up of works and analyses on Chinua Achebe, Rosette Abou'ou, and their respective novels as concerns culture and the environment. The purpose of this is to have an overview of what has been written on both novels so far and to review the analyses and interpretations that critics give to events, characters, themes, and narrative discourse in both works.

This part of our review of literature starts with *Things Fall Apart* (1958) which is the first published text following the chronological order. It is worth noticing that, being a masterpiece, written many years ago by a famous author, many critics commented on the cultural and environmental aspects of TFA. This said, we must precise that the review does not follow a chronological order and different works are mentioned following their perspectives and their connection to our topic.

In “*Things Fall Apart* as a Postcolonial Text - An Assertion of African Culture” (2013), Rahul Singh classifies TFA in the category of postcolonial texts. According to him, this novel is postcolonial in the sense that it draws a clear line and critically analyses the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, a relationship basically based on two things – knowledge and power. Broadly speaking, TFA is a response to, as well as a record of the traumatic consequences of the Western capitalist colonialism on the traditional values and religious institutions of the African people (*Language in India* 272). Yet, we are in the perspective of promoting African culture by addressing postcolonial features.

Singh mentions that the disastrous impact brought upon Africa is usually depicted in three phases. The first phase deals with the depiction of the strategies adopted by the white man, for forcefully introducing an alien form of administration, education and religion and thereby inducing the natives to prefer Western culture and regard their own religion with contempt. The second phase deals with the period of resistance on the part of the natives, and finally the third phase deals with the post-independence stage. Thus, he states that in TFA, Achebe focuses on the first phase.

Like most of the African postcolonial novels, TFA showcases different aspects of post-colonialism that Singh reviews in his article. The depiction of the fictional hero, Okonkwo, as the leader of the struggle against colonial powers is one of the most relevant traits. From the first lines of the novel, he is depicted as a local wrestling champion in Umuofia, a fictional group of nine villages in Nigeria, inhabited by Igbo people. He is strong and hard-working. He never shows any kind of weakness. His character is a complete contrast to that of his father Unoka. Okonkwo is one of the leaders in his village, and he has attained that position in this society he has striven for all his life.

The novel is also the unfolding of the cultural and religious beliefs of the nineteenth-century Igbo land. As the novel shows, there used to be a complete hierarchy of gods and deities ranging from the personal god “Chi” to the greatest God “Chukwu” in Igbo land. The shrine of an Igbo man used to have the wooden images of “Chi” and his ancestral spirits.

Then there were other deities like Udo, Ogwugwu and Idemili, who used to protect the village and the clan. Ani, the earth goddess was responsible for all the fertility. The natives believed in the omnipresence of God and they used to pray to the lesser gods and deities, in order to approach the highest God Chukwu.

In his analysis of TFA, Singh also comments on Achebe's attempt to portray the society, belief system and other cultural factors honestly. While on the one hand he has celebrated the culture of the natives, on the other hand he has never for once tried to conceal the shortcomings inherent in their culture. Perhaps it is for this very reason that the behaviour of the natives has been shown as somewhat irrational and the people are depicted as superstitious in religious matters. For instance, at the very outset, parents are seen advising their children not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits (TFA 9). Another irrationality is that when a man was afflicted with swelling in the stomach and the limbs he was not allowed to die in the house. He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die (TFA 18).

Singh equally discusses the beliefs in omens, the superstitious approach to life and complex rituals of the people of Umuofia; then the emergence of a new religion, the changing values that go with breaking away from original beliefs and the conflict between traditional decision-making and colonial decision-making from Achebe's perspective in TFA. The most important achievement of this novel, it seems, is that it has changed the attitude of people and even that of the novelists towards Africa and it has set the foreground for numerous African novelists. Before this novel, European novelists portrayed African society as a place of savages, which needed to be enlightened by the Europeans.

Such analysis shows that despite being himself a Christian convert, Achebe wrote TFA, not only in response to the various misinterpretations about the native people, but also to depict the dignity of Igbo culture to his fellow citizens. In short, in spite of all the shortcomings and irrationalities in the beliefs of the African people and their society, Achebe, through his novel, calls them to live with self-respect and dignity, without feeling any shame for their past (*Language in India* 279).

Similarly, in "Culture, Language and Evolution of African Literature" (2014), an article written by Georges Anaso and Nwabudike Christopher Eziaba, published in the *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, some relevant points of the cultural origins of TFA are discussed. In agreement with Obiechina that they quote, they trace back Achebe's purpose in writing TFA. The said purpose is to correct the distortion of West African cultures, to recreate the past in the present in order to educate the West African reader and give him/her

the confidence in his cultural heritage which has been eroded by colonialism, and also in order to enlighten the foreign reader and help him/her get rid of the false impressions about the West African cultures acquired from centuries of cultural misrepresentations (*IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 83).

Following the above, it is obvious that one of Achebe's major goals in TFA was to deconstruct in his reader's mind, the history of Africa as presented by European scholars. To achieve that goal, he sensitises Africans as well as foreigners that West African culture should neither be denied nor trampled underfoot. Furthermore, this reassertion of African cultural identity is, as pointed out by Anaso and Nwabudike, Achebe's attempt at re-educating his audience through literature. This attempt can be clearly seen as a potent tool to correct all the racial misrepresentations intended to establish the assumed cultural superiority of one race over the others as exposed in the concept of Western universalism. As for the allegation that West African people had no culture before the advent of the white men, and that what West Africans have today was as a result of Western influence, Achebe, through his early works – *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* – points out clearly that West African people did not hear of culture first from the white people; these people had well established cultural and social organisations which the Europeans met on the ground at their arrival. The critics conclude that cultural and historical orientation of the readers are possible by the means of literature which, apart from being a tool for linguistic development, is also an asset in building mankind up morally and intellectually so as to turn the world into a global village where people are expected to see things from a general perspective as members of one large human community.

TFA is also perceived and commented following the concepts of intermediality and Negritude (African identity). In his article entitled "Intermediality: A Paradigm for African Identity in the Twenty-First Century" (2017), published in the *Journal of Literary Studies*, Fetson Kalua comments on the higher level of African culture that the reader can find in Achebe's novel. According to him, this brings us back to the two opposite ideologies of the Negritude movement. On one side those who were thinking with Aimé Césaire that it was no more possible for Africans to return to a pure and authentic Africa, that of our ancestors, because colonisation has taken away from us "something" and we must move forward despite that. And on the other side, those who, like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Kwame Nkrumah believed that the pure, virgin, profound Africa was still there, somewhere, waiting to be found by Africans. At this point we can also refer to Manyaka Toko's description of Senghor as one

who purported that there is an intricate relationship between man's essence, existence and spirituality. Most importantly he believed in living close to nature; consequently, he preached a return to nature (*Cross-Cultural Affinities* 9). Surprisingly, Achebe is considered to have found the happy medium and almost succeeded in putting everybody on the same board through writings that seem to be the point of intersection between the two aforementioned opinions. Achebe is indeed very famous for the way he has succeeded in showcasing African identity particularly in TFA. He integrated the World into *Things Fall Apart* and later on, he integrated *Things Fall Apart* into the World.

Kalua argues that the novel has received fulsome praise over the years precisely for extolling the image of "Africanness". Achebe's faithful blend of realism and traditional oral forms was perceived as underscoring the "whatness" of African literature and, by extension, African cultural identity. By celebrating the so-called African culture, as well as attempting to legitimise the postcolonial African nation, this kind of writing was meant to bear witness to the fact that the African "other", at once created its unique reference, and Achebe has managed to successfully re-constitute the black identity in a separate realm from colonial definitions. However, though this analysis provides some useful information, it is more oriented towards intermediality and African identity, which is not the focus of our dissertation.

"The Issues of Culture and Identity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Malek Haddad's *Le quai aux fleurs ne répond plus* (1961)" (2020) by Fella Khentout and Sabrina Kahil is a dissertation whose approach is close to mine though the concern differs. Indeed, this research explores the issues of identity and culture in two postcolonial Nigerian and Algerian novels. According to the authors, the objective is to draw a comparison between Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Malek Haddad's *Le quai aux fleurs ne répond plus*, to show how the English coloniser shaped the culture and identity of the Nigerian people, and how the French coloniser influenced the cultural perspectives of the Algerians, leading to an identity crisis. This, with the aim to show how African culture and identity have been reshaped by colonisation.

In their research, Khentout and Kahil focus on the postcolonial analyses and comments on TFA which show that Achebe in TFA speaks about Igbo culture as well as the clash of Western and traditional African values during the colonial era. They note that even

after the withdrawal of colonial forces from the African countries, the latter remained in a state of disorder, clash of cultures and identities which alienated them from their environment. They use Frantz Fanon's theory of culture and identity associated with Homi Bhabha's concept of culture and identity to show how people's loss of their culture, customs and traditions eventually leads them to a total change of habits and even to a crisis of identity.

Researches and publications concerning cultural values and African identity in TFA are numerous though there are still some differences in the authors' opinions. These multiple writings and comments on TFA acknowledge Chinua Achebe's undeniable goal to reassert African culture and identity so as to instil in Africans pride in their cultural and environmental heritage. The works mentioned here above take into consideration the cultural and identity aspects of TFA. Singh analyses TFA as a post-colonial novel. Therefore, he reviews the different aspects of post-colonialism that the novel showcases. Anaso and Nwabudike rather comment and insist on the importance of literature in building up morality and intellectuality so as to turn the world into a global village. Their work draws illustration from Achebe's novels *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Fetson Kalua on his part, lays more emphasis on the great level of representation of African culture in TFA and how it establishes a bond between the two distinct ideologies of Negritude. Similarly, Khentout and Kahil in their comparative analysis of TFA with an Algerian novel lay stress on culture and identity.

However, culture is not the only predominant factor in our study that has already been discussed or mentioned in several works. Indeed, Bandana Sinha Kumar examines TFA from a different viewpoint, which is from an ecocritical perspective. His article titled "An Ecocritical Interpretation of *Things Fall Apart*" traces the depiction of nature in the aforesaid novel to determine whether it is anthropocentric – a system of beliefs and practices that favours humans over other organisms– or whether it is anthropocentric in an enlightened manner. He considers that one can perceive "serve the earth" attitude in Chinua Achebe's sublime novel. Indeed, TFA articulates a new vision of the Igbo society and gives expression to a new sense of the African experience that is more penetrating than what has been available before its appearance.

Kumar includes in his analysis major themes of ecocriticism such as 'animism', 'dwelling', 'nature' and 'apocalypse', 'Yams', 'the silk-cotton tree' and 'the moon' which are also part of the Igbo society in which humans and nature had a symbiotic relationship. A relationship that Achebe portrays mainly through the plot, themes, places and characters of

the novel. As Kumar states, the Igbo society is dependent on farming and ‘yam’ is the wealth of these people. Ecology is an important aspect of this work. Nature and Man live in a symbiotic relationship; they nurture each other. The rise and fall of Umuofia are dependent on nature. The natural world coexists in the landscape of TFA alongside with humans. Instances in this novel point to the fact that utmost care was shown towards earth while farming. The “Serve the Earth” attitude is apparent in Umuofia (*Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education* 12).

Following Kumar’s analysis, Achebe shows the Igbo’s agricultural life, religious beliefs, festivals, and according to him, their ideas about the world and human life are all intertwined with nature. Thus the conception of men exploiting nature for their own benefit is not acceptable in the Igbo society. They believe in the sanctity of the earth and refrain from any negative attitude towards the Earth.

In the same vein, Gitanjali Gogoi views TFA as a picture of nature and the environment in their inviolate state. In his paper titled “An Ecocritical Approach to Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*” (2014), he mentions that Chinua Achebe, in TFA, portrays a spiritual relation between the Igbo and their natural world, a relation that goes beyond the visible physical correspondence. Set in a village called Umofia, the novel portrays nature as another character and it does not just keep it in the background. The work presents nature as a living entity which acts along with the human characters. Therefore, the idea of exploiting nature for their own benefit is unimaginable for the Igbo. This is apparent in their physical activities and thinking which are shaped by the surrounding environment. In addition, for the Igbo, nature is divine, hence, trees, rivers, hills, cave, and different other components of the environment hold divine powers. For instance along the story we have Ani, the goddess of earth and fertility; Amadiora, the god of thunder; Ufiojioku, the god of harvest and Anyanwu the sun god. Also, the frequent references to flora and fauna in the novel show the Igbo’s closeness to nature.

A major feature addressed by Gogoi to be mentioned here is the attitude of Okonkwo’s fellow tribe members in the final scene. When he hangs himself, it is described as an offense against the earth. His body is considered evil and only strangers may touch it (TFA 207). As the Igbo believed that a man must be a part of the surrounding nature after his death, Okonkwo, who went against nature by killing himself, did not deserve a burial and so must not be allowed to be a part of nature.

In like manner, Fakrul Alam analyses Achebe's novel from an ecocritical perspective. In his article, "Reading *Things Fall Apart* Ecocritically" (2010), he illustrates how Achebe, through his writing and use of language, conveys the rich connections between Africans and their land. He also depicts the extent of the damage in the relationship between Africans and their natural world caused by the advent of colonisation. Alam's paper thereafter lays emphasis on Achebe's profound consciousness about the vital relationship Africans must reactivate with the natural world to make themselves whole again.

According to Alam, *Things Fall Apart* is not only the story of Okonkwo, a headstrong and proud man who is forced to commit suicide after being humiliated by the white men, it is also the story of the African community of Umuofia to which he belongs and its changing fortunes because of the coming of Europeans. What one notices about the first two-thirds of the novel is how Okonkwo's story is embedded in that of his community. On the whole, pre-colonial Umuofia is shown to be the dwelling of contented men and women. Despite occasional bad harvests due to inclement weather or locusts, it supported the hard work of people who respected the earth and satisfied its yearnings. This is why when the characteristically intemperate Okonkwo beats up his wife, Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess, Ani, rebukes him. But even Okonkwo knows that the earth goddess had to be appeased since she was "the source of all fertility" (*Bhatter College Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 42).

In their article titled "Distorting the Cultural and Environmental Integrity through Invasion: An Ecocritical Post-Colonial Analysis of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" (2022), Ahmad Wani Waseem and Bashir Ganaie Mudasir put together ecocriticism and post-colonialism that they consider to be the offshoots of post-structuralism to scrutinise TFA. They indicate that both literary theories are new in origin and interconnected with each other. Like post-colonialism, ecocriticism also developed out of the love and concern regarding the natural world in its totality. Ecocriticism tries to make the bond between nature and the social world very strong. It proclaims that nature should not be deteriorated because of human materialistic demands. So, ecocriticism and post-colonialism provide them the lenses to look deeper into the genesis of cultural and environmental degradation caused by the white colonists on the pretext of development and modernisation. Subsequently, Waseem and Mudasir posit that Achebe's TFA portrays the impact of colonialism on the human and non-human entities in a realistic and accurate manner. They analyse the way the culture and environment of Africa were exploited by the colonial rulers and they also compare the pre-

colonial African society with the colonised Africa and the changes which were brought by the imperial rulers (*International Journal for Research Trends and innovation* 436).

Susie O'Brien's article "Superfluous Words: Ecological and Cultural Resilience in *Things Fall Apart*" published in *Postcolonial Text* (2009) is the closest analysis we came across in regards to the thematic concern of this dissertation as she is particularly interested in the novel's capacity to speak to a contemporary crisis that she calls the environmental crisis. Her argument works on the assumption that environment, culture and politics are densely entangled and she holds the thesis that TFA offers a vision and strategy of resilience for coping with the complex, potentially catastrophic, ecological and cultural changes that confront us today. In her analysis, O'Brien articulated two major theories. Joseph Meeker's theory of culture and ecology which stipulates that the genre of comedy is conducive to ecological health. By this he means not just that comedy embodies ecological values, but that evolution itself follows a comic structure. Then the resilience survival theory, a model of ecological change that is not predicated on dominance, but on resilience. "Resilience" which, according to Brian Walker et al., refers to the ability of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedback (qtd. in O'Brien 6). Put more simply, it is the capacity to deal with change and to continue to develop.

According to O'Brien, TFA reveals the complex effects of what might be termed "panarchic" environmental processes, illustrated repeatedly by contingencies that defeat conventional demonstrations of wisdom and strength. For instance, there was the year, early in Okonkwo's career as a yam farmer when "nothing happened at its proper time" (TFA 17). As a consequence of the unusual patterns of rainfall, diligent farmers like Okonkwo, who planted their seeds at the right time, lost their entire crop, while "lazy easy-going ones who always put off clearing their farms as long as they could" turned out under the circumstances to have been "the wise ones" (ibid). Rather than vindicating one planting method over another, this event illustrates both the complexity of human and ecological cycles, such that strategies that work in some circumstances (industrious effort, the observance of conventional wisdom) fail in others, and the inevitability of periodic, catastrophic disruption, of which the incursion of colonisers is but one particularly painful example.

Aliyu Salisu Barau, in his paper "Bridge-building between Literature and Environmental Values of Africa: Lessons from *Things Fall Apart*" (2009), highlights the inherent ecological values embedded in Achebe's novel and how they add value to the

ongoing debate on contemporary global environmental issues. In his analysis, Barau uses contemporary theories such as ecocriticism, environmental determinism and neo-environmentalism to explain the feat achieved by the novel in fostering balance between environment and development. He sees in nature, an added value of the masterpiece. For him there is a balance between environment and development. Nature is revered, adored, and in some instances abused by people. The communities in TFA have their environmental concepts, natural resources, environment-friendly livelihoods, and range of natural and human induced environmental problems. The paper suggests that observing some of the inherent lessons in Achebe's masterpiece can help to reawaken the public interest in environmental stability in Africa. Therefore, Barau's interest here is not in the characters of the story but rather in the physical environment and the way it influences the lives of the people, the way they perceive the environment and subscribe to its laws as well as the lessons that other parts of the world could learn especially at the height of the quest for ecological stability.

The second novel of our corpus, Marie Rosette Abou'ou's *Lettre à Tita*, is more recent, less known and few critics have examined it. However, it is an indubitable reservoir of African environmental and cultural elements.

"Lettre à ... feu grand-père", an article published by *Cameroon Tribune* in February 2013, provides an overview of this letter addressed not only to Tita. In her novel, Marie Rosette Abou'ou calls for the preservation of values. The book is published in two volumes (having respectively 116 pages and 85 pages). Tita, Edima's grandfather is presented as the guarantor of his people's traditions. He once lived in Zilan-village in the South Region of Cameroon. A place where nature and man still lived in symbiosis, where human beings still knew how to communicate with trees and animals, and moreover a place where the environment did not yet need any major protective laws to ensure its development and survival (LAT Vol. 1, 23).

Edima, son of Monetita, and grandson of Tita wants to communicate with his deceased grandfather. The aim is to give him news from the village, where nothing is going well any more. "Tita! Cher Tita, moi Edima, je te parle aujourd'hui pour t'informer que les mécanismes de fonctionnement que tu as installés dans ce village sont en déroute depuis ton départ ... C'est le désastre au village où la mort, la maladie, la famine et l'alcool sont aujourd'hui les collaborateurs inséparables des Zilanais" (Tita, dear Tita, I, Edima, I am talking to you today to inform you that the mechanisms of management that you have installed in this village are uprooted since you left ... It's a disaster in the village, where death,

disease, starvation and alcohol are now the inseparable companions of the Zilanese) (LAT Vol. 2, 24-25). Edima adds that starvation has become a daily reality in Zilan-village and the forests no longer have any wild animals. These are not the only disasters brought up by modernity; the addresser of the letter continues: “Te souviens-tu de l’oncle Bitoo? Il a entrepris non seulement d’avoir dans son lit toutes les femmes de ses frères, mais il s’attaque aujourd’hui à ses cousines et nièces” (Do you remember uncle Bitoo? He has decided not only to sleep with all his brothers’ wives and today he even sleeps with his cousins and nieces) (Vol. 2, 31). Also, mourning buffets have become places where families eat and rejoice while same-sex couples are allowed to marry.

The article portrays Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou’ou as a committed writer who uses precise imagery to call for the preservation of traditional, familial and ancestral values. In LAT, she contrasts the transformations of the Zilan where Africanness has been able to cope with globalisation and the Zilan of the sons of Edima where mothers no longer know how to use palm oil to cure their children’s fever nor use gorilla bones to treat fractures.

In his preface to the novel, Jacques Fame Ndongo notes that : “Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou’ou va dépeindre la société de son temps à travers les méfaits de la mondialisation qui inclinent sa plume vers l’engagement, dénonçant ainsi l’absurdité des dangers de la modernité sur les traditions...” (Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou’ou portrays the society of her time through the misdeeds of globalisation, which leads her writing towards commitment, thus denouncing the absurdity of the ills of modernity on tradition...) (LAT Vol. 1, 9). Abou’ou also campaigns for a redefinition of Africa’s objectives. Therefore *Lettre à Tita* is depicted as a dialogue between the present, the past and the future.

In “Écriture féminine de jeunesse et postulation de l’émergence d’un pays dans *Lettre à Tita 2*: entre anti-modernisme, exaltation passéiste et quête éthique” (“Female Youth Writing and the Postulation of the Emergence of a Country in *Lettre à Tita 2*: Between Anti-Modernism, Past Exaltation and Ethical Quest”) (2021), Pierre Suzanne Eyenga Onana reviews the second volume of LAT. His analysis shows that Jeanne Abou’ou’s *Lettre à Tita 2*, beyond the stigmatisation of a poorly assumed modernism or the exaltation of traditional values, deeply encapsulates the desire to postulate an emerging world in which Cameroonians would readily identify themselves. According to Eyenga Onana, the transition from a traditional system to a so-called modern system penalises the village youths.

According to Eyenga Onana, LAT crystallises an innovative style of writing that inscribes it in the Ekang culture. The Ekang, who are generally referred to as the “Lords of the Forest” and who are descending from the so-called Pahouin group (Beti, Fang, Bulu), pay particular attention to the habits and customs that govern their lives and underpin their age-old traditions, while respecting them scrupulously. Although, this is no longer the case in the Abou’ousian narrative, Eyenga Onana observes that there are a number of ways in which this writer articulates the implicit language namely: intertextuality, intergenericity, narrative anachronisms and embedded narratives (*Romanica Silesiana* 72).

In “Facilitateur Didactique adapté à l’Approche par les Compétences: pour l’Étude de *Lettre à Tita*, Volume 1”, Pierre Gueye Nonka and Athanase Charlemagne Toe argue that the first volume of LAT is a letter only by name. According to them, the author under the guise of a simple letter has only unfolded a classic story and the reader is dealing with a kind of tale in which there is a main storyteller, Edima (67 years old, retired civil servant and grandson of Tita —Zilan’s revered ancestor—) and an audience of all ages (children, young girls and boys, women, men and old people). Following this analysis, Volume 1 contains a number of characteristics specific to the realistic narrative given that some of the events evoked, such as the lives of the characters and the relationships between them, may seem strangely familiar to readers. However, by going deep into the discovery of the story, we reach the dimension of the traditional tale of ancestral Africa. The main themes developed are traditional marriage; polygamy; the hymn to traditional African values; the critique of socio-cultural changes in Africa; the exaltation of African culture and tradition; the harmony between man, nature and the cosmos.

In “Facilitateur Didactique adapté à l’Approche par les Compétences: pour l’Étude de *Lettre à Tita*, Volume 2”, Yacoubou Oyéniran and Athanase Charlemagne Toe expand on moral depravation, loss of identity, globalisation, the consequences of deforestation, the death of traditional medicine as some of the major thematic concerns of the novel. They also present the second volume of LAT as, contrarily to the first, a one-voice epistolary novel that is both a hymn to ancestral African traditional values and a plea for the return to most of these lost values. Edima, filled with bitterness and indignation, writes a letter to Tita, his late grandfather and through him to all the ancestors, asking for their help and intervention in the face of moral decadence and decay of traditional values that are gradually taking ground in Zilan-village. This said, the work is mainly oriented towards didactic perspective that is, how

to teach and understand the storyline as well as the analysis of the main themes developed on the basis of selected passages.

In a nutshell, this review of related literature covers a wide body of knowledge mostly on Achebe's TFA. The majority of those works review the issues of culture, identity and environment separately. There are a few critics who come closer to the focus of our dissertation by putting together, to compare them, the environment and culture. However, the particularity of this study is to compare this well-known novel with a more recent one, Abou'ou's *Lettre à Tita*, which has not yet really been at the centre of critics' analyses. This will permit to establish at different levels, similarities and differences in both authors' writings as far as the environment and culture are concerned, which is the purpose of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUALISING THE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

This chapter scrutinises the working of the environment and culture in the novels under study. The current environmental crisis which is a major issue to be taken into consideration, calls upon all human beings as well as various fields of human life to reconsider the relationship between man and nature. From an historical point of view, the relationship of culture to the environment is one of the oldest problems faced by humanity. Therefore, in a bid to understand the environmental degradation and its relationship to the loss of cultural values which are currently ongoing, the study of the connections between cultural patterns and physical conditions is of great importance. However, areas that seem similar geographically may differ greatly culturally and from one place to the other cultural and environmental conditions differ as they are specific to each area. For this reason, this chapter analyses, in a comparative way, the issues of environment and culture in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Lettre à Tita* (2013) following the specific African societies which they represent.

The Environment and Culture in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Things Fall Apart is a novel written by Chinua Achebe in two parts, made up of twenty five chapters. Published in 1958, its story chronicles pre-colonial life in the south-east of Nigeria and the arrival of the Europeans during the late nineteenth century. The book is one of the first modern African novels in English to receive the global critical acclaim. It is a staple book in schools throughout Africa and the most widely read and studied book in English speaking countries around the world. We begin our comparative analysis with this masterpiece because historically it is set earlier than Abou'ou's novel LAT. Indeed, the story takes place between the pre-colonial and the colonial periods and Achebe wrote the novel the first years after independence, which is during the postcolonial period.

From what the bibliographical information of Chinua Achebe mentioned in our introduction reveal, the social context in which he grew up made him a person who knows his culture, he was rooted in it from an early age and grew up learning to respect and value the said culture. It is therefore this message of valorisation or rather revalorisation of African

identity and culture that his writings convey; and the novel we have chosen for this comparative study is no exception to this rule.

From the plot of TFA, the reader learns that Okonkwo, a courageous and self-made man of Umuofia – a powerful clan made up of nine villages – grew up with the fear of resembling his “good-for-nothing” father Unoka. A lazy and coward father who died in disrepute, leaving many debts unsettled. From his early age, Okonkwo builds a compound where he lives with his three wives and many children including Nwoye his first son and Ezinma his favourite daughter. He finds his twelve-year old son Nwoye lazy and effeminate, so he would have preferred his daughter Ezimna to be a boy. Okonkwo is a wrestler and a hardworking farmer. His family welcomes a new member when an ill-fated lad is given to Umuofia in compensation for the killing of Ogbuefi Udo’s wife in Mbaino. The fifteen-year old boy Ikemefuna, successfully integrates in Okonkwo’s family. He develops a strong attachment to Nwoye, Okonkwo’s only son to whom he is closed, and succeeds in gaining Okonkwo’s admiration. However, despite his fondness for Ikemefuna and the fact that the boy begins to call him “father”, Okonkwo does not want to show any particular affection for him. After the New Yam Festival, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a respected village elder, informs Okonkwo of the Hills and Caves Oracle’s decision that Ikemefuna must be killed. Ezeudu warns Okonkwo not to bear a hand in Ikemefuna’s death because the boy calls him “father”. Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna that a group of men from Umuofia are accompanying him to his village. After several hours of walking, some of Okonkwo’s clansmen attack the boy with machetes. Ikemefuna runs to Okonkwo for help but Okonkwo who does not want to look weak in front of his fellow tribesmen, cuts the boy down: “Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak” (TFA 61). This death causes sadness in Okonkwo’s household, especially to Nwoye who considered Ikemefuna as his elder brother and to Okonkwo too who loved the boy but did not want people to be aware of it.

Okonkwo finally forgets the pain due to Ikemefuna’s death as he and his fellow tribesmen successively pass through other events in Umuofia among which, Obierika’s daughter marriage and the judgement scene on the village *Ilo* – which means the village green, where assemblies for sports, discussions, and all great ceremonies take place –. *inyanga*: showing off, bragging. Later on, the death of the oldest man in the village, Ogbuefi Ezeudu, is announced. During his funeral ceremony, when guns are fired, Okonkwo accidentally kills the deceased’s son and must be exiled for seven years as punishment: “It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must

flee from the land (...) He could return to the clan after seven years (124). So he gathers his most valuable belongings and takes his family to his motherland at Mbanta, to Uchendu's, his maternal uncle's, household. There, Okonkwo's kinsmen especially his uncle Uchendu, receive him warmly. They help him to build a new compound of huts and lend him seeds of yam to start a farm. Okonkwo painfully starts a new life and is informed of all the news in Umuofia by his friend Obierika who visits him from time to time. He thus learns of the coming of the white men in Umuofia, which is like the situation in Mbanta where the new religion, Christianity is established through Mr. Livingstone and Mr. Kiaga, helped by the messengers and interpreters who are speakers of the native language. The new religion gains legitimacy and more people are converted amongst them his son Nwoye to the disappointment of Okonkwo. After seven years spent in Mbanta, Okonkwo and his family return to Umuofia. Before leaving, he organises a great feast in order to thank his mother's kinsmen who welcomed him and his family.

Back to Umuofia, things have really changed. Christianity has spread, gaining more and more converts first headed by Mr. Brown and later by Reverend James Smith who are white missionaries. Apart from that, the white men have established their government through the District Commissioner. This religion and government do much harm to Umuofia's traditions and atrocities like the killing of the sacred python are committed: "the royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as 'Our Father'" (157). When he returns to Umuofia, Okonkwo discovers that the land has been completely changed with the arrival of the missionaries, so he decides to do something to change the situation. During a meeting with the elders, the missionaries send a group of five messengers to prevent their collision by putting an end to the meeting. When they arrive at the meeting place, Okonkwo, expecting his fellow kinsmen to join him in the uprising, kills one of them and the other ones escape. With this incident, Okonkwo understands that everything was lost since the people were frightened: "He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He heard voices asking 'why did he do it?'" (205). So, before the arrival of the District Commissioner at the head of an armed band of soldiers and court messengers, Okonkwo commits suicide by hanging himself. His clansmen could not take down his hanged body nor bury him because it was an abomination to commit suicide (208).

As aforementioned, TFA's story is set in an Igbo context and as such, the language in this novel has words, phrases and proverbs pertaining to the Igbo culture. From one end of the

novel to the other, Achebe succeeds in making known the aspects of his culture by inserting them in his novel, evidence of the pride he has of his culture and which he invites the (African) reader to share. Some of the cultural features drawn from this masterpiece are:

Proverbs and figures of speech: Chinua Achebe in his novel equates proverbs to “the palm oil with which words are eaten” (6); which means that they incorporate realities of the land on which they are told. In the novel, proverbs have a pedagogic dimension because they are used to advise, rebuke and teach. For example:

- “A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness” (19).
- “Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble” (26).
- “When a man says yes his *chi* says yes also” (27).
- “A child fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm” (67).
- “I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle” (165).

The above proverbs make a clear connection between the environment and culture. They illustrate the preponderant role that the Igbo culture gives to nature. For example, they consider that man does not become great by himself but rather through the contribution of the elements of nature. Therefore, he must be humble since his life and destiny are determined by the supernatural forces that are above him. This life principle is conveyed by many proverbs in the novel, including the first three mentioned above. The idea of being a man who has a benevolent spirit to crack palm-kernels for him or a *chi* – personal god – he should be in agreement with shows the pedestal on which nature is placed. Other cultural conceptions conveyed by these proverbs are those of the mother who cannot harm her child with something that does not suit him/her; or the idea of being satisfied with little in a context of abundance where one could obtain more. It is important to note that when Okonkwo says that “a child fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm”, he refers to the Earth as the mother who cannot punish him for obeying her messenger, the Oracle, who said Ikemefuna had to be killed. Despite the fact that the boy could be considered his son, he felt free to kill him because the order came from the Earth.

This representative sample of the numerous proverbs found in the novel shows the significant place occupied by the environment in the Igbo’s culture. Through the symbols, illustrations, comparisons, figurative language, the reader can feel the harmony between

nature and the Igbos. Also, most advice, teachings or warnings are passed on by adults using proverbs with a nature-based language to sensitise and educate the younger ones. In his essay entitled “Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and the African Oral Tradition”, Ben D. Wilkerson mentions Solomon Iyasere’s statement that: “(Achebe) uses proverbs both to infuse the English language with traditional African wisdom and perceptions ... to provide a ‘grammar of values’ of the world within the novel” (qtd. in *Essays of a Young Philologist* Par. 2)

According to Fakrul Alam, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe through the voice of his narrator signals the centrality of proverbs rooted in nature from the opening pages of his narrative as he writes: “Among the Ibos the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (6). The story of Okonkwo’s rise and fall and of his community’s disintegration is thus strung with proverbs. For instance, Okonkwo on the rise is admired for his wily qualities which are said to make him “as slippery as a fish in water” (3). His physical prowess makes him highly visible in Umuofia where his fame is said to have grown “like a bush-fire in the harmattan” (ibid). He is accepted by the elders of the community, one of whom graciously accepts his present of kola nut and alligator pepper. The elder acknowledges his status and right to be himself by telling him, “Let the kite perch and let the egret perch too” (17-18). In fact, this elder helps Okonkwo to consolidate his presence in the community since he is convinced that “you can tell a ripe corn by its look” (20). These proverbs that highlight the Igbo cultural identity are like those quoted and interpreted above: in a fully environmental language. The assimilation of proverbs to the palm oil words are eaten with, the comparison of Okonkwo’s agility with that of a fish or his fame with a bushfire in valorising terms, and the acceptance of his present of kola nut and alligator pepper by the elders as a sign of approval all give value to elements of the environment. In the same token, they show interconnectedness not to say a complementarity between man and his ecosystem.

Moreover, for the narrator, nature is the source of the most vivid comparisons. We can read similes and metaphors related to the elements of nature such as: “he who brings kola brings life (6); or “Okonkwo stood by, rumbling like thunder in the rainy season” (80). Ikemefuna who “grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life” (52) and Nwoye who, according to his father, is not too young to behave as a man because “a chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches” (66). In the same logic, Okonkwo complains that his children do not resemble him which brings him to the metaphorical questioning “where are the young suckers that will grow when the old

banana tree dies?” (ibid). When Okonkwo’s second wife Ekwefi is frightened about the life of her only daughter Ezinma, the narrator says she is “like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite” (93). Once more, different elements of nature illustrate Igbo’s culture and ideology. The kola symbolises life so much so that the person who offer it is held in esteem. If the kola is accepted it is even more a great symbol of peace, respect and approval. Also, Okonkwo’s anger compared to the thunder in the rainy season allows the reader to have a clear and familiar illustration of the said anger. Nature is used for the purpose of describing a state of mind. Further on, we still have a language related to the environment as the narrator equates Okonkwo with a banana tree that fears not having an heir worthy of his caliber and achievements. According to him, his son Nwoye is not on the way to becoming a worthy heir. He referred to him as a chick that does not show signs that it will grow into a cock unlike Ikemefuna who grow rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season. The words used here to describe Ikemefuna symbolise life, multiplication and strength. Both the crop chosen and the growing process remind the Igbos’ deep attachment to their land as part of their culture as well as the question of inheritance and succession that Okonkwo is thinking about, which is one of the key aspects of African culture.

Like proverbs, songs are also used in TFA to highlight the Igbo culture and environment.

Songs are used during rituals by oracles when they are in trance and they transmit the messages of the gods to the villagers. They are also sung by ordinary people especially when they work or walk. According to Wilkerson, traditional songs are scattered throughout Achebe’s TFA and they give the novel a much more traditional African feeling (Par. 3). An example of song is that which Ikemefuna sings on his way to his murder:

Eze elina, elina!

Sala

Eze ilikwa ya

Ikwaba akwa oligholi

Ebe Danda nechi eze

Ebe Uzuzu nete egwu

Sala (TFA 60)

This song remains untranslated in the novel. However, the narrator reveals several pieces of information about the context in which it is sung. Ikemefuna sings in his mind walking to its beat and telling himself that if the song ended on his right foot, his mother was

still alive and if it ended on his left foot she was dead, “no, not dead but ill” (ibid). This, illustrates how through a song silently sung, Ikemefuna wants at the same time to control his eagerness to see his kinsmen and to guess if death has taken away his mother. While singing, Ikemefuna expects the song to let him know if his mother is still among the living. He turns back to a trick he had in his childhood to settle confusing matters so as to remain confident in his expectations. As pointed out by Moruwawon Babatunde and Samuel Njosi Festus Chukwuka in their article entitled “The Translation of Chinua Achebe’s Praise Songs in *Things Fall Apart*”, “language is the foundation upon which culture is propagated. In other words, language is the carrier of culture and cultural information is spread through every level of language system” (*Research and Criticism Journal* 116). With this in mind, we can observe how Ikemefuna conveys an aspect of Igbo culture: that of song. While singing Ikemefuna is communicating with *Chukwu* or God’s house and he feels like a child once more. His song aims to get an answer from supernatural forces about whether his mother is still alive. He tries to communicate with nature and to guess what he does not know because it is the belief in his cultural context since his childhood.

In another song, Achebe describes how when rains became lighter and less frequent, and earth and sky once again became separate, children ran about singing “*the rain is falling, the sun is shining, alone Nnadi is cooking and eating*” (35). The song conveys the message of cohesion and harmony between two elements of nature which are generally considered to be opposed. And the said harmony is enjoyed and celebrated by children running and singing under the “slanting showers through sunshine and quite breeze” (ibid).

The value and scope of songs in Igbo society are once more showcased through Unoka’s love for the first kites that returned with the dry season, and the children who sang songs of welcome to them. He would remember his own childhood “how he had often wandered around looking for a kite sailing leisurely against the blue sky. As soon as he found one he would sing with his whole being, welcoming it back from its long, long journey, and asking it if it had brought home any lengths of cloth” (TFA 5). As stated by Sheung Wai Chan, “songs originate from feelings and emotion. Therefore, songs are presentations of feelings in words and forms to produce harmony” (qtd. in *Research and Criticism Journal* 121). Singing is therefore a way to express positive and negative emotions in Igbo culture. The singers share with those around them their joys, sorrows, desires and everything they may have on their heart.

Those songs sung in various circumstances belong to Igbo identity and express their vision of life. They sing to put into words their feelings, thoughts, doubts, worries, fears to name only these few. In most of the songs contained in this novel, there is therefore a question of culture. Singing allows men to celebrate nature, thereby showing their attachment to the environment through the words and expressions that they use.

Another major element in TFA that illustrates Igbos' attachment to the environment as part of their culture is the folktale.

Folktales are used in the novel to entertain kids in the night after dinner. A lesson can always be derived from folktales. There are several folktales in the novel which are all accompanied by lessons. Some of them are Okonkwo's stories of wars which he narrates to Nwoye and Ikemefuna, we also have the story of the quarrel between the Earth and the Sky which Nwoye's mother used to narrate to him and the story of the Tortoise which Ekwefi, one of Okonkwo's wife, narrates to her daughter Ezinma. Achebe makes it quite clear that for the storyteller of a people who lives in harmony with the land, nature is the source of all the figures of speech necessary for their story-telling.

It is interesting to notice that the main characters of most folktales are components of nature as in the case of Nwoye's mother tale about the quarrel between Earth and Sky:

He remembered the story she often told of the quarrel between Earth and Sky long ago, and how Sky withheld rain for seven years, until crops withered and the dead could not be buried because the hoes broke on the stony Earth. At last Vulture was sent to plead with Sky, and to soften his heart with a song of the suffering of the sons of men ... At last Sky was moved to pity, and he gave to Vulture rain wrapped in leaves of coco-yam. But as he flew home his long talon pierced the leaves and the rain fell as it had never fallen before. And so heavily did it rain on Vulture that he did not return to deliver his message but flew to a distant land, from where he had espied a fire. And when he got there he found it was a man making a sacrifice. He warmed himself in the fire and ate the entrails. (53-54)

This tale illustrates the importance of harmony between all the elements of nature. As soon as one does not play its role because of a disagreement, the consequences are terrible and things fall apart for the whole ecosystem. Here the quarrel takes place between the Sky and the Earth but men are the most affected since they are deprived of harvest and cannot even be buried because of a stony earth. Interestingly Vulture that was neither concerned nor mentioned in the quarrel from the beginning is sent as a correspondent to plead in favour of peace and

appeasement. This shows the culture of peace that Nwoye's mother instills in her children by narrating a tale that personifies the sky, the earth, the plants and animals and puts them on a same foot. This personification gives value to all the elements of the ecosystem and teaches children from an early age to consider and respect them, taking into account that the wrath of the sky can withhold the rain or the Vulture's clumsiness can cause torrential rain to fall. Our actions towards the environment come back to us positively or negatively in one way or another.

In those tales, a particular emphasis is put on the environment from fauna and flora to sky, rains, fire, and human beings. The story revolves around what constitutes our ecosystem. Man is mentioned in the background but the elements of nature are those that determine the story.

The last but not the least element we analyse here is Igbos' words and expressions which like proverbs, songs and folktales highlight the relationship between Igbo culture and the environment.

Some realities are exposed in Igbo language; some of those words and expressions are: *agadi-nwayi* (old woman), *chi* (personal god), *egwugwu* (a masquerader who impersonates one of the ancestral spirits of the village), *obi* (the large living quarters of the head of the family), *efulefu* (worthless man), *obodo dike* (the land of the brave), *kwenu* (a shout of approval and greeting), *osu* (outcast), *ndichie* (elders), *nno* (welcome), *Obi* (hut) and *Ogbanje* (child that died and was reborn several times).

The massive and regular presence of these words in Nigerian local language, although the novel is written in English, indicates Achebe's will to exhibit African culture, especially the Nigerian culture by narrating Okonkwo's story in the context of the unfolding of events and remain as faithful as possible to historical and cultural facts.

From the above, it is obvious that cultural values and praise of nature constitute predominant factors and major issues in TFA. Those illustrations of proverbs, folktales, and recurrent words and expressions from the novel demonstrate the symbiosis between Umuofians, their culture and their environment. Their reverence and attachment to nature is perceptible in all aspects of their culture and identity. Achebe is considered to be the essential novelist on African identity, nationalism, and decolonisation. His main focus has been cultural ambiguity and contestation. The complexity of a novel as TFA depends on Achebe's ability to bring competing cultural systems and their languages to the same level of representation,

dialogue, and contestation. However, we are interested in analysing the specific features that display the relationship between nature and culture in the said novel.

TFA depicts a vibrant community in which human society is not only at one with nature, but rather densely entangled with it. Therefore, environmental crises—drought, locusts, along with the quotidian challenges of weather and sickness—are part of Igbo life, managed within a system of agricultural, political, social and spiritual practices that have evolved over time. Drawing on practical knowledge infused with an elaborate mythology, in which the concept of *chi* jostles against the authority of ancestors and strictly delimits spheres of masculine and feminine power, the Igbo negotiate – not always successfully or in ways that accord with contemporary ethical understanding– tensions between cosmological and mundane forces, between fate and contingency. One of the key ways this negotiation occurs is through stories, which speaks to the ability to learn and adapt (O’Brien 8).

From the onset, the novel highlights a genuine harmony between man and the environment. There is a sense of power and mystery of the natural world. For instance, when Okonkwo inadvertently kills Ezeudu’s son:

As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu’s quarter stormed Okonkwo’s compound ... set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman. (125)

The attitude of Okonkwo cannot be tolerated because it was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was considered female because it had been inadvertent but Okonkwo had to flee from the clan for seven years. From the above quotation, we understand that Okonkwo clansmen were not taking pleasure to demolish or set fire to his belongings, they were mere messengers enforcing the laws of the earth goddess. It was part of the Igbo’s culture to respect the laws of nature no matter the cost.

There is an intimate and symbiotic relationship between Igbo people and the environment that surrounds them. Natural world coexists in the landscape of TFA along with humans as they nurture each other. From the outset of the novel, we see that nature holds an important place in the Igbo society. The name of the village is Umuofia which means “people

of the forest”, and this represents a great symbol. Another element illustrating the closeness of man to his environment is the rise and fall of Umuofia depending on nature. In this light, Waseem and Mudasir show the influence of nature on the Igbo language. As an oral society, the Igbo use variety of oral methods in their discussions such as riddles, sayings, myths and proverbs that are related to natural elements. For instance, Okonkwo’s growing popularity is compared to the bush-fire and Obierika’s business to the anthill. Achebe combines a multitude of myths and traditional folktales like the mosquito myth, the locust myth, the quarrel between the Earth and the Sky and the tale of the tortoise and the birds. All these are evidences of the love that the Igbo people have for their land. Thereupon, Waseem and Mudasir quote DeLoughrey’s observation that “The post-colonial ecology of TFA is evident in the way that language develops in a long historical relationship to a particular environment and culture” (*International Journal for Research Trends and innovation* 438). This sense of connectedness even in the choice of words manifested in Achebe’s use of Igbo proverbs and significant metaphors and comparisons arise from the African storyteller’s oneness with the physical environment.

Also, instances in this novel point to the fact that utmost care was shown towards earth while farming. Waseem and Mudasir expand on how the Igbo maintained strict rules during the planting and harvest season to illustrate their reverence for the environment. Before the planting season, they observed a “Week of Peace” with specific cultural laws to please Ani, the goddess of earth so that she may bless them with good crops. As they say, “our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow” (30). During this week, people do not work. They visit the families of their friends and spend most of their time in talking, gossiping, eating, drinking and merry making. Even saying a harsh word to anyone is considered a sin. If a person dies during this week, he/she is not buried but thrown into the Evil Forest to rot in the open. No one dares to do anything contrary to the norms of this festival and if anyone goes against it, he has to suffer a heavy penalty imposed by Ezeani, the priest of earth goddess Ani. Okonkwo once broke the sanctity by beating his second wife Ojiugo and was ordered to bring one goat, some cloth and a huge amount of money to the holy place of Ani as a sign of repentance.

The Igbo society is dependent on farming and ‘yam’ is the wealth of these people. For this reason, yam is referred to as “the king of crops (...) a very exacting king. For three or four

moons it demanded hard work and constant attention” (33). This shows the interconnectedness of human beings with nature. Through such laws, the society depicted by Achebe reflects a close relationship between the people of Umuofia and their surroundings. The earth is sensitive to human beings’ attitudes and they need to beware of their actions especially when they are about to plant their crops. They consider that the earth gives back what it receives; therefore they should honour it by observing a week of peace when planting so as to be rewarded with good harvest.

The Igbo people equally observe the New Yam Festival to honour the earth goddess and the spirits of their ancestors, which they believe, are important parts of the natural world. The festival not only provides food and merry-making, but it also develops intimacy among the Igbo community. A large number of guests are invited from far and nearby villages; wealthy farmers and in-laws also get special invitations. This occasion provides them an opportunity to exchange their views for a better understanding. Uchendu explains the philosophy of this festival by saying that “A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes (...) we come together because it is good for the kinsmen to do so” (TFA 118). The Igbos have a festival during which they celebrate, together the nature. The fact that the objective of this festival is to honour the earth goddess and that they call the said festival, the New Yam Festival is very revealing of the importance given to nature. In the same vein, Wasseem and Mudasir comment that the Igbo people observe the New Yam Festival to honour the earth goddess and the spirits of their ancestors, which they believe are important part of the natural world. The festival not only catered to the needs of eating, drinking and marry-making but also develop intimacy within the Igbo community. A large number of guests are invited from far and near by wealthy farmers, in-laws also get special invitations. This occasion provides them an opportunity to exchange their views and celebrate nature (*International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation* 437).

Another instance that illustrates the role that nature is given in TFA is when Unoka, Okonkwo’s father, is told by the priestess of *Agbala*:

You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your machete and your hoe. When your neighbours go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear. They cross seven rivers to make their farms, you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man. (17)

It is apparent that when the priestess rebukes Unoka for his laziness, she implies that tilling the same piece of land again and again destroys its fertility. It is a crime against the earth goddess. So, Earth is bestowed with divine powers and as such, it must be respected and protected. Men must therefore cultivate the land, but without affecting it. Like Unoka's neighbours, they must sow their crops in virgin forests that still have much fertility to offer instead of tiring the same soil because it is within their reach and close to their houses.

Also, the idea of the sacredness of the earth which was revered and preserved is referred to thus: "The sickness was an abomination to the earth, and so the victim could not be buried in her bowels. He died and rotted away above the earth and was not given the first or the second burial. Such was Unoka's fate" (18). He was left to die in the Evil Forest. Unoka died of a swelling in the stomach, a rare sickness and if buried, priests felt, he would pollute the earth or goddess Ani. Hence, he was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die. Many years later, Okonkwo himself could not be buried by his clansmen and sacrifices had to be made to cleanse the desecrated land after his burial. Despite his fame and great achievements along his life, he had to be buried by strangers for "it was an abomination, an offense against the Earth for a man to commit suicide" (208). Igbo society refrained from polluting earth goddess, which is an environment-friendly attitude. Their respect for the earth is part of their customs and it is manifest in their daily life.

Likewise, forests hold special significance in this novel. The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the dead. The dark forest symbolises evil forces and can be used to punish: as a matter of fact, "every clan and village had its "evil forest". In it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox. It was also a dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they died. An "evil forest" was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness (148). The forest surrounding Umuofia is revered; on the other hand the Igbo show great regard for the wellbeing of the earth and the environment. The forest is natural and pristine to the people of Umuofia, which has the dialectics of good and evil:

The forest holds a special place in the Igbo society. The wrestlers were not there yet, and the drummers held the field. They too sat just in front of the huge circle of spectators, facing the elders. Behind them was the big and ancient silk-cotton tree which was sacred. Spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting to be born. On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade (46).

The 'silk-cotton tree' is sacred for the Igbo. This tree is the symbol of everlasting life from time immemorial. The ancient silk-cotton tree harboured spirits of good children waiting to be born so it has the status of a deity; which was believed to be a divine solution for the young Igbo women. Through this we notice once more that the Igbo people considered all the features of the environment as inspirited. Also, they believed in nature as the source of provision. They were convinced that good children were provided by nature. Such a consideration shows once more the supremacy of the environment for the Igbo.

Likewise, Kumar keenly illustrates ecocritical elements in TFA. Animism, the natural rhythm of nature is important to the Igbo society. Considered to be the belief that all natural things and phenomena are alive as they have innate spirit, animism has various occurrences in the novel. For instance, animals are invested with special powers. Also, forests hold special significance so that the forest surrounding Umuofia is revered, while the dark forest symbolises evil forces. Besides, there is also the aspect of dwelling. It plays an important role for the Igbo who live in harmony with nature but have different cultures which dwell on this earth differently. The *oikos*, which means household/habitat in Greek, is the basis of a holistic society in which humans, nature, and the sacred are close-knit. The *oikos* constitutes a part of the dwelling. TFA revolves around Okonkwo and the first *oikos* represents him, his family, his dwelling. The *oikos* constitutes a part of the dwelling and Okonkwo fits into oikic model easily since it is lifestyle that integrates specific space and time, nature-cultural elements and human action (*Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education* 21).

The respect of the ancients is also a major cultural element in some instances connected to the environment that should be mentioned. More than once in TFA, Ogbuefi Ezeudu is referred to as the oldest man in the village. He is respected and revered: "he had been a great and fearless warrior in his time, and was now accorded great respect in all the clan" (57). He is a patriarch and a living library that many could consult to find out about the ancestral laws of remote time. When Okonkwo breaks the law of the Week of Peace by beating his second wife Ojiugo, Ezeudu on his sanction says that:

The punishment for breaking the Peace of Ani had become very mild ... in the past a man who broke the peace was dragged on the ground through the village until he died. But after a while this custom was stopped because it spoiled the peace which it was meant to preserve. (31)

From the above one can notice that the elders or ancients of the clan were there to pass on cultural values and even give precisions on what was improved throughout the time.

Therefore if one did not pay any respect to a guarantor of traditions, this would inevitably affect the way he would treat nature or the environment surrounding him.

Furthermore, as Barau states in his analysis of TFA, the values of the people of Umuofia are embedded in their religious beliefs, customs and traditions which were to a sufficient extent drawn from the physical and metaphysical environment. Since the level of literacy and the general impacts of extra-tropical cultures were absent in Umuofia, the citizens lived with a dreaded and much undisclosed natural environment which they interchangeably fear, revere and uphold (*International Institute of Sustainable Development* 5). Some passages he quotes from the novel testify to that:

Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals become even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called string. And so on this particular night as the crier's voice was gradually swallowed up in the distance, silence returned to the world, a vibrant silence made more intense by the universal thrill of a million forest insects. (TFA 9)

This shows how the constituents of nature are very important and are therefore highly respected by the Igbo. They later adjust their attitudes to the laws of their environment because they believe in retributions from nature. The people of Umuofia believe in mysteries and terror associated with darkness. For them there are attitudes to avoid in the night like to whistle or to call a snake by its name.

Another quotation from Barau's reading of TFA reveals that "The royal python was the most revered animal in Mbanta and all the surrounding clans. It was addressed as "Our Father", and was allowed to go wherever it chose, even into people's beds. "It ate rats in the house and sometimes swallowed hen's eggs" (TFA 157). Through these words, Achebe pictures the great reverence given to nature. The royal python is not just an animal but a holy creature venerated by the Igbo. It has the right to be found even in people's beds, this shows the higher level of proximity, complicity and understanding between men and natural ecosystem, even with animals considered as the most dangerous. A snake addressed as "Our Father" which does not frighten human beings but instead live in harmony with them is an undeniable demonstration of oneness between men and their environment.

Also, when Okonkwo's friend Obierika rebukes him for taking part in the murder of Ikemefuna, he says: "What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for

which the goddess wipes out whole families” and Okonkwo justifies himself saying “The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger (...) A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm” (67). Here, Achebe once more illustrates the great respect that nature inspired to the Igbo and how this reverence was effective daily in their behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and words. For instance, as already mentioned in the section on proverbs, Okonkwo who considers the Earth to be the mother of mankind strongly believes, contrary to what his friend tells him, that he cannot be punished for obeying the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, Agbala’s instructions as the messenger of the Earth. Umuofians did not lose sight of pleasing the Earth in their actions and thoughts. They were convinced about those regulations so they did not protest against the said laws which were naturally applied and accepted.

From the above it appears clearly that human life, culture, habits, beliefs and attitudes were interwoven with natural environment so much so that it was a “Must” for the Igbos to please the Earth.

Similarly, Hadiyanto Hadiyanto et al., from their ecological analysis of TFA, come to the conclusion that African traditional community, as reflected in Chinua Achebe’s masterpiece, has an intense interaction and a harmonious life with nature; for instance, they learn to mingle familiarly with the dry season, rainy season, and harmattan season for a successful farming method and harvest of yam, they also use and interact very well with various kinds of vegetation such as bamboo, kola nut, banana leaves, grasses, roots, barks of trees to fulfill their life necessities, and they know to effectively interact and make good use of animals for ritual and meal, especially goats and locusts. In addition to that, African traditional Igbo tribe society also has a solid commitment to keep the harmonious relationship with nature by maintaining a life balance with nature including vegetation and animal, to enjoy living in happiness with nature by warmly welcoming various seasons, such as the rainy season, the dry season, and the cold, dusty harmattan season, and to maintain natural resources friendly and wisely in clearing the new land for planting staple food plants and other supporting plants sufficiently (*Literary Ecology Approach in Literature* 6).

From Waseem and Mudasir’s point of view, after presenting a complete picture of the pre-colonial Igbo culture, Achebe shows how the imperial rulers ruined the philosophy of the indigenous people. The natives have a subjective relationship with the land while the foreign rulers consider the land as an economic resource that they use to build their institutions and houses. The trees are cut down to build the church buildings. The Igbos consider Pythons as

sacred and divine, but the missionaries induce them to kill the python by regarding it as a mere snake (437). Later on, a story went around that Enoch had killed and eaten the sacred python, and that his father who was the priest of the snake cult had cursed him. This situation started the conflict opposing man to the wild world and spiritual entities.

Kumar also expands on nature and apocalypse as ecocritical elements found in TFA. Nature is untouched and revered along the novel. Yet, the second part of the novel, devoted entirely to Okonkwo's life in exile in his mother's village after his accidental killing of a clansman, can be read as an extended development of this secondary theme that enhances the narrative at its primary level of development. Furthermore, the apocalypticism of TFA is considered as evident from the title; Okonkwo's world crumbles around him. His glum acceptance contrasts with the enthusiasm that accompanies his return to Umuofia, where his loss of social standing soon reveals itself as irreparable, and a tragic fate awaits him. Okonkwo represents not only Umuofia but the whole of Africa which was being mauled by colonial masters and fell apart with their arrival (*Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education* 21).

In chapter 21 of the novel, after Okonkwo's return to Umuofia following his exile, Obierika brings him up to date on the new system set up by the white missionaries and administrators. Concerning a piece of land in dispute, he tells him about the white man's court decision in favour of a family who gave much money to messengers and interpreter, Okonkwo is shocked as he asked "does the white man understand our custom about land?" (176). This question expresses the huge gap which exists between the Igbos' culture, their established system concerning the environment and the new system introduced by the white men. From Obierika's answer we note that white men cannot understand the local customs since they do not even speak the local language. He goes on saying that "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (ibid). So falling apart comes from the fact that a sensitive point has been touched: the unity of the people. They are no more one in their way of thinking, customs, beliefs or attitudes towards nature.

To tell the story of the falling apart of the Umuofians, Achebe resorts to the storytelling techniques and traditions of his people. Alam, referring to Achebe's interview by Charles H. Rowell, mentions that when he is asked what he means by identifying himself as a storyteller, the novelist says:

We mustn't forget that we have a certain link of apostolic succession; if you like, to the old griots and storytellers and poets. It helps anyway; it gives me that sense of connectedness, of being part of things that are eternal like the rivers, the mountains, and the sky.... (qtd. in Alam 46)

The story of Okonkwo and the Igbos is evolutive. It starts from the total harmony and oneness with nature and progressively moves to the falling apart of this well-organised society. Life is no more the same after the intrusion of white people through colonisation. As pointed out by Alam, The sense of oneness with nature, the sense of a dwelling, of an environment where one feels at home is gone; the harmony and balance that sustained the community have disappeared; and the traumatised villagers have lost their sense of place and consequently have no sense of direction anymore. *Things Fall Apart* thus ends up with the Umuofians traumatised, one of their standard bearers – Okonkwo – destroyed, and the land itself degraded.

The degradation of an environment which was first revered, sacred and pristine raises from critics various analyses and interpretations of Achebe's TFA. Some conceptions are typically environmental. For instance, Barau associates, to compare them, the concepts of sustainable development, the environment, environmental hazards, and environmental law and policy with the people and environment of Umuofia. He quotes the International Institute of Sustainable Development which defines sustainable development as "the development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (8). Afterwards, Barau remarks that this view of sustainability is incomplete if it is compared with that of TFA because the African contemporary universal concept of sustainable development only takes care of the present and future and jettisons the past. On the other hand, in Africa, the present and future are woven with the threads of the past. However, many passages from TFA have indicated how people took into consideration their ancestors. They believed that their ancestors were still attached to them and could be harmed or pleased by the actions or inactions of the living generations (*International Institute of Sustainable Development* 8).

As regards the other environmental concepts in TFA, Barau examines them successively. He starts by environmental resources and reminds that the people of Umuofia are people of the nature. Therefore, there are some resources that they utilise in their day to day activities. The list covers food items and sources of water and energy. Interestingly, the mode of exploitation of the natural resources in TFA is not harmful and does not threaten the

balance of the ecosystem. The resources available to the inhabitants of Umuofia include: gourds of palm wine, alligator pepper, kola nut, white chalk, palm oil, cowries, bamboo, palm oil, moonlight, cock crow, chicken, virgin forests, seven rivers, beans, locusts, firewood. We can also read in the novel “Okonkwo had returned from the bush carrying on his left shoulder a large bundle of grasses and leaves, roots and the barks of medicinal trees and shrubs” (Achebe 85).

Barau also treats the environmental hazards which are defined by Olofin E. as occurrences, presences and processes that constitute some risks or dangers to the quality of the environment (*International Institute of Sustainable Development* 6). Environmental hazards can either be natural, human assisted or human induced. Industrialisation, urbanisation, modern agriculture, and even warfare constitute some of the environmental hazards plaguing our continent. TFA has sufficiently grasped the duality of ecological hazards in the way that it talks about droughts, floodings, gullies and habitats destruction.

In Alam’s opinion, Achebe’s success as a novelist in TFA is also to show how the coming of imperialism had impacted adversely on the lives of people who had been dwelling in harmony with nature and how the coming of the whites had disturbed the balance achieved by the West Africans in their dealings with their environment. Through his narrative strategy, his use of time, and his mastery of language and deployment of proverbs and metaphors, Achebe has succeeded in depicting the manner in which the community became troubled and the land became polluted by the advent of colonisation. By the time he concludes the novel we come to realise that the Igbos’ world had become traumatised and the complex ties forged between nature and society by the clan had become unsettled because of the actions of men like Mr. Brown and the District Commissioner.

However, Achebe who wants to be as transparent and faithful to the truth as possible does not hide the flaws of African society to show only the good sides. He reveals that African society had its own contradictions and spiritual crisis before the encroachment of colonisation. There are laws that the villagers themselves respect without any conviction for instance the law about the twins who had to be thrown away after their birth: “Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest” (61-62) and “Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a prosperous farmer (...) had had four previous pregnancies and child-births. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away” (151). Another example of illogicality is found in the case of

Umuofia asking for a virgin and a young lad to atone for the murder of one of their clansmen's wife. The virgin is given to the clansman in replacement of his wife and the young boy Ikemefuna is entrusted to Okonkwo. But after three years spent in Okonkwo's household, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves pronounces that the young lad Ikemefuna should be killed without giving any reason to that (57). Equally, when Okonkwo is sent into exile it is for killing accidentally someone. On the same evening, some men, among whom his greatest friend Obierika, set fire to his houses, demolish his red walls, kill his animals and destroy his barn. They consider those actions to be justice of the earth goddess, and themselves as simple messengers. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman (125).

In the novel, it is mentioned that Obierika himself is doubtful about all these laws:

When the will of the goddess had been done, he sat down in his obi and mourned his friend's calamity. Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities. He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? The Earth had decreed that they were an offence on the land and must be destroyed. And if the clan did not exact punishment for an offence against the great goddess, her wrath was loosed on all the land and not just on the offender. As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others. (125)

These so-called inhuman laws, for which no justification is given, will later on create division in the Igbo clan. Indeed, the white missionaries' new religion condemned these laws therefore, some people who were already confused and did not agree with the said laws, also rapidly enrol in the new religion. "There was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son" (147).

Nwoye was captivated by:

The poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul — the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled. (ibid)

The white men built their church in the Evil Forest and they were rescuing twins from the bush, but they never brought them into the village. They also welcome Osu in their midst, an Osu was “a taboo for ever, and his children after him. He could neither marry nor be married by the free-born. He was in fact an outcast, living in a special area of the village, close to the Great Shrine (...) An osu could not attend an assembly of the free-born, and they, in turn, could not shelter under his roof ” (156). The white men therefore took advantage of some internal divisions among the Igbo as well as certain harsh and barbaric laws that the people themselves found difficult to endure. They insert themselves in the midst of the local people and propagate their religion while installing their government to defend those who agreed to be one of their own.

According to Waseem and Mudasir, it is because of cruel practices that the white rulers consider the Igbo culture devoid of ethics and moral codes of conduct. The missionaries had come with the seemingly noble purpose of urging the tribal people to forego their barbaric, savage culture and embrace the peaceful religion of Christianity. They built churches in various villages to propagate the Christian teachings and attracted a large number of people to their religion. The number of converts increased day by day and these converts in turn became bitter enemies of their brothers and the conflict between the two became a matter of routine. In the novel, Obierika is depressed to see the division among his community, he observes, “Our own men and sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. (...) How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us?” (TFA 176). However, the real disintegration of the Igbo society begins when the British rulers established their governmental institutions like courts, prisons and regulations for trade and commerce. The government began to enforce its laws; and those who did not abide by the white man’s laws were put behind the bars (*International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation* 437).

Concerning the relationship of Africans to their environment and culture; as already pointed out from the outset, it is an entanglement of entities which end up also falling apart after the intrusion of the whites. Alam’s paper is an ecocritical reading of Achebe’s great novel to show how he wrote it from what would now be called an ecological consciousness to suggest that Africans learn to value the land that they dwell in and to point at the importance of respecting the natural world. Achebe wrote TFA, of course before the discipline called Ecocriticism was born, but it can be analysed and interpreted following the central tenets of this recent field of study.

Waseem and Mudasir for their part, assert that ecocriticism tries to make the bond between nature and the social world very strong and proclaims that nature should not be deteriorated at the cost of human materialistic demands. For that reason, ecocriticism and post-colonialism provide us the lenses to look deeper into the genesis of cultural and environmental degradation by the white rulers on the pretext of development and modernisation. Indeed, it is not just a matter of looking at the cultural and environmental consequences of the white man's intrusion into the African world with new realities that have upset the system in place. Our study goes beyond, as it lays emphasis on the relationship between cultural and environmental degradation. Behind the falling apart, there is that symbol of interconnectedness between nature and culture. As the Igbo people lose their identities, there is also deterioration in their culture, and the degradation spreads to any other domain connected to their beings. So cultural degradation automatically leads to environmental degradation as well as the deterioration of all human values. This nature-culture interconnection is also perceptible in Abou'ou's *Lettre à Tita*.

The Environment and Culture in Abou'ou's *Lettre à Tita*

Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou'ou is author of 09 literary works on African culture. The set of information about her life reveal that she is particularly concerned by the preservation of African cultural value and the environment. She also grew up in her country, Cameroon, where her cultural environment shaped her identity. It is therefore not surprising that, as a writer, she denounces and protests against the negative impact of modernity and globalisation on ancestral Africa.

Abou'ou's *Lettre à Tita* is an epistolary novel written in two volumes. The first volume is made up of two chapters that give an overview of the novel setting while the second volume is the letter proper. It is important to mention that both volumes are under study for this dissertation. The novel belongs to a recent wave of postcolonial literature and lays emphasis on African cultural values, identity, modernity, globalisation, environmental crisis to mention only these few. The story can be historically situated between the pre-colonial and the post-colonial periods.

The first volume starts with a prologue in which Tita's death is announced through a traditional instrument (tom-tom):

Grand-père Tita est mort cette nuit. Il avait cent vingt-trois (123) ans, le dernier survivant d'une génération lointaine. L'homme qui, jusqu'à cet instant, était le garant des valeurs essentielles de la communauté Zilan, venait d'entamer la route vers l'au-delà pour rejoindre ses ancêtres. Le repère historique de tous les fils et filles du village, et même de la contrée, venait de tomber. Il laisse derrière lui : 15 épouses, 93 enfants, 184 petits-fils, 83 arrière-petits-fils et 28 arrière-arrière-petits-fils. (Vol. 1, 21)

Grandfather Tita died last night. He was one hundred and twenty-three years old, the last survivor of a remote generation. The man, who up to now was the guarantor of the essential values of the Zilan community, had just started his journey to the world beyond in order to meet his ancestors. The historic landmark of all the sons and daughters of the village and even the land had just fallen. He leaves behind him 15 wives, 93 children, 184 grandchildren, 83 great-grandchildren and 28 great-great-grandchildren.

With this announcement the narrator introduces the reader to a traditional realm where both the classic means of communication used and the message transmitted are pregnant with a genuine symbiosis between human beings and nature. The story takes place in Zilan-Village, a fictive place which is a metonymy of Cameroon and even a mirror of the traditional African society. A place referred to several times in the novel as “cette bourgade enfouie dans la forêt équatoriale” (A large village buried away in the equatorial forest) (23). According to Eyenga Onana's article, the setting of LAT inscribes the novel in the Ekang culture. Also called “Les seigneurs de la forêt” (“the lords of the forest”), and descendants of the so-called Pahouin group (Beti, Fang, Bulu), the Ekang pay particular attention and scrupulous respect to the habits and customs that govern their lives and underpin their thousand-year-old tradition (72).

The first volume of LAT is a nostalgic depiction of the daily atmosphere before the intrusion of foreign habits and customs at a time when man was still living in harmony with the natural environment. From the first paragraph of the novel, Zilan-village is displayed as:

(...) l'endroit où la nature et l'homme vivaient encore en symbiose, là où l'être humain savait encore communiquer avec les arbres et les animaux, où l'environnement n'avait pas encore besoin d'une cohorte de grandes lois protectrices pour assurer son épanouissement et sa survie. (23)

(...) the place where nature and men still lived in symbiosis, where human beings still knew how to communicate with trees and animals, where the environment did not yet need a cohort of great protective laws to secure its blooming and survival.

This statement depicts Zilan-village as a place where the preservation and conservation of the environment were a lifestyle. Villagers were preserving the environment on their own initiative without the need to be forced to do so.

Like TFA, LAT highlights a perfect relationship between men, their culture and their environment. Here also, cultural habits naturally protect and preserve nature. Natural equilibrium is maintained because Zilanese innately value their environment; they know how to treat nature with care as it is part of them. According to Fame Ndong in his preface, the author Abou'ou does not deprive her reader of the imaginary universe of this small village by taking him between the divine, cosmic, hydraulic, human, animal and vegetal worlds. For him, "l'auteur fait prendre conscience de (...) la richesse qui est offerte aux enfants de l'Afrique: une vie saine et plus simple proche de la nature. Une vie en or, l'or vert c'est la forêt sublime où l'auteur promène son esprit. Un vert qui donne sa valeur culturelle à l'encolure qui enrobe le texte entier" (The author raises awareness of ... the wealth offered to the children of Africa: a healthy and simpler life close to nature. A golden life, the green gold which is the sublime forest where the author takes round her mind. A green colour that gives its cultural value to the neckline that wraps up the whole text) (13). Fame Ndong in this way identifies in Abou'ou's novel a perfect mingling of the preciousness of the environment with cultural value.

Edima, Tita's grandson, is at the same time the main character and the narrator of the major part of the story. In the first chapter of the novel (Vol. 1), there is an unidentified and omnipresent narrator who describes the authentic universe of Zilan-Village in Tita's time. The said description is interspersed with drawings which perfectly illustrate Zilanese' lifestyle i.e. their cultural values, customs, habits and natural environment to name only these few. The first drawing shows Zilan-village in all its natural beauty and charm. The following drawings represent a *Hunting scene* (n° 3), a *Scene of hoop net fishing* (n° 4), a *Scene of dam fishing* (n° 5), a *Foodstuff farm* (n° 6), a *Cocoa farm* (n° 7), and a *Poster illustrating perfect harmony among animals and inhabitants* (n° 8). Those images permit to see Zilanese in their daily activities communicating and living in symbiosis with nature.

In this first part of the novel there is also the intrinsic norm of respecting nature as a major symbol of the relationship between man and nature. This is exemplified with the story of women who went to a river in the forest to quench their desire of eating fish; but they were frightened by a heavy thunderstorm that they considered to be the wrath of gods. However,

the narrator concludes that it was just a natural phenomenon since nature has its laws that must be known and respected.

Besides, respect for the elders is another fundamental law. The narrator tells funny scenes experienced by Kiki, a young driver and son of the region, who has the only vehicle to transport Zilanese over long distances. Therefore, he is automatically commissioned by elderly people who cannot travel to town for lack of identity cards or inclusive tasks.

Les courses se reduisaient à l'achat du sel de cuisine, du savon, du fil à tresser pour les femmes ou du pétrole lampant et d'autres petits besoins quotidiens à satisfaire (...) le pauvre conducteur qui ne bénéficiait d'aucun centime en guise de frais de commission, se retrouvait le plus souvent victime d'incompréhensions de toute sorte, voire d'accusations de détournement d'argent et même d'escroquerie. C'était des scènes assez cocasses car, la règle d'or étant la loi du plus fort, le plus fort à Zilan-village était toujours l'aîné. Dès qu'on était accusé par une personne âgée, on était tout simplement très mal parti. (LAT. Vol.1, 25-26)

The purchases were limited to buying salt for cooking, soap, plaiting thread for women or paraffin oil and many other daily needs to satisfy (...) the poor driver who did not get a penny as commission fees, more often found himself accused of embezzlements and even swindling. There were funny scenes because the golden rule was the law of the strongest, and the strongest in Zilan-village was always the elder person. Once you were accused by an elderly person, you were simply off to a very bad start.

Zilan-village in Tita's time is a typical representation of the great Africa, pure, authentic with of course ancestral African traditional values. Each element of the environment has its place and plays its role in being an active part of a complementary whole.

The second chapter of this first volume brings in Edima, who from the top of his 67 years decides to share the nostalgic memories of his childhood, when Tita was still alive, with his six children who did not know their great-grandfather. Edima tells them several stories among which that of Pa Ojo who was warned by his brother Pa Koulou to stay in his farm because the tax collectors were in the village, waiting for him. A story which illustrates love and solidarity existing among brothers in an authentic African community. The attractive part of it is the traditional instrument, a kind of drum (tom-tom) used by Pa Koulou to communicate the information. Edima explains to his children that: "Notre cher Tita nous apprenait dès le bas âge à décoder le message du tam-tam. L'annonce d'un deuil au village, l'arrivée d'un étranger, ou encore la simple invitation d'un individu du village, étaient clairement decodées par nous à travers les versets du tam-tam" (Our beloved Tita taught us

right from childhood how to decode the message of the tomtom. The announcements of a death in the village, the arrival of a stranger, or the simple invitation of an individual of the village were clearly decoded by us through the verses of the tomtom) (65-66). At Edima's time the tomtom which is a traditional tool made from the elements of nature was also a communication tool. From childhood Zilanese were initiated to the specific use of this means of communication. It was important for them to decode the messages of the tomtom in order to communicate — give or receive information — about natural and other events.

Still in this part of the novel, Tita is described as a living symbol of the harmony between man and the environment:

Notre cher Tita était le garant de la tradition. Il était le maître d'œuvre de tous les rites traditionnels organisés dans le village. Il jouissait du privilège d'une grande complicité avec les forces de la nature qu'il affectionnait considérablement. Pour lui, tous les éléments constitutifs de la nature avaient un rôle important à jouer et devaient être respectés et préservés. On le trouvait régulièrement entrain d'adresser la parole à un arbre, à l'eau, aux étoiles, au soleil ou à un animal (...) Il savait également réclamer à cette nature le bénéfice de cette complicité. C'est ainsi que Tita pouvait guérir plusieurs maladies grâce aux plantes, écorces tirées de la sylvie équatoriale. (63)

Our beloved Tita was the guarantor for tradition. He was the foreman of all the traditional rites organised in the village. He enjoyed the privilege of a great complicity with the forces of nature that he was considerably fond of. To him all the elements of nature had an important role to play and had to be respected and protected. He was regularly met talking to a tree, to water, to stars, to the sun or to an animal (...) He also knew how to obtain from nature the benefits of that complicity. This is how Tita could cure several diseases thanks to plants and tree barks from the equatorial forest.

Tita is the illustration of the perfect communion with nature, a vision of life that he advocates. Throughout his life, he respected and cherished his environment as he was totally convinced that trees, plants, animals, water, sky, stars were also living beings and not mere environmental elements to be used or exploited for human beings' benefit. Tita therefore believed in a complementary relationship between man and nature. He worked in collaboration with trees and plants to cure several diseases.

Yet, Tita did not only embody or personify this cheerful blend of culture and environment but he also made sure to transmit, especially to his grand-children, all the ancestral knowledge he had accumulated. As Edima points out: "Notre cher Tita, soucieux du devenir de la communauté après lui, utilisait tous les moyens qu'il détenait pour transmettre

toutes ces connaissances ancestrales qu'il avait capitalisées" (Our dear Tita, concerned about the future of the community after him, used all the means he had to transmit all this ancestral knowledge that he had capitalised) (63). So during the school holidays, Tita gathered all the little children to pass on this ancestral knowledge orally. He knew that to preserve our mentalities, we had to transmit them to younger generations. We can read that "Notre cher Tita nous a appris également à comprendre le langage des oiseaux, à identifier les différentes phases de l'évolution des arbres, à reconnaître les variations des saisons et à définir des activités à mener selon la saison en cours" (Our beloved Tita has also taught us how to understand the language of the birds, to identify the different phases of the evolution of trees, to recognise the changes of seasons and to define the activities to carry out according to the current seasons") (64). Therefore they were able to know in advance if they could expect production; knowledge transmitted to them by the wise Tita. His ultimate goal in passing on this knowledge to younger generations was to maintain it. There was a question that the said knowledge of the elements of the ecosystem and the way of living in harmony with nature would not fade over time but rather be passed on as a legacy from generation to generation.

At the end of volume 1, Edima is disappointed and sad at the new face of Zilan-village. He decides to do something, to inform Tita about what the village has become. He therefore resolves to write a letter to Tita.

As aforesaid, the second volume of the novel is the letter proper. Edima begins his letter with his motivation for writing it: to inform Tita that the operating mechanisms he has installed in Zilan-village are on rout since his death. Edima who is shocked by the new realities brought by modernism complaints about deforestation, rich people come from town with money and promise to build schools, health centers, and tarred roads in compensation they cut all the big trees in the forest to sell them at high prices in faraway countries. Added to that, game trade also empties the forest and there are no longer wild animals. This brings about starvation and other wrong behaviours such as egoism.

As Edima writes:

Sais-tu, Tita, que la pêche est presque finie, les rivières n'ont plus d'eau ? On nous parle de plusieurs choses entre autres: le réchauffement climatique, la destruction de la couche d'ozone, les émissions de gaz à effet de serre (...) Plusieurs lois sont élaborées pour protéger les forêts, les rivières, les animaux, les poissons (...) Les scientifiques disent que c'est pour éviter une catastrophe humanitaire qui se prépare. Tita le soleil planifie quitter son antre afin de nous infliger une correction pour le non-respect et l'exploitation à outrance des

éléments de la nature. Ici à Zilan-village, nous subissons déjà ce soleil de plus en plus ardent. (Vol.2, 25)

Do you know, Tita, that fishing is almost over, and rivers no longer have water? They tell us many things among which: global warming, the destruction of the ozone layer, the emissions of greenhouse gases (...) Many laws are elaborated to defend the forests, rivers, animal, fishes (...) Scientists say that it is to avoid a humanitarian disaster in preparation. Tita the sun is planning to come to inflict on us a correction because of the disrespect and the excessive exploitation of the elements of nature. Here at Zilan-village, we already suffer from that sun which is lashing more and more.

Here, Abou'ou lays emphasis on the dangerous consequences of overexploiting the environmental resources. Global warming leading to climate change, the destruction of the ozone layer, emissions of greenhouse gases are nowadays recurrent concepts. Our novelist points out these new realities as emanating from the excessive exploitation of natural elements. These natural elements are thus inflicting a punishment to men.

In addition, a new culture of modernity is operational at Zilan-village. The villagers have changed their customs, habits, beliefs, ways of life in order to adopt new behaviours and this change is not without consequences for both nature and human beings. The banks of all the big rivers are fatally narrowing, soils have become resistant even to fertilisers because villagers have integrated new farming methods, and in their thirst to earn a lot of money, they use fertilisers in an uncontrolled way. This has physical damage and disastrous consequences on the Zilanese' health since they have also abandoned traditional medicine to focus exclusively on modern medicine. Thus, babies are born with diabetes, cancer, renal or cardiac insufficiency; children are sick all the time; women rarely have more than five deliveries because they are exhausted; mothers no longer know how to use the barks of trees, herbs and other traditional medicines to prevent or cure children's illnesses. This failure thus gives birth to what Edima calls globalisation illnesses.

Edima also denounces the depravity of moral standards through incest, paedophilia, and homosexuality that people tolerate and even try to justify. He decried the death of traditional medicine, the apparition of new sicknesses, alcoholism, mourning ceremonies which are now occasions to show off, dishonesty that is established as the norm and one of the worst things, the traditional tribunal no longer exists. There is no longer a traditional entity that enforces order and punishes those who do not respect the laws of nature among others.

Obviously, when men are not judged and condemned for their wrongdoings, they can only end up living as they want without any fear or respect for nature.

In his analysis of the novel, Eyenga Onana also examines the great changes in the modernised Zilan-village. According to him, Edima points to the incongruities of a modernity that has established a hard jurisdiction based on the law: “tous les problèmes sont portés devant les autorités publiques. Même les différends qui opposent les frères de même mère se règlent devant ces inconnus ” (All problems are brought before the public authorities. Even disputes between brothers of the same mother are settled before these strangers) (LAT Vol. 2, 38). The main complaint that Edima has concerning modernity, coupled with globalisation, is that children’s rights lose all sense of logic. As a result, children can now report their parents to strangers and be found right. In his rhetorical questions, Edima, who considers this to be a sacrilege, expresses his dismay: “Leur logique est délirante. Ils traitent des problèmes de père et fils et donnent même souvent raison au dernier. Un fils doit-il avoir raison devant son père ? Est-ce ce que tu nous as appris ?” (Their logic is crazy. They deal with the problems of father and son, and often rule in favour of the latter. Should a son be right in front of his father? Is that what you taught us?) (ibid).

LAT is Abou’ou’s in-depth investigation about a modern Africa that seems to be trapped as it was during the colonial era. It is a voice that spins to shake up a continent that is losing its culture and authenticity in the name of global construction. A process in which Africans put aside their identity, which is supposed to be their contribution, to become mere receptors of new cultures. Volume 2 of LAT presents the Zilanese bruised by ill-adapted political and economic models. Their former wealth seems to have been buried with Tita who was its living representation. After an undeniable feast of picturesque clichés of a dying Africa with its ancestral values on the brink of extinction in the first volume; the second one comes as a serious reminder of the urgent need to raise awareness and promote the development of an Africa which should pull itself together against degradation. Edima’s depiction of Zilanese’ new environmental realities shows the level of disconnection between man and nature and its consequences which are already noticeable in all spheres.

In his already-mentioned article, Eyenga Onana comments on the mainspring of Edima’s letter. Following his analysis:

Les raisons qui poussent le jeune Edima à écrire une lettre à Tita s’inscrivent dans un registre de requêtes litaniques. Affaibli par le vice du mauvais comportement, Zilan-village est frappé de sclérose. Par conséquent, son

développement piétine. Les indicateurs caractérisant cette régression irréversible sont, entre autres, l'irrespect des us et coutumes qui maintenaient le village sur le droit chemin. (69)

The young Edima's reasons for writing a letter to Tita are in keeping with a litany of requests. Weakened by the vice of bad behaviour, Zilan-village is stricken with sclerosis. As a result, its development is stagnant. The indicators which characterise this irreversible regression include disrespect for the habits and customs that have kept the village on the right path.

From this comment, we can observe that Zilan-village's landscape is as ailing as its cultural identity. A common degradation has moved from their behaviours to their surroundings. As Eyenga Onana later on adds : "Le texte dépeint le visage d'une société décapitée, en proie aux faillites comportementales diverses. Rongés par des vices tels que l'égoïsme, les hommes tournent le dos aux valeurs nobles qui promeuvent l'altruisme" (The text depicts the face of a beheaded society, plagued by various behavioural shortcomings. Riddled with vices such as selfishness, men turn their backs on noble values that promote altruism) (63).

From Eyenga Onana's point of view, Abou'ou's epistolary novel, which is neither radically anti-modernist nor totally set in the past, outlines the trajectories of an emerging country ready to make its contribution in order to build a fair globalisation that matches neither with the assimilation of some nor the ostracisation of others, but one that bases its mode of action on fruitful partnerships (*Romanica Silesiana* 78).

Subsequent to the analyses of both novels under study, there are some similarities and differences to closely examine in this last part of our chapter. As concerns the features linked to the relationship between the environment and culture, TFA is similar to LAT.

The first point of similitude is Achebe's and Abou'ou's similar depiction of a community in which human beings are not just at one with nature but entangled with it. For each one of these novels, there is a connection between human beings, their culture and their environment, a connection depicted at almost every level of the enunciative framework. As matters of fact, LAT represents Ekang culture, that of those who are also called "the lords of the forest" and TFA is set in Umuofia which means people of the forest. Besides, the rises and falls of both fictional places Umuofia and Zilan-village all depend on nature and cultural values which are applied. As long as the laws that protect nature constitute intrinsic cultural values, everything happens to be in a normal order but at the specific time when another lifestyle or worldview is integrated or adopted in those temples of nature, things fall apart. In

the case of Umuofia, the disrupting factor is colonisation and in Zilan-village it is modernity coupled with globalisation.

Another similarity is the cultural constraint to respect the environment that must not be used to satisfy personal interests. Nature is depicted by both novelists as not only useful to heal through barks of trees and herbs and to provide food through fertile lands, but also as an instrument to punish people for their wrongdoings. On the one hand in TFA, there is an evil forest, a place that embeds sinister forces and powers of darkness, where the Igbo clan buried all those who died of the evil diseases. On the other hand, in LAT Vol. 2, Edima considers global warming as the sun planning to come out of its lair to inflict on Zilanese a correction because of the disrespect and the excessive exploitation of the elements of nature.

TFA and LAT also share some cultural beliefs and superstitions on how to take care of the land so as to have good harvests. For instance, in LAT we can read :

Certaines attitudes étaient considérées comme garantissant la pousse de certaines plantes. C'est ainsi qu'on recommandait de ne pas adresser la parole à quelqu'un le matin où on devait semer le melon, l'igname, ou le concombre. Il était également recommandé de lancer la houe par terre en direction de la parcelle travaillée dans la journée, chaque fois qu'on arrêta le travail journalier. Il était interdit de pointer du doigt les tiges d'aubergine ou de piment, on les désignait plutôt par un hochement de tête. (Vol. 1, 44)

Some attitudes were considered as assuring the sprouting of some plants. That is why it was recommended not to say a word to anyone on the morning one had to plant melon, yam or cucumber. It was also recommended to throw the hoe in the direction of the plot of land cultivated during the day; every time one stopped his/her daily work. It was forbidden to point fingers at the stems of aubergines or pepper; one should instead designate them with a nod.

In the same way in TFA: "The Feast of the New Yam was held every year before the harvest began, to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers" (36). Also, in Umuofia, the forefathers "ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow" (30). This shows the importance of peace among elements of the ecosystem. Both Igbos and Zilanese in the traditional setup believe that they should honour and celebrate the earth and adopt some attitudes that will please it.

The respect of the ancestors, the environmental laws and cultural values established by the ancestors is advocated by both Achebe's and Abou'ou's novels. The ancestors are considered as guarantors of African traditions that convey a peaceful relationship between human beings and the nature surrounding them. So, disrespecting these traditions and nature is considered as a source of curses. The disappearance of revered old men and women also constitutes a threat to our culture, our identity and our environment.

However, there are some differences in Abou'ou's and Achebe's representations of the relationship between the environment and culture in their respective novels. The first contrast we will mention here is the style chosen by each novelist. While Achebe wrote TFA as a typical narrative novel, Abou'ou chose the epistolary style for her novel. Both authors convey their message with an undeniable artistry. However, the representation of Umuofia's natural and cultural riches by Achebe is enriched with traditional words, names, proverbs, songs and folktales that introduce the reader to the Igbo culture whereas in LAT there are fewer practical illustrations of traditional elements. It is worth noting that we acknowledge the presence of drawings which illustrate some natural and cultural elements; the names of the characters with traditional implication (Tita, Monetita, Edima, Koulou, Bit'a, Betilmenyu...); and of course the mention of "*Pkwem*" and "*olom*" as far as food is concerned but this remains limited as compared to the extensive demonstration of African rich linguistic repertoire found in TFA.

Also, the irrational exploitation of nature which is a consequence of the intrusion of another culture in both novels somehow differs on some points. TFA shows that in pre-colonial times, the mode of exploitation of natural resources was not harmful and did not disrupt the balance of the ecosystem. It was a cultural value to be respected. But by the end of the novel, though the reader could guess the changes that the colonial system would bring with its new world conception, this disruption is not clearly stated in the novel. However, Abou'ou in LAT presents the situation before and after the arrival of strangers along with their modernity. Therefore, the reader can observe how the Zilanese moved from protecting and respecting their environment and culture to harmful attitudes such as deforestation and wild poaching which are against the law of preserving the equilibrium of the elements of nature that the people once obeyed. This suggests that while Achebe gives the responsibility to the reader to guess the extent of the situation when things fall apart, Abou'ou, through Edima's letter to Tita already reveals what happened.

A final point of comparison that can be located somewhere between similarities and contrasts is the relationship between the environment and culture from Achebe's and

Abou'ou's respective viewpoints. While Achebe focuses on the impact of culture, identity and traditional values to bring out their incidence on the attitude of man towards the environment, Abou'ou emphasises the importance of making the bond between the environment and the social world very strong so that Nature should not be deteriorated at the cost of human materialistic demands. Thus, we can understand why the evolution of Achebe's novel is more focused on his main character while Abou'ou's LAT concentrates more on the surrounding environment than on the characters' adventures. This also proves the importance of using both cultural studies and ecocriticism as theoretical framework for this research.

In a nutshell, it is verifiable that ecocriticism and cultural studies (including postcolonial theory) are distinct fields of study. While one deals with the environment the other deals with human beings. However, there is a meeting point between them since one cannot discard the fact that colonisation influenced both people and places. When one region is colonised, it means the whole biosphere of that region is colonised. As a matter of fact, TFA and LAT both represent the intimate relationship that people had with the natural surroundings before things started falling apart respectively because of colonisation and globalisation. According to Manyaka Toko, "espousing an author's worldview implies that his/her text appeals to the readers' experiences, interest and goals" (*Higher Education Studies* 15). Therefore, though there are some differences in the way both novelists exhibit the relationship between the environment and culture in the novel under study, this chapter has demonstrated that the degradation of some African cultural values goes *pari passu* with that of the environment. The next chapter will discuss the differences between African and Western perceptions of the environment and culture.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN AND WESTERN PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

People's perceptions of notions and concepts are generally influenced by their mentalities and ways of life. Environmental degradation is a global issue but it is addressed differently as we move from one place to another. Quoting Julian Steward, Michael Joseph Francisconi mentions in his work "Cultural Ecology" (2006) that "each society has its own specific historical movement through time (...) cultural ecology is the adaptation by a unique culture modified historically in a distinctive environment" (*Encyclopedia of Anthropology* 629). Francisconi comments that with this definition, Steward outlines a creative process of cultural change. He adds that "culture, according to Steward, is a means of adaptation to environmental needs" (*ibid*). In this regard, this chapter examines while comparing them, African and Western perceptions of the interrelationship between nature and culture based on our corpus. Taking into account that as environmental needs are not the same everywhere, so too are not people's responses to the environmental crisis and the degradation of cultural values.

Everywhere, human beings affect their environment but people with different lifestyles create different kinds of changes. According to Goldenweiser, as culture progresses it makes different uses of the same environment, and different cultures make different uses of similar or identical environments. In all such cases the environment alone cannot be held accountable for the discrepant results. The environment absorbs culture and becomes saturated with it, and while it continues to be an active factor it is no longer the environment alone which acts, but the environment plus culture (*American Journal of Sociology* 631). In this view, Lisbeth Witthøfft Nielsen states that "an approach to the concept of nature that has become more and more common in the recent years is that nature is a socially constructed concept that can be understood only within a specific social context" (32). As matters of fact, urban and industrial societies usually have the greatest effects on the environment, using great amounts of resources to fuel their activities. However, this does not exclude non-industrialised societies from environmental crisis; it is a global issue which is only perceived and tackled in different ways.

From the above it appears that nature-culture interrelationship takes into consideration the historical background as well as geographical and social contexts. All human beings rely on the environment and natural resources to satisfy their basic needs. However, as stated by Nielsen “there is no consensus when it comes to defining the value of non-human nature, because it depends on our perception of nature and its relation to Man” (*Global Bioethics* 31). People have the greatest impact on their environment in the ways they exploit natural resources and dispose of waste. When these activities are not managed carefully, they can lead to environmental degradation, and the damage affect people, animals, plants, waterways and every other part of the natural world. Different human cultures have varying effects on their environments. Some cultures have little environmental impact while others have a greater incidence. This might be due to the fact that in some societies, the local culture and laws have emphasised environmental protection, and in others this has not been a concern. The results of these opposed tendencies are often obvious: for instance, some areas have low pollution despite their industrial activity while other areas with similar activity are highly polluted. It all depends on how people perceive and consider their environment.

In their volume on “Redefining Nature” (1996), Ellen and Fukui observe that “one of the main sources of data on how humans perceive and interact with the environment is the language we use to describe it and the categories we infer from this” (qtd. in Pannell 5). This said, science and scientists have an important role to play in effecting a transformation in perception and values. In the Western context, professional scientific discourse represents a powerful and pervasive framework for describing and interpreting human action, and for understanding the world we live in. Yet, modern science offers more than just description. It provides the procedures for the production of nature. As Ellen points out, scientific productions of nature are at the “heart of environmental politics, development and conservation practice” (*Loc. cit.*).

Similarly, literature and culture have an imperative role to fight contemporary environmental issues. As illustrated by Bahuguna, literature played a pivotal role in giving rise to the Chipko Movement (1973 – 1980), which grew as a non-violent resistance to save the green cover of Himalayan regions of Uttar Pradesh. The native villagers initiated this movement by ‘embracing’ the trees that were chosen to be cut down by the axes of the contractors. The word *chipko* literally means ‘a command to embrace’, but the nature of this peaceful protest suggests that it was indeed a ‘suggestion to embrace’ the trees (Dattaray and Sharma 13).

A combination of significant drought and poor farming practices contributed to the Dust Bowl of the Great Plains region in the United States in the 1930s. Even today, large farms and livestock operations produce runoff that pollutes water sources. As the Industrial Revolution prevailed, most people in America and Great Britain had little understanding of the way industry and its waste affected the environment. In a periodical article titled “As China Roars, Pollution Reaches Deadly Extremes” published in New York Times (26 August 2007), Kann Joseph and Jim Yardley state that today the types and severity of pollution vary greatly around the world. Some of this can be attributed to the kinds of activities and resources available in an area, and some to cultural attitudes and practices regarding the environment. A vivid example is the extensive pollution produced by industrial activities in modern China. This highlights some differences between developing countries and the West. In China and other developing nations, many residents do not consider pollution as a problem, or they consider it to be less serious than other observers do. Others argue that today’s developed countries attained their development status by creating pollution; therefore developing countries deserve that same right.

According to Kann and Yardley, countries such as the United States have learned from experience that unregulated pollution eventually causes serious problems that are expensive to remedy. Citizens and regulation demanded that industry produce less pollution and that contamination be cleaned up. After many years of living under anti-pollution legislation, Americans and citizens of many other countries have come to expect low levels of pollution and lower-impact methods of logging, mining and manufacturing. Developing nations like China are already seeing the effects of environmental destructions in rising rates of diseases. Already, many residents of these countries are demanding that their governments protect them from dangerous pollution and slow the environmental destruction that is consuming vital resources.

As stated in the comment of an event held at the University of Sydney on “The Re-(E)mergence of Nature in Culture” (23 February 2017), large scale degradation of the environment and the threat of irreversible global natural change illuminate the inextricable and complex links between the natural and the cultural, challenging the wedge Western philosophy, religion, politics and practices has driven between the two. Attention is refocusing on the de-deification of the human, and a merging of nature within culture to ensure long-term survival for both. Some suggest it is timely to remove human from centre

stage and to accept that the cultural does not sit outside of the natural, but it is instead deeply embedded, immersed and merged in and with it.

Such an immersion is integral to many indigenous peoples' culture, cosmology and philosophy. Nature and culture have been and are combined, entwined, and interwoven. The links between nature and culture are strong and inseparable. Accordingly, Australian Aboriginal cultures are deeply rooted in and engaged with the lands, soils, waterways, seas, animals, and plants lives. In the traditions of the Aboriginal peoples, human beings are part of the continuum of living and non-living components of the blue planet. It is an indisputable fact, so they can no more live outside of nature than they can outside their own being.

Nielsen argues that the Western concept of nature can be described through four basic categories namely:

1. Nature is the physical whole, everything that constitutes the world, i.e. the physical elements and the "cosmic" laws or the laws of nature.
2. Nature is that which is not created by Man, or manipulated by Man.
3. Nature is the essence of a thing or a living being, in essence:
 - Nature is what makes a human body human and a tree a tree (The physical state).
 - Nature is what makes a person that specific person (The inner/ mental state).
4. Nature is what constitutes this world in its difference from others, in essence:
 - Nature stands in contrast to the supernatural world (the religious sphere);
 - Nature is what is common/natural in contrast to mutations/unnatural.

According to her, what is specific to these four categories is firstly that they do not seem to contradict each other. Then, although the language changes and nature is described in new terms, due to cultural changes and knowledge obtained by science, the core of the reference leads back to at least one of the four mentioned categories rather than forming new categories. In short, at least one of these categories is always represented whenever we refer to the concept in a Western cultural and historical context (33).

It is also important to draw attention to Christianity's influence in the Western cultural and historical context. Within Christianity the concept of nature does not always equate with good. Instead human nature becomes dualistic in itself: the original human nature is good, since God created it, but human nature is considered as being bad/evil because of the fall of

Man. Nevertheless, non-human nature can only be considered as good by virtue of its status as created by God, but not in itself. One cannot ignore the fact that it may be this tradition of “nature” as good (by the virtue of its creation) that lies behind our present moral references to the ‘natural’ as equivalent to “the good” or “the preferable” (35). This shows that nature from the genesis is considered to be pure and pristine but human beings’ depraved actions and behaviours ended up causing environmental degradation.

In the present Western cultural and political context, the concept of nature plays a central role in the debate about new technologies. Here, the concept of nature appears as two-fold, namely as the object/phenomenon discussed in order to be protected, and as a normative frame of reference, where different kinds of interests play a central role for how the ‘nature of nature’ is communicated. The problem is that, though we refer to the same internationally-recognised principles, such as the precautionary principle and the principle of sustainable development, we still do not agree about the very essence of nature. The disagreement is often explained with reference to two different worldviews. On the one hand is the opinion that Man is the ethical creature living in and from nature and that nature is first and foremost a resource available to us so that we can outlive our own nature, as rational beings. On the other hand, is the idea of Man as part of nature and as the creature responsible for the wellbeing of nature, since it is Man who, because of his rationality and technical skills, is capable of destroying his own foundation of life. These views of nature represent the classical clash between the anthropocentric worldview and the bio-centric worldview. However, the distinction between these two views should be seen with some reservations, since Man's relation to his environment (non-human nature) is not as clear as the theoretical distinction between the worldviews (36).

Nielsen infers that in present Western ethical debates, to make people understand what is meant when referring to “nature”, they systematise or rather split non-human ‘nature’ into different boxes; for instance habitats, ecosystems, biosphere. Perceptions of nature can change from situation to situation, depending on which “box” the protection of nature is discussed within. One might consider nature as robust when it comes to the impact of releasing genetically-modified plants into the environment but not in the case of global warming. Thus, each individual human being may have several perceptions of nature and these perceptions are independent of whether one represents an anthropocentric or a bio-centric worldview.

With reference to the various aspects of Western perception enunciated in this subsection of the work, it appears that there are a lot of theories and principles which diversify

the meaning of nature and culture even within the Western context. In the chapter “No Nature, No Culture: The Hagen Case” of her book titled *Nature, Culture and Gender* (1980), Marilyn Strathern’s observes that: “[N]o single meaning can in fact be given to nature or culture in Western thought; there is no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts” (Qtd. in Pannell 71). This statement shows that the Western perception does not have unified or harmonised meanings given to nature and culture. Both concepts do not refer just to a path with two inputs but rather to combined terms that gives way to multiple inputs.

As concerns the African perception of the relationship between the environment and culture, we are mostly drawing from Vimbai Chaumba Kwashirai’s work entitled “Environmental History of Africa” (2014), our first concern is to keep track of African environmental history in relationship to culture. According to Kwashirai, African environmental historiography is rich in lessons about the dangers of preservationist and desiccation rhetoric, and the tendency of outside technocratic authorities and representatives to misrepresent Africans and their landscapes. The focus on instrumental discourses of erosion and deforestation generates difficulties involving making normative judgments about environmental change. Western observations and notions about environmental degradation have been subjected to close ecological and cultural analyses in some of the literature. African environmental history also offers innovative models for thinking about disease and public health as imperial, environmental and local problems. Tying together many of these themes is what defines African environmental historiography because the history of human land management on the continent is deep, complex, and non-linear. Degradation narratives must be treated with great scepticism as they often have served colonial and post-colonial critiques of traditional African land use practices. The relative lack of traditional historical sources notably written documents has meant that African environmental historians often have relied on scientific, archaeological, and linguistic methods to reconstruct the continent’s pre-colonial environmental history. In reconstructing the environmental history of past land use, African environmental historians ought to employ a deeper time frame in spite of the methodological limitations. It is time to pay more attention to the pre-colonial environmental history of Africa rather than to render it as just a prelude (*UNESCO - Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* Par. 2).

Regardless of the overarching focus on the intrusive colonial and capitalist systems in African environmental history, forces that also imparted foreign conservationist ideas and practices, there are regional differences, strengths and weaknesses in African environmental

scholarship. West African literatures are at the forefront in investigations of indigenous knowledge and practices, and in historicising strategies for mitigating drought and famine since the region was least affected by settler colonialism. East African environmental historians have been preoccupied with demography and disease histories, especially given the strong evidence of population decline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. North Africa has the longest history of imperial rule stretching to Roman times. Southern African scholars have lagged behind on these themes but are strong on the invasive reorganization by settlers of African land use and wildlife conservation. Great attention has been given to the environmental policies pursued by southern African colonial and settler states. A common thread and shared emphasis in African environmental historiography is African resistance to a wide range of unpopular outside environmental interventions, whether by the state or other actors. Also there have been more continuities than changes in the key issues examined by African environmental historians over the last half of the 20th century. A political economy approach dominates the writings emphasizing Africa's long-term exploitation and marginalisation in the global sphere (ibid).

Africans' perception of nature and culture interdependence can be seen through a key principle: that of preservation. Kwashirai notes that preservation is a model of environmental control in which natural forces can be destabilising and human interventions restorative. The history of national parks and wilderness areas shows that human intervention is involved in keeping these landscapes wild and for that matter much of what Africans read as wild has been the product of human management with far deeper roots. As a matter of fact, for several centuries African environmental management had been enhanced by the sacred grove tradition in which communities were forbidden or excluded from cutting vegetation – a prototype of modern national parks. Some African communities believed certain natural forests were inhabited by ancestral spirits and were therefore sacrosanct (UNESCO-EOFSS Par. 10).

The African political and religious elite played a significant and leading role in making and enforcing environmental regulations regarding consumption and conservation. Indigenous knowledge, spirit guardians and holy shrines have yet to be fully appreciated as a means through which ritually controlled ecosystems functioned. The ownership, allocation and control of land, forests and water resources all fell within the spiritual realm. For instance, many valuable trees were especially protected due to their food, timber, medicinal and other value and linkages with rainfall patterns and worship. The linkage explains why people never

removed large and fruit trees from fields, a concept which was criticised and banned by colonial agricultural extension workers.

The conservation of wild fauna was steeped in community-based rules, beliefs and taboos. The cultural practice of totems promoted game conservation. Ethnic groups, clans or kinships adopted an animal or bird as its totem. The totem acted as a “tag” a form of identity binding groups together in one large related family. The adopted species was neither harmed nor eaten by members of the group who believed in its medicinal value. Common totem species included; elephant, eland, buffalo, fish, and zebra. Totem beliefs also resulted from the intense admiration of wild game by Africans generally. Superstition also played a role in forest and game preservation. The hyena, owl and snakes were feared and viewed as agents of witches and sorcerers. Some revered lions acted as vehicles for spirits. Certain customary hunting laws were generally observed by hunting parties. As with forests, it was against custom to use fire to regenerate pastures, drive game or hunt during certain periods like the breeding season when animals raised their offspring. Yet, this does not imply that these rules were not infringed upon.

Resources were managed on a common property basis, either community or ethnically based. Land was generally communally owned by all people but vested in the king or chief who held it in trust of the people. Rulers oversaw the distribution and allocation of land to individuals for homesteads and plots. Pastures were also generally communally owned and used equally by all under a common property regime. Individual families retained usufruct rights on allocated land provided they did not display political disloyalty, migrate, commit a legal offence or violate conservation laws. Likewise, all trees, wildlife and water belonged to the whole community. Forests were viewed as wilderness, where all had equal access to collect the multiple forest products on which indigenous material culture was based. Core settlement areas and urban areas with denser populations made common property management vulnerable to deforestation and erosion. The resource shortages associated with high population densities created competition and tensions that local institutions and mechanisms often failed to resolve and could lead to a breakdown in local resource management. Peasants generally observed cultural values, fears and superstitions that deterred them from breaching laws pertaining to environmental control. The system of environmental management operated on clear taboos bearing strong conservation value.

From the preceding illustrations of beliefs, customs traditions and management system of resources, it appears that African cultural background had an incidence on its people's

attitudes towards environment. Their behaviours, positive or negative, were greatly influenced by how they conceive their environment in their cultures. Therefore it is not surprising that the degradation of cultural values has a tremendous impact on the environment preservation.

Based on a report titled “Nature and Culture Need Each Other” (12 February 2021) published on the website of Wageningen University and Research by the anthropologist Bas Verschuuren and his team, nature conservation is a Western concept that has been exported all over the world. Verschuuren explains that the first national parks were established in the United States, in a time in which indigenous people had to make way for protected nature and development. However this philosophy is outdated. Nature is still important for biodiversity conservation, but also for our identity and as we experience it in the current pandemic, our mental and spiritual health. This cannot be ignored in modern conservation.

Verschuuren and his team list six principles for an effective implementation of the preservation of nature:

- 1) Respect diversity
- 2) Build various networks
- 3) Ensure safety and inclusivity
- 4) Account for change
- 5) Recognise rights and responsibilities
- 6) Recognise nature-culture linkages.

From the above we can observe that all the principles imply dynamism and mutual acceptance despite the different viewpoints for our common good.

African and Western Perceptions of the Nature-Culture Relationship in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*

In TFA it is a certain fact that Europeans greatly influenced the lifestyle of Igbo society. This influence exposes Western perception of various domains and in particular their perception of the environment and culture which is our concern in this section. Things falling apart correspond to the part of the novel disclosing the sudden changes brought by the white missionaries with their new political structure and institutions. Those changes involve almost every aspect of Igbo society; from religion and culture to traditional beliefs and habits. This section takes into consideration the emphasis already laid, in the previous chapter, on

African's perception of nature as a part of human life. Therefore, the major focus will be on the Western perception which is intrinsically related and compared to the African view.

Achebe's TFA showcases African culture by displaying their customs, beliefs, rules and language. However, As Alam states, it is significant that the proverbs and the metaphors of the first part of the story begin to disappear as the whites make their presence felt in Umuofia. The proverbs that replace them are often from the tradition of the white colonisers. In one obviously ironical instance, we can read that Mr. Smith suspended a young converted Christian woman from church "for pouring new wine into old bottles" (185). The District Commissioner for his part uses an animal metaphor, but there is patently irony in his telling the clan men that if they played "any monkey tricks they would be shot" (207). The one noteworthy metaphor associated with the clan in the concluding chapters is, significantly, an animal one that is from everyday experience that has become folk wisdom, for one of the elders talk about their predicament as comparable "to a toad jumping in broad daylight" (182), a sure sign of desperation. (*Bhatter College Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 47). Achebe makes it clear that for the story-teller of a people who live in harmony with the environment, nature is the source of all the figures of speech necessary for their story-telling. This explains why the arrival of white men and their intrusion in Igbo land gave another twist to the way the story is told. The disconnection between the native people and nature is felt even in the language. The story-teller language exposes cultural degradation with an undeniable after-effect on environment.

To the Umuofians, nature in its bounty provides them with endless images which they use to weave their proverbs, metaphors and stories. To the whites the native mode of speech seems wasteful and decorative. This, at least, is what goes through the furious District Commissioner's mind when he is trying to find out where Okonkwo has disappeared and receives evasive answers, he thinks then: "one of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words" (206). There is a clash in almost every aspects of the encounter between Umuofians and white men. For the latter, culture is mainly their religion and educational system as opposed to nature-worship and animist practices which are part and parcel of Igbo culture. A new vocabulary is therefore put forward with the arrival of the whites, full of words and expressions related to Christian religion such as: Holy Communion, church, Lord's vineyard, Lord's holy, the Trinity and the Sacraments, Kingdom of God, slaying the prophets of Ball, seeds sown on a rocky soil or idolatrous crowd. This confirms the gap that exists between Europeans and Africans in their beliefs and ways of doing things.

Also, as pointed out by Lame Maatla Kenalemang in her dissertation entitled “*Things Fall Apart: an Analysis of Pre and Post-Colonial Igbo Society*” (2013), “the Europeans [hold] a Eurocentric view of the world; firmly believing European culture to be superior. Eurocentrism therefore perceives Europe as the core of civilisation and of humanity. Eurocentrism had racist tendencies which granted an inferior status to the non-whites”. This attitude can be pinpointed in various passages of Achebe’s novel. For instance, when the District Commissioner representing European administration in the land sent his sweet-tongued messenger to the leaders of Umuofia - Okonkwo and five other men - he peacefully but maliciously asks them to meet him in his headquarters. This summons closely follows their violent reaction to a sacrilege committed by Enoch, one of their brothers who has been converted into a zealous Christian. Finally, what was supposed to be a fair discussion to bring back peace turns to be a dictatorial judgement in which both parties are not given a neutral listening hear. The District Commissioner tells the six men that:

We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen. I have brought you here because you joined together to molest others, to burn people's houses and their place of worship. That must not happen in the dominion of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world. I have decided that you will pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries. You will be released as soon as you agree to this and undertake to collect that fine from your people. (194)

Through these words, the District Commissioner simply imposes a judgement instead of what was supposed to be a peaceful exchange. He affirms that the Queen of England rules the world and although they are not in England he firmly fines Okonkwo and his companions. This is a perfect illustration of the Eurocentric attitude, an administration that seeks to impose their laws and ways of doing even where they are strangers.

Overwhelmed by the white culture, the proverbs and the metaphors of the Igbos seem to suffer like the people themselves. No doubt because the District Commissioner is intent on straightening out the language and the narratives of these people as well as their politics, he resolves to title his account of his experience in the region, “The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of Lower Niger” (Achebe, TFA 209). But Achebe himself takes the opposite task in writing his tale on the way things fell apart for his country. His mission was to bring the land and its stories alive by using a vibrant narrative strategy dependent on indigenous story-telling traditions and techniques. As he puts it in his famous essay, “Colonialist Criticism”: “every literature must seek the things that belong unto its peace, must, in other words, speak of a

particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current, and the aspirations and destiny of its people” (Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments* 74). With this opinion Achebe draws attention to the differing socio/cultural-based conceptualisations of the environment and culture. Each global section is therefore responsible for voicing its opinions by contributing through creative writings and critical perspectives to the environmental debate; a strategy implemented by Achebe himself with his cultural and environmental writings on behalf of Africa.

TFA’s staging of two different and opposed perceptions is also the opportunity to assess the resulting consequences in the host country. We can note that changes brought by white men in Igbo land have two phases: a pacific one with the first missionary Mr. Brown and a rude one with Mr. Smith. While the first tried to restrain the excess of zeal of some of the members of his energetic flock, the second condemned openly this policy of compromise and accommodation. He claims his preference for a few number of consecrated and zealous Christians rather than an idolatrous crowd unworthy of the Lord’s Table. But Mr. Brown comes to be more respected even by the clan. He made friend with some of the great men as he frequently pays visits to the neighbouring villages where he had been presented with a carved elephant tusk, which was a sign of dignity and rank. His pacific debates with a certain great man called Akunna during which they learned more about their different behaviours, though neither of them succeeded in converting the other, brought Mr. Brown to the wise “conclusion that a frontal attack on [the Igbo religion] would not succeed. And so he built a school and a little hospital in Umuofia. He went from family to family begging people to send their children to his school” (181). Contrary to Mr. Brown, the Reverend James Smith, who replaced him when he had to return to England, was the Western counterpart of Okonkwo, “he saw things as black or white. And black was evil”; also, he seemed to see only through a reductive perspective based on the principle of puritan allegory where “the world was a battlefield in which the children of light were locked in mortal conflict with the sons of darkness” (184).

Regarding the interrelationship between culture and the environment in TFA, it is obvious that a degradation of cultural values automatically alters the preservation of the environment. With the intrusion of the Western vision, there is no more a harmonised respect and care for nature. Native people discover that they can use natural resources to make money and satisfy their needs. Tri Santoso et al. trace this change from eco-centrism to anthropocentrism in their essay, “The Relationship between Humans and Natural

Environment in *Luka Perempuan Asap* Novel by Nafi'ah Al-Ma'rab: Literature Ecocritics Review” (2020). They remind that human beings and nature initially had consistency and dependence, to create harmony and conformity in the human's mind and to generate sustainability or maintenance; but in the course of development and to meet personal survival, humans often make changes to nature. This results in the loss of native species, a decline in the quality of the environment, and even threatens the preservation and harmony of human life itself. To this effect, human beings and nature must follow the symbiosis of mutualism and the principle of dependence. The central concept of the ecological chain promotes harmony between humans and nature to achieve survival.

Likewise, DeLoughrey observes that “the post-colonial ecology of *Things Fall Apart* is evident in the way that language develops in a long historical relationship to a particular environment and culture” (qtd. in Waseem and Mudasir 437). Nature is an integral part of the Igbo culture; it is not as pronounced as the words referring to culture but they are in fact two sides of the same coin. However, in the name of development, the colonisers who do not value nature as well as Africans do, or did so far, destroyed the environmental resources like forests, hills, rivers etc. Constructing roads through the dense forests leads to the cutting of numerous trees, which ultimately affects the lives of wildlife species. The colonisers used their power and knowledge to dominate every field of African communities and deprived them of their own ways of thinking and living. They successfully robbed them of their riches and degraded their environment for their own material benefits.

As developed in the previous lines, one of the greatest influences on African perception of nature-culture relationship is economic. Among the new principles introduced by colonialism, the culture of earning money through natural resources particularly interests the Igbo: “the white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he has also built a trading store and for the first time palm oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia” (179). The fact that native people realise that they can make a lot of money from their agricultural production has also changed their ways of behaving and thinking; they start exploiting the land to enrich themselves.

In agreement with Alam, we think that Achebe's success as a novelist in TFA is also to show how the coming of imperialism had impacted adversely on the lives of people who had been dwelling in harmony with nature and how the coming of the whites had disturbed the balance achieved by the West Africans in their dealings with their environment. Through his narrative strategy, his use of time, and his mastery of language and deployment of

proverbs and metaphors, Achebe has succeeded in depicting the manner in which the community became troubled and the land became polluted with the advent of colonisation. By the time he concludes the novel we come to realise that the Igbo world had become traumatised and the complex ties forged between nature and society by the clan had become unsettled because of the actions of men like Mr. Brown and the District Commissioner (49).

TFA, apart from providing an evaluation of how the Igbo society conceives and interacts with the environment, also dramatises what the critic Ato Quayson calls “the struggle between an organic esthetic...indigenous to the culture and an esthetic...that comes with colonialism” (qtd. in Alam 48). Otherwise said, what is considered as “extra-literary” to the Western critic is intrinsic to the African writer, who because of the historical predicament and tradition draws material from the socio-political happenings around him or her (*Journal of English Studies* 41).

Additionally, reading TFA from an ecocritical perspective permits to show that Achebe was writing the novel in part to make his West African readers aware of the extent of the embeddedness of their forefathers in the environment. The way he conveys the rich connections between the Africans and their land can be illustrated through his writing and use of language. Equally, the extent of the damage in the relationship between Africans and their natural world caused by the advent of colonisation is another determinant factor in Achebe’s novel as well as his profound consciousness about the vital relationship the Africans must have to the natural world to make them whole again (Alam 40). TFA paints the picture of a culture where the environment is praised and placed at the centre of human life. The African view, through colonisation, collides and conflicts with the Western perception of the environment as a treasure to be exploited. The white men certainly do not question the priceless value of natural resources, but they consider them as opportunities to be exploited for the benefit of human beings. This difference in the African and Western perceptions of the man-nature relationship proceeds in Abou’ou’s *Lettre à Tita*.

African and Western Perceptions of the Nature-Culture Relationship in Abou’ou’s *Lettre à Tita*

Most writings on African environmental and cultural perceptions consider that a key feature of African historiography lies in its emphasis on colonial capitalism and imperialism

as contexts and processes. Accordingly, globalisation as well as colonisation have been prominent in various works. This can be highlighted in Abou'ou's LAT as earlier mentioned.

The novel opens with the description of Zilan-village, a village located in the equatorial forest where harmony between species is a life principle. As in TFA, It is a well-structured land where there is a strong belief in a continuous cohesion between man and nature. This worldview of a symbiosis between nature and humans informs the belief that natural disasters are a sign of disequilibrium from the moment different species turn to live disconnected and in disrespect of natural laws. When Edima writes his letter to Tita, he tells him about the sun which is planning to come out of his lair to inflict a punishment on Zilanese because of their disrespect of the environment and excessive exploitation of its natural resources (LAT Vol. 2, 27). It is worth noting that what is criticised here is the extrapolating actions. In a normal case, there is completeness between man and his environment. Nature provides for man's survival, not for his enrichment.

In LAT, Western perception of nature and culture interrelationship interfer in people's lives through globalisation. However, white men are no longer solely responsible for putting their doctrines in practice since they have already sided with blacks who implement them. The written letter, as in the first volume of the novel, is intersected with very poignant images. One of them depicts a scene of trees cutting and the other an image of a truck transporting wooden logs (drawings 23 and 24). There is also the illustration of trucks transporting foodstuff to a neighbouring country through the border (drawing 25). Edima backs these images with the following comment:

Sais-tu Tita, que la famine est devenue une réalité quotidienne à Zilan-village? Les forêts n'ont plus d'animaux sauvages, le commerce du gibier a vidé les forêts. Oui! Je dis bien commerce du gibier, cette viande qui nous est tombée du ciel est devenue une source financière pour les non-respectueux de la loi sur le nécessaire équilibre des éléments de la nature (...) Les animaux qui échappent à ce braconnage sauvage se sont enfuis très loin du village. Non seulement pour fuir les chasseurs, mais également parce qu'ils sont affolés par le bruit de ces machines utilisées pour la coupe des arbres dans toutes les forêts que tu connais. (LAT Vol. 2, 25)

Do you know Tita that starvation has become a daily reality in Zilan-village? The forests no longer have wild animals, the game trade has emptied the forests. Yes! I say game trade, this meat that fell from heaven has become a financial source for those who do not respect the law on the necessary balance of the elements of nature. (...) The animals which escaped that wild poaching

have fled far from the village. Not only to run away from hunters, but also because they panick because of the noise of the machines used to cut down trees in the forests that you know.

The new face of this once place of harmony between species is just the absolute opposite of its former face. Edima himself continues to be shocked and scandalised as he describes what the place cherished by Tita has turned to. There is an apparent dislocation in the whole entity formed by human beings and their environment. Those animals, once considered as gifts from heaven for man's subsistence are now feeling totally insecure. Because of the men's new abusive practices, the animals must escape to save their lives. Besides, the uncommon noise of the machines that cut the trees is sufficient proof that a radical change has taken place and men are no longer the same in Zilan-village. The principle of subsistence which requires that men maintain themselves at a minimum with food, water, money and other necessities needed to stay alive is henceforth old-fashioned. Zilanese have enjoyed learning how to exploit natural resources to their own benefit.

Zilanese acquired their new capitalist habits because of the contact of cultures resulting itself from globalisation. Edima informs Tita that rich people now come from the city, with a lot of money, they promise the development of the village through the building of schools, health centres, tarred roads and many other modern infrastructures. In compensation they cut all the big trees in the forest and sell them at very high prices in faraway countries; countries he refers to as "the land of demigods". The intrusion of the Western ways in Zilan-village is disastrous. As Edima's letter states, the banks of all the rivers are fatally narrowing; some of the rivers have disappeared completely. Many species of fishes no longer exist, and Edima is sure that his grandfather will not believe that those he calls the demigods have brought new methods of animals and fowl breeding. They talk about new methods for self-sufficiency in food; new habits through which Zilanese find themselves afflicted with new diseases. Fundamental life principles are no more the same as men have become more involved in egoistic interests, to the point of being blinded by the financial gain that prevents them from seeing the devastating effects of their actions on the environment; effects that affect their own lives.

Zilan-village women have started cultivating large farms in order to earn a lot of money. People harvest quickly to sell, often forgetting to keep aside part of the foodstuff to feed the family. The family is reduced some time later to begging and even stealing to survive. Women have then integrated new farming methods that no longer take seasons into

consideration. Thus, as soon as the farm is empty, they begin another one at the same place. Edima also expatiates on this point:

Tu sais Tita, que Zilan-village est situé non loin des frontières qui nous séparent des pays amis et frères de la forêt équatoriale. C'est là où tout a commencé. Les Zilanais se sont laissés avoir par les billets de banque de nos voisins contre les récoltes. Après c'était contre les champs entiers. Aujourd'hui ils vendent les arbres fruitiers pour une saison entière. Rien n'est épargné. Il n'y a plus de culture qui ne soit destinée à la vente. De la canne à sucre au piment en passant par tous genre de tubercules et de fruits, même les fruits sauvages. (LAT Vol. 2, 29)

Tita, as you know Zilan-village is located not far from the borders that separate us from friendly and brotherly countries of the equatorial forest. That was the starting point. The Zilanese have been deceived by the banknotes of our neighbours that were exchanged with their crops. After that, it was with the entire farms. Today, they sell fruit trees for a whole season. Nothing is spared. There is no crop that is not meant for selling. From sugar cane to pepper passing through all kinds of tubers and fruits, even wild fruits.

Capitalism, which promotes private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit, is now at the heart of the ways of thinking and attitudes. Zilanese have set aside the symbiosis that was supposed to bind them to their environment. They have turned their backs on Tita's era and concepts; those of a true and unwavering attachment to nature. Now, for them, nature has become a mere element to be exploited and even overexploited in order to become rich.

Edima then elaborates on the impact of globalisation on the Zilanese's new lifestyle and moreover their reaction to the phenomenon: "Nous nous adaptons au développement des technologies de la mondialisation. En vérité nous, tout-petits Zilanais, nous ne pouvons rien, car ces choses émanent des réflexions lointaines avec des objectifs bien calés et des intérêts plus grands que la préservation de notre petite santé" (We adapt to the development of technologies and globalisation. To tell the truth, for we, very small Zilanese, there is nothing we can do because those things proceed from distant reflections with well-thought objectives and interests that are bigger than the protection of our small health) (Vol. 2, 27). This attitude is the perfect illustration of the Western influence on Zilanese through globalisation. Once more, as in TFA, white men decide what should be done in other parts of the world where they are strangers and ignorant of the local system. The "demigods", as Edima calls them, is a name used on purpose. Their behaviour is in agreement with the designation. For instance, in the present case, they came out presenting globalisation as the process of becoming a more

interconnected world but, as soon as their feet treaded on the African lands, this concept seems to have taken on another meaning; it is no longer an interchange, a win-win relationship. Drawing from the analysis of our epistolary novel, globalisation turns out to be another pretext to come back for the exploitation of these same cultural spaces that were victims of colonisation some many decades earlier.

Globalisation thus takes on the appearance of neo-colonialism: “En definitive c’est le désastre (...) Nous fermons les yeux Tita, car seuls les demi-dieux sont habilités à nous dire que tel ou tel produit n’est pas bon pour notre santé. Si on déroge à ce contrat, les représailles contre ceux qui nous dirigent glisseront dans d’autres domaines et s’amplifieront et tant pis pour nous (Definitely it is a disaster (...) We are closing our eyes, Tita, because only the demigods are empowered to tell us that this or that product is not good for our health. If people go against that contract, the reprisals against those who govern us will slide towards other domains and will expand, which is very bad for us (Vol. 2, 28).

One of the most striking points that is important to address here is the pairwise degradation of cultural and environmental values. Not only have the Zilanese lost their sense of environmental preservation, many have also become depraved in every aspects of the word. Through her realistic pen, Abou’ou denounces the shortcomings of a society that has completely lost its bearings. This ideal place of yesteryear, this natural picture of perfect harmony between man and his environment, is now nothing but a place of chaos. Edima tells his grandfather that:

(...) une generation d’athées est née. De vrais anges déchus, sans foi ni loi, ayant pour mission propagandiste, la dépravation des moeurs. Tita, cette race ne recule devant rien: elle vole, tue, pratique l’inceste, la pédophilie, la zoophilie, l’homosexualité. Elle fait de la magie, vénère l’alcool, insulte les parents et les bastonne, voilà la triste réalité de Zilan-village aujourd’hui. Elle n’a même pas daigné accorder un moindre respect à ta tombe. Oui! (...) Elle ne respecte ni les vivants, ni les morts. (Vol. 2, 31)

(...) a generation of atheists was born. True fallen angels, who fear neither God nor man, whose propagandist mission is the depravity of moral standards. Tita, nothing will stop that race: they steal, kill, practise incest, paedophilia, zoophilia and homosexuality. They do magic, venerate alcohol, insult their parents and beat them up, that is the sad reality of Zilan-village today. They did not even deign to grant the least respect to your grave. Yes (...) They respect neither the living nor the dead.

The above description of present-day Zilan-village reveals the extent of the loss of cultural values. The Zilanese who have lost their identity no longer have any personality and, as the

sender of the letter says “Intégrité, dignité, loyauté sont devenues des absurdités des ères révolues, de pauvres expressions latines” (Integrity, dignity, loyalty have become absurdities of bygone eras, poor Latin expressions) (32).

Edima mentions television as an interesting innovation of globalisation with several beneficial effects. But he is not less aware of the multiple drawbacks of this digital tool which is another invention by the “demigods” to remake the world according to their beliefs and fantasies. Children who are mainly exposed to this tool and whose minds are also easier to influence are precisely at the mercy of television and passive receivers of what its inventors and holders want to transmit and convey as messages. To educate children by transmitting them important cultural and moral values has become a difficult task for the parents because “[les demi-dieux] utilisent cette invention louable pour montrer à nos enfants tout ce que [Tita] s’évertuait à leur cacher au bénéfice de leur équilibre moral et physique. La propagande du crime y est menée (...) On montre comment on peut mentir sans se faire attraper, comment on peut être mahonnête et demeurer respecté dans la société” ([The demigods] use that commendable invention to show our children everything that [Tita] struggled hard to hide from them to the advantage of their moral and physical equilibrium. The propaganda of crime is exhibited there (...) It shows how one can tell lies without being caught, how one can be dishonest and continue to be respected by the society) (44). This deprivation of moral values affects the environment because Zilanese’s attitude towards nature has completely changed and new mindsets have come into force.

Naturally, apart from the catastrophic consequence of the environmental degradation, the degradation of cultural values is also at the origin of other strange phenomena that seem to be divine curses. Edima tells the story of Uncle Bitoo, a man obsessed with money to the point of turning to satanic practices for him to always have more money. This is how he will find himself having sexual intercourses with his brothers’ wife, his cousins, nieces and more scandalous, his own daughter who ended up being impregnated by him at the age of 14. The child she gives birth to, Papi is the human representation of the depravity that his birth embodies. His inclinations will later on be homosexuality and even zoophilia in addition to all the other vices going hand in hand with modernity.

However, the end of this story testifies to the existence of a supreme entity still at work:

Quant à Papi, tout le monde de par ses origines, comprit qu’il était livré à la colère des dieux. (...) Telle une malédiction sévère, il tomba malade quelques

temps après. Une maladie encore inconnue jusque-là qui se manifestait par des brûlures graves de la peau. Il mourut au bout de deux mois de souffrance atroce (...) Ironie du sort, deux mois après le décès de Papi, son grand-père et père Bitoo, que l'histoire a rattrapé avec cet évènement, tomba malade de la même maladie avec les mêmes manifestations. Seulement celui-ci souffrit pendant plus de six mois. (37-38)

As far as Papi was concerned, everybody, from his origins understood that he was delivered to the wrath of gods. (...) As a severe curse, he fell sick some time later and died. A hitherto unknown disease that manifested itself in severe burns of the skin. He died two months later of excruciating pain (...) By a strange irony of fate, two months after Papi's death, his grandfather and father Bitoo, that history caught up with this event, fell ill with the same disease. But he suffered for more than six months.

This terrible story not only illustrates the loss and depravity of morals but also the fact that abominable acts still catch up with their perpetrators in Zilan. Supernatural forces are still at work. In this case, the punishment consists of a disease as strange as the acts of these men.

As Tsala Tsala states in his preface to the second volume of the epistolary novel under study, "cette lettre prolongée à Tita est pour le petit-fils témoin, un exutoire qui canalise les angoisses d'une jeunesse tourmentée par la transformation souvent trop rapide du monde. Elle pose aussi les jalons d'une histoire commune sans laquelle le passé ne saurait éclairer le présent et l'avenir de tous" (This prolonged letter to Tita is for the witness grandson a release that channels the anguish of a youth tormented by the often very quick change of the world. It also paves remembrance of the ways for a common history without which the past cannot shed light on the present and the future) (19). This opinion shows the crucial role of a common story which constitutes a people's past or identity and is always required in discussions on the present and future. Edima also announces the degradation of moral and Christian values at the image of the old village chapel. According to Tsala Tsala, the reading of the first volume is a true moment of fantastic pleasures that takes the reader round a universe which is at the same time dreamlike, historic and real (Vol. 1, 18). Thus, the strength of the second volume relies on the fantastic organisation of the effect of social changes on behaviours, thoughts, and beliefs (Vol. 2, 17). LAT, like TFA reviews the changes brought by an external system to a traditional society. The preceding analysis showed that the Western perception of the interrelationship of the environment and culture ended up influencing the African perception.

Throughout this chapter, we considered African and Western perceptions of the relationship between environment and culture. We analysed to what extent a culture can influence human beings' relationship with their environment; and this led us to the statement that environmental preoccupations are global and represent a major concern and a crucial element for everybody's survival. As pointed out by Sinha Kumar, Man is related to nature and environment in every moment of his life from his birth, during his life and even at the moment of death. Hence, environmental wellbeing is the prime area of concern (*Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education* 13). Therefore we can argue that the degradation of humans' values which has an impact on our attitudes towards nature greatly contributes to environmental degradation. In other words the degradation of cultural values also affects men's relationship to their environment. This said the next chapter comments, based on our corpus, on what is concretely done in the literary field to solve this global issue.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND AFRICAN CULTURE

This chapter shows how Achebe and Abou'ou promote the preservation of the environment and African culture in their respective novels. Through a comparative analysis, the emphasis is laid on how *Things Fall Apart* and *Lettre à Tita* both contribute to reassert African values which promote the preservation of nature. As environmental problems have become more apparent and preoccupying, our understanding of the problems, and the solutions we develop to address the said problems occur through the filter of culture. Therefore, using a side by side comparison of the novels under study, we examine in this part of our dissertation the influence of culture on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals to promote the preservation of the environment. This will be done with an emphasis laid on the time, settings and characters factors on the one hand and the novels' structures as well as the main themes related to our study on the other hand.

It is a widespread assertion that the originally African culture has always given a prevailing and inescapable place to nature in human life. Africans used to preserve and promote their natural environment because they believed to form one with nature. However, their culture has been hybridised with the intrusion of capitalism which brought a fundamental change in mentalities, beliefs, traditions and attitudes in such a way that new habits came up. They began to have an anthropocentric vision of the natural world. In other words, men started considering that nature is there to serve them and satisfy their personal interests and needs, to the detriment of all the past traditional values. According to Greg Garrard, Anthropocentrism names any stance, perception or conception that takes the human as centre or norm. An 'anthropocentric' view of the natural world thus sees it entirely concerning human beings, for instance as a resource for economic use, or as the expression of particular social or cultural values – so even an aesthetics of landscape appreciation can be anthropocentric (qtd. in Hikmah 32). However the novels under study do not promote an anthropocentric vision of life. On the contrary they value nature and symbiosis between this latter and men.

Time, Space and the Preservation of the Environment and African Culture in Achebe's and Abou'ou's selected novels

In this first subsection of the chapter, we are interested in discussing how Achebe and Abou'ou use settings and the main characters of their novel to promote the preservation of the environment and African cultural values.

In TFA, Umuofia which is Okonkwo's fatherland is the main setting where the story takes place. Umuofia is part of a cluster of nine villages belonging to the Igbo's community as we can read in the novel: "The next day a group of elders from all the nine villages of Umuofia came to Okonkwo's house early in the morning" (57). Those villages are located in Africa, more specifically in the south-eastern tip of Nigeria. The second important place is Mbanta, Okonkwo's motherland where he spent seven years into exile when he is found guilty of manslaughter: "Okonkwo and his family were fleeing to his motherland. It was a little village called Mbanta, just beyond the borders of Mbaino" (124). Mbaino is also an important place to take note of since it is the village of Ikemefuna; the young lad who became Okonkwo's foster child and that he finally killed. As pointed out by Lame Maatla Kenalemang in her dissertation entitled "*Things Fall Apart: An Analysis of Pre and Post-Colonial Igbo Society*" (2013), the setting of the novel is in the outskirts of Nigeria in a small fictional village, Umuofia just before the arrival of white missionaries into their land. Due to the unexpected arrival of white missionaries in Umuofia, the villagers do not know how to react to the sudden cultural changes that the missionaries threaten to make with their new political structure and institutions (4). It is important to say that till then, the village life was determined by the physical environment.

In Abou'ou's LAT the main setting is Zilan-village which as already stated in the previous chapter is a fictional place to represent Africa in general and the south region of Cameroon in particular. All over the two volumes, Zilan-village is referred to as "cette bourgade enfouie dans la forêt équatoriale" (That large village buried away in the equatorial forest). It is a place that symbolises a perfect harmony between man and his environment until the intrusion of "modern ways" from elsewhere. This "elsewhere" constitutes another part of the novel setting which is mostly simply mentioned: foreign or faraway countries, among the demigods. Being the precursors and defenders of modernity and globalisation, the demigods would be here most certainly the white men even if it is not said explicitly in the novel.

In both TFA and LAT, the setting and time are important. Even though the physical places remain the same all over the storylines, there are drastic changes respectively driven by colonisation and globalisation. The first part of TFA is essentially about life in a traditional Umuofia while the two latter parts of the book put on stage the arrival of the white men and the intrusion of change. In LAT, the first volume corresponds to the traditional Zilan-village and the second one is the new and modern Zilan, influenced by globalisation. Those precise moments of the stories therefore have a significant influence on the main settings of both novels to which they give a different look: that of change.

Equally, throughout Achebe's novel, indications of time are given with traditional references to the environment through the seasons, moments corresponding to a specific agricultural crop or local terms. This is visible in the following excerpt:

This was before the planting season began. For a long time nothing happened. The rains had come and yams had been sown. The iron horse was still tied to the sacred silk-cotton tree. And then one morning three white men led by a band of ordinary men like us came to the clan. They saw the iron horse and went away again. Most of the men and women of Abame had gone to their farms. Only a few of them saw these white men and their followers. For many market weeks nothing else happened. They have a big market in Abame on every other *Afo* day and, as you know, the whole clan gathers there (TFA 139).

In the excerpt, the narrator makes use of the following temporal references related to nature and culture: before the planting season, the rain had come and yams had been sown, for many markets weeks, on every *Afo* day. Here we should notice that *Afo* corresponds to one of the four days of the week of the Igbo calendar which is also a market day. According to Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "Among the most powerful religious and social elements in Igbo religion, history and culture, are the Igbo market days. These market days include- *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*" (*African Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems* 41). He adds that the English calendar which has 7 days in a week, 30 or 31 days in a month exception made of February, 4 weeks in a month, 52 weeks in a year, 12 months in a year, and 365 days in a year differs from the Igbo calendar which has 4 days in a week, 7 weeks in a month, 28 days in a month, 13 months in a year, 91 weeks in a year, and 364 days in a year. Kanu in his paper focuses on how "Igbos' traditional societies through [the market sacred] days worked towards the preservation of the environment through the promulgation of taboos. The taboos for each of the days had a way of preventing particular activities that had exploitative consequences on the ecosystem" (ibid). He also reminds that as far as the beginning of their history, the Igbo of

Eastern Nigeria and Western Africa knew the consequences of environmental degradation and the need to preserve it. This explains why even their notion of time vehicles their concern for the environment.

Concerning the time, Abou'ou also gets inspiration from nature to situate the reader in specific periods. Though we have more modern temporal references and fewer cultural ones than in TFA, we can read in the novel indications like: "On the market day during the planting of harvest, during the rainy or sunny season. For instance we can read: "Dans cette bourgade enfouie dans la forêt équatoriale (...) Les methods de pêche variaient selon les saisons. En saison pluvieuse, périodes de grandes crues, on pratiquait la pêche à la nasse (...) En saison sèche on pratiquait la pêche à la digue" (In this large village buried away in the equatorial forest (...) Fishing methods varied depending on the seasons. In the rainy season, periods of big water rising, they practised hoop net fishing (...) In the dry season, they practise dam fishing) (LAT Vol. 1, 39-40).

In TFA, Nature keeps Umuofia enchanted, and acquires a significant place in the Igbo society. Natural wealth is treated with care and reverence. Kumar describe Umuofia as an environment friendly to people and society. They negated the colonial attitude of 'anthropocentrism', giving preference to people over nature. The rich natural imagery of *Things Fall Apart* is a rich tribute by Achebe to nature, and the environment (Kumar 24). In Sinha Kumar's analysis of TFA from an ecocritical perspective, he focuses on ecocritical elements to determine the symbiotic relationship between man and nature and the impact of colonisation on that interdependence. Similarly, according to Salisu Barau nature appreciation is indubitable because there is no reason why a curious reader would not credit TFA for the way it appreciates and praises nature. In fact, one can categorise the work as nature writing. Some passages are elegant descriptions of the beauty and wonders of nature in an environment where there is balance between humans and the natural environment. Barau further establishes a link between the environment and development and considers TFA as an asset to draw public interest on the environmental concern so as to improve African relationship to the natural environment. As evidenced from the aforesaid, TFA shows a 'Serve the Earth' attitude. In Kumar's opinion, "Umuofia or 'People of the Forest' understood their surroundings and environment. They knew how to coexist with nature in harmony" (23).

The same harmony prevails over the life in Zilan-village, which is the main setting of Abou'ou's LAT. Indeed, the Zilanese lived in harmony with nature in an exalted past. In his preface to the first volume of the novel, Tsala Tsala depicts Zilan-village as an absolute forest

ode where man still lived in symbiosis with nature sharing his food –rice– with birds from the forest which announced its ripening. It is a particular time described as a time when “Zilan-village n’avait encore rien perdu de son charme naturel malgré les assauts répétés de la ‘mondialisation’ (Zilan-village had not yet lost anything of its natural charm despite the repeated assaults of ‘globalisation’) (23). As already mentioned in the third chapter of this work, from the first lines of volume 1, the description of the main setting of this novel reveals an indubitable closeness between human beings and nature. The narrator promotes the preservation of the environment and African cultural values as he talks about a large village buried away in equatorial forest where human beings still knew how to communicate with trees and animals and the environment did not yet need a cohort of protective laws to ensure it’s blooming and survival (ibid).

Eyenga Onana in his analysis and comment of the letter to Tita posits that:

Dans la société idéale postulée dans *Lettre à Tita 2*, la vertu est sublimée, tandis que le vice est réprimé. Le paradoxe naît du basculement noté dans l’échelle des valeurs à travers le dévoilement du vrai visage de certains gens. Ayant par voie d’inceste mis enceinte sa fille, Bitoo n’est ni sévèrement puni par les siens, ni condamné par le moindre tribunal ancestral. Relevant un tel paradoxe pour le déplorer, le narrateur affirme que Bitoo “a continué à être autant respecté au village qu’avant l’éclatement au grand jour de cette abomination”. (*Romanica Silesiana* 74)

In the ideal society postulated in *Letter to Tita 2*, virtue is sublimated, while vice is repressed. The paradox arises from the shift noted in the scale of values through the unveiling of the true face of some people. Having impregnated his daughter, Bitoo is neither severely punished by his family nor condemned by any ancestral court. Pointing out such a paradox to deplore it, the narrator says that Bitoo “continued to be as respected in the village as before the breakup in broad daylight of this abomination”.

The above statement shows that from the first volume of the letter to the second, there is a shift in lifestyle. On the one hand, volume 1 describes an ideal place where each element of the ecosystem is in place and plays its role under penalty of being reframed according to pre-established laws. On the other hand, in volume 2, life in Zilan-village is turned upside down. Everyone does as he/she pleases and is in no way punished; on the contrary those who are henceforth honoured because of their wealth remain so even after having committed the most villainous acts. Therefore, it can be noticed that one of Abou’ou’s approaches consists in promoting the ideal and virtuous society while denouncing the vices that must be eradicated.

In the first volume of the novel the narrator tells that:

A cette époque-là, les sols étaient fertiles, les récoltes satisfaisantes. Ici, la vente des produits des champs n'était pas une pratique courante. Pour gérer le surplus de la production champêtre, une grande étagère était hissée au milieu du village; on y déposait des denrées à l'intention des passants. Ainsi, les inconnus de passage pouvaient se servir sans demander une quelconque permission. (45)

At that time, soils were fertile and crops satisfactory. There, the selling of farm products was not a current practice. To manage the surplus of the rural production, a big shelf was hoisted in the middle of the village; foodstuffs were put inside for the benefit of passers-by. So, unknown passers-by could serve themselves without asking for permission.

The above statement refers to a practice that illustrates Zilanese's community spirit of mutual assistance even towards passers-by. The Zilanese considered that the land itself had been generous to them by allowing them to reap the fruits of their work in the farms. For that reason they also shared by common agreement what they had received. Unfortunately, this practice radically changed and even totally disappeared in the new and modern Zilan-village governed by globalisation.

As Edima rightly points out:

Ceux qui nous commandent trouvent que c'est un atout que d'avoir les voisins qui achètent tout. Entre-temps Tita, nous mourons de faim. Nous n'arrivons plus à acheter de quoi manger sur notre propre marché avec les moyens que nous avons, car le voisin propose plus d'argent que nous et prend tout. On refuse délibérément de vendre à son propre frère Zilanais parce qu'il est pauvre. (Vol. 2, 30)

Those who govern us find that it is an asset to have neighbours who buy everything. In the meantime, Tita, we are dying of hunger. We are no longer capable of buying something to eat in our own market with the means available to us, because the neighbour proposes more money than us and takes all the goods. We deliberately refuse to sell goods to our own Zilanese brother because he is poor.

From the aforementioned assertion, we clearly see the radical gap that exists between the traditional Zilan and the globalised one. The reader is "moved" from a place where food was prepared and kept somewhere for strangers to the same place, some years later, modernised and globalised, where people sell everything and even select their customers so as not to sell food items to their brother who lack money as compared to the neighbour. By describing

traditional then modern mentalities in the same setting at two different points in time, Abou'ou demonstrates the influence of our culture upon our immediate environment. What we think and believe influence how and where we live. It is therefore fundamental to value a culture that promotes environmental preservation – African culture in this case – if we want to achieve the green planet goal.

Similarly, Achebe criticises colonisation, the new administrative system of the Igbo society that emerged under the leadership of the white men to upset and unbalance a culture that until then valued nature. In TFA, when Okonkwo come back from exile, his friend Obierika informs him about the new colonial system and the way they manage some cases as exemplified in the following dialogue:

‘What has happened to that piece of land in dispute?’ asked Okonkwo. ‘The white man’s court has decided it should belong to Nnama’s family, who had given much money to the white man’s messengers and interpreter.’ ‘Does the white man understand our custom about land?’ ‘How can he when he does not speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad.’ (176)

The above conversation illustrates how new mentalities are inserted in Igbo community. In this judicial case of a piece of land in dispute, it is obvious that injustice and corruption are practised in the white man’s court since the land is given to the family that has given much money to the white man’s messengers and interpreter. Not only they don’t understand the local system, nor even try to do so, but the white men also impose their own system and teach the people to value it at the expense of their own.

Following Salisu Barau’s analysis, TFA also displays an evident closeness between men and their natural environment. It is important to highlight how the core values of the people of Umuofia perceive the environment, their code of conduct as well as attitude towards nature. This permits to truly understand and expose the harmony achieved between humans and the environment. To achieve this goal, Barau insists on the fact that Umuofia is a typical pre-colonial African rural settlement whose primary means of livelihood include farming, hunting and forest resources gathering. Invariably, this indicates that the population of that rural area is bolstered by what nature offers it. In other words, the village life is determined by the physical environment. Some passages from the novel reveal that it was possible to understand even the demographic dynamics of the village i.e. its crude birth and death rates as well as the size of the population of the village (3-4). Therefore, the theory of environmental determinism is very relevant to Barau who illustrates this in the following passage: “There

was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village that had three huge barns, nine wives and thirty children" (18). A sentence which shows how the riches of a man could be determined by what nature granted him as possessions.

In the same vein, LAT also symbolises and showcases the interrelationship between the environment and culture in Africa. J.F Ndongo observes in his preface to the novel that:

Le tableau général qui se dessine sous la plume de cette jeune romancière, est celui d'une forêt, avec des cases, des rivières, un chemin de campagne et des activités agricoles (...) une splendeur sauvage dont la vue est source d'étonnement et d'émerveillement, émerge des flancs d'une montagne. Une brise matinale effleure le lecteur en lui faisant humer une fleur virginale. Des pluies mélancoliques et molles font monter une précieuse odeur de terre mouillée. On dort sous la caresse des feuilles des arbres dont l'ombre plonge au fond des eaux calmes d'un fleuve qui vous berce. Non loin de ce miroir qui coule, une source se rafraichit au contact des rochers, des brindilles et des racines (7).

The general picture that this young novelist draws is that of a forest with huts, rivers, a countryside path and agricultural activities (...) a wild splendour whose sight is a source of amazement and wonder that emerges from the slopes of a mountain. A morning breeze blows toward the reader and makes him/her breathe a virginal flower. Melancholic and soft rains make a deep and delicious smell of wet land rise. People sleep under the caress of tree leaves whose shadow dives into the bottom of the dormant water of a river that rocks you. Not far from that mirror that flows, a spring gets colder in contact with rocks, twigs and roots.

It appears from the above statement that Zilan-village is originally a place of perfect harmony and even symbiosis between human beings and their environment following their culture. All the elements of nature are interconnected and valued in their raw state. Besides, cash crops, a reserved area for men, are cocoa, palm oil, rubber and tobacco. Cocoa is the dominant crop as it is the main source of financial income. Consequently, the Zilanese have large cocoa plantations. We then see the same environmental determinism as in TFA since the elements of nature are the prime factor to determine how rich a Zilanese is: "A cette époque-là, une audience de choix était accordée aux propriétaires des plus grandes plantations. Au niveau du village, la vente de ce produit servait à envoyer des enfants à l'école, à construire des maisons, à doter des femmes, à faire des achats pour la famille. La réussite dans cette culture était en somme un facteur de prospérité" (At that time, special interest was granted to owners of the biggest plantations. In the village, the selling of that product helped to send children to

school, build houses, pay the bride price for women, and do shopping for the family. The success of this agricultural crop was in short a factor of prosperity) (LAT Vol. 1, 47).

Still about the setting, J.F Ndongo points out that “comme de nombreux villages, Zilan appartient, dans l’imaginaire traditionnel, à l’espace Béti, Boulou, Fang. De nombreux indices inscrivent le récit dans le grand Sud-Cameroun avec ses hommes, ses coutumes, ses croyances...” (Like many villages, Zilan belongs, in the traditional imaginary to the Beti, Boulou, Fang space. Many clues place the story in the big South-Cameroon with its men, customs, beliefs...) (LAT 12). In the same vein, the second preface of the novel by Tsala Tsala Jacques Phillipe, asserts that “Tout commence de manière anodine et tranquille dans un village du Sud-Cameroun, dans la luxuriante forêt équatoriale. La vie y est ordinaire, lente ; rythmée par des habitudes, une ritualité quotidienne (...) On va à la chasse. On va à la pêche. On vit. On meurt.” (Everything begins in a trivial and peaceful manner in a village of Southern Cameroon in the luxuriant equatorial forest. Life is ordinary there, slow; with a rhythm given by habits, daily rituals (...) People go fishing. People go hunting. They live. They die) (LAT Vol. 1, 17). It is obvious that nature is supposed to be treated as a companion, a part of us and not an inexhaustible source to be continuously spoiled, exploited and even over-exploited.

Furthermore, as regards TFA, Kumar comments on Umofians preservation of their environment in such a way that exploiting nature for their own benefit was not admissible to the Igbo society. They believed in the sanctity of the earth and refrained from any activity dealing with the degradation of their land. Kumar then refer to Gitanjali Gogoi’s assertion that “Achebe shows the Igbo’s agricultural life, religious beliefs, festivals, their ideas about the world and human life are all intertwined with nature” (qtd. in Kumar 13). This indicates how humans are related to nature and environment in all aspects of their life, a reality that has proven to be true until the intrusion of an entirely different operating system.

For both Achebe and Abou’ou these alterations in African communal system following the intrusion of new systems and realities from Western countries are to be fought and solutions must be provided to bring back African legendary harmony between human beings and nature which is part of our culture.

To eradicate the degradation of the environment and African cultural values in order to promote their preservation, both novelists also use characterisation purposely. Concerning the novel TFA, Achebe has declared about his main character that, “The story of Okonkwo is

almost inevitable; if I hadn't written about him, certainly someone else would have, because it really is the beginning of our story" (qtd. in Kumar 16). According to Sinha Kumar, Achebe's observation concerning his fictional creation draws attention to the allegorical significance that Okonkwo has assumed for the African imagination: he is not merely a character in a novel but the representative figure of African historicity. A determining element of the novel's structure and development is thus the way in which his story is embedded within an elaborate reconstruction of forms of life in the traditional, pre-colonial culture, specifically, that of Achebe's own people, the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria (16). African traditional community has excellent ecological interaction with nature by keeping and living a harmonious life in the geographical environment around. According to Hadiyanto et al., this can be viewed based on the mutual commitment of the Igbo tribe to maintain a life balance with nature, including vegetation and animals. Social life and mutual advantage concept between humans and nature becomes the basis to act of Igbo community, to treat, protect, and preserve the surrounding natural environment.

For example, Okonkwo shows an attitude of great concern for the trees planted. As quoted below, he gets very angry with his wife's careless attitudes that cause the banana tree he likes best to be gradually withered:

"Who killed this banana tree?" he asked. A hush fell on the compound immediately. "Who killed this tree? Or are you all deaf and dumb?" As a matter of fact the tree was very much alive. Okonkwo's second wife had merely cut a few leaves off it to wrap some food, and she said so. Without further argument Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping. (38)

Based on the above quotation, it can be analysed that even though plant leaves can function for life necessities, it does not mean that the Igbo society has to exploit vegetation massively without any responsibility to preserve nature. Okonkwo's anger reflects his concern for the protection and preservation of nature. Okonkwo, as representative of the traditional African community, cares a banana tree in the same way he does for the green forest surrounding the native villages ("Human-Nature Ecological Interaction of African Traditional Community in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" 4).

It is in the same way that Marie Rosette Abou'ou represents Tita in her novel. Tita is a symbol or the guarantor of tradition, a defender of the environmental cause. As already mentioned about him:

Notre cher Tita était le garant de la tradition. Il était le maître d'œuvre de tous les rites traditionnels organisés dans le village. Il jouissait du privilège d'une grande complicité avec les forces de la nature qu'il affectionnait considérablement. Pour lui, tous les éléments constitutifs de la nature avaient un rôle important à jouer et devaient être respectés et préservés. (Vol. 1; 63)

Our dear Tita was the guarantor of tradition. He was in charge of all the traditional rituals organised in the village. He enjoyed the privilege of a close relationship with the forces of nature, which he loved dearly. For him, all the constituent elements of nature had an important role to play and as such had to be respected and preserved.

From what precedes, it is obvious that Tita as a character symbolises a typical representative of African culture. Through him we can see the preponderant place that nature occupies in the said culture. As stated from the first paragraph of the same volume: "Sa vie n'avait de sens que dans la recherche permanente de la cohésion entre l'homme et la nature, convaincu alors du salut probant qui découlerait de cette harmonie" (There was no meaning in his life apart from the permanent quest for cohesion between man and nature, convinced in that case of the probative salvation that could result from that harmony) (23). This shows how careful African culture is about the preservation of the natural environment.

From the above analyses, TFA and LAT are obviously calls to nature preservation that Achebe and Abou'ou address to their readers while showcasing the significance and preciousness of nature in African traditional society. It should be noticed that man as an agent of destruction has the power to destroy the environment. But he also has the power to reverse what is still possible by fixing the wreckages using "things that fell apart". Humans' minds and thoughts can protect and preserve nature for a sustainable development. Humans should take responsibility for restoring devastated nature and preventing upcoming natural disaster such as floods, landslides and droughts.

As main characters of the novels under study, Okonkwo and Tita respectively embody or incarnate the great respect that men must have for their natural environment. However, there are other characters in the novels who promote the preservation of the African culture and the environment. Achebe's TFA has 66 characters with specific roles. Obierika is Okonkwo's reliable friend who shows unwavering understanding of and support for Okonkwo from the beginning of his story until his death. He is also an undeniable ally in promoting balance in the relationship between nature and culture, with man at the centre. In LAT Edima who writes the letter and narrates a great part of the story is also a first-class character as he

conveys important messages and stands out from the 28 other characters mentioned by name in the first volume and the 18 characters in the second volume. In both novels, antagonists are concepts or new systems that appear in the daily reality of the characters. In TFA it is the rise of European influence through colonisation and Christianity whereas it is the intrusion of modernity and globalisation in LAT. The subsequent subsection focuses on the similar themes that the two authors use to promote the preservation of nature and culture.

Thematic Similarities and the Preservation of the Environment and African Culture in Achebe's and Abou'ou Selected Novels

This second subsection of Chapter Four examines the major thematic concerns as well as the structures of the novels which promote the preservation of the environment and African cultural values.

Throughout the first volume of LAT, the narrator values the link between man, his cultural identity and his care for the environment. However, something happens in the course of the story causing Edima to write his letter to Tita: modernity coupled with globalisation. As we can read in Tsala Tsala's preface to the first volume: "Cette mondialisation-là, exterminatrice de l'africanité (...) dévastatrice des valeurs fondamentales des peuples (...) élaborée aux bénéfices et service de ses géniteurs" (That globalisation, exterminator of africanity (...) destructive of the fundamental values of people (...) elaborated for the benefit and service of its conceivers) (23). The emergence of globalisation and modernity in Zilan-village as disturbing factors result in a total confusion. This disorder comes from the fact that globalisation is somehow and indirectly another form of colonisation since new lifestyles from elsewhere are inserted in Africa to the benefit of Western countries. From Fame Ndongo's preface, the reader learns that:

Edima, fils de Monetita et petit-fils de Tita n'en peut plus. Il fait recours à l'écriture pour se libérer, sorte de thérapie épistolaire. Il faut bien que ceux qui sont partis le sachent, surtout Tita, que tout a changé au village, que les valeurs traditionnelles, symboles de noblesse de la sylvie équatoriale que ce dernier ne cessa de perpétuer, s'étiolent au profit d'une incontrôlable vague de conduites iconoclastes (...) Nostalgique est cette fresque chatoyante sur la vie et les mutations de Zilan, petit village étalon dans lequel tout se transforme au rythme d'une modernité qui, avec violence frappe à la porte de l'autonomie animale, presque végétale de ces habitants, et qui s'impose au détriment d'un modus vivendi dont les valeurs s'éteignent. (7-8)

Edima, son of Monetita and grandson of Tita can't take it anymore. He resorts to writing to release himself, a kind of epistolary therapy. People who have died, especially Tita, should know that everything has changed in the village, that traditional values, symbols of nobility of the equatorial forest that the latter never stopped perpetuating are growing weak to the advantage of an uncontrollable wave of iconoclastic behaviours (...) this nostalgic shimmering portrait on the life and changes of Zilan, a small yardstick village in which everything is transformed to the rhythm of a modernity that, with violence, knocks at the door of animal autonomy, almost vegetable of these inhabitants and that compel recognition to the detriment of a *modus vivendi* whose values are fading.

Fame Ndongo's observations show the overriding place of the environment and culture in Zilan-village. This also gives an insight into the villagers' perception of the interrelationship between these two. In the first volume of Abou'ou's novel, a special emphasis is laid on the promotion of cultural and ancestral values as well as a scrupulous respect of nature and its symbols. Zilan-village reflects the harmony between man and his environment. The above comment illustrates how far Zilanese were respecting and cherishing nature in Tita's time before modernity came on the scene.

The same harmony and interconnection between man and his natural environment constitutes a lifestyle for the Igbo before the arrival of the settlers. People live in peace with their surroundings as they respect, fear and even worship nature. The population staged by the narrator is far from considering or even imagining the exploitation of natural resources for their personal satisfaction.

Also, there is a close relationship between the earth and the ancestors. The Earth goddess Ani is responsible for maintaining the ecological balance and increasing agricultural production by keeping excellent relationships between the living and their deceased ancestors. It is also striking to read that the goddess of earth promotes values that determine success. She is in charge of judging the morality and conduct of the Igbos.

Chinua Achebe through his famous novel, TFA, reaffirms the essential role of the preservation of African cultural values, including *ex officio* special care for the environment. More than five decades later, Marie Rosette Abou'ou does the same thing in writing LAT, a novel presented by Jacques Fame Ndongo in his preface as a mirror of the African traditional society. Even though nowadays, nature has been forgotten and destroyed by man because of industrialisation, the importance and influence of nature in man's life cannot be ignored. Since the beginning of human life, man has known and recognised the importance of natural

beings or creatures and non-human objects. Gitanjali Gogoi in “An Ecocritical Approach to Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*” (2014) holds that, “The present day environmental predicament is a sure result of the age old practice of exploitation of nature and abuse of the environment for the benefit of human civilisation” (qtd. in Kumar 15). In the case of LAT, modernity that comes with globalisation is the starting point of moral depravation and environmental degradation. Perhaps, the time is ripe for a change of attitude towards nature; one has to practise enlightened bio-centrism. Human beings have to be mindful of the protection of nature and culture.

This raising of consciousness is really important as it brings forth the theme of bio-centrism versus anthropomorphism. Bio-centrism as opposed to anthropomorphism is a vital attitude to save and serve the earth. As long as economic growth will prevail over environmental preservation, people will be adopting wrong attitudes and taking the wrong decisions leading to a global catastrophe. That is the reason why many researchers agree that starvation and under-development are major causes of environmental degradation in developing and underdeveloped countries. As Tsala Tsala states concerning the new mentalities in Zilan-village after Tita’s death, starvation leads to everything. People no longer cultivate for consumption. They cultivate to sell and earn a lot of money. Neighbouring countries need food that they buy at a higher price (*Preface* to LAT Vol. 1, 18). This shows how the shift in prioritisation brought about by Tita’s death, followed by the emergence of globalisation, has also greatly influenced the Zilanese’s mentalities and ways of thinking. The essential values of the past have become out-dated and have even been buried with their defender. These values include the absolute preservation of the environment, no matter what could be the financial benefit that derives from its massive destruction through abusive deforestation. An attitude which is no longer part of the Zilanese’s priorities since they are actually obsessed with getting rich even if to achieve that goal nature has to disappear.

The contrast between capitalism and environmental protection is another major concern in both novels under study. According to Wesley Schultz, the issue of economic growth versus environmental protection has been a longstanding tension in the environmental movement. However, following the book entitled *Health of the planet: Results of a 1992 International Environmental Opinion Survey of Citizens in 24 Nations* (1993) by Dunlap E. Riley et al., a high percentage of people in the United States express a willingness to pay more for environmental protection. But would people in other countries express a similar willingness? Dunlap et al. comment that people in the United States are generally financially

comfortable (compared to many other countries in the world), so perhaps it is easier for them to say this. However, the cross-cultural results show that a majority of people in 17 of the 24 countries (including many developing countries like India, Chile, and Mexico) express a willingness to pay more for products in order to improve environmental quality (Schultz 6). This is the proof that the earlier people become aware of the seriousness of environmental degradation the better it is; because they will propose solutions and respect the measures taken following the proposed solutions.

In their work entitled *Beyond the Limits* (1992), Meadows D. H et al. point out a second cause of environmental degradation related to the population growth and consumption. As quoted by Schultz, they remark that more people means more consumption, greater demand for resources, and more pollution and waste. Population growth over the past 100 years has been staggering. For 99.9% of human existence on this planet, fewer than 10 million people inhabited the planet. In 1830, less than 200 years ago, the human population reached 1 billion; in 1930 it reached 2 billion, and the growth continued exponentially. As of 2000, there were approximately 6 billion people on the planet. Projections about the number of people the earth can bear vary, but it is clear that 6 billion people living the consumptive lifestyle widespread in industrialised nations like the United States, Western Europe, or Japan, is not sustainable (Schultz 4). And of course this exponential growth of the population is not without consequences.

The rapid growth and technological development that was ushered in by the industrial revolution have caused serious environmental problems. Following is a brief list of some of the environmental problems that have resulted from human activity and consumption, excerpted from a recent article by Stuart Oskamp, "Psychological contributions to achieving an ecologically sustainable future for humanity" (2001):

- Global warming due to the greenhouse effect. The primary source of human-made greenhouse gases is the burning of fossil fuels in cars and to produce electricity.
- Loss of the earth's protective ozone layer due to the release of Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).
- Global climate change and loss of biodiversity due to the destruction of tropical and temperate rainforests.

- Overfishing and exhaustion of the world's ocean fisheries and decreasing agricultural productivity due to many unsustainable harvesting practices.

- Acid rain, which damages forests and crops and also kills fish, plants, and other organisms in lakes and rivers.

- Toxic pollution of air and drinking water supplies.

- Genetic and hormonal damage and cancer due to exposure to dioxin and other toxic chemicals (qtd. in Schultz 3-4).

Scanning the above enumeration, we can notice that these points are not really addressed by Achebe while Abou'ou puts them at the centre of her description of the new Zilan-village in the second volume of her novel. It should be noted that the arrival of the white men indirectly announces many changes in socio-cultural, economic or environmental realities. Changes that will undoubtedly have disastrous consequences on the environment such as the aforementioned. For instance, the fact that white men build a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel become things of great price bringing much money in Umuofia, announces a different attitude of Umuofians towards their environment. As pointed out by the narrator, "there was a growing feeling that there might be something in it after all, something vaguely akin to method in the overwhelming madness" (TFA 178).

Contrary to TFA, in LAT (Vol. 2), the new environmental realities are clearly put into words. In the second volume of the novel, Edima informs Tita that fishing is almost over, and rivers no longer have water because new phenomena are emerging namely global warming, the destruction of the ozone layer and emissions of greenhouse gases... Many laws are elaborated to defend the forests, rivers, animals and fishes... Scientists say that it is to avoid a humanitarian disaster in preparation. The sun is planning to come and inflict a punishment on the Zilanese because of their disrespect and overexploitation of the elements of nature. Edima even testifies that they already suffer from the sun which is lashing more and more in Zilan. Besides, the beds of the great rivers are fatally narrowing, some disappear altogether (LAT Vol. 2; 25). Edima ironically states that the Zilanese adapt to the development of globalisation technologies. The soils no longer rest; all crops are henceforth destined for sale, not to mention the uncontrolled and abusive use of chemical fertilisers since the most important thing is then to raise more and more money. Consequently, there is no longer any distinction between sickness for the old and for the young. Babies are born with diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, kidney or heart failure (26-27).

According to David Harmon, most African communities also have traditional ecological knowledge of natural resources within their environment which is transmitted from older to younger generations through myths and stories. The role of indigenous knowledge in environmental conservation is internationally recognised in the United Nations declaration of the rights of indigenous peoples and Agenda 21 (qtd. in Karigu 18-19). This shows the importance of novels such as TFA and LAT to remind, reassert, value and pass on from generations to generations the message of what is supposed to be done concerning the thematic of the preservation of nature. This said, Barau discusses in his “Bridge-building between Literature and Environmental Values of Africa - Lessons from *Things Fall Apart*”, the typology of sustainability in *Things Fall Apart*. He points out that today all development round tables and fora are stereotyped with the concept of sustainable development. However, for Barau, this concept of sustainability is incomplete nowadays if it is compared with that of TFA. Simply because the contemporary universal concept of sustainable development as it comes to Africans from the industrialised states only takes care of the present and future and jettisons the past. On the other hand, in Africa, the present and future are woven with the threads of the past.

Many passages from Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* indicate how people take into consideration their gods and ancestors. They believe that their ancestors are still attached to them and could be harmed or pleased by the (in)actions of the living generations. Additionally, Africans believe in the sacredness of the nature, therefore, they seek consent of their sundry gods whenever they will act. The following passage justifies this argument: “Every year ... before I put any crop in the earth, I sacrifice a cock to Ani, the owner of all land. It is the law of our fathers. I also kill a cock at the shrine of Ifejioku, the god of yams. I clear the bush and set fire to it when it is dry. I sow the yams when the first rain has fallen and stake them when the young tendrils appear. I weed-” (17). Here, Unoka - Okonkwo’s lazy father - is consulting the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, Agbala, to find out why he always has a miserable harvest. He proclaims his respect for the ancestors and the earth by describing how he goes about sowing in order to denounce his failure in the harvests as an injustice. The answer that he receives is indicative of key facts: “Hold your peace! Screamed the priestess ... You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your machete and your hoe” (ibid). This exemplifies the belief that a man relationship with his gods and ancestors determines the

quality of his harvest. However, Africans are called upon to be hardworking as well as to respect nature and promote their culture if they want to be prosperous.

Another sign of the unbreakable link between this traditional society and their gods and ancestors is found in the following lines: “All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping. Ogwugwu is weeping. Agbala is weeping, and all others. Our dead fathers are weeping because of the shameful sacrilege they are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our eyes” (143). From these words by one of the leaders of the clan called Okika, it is easy to perceive the great interest that the gods and ancestors of the afterlife still have for their people. They are always present and show concern as they are affected by the realities of the livings. In that event, the people of Umuofia have gathered to find a solution to chase away the settlers. Talking about those among them who have joined the Western system and religion, Okika declares that “they have broken the clan and gone their several ways. We who are here this morning have remained true to our fathers, but our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland. If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansman. But we must do it. Our fathers never dreamed of such a thing, they never killed their brothers. But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our fathers would never have done” (op cit.). The people of Umuofia are confronted with an unusual situation that they never imagined living and yet they have the reflex to wonder what their ancestors would have done. So they take their decision referring to their ancestors’ world vision although the context is different and they are obliged to act differently. It should also be observed that colonisation has resulted in division and disequilibrium in formerly harmonious relations between brothers.

Following the above reasoning about the great incidence that the past still has on the present and future; Bloom refers to Francis Ngaboh-Smart who, talking about TFA, asserts that “narrating the past in a postcolonial context implies a desire to have or talk about the past, the present and the future at once” (qtd. in Vuletic 51). Highlighting the same view concerning LAT in his preface to the novel, J.F. Ndongu says: “L’histoire en tant que mémoire collective a donc un grand intérêt chez Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou’ou. Elle est un dialogue entre le présent, le passé et l’avenir” (History as a collective memory therefore has a great interest in Jeanne Marie Rosette Abou’ou’s view. It is a dialogue between the present, the past and the future) (12). The letter that Edima addresses to his grandfather bears a great symbol. The idea of writing a letter enhances communication between the past and the present with the objective of improving the future. Tita is a revered ancestor, and Edima’s initiative to

communicate with him is a quest for ancestral intervention to reconcile the Zilanese with their culture and their environment. In the second volume of the novel, Edima tells the story of Tara, a former robber and crook who has become the chief of Zilan-village. Naturally, he settles in the chieftaincy and he continues with bullying, scams and dishonest actions, not to mention his multiples crimes of the past that enriched him and allowed him to access the position of chief. When Tara is ultimately found and arrested by the gendarmes, Edima sees it as an ancestral intervention. He tells Tita in his letter that: “Je sais que c’est vous de l’au-delà, qui avez mené cette action de sauvetage du village Je te supplie donc, cher Tita de ne pas en rester là. Il faut s’attaquer à tout ce qui cause la perte de tes filles et fils” (I know that it was you from the afterlife, who carried out this action to save the village... So I beg you not to stop there. You must deal with everything that causes the misbehaviour of your sons and daughters) (83). This confirms the preponderant place given to ancestors in Africa, the conviction that they can step in and take action to correct and improve anything that is wrong. It is also worth mentioning that the interconnection between past, present and future, more than a narrative strategy, constitutes a specific hallmark that characterises both novels’ structures.

Another symbolic issue to discuss here is death. Coincidentally in both novels under study, there is a character that symbolises at the same time African values and preservation of the environment. Later on the death of each one of these characters brings about a general turning upside down for the places which they cherished. In the case of TFA, Okonkwo committed suicide knowing that his clansmen would not cooperate with him in fighting against the cruel settlers. According to Waseem and Mudasar, Okonkwo’s death means the collapse of Igbo culture and the victory of British rulers. The external power succeeds in shattering the Igbo culture by spreading its own religious and political ideologies which are considered superior and advanced. They quote Ernest N. Emenyonu’s statement that “*Things Fall Apart* is indeed a classic study of cross-cultural misunderstanding and the consequences to the rest of humanity, when a belligerent culture or civilisation, out of sheer arrogance and ethnocentrism, takes it upon itself to invade another culture, another civilisation” (*International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation* 437). Colonisation is denounced as the origin of things falling apart. Okonkwo’s death gives a glimpse of the catastrophe that is coming: the colonised Igbo people who will henceforth live according to the laws, convictions and demands of the Western culture. If TFA ends with an indirect announcement

of the socio-cultural and environmental disorder that has infiltrated the land and will undoubtedly grow, LAT is more revealing of this disorder.

It is crucial to note that in LAT also, the starting point of change or disorder is symbolised by Tita's death which is described in alarming terms from the prologue of the novel:

En cette matinée de petite saison sèche le souffle de Zilan-village s'était arrêté. Un calme frissonnant y régnait. On se croirait à un lendemain de tornade dévastatrice. Les arbres avaient perdu de leur splendeur habituellement entretenue par les rayons de lever du soleil. L'atmosphère était lourde, si lourde que même les animaux avaient compris que quelque chose de grave avait eu lieu. Aucun cri d'animal depuis ce matin là ... Les femmes qui, à cette heure, devaient déjà être sur le chemin des champs, étaient restées cloîtrées dans leurs cuisines. Les pleurs des enfants avaient mystérieusement disparu. Il était évident qu'un malheur venait de s'abattre sur Zilan-village ... L'homme qui jusqu'à cet instant, était le garant des valeurs essentielles de la communauté Zilan venait d'entamer la route vers l'au-delà pour rejoindre ses ancêtres. (Vol. 1, 21)

In that morning of the early dry season, the breath of Zilan-village stopped. A shivering dead silence was prevailing there. It looked like the day after a devastating tornado. Trees had lost their magnificence usually kept by the sunrise rays. The atmosphere was heavy, so heavy that even the animals understood that something serious had happened. No animal cry since that morning ... The women, who by now must have been on their way to the fields, had remained cloistered in their kitchens. Children's wailings had mysteriously disappeared. It was evident that a tragedy had just fallen on Zilan-village ... The man, who up to this moment had been the guarantor of the essential values of the Zilan community had just started his journey to the world afterlife to join his ancestors.

The preceding citation reveals the incidence of Tita's death on the village population and their natural environment. Before the announcement is made, nature already feels that a tragedy has taken place. Villagers, trees, animals and even the atmosphere reflect the impact of this sad news everywhere, on everyone or everything. The narrator highlights that nothing will ever be the same again, for this great loss will lead to irreversible changes in all the areas. It is obvious that Tita's death in LAT represents the starting point of decadence and deterioration of both cultural values and the environment. As the narrator states in the first volume of the novel: "On peut le dire sans risqué de se tromper, Zilan était un village paisible et prospère, et ce, jusqu'à la disparition de Tita (One can say it without taking the risk of being wrong, Zilan

was a peaceful and prosperous village, and this, until Tita's death) (52). The new disastrous situation will then motivate his grandson Edima, several decades later, to write him a letter asking for his intervention. As pointed out by the narrator, "La disparition de son grand-père l'avait profondément affecté. Il était conscient dès cet instant de l'avènement d'une époque nouvelle à Zilan-village, mais sans savoir à quel point..." (He was deeply affected by his grandfather's death. From that moment he was aware of the advent of a new era at Zilan-village, but he did not know to what extent...) (58-59). Fortunately, there are various solutions proposed in literature to this preoccupying issue.

In "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism", Ursula K. Heise ponders over the possibility to return to more ecologically attuned ways of inhabiting nature, and what would be the cultural prerequisites for such a change (504). Susie O'Brien on her own, without denying the crucial role that Achebe's fiction has played in illuminating Africa's past, in her paper wants to think about his writing and teaching—specifically his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*—in more prophetic terms. As she states, "in particular I am interested in the novel's capacity to speak to a contemporary crisis, one whose devastation, like colonialism, touches some places more than others, but that is global in scope. For purposes of clarity, we'll call it the environmental crisis"(1). Her argument works on the assumption that environment, culture and politics have always have been connected, but now they are more densely entangled. Furthermore, she argues that her principal thesis is that "*Things Fall Apart* offers a vision and strategy of resilience for coping with the complex, potentially catastrophic, ecological and cultural changes that confront us today" (ibid). Also, O'Brien considers that arts have an evolutionary as well as revolutionary function. This demonstrates the great importance of literature to discuss and provide solutions to ongoing issues. Literature evolves following current troubles while keeping a revolutionary power to fix the mess. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion with O'Brien that the contribution of arts is not only to human beings, but also to the whole universe for the survival of all.

Hadiyanto et al. hold the hypothesis that if human beings can live along, adapt happily to, and learn appropriately from nature around, they will certainly be able to use their knowledge of various natural phenomena for the betterment of humans' lives in many aspects. Humans' knowledge of vegetation and animals, which are parts of nature, will also give a lot of advantages and prosperities for the fulfillment of humans' life necessities. Humans' and nature's interactions are ecologically inseparable (1-2). As a matter of fact, the mystery and fear of nature which can be observed through values intrinsic to the peoples of Umuofia and

traditional Zilan society, serve to promote respect of the environment and its preservation. In TFA we can read that Okonkwo's whole life was dominated by the fear of failure and weakness. This made him special and different from others who were dominated by "the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw" (13). Similarly, in LAT Edima talks to his children about the fear of dead people who were suspected to wander in the environment when they had just died. He tells them that:

(...) La propreté corporelle pendant le deuil était défendue. Encore fallait-il avoir le courage d'aller à la rivière pour se baigner avec tout ce qu'on racontait (...) La croyance populaire était que l'esprit de celui qui est mort, avant son enterrement, errait dans tous les endroits où il avait vécu, et si on allait en forêt et que c'était la même forêt qu'il fréquentait de son vivant, on courait alors le risque certain de l'y rencontrer. Ce n'était pas une rencontre à souhaiter car il se disait que l'esprit pouvait apparaître sous des forms effrayantes. (70)

(...) Body cleanliness during mourning was forbidden. Again, one needed courage to go to the river to bathe with all that was said (...) popular belief was that before the burial of the deceased, his spirit wandered in all the places he went to when he was alive, therefore, if one went to a forest, the same forest where the deceased used to go to, one ran the risk of meeting him there. It was not an encounter to be wished for it was said that the spirit could appear in frightening forms.

In both novels, local populations are embedded in their religious beliefs, customs and traditions which are to a sufficient extent drawn from the physical and metaphysical environment. They are living in a dreadful and undisclosed natural environment which they interchangeably fear, revere and uphold.

One of the key principles to face the current environmental crisis is resilience. As O'Brien mentions, TFA certainly does not condemn efforts to prevent disaster, but suggests instead that such efforts must reflect recognition of the complexity and connectedness of the human and non-human ecologies in play. More crucial perhaps, and more relevant to the message of Achebe's novel, is the way we respond to disaster when it occurs. Resilience is the capacity to undergo change—to fall apart, even— without ceasing to exist. Three characteristics are essential to the quality of resilience in ecology that has particular bearing on TFA. First resilience is based on principles of interdependence; then, resilience is predicated on adaptive capacity, i.e. the degree to which the system can build the capacity to

learn and adapt; and thirdly, resilience is based on self-organisation (versus lack of organisation, or organisation forced by external factors) (*Postcolonial Text* 7-8).

The aforementioned characteristics of resilience –interdependence, adaptive capacity and self-organisation– demonstrate that the unexpected is planned so as to find solutions when the worst happen. To bring more light on this point, O’Brien quotes Deborah Bird Rose who states:

[In ecological terms,] resilience (...) refers to relationships within ecosystems and is attuned to the instability of living systems. Each living thing has its own will to flourish (...) The will to flourish brings every living thing into relationship with other living and non-living parts of its environment. When those relationships work to enable life to flourish, the system itself may be said to be resilient (...) In human terms, resilience has a similar meaning, referring to the capacity of groups of people to sustain themselves in flourishing relationships with their environment, to cope with catastrophe, and to find ways to continue. (qtd. in O’Brien 8)

From Rose’s definition and analysis, resilience is a prerequisite to survive. It is evident that there would always be catastrophes, including cultural decadence, moral depravation or environmental crisis. However, when things fall apart, one of the major focuses must be human beings’ ability to survive, to get up and to continue progressing. This means that if we cannot avoid a catastrophe we must learn how to overcome it. Both novels under study tackle the theme of resilience as a way to go beyond degradation and bring solutions to reconcile man with nature.

The careful reading of TFA informs us that, environmental crises—drought, locusts, along with the quotidian challenges of weather and sickness—are part of Igbo life, managed within a system of agricultural, political, social and spiritual practices that have evolved over time. Besides, in the case of LAT, the first volume shares TFA’s natural organisation with solutions found to daily disasters while the second volume is the letter proper, a call to Tita as well as the other deceased ancestors to intervene and solve the disaster that life has become in Zilan-village.

Modernism and globalisation are regarded by Abou’ou as factors responsible for change or cultural and environmental degradation. Emmanuel Kelechi Iwuagwu in his article, “Socio-Cultural Globalization and the Death of African Socio-Cultural Values and Identity” (2014), decries the negative effects of globalisation on African socio-cultural values and identity though he recognises its undeniable benefits. Iwuagwu discusses how the African

customs, traditions, values, ideologies, worldviews and identity are being daily subjected to violence and destruction by the domineering influence of Western values and lifestyle through globalisation. He acknowledges the inevitability of the globalisation process as well as its many benefits but he argues that in this globalisation process the African culture and identity are being erased. This said, at the rate socio-cultural globalisation is going; the consequence is predictable: the extinction of African socio-cultural values and identity in the nearest future (*European Journal of Scientific Research* 321). In both novels the dominant culture ends up swallowing the less imposing. As earlier mentioned, when the white men arrived, the missionary Mr. Brown is said to spend long hours with Akunna a great man in one of the local villages, talking through an interpreter about religion, “neither of them succeeded in converting the other but they learned more about their different beliefs” (179). However, based on what happened next, it is no longer necessary to demonstrate that, Christianity ended up taking over African traditions, in fiction as well as in real life. Likewise, another fact from LAT concerns the domain of health; Edima in his letter reminds Tita that: “Toi tu nous disais à l’époque que les deux médecines, moderne et traditionnelle, ne s’excluaient nullement. Aujourd’hui, avec l’exigence de l’abandon du dernier par les acteurs du premier, le resultat est catastrophique” (You told us in your time that the two types of medicine did not exclude each other. Today, with the exigence to abandon the latter imposed by the actors of the former, the result is catastrophic) (27). Once more, it is noticeable that with globalisation, Western people first pretend to cooperate with Africa but they end up assimilating them by giving ascendancy to their own vision and ways.

Iwuagwu argues that in the name of globalisation, less influential nations simply dissolve and disappear under the pressure of the dominant cultures and values of the more civilised and influential nations. Talking about globalisation therefore, some pertinent questions must be addressed, namely: the questions of whose cultures or values are being globalised? And whose cultures and values survive in the pool of globalised cultures and values after the contact with other cultures and values? As expressed by Iwuagwu: “Globalisation is a multidimensional phenomenon whose tentacles spread across every aspect of human endeavour. Discussing globalisation is discussing anything that can be transmitted. Hence we can talk of economic globalisation, cultural globalisation, social globalisation ... environmental globalisation” (*European Journal of Scientific Research* 324). He also refers to Steger Manfred who identifies five dimensions of globalisation namely: economic, political,

cultural, ecological and ideological globalisation (ibid). In LAT all these dimensions are represented but the major ones are cultural, ecological and ideological.

Iwuagwu reminds in his study that the quest for survival is the driving force of globalisation. Man is by nature a social being whose life is meaningless and incomplete without others. His potentialities will remain latent if he limits himself to his immediate environment. One's immediate environment cannot provide all that he needs in life. A cursory look at what surrounds one wherever he/she lives reveals that more than half of them come from outside: the petrol, gas, books, electricity, pens, electronics, computers, cars, phones, building materials, house utensils, furniture, etc. may have come from distant places. No man is an island; to reject globalisation in the contemporary world is to be isolated, ostracised, and stagnant. Another factor that has made globalisation inevitable in the contemporary world is the unprecedented advancement in technology especially in communication and transportation infrastructures (325).

However, a glance at the modern day African socio-cultural milieu displays very little of the African identity different from the European or American identities. To be educated and civilised is gradually taking the meaning of being westernised, hence the promptness with which Africans are discarding their socio-cultural values and identity in preference to Western values. Iwuagwu's brief survey of the various aspects of social life in the contemporary African society shows a speedy erosion of some traditional African socio-cultural values and their total extinction in the nearest future. As areas of endangered values he points out language and educational system; customs, traditions and morals; social values and cultural festivals; news, media and entertainment to name only these few among the innumerable which exist. Iwuagwu deplores the fact that the lifestyle of an African today is an imitation of the Western lifestyle. From his house and its furnishings, to his clothing, toiletries, jewellery, hairstyle, vehicles, mobile phones, language, phonetics, food, drinks, schools, religion, medicals, recreational activities, sports etc. (*European Journal of Scientific Research* 330)

These are the same negative side-effects of globalisation that Abou'ou criticises in her novel. According to J. F. Ndongu in his preface to the novel:

Dans cette histoire poétisée, elle exalte le passé, mais cette rencontre avec le Zilan ancien cède vite la place à la découverte de la modernité. L'auteur fait prendre conscience des méfaits de la civilisation industrielle qui mécanise l'homme en faisant comprendre au lecteur la richesse qui est offerte aux

enfants de l'Afrique : une vie saine et plus simple proche de la Nature. Une vie en or, l'or vert c'est la forêt sublimée où l'auteure promène son esprit. Un vert qui donne sa valeur culturelle à l'encolure qui enrobe le texte entier. (13)

In this poeticised story, she glorifies the past, but this encounter with the old Zilan quickly gives way to the discovery of modernity. The author makes people aware of the damage of the industrial civilisation that mechanises man by making the reader understand the wealth that is offered to African children: a healthy and simpler life close to Nature. A golden life, green gold is the sublimated forest where the author takes round her spirit. A green colour that gives its cultural value to the enclosure that wraps up the entire text.

In this statement Fame Ndongo highlights the passage in LAT from an authentic Zilan-village to a modern place where everything has changed. By comparing the former with the latter, Abou'ou seeks to sensitise Africans on the disadvantages of industrial civilisation and the importance of returning to traditional African values that bring us closer to nature and promote the preservation of the environment. In the same vein, Tsala Tsala's preface to the first volume of LAT, describes this epistolary novel as "une histoire forte qui vient soutenir l'irrépressible combat entre la paisible et la rassurante tradition et une modernité toujours plus étonnante et plus provocatrice." (A strong story that comes to support the irrepressible fight between the peaceful and reassuring tradition and a more and more amazing and provocative modernity) (17). Both Tsala Tsala and Fame Ndongo present the overgrowing of modernity in African traditional set up as a major issue discussed in LAT.

As already mentioned in the opening of this last chapter, Abou'ou, through the voice of her narrator, depicts globalisation as exterminator of Africanity; destroyer of the fundamental values of people and elaborated for the benefit and service of its genitors (23). Obviously the author considers globalisation as a strategy put in place by the dominant cultures for their sole profit. A view which is shared by Achebe in TFA.

Indeed, Achebe rejects the first invasion of the European in Africa with the pretext of civilising African people through colonialism. As concluded by Waseem and Mudasir in their article, one cannot discard the fact that colonisation influences both people and places.

With regard to the structures of the two novels in relationship to our topic, we can say that through his narrative technique, his use of time, command of language and usage of proverbs and metaphors, Achebe has succeeded in portraying the manner in which the society changed and the land became contaminated. At the end, the natives fail to preserve their age-

old relationship with nature and surrenders before the colonial rulers. According to the South African writer and critic, Lewis Nkosi, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe takes on the heavy responsibility of projecting the African continent through “the thrill of representing the drama of a vast, unwieldy and refractory drama of becoming,” to the rest of the world in a balanced, unapologetic perspective: “Chinua Achebe has not escaped this penance. Reading through millions of words of public statements, of reviews and interviews, of adulation and accusation, one is struck by the high price he has paid for being Africa’s greatest indigenous novelist” (qtd. in Francis Ibe Mogu 184).

Moreover, as can be read in Snezana Vuletic’s PhD thesis entitled “From Colonial Disruption to Diasporic Entanglements” (2018), *Things Fall Apart* is an excellent illustration of David Attwell’s claim that “there is no escape clause from the encounter with modernity” (qtd. in Vuletic 50). According to her, the novel subverts, rewrites and expands the category of Igbo cultural identity, which has its origins in colonial modernity. Moreover, it also engages with the very genre that shaped Igbo cultural identity: ethnographic writing. TFA, however, does not uncritically adopt colonial practices and discourses, but re-examines them in a new, anti- and de-colonial light and re-appropriates them as means of de-colonial struggle. The novel takes up the remnants of colonial modernity –its genres such as ethnographic writing and its narratives of Igbo cultural identity – in order to interrogate them, challenge their authority and subvert them. She comes to the conclusion that if Attwell’s assumption that one cannot escape modernity is correct, then TFA testifies to how early postcolonial writers found ways to challenge modernity “from within” (ibid).

Pierre Gueye Nonka and Charlemagne Toe in their analysis of the first volume of LAT points out that the said volume is in reality a tale under the model of traditional African tales. There is a main storyteller, Edima, 67 years old, a retired civil servant, listened to by an attentive audience that he finds in his 6 children, all adults, who live in Zilan-village. According to Gueye Nonka and Charlemagne Toe,

Lettre à Tita (volume 1) contient un certain nombre de caractéristiques propres au récit “réaliste” tant certains événements évoqués, la vie des personnages et les relations qui les unissent nous sont étrangement familiers. Cependant en poussant un peu plus loin l’analyse, on atteint la dimension du conte traditionnel de l’Afrique ancestrale. Par exemple (...) le récit nostalgique de Zilan-village: un havre de paix (...) [et] le récit élogieux sur le personnage de Tita: (qualités morales: personnage clairvoyant, charismatique, dépositaire de la tradition, un homme juste, etc.). (*Les Editions Fleurus Afrique* 6)

Letter to Tita (volume 1) contains a number of characteristics which are specific to the “realistic” narrative, as some of the events evoked; the lives of the characters and the relationships between them are strangely familiar to us. However, if we take the analysis a little further, we reach the dimension of the traditional tale of ancestral Africa. For instance (...) the nostalgic story of Zilan-village: a haven of peace (...) [and] the glowing tale about the character Tita: (moral qualities: far-sighted person, charismatic, custodian of tradition, a fair man, etc.).

This analysis of the structure is verified throughout the first volume which opens with an omnipresent narrator who will remain unidentified. The latter then gives the floor to Edima who will let his children know what this village looked like in Tita’s time.

Abou’ou’s choice of the narrative structure in the case of LAT is of particular interest to us because it differs from one volume to another. While the first volume is akin to an ancestral traditional tale that goes hand in glove with the nature of the facts told, in an environment of nature-culture symbiosis, the structure of the second volume immerses us in a letter. This is a modern structure as well as the modern environment it describes. The epistolary structure establishes a deeper connection between Edima and his grandfather. What he first relates to his children about Tita in the ancestral and ideal Zilan is not sufficiently revealing of his closeness and complicity with Tita as the letter he writes to him in the second volume. The first paragraphs of the second volume tell us about Edima’s attitude in writing his letter. With a confidence nourished by the hope of a possible rescue of the village by the ancestors, he enters in his bedroom, double-locks the door, and orders his family not to disturb him for any reason. He takes up a pen and a paper and engages in an epistolary enterprise, one would speak of the writing of a tragedy that describes the descent into hell of the village (LAT Vol. 2; 22). The letter is peppered with phrases reminding the reader that Edima is writing down to a special person whom he respects and cherishes. We can regularly read at the beginning of a new paragraph “Tita! Dear Tita” or “Do you know Tita that...”. The end of this volume informs us that: “Après avoir fait cette lettre, Edima se sentit soulagé. Il la déposa soigneusement au chevet de son lit, attendant avec impatience la visite du destinataire du courrier” (After writing his letter, Edima felt relieved. He placed it carefully by his bedside, eagerly waiting the visit of the mail recipient) (84).

Preservation and conservation of the environment and natural resources is among the top solutions proposed by the defenders of the environmental cause. Vimbai C. Kwashirai in his paper entitled “Environmental Change, Control and Management in Africa” (2013), draws

on economic and environmental historical approaches to explore the consumption-conservation nexus in the use of African natural resources. He investigates environmental changes resulting from a range of interactive factors, including climate, population, disease, vegetation and technology. Kwashirai explores in his study the role and impact of the states, whether exploitative or conservationist, from pre-colonial times to the present. According to him, “the relationship between economic development, nature and conservation is central, given that the main axiom of world conservation strategy is that development depends upon conservation, and lasting development is impossible without conservation” (*Global Environment* 166). To preserve both environmental and cultural resources, one has to apply conservation strategy. This can only be done when people are aware of the importance of what they must preserve and conserve for their own survival. Our analysis in this chapter shows that Achebe and Abou’ou through their novels under study demonstrate the essentiality of African cultures that must be conserved if we want to preserve our environment and restrict the incidence of environmental crisis.

This chapter focused on examining how Achebe and Abou’ou through their novels under study, promote the reassertion of African culture in a bid to preserve the environment and fight against environmental degradation. This part of our analysis was a step-by step comparison of the similar and/or different methods that both writers use to achieve their goal. Therefore, it appears that sustainability is a concept to use correctly and to put in practice in our society following Mensah and Castro’s assertion that it is “the process suggested to improve the quality of human life within the limitations of the global environment. It involves solutions for improving human welfare that does not result in degrading the environment or impinging on the well-being of other people”(ZEF Center for Development Research 4). According to them, although there is no general agreement about the precise meaning of sustainability, there seem to be a general consensus that three basic concepts are involved in sustainable measures: “living within certain limits of the earths’ capacity to maintain life; understanding the interconnections among economy, society and environment; and maintaining a fair distribution of resources and opportunity for this generation and the next” (ibid). In their novels, Achebe and Abou’ou defend these three basic concepts.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This comparative study was carried out with the aim of scrutinising the incidence of African culture on the preservation or destruction of the environment. We examined in the novels under study –Achebe’s TFA and Abou’ou’s LAT– what the environment symbolises in African culture. This analysis highlighted the relationship between the environment (nature), its representation in the novels selected, its transformation by man and its preservation. In his book titled *In my Father House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Anthony Appiah asserts that there is “no better point of entry to the issue of the African intellectuals’ articulation of an African identity than through the reflections of (African) most powerful creative writer” (qtd. in Vuletic 160). It is no more the place to demonstrate the indubitable creativity of both Chinua Achebe and M.R. Abou’ou which has been showcased throughout this work.

From the outset, our argument has been that some cultures in the global context are exposed to extinction. This generates some human beings’ practices which are harmful to the environment. The protection of both cultures and the environment therefore becomes a major cause of concern. However, cultural values are the bond between human beings and their environment.

The first chapter of this research focused on discussing the theoretical framework and a literature review of the study. It examined how TFA and LAT shape the conceptualisation and perception of the environment and culture. In the first part of the chapter, cultural studies and ecocriticism were introduced as the theories on which the analysis of the whole work is based. Then the second part of the chapter, the literature review was tackled in two major sections: the first part concerned issues related to the relationship between the environment and culture while the second part analysed what had been written on both novels so far in connection with the topic. This section aimed at reviewing a good number of critical writings related to the environment and culture in literary production. Most of those works concentrated on the issues of culture, identity and the environment separately. This permitted to highlight the particularity of our comparative analysis of TFA and LAT which focused on the capital role of culture to make the choice to preserve or destroy the environment.

The second chapter on the environment and culture in Achebe’s TFA and Abou’ou ’s LAT addressed the issue of Africans’ view of their environment and culture. Tracing its origin

in history, the relationship between the environment and culture is one of the oldest problems faced by humanity. From this point of view, we established a parallel at different levels while determining similarities in both authors' writings as far as the environment and culture were concerned. As a matter of fact, this section of the work demonstrated that TFA and LAT both represent the intimate relationship that African people had with the natural surroundings before things started falling apart because of colonisation and globalisation. Therefore, despite the differences in the way both novelists exhibit the relationship between the environment and culture in the novel under study, this chapter demonstrated that the degradation of some African cultural values goes hand in glove with that of the environment.

The third chapter examined African and Western perceptions of the environment and culture. Throughout this part of the work, we reviewed analyses on how African and Western people perceive their environment and the various strategies they develop to preserve it. It was a comparison based on different cultural perceptions across the world. We observed that though environmental crisis is a global issue, it is addressed differently as we move from one place to another as environmental needs are not the same everywhere, people's responses to the environmental crisis and the degradation of cultural values are also different. This said, our third chapter demonstrated that the degradation of cultural values also affects men's relationship to their environment.

The fourth and last chapter concentrated on the promotion and preservation of the environment and African culture following Achebe and Abou'ou's respective approaches in their novels. Through a comparative scrutiny, the emphasis was laid on how *Things Fall Apart* and *Lettre à Tita* both contribute to reassert African values which promote the preservation of nature. Therefore, through a comparison, we discussed in this section of our dissertation the influence of culture on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals to promote the preservation of the environment. As major measures taken to hold back environmental crisis we mentioned in this chapter the concepts of sustainability and conservation of cultural and natural resources.

Following Ibe Mogu's observations, a major accomplishment of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is that it has been able to reach across to a wide spectrum of cultures globally to express the rich and unique culture possessed by Africa and Africans prior to the arrival of the European. This fact allows for objective comparisons among readers from various backgrounds to discover what is universal or particular among Africans and the rest of the human family globally (*LWATI, A Journal of Contemporary Research* 188). In the same vein,

this work also showed how M. R. Abou'ou follows Achebe's steps to reassert African cultural values through her novel *Lettre à Tita*.

Acknowledging Ibe Mogu's assertion that accomplishments in the fields of science and technology have increasingly turned the world into a global community, this research was an attempt to demonstrate that the variegated nature of cultures and traditions in the world should contribute to the magnificence of the human race and add to its splendour. Through *Things Fall Apart* and *Lettre à Tita*, Achebe and Abou'ou have added, in their respective times, the African voice to the fight against environmental and cultural problems.

Environmental preservation which is everyday a more vital concern, is at the centre of various initiatives, movements and resolutions. The dangers and consequences of the environmental crisis are already visible and tangible so much so that the state of the globe is a complete message. Thus, human beings who are the main agents of this destruction are called to more responsibility and consciousness for their own survival. That is the reason why Rose could say that "an organism that deteriorates its environment commits suicide" (Mogu 188).

Achebe and Abou'ou both promote the reassertion of African values, values that foster among others respect and the preservation of mother Earth while condemning all attitudes which tend to jeopardise the environment. Both African writers advocated communality which was the life principle in African traditional setup as opposed to the ongoing and day-by-day increasing anthropomorphism. Man centers everything on him and with this attitude, he broke up the natural harmony of the African traditional setup and enters in the process of setting apart from nature.

Okwonkwo in TFA and Tita in LAT both represent great symbols of Africanity; defenders of African cultural values and venerators of nature. Achebe and Abou'ou used these characters to showcase how entangled one can be with his culture and his environment. People that respect their culture automatically preserve their environment. They do not need laws to permit or forbid some actions and attitudes towards the environment; they know how to live with and respect this part of themselves.

All things considered, we recommend the conservation, preservation and respect of nature as the most currently needed African cultural principles to "save" and "serve" the environment. The environmental crisis which is a global issue also necessitates a global response and global implementation of strategies to make the Earth a better place. Further research on environmental and cultural studies could focus on more practical solutions to

eradicate cultural and environmental degradations. This will contribute to the improvement of societal values, for only human beings who are aware and conscious of the damage incurred by a polluted environment can create, maintain and militate in favour of a green planet.

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