The Significance of Land in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

This article is concerned with the significance of land in Chinua Achebe's seminal work 'Things Fall Apart'. It focuses on questions of how the land is distributed and utilised and the attitudes and beliefs surrounding it. In handling the question, the article analyses various situations and contexts in which issues of land and its use arise. The main tool of analysis is ecocriticism complemented by the social constructionist theory. The article argues that the Igbo culture as presented in Things Fall Apart is a nature-culture characterised by land as a culture-scape. The beliefs of the Igbo determine how they relate to and use the land. Further the article argues that land is very central to the life and lifestyle of the Igbo people as it helps define their religion and customary practices.

Key Terms: culturescape, nature culture, centrality of land, ecocriticism, African ecocriticism, ecophilosophy, traditional religion, social constructionism, Okonkwo

Introduction

The study of land cannot be divorced from the relationship between human beings and nature since land is a part of nature. Similarly, any study of the interaction between people and their environment cannot avoid dealing to some extent with the factor of land. For decades now, environmentalists have concerned themselves with the interface between people and the environment. This interest in the environmental has not been confined to actual geographical spaces inhabited by human beings and other living beings; it has also been extended to lived inhabited environments as portrayed in works of fiction. One of the available tools for studying the interaction between land or nature, on the one hand and human beings on the other is eco-criticism.

Eco-criticism is concerned with the relationship between the literary text and the environment. In their co-edited seminal work consisting of a collection of definitive essays entitled the *Eco-criticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996: xviii) Glotfelty and Fromm define eco-criticism as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment'. Other scholars prefer to use the term "green studies" instead of eco-criticism. Whichever term one settles for the issue of land is a big factor in matters to do with the interaction between human beings and the environment.

From the earliest times of their existence human beings have explored the environment in which they live and, in due course, have learnt how to overcome

the challenges of their existence in the context of nature. Humans learnt to exploit nature's offerings for their own good and for the betterment of their lives. For food and sustenance as well as healing from illness and injury turned to nature through its offerings on the land.

The interaction between nature or the environment on the one hand and human beings on the other hand has, among other things, led to the production of works of literature. As writers are influenced by the environment in which they grow up in, it may be argued that literary works are to some degree a product of the environment in which they find themselves. This article is concerned with the relationship between human beings and nature specifically land as depicted in *Things Fall Apart*.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

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

Social Constructionism

The main argument of social constructionism is that reality is not a fixed or independent entity but is socially constructed. It is therefore concerned with how knowledge is constructed using the medium of language and how the daily interactions between people determines the construction of reality. The ontological concerns of social constructionism are related to the question of how culture influences our perception of reality (see also: Manganaro, 2002; Barry, 2002; Woolcott and Unwin, 1983; Chilala, 2011).

The reason this theory has been adopted as one of the tools of analysis is that it supplements the eco-critical theory on the question of perception and the constructedness of reality. In other words, while this study uses eco-criticism as the main theory, it however takes the view that the role of culture in the interpretation and creation of attitude to reality, in this case nature, cannot be ignored. Hence the decision to include social constructionism so that the cultural elements embedded in the interaction between the characters and nature in the two novels under study may be taken care of. As eco-criticism itself acknowledges, different people react differently to natural stimuli, a phenomenon which is largely due to differences in cultural orientation.

Eco-criticism

A number of definitions of the concept of eco-criticism have been proffered by a variety of scholars among them Rueckert (1996) who suggests that eco-criticism is 'the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world'. For Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) as indicated above, eco-criticism is the study of the interaction between literature and the physical environment.

In agreeing with the latter definition, this article argues that literature is a product of human beings while the physical environment is largely a product of nature. As Barry (2002, p. 255) indicates, nature may manifest itself in terms of the wilderness which include deserts, oceans and uninhabited land masses (such as the north pole or south pole) for example. Related to these expressions of nature are rivers, lakes, mountains, cliffs, waterfalls and forests, all of which are land-related.

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

Eco-critics acknowledge the importance of culture in the humanity-nature equation. That is, they do acknowledge that, since human beings are creatures of culture, they interact with nature with their cultural baggage; they interpret some objects of nature or natural phenomena based on their own lived experience within the specific cultural context of which they are products. Eco-critics further argue that in their interaction with nature, human beings can eventually move from seeing nature as nature to seeing it from a cultural perspective; that is, moving from nature to culture (Barry, 2002, p. 255). In essence eco-criticism argues that nature plays a significant role in the interpretation of reality and may therefore help us understand some nature-related cultural practices.

Thus, although eco-criticism is essentially a western concept, its application is universal and may be applied to the African situation. More precisely it may be appropriated to the African cultural context. If we are to stand by the argument that the literature of each society contains environmental issues, it follows that there are some environmental issues that are unique to some societies because of their unique nature. Uniqueness, in this regard, is not only in the geographical sense, but also in the cultural sense, especially because any landscape is also a culturescape – as has been argued by some scholars such as Syned Mthatiwa in his article 'Animals, Nostalgia and Zimbabwe's Rural Landscape in the Poetry of Chenjerai Hove and Musaemura Zimunya' (2016, p. 276).

Thus, if landscapes are culturescapes, it may be argued that it is not possible to separate a landscape from the cultural ethos and practices of the people that occupy it. It may be argued, further, that the geo-cultural context of a text should be taken into account when analysing its environmental content. As a consequence of the above position, it would be justified to posit that there are some environmental issues that are peculiarly African and or peculiarly Zambian as we conduct an

ecological analysis of African or Zambian texts. Vital (2008: 88) uses the term African ecocriticism or Afroecocriticism to refer to the Africanised approach to ecocritical analysis. Wu (2016, p. 146) refers to it as "Africa-focused ecocriticism" while Slaymaker (2007) prefers the term Afroecophilosophy.

Whatever term is used, the critical point to note is that, at least when considered from the social constructionist perspective, each culture has its own views about nature and its various manifestations such as land. Members of a particular society will interpret nature and land, and indeed any aspect of human life, according to their own culturally-determined "interpretive frame" (Chilala, 2018). The concept of eco-criticism needs to be appropriated to the African context in much the same way that, for example, the English language is appropriated by African speakers and writers. In this regard, therefore, this article is concerned with the meaning of land of the Igbo people of Nigeria as exhibited in *Things Fall Apart.*

Interaction between the Igbo and Land in *Things Fall Apart*

Musiyiwa (2016) argues that land is central to Shona mythology and that the Shona exhibit a land-based nature-culture. The same may be said of the Igbo world presented to us in *Things Fall Apart*. The Igbo ethos or mythology divides land use into at least five categories: (1) land as a dwelling-place; (2) land as a source of natural sustenance; (3) land as a space for food production; (4) land as sacred and dedicated to the gods; and (5) land as sacred and dedicated to evil spirits.

Land as a Dwelling-Place

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

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

The land is very pivotal to the survival of the family in the homestead. Apart from the fact that the structures in the homestead are built using materials from nature's provisions such as mud (from the soil), grass and wood, there are also some

domesticated animals such as chickens and the yam grown on the land also stored in the barn. It may then be posited that the Igbo people depend on the provisions of nature and that is partly why they need to live in harmony with nature.

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

There were times, however, when the land as dwelling-place also played the role of refuge for those who committed certain crimes. Thus, when Okonkwo kills a clansman in Chapter Thirteen he is allowed to flee to his mother's village in Mbanta to seek refuge. The reason he is allowed to flee is because he commits the female version of murder – the inadvertent killing of a kinsman. As long as Okonkwo and his family are in Mbanta, they cannot be killed. It would be a violation of the justice of the earth goddess, Ani, to follow Okonkwo to his mother's village and kill or harm him. Okonkwo spends seven years in exile in Mbanta.

Land as a Source of Natural Sustenance

This refers to natural provisions of the land such as rivers and streams where people drew water for cooking, drinking and bathing. The waterways also provide the people with the opportunity to catch fish and alligator which, according to the textual evidence in Chapter One, is partly used to make pepper (5).

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

Land as a Space for Food Production

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

(6). Palm-wine, on the other hand, is associated mostly with occasions of merry-making such as feasts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The *kola* nut, therefore, takes the same place of prominence as palm-wine in matters of interpersonal relationships. It is to be served with reverence and is not to be broken in haste especially by individuals considered unworthy. That is the reason why when Unoka serves the *kola* to Okoye, the two of them initially argue about which of them should take the honour of breaking the nut. No unworthy individual should break the *kola*.

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

Land as Sacred and Dedicated to the Gods

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

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

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

To the Igbo, then, the hills and caves are not only the symbols of Agbala but also his dwelling-place. Anyone who wants to petition Agbala goes to the caves and hills, not anywhere else. Thus, for example, Unoka goes to consult the priestess of Agbala in Chapter Three and, in Chapter Eleven, Chielo takes Ezinma to the caves in the hills because Agbala wants to see her (91). The priestess refers to Agbala with a variety of names (97): 'the owner of the future, *the messenger of earth*, the god who cut a man down when his life was sweetest to him' (emphasis added). Agbala is the god of the future. Through the worship of Agbala, therefore, the people sought peace and harmony with the earth.

In their quest to live in harmony with the earth the Igbo people worship Ani, 'the earth goddess and the source of all fertility' (Achebe, 1958, p. 33). This is the most important god of the Igbo and is "the ultimate judge of morality and conduct"

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

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

Land as Sacred and Dedicated to Evil Spirits

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

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

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

It is therefore a point worth noting that when the missionaries approach the people of Mbanta for land to build their church, the elders allocate them land in the Evil Forest. They consider the missionaries and their steadily growing number of Igbo converts to be *efulefu* or worthless men. We read at the start of Chapter

Eighteen (141): 'If a gang of *efulefu* decided to live in the Evil Forest it was their own affair. When one came to think of it, the Evil Forest was a fit home for such undesirable people.' The mere act of allocating "evil" land to the Christians illustrates, quite poignantly, not only the Igbo people's contempt for the Christians but for the Christian religion. In the Igbo ethos, the Christians, their religion and their god are evil and would be consumed by the malevolent spirits that dwelt in the Evil Forest.

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

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

That the Evil Forest is associated with judgment and destruction of the wicked is reflected in the fact that, at the trial in Chapter Ten, the leader of the *egwugwu* or masquerades is called Evil Forest. If the women and children are overcame with fear and take to their heels (80) upon the mere appearance of the *egwugwu*, then they fear the Evil Forest *egwugwu* most. The mask worn by Evil Forest is such that smoke "poured out of his head" (81). Smoke symbolises fire and judgment or wrath. Hence the *egwugwu* says of himself at the end of the trial (85): 'I am Evil Forest, I am Dry-meat-that-fills-the-mouth, I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots.'

Other Uses of Nature's Endowments Through Land

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

Conclusion

The Igbo people as presented in *Things Fall Apart* exhibit a land-based nature-culture. Land is central to their mythology and lifestyle. Within the villages the land is also apportioned according to functionality. Thus, there is within the villages land for building homesteads, land for playing and for large gatherings, as well as land set apart for shrines.

The Igbo apportion land for the growing of crops apart from the fact that they gather some food from the forest. The main crops of the Igbo is yam. The forest is also a source of traditional herbal medicine. Thus, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* is known to gather herbs for use as medicine. When the people of Igboland build houses they use natural means – trees, grass and mud.

Land is a political and spiritual matter in *Things Fall Apart* and its distribution and apportionment to a large extent depends on who has the authority to do so. The *ndichie* or elders have power to apportion land. There is a gender element to this as women do not have power to allocate land (Maganaro, 2002; Chilala, 2003). Thus when the missionaries ask for land to build a church the elders of Mbanta, who consider the message of the missionaries as inimical to the traditions and religion of the people, allocate them land in the Evil Forest. Their reasoning is that the missionaries and their blind followers will perish in the forest, consumed by the evil that lurks therein. They see Christianity as an abomination which cannot be sanitised or dignified by allocating the missionaries land in any of the villages. They also reason that an abominable religion such as Christianity would defile their land and is only fit for the Evil Forest (Chapter 17). Christianity is therefore seen as an antithesis of nature.

There is a link, it would appear, between the mythology and ecophilosophy of the people of Igboland on one hand and the apportionment of land on the other, as is suggested by the fact that each clan in Igboland would apportion an area as an "evil forest". The text of *Things Fall Apart* says in Chapter Seventeen (135): 'Every clan and village had its 'evil forest'. In it were buried all those who died of the really evil diseases, like leprosy and smallpox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they died. An 'evil forest' was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness.'

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

> Near the barn was a small house, the 'medicine house' or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of *kola* nut, food and palm-wine, and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children.

The other type of shrine is for the gods of the Igbo nation such as Agbala. Thus, for example, we read in Chapter Three that Agbala is the Oracle of the Hills and Caves – hence the hills and caves are not only a symbol of the god but also his dwelling-place. In Chapter Eleven Chielo the priestess of Agbala takes Ezinma to the shrine of Agbala in the sacred hills and caves.

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