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Department of Communication

**AN ECOFEMINIST READING OF SELECTED BLACK FEMALE WRITERS'
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORKS**

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Declaration

I, Irene Lumba Sibanga, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis entitled: An Ecofeminist Reading of selected black female writers' autobiographical works is my original work, and that I have not previously, in its entirety or part, submitted it to any other university or higher education institution for the award of a degree.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the following: Our mighty god, my husband, and my mother. Without you, it would have been very difficult to fulfil this task. Walking with you through this journey has given me the much-needed strength. Mom, thank you so much for your faith in me and teaching me that I should strive until the end.

Abstract

This study was an ecofeminist reading of selected black female writers' autobiographical works (*Unbowed: A Memoir [UM]* (2007) by Kenyan, Wangari Maathai, *Nervous Conditions [NC]* (1988) by Zimbabwean, Tsitsi Dangaremba, and *Walking the Boeing 707 [WB]* (2008) by Namibian, Lydia Shaketange). The relationship between humans and nature remains largely under-investigated in literary studies, particularly in Africa. This relationship did not happen accidentally, but instead developed from a carefully crafted frame of life and environmental perspective. It becomes important to have a serious conversation on the connectivity between human and non-human nature. Premised on the ecofeminism framework, this study explored the relationship between women and nature in a male-dominated society, as depicted in the autobiographical texts and one semi-autobiographical text by black African female writers. The study was framed by ecofeminism where ecofeminism examines the interconnections between the domination of women and the domination of nature. A literature review was conducted and relevant sources were consulted that aided in establishing a foundation from which this study was built. The study employed content analysis as it was a qualitative desktop type of research. No field work was conducted. The main objective, together with the sub-objectives, were all fulfilled as revealed in the analysis which culminated in the findings. The study revealed that the results were almost the same, namely that the societies were mainly patriarchal, particularly for *UM* and *NC*. The way Maathai had to fight throughout the novel shows the oppressive nature of the society that she finds herself in. In *NC*, the characters: Tambu, Maiguru and Nyasha, also suffer equally under patriarchal domination as well as the vicious colonial system. Hence, the female characters in the novel have nowhere to escape to and are literally trapped in a system that they can never unshackle. The study suggests as one of its recommendations that future studies may consider using further different texts that deal with environmental issues and aspects pertaining to the subjugation of women. This may widen the understanding of the ecofeminist theory.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the background of the study. It introduces the problem statement, outlines the research objectives, and describes the importance of the study. In addition, the delimitations of the study are stated, and technical terms are defined. The organisation of the study chapters is given. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary which provides a synopsis of Chapter One.

1.1 Background to the study

In African society, the environment has always played a significant role in women's lives. As such, women's and environmental issues have become fertile ground for scholarly reflections (Xiao & McCright, 2015). The relationship between humans and nature remains largely under-investigated in literary studies, particularly in Africa. This relationship did not happen accidentally, but instead developed from a carefully crafted frame of life and environmental perspective. According to Roy (2014, p. 93), "literature might prove to be a useful and potent tool, not only to have a historical understanding of the man-nature relationship, but it might also influence the way man treats nature in the future." It becomes important to have a serious conversation on the connectivity between human and non-human nature. Centrally, this study attempted to explore how African women writers have also highlighted the relationship between African women's roles and their environment.

Premised on the ecofeminism framework, this study explored the relationship between women and nature in a male-dominated society as depicted in two autobiographical texts and one semi-autobiographical text by black African female writers (*Unbowed: A Memoir* (2007) by Wangari Maathai, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangaremba, and *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008) by Lydia Shaketange). The patriarchal domination of black women and the exploitation of the environment are the main focus of this study. Parallels between the unjustifiable treatment of women and the degradation of the environment by men have become a major concern in many African countries, such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and Namibia, which are increasingly drawn on by thinkers and scholars such as Cockram (2017); Anderson (2014); and Gadzikwa (2017); in various disciplines and geographic regions. This study has referred to the three countries mentioned above as these are the respective countries of the authors of the three selected texts. Ecofeminist critics and scholars such as Ruether (1995); Plant (1989); and Shiva and Mies (1993) have equated the oppression of women with the degradation of nature. Along the same vein, this study attempted to investigate how this

parallel relationship is represented in the three select texts. The ecofeminist theory was used to analyse two autobiographies and one semi-autobiography: *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2007), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008).

According to Ruether (2012, p. 12), “ecofeminism examines the interconnections between the domination of women and the domination of nature”. Ecofeminism puts forth the idea that life in nature is maintained through cooperation, mutual care and love. It is an activist and an academic movement, and its primary aim is to address and eliminate all forms of domination while recognising and embracing the interdependence and connection humans have with the earth (Sturgeon, 1997). In other words, the discipline goes beyond establishing connections between the experiences or the fate of women in the environment in male-dominant society. Mellor (1997) notes that ecofeminism is a movement that envisages a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Thus, in other words, ecofeminism deals with the oppression of women and the environment at the hands of the patriarchy.

In addition, the study examined how women also bear the brunt of environmental degradation. The human use of nature causes pollution, the destruction of the natural systems and threatens the foundation of life on which the human community itself depends. It is therefore the humans’ responsibility to ensure that the ecosystem is sustainably preserved for future generations (Plumwood, 1993). Hence, creative writers have taken up this cause through their art as observed in works like *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2007), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008), amongst others. As such, the study also examined the link between the domination of women and the domination of nature, and the ways in which the representation of nature expressed in these selected texts are consistent with conserving the natural environment and ecofeminist principles. Ecofeminism advocates for the better treatment of not just the environment, but also of women by patriarchal society (Sturgeon, 1997).

1.2 Statement of the problem

In a world where environmental issues have generated great concern, very little has been said about the ecological insight of African literary texts and gender relationships, let alone in autobiographies and semi-autobiographies. Worugji and Simon (2018) looked at patriarchal domination and female search in *Nervous Conditions*. Kara (2014) included *Nervous Conditions* in a study on third world feminist approaches to femaleness as inferior to maleness. These two studies were both framed by feminism just as the majority of the studies, nonetheless this study employed ecofeminism as its frame. Mukutu, Kabira and Siundu (2018)

analysed *Unbowed* from an ecocritical perspective. Also, Tunai (2015) explored *Unbowed* using the narrative theory by focusing on narrators, their voices, and their philosophies. With *Unbowed*, it seems none of the consulted studies to date have considered analysing it from an ecofeminist point of view. So far, only one study by Nahole (2017) has engaged *Walking Boeing 707*, but she framed it using the post-colonial theory. Thus, most of the studies consulted so far on the three selected texts have not considered the ecofeminist theory, thereby creating a possible gap for this study. Attention of this study was drawn to the interconnectedness of man's domination of nature and the subjugation and dominance of black women as depicted in the three selected creative works from an ecofeminist perspective. Each one of the three novels uniquely shows that women's struggle to survive is simultaneously a struggle for the protection of nature. In other words, parallels can be drawn between the suffering and oppression of women and the degradation of the environment. Hence, one of the most problematic issues in this study was investigating the insight that women and nature are associated not in passivity, but in creativity and in the maintenance of life (Shiva & Mies, 1993).

1.3 Research objectives

The main objective of this study was to explore the relationship between women and nature in a male-dominated environment.

However, the main objective was further subdivided into the following sub-objectives which were:

- To investigate the portrayal of the environment in relation to humans and determine its effects on the black women in the select texts;
- To explore how the representations of nature expressed in these texts are consistent with conserving the natural environment and with ecofeminist principles; and
- To examine the survival strategies that the female characters adopt as coping mechanisms in the different environments of the study.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study contributes to African scholarly knowledge of ecofeminism by using the three texts (*Unbowed: A Memoir*, *Nervous Conditions* and *Walking the Boeing 707*) to draw attention to the relationship between women and the natural environment. It also shows how African literary texts contribute to ecocriticism and ecofeminism. The study might serve as a reference point for other future scholars who may be interested in pursuing ecofeminism studies in literature.

1.5 Delimitation of the study

The research primarily focused on three African texts written by black female writers, namely: *Unbowed: A Memoir*, *Nervous Conditions* and *Walking the Boeing 707*. The three texts were purposively selected as they all share similar thematic concerns that this study intended to explore. The researcher chose the three texts from Namibia, Kenya and Zimbabwe as they are spread out across Southern and Eastern Africa and hence give a more representative picture of the broader African nation. The study examined the representation of nature in the selected literary works and their relationship with the environment. This study adopted an ecofeminist stand.

1.6 Definition of technical terms

Ecocriticism – Is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Barry, 2002)

Ecofeminism – Explores how male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology and in social structures (Howell, 2003)

Patriarchy – A system of society or government in which the father or the eldest male is head of the family and descent is derived through the male line (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

Feminism – The theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2019)

1.7 Organisation of the study

The study was organised as follows:

Chapter One comprised the introduction of the study by providing the background of the study and other crucial components such as the research objectives and ethical considerations.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature that enhances one's understanding of ecofeminism and the environment. It also evaluates the relationship between women and the environment in literary studies.

Chapter Three discusses the theory that was used in framing this study as well as all the methods that were employed in carrying out this study from the beginning to the end.

Chapter Four presents the analysis of the selected texts in relation to the research objectives as well as the reviewed literature in Chapter Two.

Chapter Five was on the conclusion of the study as well as the recommendations emanating from the findings of this study for future research.

1.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was sought from NUST's research committee before the research was conducted. The study was based on autobiographical texts that are accessible in the public sphere, thus, the study did not involve direct contact with human participants. Nonetheless, the researcher considered not ridiculing the authors of the three selected autobiographies. Lastly, the researcher acknowledged all the sources consulted and followed the requirements of the APA Referencing Style, both for in-text citations and in the reference list.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter, Chapter One, described the background of the study. The statement of the problem was spelt out as well as the research objectives. Additionally, the importance of the study, delimitations and the definitions of key terms were considered in this chapter. The way the study was organised was presented by providing highlights in each chapter from the beginning to the end. The next chapter, Chapter Two, looks at the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant literature that aids in establishing a foundation on which this study is built. Aspects pertaining to the relationship between humans and nature, human beings and environmental mortification; the portrayal of the environment in relation to humans and its effects on society as a whole; previous studies on the selected texts; and the gap established from the reviewed literature, are discussed in this chapter. All these aspects that form the literature review are based on the research questions for this study.

2.1 The relationship between humans and nature

The relationship that exists between human beings and the environment in which they subsist may be envisaged as a complex phenomenon as humans are continually interacting with the environment for their subsistence. This present study is not, however, the first study to point at the relationship between human beings and the environment as numerous studies on this topic have already been conducted. In her study, Mairs (2007) discusses how theories related to how humans interact with the environment have developed and evolved over the past century. Additionally, the study considers specifically the theoretical methodologies that have in the past driven human environment research and how the current theories of historical ecology have grown from such theories. The study identifies a number of theories which include environmental determinism, which is a simple model of the relationship between people and the environment. Mairs' (2007) study concludes that "interactions between people and environment were perceived as one-directional linear systems, but current human-environment research favours an approach that emphasises the existence of feedback loops as opposed to linear causality" (pp. 31-32). Mairs' (2007) study is significant to this study as it reinforces the belief that a relationship between human beings and the environment exists, though this present study was narrowed down to the treatment of women and the environment in a patriarchal society.

In a different study, Lambin (2005) focuses on human-environment systems and conditions of sustainability. The study addresses sustainable resource use which refers to the use of the natural environmental resources in producing products and services with future needs in mind but not damaging the natural resource base. Lambin (2005) observes that "environmental problems differ considerably in their cause and solution" (p. 179). Based on this observation, the causes of the suffering of the women in the selected autobiographies may not necessarily be the same, considering that the women represented have different geographical and contextual backgrounds. Thus, the analysis of each text is different because of the different

backgrounds and different contexts, even though they were defined within the same theoretical framework.

Maxwell and Lovell (2017) provide an evidence statement exhibiting the link between human health and the natural environment. This highlights that humans' health and wellbeing are dependent on water, food, air and shelter, all fairly derived from the natural environment. According to Maxwell and Lovell (2017) "exposure to natural environments has been linked with more favourable: heart rate; blood pressure; vitamin D levels; recuperation rates; and cortisol levels. Greenspace may also help to reduce the prevalence of type 2 diabetes" (p. 2). It may therefore be commented that any form of environmental mortification may be to the detriment of human health. Thus, this present study explores environmental mortification concerning females and how this varies from one text to another because of the differences in their backgrounds and to a point where the majority of the problems are emanating from.

Schimel et al. (2007) notes that "a full understanding of the challenges facing humanity requires knowledge of the evolution of the roles of technology, population expansions, cultural mores, climate, disease and warfare in changing human attitudes and responses through time" (p. 2). All these listed challenges impact and contribute in some way to the destruction of the environment which in turn causes problems such as the deprivation of more favourable conditions as mentioned earlier on by Maxwell and Lovell (2017). Thus, Schimel et al.'s (2007) study is of relevance as it points out some of the problems that are actually presented in the selected autobiographies for this present study, for instance, technology and development as noted in *Unbowed: A Memoir* by Wangari Mathaai (2007). Schimel et al.'s (2007) study concludes by commenting that if humans could learn from their integrated history, they might as well generate a sustainable and desirable future for the human species.

In a report, Boyd (2018) states that climate change will aggravate weather-related catastrophes which even now have harmful effects on people and deprive them of their pleasure of the right to life; this is mainly in developing areas. Significantly, the selected texts are all from Africa where development is still in a premature stage. This study endeavoured to establish how the characters are deprived of their right to life, emanating from the environmental catastrophes in the texts. According to the United Nations (2015), climate change is capable of causing mortality by means of drought as well as expanding disease vectors. The selected texts for this present study subtly discuss the aspects pertaining to climate change.

A study by Kahn, Severson, and Ruckert (2009) focuses on technological nature and its benefits as well as its shortcomings as compared to actual nature. The study reinforces the significance of the relationship that exists between humans and the natural environment. The

study goes further to note that “when actual nature is not available, there is substitute technological nature” (p. 41) but still points out insidious shortcomings such as humans adapting or going extinct. Also because of biophilia, that is, humans’ “evolutionary need to affiliate with nature”, humans will suffer “physical and psychological costs” (Kahn et al., 2009, p. 41). This study is of significance to the current study in that it discusses the concept of biophilia which is also prevalent in the selected texts for this study. Additionally, the studies by Kahn et al. (2009) and Maxwell and Lovell (2017) both emphasise the innate relationship that exists between humans and nature.

Although the studies consulted so far, Maxwell and Lovell (2017); Kahn et al. (2009); United Nations (2015); Schimel et al. (2007); Mair (2007); Lambin (2005); and Boyd (2017) reflect on the relationship that exists between humans and nature, they do so from different perspectives and different disciplines. Nonetheless, all the reviewed studies cement the existence of humans and nature as well as their interactions, hence the need to consider the relationship between humans and nature as presented in *Unbowed: A Memoir, Nervous Conditions* and *Walking the Boeing 707*.

2.2 Human beings and environmental mortification

Human beings may be to a large extent held responsible for the mortification of the environment. According to Reser (2007), “environmental degradation is to a large part caused by human behaviour and it directly affects human health and well-being” (p. 2). The problems emanating from human inattention and obliviousness are underlined in the selected texts *Unbowed: A Memoir, Nervous Conditions* and *Walking the Boeing 707*. Also, the idea of the problem of health mentioned by Reser (2007) is shared by Maxwell and Lovell (2017) and the United Nations (2015) which links human health to the environment.

Environmental mortification involves the abuse of the environment through varying means. For example, the African continent’s environment has experienced and is experiencing varying forms of exploitation and mortification, particularly with the coming of the colonisers to the continent (Owhofasa, 2013). Practical examples include diverse health problems, pollution of water, pollution of farmlands, the destruction of trees, loss of pastoral beauty, and the destruction of water, all of which were foreign to Africa (Owhofasa, 2013). Additionally, Ojaurega (2013) notes that the non-preservation of trees in the forests and wildlife as well as the natural seashores because of developments in modern architecture, are similarly significant causes liable for the on-going environmental defacement being felt in various parts of the world.

Of interest is the way the environment is harmed through powerful and spiteful forces ranging from colonialism to modernisation. Of course, the environment does react to the harm inflicted

on it and that impacts the lives of humans as observed by Reser (2007) who observes that “the perception and/or direct experience of environmental degradation and loss can lead to concern, anxiety, guilt, anger, helplessness, dread, and pessimism” (p. 4). This again validates the innate relationship between the reciprocity and interconnectedness between humans and the environment. Thus, Shoba and Nagaraj (2013) remark that “If man does not harm nature, the nature keeps him safe” (p. 85). In other words, human practices in the environment ascertain the way nature would give back to humanity. Hence, the study’s argument that the way some characters in the selected texts (*Unbowed: A Memoir*, *Nervous Conditions* and *Walking the Boeing 707*) contribute to environmental mortification, resulting in their own suffering and other people around them.

2.3 The portrayal of the environment in relation to humans and its effects on society as a whole

In fictional and nonfictional works, the environment is portrayed in relationship to humans, but in different contexts. Accounts of the relationship between humans and nature, convey ambiguous messages that identify humankind as both the destroyer and rescuer, and the wilderness or “natural nature” as both a threat and refuge (Uggla, 2010). For instance, with regards to Maathai’s (2003) *Green Belt Movement*, Hunt (2014, p. 2) notes that the book focuses on three Green Belt Movement campaigns in Kenya that operated as praxis to resist environmental and political oppression, empowering rural women to enact a political consciousness democracy and environmental justice. Thus, this study also considered how the selected texts represent the relationship between humans and the environment in the respective patriarchal societies of Kenya, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

From the novel, *The Grass is Singing*, Gyuris (2012) notes that “In Lessing’s case, it is not only the land and the African atmosphere that are described as dry and suffocating but the inhabitants (the white settlers in particular) as well” (p. 189). In other words, the environment is described as unfavourable. Also, Shodhganga (n.d.) comments that the entire novel, *Things Fall Apart*, has a tragic environment as it reflects the unhappy situation of the Ibo people. Furthermore, many of the Ibo people are underprivileged and many suffer from illness, thus the environment is also occasionally demonstrated as being pitiless for the Ibo community (Shodhganga. (n.d.). Moreover, Gogoi (2014) points out that while Achebe incorporates numerous other stories to prove nature as a living entity for the Ibos. The colonial rulers did not find it beautiful and welcoming, let alone its spiritual value (Gogoi, 2014). Hence, this study exploration of how the environment is portrayed in the selected texts, *Nervous Conditions*, *Unbowed: A Memoir* and *Walking the Boeing 707* in relation to humans and society as a whole.

Gnanadason (1994) clarifies that, “women and children are mostly affected by environmental degradation due to socially prescribed labour laws that demand for women to do the most strenuous kinds of work related to resources of the earth” (p. 179). Such acts of environmental degradation affecting women and children are also prevalent in the selected texts thus, this study will also focus on how women are equally affected. The novel *The Land’s Lord* by Echewa (1976), was subjected to the ecofeminist lens by Asika and Madu (2015). The book visibly illustrates how the environment is perceived by different members of the society. In doing so, the author clearly portrays the environment, its relationship to humans and how it affects them. *The Land of the Lord* is set during the early times of colonialism and Asika and Madu (2015) comment that the environment is portrayed from an ecofeminist view where colonialism is deemed the oppressor and destroyer, yet the natives view the environment as a place of affinity where survival of one is dependent on the other. Similarly, this study deliberated on how the repressive systems in each of the selected novels are responsible for the destruction of the environment and at the same time the oppression of women.

2.4 Presentation of women and the environment

This this section deliberates on how women and the environment are presented generally by the world of academia. The reviewed literature in this section provided a platform for comparing the representation of women and the environment in the study’s selected texts.

In a study on gender differences regarding environmental concerns, Xiao and MacCright (2015) note that previous studies, for instance Zelezny, Chua, and Aldrich (2000), consistently realised that women have reasonably stronger pro-environmental beliefs, attitudes and values than men. Thus, women were considered to be ahead of men in terms of beliefs, attitudes and values regarding the environment. However, Xiao and MacCright (2015) dispute this general consensus as their study reveals that men and women actually have comparable intensities of trust regarding attitudes, beliefs and values regarding the environment. Thus, Xiao and MacCright’s (2015) study demonstrates that environmental concerns are not matters of women alone but equally of men. This makes the study significant in the analyses of the selected texts, bearing in mind that some men are capable of being male ecofeminists.

Harris (2016) employs the ecowomanism theory in the analysis of Alice Walker’s, *The Color Purple*. The study notes that, “Ecowomanism centers the religious, theological, and spiritual perspectives of black women and women of color as they confront multi-layered oppressions such as racism, classism, sexism, and environmental injustice” (Harris, 2017, p. 27). Moreover, Harris (2016) expounds the theoretical underpinnings for ecowomanism, specifically “the womanist writings of Alice Walker, the environmental justice movement, and

its relation to eco-feminism” (p. 27). In this study, women are presented as confronters of multifaceted subjugations such as sexism, racism, classism and environmental injustice. This study becomes relevant in the analysis of the selected texts, *Nervous Conditions*, *Walking the Boeing 707* and *Unbowed: A Memoir*, as the forms of subjugation experienced by the authors were employed as key areas of concern in the analysis.

In another study, Pasi (2017) argues that parallels may be drawn between the domination of nature and the environment, and the exploitation and oppression of women. The study scrutinises the feminist domination of nature in literary works by black female writers from different countries in Africa by demonstrating how ecofeminism has influenced both environmental praxis, activism and theorisation of nature-woman links in African literary studies. The study uses ecocriticism and ecofeminist theories. Thus, the study is significant to this present study as it sheds light on how to incorporate ecofeminism in literary studies. Pasi (2017) observes in one of the texts analysed that;

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, nature is seen as an archetypal image of harmony and its disruption is analogous to the exploitation and oppression of women. An analysis of the novel reveals that the women embrace nature and navigate their lives in the suffocating patriarchal environment (pp. 224-225).

Thus, according to Pasi (2017), women hold on to nature and have their lives steer around it in a stifling patriarchal environment. Women are therefore presented as people of willpower and self-sustaining, an aspect that is prevalent in the selected texts, *Nervous Conditions*, *Walking the Boeing 707* and *Unbowed: A Memoir*.

2.5 Autobiography and ecofeminism

The researcher chose to analyse autobiographies based on Simataa’s (2019) observation that “writers of autobiographies affirm and reaffirm their identities through their texts” (p. 38). Besides, autobiographies speak from the author’s heart and experiences. Hence, Latha (2013) posits that an “autobiography in fact, communicates on several levels at once; it is simultaneously a private history, artful story, and rich outpouring of energies” (p. 46). This study chose the autobiographies to explore the intrinsic relationship between women and nature and how women’s struggles and environmental mortification can be paralleled. In essence, autobiographies are believed to “naturally consist of fictions that are part and parcel of one’s life, these are; fears, dreams, ideas, hopes, and reveries” (Lopičić, n. d., 1). Hence, whatever is written in the autobiography is bound to replicate another person’s life and experience somewhere in the world.

In their study, Bhuvanewari and Jacob (2012) did an ecofeminist study of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. The study pronounces the contribution of Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, to the creative ideas of environmental protection and ecological conscience, employing configurations that connect ecocriticism with feminist criticism. Additionally, the study discussed the images of women and nature in *The Color Purple*, the association between the oppression and exploitation of nature by male dominance, enslaving both the female and nature in the commercial market. The study concludes that, women must stand up against the unfair treatment they receive at the hands of men and they must do this by helping one another as is evident in *The Color Purple*, where the women band together to support and sustain one another throughout the novel. The issue of women standing against unfair treatment is prevalent in the autobiographies selected for this present study, particularly in Maathai's, *Unbowed: A Memoir*.

In addition, Doris Lessing's, *The Grass is Singing*, can be classified as a semi-autobiography as it describes the life of Mary, from her childhood through to the time she faces her demise on a farm in Rhodesia. Zhang (2011) explored *The Grass is Singing* from an ecofeminist perspective to reveal its ecological meaning that is scattered throughout the novel. The study also reveals Lessing's profound reflection on the relationship between male and female, and racial inequality. The study concludes that, the colonists' ruthless exploitation of the land caused a serious ecological crisis in Southern Africa. The unbalanced male-female relationship as well as racial inequality also led to a serious spiritual eco-crisis in that area. In *Nervous Conditions, Walking the Boeing 707 and Unbowed, A Memoir*, the inequality between female and male is prevalent throughout the text with the females suffering under the hands of patriarchy.

Another autobiography is *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys (1966). Antoinette's story begins when she is a young girl in the early nineteenth-century in Jamaica and ends up as an insane woman in London. Jizdny (2017) did a postcolonial ecofeminism study of the two novels namely, Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Jizdny's (2017) thus comments on *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) that, "looking at the lives of the characters of Antoinette Cosway... through postcolonial and ecofeminism theories, it is easy to explain why the marriage fails" (p. 48). The study concluded that, in Antoinette's marriage, Mr Rochester is a male dominant who tries to preserve his power which leaves Antoinette marginalised, oppressed and diminished.

Arundhati Roy's (1997) *God of Small Things* is a novel that can be classified as an autobiography whose story jumps back and forth between 1969 and 1993 involving numerous characters such as the twins, Estha and Rachel, who were seven years old in 1969. The story

ends in 1963 with the twins reaffirming by having a sexual relationship after they had been separated at childhood. In another study, Sebastian (2016) did an ecofeminist reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. From the study, Sebastian (2016) observes that, Arundhati Roy uses her debut novel, *The God of Small things*, as a medium to convey her ecological concern. Her female characters are the silent victims of patriarchy like the ever exploited Meenachal River, the pinned-up butterflies and the horror striking moths in the story (p.302). The study concluded that in *The God of Small Things*, the female characters have a direct association with the natural world or the animal world as they are subordinated and suppressed by patriarchy; similarly, nature is tamed by culture. This concurs with the prevalent suffering of female characters in *Nervous Conditions*, *Walking the Boeing 707* and *Unbowed: A Memoir*, where their suffering runs parallel to the degradation and mortification of the environment.

According to Cuesta (2011), autobiography is defined as “a term for a particular practice of life narrative, a concept which celebrates the impact of the autonomous individual, but also the universalising meaning of the life story” (p. 1). Some critics argue that autobiographies cannot be exempted from misrepresentation but Mlambo (2015) retains that the doubt that surpasses autobiography for its frankness can be dispersed by accepted standards of historical truth. Thus, Simataa (2019) comments that, “This argument makes autobiographical texts a central tool for understanding the multiplicity of individuals and society” (p. 42). As such, this study chose the three texts on the merit that they reflect people's lives and the environment that surrounds them by focusing on their “fears, dreams, ideas, hopes, and reveries” (Simataa, 2019, p. 40). Thus, autobiographies address issues that pertain to the continuity of human life and the ecosystem.

2.6 Previous studies

At this point in time, the researcher felt it imperative to review previous literary studies on the selected texts, *Nervous Conditions*, *Walking the Boeing 707* and *Unbowed: A Memoir*. This allowed the researcher to establish the gap in literature as well as minimise duplication. Besides, the consideration of existing studies also aided in positioning this present study in the rapidly proliferating information and knowledge base regarding literary studies. Thus, this section looks at the three selected texts individually, starting with *Nervous Conditions*, followed by *Unbowed: A Memoir* and then *Walking the Boeing 707*.

2.6.1 Earlier studies on *Nervous Conditions*

There is a plethora of studies on *Nervous Conditions* and some of which I referred to below. Worugji and Simon (2018) employ feminism/womanism as a theoretical framework to examine

patriarchal domination and the female's search for self in *Nervous Conditions*. The study concludes by stating that the issue of patriarchal domination is an age-long tradition that has lingered to dehumanise women not only in Africa, but in other societies and parts of the world and that characters like Tambudzai, Maiguru and Nyasha are poised to fight patriarchal domination, motivated by standing up and challenging the status quo.

Pasi (2017) explores ecocriticism and ecofeminism in selected black female writers' works and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is one of the selected texts. Pasi (2017) notes that "*Nervous Conditions* illuminates the eco-function of the environment" (p. 76) and that both males and females "use various liberatory strategies to escape the dualisms in which they are traditionally entrapped" (p. 77). The study concludes that "any disturbance or imbalance in this woman-nature interconnectivity bears a negative impact on the women. It is the women who bear the brunt of any land degradation; hence, land concerns are a feminist issue in *Nervous Conditions*" (pp. 215-216).

In another study, Okonkwo (2003) focuses on form and content in *Nervous Conditions*. Aspects pertaining to narrative, form and the bulk of the study by Okonkwo (2003) observe that *Nervous Conditions* "exemplifies the notion that content and form complement each other and thus are inseparable" (p. 53). However, this study seems to be somehow divorced from aspects pertaining to women and nature which is the focus of this present study but goes beyond the framing of ecofeminism.

Giménez (2013) employs a postcolonial and feminist approach in analysing women's voices in *Nervous Conditions*, with a focus on gender, class and ethnicity. The study ends by noting that "thanks to this realistic approach to the female characters, readers can finally hear the subaltern speak, as the narrator, by telling also other women's stories, is giving a voice to other women" (p. 47). Giménez' (2013) study differs from this present study with regards to the theories that were employed to frame it.

From another angle, Smith (2000) brings girl power to the centre in *Nervous Conditions*, bearing in mind fiction as a research site. The study notes that "Dangarembga's use of adolescence as trope encourages an examination of how her work might be linked to other texts which concern themselves with girlhood in the world" (pp. 257-258). Following the same line of thought, Saxton (1999) observes that "contemporary stories of girlhood constitute a new and generative lens for literary and cultural study" (p. xiii). Smith's (2000) study focuses mainly on the girl child, hence it is different from the present study which aims at exploring women subjugation in relation to the degradation of nature in a patriarchal setting.

More and more studies could have been listed here for *Nervous Conditions*, however those studies that have been listed show how widely *Nervous Conditions* has been examined in literary studies. The majority of the studies employ feminism or post colonialism or both as a theoretical paradigm for the studies. So far none have considered framing their study specifically with ecofeminism. Merging *Nervous Conditions* with specifically *Unbowed: A Memoir* and *Walking Boeing 707*, has thus created a possible gap that this present study endeavoured to close.

2.6.2 Previous studies on *Unbowed: A Memoir*

Numerous studies exist on the text *Unbowed: A Memoir*, implying that the text is quite popular in the scholarly studies arena. A few of the studies were sampled in this section in order to establish a literature gap for this present study. Ovesen, Fity, and Bengtsson (2008) make reference to Taylor's concepts of recognition, and the study discusses how Maathai organised the Memoir, the linguistic means of argumentation, her rhetorical approach and how she writes convincingly for nation building in Kenya. It may be relevant to note that Taylor's (2000) work "explicates an environmental justice paradigm as a framework that links social justice with environmental justice" (p. 510). This is similar to Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* which also bears the same framework that links environmental justice to social justice.

In *Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism*, Nixon (2011) proposes that Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir*, is framed by ecocriticism. In the study, Nixon (2011), explores autobiographies by prominent notables like Arundhati Roy, Wangari Maathai, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Abdulrahman Munif, Rachel Carson, Nadine Gordimer, Jamaica Kincaid, Njabulo Ndebele, and June Jordan. Nixon's (2011) work aids in connecting the literary features of Maathai's work by clarifying how she directs action for environmental justice and how she creatively presents the prevailing challenges using autobiographical writing. Nixon (2011) views *Unbowed: A Memoir* as an entry point to study the "movement memoir" (p. 129) with the aim of building a better future for Africa.

Framed by the Africana womanism theory and the critical pedagogy developed by Ferreira, Ochwa-Echel and Onyango (2018) employ these theoretical perspectives to elucidate "how the process of thinking about liberation translates into activism" (p. 94). The study further observes that Maathai's journey concerning personal change and self-definition are denoted in *Unbowed: A Memoir*. Thus, Ebila (2015) concurs that "her [Maathai] autobiography becomes a powerful tool for self-identification that recounts her personal experiences and offers lessons to readers about the importance of being in control" (pp. 148-149). Both studies by Echel and Onyango (2018) and Ebila (2015), are significant to this present study as they provide further comprehension of *Unbowed: A Memoir*, and a nuanced analysis and

appreciation of the text. Additionally, Caminero Santangelo and Myers (2011) explore the significance of Maathai's autobiography for sustainable development, thereby reinforcing the value of *Unbowed: A Memoir*.

Mukutu et al. (2018) did an ecocritical reading of *Maathai's Unbowed: A Memoir* and note that the text "displays a close relationship between the present culture and nature" (p. 12). The study further observes that Maathai organised *Unbowed: A Memoir* as a rhetorical and linguistic means of argumentation for the empowerment of women through planting trees in Kenya. Thus, the research by Mukutu et al. (2018) may be considered as another study that explores *Unbowed: A Memoir on diverse platforms*.

Kushner (2009) ruminates on Wangari Maathai as a 'righteous leader of environmental and social change' after reading two of Maathai's texts (including *Unbowed: A Memoir*). The aim of the study was to introduce Maathai to adult education. The study employed Afrocentrism, which Asante (2003) defines as "a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values and perspectives predominate" (p. 2). Kushner (2009) concludes the study by stating that "Through the Green Belt Movement, Maathai employed adult education as a decolonization process, to foster the revitalization of indigenous culture, self-ethnic identity, women's empowerment, and participatory democracy" (p. 200).

Given the studies in this section, it seems none of them have considered framing their studies of the text with ecofeminism. Varying theories have been employed instead, hence leaving a gap that this present study sought to cover. All the studies are significant to this present study as they proffer a firm foundation for a better understanding of Maathai's text, *Unbowed: A Memoir*.

2.6.3 Studies on *Walking the Boeing 707*

Though *Walking the Boeing 707* by Shaketange (2008) was published over a decade ago, it seems there is meagre research on the text. Currently, only Nahole's (2017) research has incorporated the text. The other appearance is when Shigwedha (2014) explores the relationship between UNITA and SWAPO, focusing on the allies and adversaries, and then cites *Walking the Boeing 707*. Nonetheless, Nahole (2017) employed postcolonial literary theory in the exploration of childhood by navigating the contours of the notion of "childhood agency", portrayed by child participants in the liberation struggle in *Walking the Boeing 707* and another text. Nahole's (2017) study is significant to this present study as it provides an existing dimension of the analysis of the text, which, however, is different from the focus of this present study that is framed by ecofeminism.

2.7 Research Gap(s)

Numerous studies have been done on the analyses and interpretations of the text *Nervous Conditions*; these include the study by Howell (2003) who discusses space in this semi-autobiography. Also, Eslamieh (2005) highlights the struggle that individuals face in defining their personal identities within a multinational, and multi-ethnic environment that emphasises hybridity. Similarly, Moyana (1994) adopts a feminist tradition by analysing the roles of men and women in the novel. Besides, Zhou (2016) focused on colonialism, African women, and human rights in *Nervous Conditions*. Then Thompson (2008) centred on mother tongue and bilingual hysteria, particularly with regards to the translation of metaphors in *Nervous Conditions*. It appears so far, that none of the studies have considered reading *Nervous Conditions* from an ecofeminist perspective, thereby leaving a gap for this study.

Secondly, *Unbowed: A Memoir* is presented by Ogaga Okuyade (2013) through rethinking ecological justice. Sylla and Leye (2014) researched the personal as a challenge to the 'old' political order in this autobiography and utilised *Unbowed* in the writing of the paper. In addition, Tunai (2015) examines the narrators, their voices, and their philosophies in *Unbowed*. Furthermore, Okayade (2004), explored whether the earth can be belted by rethinking eco-literacy and ecological approaches. It appears again that no study has attempted to analyse *Unbowed* from an ecofeminist perspective.

Lastly, examining *Walking the Boeing 707*, Nahole's (2016) and Shigwedha's (2014) studies discussed above, have not considered the exploration of feministic issues in this novel, thus, opening a space for this study. Looking at the reviewed literature so far, it appears no study has yet attempted to do an ecofeminist analysis of the three novels at once, hence the need for this study which intends to close this gap.

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter was mainly a review of the relevant literature which was guided by the research questions of this present study. Similarly, the establishment of the gap in the reviewed literature was considered. The next chapter focuses on the theory framing this study as well as the methods that were used in carrying out this research.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

Chapter Three, focuses mainly on the theoretical framework and the methods that were applied in carrying out this study. Hence, this chapter describes the study's research design

and analysis procedures followed. The theoretical framework and the specific methods employed for this study, were conferred in the following segments.

3.1 Theoretical framework

The study was delineated by ecofeminism, a theory that can be described as a challenging multifaceted and multi-located structure that confronts systems of patriarchy, race and class. It also broadens the scope of the cultural critique and incorporates disparate, yet radically connected elements (Siwila, 2014). Thus, ecofeminism may be viewed as a theory that generally confronts multiple forms of patriarchy. In essence, ecofeminism is the interaction of feminist theory and that of ecology. Combining the feminist and ecological perspectives, ecofeminism ascertains the women/nature relationship, that is, the domination, exploitation, and fear of both women and nature are characteristic of patriarchal thinking (Martinez, Meyer, & Carter, 2014). Thus, this study was framed by the ecofeminist theory because issues pertaining to environmental degradation and the exploitation of women in patriarchal societies form the backbone of the study.

3.1.1 Link between feminism and ecology

The primary insight of ecofeminism is that all matters of oppression are interconnected. In the ecofeminist vision, there is no such thing as the struggle for women's rights being separate from the struggle to repair earth. Some ecofeminists link man's destructiveness to woman's reputed capacity to heal in a way that assumes an essential connection between women and nature. This connection between feminism and ecology is also suggested by Sandilands (1991) who defines ecofeminism as "a theory and movement which bridges the gap between feminism and ecology, but which transforms both to create unified praxis to end all forms of domination" (p. 90). In other words, ecofeminism brings together feminism and ecology in an attempt to fight numerous forms of control. This study analysed the three select texts to explore the link between feminism and ecology and to establish how the authors address the degradation of the environment and the subjugation of women.

3.1.2 Ecofeminism

According to Warren (1990), ecofeminism is a field which brings ethics and feminism together and that seeks to explore the conceptual connections between environmental degradation and sexist oppression. According to King (1989), ecology is incomplete without feminism, because it does not recognise the necessity of ending the oppression of women; and feminism is disembodied without the ecological perspective, which 'asserts the interdependence of living things'. Thus, ecofeminism may be viewed as a sphere that forbids the perpetuation of ecological mortification and sexist domination. Aspects pertaining to ecological mortification

and sexist domination are prevalent in the three selected texts for this study as shall be realised in their analysis.

Ecofeminism is also, according to Birkeland (1993), defined as a “value system, a social movement, and a practice (which) also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction” (p. 6). Ecofeminism also incorporates political analysis that surveys the relationship between humans and their environments. Furthermore, Birkeland (1993) states that ecofeminism is an “awareness” that begins with the realisation that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western man’s attitude towards women and tribal cultures. Ecofeminism is thus described as being mindful of connecting Western men’s attitudes towards women with misuse of the environment. Moreover, Warren (1990) is of the view that ecofeminism is the “logic of domination”, in association with value-hierarchical thinking and value-dualism that sustain and justify the twin domination of women and nature. For ecofeminists, therefore, it may be presumed that the domination of women and nature is basically rooted in ideology.

In order to overcome domination, there may be a need to reconstruct and reconceptualise the underlying patriarchal values and structural relations of one’s culture. It is necessary to promote equality, non-patriarchal values, structural relations of one’s culture, non-violence, and non-hierarchical forms of organisation to bring about new social forms. According to Warren (1995) and King (1989), one also needs to realise the inter-connectedness of all processes and hence revere nature and all life forms. Humans should not try to control nature, but work along with it and try to move beyond power-based relationships. There may be a need to change the patriarchal nature of some systems by withdrawing power and energy from patriarchy (Gaard, 1993, pp. 16-20). Hence the existence and significance of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism is a theory and movement which makes explicit the links between the oppression of women and nature in a patriarchal culture; an ethical position informed by ecofeminist thought and activism is one which resists these oppressions. What ecofeminists exactly mean is, however, debatable. Many different interpretations of ecofeminism exist, such as that of Vance (1993), who asserts that each interpretation is “rooted in a particular intersection of race, class, geography, and conceptual orientation” (pp. 125-126). Additionally, Harris (2016) observes that “Eco-feminist philosophy has at least three branches that coincide with traditional branches of feminism. They are liberal, radical, and socialist ecofeminist perspectives” (p. 31).

King (1989) describes ecofeminism as a ‘holistic way of thinking’ implying an all-inclusive way of thinking. Berg (2009) notes that ecofeminism continuously connects issues like violence

against women, military violence, and degradation of the planet. Ecofeminism is not limited to a specific form of violence, but rather encompasses all forms of violence against women, which at the same time linked to the environment. Furthermore, everything on the feminist agenda – equal rights, quality of work, child care, reproductive choice, and domestic violence, are interconnected, just as the feminist agenda is irrevocably connected to the environmental agenda (Berg, 2009). In essence, all the aspects pertaining to feminism are thus linked to environmental itineraries. Thus, such agendas were identified in the analysis of the selected texts in establishing the link between environmental degradation and the oppression of women.

According to Kitty (1990), ecofeminists link patriarchy with destroying the environment and oppressing women and minorities. Through the analysis of the selected texts, this study ascertained the women/nature connection and established whether the pollution of the planet and oppression of women are caused by the same set of mores as highlighted by Kitty (1990) and Martinez et al. (2014). In addition, Ruether (1995, p. 2), observes that “ecofeminism brings together exploitations of these two entities, namely ecology and feminism, in their full, or deep forms, and explores how male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology and in social structures.” Birkeland (1993) sees ecofeminism as the logical conclusion of feminism that “theorises the interrelation among self, societies, and nature” (pp. 17-18). Thus, ecofeminism focuses on the link that emerges when the environment is degraded and women are subjugated, which this study explored in the selected texts. Adams (1993), notes that “Ecofeminism identifies the twin dominations of women and the rest of nature. Ecofeminism argues that the connections between the oppression of women and nature must be recognised to understand adequately both oppressions” (p. 1). Consequently, this study probed the selected novels to understand the oppression of both the environment and women.

Thus, this study selected ecofeminism as the most appropriate theory for framing this study on the merit that it “brings together exploitations of these two entities, namely ecology and feminism, in their full, or deep forms, and explores how male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology and in social structures” (Ruether, 1995, p. 2). The selected texts exhibit the link that exists between the domination of women, the exploitation of women and the exploitation of the environment.

3.1.3 Ecofeminism tenets

Numerous scholars, including Indu (2015), regard ecofeminism as a theory that deals with the oppression of women paralleled to the mortification of the environment. With that in mind, Indu (2015) states that, “Ecofeminists opine that there is a great analogy between male domination

and the subjugation of women in society and the exploitation of environment by masculine power” (p. 1). Additionally, Birkeland (1993) observes that, “Ecofeminism questions fundamental assumptions about dualisms of culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, human/animal, subjectivity/object, individuality/interconnection, and public-male/private-female” (p. 20). Thus, with this observation, an element of binarism instantly perceived. Hence King (1989) comments that:

Because dualist and hierarchical thinking justifies devaluation and domination, opposition to this negative association of women and nature is the basis of ecofeminist criticism and activism that argue that the struggles of nature are, in fact, the struggles of women. (p. 19).

Moreover, regarding ecofeminism, Indu (2015) notes that there are certain claims that show the relationship between the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment as well as why ecofeminism is significant. These were established from an analysis as follows:

- The oppression of women and the oppression of nature are closely related.
- Both women and nature are devalued and exploited to serve the needs of men.
- There is some connection between women and nature that men either do not possess or cannot experience, like giving and nurturing life.
- A feminist perspective is needed for solving ecological issues (Indu, 2015, p. 3).

These claims are crucial for this study as they form part of the ecofeminist basis of the analysis of the selected texts. Besides these claims by Indu (2015), Birkeland (1993) provides ecofeminist presuppositions as follows: The first presupposition and expectation of ecofeminism is that social transformation is necessary for the sake of survival and justice. Social transformation must reassess and reconstruct values and relations toward equality, cultural diversity, and nonviolence in associations that are non-hierarchical, non-competitive, and fully participatory (Birkeland 1993, p. 20). A second presupposition and expectation of ecofeminism is that social transformation must include an intellectual transformation. Whereas normative logic relies on formulaic dualism and hierarchy, ecofeminism urges non-dualistic and non-hierarchical forms of thought. (Birkeland 1993, p. 20). A third presupposition of ecofeminism is that reforming the way that nature is valued should transform the relationships that humans have with nature. Ecofeminism calls for a shift from instrumental value to intrinsic value in assessing nature. In other words, ecofeminism advocates for a corresponding shift from treating nature as a commodity and object to respecting nature in itself, rather than for its usefulness to humans. As such, valuing nature entails valuing the wisdom intrinsic to nature (Birkeland 1993, p. 20). The fourth ecofeminist presupposition is that what ecology teaches us about nature is equally relevant to humans, since humans are part of nature and

participants in ecological processes. Biological diversity suggests to ecofeminists that human diversity is valuable. Under this principle, women, persons of colour, and the poor should be recognised for their intrinsic value and subjectivity. Some ecofeminists are careful to mention the value of diverse human expressions of sexuality, religion, ability, and nationality, as well as the diversity within constructed categories of humans (Birkeland 1993, p. 20).

3.2 Research methodology

3.2.1 Research design

The research embraced a qualitative research approach which investigated the treatment of the environment as well as of black women by the patriarchal systems in the three selected texts, *Unbowed: A Memoir*, *Nervous Conditions* and *Walking the Boeing 707*. Research designs are strategies and the procedures for research that cover decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). Thus, qualitative research goes past the statistical representation of data since much enunciation is on the aspect of quality that is associated with human feelings which in turn are naturally uncountable. According to Crossman (2017) “qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help us understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places” (p. 1). Thus, the qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it is interpretive in nature and seeks to understand the qualities or characteristics of social life.

3.2.2 Procedure

The researcher did an intensive and comprehensive reading of the selected autobiographical texts, at the same time making notes of the relevant themes relating to the treatment of the environment and black women by the patriarchal systems as presented in the texts. Also, the researcher reflected on the relevant secondary sources (mainly the reviewed literature) in supplementing the analysis of the selected autobiographies. The paradigms of the theory of ecofeminism were also considered in the analysis and this resulted in some findings and judgements which were then categorised and presented in narrative form. The paradigms are also the presuppositions previously indicated in section 3.1 of the Theoretical Framework section of this study.

3.2.3 Data analysis

The collected data for this study was analysed using content analysis. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) note that content analysis allows the researcher to test theoretical concerns so as to heighten comprehension of the data. Krippendorff (1980) comments that, content analysis is a research

method which allows the researcher to make replicable and valid suppositions from data to their context, with the intention of giving new insights, knowledge, and practical guidance to action and a representation of facts. Moreover, content analysis does not involve measuring and quantifying patterns, instead, it interprets the opinions and viewpoints of numerous subjects (Shruti, 2016), hence, it was selected for this qualitative study.

Thus, this study adopted content analysis and the collected data were arranged into categories which made it easy to manage. The data were then clarified according to the paradigms of ecofeminism. Subsequently, the data was presented in narrative form corresponding to themes. Lastly, findings were obtained from the analysis and interpretations which then resulted in the formulation of the discussions and the conclusions.

3.3 Chapter summary

This chapter, Chapter Three, provided the methods that were used in composing this study, from the initial stage to the last stage. The next chapter, Chapter Four, analyses and discusses the selected texts.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses mainly on the analysis and discussion of the selected texts *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2007), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008). The study conducted an ecofeminist reading of the selected black female writers' autobiographical works. This chapter provides synopses of the three selected texts, as well as an analysis of the relationship between women and the environment as presented in the selected texts. Additionally, the chapter explores the representation of nature in the selected texts and incorporates that aspect of the representation of nature with consistency to the conservation of the natural environment. Moreover, the chapter deliberates on the representation of nature

in the selected texts and its consistency with ecofeminist principles which according to Berg (2009) include: equal rights, quality of work, child care, and reproductive choice, amongst others. Lastly, the chapter contemplates on the resilience and survival strategies of the female characters as projected in the selected texts. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

4.1 Synopses of the selected texts

The following are the synopses of the selected texts namely: *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2007), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008). These synopses provide a brief and precipitated form of the selected texts. Moreover, the synopses also provide the plot lines of the texts.

4.1.1 *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2007) – A synopsis

Unbowed: A Memoir (hereafter referred to as *UM*), written by Wangari Maathai, is a story that registers Maathai's progress from a juvenile in the then British Kenya to the time she becomes a divorced mother with three children, fighting in order to protect her country from a corrupt dictator. The memoir reflects on Maathai's infancy through her education, and also accounts for her up-bringing in a polygamous home, as well as acquiring an education at a time when the majority of female children stayed home. The memoir also provides a trajectory of Maathai being part of the pioneer group of post-colonial Africans to obtain an American college education. The memoir pronounces Maathai's entry into activism, which was driven by an understanding of and affection for the landscape of Kenya during her childhood, and an early consciousness of social injustice. Upon returning home and as part of the college educated Kenyans, Maathai started her political activism as she was anxious to part-take in building Kenya, her recently autonomous country. She, however, encountered challenges as a result of tribalism and sexism at the University of Nairobi and with that, could not work. Maathai realised the environmental mortification confronting Kenya and thus established the Green Belt Movement to fight it. It is during her environmental activism that she perceives the larger picture that sexism, corruption, tribalism and poverty are all intimately interrelated and that all must be fought against simultaneously. She literally became an advocate on all fronts, and was humiliated in the press, arrested and beaten, ostracized by friends, and even condemned in parliament (even pointing at her for being a divorcee), but she was never intimidated. The closing chapters of *UM* enunciate the Green Belt Movement, which initially was a volunteer organisation and later become Maathai's work. Other than empowering Kenya's rural women to plant trees and fight for their own land, the Green Belt Movement has assisted in educating people concerning human rights, democracy and activism. *UM* illustrates the conflict with the increasingly despotic government of Kenya and specifies her growing network of transnational fellow activists and supporters. Moreover, Maathai facilitated in raising awareness around the necessity for a multi-party system, and for that was elected into parliament in November 2002

as a minister. Maathai's election intersected with the election to power of President Kibaki, who superseded the corrupt President Moi.

4.1.2 *Nervous Conditions* (1998) – A synopsis

Nervous Conditions (1998) (thereafter referred to as *NC*) is written by Tsitsi Dangarembga and is narrated by Tambudzai who happens to also be the main character. The story opens with Tambudzai not being disturbed by the death of her elderly brother, Nhamo. This then allows Tambu to narrate her story before her brother died, namely that their parents had given preference to Nhamo, the boy child, to go to school over Tambu, the girl child. Babamukuru and his family (Maiguru, Nyasha and Chido) live in England for five years, and Babamukuru is the one who usually helps Tambu's father financially however his absence impacted drastically on Tambu's family. As a persevering character, Tambu grows maize for resale in order to raise her own school fees. Tambu learns about how Nhamo was stealing maize cobs from her garden and they fight at school over that issue. Tambu, with the help of Mr Matimba, goes to sell her maize to people in Umtali, a town far away from their village. In town, a white couple refuses to buy the maize but instead donates money towards Tambu's school fees, thus Tambu is able to stay in school. Upon Babamukuru's return from England, it is decided that Nhamo moves to the mission school. Just after his first year at the mission, Nhamo changes distinctively and even claims to have forgotten how to speak in his mother tongue, Shona. The narrative bounds back to the time when Babamukuru brought the news from the mission to the village that Nhamo had passed on. Nhamo's death creates an opportunity for Tambu to study at the mission in the place of Nhamo. At the mission house, Tambu shares a bedroom with her cousin, Nyasha and frequently witnesses Nyasha and Babamukuru's fights. Just before her final exams at primary level, nuns from Sacred Heart visit her school and Tambu is given a scholarship to study at that prestigious Catholic convent school. On her return from Sacred Heart, Tambu notices a change in her cousin, Nyasha as she appeared more skeletal and malnourished. Nyasha is taken to the psychiatrist who suggests that Nyasha needs to be hospitalised under observation and allowed to recover. Tambu goes to her mother's compound where her mother warns her about assimilating the English language and its culture.

4.1.3 *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008) – A synopsis

Walking the Boeing 707 (2008) (thereafter referred to as *WB*), is written by Shaketange (2008) and describes the arduous and grievous trek that she and other people had to embark on from her home village in the then German South West Africa to other countries like Angola, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Finland, the United Kingdom and then back to Namibia. *WB* represents Shaketange's life experiences as a woman who, at a tender age, was associated with the liberation struggle, accentuating her individual role in relation to others as they confronted

challenges as oppressed women during the apartheid time, and as liberated women, at the advent of Namibia's independence. *WB* recounts how Shaketange escaped after they learnt from Mr Barkias about buses carrying people from Oshikango to Ondjiva in Angola. The story describes all their ordeals as they travel through Angola and how they meet the SWAPO soldiers. Shaketange narrates how they walked the Boeing 707 instead of flying to Yuka, a SWAPO transit camp in Zambia. From Yuka, Shaketange and others then moved to the Old Farm to continue school as they were too young to engage in battle fronts or other war activities. From Old Farm they moved to Nyango Camp which was a continuation of their previous school life. At some point, names were called out, including Shaketange's, and these were to move from Nyango Camp. Travelling documents were procured under the care of United Nations and the girls went through pregnancy tests and screenings which Shaketange describes as patronising and insulting. They arrived in Sierra Leone and settled in Kenema town which later closed. Shaketange and Ndahafa had to be moved to complete school and arrangements were made for them to be at Holy Rosary Secondary School. After writing their final exams, they left Holy Rosary Secondary School for Kwanza Sul, Angola. Their results were to be sent by the Nigerian Examination Board to the SWAPO Department of Education in Lusaka or Luanda in early 1983. In Kwanzazul, it was noticed that Shaketange was a good teacher and for that she was selected to go to Finland. Her friend, Ndahafa, had already left for Finland. From Finland, Shaketange managed to get a scholarship to study education for two years in England. After studying for an education diploma they returned to Kwanza Sul and from there they were repatriated back to Namibia after the intervention of the United Nations in monitoring elections that led to Namibia's independence. The story ends with Shaketange being reunited with her family.

4.2 The environment in relation to women as presented in the selected texts

The study was set to comprehend an ecofeminist reading of the selected black female writers' autobiographical works. This section examines the interaction between women and the environment as represented in the selected texts. To begin with, it may be alluded to that there is a relationship between humans and their environment. Thus, man and the environment may be viewed as an ecosystem in which components are dependent on each other.

In *UM*, the extraordinary relationship between man and the environment is instantly pronounced when Maathai (2007) reveals that "They [Maathai's parents] lived from the soil and also kept cattle, goats, and sheep" (p. 3). Their life simply revolved around the environment: they tilled the soil, planted crops and kept animals that also depended on the soil which produced grass for the stock-feeds. Such interdependence provides an indisputable link between man and nature. Besides, Maathai was born "at home in a traditional mud-walled house..." (p. 3) implying that the materials that were used to construct the mud house were

afforded from the environment, again a sign and indicator of the interdependence of man and the environment. The idea of Maathai being born in a traditional mud-house may imply that it was a premonition of her natural passion for the environment and that she would turn out to be an environmental activist later in her life. Maathai already had a tie with the land as she was born in a natural environment and relied on it for survival.

Moreover, the environment augmented the life of the natives and they subsisted on Maathai's land as noted in *UM*:

We lived in a land abundant with shrubs, creepers, ferns, and trees, like the *mĩtũndũ*, *mĩkeu*, and *mĩgumo*, some of which produced berries and nuts. Because rain fell regularly and reliably, clean drinking water was everywhere. There were large well-watered fields of maize, beans, wheat, and vegetables. Hunger was virtually unknown. The soil was rich, dark red-brown and moist (*UM*, pp. 3-4).

The environment made clean water available for the people and the forests provided a variety of wild fruits. At the same time, vast patches of land had an assortment of agricultural food supplies which meant that the people did not starve. This reinforces and shows the relationship that exists between the environment and man. Also, when Maathai went to St. Cecelia, the boarding school, the mattresses were made from natural products obtained from the environment as she notes, "The bed was comfortable - it had one set of sheets and a pillow and mattress stuffed with grass which I could smell ... it was a bed fit for a queen" (p. 55). This further underlines the relationship between **humans** and the environment.

Additionally, the rituals performed when a new baby was born also reflect the relationship that exists between humans and the environment. One may argue that the ritual evidently cemented the connection between the newly born and the environment. This is shown in *UM*, "When a baby joined the community, a beautiful and practical ritual followed that introduced the infant to the land of the ancestors and conserved a world of plenty and good that came from that soil" (p. 4). The performers of the ritual would use natural foods produced by the environment to ascertain the link between the baby and the soil to which it belongs. Thus, Maathai (2007) remarks that:

Even before breast milk, I would have swallowed the juice of green bananas, blue-purple sugarcane, sweet potatoes and a fattened lamb, all fruits of the local land, I am as much a child of my native soil as I am of my father, Muta Njugi, and my mother Wanjiru Kibicho... (*UM*, p. 4).

Thus, Bone (2016) comments that “through rituals we build families and community, we make transitions and mark important events in our lives, we express ourselves in joy and sorrow, and perhaps, most importantly, we create and sustain identity” (p. 1). In this case, the ritual performed on a new baby engenders a connection between the environment and the humans.

Moreover, the environment always provides a haven for humans as noted with Thumbi who had to hide in the thick forest to avoid going to the war at his mother’s suggestion. This is evident in *UM*:

My grandparents had such a son, Thumbi. My grandmother did not want her son, who was no more than twenty at that time, to join the war. She was in despair. So she advised him to hide in the dense vegetation near a high waterfall in the Tucha River near Iithe, and brought him food from her farm every day. (*UM*, p. 27)

Thumbi survived when he hid in the forest. Had he not been found by the British soldiers, there is a possibility that he would have lived a much longer life in the forest. Sadly, Thumbi was shot and killed in the war (Maathai, 2007). Thus, Thumbi was more secure in the forest environment which may possibly be interpreted as a positive relationship existing between humans and the environment that provides fortification. This is similar to when Maathai, with other two girls and a baby sought refuge in the woodlot when running away from the Mau Mau (p. 65). The environment protected Maathai and her colleagues from being taken away and abused. This concurs with Berg (2009) who refers to caring as one of the principles of ecofeminism and in this case the caring is denoted by the environment that protects women and children from harm.

In *NC*, Tambudzai delivers herself from her father’s decision to send Nhamo to school instead of her. She comes up with an idea of tilling the land and growing maize for selling to raise school fees. This is evident in *NC*:

‘I will earn the fees,’ I reassured him, laying out my plan for him as I had laid it out in my own mind. ‘If you will give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much. Just enough for the fees (*NC*, p. 17).

This shows the spontaneous bond which exists between the environment and humans as shown in the case of Tambudzai. Her dream to be educated had been wrecked, stemming from the poverty in her family but she uses the environment to challenge this predicament by planting and selling maize to pay for her fees. Thus, characters like Tambu, as previously stated by Pasi (2017), “use various liberatory strategies to escape the dualisms in which they are traditionally entrapped” (p. 77). Tambu interacts with the environment and escapes the

prejudices of being a girl child and being denied access to school. When Tambu was given the seed she indeed worked hard:

By the time the sun rose I was in my field, in the first days hoeing and clearing; then digging holes thirty inches apart, with a single swing of the hoe as we had been taught in our garden periods in school; then dropping the seeds into them, two or three at a time and covering them with one or two sweeps of my foot; then waiting for the seeds to germinate and cultivating and waiting for the weeds to grow and cultivating again. (NC, p. 20)

The environment could have possibly fathomed Tambudzai's plight and in turn it positively supported her and rewarded her as, "by February [her] maize was dark green, taller than [her] and still growing ... All that remained was to wait for the harvest" (NC, p. 21). The relationship between man and the environment is thus established. That aspect of caring, as Berg (2009) states, is also observed.

Furthermore, the strand of the relationship between man and the environment is also perceived, even in the historical narration of people. For instance, Tambu's grandmother enlightens Tambu on how their family migrated to the present lands where they now live. Their family lived initially in places that had rich soil and they had interacted fittingly with the environment. This is evident through her grandmother's words:

We lived up in Chipinge, where the soil is ripe and your great-grandfather was a rich man in the currency of those days, having many fat herd of cattle, large fields and four wives who worked hard to produce bountiful harvests (NC, p. 18).

The gains linked to the interaction between men with the environment are displayed in Tambu's grandmother's story. The wealth that the grandfather had was all produced by working harmoniously with the environment. The fat herd of cattle grazed the grass that is produced by the soil. Also, the plenteous harvests are a product of working hard with the soil which in turn produces food. With that, it may be commented that, there justly existed a relationship between the environment and man, where man cared for the land and, in turn, the land sustained the people.

Thus, in Chipinge, the family lived and interacted with the environment harmoniously hence so much wealth and plenteous harvests. For the soils to be continuously generous, there must have been particular farming methods that complemented the caring of the land, hence a synchronised relationship between man and the environment. However, this consistent harmony between man and the environment was disrupted with the advent of the colonisers,

“Wizards well versed in treachery and black magic came from the south and forced the people from the land” (*NC*, p. 18). This involuntary move impacted the natives of the land as they moved to environments that they were not familiar with and were forcibly settled in areas where the soils would not produce sufficient food. This is evident in *NC* where it reads “...At last the people came upon the grey, sandy soil of the homestead, so stony and barren that the wizards would not use” (*NC*, p. 18). Thus, the reciprocated relationship between humans and nature is consequently interrupted.

The appreciation of nature is noted in Tambudzai as she admires the plants at Maiguru’s mission house, the first time she visits the place. The ability to see the beauty in plants may be attributed to the consciousness of the environment that surrounds the life of man. This is shown in *NC* where it reads:

The smooth, stoneless drive had run between squat, robust conifers on one side and a blaze of canna lilia burning scarlet and amber on the other side. Plants like that had belonged to the cities ... I would ask Maiguru for some bulbs and plant a bed of those gay lilies on the homestead. In front of the house (*NC*, p. 64).

Such an appreciation allows the conception and amplification of the relationship between humans and the environment. Seeing the beauty in the plants at Maiguru’s mission house, Tambu felt she might as well transmit the exquisiteness by taking some plants to her mother’s house in the village. This act may be interpreted as the diffusion of the natural link that exists instinctively between human beings and the environment. Thus, the power of the rapport between the environment and humans may appropriately be attributed to its malleability oddity.

In *WB*, the relationship between the environment and humans is emphasised in a different form hence, showing the multi-nature of the relationships. Reading through *WB*, it is evident that the relationship between humans and the environment is feasible, “It has always been a tradition of the Owambo people that when it rained well, every household was expected to work in the omahangu fields and produce omahangu to last for at least two years” (Shaketange, 2008, p. 11). This shows how the Owambo people interacted with the environment in order to sustain life through growing enough omahangu. This can only be possible when the people are in harmony with the environment. With the absence of that positive relationship, the environment may be barren and not produce the food required by the humans. Thus, Shoba and Nagaraj (2013) remark that “If man does not harm nature, the nature keeps him safe” (p. 85).

Additionally, the relationship between humans and the environment is matchless as its expression is visible to a keen eye. The manifestation of the relationship takes different forms and shapes and on occasion one might not have noticed or given heed. In *WB* (p. 25), Shaketange says, "We travelled quite a long distance, probably for four hours, before we stopped for lunch. It was very hot and everybody hurried to the shady trees where we ate bread and fish in comfort". The environment provides a moment of cooling off as the narrator and her colleagues enjoyed the bread produced by the soil and the fish provided by the rivers. The environment thus becomes a focal point from which human life hinged. Shaketange and the other characters are on a journey that is testing, unpredictable and arduous but in the process, the shade from the trees provides soothing moments by shielding them from the intense heat.

Through the texts under study, it has been established that humans and the environment have an established unique relationship that exists between them, thus, supporting Mair's (2007) environmental determinism which is a simple model of the relationship between people and the environment. In essence, the determinism just underpins the notion that an authentic relationship between people and the environment that surrounds them, exists.

4.3 Representation of nature in the selected texts

4.3.1 The natural environment in the selected texts

In the three texts, *UM*, *NC*, and *WB*, the natural environment is personified in such a way that it is a character which comprises both positive and negative attributes. In the first place, nature is represented as a generous character as it is capable of providing the majority of the things that aid in sustaining human life. At the same time, nature is presented as an aggressive and uncompromising character. However, the presentation of nature in the selected texts varies because of the differences in the story lines.

In *UM*, life was bearable at the time when Maathai was still a child and growing up. The environment was generous and contributed to the sustenance of human life. However, life changed because of the mortification of the environment, resulting in massive soil erosion whenever it rained which culminated in siltation. Maathai, when she embarked on her post-doctoral study comments that, "This was different from the time when I was growing up" (p. 121). Thus, with siltation, it implies that less water was available in rivers as they were filled with soil which was deposited in the riverbeds. This in turn impacted the water supply for humans, their livestock and the wild animals. This situation was not only prevalent in rural areas outside Nairobi where Maathai was carrying out her study, but appears also to have affected almost the whole of Kenya. Maathai notes that:

When I went to visit my family in Nyeri, I had another indication of the changes under way around us. I saw rivers silted with topsoil, much of it was coming from the forests where plantations of commercial trees had replaced indigenous forest. I noticed that much of the land that had been covered by trees, bushes, and grasses when I was growing up had been replaced by tea and coffee. (*UM*, p. 121)

The advent of colonial administration and transforming the area from its natural state into a commercial space also resulted in the alteration of the environment's character. This impacted negatively the face of the environment and the people and other creatures living in that environment. Thus, the environment literally became harsh and unyielding as water and food supplies, normally provided by the environment, decreased at a rapid rate. This is further elaborated when Maathai states that, "there was little grass or other fodder for them [domestic animals] to eat where they grazed, and during the dry season much of the grass lacked nutrients" (*UM*, p. 121). The people of this area had never experienced such disapproval from the environment as they had lived harmoniously on their land until commercialisation. It may therefore be commented that the advent of commercialisation resulted in the destruction of the environment, the life of the people, and their livestock.

Significantly, Maathai notes that, "The cows were so skinny that I could count their ribs" (*UM*, p. 121), posing a disaster to the livestock industry, not only in Kenya, but also in the region as a whole. The reason for the change of the environment from sustenance to a drought like situation is blamed on indiscreet human actions that forced the environment to change. Not only are the animals affected but "The people, too, looked undernourished and poor and the vegetation in their fields was scanty" (*UM*, p. 121). The negative changes in the environment caused life to be precarious for humans in their struggle to survive as their life depended on the environment. The famished humans were in that situation because of hunger; the food from the environment was insufficient since "The soils in the fields weren't performing as they should as their nutrient value had depleted" (*UM*, p. 121). Thus, the relationship between humans and the environment was disturbed. Caring for the environment, on the other hand, would in turn ensure sustenance for humans implying that the relationship is reciprocal in nature.

It was not that the ordinary people or indigenous people of the area who changed their environment, but they were forced to do so by the repressive systems. Maathai states that "I remembered how the colonial administration had cleared the indigenous forests and replaced them with plantations of exotic trees for the timber industry" (*UM*, p. 123). This gave rise to the suffering and shortages of land, which the natives experienced as their natural environment had been disturbed.

In *NC*, the Nyamarira River is of much significance. The river remains a source of sustenance and provides generously to the communities around it. Also, the river's relentless supply of water reinforces Ojaide's (2012) words about the intermeshed relationship that exists between people and the environment. From *NC*, Tambu says "...I diverted one of Nyamarira's tributaries into the beds of onions and rape" (*NC*, p. 47). In this way, Tambu works harmoniously with the environment to produce vegetables for food. Also, it is the same Nyamarira River that supplied Tambu's family with water for drinking and other domestic uses. Just like this particular Christmas holiday, when they had gathered at the homestead for the festive season, "Twenty-four bodies of which water had to be fetched from Nyamarira daily. Twenty-four people's laundry to wash as often as possible, and Tete's youngest was still in napkins" (*NC*, p. 135). The family could gather for such a long time in the homestead in such large numbers and could still be sustained by the continual replenishment from the environment. Thus, nature is represented as a pillar upon which human life rests.

The environment is also represented as a supernatural element that drives the humans' destiny. This is noted through Tambu, when she grows and nurtures her maize on a patch. Tambu had faith in her maize cobs and believed that after selling them she would be able to raise enough for her school fees; "I will earn the fees...if you give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much, just enough for the fees" (*NC*, p. 17). She laboured her patch with love, "I worked on the homestead, in the family fields and on my plot" (p. 170). Nature rewarded her and she harvested, though some of the maize cobs were stolen by Nhamo (*NC*, p. 22). When Tambu went to Umtali to sell her maize, nobody bought the maize, but it was in the process of selling her maize that she obtained the money for school fees, that is the ten pounds donated by Doris, the white lady on the streets of Umtali. In other words, one may argue that, Tambu received her school fees indirectly from the environment. She grew her maize and the maize led to her going to Umtali where she met Doris who made the donation towards her fees.

In *WB*, nature is mostly presented as a brutal character which could also augment and complement the time of war that Shaketange and her colleagues were going through. Life was not stable at that time and this instability is also reflected in the environment itself hence, the connection between humans and the environment. Shaketange narrates "We usually travelled in the heat of the day. Temperatures could rise to above 40 degrees Celsius by midday" (*WB*, p. 39). In this heat, the environment becomes menacing and unfriendly. Neither did they opt to travel by night when temperatures dropped as they "had to travel by sunlight to know where we were going" (*WB*, p. 39). Thus, travelling by day made the environment hostile and the journey unfavourable even though they desperately needed the light of the sun to see where they were heading.

Additionally, the journey was worsened by the routes that they took. Shaketange reports, “We walked over rough ground. Some of us were barefoot. Some wore those hard shoes meant for church” (*WB*, p. 39). Thus, nature takes the form of an agent of destruction which amplifies the suffering Shaketange and her colleagues go through. The menacing heat and other hostile environmental factors are dispiriting and somehow incite thoughts of returning home and regretting the whole idea of joining the liberation struggle. Besides that, the environment was just vicious as it could not nourish Shaketange and her team as, “Water was scarce and [their] diet was not full of proteins, or vitamins, but starches and sugars from ‘nguru’ [sweet potato] that burn away easily” (*WB*, p. 39). The inability of the environment to provide water shows a misalignment of the points that link humans and the environment hence the suffering of Shaketange and her colleagues on their way to Yuka camp in Zambia.

Nonetheless, when Shaketange and her colleagues arrived in Yuka, they protested against going back about a kilometre to the river. Life suddenly changes as the environment now provides them with a soothing effect and rejuvenation of energy. Despite the long and arduous journey, they had travelled for five days without taking a bath. The idea of taking a bath in the river rekindled life in the characters. Noted in *WB* “...after consideration, we all realised that we desperately needed the suggested bath. We therefore, dragged our feet forward until we arrived back at the river to take a bath” (*WB*, p. 42). Afterwards, they could feel the goodness in taking the bath thus Shaketange comments “...but it felt good to be clean” (*WB*, p. 42). Thus, nature may be described as holding therapeutic qualities, as they felt good after a bath in the river. Also, the bathing may be interpreted as literally the washing away of the challenges they had encountered on their long walk to Yuka camp. Thus, nature may in this instance, be described as sympathetic and caring hence, reinforcing the link that exists between humans and the environment. This is established by Mair (2007) in the environmental determinism which emphasises the link between humans and the environment.

The conservation of the environment is presented in different ways in the selected texts, *UM*, *NC*, and *WB*. Conservation is critical since the environment is linked to humans’ sustenance. Thus, as already remarked by Okuyade (2013), humans are continuously making concerted efforts to ensure that the environment is kept alive.

In *UM*, before the colonial administration was in place, the environment was wholesome, people lived harmoniously with the environment and life seemed stable. This is evident from Maathai’s statement:

Everywhere I looked I could see woodlots, and between them farms and rows of crops. Far in the distance, seeming to hover above the horizon, where the imposing outlines of the snow-capped peak of Mt Kenya to the North and Aberdare Range to the west.

Both were covered by thick forests that to my eyes seemed like blue-black blankets.
(*UM*, p. 31)

Even food was in abundance as natives could work on their lands to produce food, noted in "... a series of valleys, bright green and luxuriant, punctuated with yams, bananas, sugarcane, and arrowroots" (*UM*, p. 31), which were staple foods of Maathai's people. However, with the advent of colonial administration, life had to change and so did the environment. Problems such as climate change also affected Maathai's people as evidenced in the text, "Today, the central highlands are no longer as cold as they used to be, probably the impact of climate change" (*UM*, p. 41). The climate change is a result of the mortification of the environment. Also, Maathai noticed that "The soils in the fields weren't performing as they should because their nutrient value had been depleted" (*UM*, p. 121). The loss of soil nutrients could be as a result of poor farming practices such as the introduction of tea plantations that came alongside colonialism. Thus, traditional farming practices that were environmentally friendly and which cared for the environment, were substituted by the plantations. As a result, with poor soil, not much is harvested from the farms; this becomes detrimental to the food supplies of the masses who hence experience food shortages. In *UM*, "The people, too, looked undernourished and poor and the vegetation in their fields was scanty" (*UM*, p. 121), implying that the people were affected by the negating changes in the environment.

It may be remarked that the degradation of the environment has a ripple effect that impacts all facets of human life as the mutual link between humans and the environment would have been ruined. It is the duty of humans to care for the environment so that in turn, it provides sustenance. However, as noted by Reser (2007), environmental degradation is to a large part caused by human behaviours which directly affect human health and well-being. The human behaviours in this case are the colonial systems that are mentioned in *UM* as, "[Mathaai] remembered how the colonial administration had cleared the indigenous forests and replaced them with plantations of exotic trees for the timber industry" (*UM*, p. 123). Colonialism, a human action, had contributed to the mortification of the environment. Besides that, and surprisingly, "After independence Kenyan farmers had cleared more natural forests to create space to grow coffee and tea" (*UM*, p. 123). All these actions are detrimental to the environment and for that would consequently impact human life. With environmental degradation, challenges emerge. Some of the practical examples mentioned by Owhofasa (2013) include diverse health problems, pollution of water, pollution of farmlands, the destruction of trees, loss of pastoral beauty, and the destruction of water, all of which earlier on were foreign to Africa. Hence the people in *UM* were undernourished and poor.

Moreover, nature is presented as an entity that is very sensitive in the sense that once harmed it is bound to retaliate and when it hits back, the impact is bound to be devastating on human lives. In relation to the exotic trees that were planted, it is noted in *UM* that:

Farmers appreciated their [exotic trees] commercial value and planted them enthusiastically at the expense of local species. However, these trees did damage, too. They eliminated local plants and animals, destroying the natural ecosystem that helped gather and retain rainwater. When rains fell, much of the water ran downstream. Over the subsequent decades, underground water levels decreased markedly and, eventually, rivers and streams either dried up or were greatly reduced. (*UM*, p. 39)

This degradation impacted the people as their food supplies depleted and affected their natural water reservoirs hence, the shortages of drinking water and also the absence of indigenous trees that supplied them with firewood for cooking. With the change of the environment, the social patterns were also affected. Women fed their “families processed foods like white bread, maize flour, and white rice, all of which are high in carbohydrates but relatively low in vitamins, proteins, and minerals” (*UM*, p. 123). The people had no choice as the supply and availability of natural foods had been affected due to the mortification of the environment. The result was that the people suffered from malnutrition. In line with this thought, Owhofasa (2013) observes that environmental mortification involves the abuse of the environment through varying means, for example, the environment of the African continent experienced varying forms of exploitation and mortification, with the coming of the colonisers to the continent.

Then in *WB*, the presence of the river signifies an element of the environment. When Shaketange and her colleagues crossed the last river that led them to Yuka camp, the river is symbolic as the process of successfully crossing it may be interpreted as an enormous achievement. They had crossed to the other side of their journey to freedom even though the river was wide and deep:

It was a big river with clear, deep, blue water. We had to walk in a long line holding each other's hands in order to cross it. I think people were frightened to cross the river but wanted to reach Yuka very, very badly (*WB*, p. 41).

It may be intimated that these people were in harmony with nature as they all successfully crossed to the other side. If there had been disharmony, then probably one or two or even a couple of them would not have made it to the other side of the river. Accordingly, in this case, the relationship between nature and humans may be described as congruent.

When they got to Yuka, they had to go back to the same river to bath, despite the cumulative tiredness from walking for five days. They “dragged our feet forward until we arrived back at the river to take a bath” (*WB*, p. 42). The fascinating issue about the river is the therapeutic quality it provides to Shaketange and her colleagues. In the absence of that river in particular, the numerous benefits mentioned would not have been possible hence. The importance of keeping the river in its natural state without polluting it, as well as avoiding activities that allow siltation of the river, would not have been realised. As the narrator observes, “There were so many women at the river. Some were swimming while others were washing their belongings. Tuhafeni and I could not swim. We therefore had to wash ourselves at the edge of the river” (*WB*, p. 42). With all these activities going on at the river, the text underscores the need to conserve the river so that there is continual enjoyment and benefit from the natural resource. Hence, Shoba and Nagaraj (2013) remark that, “If man does not harm nature, then nature keeps him safe” (p. 85).

4.3.2 Representation of ecofeminist principles in the select texts

Since nature cannot communicate verbally with humans, in *UM* nonetheless, people can interpret when nature communicates through signs and symbols. Nature and the life of man are interconnected (Ojaide, 2012) and for that reason, it becomes impossible for human beings to separate themselves from its influence. Hence, Berg’s (2009) observation, ecofeminism continuously connects issues like violence against women, military violence, and degradation of the planet. There are instances in *UM* where the characters and nature are presented in line with as well as against ecofeminist principles.

In *UM*, the exotic tree plantations as well as the coffee and tea plantations replaced the indigenous way of food production and affected the fuel supply, namely wood, meant for cooking. This impacted mainly women as they were responsible for sourcing and preparing food for their families. Thus, their misery may be paralleled to the negative impact of colonialism on the environment. For instance, the tree, coffee and tea plantations depleted the natural resources and natural food production hence “women were feeding their families processed food” (*UM*, p. 123). Reser (2007) observes that, “the perception and/or direct experience of environmental degradation and loss can lead to concern, anxiety, guilt, anger, helplessness, dread, and pessimism” (p. 4). Due to deforestation in *UM*, there was not enough wood for fuel, however, with the introduction of these processed foods, which were relatively easy to prepare, very little fuel was consumed but the greatest challenge was that people were malnourished.

Additionally, Maathai as a politician, faced the challenge of being mocked by fellow politicians who did not care about the status of the people or the environment. They mocked her for

working with the earth yet she was an educated woman, who should not be seen working on the ground:

Although I was a highly educated woman, it did not seem odd to me to be working with my hands, often with my knees on the ground, alongside rural women. Some politicians and others in the 1980s and 1990s ridiculed me for doing so. But I had no problem with it, and the rural women both accepted and appreciated that I was working with them to improve their lives and the environment. (*UM*, pp. 137-138)

The circumstances Maathai finds herself in, show how the loss of the environment's natural status matched her confrontations as an educated woman who was not readily appreciated by the patriarchal society around her. Hence, Pasi (2017) argues that parallels may be drawn between the domination of nature and the environment, and the exploitation and oppression of women. Even in the political and social arena, the environment was male dominated and the presence of Maathai was actually a threat to the political male counterparts. Maathai points out that "I was also facing the challenge of venturing into what was considered a man's world. Nobody told me that men would be threatened by the high academic achievements of women like me" (*UM* p. 139). It was "obvious that politics was at play again. The ruling party didn't want me in parliament and had figured out a way to stop me from getting there" (*UM*, p. 161).

Even though Maathai had an education equal to that of her husband, Mwangi, he did not perceive his wife as an equal as his insights were fundamentally regulated by societal norms, those of despising women. This is evident in *UM*, "That societal attitude toward me in regard to my husband shaped Mwangi's view of me: He saw me through the mirror given to him by society rather than through his eyes" (*UM*, p. 139). Hence their marriage did not last as the husband walked out of the marriage (p. 141). Mwangi was not different from the rest of the Kenyan men though he was as educated as Maathai.

The breakup of Maathai's marriage happened at the same time as she was developing the Green Belt Movement. The breaking up of the marriage is symbolic of the degradation of the environment hence the need for and initiation of the Green Belt Movement, set up to help the environment recover from the devastation. Thus, this is in line with Pasi's (2017) argument on the domination of nature and the exploitation of women. In the case of *UM*, the treatment of Maathai by her husband shows that she did not appreciate her achievements or her potential. Nonetheless, despite the undesirable experiences that Maathai had during her marriage and in the socio-political arena, she became an even better character as her ambition was to resuscitate the environment which suffered at the same time as did Maathai.

In *NC*, colonialism, a common feature responsible mainly for the degradation of natural resources, is also prevalent. Thus, the suffering of the female characters in the novel may be paralleled to that of the environment. In fact, the female characters may be described as experiencing double repression, under the colonial system and their patriarchal male counterparts. The patriarchal system, as well as the colonial system, always remind and relegate women to their assumed positions, which in most, if not all, cases, downplays the significance of the females. For instance, when Nhamo speaks to Tambu and reminds her that “‘It’s the same everywhere. Because you are a girl.’ It was out. ‘That’s what Baba said, remember?’” (*NC*, p. 21). Tambu is deprived of going to school as she is a girl child; and preference is given to Nhamo, the boy child. In essence, the patriarchal society they live in, is responsible for the prejudice that female characters endure in *NC* and under the colonial system.

Also, Maiguru suffers at the hands of Babamukuru who is an educated man but still allows societal conventions to control his way of thinking. Babamukuru dominates Maiguru to the extent of controlling her salary. This is noted in the novel when Maiguru had an outburst. It is the first time she was heard quarrelling and answering back angrily at Babamukuru “...But when it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her [Tambu] and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings, that’s when they are my relatives too” (*NC*, p. 174). The oppression that Maiguru had endured had been building up and finally came to a turning point when she poured out all that was overwhelming her, thereby exposing the ills of the patriarchal system in which she is a victim. This thus complements some ecofeminist critics and scholars such as Ruether (1995); Plant (1989); Shiva and Mies (1993) who have equated the oppression of women with the degradation of nature. Thus, the suffering of women runs concurrently with the mortification and suffering of the environment. Parallels may be drawn between the domination of nature and the environment, and the exploitation and oppression of women (Pasi 2017). Moreover, Nyasha and Maiguru also agonise under the harsh hand of Babamukuru. Nyasha’s suffering overlaps with the colonial epoch hence the females’ sufferings in *NC* are parallel to nature’s degradation. Mellor (1997) notes that ecofeminism is a movement that envisages a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world, the subordination and oppression of women. The foisting colonial context that devastates the environment of the female characters, is comparable to the females’ suffering under the masculine order in *NC*.

With Tambudzai, just like the other female characters in *NC*, she equally suffers under the patriarchal order. In the first place, priority to go to school is given to Nhamo, a decision made by Jeremiah, the father, as Nhamo was the boy child. Secondly, her future after completing Grade 7 level in school is also determined by ‘her fathers’, Jeremiah and Babamukuru, “It was

on New Year's Eve that my uncle and my father discussed my future. The discussion took place in the house. I was obliged to eavesdrop" (*NC*, p. 185). Thus, it may be remarked that, females do not have control over their lives; much of what they become in life as well as their destinies, are determined and driven by male decisions. Hence, females suffer double oppression due to colonialism and patriarchy. Viewing this from an ecofeminist lens concurs with the opinion of Ruether (2012, p. 12) that, "ecofeminism examines the interconnections between the domination of women and the domination of nature".

In *WB*, the presence of the South African regime during colonialism in Shaketange's country made life unbearable for the natives, hence some of them trekked to other lands in order to train as freedom fighters and in turn, liberate their country. The oppression of the land through colonialism is thus paralleled to the suffering of the female characters and in turn affect and impact the future generations of Namibia. With that, it is therefore the duty of humans to ensure that the ecosystem is sustainably preserved for future generations as well (Plumwood, 1993).

The course that Shaketange and other female colleagues took, together with the males, is spotted with numerous challenges, some of which are life threatening. In Angola, in transit to Zambia, the country was also at war with the Portuguese, hence landmines were planted in the war zone which made life riskier for Shaketange and her colleagues, "We were told not to get off the trucks. Even if one needed the toilet, one could not possibly get down since the whole area was riddled with landmines. The day was long, and the atmosphere was tense" (*WB*, p. 29). It may therefore be remarked that, had their Namibian environment been free of the South African regime, then peace would have prevailed. Hence, the females engaged in their normal routine activities of liaising with nature for food production as well as caring for the environment for sustainability. This echoes Xiao and McCright's (2015) belief that the environment has always played a significant role in women's lives in African society.

The insecurity of the Namibian environment during colonialism saw Shaketange and other female colleagues hopping from one place to another, first into Angola, then to Zambia where she again moved from one station to the next. From Zambia she moved to Sierra Leone, Finland then Britain and finally back to Namibia. If all had been well in Namibia, then life would have been peaceful and enjoyable as Shaketange would have been in her home country with no traces or presence of colonial subjugation. Thus, Asika and Madu (2015) comment that the environment is portrayed from an ecofeminist view where colonialism is deemed the oppressor and destroyer, yet the natives view the environment as a place of affinity where survival of one is dependent on the other.

4.3.3 Resilience and survival strategies of female characters in the selected texts

Considering the settings and contexts in which the selected texts *UM*, *NC*, and *WB* appear, resilience and survival strategies are prominent, as exhibited by the different characters. This concurs with Lambin's (2005) observation that "Environmental problems differ considerably in their cause and solution" (p. 179) therefore, each confrontation is bound to be treated according to the reaction of the people involved and the environment in which they are.

Starting with *UM*, Maathai had to stay at home and work in the fields when her mother was admitted to hospital. This meant that the family would not starve as food was available. Maathai chose to work in the fields in the absence of her mother, and this strategy benefited the family in the long run:

Rather than visit her every day in her hospital bed, I decided that it was important for the planting to be done. Whatever became of my mother, food would be a priority for the family. Therefore, I visited her only rarely (I later learned that my mother would have preferred me to visit more often). Nevertheless, when she came home, she was amazed at how much work my sisters and I had done during her hospitalization. (*UM*, p. 48)

Of course, the mother would have desired Maathai to visit her in hospital. She later appreciates the reason why she did not visit her when she learns about how Maathai and the sisters had laboured. This may be linked to the idea of working harmoniously with the land for it to sustain human lives as seen through Maathai and her sisters in the absence of their mother. Thus, the idea of nature being caring as Berg (2009) asserts, is exhibited in this case and caring is one of the principles of ecofeminism.

When Maathai was working at the University of Nairobi, she encountered gender discrimination as she was one of the few but highly educated women in Kenya at that time, literally rendering her a threat to the male counterparts. Finding herself in such a situation, she had to fight the discrimination to survive. This is evident from *UM*:

I had never anticipated that I would be discriminated against on the basis of my gender as often as I was, or that I could be belittled even while making a substantial contribution to society. I did not want to accept that one human would deliberately seek to limit another, and I found myself challenging the idea that a woman could not be as good as or better than a man. (*UM*, p. 117)

Maathai had to challenge the system as a way of surviving as she felt all people, including herself, had equal potential to contribute to the wellbeing of their societies, regardless of

gender. The confrontation she encounters at the university in Nairobi assisted her in building more resilience in fighting for what she felt was right. She says:

What the struggle at the university also taught me was that sometimes you have to hold on to what you believe in because not everybody wishes you well or will give you what you deserve – not even your fellow women. Indeed, I found myself wanting to be more than equal to some of the men I knew. I had higher aspirations and did not want to be compared with men of lesser ability and capacity. I wanted to be me. (*UM*, p. 117)

Maathai's courage and capability for being a strong-willed woman ended up ruining and costing her marriage. Of course, she did not see it coming but only realised that something was amiss when her husband, Mwangi, packed his belongings and left her with the children and the maid, without noticing:

...although I was used to Mwangi's going away on long business trips and not coming home at the end of each day, the minute I walked into the house, I could tell that things were different...I was stunned: Mwangi had made a decision to leave me. (*UM*, p. 141)

Nevertheless, Maathai finds a way of resolving her problem. She had to face life as it had turned out to be and had to continue without Mwangi. She searched her past from the time she met Mwangi, their marriage, the good times when the children were born and the odd times up to the present. From that moment she had a compelling feeling that prompted her to do something:

Then a strong force pulled me out of my chair to look for a broom. "Sweep" an inner voice ordered me. I obeyed and walked to the kitchen, found a broom, and started sweeping the rubbish Mwangi had left behind. (*UM*, p. 141)

The broom and the sweeping, in this case, may be interpreted as symbolic. Her life had to go on and the broom represents the instrument for cleaning all traces of Mwangi. They were also a form of obstruction that hindered her progress as a talented and educated woman. The clean place, as a result of sweeping away Mwangi's rubbish and dirt and dust, could symbolise a new page, a new beginning. Thus, the sweeping may be equated to some form of strategy of moving on with life after encountering the devastating situation of being dumped by someone whom she all along thought was a partner and a companion. On top of that, Maathai moved out of the house that she once shared with Mwangi to another, again a strategy to move on with life with less constant reminders of Mwangi.

Also, the success of the Green Belt Movement did not come on a silver platter. Maathai had to go through hardship for her project to succeed, “I was being pushed and pulled in many directions, and I pushed and pulled myself, too” (*UM*, p. 155). Maathai’s willpower was noticed when she lost an election for the post of chairperson for the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK):

The reason they gave for objecting me, and presumably thought it a good one, was closer to home: I should not be elected head of national women’s organisation because I was divorced, so didn’t set a good example of Kenyan women. (*UM*, p. 157)

However, this did not stop Maathai from pursuing what she thought was right, even though some women in the NCWK had asked her to just do away with the candidacy and pointed out that, “You don’t want the divorce to be in the headlines all over again... Save yourself and your children from the embarrassment” (*UM*, p. 158). This was not convincing enough to deter Maathai from getting what she wanted. Her response to the NCWK women’s remarks already signalled the carefree but determined direction that Maathai had decided to take “But I have nothing to save... Everything has been lost and you can’t use that to punish me” (*UM*, p. 158).

Despite all the harassment and threats, Maathai built some resilience which shaped her life and aided her up the ladder of success. The attribute of being strong-willed and knowing what she is and what she wants helped her fight for what she desired: “When pressure is applied to me unfairly, I tend to dig my heels and stand my ground - precisely the opposite of what those applying the pressure hope or expect” (*UM*, p. 158). Perseverance became a strategy that Maathai adopted as a means of surviving, considering the pressures that were mounting on her from all directions, but she endures and survives. Thus, Maathai remarks:

I have always seen a challenge as a way to pull myself up and keep going. A stumble is only one step in the long path that we walk and dwelling on it only postpones the completion of our journey. Every person who has ever achieved anything has been knocked down many times. But all of them picked themselves up and kept going, and that is what I have always tried to do. (*UM*, p. 164)

Maathai’s determination resulted in the successes of the Green Belt Movement and was later joined by other mothers in protesting against the arresting and detention of political prisoners and at the same time demanding their release. Resilience is seen in Maathai and other women given the number of days of protest at Freedom Corner in Nairobi where the incident did not just end with the “hospitalisation and dispersal of the mothers. We remained unbowed” (*UM*, p. 222). The brutalities that Maathai experiences can be linked to complexities surrounding gender issues, namely that men (including the government of Kenya), felt threatened by her

presence and her gallantries to confront any form of oppression and injustice meted against her. The corrupt nature of the government in degrading the environment, was exposed as the Green Belt Movement was fighting for the restoration of the environment, and that resulted in Maathai clashing with the authorities.

I felt strongly about land-grabbing, since the destruction of the forest mirrored the government's looting of the nation's treasures, whether it was money from the treasury or the natural resources from the environment. I knew that all the Green Belt Movement's work would be in vain if the government continued to sell off or exploit natural forests. (*UM*, p. 261)

With so much determination, Maathai had to save the environment as she knew the possible outcome associated with the deforestation and extinction of natural forests, "If we didn't do something about it, the Sahara Desert would continue to spread south and life for millions of people would only get harder as land suitable for agriculture and habitats for wildlife got scarcer" (*UM*, p. 261). In order to keep and drive forward human life, Maathai acts strategically, exhibiting resilience for her to save the environment for today and the future generations. Thus, as remarked by Shoba and Nagaraj (2013), "If man does not harm nature, the nature keeps him safe" (p. 85).

In *NC*, some female characters also exhibit characteristics of resilience as well as survival strategies in both the colonial and patriarchal context. Tambudzai had to grow her own maize in order to raise own money to pay for her school fees. This strategy of course leads her to her providence of finding Doris, the white lady who donates ten pounds towards her school fees instead of buying the green mealies. The garden is symbolic of the resilience against the oppression and unjust patriarchal system which prejudices the girl child in favour of the boy child, hence school fees were only available for Nhamo, Tambu's brother. Tambudzai knew that her chances were very limited while Nhamo, 'the boy child', was around, hence the garden is a powerful emblem of being self-willed and determined and after Doris donates the money, Tambu finds herself back in school the following year.

For the character Nyasha, her vomiting may be interpreted as a form of protest against the patriarchal system. She would use a toothbrush to retch the food that her father forced her to eat as indicated in *NC* (p. 193). On several occasions, Nyasha never agreed with her father (Babamukuru). They had different perceptions of life and their differences were even further apart as a result of the gulf between their understanding of gender. Babamukuru would impose his powers as the head of the family and considering that Nyasha was slowly becoming anorexic, he had to force her to eat. Yes, she would eat, but would not allow that food to stay in her stomach:

When Nyasha's plate was empty they both relaxed and the atmosphere returned almost to normal. Nyasha excused herself immediately. I thought she had gone to the bedroom to read but when I followed her there the room was empty. I could hear her retching and gagging from the bathroom (*NC*, p. 202).

Unfortunately, Nyasha's strategy of retching all the food does not benefit her much. It is a form of resistance but in the end results in serious medical complications as she ends up hospitalised.

The character, Maiguru, also suffers under patriarchal oppression, just like most of the female characters in *NC*. She is an educated woman but lives a miserable life as Babamukuru is always exploiting her to the extent of controlling the salary she earns as a teacher. As a strategy to overcome this oppression, she protests against the continual unfair treatment:

I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself sick to support...I am sick Babawa Chido. Let me tell you, I have had enough! (*NC*, p. 174)

It is as I say...And when I keep quiet you think I am enjoying it. So today I am telling you I am not happy. I am not happy anymore in this house (*NC*, p. 175).

Sadly, in *NC*, no matter the strategies that the female characters may formulate, their plans usually end with the female characters being victims of their own making as the patriarchal system is vicious and did not spare any of its victims. Thus, Maiguru packs her bags and leaves the mission home but ironically flees to her brother's house, another man. It may thus be remarked that the colonialism in *NC* impacts the environment and further extends to the subjugation of female characters.

Lastly, in *WB*, Shaketange and her female colleagues also exhibit some form of resilience on their journey to freedom as well as strategies for them to survive their tough journey. From their home, Shaketange, Tuhafeni and Philemon had to strategise on how to escape from their homes as no one was supposed to know or suspect their intentions to go into exile:

I quickly put one dress under the one that I was wearing, put on two more underpants and took my shoes in my hands. Usually I would only wear my shoes when I went to church on Sundays. This time, I could not put them on or it would raise suspicions. I hurried outside. I could hear Aunt Olivia reminding me, that I should go and pound millet before it was too late and that I had to brew traditional beer for Uncle Jonas who had arrived the previous night. I assured her not to worry, and that everything was in order. (*WB*, pp. 16-17)

This strategy was successful as Shaketange left home without being suspected of any intention of escaping to Zambia to fight for the liberation struggle. As they got to the Oshikango border leading into Angola, they had to come up with a strategy of crossing individually as it would protect them and not raise suspicion. The strategy was successful as the three of them made it into Angola and proceeded with their journey:

In order to cross safely to the other side, we decided to cross individually and at different points. We went in different directions and because we were young and alone, we passed without raising any suspicions on either side. (*WB*, p. 19)

The idea of exchanging their clothes for water and food is another strategy that allowed them to keep going during the tiring journey to Yuka camp in Zambia on foot.

Also, at Old Farm, Shaketange and her friends planned to pilfer maize from the maize field, “one evening, we planned to get some of the fresh maize from the farm so that we could secretly cook it and enjoy it for ourselves” (*WB*, p. 58). Their plan started off as successful as they managed to pluck the maize cobs from the field. However, the plan did not yield positive results as Comrade Willie caught them red handed, while they were strategising as to how to steal the maize.

The resilience on the part of the female characters is noted when they reached Yuka camp together with their male counterparts. None had faltered and nobody had died along the way, though the trek to Yuka on foot was not an easy one. It may be noted that, the trek to Yuka had prepared Shaketange and her colleagues for the rest of the journeys they later undertook and for the distances even further away from home. The resilience that they had built through the first trek helped them to endure and survive their time away from home.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the analysis of the selected novels: *UM*, *NC* and *WB*. Other than providing the synopsis of the selected texts, a number of issues were also deliberated. The chapter thus explored the representation of nature in the selected texts and incorporated that aspect of the representation of nature with consistence to the conservation of the natural environment. In addition, the chapter deliberated on the representation of nature in the selected texts and the consistency with ecofeminist principles. Finally, the chapter contemplated on the resilience and survival strategies of the female characters as projected in the selected texts. The next chapter, Chapter Five, presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter deliberated on the analysis of the selected texts, bearing in mind the research objectives set in Chapter One of this study. This chapter summarises and concludes the study's discussion and findings on the relationship between women and the environment as they are represented in *UM*, *NC* and *WB*. The chapter also gives recommendations for further investigations related to this study. In addition, this chapter serves as the closing chapter for this study.

The conclusions will be premised on the objectives of the study. The main objective of this study was to explore the relationship between women and nature in a male-dominated environment. However, the main objective was further subdivided into the following sub-objectives which were:

- To investigate the portrayal of the environment in relation to humans and determine its effects on the black women in the select texts;
- To explore how the representations of nature expressed in these texts are consistent with conserving the natural environment and also with ecofeminist principles; and
- To examine the resilience and survival strategies that the women characters adopt as coping mechanisms in the different environments of the study.

5.1 Summary of major findings in relation to research objectives

5.1.1 Objective 1: The first sub objective was to investigate the portrayal of the environment in relation to humans and determine its effects on the black women in the select texts. The analysis in Chapter Four of this study (see section 4.4.1: Representation of nature in consistency with conserving the natural environment), again shows a common trend featured in the three texts. It appears colonialism brought about the suffering of the female characters. The times referred to before colonialism show that life was stable as people liaised and interacted well with their environments. In *UM*, food supplies were satisfactory, and there was no deforestation and siltation of rivers. In *NC*, Tambu's original family lived on the fertile soil of Chipinge. Her great-grandfather was wealthy, with livestock and a big farming area with very rich fertile soil that produced harvests in abundance. In *WB*, life was stable and Shaketange and other people and their families could grow enough food to sustain them and families were never separated as there was peace. All these lifestyles changed for the worst

for the people in the three selected texts; women were mostly affected by the mortification of the environment, a result of colonialism.

5.1.2 Objective 2: The second sub objective was to explore how the representations of nature expressed in these texts are consistent with conserving the natural environment and also with ecofeminist principles. The study found that the misery of the female characters may be paralleled to the negative impact of colonialism on the environment. For instance, the tree, coffee and tea plantations depleted the natural resources and natural food production hence in *UM*, women fed their families processed food. Due to deforestation, there was not enough wood for fuel. These processed foods were relatively easy to prepare as they consumed little fuel but resulted in the malnourishment of the people eating that food. Also, the breaking up of Maathai's marriage is symbolic of, and runs parallel to the degradation of the environment hence the need for and initiation of the Green Belt Movement, set to help the environment recover from the devastation.

In *NC*, the study observed that female characters suffer double oppression, from colonialism and patriarchy. The suffering of the characters runs parallel with the suffering of the environment under colonialism. Lastly, in *WB*, again the suffering of the women is equated to the instability of the environment under colonial rule. It may thus be concluded that indeed the suffering of women concurs with the suffering of the environment as already established by ecofeminist critics and scholars such as Ruether (1995); Plant (1989); Shiva and Mies (1993) who have equated the oppression of women to the degradation of nature.

5.1.3 Objective 3: The last sub objective was to examine the resilience and survival strategies that the women characters adopt as coping mechanisms in the different environments of the selected texts. Interestingly, the study reports that all female characters had to devise strategies in order to escape whatever unfavourable circumstances they might find themselves in. In *UM* and *WB* at least some of the strategies were successful as Maathai had the Green Belt Movement running and Shaketange and her colleagues made it to Yuka camp and further. Unlike in *NC*, the colonialism and patriarchy presented a combined power that could not easily be defeated. Tambu's maize plants were successful but the maize cobs were stolen. Maiguru and Nyasha's fights and disagreements were all dwarfed and thwarted by Babamukuru's superior power over them all. Maiguru's garden also flourished and sustained the family.

5.2 Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations for future studies that might wish to pursue research in the same area of study:

- This present study utilised only the ecofeminism theory, therefore it recommends that future studies may consider merging ecofeminism and other theories such as Post-colonialism or Bakhtin's Chronotope or any other theory that the researcher might think of that works with literature studies.
- This study analysed three selected novels: *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2007), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008). Thus, it recommends that, future studies may consider using other texts that deal with environmental issues and aspects pertaining to the subjugation of women. This may widen the understanding of the ecofeminist theory.
- This study selected novels set in three African countries, that is Kenya, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Future studies might consider using texts from other continents and discover how the relationship between women and the environment are presented in other worlds.

5.3 Conclusion

The study attempted to explore how African women writers highlight the relationship between African women's roles and their environment by analysing three selected texts: *Unbowed: A Memoir* (2007), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008).

The main objective of the study was to explore the relationship between women and nature in a male-dominated environment. With all three texts, the study revealed that the results were similar; that the societies were mainly patriarchal, particularly in *UM* and *NC*. The way Maathai had to fight throughout the novel shows the oppressive nature of the society that she finds herself in. Then in *NC*, Tambu, Maiguru and Nyasha, equally suffer under patriarchal domination as well as the vicious colonial system. Hence, the female characters in the novel have nowhere to escape to and are literally trapped in a system that they can never unshackle. Regarding the environment, all three texts reveal that the mortification of the environment is directly linked to the suffering of the female characters in the selected texts.

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APPENDICES